

Reincarnating to Finish Copying the *Huayan Sutra* in Blood: A Late Ming Literati Perspective

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Abstract

This article takes as its subject one very famous intergenerational blood-written copy of the *Huayan Sutra* and the subsequent veneration of this text among the late Ming literati. This artifact was copied out by the late Yuan dynasty monk Shanji 善繼 (1286-1357) who was thought to be a reincarnation of Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975), the purported progenitor of this project. However, the copy was believed to have been completed only after Yongming's second reincarnation as the great early Ming statesman Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381). The karmic connections between these three successive generations elevated the stature of this particular copy, which was revered for its provenance in a storied traceable 'Huayan lineage' comprised of two monks and a famous literatus. Yet despite this acceptance, the historical work of determining who was a reincarnation of whom became a topic of interest in literati prefaces and postfaces, many of which espoused a uniquely Buddhist method of historical proof premised on assessments of reincarnation, karmic connections, dream encounters, and personal realization. After presenting a detailed analysis of prefaces and postfaces written by Song Lian, the Huizhou scholar Xie Bi 謝陛 (1547-1615), and the famous literatus Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), this article presents a brief history of how this text left Suzhou and was later returned. And finally, I will end with a brief discussion of how this copy is referenced in other late Ming and early Qing sources. The historical reconstruction of the provenance of the Shanji copy evinces a uniquely Buddhist method of historical proof, while the intricacies of this story further shed light on the devotional status of this Buddhist artifact and its reverberations within Buddhist culture during the late Ming to early Qing.

Keywords: *Huayan Sutra*, blood-writing, Yongming Yanshou, Shanji, Song Lian, Xie Bi, Qian Qianyi, Li Weizhen, Tao Ru'nai

It is well-known that the Ming dynasty did not produce any new lengthy commentaries to the *Huayan Sutra* 華嚴經 nor is there a prominent lineage of well-regarded Huayan monks that dominated Buddhist discourse throughout this dynasty. This would seem to suggest that Huayan had receded to a distant horizon, and yet, when we read prefaces and postfaces from the collected writings (*wenji* 文集) of late Ming (1550-1644) literati, we find a surprisingly robust engagement with Huayan scripture, doctrines, images, and practices. These texts tell us that Buddhist monks, Buddhist laymen, and various other literati wrote about Huayan ideas, preached about Huayan, and recited the *Huayan Sutra* in diverse ritual settings.¹ The late Ming further witnessed an extraordinary engagement in the copying of the *Huayan Sutra* in blood. This arduous blood-writing (*xieshu* 血書) practice was so-called because practitioners used their own blood to copy scripture, sometimes in an admixture of ink or other substances. This article is focused on how late Ming literati reconstructed the history of one very famous intergenerational blood-written copy of the *Huayan Sutra* and their veneration of this text.

The artifact under analysis here was copied out by the late Yuan dynasty monk Shanji 善繼 (1286-1357) who was thought to be a reincarnation of Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975), the purported progenitor of this project. However, the copy was believed to have been completed only after Yongming's second reincarnation as the great early Ming statesman Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381, z. Jinglian 景濂, h. Qianxi 潛溪). Despite the fact that Song Lian contributed a preface and praise verses (*zan* 讚), that were not written in blood, his contribution was considered an intrinsic part of this devotional object and not conceived of as an external set of writings. In his oft-cited preface, Song Lian himself asserted that he was a reincarnation of Yongming Yanshou.

Many other late Ming prefaces and postfaces that reference this *Huayan Sutra* copy accept the idea that all three figures collectively created this devotional object. The karmic connections between these three successive generations elevated the stature of this particular copy, which was revered for its provenance in a storied traceable 'Huayan lineage' comprised of two monks and a famous literatus. Yet despite this acceptance, the historical work of determining provenance, that is, who was a reincarnation of whom, and

¹ See for example, Guan Zhidao 管志道 (1536-1608) and his attempt to combine Huayan ideas and the *Yijing* 易經; see also, Wang Yuanhan 王元翰 (1565-1633) and his acknowledgement of how important Huayan sutras and commentaries were to his acceptance of Buddhist ideas. For the former see, Wu Mengqian 吳孟謙, *Rongguan yu pipan: Guan Dongming de sixiang jiqi shidai* 融貫與批判：管東溟的思想及其時代 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2017). For the latter, see Jennifer Eichman, "Buddhist Historiography: A Tale of Deception in a Seminal Late Ming Buddhist Letter," *Journal of Chinese Religions* vol. 46, no. 2 (2018): 123-165.

thus, who copied the text, became a topic of interest in prefaces and postfaces about this copy. The rhetoric employed in literati deliberations about provenance evince a uniquely Buddhist method of historical proof premised on assessments of reincarnation, karmic connections, dream encounters, and personal realization.²

The very rich discourse on reincarnations, blood-writing practices, and literati endeavors to preserve the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* will serve as the subject of this study. As will become apparent, the arguments about who was a reincarnation of whom and who actually copied the text underscore the very real contemporaneous literati belief in reincarnation. Relevant prefaces and postfaces occasionally touch upon Huayan doctrine, but much more is said about the quality of the calligraphy, the ascetic blood sacrifice, and their devotional reverence for this Buddhist artifact. In the late Ming, the fame of this text reverberated across the Jiangnan region and outward to other geographic locations, achieving broad regional if not national fame. Consequently, many literati writers aspired to elevate other lesser known blood-writing projects, whether of the *Huayan Sutra* or other sutras, through linking them to this text.

The Shanji copy was originally housed in Suzhou at the Bantang monastery 半塘寺. On the pretext that the monastery had become dilapidated, however, the text was “lent” to the very wealthy collector Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525-1593) for safe keeping until a time when the monastery could be restored. In what follows, I will include some discussion on how this text changed hands and the lengths to which literati went to buy it back and return it to what they deemed its rightful place at Bantang monastery. My discussion of the Shanji copy will be confined to the early Ming through early Qing interest in this text and will not extend to how the text was treated throughout the later Qing and on into the Republican Era. Suffice it to say, the Shanji copy survived the Cultural Revolution and is now housed in a stone shrine just outside the vegetarian hall at Xiyuan jiechuang lu Monastery 西園戒幢律寺 in Suzhou.³

² For an extended discussion of how some of these concepts were used throughout Buddhist historiography, see John Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

³ The Bantang shengshou si 半塘聖壽寺 (Suzhou Bantang Imperial Longevity Monastery) no longer exists. Many sources simply call it the Bantang si or Shousheng si. The Shanji copy remains at another Suzhou monastery, the Xiyuan jiechuang lu si 西園戒幢律寺 (Western Garden, Precept Banner Vinaya Monastery) where it can be viewed only once every three years when the shrine is opened to dry out the text. I have yet to see the text or find a photographic reprint and for this reason will not comment on the current condition of this artifact.

The following newspaper article preserved on the Suzhou Library website offers a brief historical overview. The article is cached under the Wenwu guji 文物古蹟 section of the Difang wenxian jianbao 地方文獻剪報. Zheng Fengming 鄭風鳴, “Bantang si ji qi zhencang de xiejing 半塘寺及其珍藏的血經,” in *S*

I will analyze in detail the postfaces and prefaces written about this copy by Song Lian, the Huizhou scholar Xie Bi 謝陸 (1547-1615), and the famous literatus Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664). This will be followed by a brief history of how the text came to be possessed by Wang Daokun and the efforts to return it to Suzhou. And finally, I will end with a brief discussion of how this copy is referenced in other late Ming and early Qing sources. The historical reconstruction of the provenance of the Shanji copy evinces a uniquely Buddhist method of historical proof, while the intricacies of this story further shed light on the devotional status of this Buddhist artifact and its reverberations within Buddhist culture during the late Ming to early Qing.

Introducing the Interconnections between Yongming, Shanji, and Song:

That the monk Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975) should figure so prominently in this story is not surprising. After all, Yongming's stature grew exponentially throughout the late Ming fueled as it was by the inspiration Buddhist exegetes found in his work as they attempted to fuse Pure Land and Chan. Buddhist monks and laymen often drew novel lessons from Yongming's writings; they also artfully edited his biography to reflect their own religious needs and desires.⁴ Despite the late Ming attempts to characterize Yongming as the great synthesizer of Pure Land and Chan, one could certainly make the argument that Huayan ideas are threaded throughout Yongming's *Records of the Source-Mirror* (*Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄), but Song dynasty sources do not praise him for his devotion to the *Huayan Sutra* nor was he considered a Huayan exegete. In this respect, Yongming's prominence in this blood-writing narrative appears to be yet another artful expansion of his profile. The idea that Yongming began this blood-writing project either originates with Song Lian's mother's dream episode or with the story of the monk Shanji and his copying of the *Huayan Sutra* in blood.⁵ Late

uzhou ribao 蘇州日報, November, 13, 2015, B no. 2. <https://suzhouculture.szlib.com/dfwxjb/show.aspx?col=%E6%96%87%E7%89%A9%E5%8F%A4%E8%BF%B9&guid=c579dbc4-156e-4b11-851e-d2500b47ae7f>; and the website of the Xiyuan jiechuang lu si, <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/zdsy/65/2012-03-13/323.html>.

⁴ For one scholarly argument on the difference between what Yongming propagated concerning Pure Land thought in his own time and later interpretations of Yongming as a successful synthesizer of Pure Land and Chan, see Albert Welter, *The Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds: A Study of Yung-ming Yen-shou and the Wan-shan t'ung-kuei chi* (New York: P. Lang, 1993); for more on Yongming's Chan ideas, see also, Albert Welter, *Yongming Yanshou's Conception of Chan in the Zongjing lu: A Special Transmission within the Scriptures* (Oxford, 2011).

⁵ For the late Ming interest in Yongming Yanshou and most particularly in re-establishing his presence at Pure Compassion Monastery 淨慈寺 near Hangzhou where late Ming literati purportedly rediscovered Yongming's relic-remains, see Jennifer Eichman, *A Late Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship: Spiritual Ambitions, Intellectual Debates, and Epistolary Connections* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 170-194. For

Ming literati were, of course, equally if not more familiar with the collected writings of Song Lian, a reputable official and government advisor to the first Ming emperor. Given his stature, Buddhist-inclined literati must have been pleased to discover his assertion that he was a reincarnation of Yongming. As for the obscure monk Shanji, two factors have saved him from the dustbin of history, first, his decision to copy the *Huayan Sutra* in blood, but foremost the linking of that act to Yongming and the genealogical assessment of their karmic connection.

In comparison to Yongming, there are far fewer available sources concerning the Yuan dynasty monk, Shanji 善繼 (1286-1357, z. Juezong 絕宗). Most curiously, although Song Lian wrote the preface and praise verses for the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra*, the separate stupa epitaph he wrote for him mentions only his Tiantai training and says nothing about this pivotal episode. According to Song Lian, twenty years after Shanji's death almost no one remembered him, thus worried that Shanji would be completely forgotten, Song Lian wrote the stupa epitaph.⁶ The best information we have on how Shanji copied the *Huayan Sutra* comes from Song Lian's preface, where he tells us that Shanji first tried copying the scripture only in ink, but found it too dark, next he tried cinnabar, but found it bright enough to blind a person. Gold and silver lacked any internal affinity with himself, and so he finally settled on using only his own blood. Knowing that the blood running through our veins is what gives humans life and that humans would do anything to preserve it, he vowed in front of a buddha image to do what is most difficult and use his blood in service to the Buddha.⁷

Most monks and literati who copied scriptures in blood did so only after performing a prescribed set of rituals. Many copiers prostrated before each character they wrote.

a detailed elaboration on some of this material, see Albert Welter, *A Tale of Two Stūpas: Diverging Paths in the Revival of Buddhism in Hangzhou China* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁶ In fact, none of his canonical biographies mention copying of the *Huayan Sutra*, either. Song Lian, "Gu Wenming Haihui fashi taming 故文明海慧法師塔銘," in *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 633a15-634a12).

⁷ I have not seen the Shanji copy, nor have I been able to find a photographic reproduction of it, and thus, I will be discussing only what my sources reveal about its construction and not provide my own visual analysis. One scholar has described this copy as written in *kaishu* script with five lines per page, seventeen characters per line with each character seventeen millimeters in height. See the conference paper published only online, Xu Yuying 徐郁縈, "Yuan ming shiqi 'xieshu Huayan' zhi yinyuan chutan 元明時期「血書華嚴」之因緣初探," in *Guoji qingnian Huayan xuezhe luntan lunwenji* 國際青年華嚴學者論壇論文集, 2014, 1-16, <https://www.huayencollege.org/huayen-centre/huayen-young/huayen-young-seminar/paper-single#2014>. For the description of Shanji's thoughts on what substance to use, see the preface, Song Lian, "Xieshu Huayan jing zan (youxu) 血書華嚴經贊(有序)," in *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 674c9-674c23). See also the description in Yin Wenhan 尹文漢, "Zhongguo gudai cixie shujing zhi feng—jian lun Jiuhua shan Haiyu heshang xieshu *Huayan jing* 中國古代刺血書經之風—兼論九華山海玉和尚血書《華嚴經》," *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 vol. 1 (2016): 114-119.

Some kept vegetarian diets, limiting salt intake to keep their blood from coagulating; others sequestered themselves in a special abode.⁸ As for Shanji, other than the decision to use only his own blood and to draw that blood by pricking his ten fingers, a practice usually carried out on successive days, there is no record of his ritual choices.

In the late Ming, the monk Lianchi Zhuhong 蓮池祿宏 (1535-1615) compiled a collection of Song Lian's Buddhist writings. The resulting ten-fascicle compilation, *The Honorable Song Wenxian's Record of Protecting the Dharma* (*Song Wenxian gong hufa lu* 宋文憲公護法錄; hereafter *Protecting the Dharma*)⁹ attests to Song Lian's far-reaching engagement in various Buddhist endeavors, most particularly the writing of monk stupa epitaphs, temple stele texts, records of numerous monastery visits, monastery repairs, prefaces, postfaces, praise texts, and some poetry, among other genres. The work does not include any serious treatises on Buddhist doctrine, yet it provides an invaluable record of late Yuan and early Ming dynasty Buddhist monks and their networks. In this case, the details surrounding Song Lian's social network reveal tantalizing clues regarding the practice of blood writing. Song Lian was a lay disciple of the Chan monk Qianyan Yuanchang 千巖元長 (1284-1357), as was the monk Weian Deran 唯庵德然 (d. 1388). Deran cut his finger to draw the blood needed to copy the *Huayan Sutra*. Most notably, he later stored this copy in a seven-tiered stupa. Song Lian, who wrote a preface to Deran's poetry collection, surely knew of this.¹⁰ Song Lian also wrote a preface and praise verses for a copy of the *Heart Sutra* 心經 written in blood in the shape of the bodhisattva

⁸ For detailed descriptions of the ritual procedures followed by some Republican Era practitioners who copied sutras in blood, see Jimmy Yu, "Blood Writing as Extraordinary Artifact and Agent for Socioreligious Change," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* vol. 7, no. 3 (2020):1-9; Xu Meizhong 許美中, Cixie wei moxie jingdian—Zhicheng fashi xieshu Huayan jing shiji jianjie 刺血為墨寫經典--智誠法師血書《華嚴經》事跡簡介," *Fayin* 法音 no. 44 (1988): 38; for pre-modern descriptions, see Jimmy Yung Fung Yu, *Bodies and Self-inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500-1700* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 23 no. 2 (2000): 177-194.

⁹ See for example, Song Lian's commemoration of the Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263-1323) cloister, which has certainly enriched our understanding of that structure and its patrons. For full translation of the text and analysis, see Natasha Heller, *Illusory Abiding: The Cultural Construction of the Chan Monk Zhongfeng Mingben* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 124-127. *Song Wenxian gong hufa lu* 宋文憲公護法錄 (J no. B110).

¹⁰ For the Deran story see the untitled biography in *Chongzhen Songjiang fuzhi* 崇禎松江府志 45.27, 1630 edition (Reprint, Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe: Xinhua shudian Beijing faxingsuo faxing, 1991), 1184; "Deran zhuan 德然傳," in *Buxu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳 (X no. 1524, vol. 77, 531c13- 532a5); the *Hufa lu* 護法錄 reprinted Song Lian's biography of this monk, "Songyin an ji 松隱庵記," *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 655c24-656a22), and a postface to his poetry, "Ba De chanshi chuanju shi hou 跋德禪師船居詩後," *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 687c2- 687c13).

Guanyin.¹¹ Clearly in Song Lian's Buddhist milieu, blood-writing was one, albeit rigorous, but not unheard of method of Buddhist cultivation.

The Record of Protecting the Dharma also reprinted the Song Lian preface and praise verses written to commemorate Shanji's copying of the *Huayan Sutra*. The story Song Lian recounted in the preface of his mother's dream encounter with Yongming was often cited by late Ming literati as historical proof that Song Lian was indeed a reincarnation of Yongming. Buddhist historians had long drawn on dream encounters in their writing of history, so the use of this here follows an established pattern.¹² Late Ming literati belief in the veracity of this story had the added effect of raising Song Lian's stature in late Ming literati Buddhist circles.¹³ Referring to himself by the epithet Layman Wuxiang, Song Lian begins to narrate this story in the third-person, but then switches to the first-person:

Before the Layman Wuxiang came forth from his mother's womb, his mother had a dream in which an extraordinary monk¹⁴ [carrying] a handwritten copy of this sutra came to her and said, "I am none other than Yongming Yanshou, I would like to borrow a room to finish this text." After his mother woke from her dream, the layman was born. Now in being presented with this superb good cause, I suddenly remembered this prior event. Thereupon, I personally lit five sticks of marvelous incense. The incense smoke rose upward, coiling around to form a precious canopy over the text. I placed my palms together in supplication to the Buddha, scattered flowers, and prostrated. I then recited the following praise verses:

無相居士未出母胎，母夢異僧手寫是經，來謂母曰：「吾乃永明延壽，宜假一室，以終此卷。」母夢覺已，居士即生。今逢勝因，頓憶前事。於是親炳五分妙香，香雲輪囷，結為寶網，遍覆經上。乃復合爪向佛，散華作禮，而稱讚曰：¹⁵

¹¹ The *Heart Sutra* preface is very short as are the praise verses. Song Lian, "Xie jing wei xiang ji xieshu Xinjing zan 寫經為像及血書心經贊," *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 676b17-676b28).

¹² For dreams as Buddhist historical evidence, see John Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China*, 116, 85.

¹³ Natasha Heller aptly describes the many Buddhist biographical depictions of Song Lian who was presented variously as a Buddhist statesman, a Chan devotee, and the reincarnation of Yongming. Natasha Heller, "From Imperial Glory to Buddhist Piety: The Record of a Ming Ritual in Three Contexts," *History of Religions* vol. 51, no. 1 (2011): 73-78.

¹⁴ The term *yiseng* 異僧 has been variously translated as monks who are eccentric, extraordinary, strange, peculiar, singular, or have magical powers. See Paramita Paul, "Wandering Saints: Chan Eccentrics in the Art of Song and Yuan China" (Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 2009), 42-43.

¹⁵ Song Lian, "Xieshu *Huayan Jing zan* 血書華嚴經贊," in *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 674c30-675a4).

In this narrative of portents and flashbacks, Song Lian refers to his viewing of the Shanji blood-writing copy of the *Huayan Sutra*, as “this superb good cause” and writes that he suddenly recollected a “prior event.” Whether he means that he remembers the story his mother told him or that he remembers his past life being the monk in the dream is unclear. As will be discussed below, Qian Qianyi interprets this “prior event” to mean that Song Lian personally met Shanji. The dream narrative implies that Yongming finished the text before Song Lian was born. Yet other interpretations of this episode strongly suggest that Yongming reincarnated as Song Lian so that Song Lian could finish the copy. Given the karmic connection between Song Lian and Yongming, some literati understood Song Lian’s written contribution to be an integral part of the text. In short, unlike the many other prefaces and postfaces literati wrote for other blood-writing copies of scripture, the Song Lian preface and praise verses became devotionally inseparable from the scripture and intimately tied to the literati understanding of the Yongming-Shanji-Song Lian genealogy. And this is despite the fact that Song Lian wrote only in ink not blood. Most significantly, Song Lian describes how he venerated this sutra copy by burning incense, scattering flowers, and prostrating before it, much as a practitioner might do before a Buddha statue in the main hall of a temple. The image of a net or canopy forming over the text is redolent of how the *Lotus Sutra* sought to elevate scripture as the embodiment of the Buddha by suggesting metaphorically if not literally that scripture should be venerated like a Buddha—buddhas were often depicted with a canopy over their head.¹⁶ In short, Song Lian venerated the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* before his own writing was considered an integral part of this devotional object.

Assessing Claims to Reincarnation: Xie Bi and Qian Qianyi’s Differing Historical Views

At the end of the praise verses, *The Record of Protecting the Dharma* appended a postface written by the Huizhou native, Xie Bi 謝陸 (1547-1615, z. Shaolian 少連). A friend of Wang Daokun and his brothers,¹⁷ Xie Bi joined their poetry society, the Fenggan

¹⁶ For more on this idea and a summary of research on the notion of the cult of the book, see Bryan D. Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 3-8.

¹⁷ Xie Bi was the son of a Huizhou merchant from Shexian County. He sat for the exams, but never rose above the level of a *shengyuan* 生員. This does not seem to have hindered his participation in literati organizations. He compiled the 1609 *She County Gazetteer* 歙縣志. For more biographical information see, Chen Yi’an 陳怡安, “Wanming wenren de mingshengde jingying—yi Shexian Xie Bi de jiaoyou wei li 晚明文人的名聲的經營——以歙縣謝陸的交遊為例,” *Xin beida shixue* 新北大史學 vol. 19 (2016): 1-24.

Society 豐幹社, founded in 1567.¹⁸ Although the Xie Bi postface was originally a stand-alone work, in this context, Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) incorporates much of it at the beginning of his own postface, and thus the two works were printed in one continuous block, not consecutively as their original independent formats would dictate. Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), a well-known government official, poet, and the author of the 1616 preface to the *Record of Protecting the Dharma*, was instrumental in getting the work published, since Zhuhong had passed away the previous year. The decision to introduce Xie Bi's work in a collection devoted to Song Lian was likely that of Qian Qianyi who was particularly keen to set the historical record straight by refuting some of Xie Bi's claims about who was a reincarnation of whom. The Xie Bi postface not only comments on the successive reincarnations, but further adds pertinent historical criteria for how to make such determinations. The first half of the postface, translated here, discusses lineage succession.

As was well-known, the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* was one of the Bantang monastery's most precious Dharma possessions (*fabao* 法寶). Xie Bi wrote:

After the monk [Shanji] finished writing the sutra in blood, Mr. Song Wenxian of our dynasty added a preface and praise verses. According to the preface, we know that the monk was a later reincarnation of master Yongming and that the monk was the previous incarnation of Mr. Wenxian. Master Yongming directly ascended to the Pure Land; he was a great bodhisattva who caused many in this Sahā world to convert and ascend to that Western Land. Mr. Wenxian who wore the hatchet-embroidered robes of an official, promoted Buddhist truths as the emperor asked; in this Eastern Land he was a great official. The monk [Shanji] succeeded as the next reincarnation of Master Yongming and copied this sutra; after another reincarnation, we finally have this [full] text. When [a monk] appeared in the mother's dream, he did not say "Shanji." But surprisingly said, "Yongming." In fact, by raising the initial cause in confirming the latter result and [pulling these] together to constitute the conditions of this one great undertaking, how could one say that Mr. Wenxian is deceiving us? In again viewing this sutra I looked upon it with great admiration. Whether discussing the vigorous quality of the brush

¹⁸ The society appears to have been named after the eccentric Buddhist poet-monk Fenggan 豐幹 (active 627-649). In 1580, Wang Daokun organized the Baiyu Society 白榆社 which counted Xie Bi, Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605), and Li Weizhen 李維楨 (1547-1626), among its members. See, Guo Qitao, *Huizhou: Local Identity and Mercantile Lineage Culture in Ming China* (University of California Press, 2022), 88.

strokes or the even and clear width of the vertical columns, from start to finish one does not see the slightest negligence. And moreover, the blood's luminosity is like that of polished gems, gradually transforming into golden rays. If he were not a later reincarnation of master Yongming, then how could it be like this? Mr. Wenxian's preface shines light on this undertaking, his praise verses explain the doctrine, and his writing is of a high standard. If he were not a later reincarnation of master Yongming, then how could it be like this?

上人血書經後，我 明宋文憲公序之、讚之。據序，乃知上人永明師後身，而文憲公前身也。永明師直超極樂，轉度娑婆西方一大菩。文憲公黼黻 皇猷，宣揚聖諦，東土一大宰官。上人從永明師二轉而書此經，再轉而終此卷。其入母夢時不曰「善繼」而竟曰：「延壽」。蓋挈前因以徵後果，共一大事因緣，文憲公豈作誑語乎？余一再瞻仰此經，毋論筆鋒道勁，行款清勻，自始至終不見一毫怠惰相，而血光融瑩，漸變金光，非永明師一轉後身而能然乎？文憲公序則事昭，贊則義了，書復標解，非永明師再轉後身而能然乎？¹⁹

Xie Bi, like Wang Daokun, was a connoisseur of good calligraphy. In these opening lines of his postface, he praises the quality of the brushstrokes, the even spacing of the columns, and the luminosity that the blood brought to this piece. The calligraphic quality and luminosity of this work is in fact of such a high caliber, Xie Bi argues, that it, in effect, serves as a visual testament to the spiritual potency Shanji possessed because he was a reincarnation of Yongming. He equally claims that Song Lian's preface and praise verses are so well-written only because Song Lian was a reincarnation of Yongming. In writing this postface, Xie Bi pushes back against anyone who might be skeptical of reincarnation in general or of this specific textual lineage in particular. Most prefaces and postfaces for blood-writing texts emphasize the commitment to repaying the Buddha's kindness and the merit these ascetic acts generate: merit that could be dedicated to better rebirths for

¹⁹ Qian Qianyi inserted an extended comment after Song Lian's praise verses. The first half of the comment is the entire Xie Bi postface. This is then followed by Qian Qianyi's evaluation, which is largely a reprinting of his postface, "Ba Shanji shangren xieshu Huayan jing hou," with a few variations in word choice. This postface was printed in Qian Qianyi's work, the *Chuxue ji* 初學集, and also in Song Lian, *Song Lian quanji* 宋濂全集, 5 vols. edited by Huang Linggeng 黃靈庚 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2014), 2828. Xie Bi, "Xindu Xie Bi ba 新都謝陸跋," *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 675a27- 675b3). There is one Buddhist temple gazetteer reprint of Xie Bi's postface, "Xindu Xie Bi ba 新都謝陸跋," in *Wudu fasheng* 吳都法乘, 113-117, in *Zhongguo Fosi Shizhi Huikan* 中國佛寺史志彙刊, 3rd series, vol. 19-28 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju 、Danqing tushu gongsi, 1980-1994).

recently deceased family members.²⁰ Xie Bi offers three other criteria for why such texts might be acclaimed: the quality of the calligraphy, its level of luminosity, and the spiritual potency of its writer(s). All three of these criteria are further used to advance a particular historical narrative—judgments of reincarnation could be made on the basis of visual, material assessments, and through a fine-tuned appreciation of the written word.

Qian Qianyi was so invested in setting the record straight that he took it upon himself to refute some of Xie Bi's claims in a postface of his own. At issue was how to interpret the reincarnation of a famous monk. Qian Qianyi's postface rejects as untenable Xie Bi's claim that Shanji was a reincarnation of Yongming and that Song Lian was thus a reincarnation of Shanji. In his refutation, Qian Qianyi interprets the narrative account of the mother's dream of Yongming differently and further attempts to work out the exact dates for when Shanji copied out the *Huayan Sutra*, the dates of Song Lian's birth, and whether it is conceivable that the two of them ever met face-to-face.²¹ Qian Qianyi's reasoning is as follows:

Xie Bi Shaolian's postface records in great detail all the events surrounding this sutra, but it says, "Yongming's reincarnation was Shanji and then it was Wenxian." To think that Wenxian is Shanji's reincarnation is erroneous. With respect to whether Wenxian is Yongming's reincarnation, see the preface and praise verses to this sutra and also the [text] "In praise of Yongming's Image." Now with respect to whether Shanji is Yongming and Wenxian is Shanji, I do not know what he used as evidence.

有謝陞少連跋載此經去來事，甚詳，第云：「永明師一轉為善繼，再轉為文憲」，以文憲為善繼後身，誤也。按文憲為永明後身，見此經序、讚及「永明像讚」中，而善繼之為永明與文憲之為善繼，則未知何據也。

Wenxian's preface and praise verses are recorded in the *Later Collection of Qianxi* published by his disciples, Li Duan 李崱 and Zheng Yuan 鄭淵 (1326-1373). It

²⁰ For a greater discussion of merit as a motivating factor, see John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 23 no. 2 (2000): 177-194.

²¹ As for the idea that Song Lian is a *nirmana-kaya* body of Shanji, this view is expressed in the work of the monk Xueguan Zhiyin who wrote that Song Lian realized that he was a reincarnation of Shanji and that Shanji was Yongming (昔景濂宋學士，悟前身為半塘書經長老，即壽師脫胎應現). Xueguan Zhiyin, "Da jisheng Yu jushi wen 答集生余居士問," in *Xueguan chanshi yulu* 雪關禪師語錄 (J no. B198, vol. 27, 464a17-a18).

seems that there was a time before Wenxian had entered into service to this dynasty that Shanji copied the sutra. [He started] in 1305 and finished in 1306. Wenxian was born in 1310, [whereas] in calculating his lifespan [Shanji] died in fifty-seven [1357]. [Song Lian's] preface says, "Now in being presented with this superb good cause, I suddenly remembered this prior event." Wenxian most likely personally met Shanji, so how could he be Shanji's reincarnation? As for the succession between these three generations, it is like the extension and contraction of an arm, it is beyond our comprehension.²² However, if this extension is [understood to be] a *nirmāṇakāya* body, then as for the order of succession, it is clear. As for Mr. Xie's error, I had no choice but to correct it. In the tenth month of 1616, I visited Bantang and paid my respects to the sutra. Therefore, I wrote this postface.

文憲序、讚載其門人李崱、鄭淵所刻《潛溪後集》中²³。蓋文憲未入國朝之作。而善繼寫經，始於至正二十五年乙巳，成於次年丙午，文憲生於元至大庚戌，計是時五十有七年矣。序云：「今逢勝因，頓憶前事」，文憲殆親見善繼者，安得為善繼後身乎？三世去來，如屈信臂²⁴，不可思議。然以應身信之，則後先歷然。謝氏之訛，不可不訂也。丙辰冬十月過半塘，瞻禮是經，因志其後。²⁵

Qian Qianyi first attempts to refute Xie Bi's claims by pointing out that in the year 1310, the year Song Lian was born, Shanji was forty-seven years old, and very much alive. In fact, Shanji passed away at the age of seventy-one in 1357. Qian Qianyi extrapolates from this that the two men were alive at the same time and that they may have met. Qian does not date this purported meeting, but instead interprets the enigmatic claim "Now in being

²² Most scholars translate *bu ke siyi* 不可思議 as inconceivable, yet in this English sentence inconceivable could potentially be misunderstood to mean impossible, thus I have chosen a different wording.

²³ Li Duan 李崱 (d.u.) and Zheng Yuan 鄭淵 (1326-1373, z. Zhonghan 仲涵) were students of Song Lian. When they published Song Lian's *Qianxi houji* each wrote a preface. See, Song Lian, *Song Lian quanji* 宋濂全集, 5 vols. edited by Huang Linggeng 黃靈庚 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 2729-2730.

²⁴ In this context, *xin* 信 means extend. My translation follows the gist of how these terms are used in the *Xici xia* 繫辭下 (Treatise on the Appended Remarks II) to the *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*) where it says, "What has gone is a contraction, what is to come is an expansion. Contraction and expansion impel each other on, and benefits are generated in this process (往者屈也，來者信也。屈信相感，而利生焉。)" Translation by Richard Lynn. *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as interpreted by Wang Bi*, translated by Richard John Lynn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 81.

²⁵ Qian Qianyi, *Hufa lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 675b07-675b14).

presented with this superb good cause, I suddenly remembered this prior event,” to refer to a meeting Song Lian had with the elder Shanji and not to a recollection of a past life or a dream episode. If both men were alive and in the same room at the same time, Qian Qianyi reasons, then Song Lian could not be a reincarnation of Shanji and thus Xie Bi’s calculations are false. This is also why the monk in the dream calls himself Yongming and not Shanji.²⁶ What Buddhist definitional or doctrinal criteria Qian Qianyi had in mind when he asserted that this reincarnation is a *nirmāṇakāya* body is unclear. However, based on the internal textual evidence presented here, it is clear that he interprets this to mean that, historically speaking, only the deceased can be reincarnated. According to his thinking, both Shanji and Song Lian can be emanation bodies of Yongming, but because they were alive at the same time, Song Lian cannot be a reincarnation of Shanji. In other words, one life must end before it can reincarnate as another or even, in this case, as multiple others.

Qian Qianyi further recommends that readers searching for proof consult another text that Song Lian wrote, “In praise of Yongming’s Image” (Yongming xiangzan 永明像讚). The title is a shorthand reference to a long praise text Song Lian was asked to write by the abbot of Jingci Monastery 淨慈寺 (Pure Compassion Monastery) who had shown him a portrait of Yongming. Song Lian first praises Yongming’s self-cultivation and his writings. Only at the end of this long text does he claim that when he prostrated before the portrait that he had a sudden realization of their three-generation connection (*huwu sanshi* 忽悟三世).²⁷ Song Lian’s realization and his claim that he and Yongming had a past karmic connection (*suyin* 宿因) coupled with his mother’s dream account was all the historical evidence Qian Qianyi needed to make his assessment.

There is also a 1607 fundraising circular, *Traces of Yongming’s Path* (Yongming daoji 永明道蹟), compiled to raise funds for the rebuilding of Yongming’s stupa at Jingci

²⁶ Xie Bi was not the only one to argue that Song Lian was a reincarnation of Shanji. There is another contrary account in the *Hufu zhi* 虎阜志 that claims that Song Lian’s mother saw the monk Shanji in her dream and that he needed to complete his writing of the *Huayan Sutra* before she could give birth. For this untitled text, see *Hufu zhi* 虎阜志 10.18, edited by Lu Zhaoyu 陸肇域 and Ren Zhaolin 任兆麟, copy-edited by Qian Zhuting 任兆麟 (Rare book, 1792, held at the East Asian Library and Gest Collection, Princeton University).

²⁷ The title given here differs from that in other recensions of Qian Qianyi’s postface, which describe the text as a “Portrait of the Deceased Yongming (Yongming yixiang 永明遺像).” The full title is “Praise Verses for an Image of the Deceased Chan Master Yongming Zhijue (Yongming Zhijue chanshi yixiang zan 永明知覺禪師遺像讚).” Song Lian, “Yongming Zhijue chanshi yixiang zan 永明知覺禪師遺像讚,” in *Song Lian quanji*, 2116.

Monastery in Hangzhou. The text is comprised of a biography of Yongming that is divided into sections interspersed with short comments by various literati supporters. The biography states that Shanji was a reincarnation of Yongming.²⁸ But the ensuing series of comments by the prolific writer Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639) identify Song Lian only as a reincarnation of Yongming, not Shanji.²⁹ Chen Jiru further asserts that when born, Song Lian was originally named Shou 壽 because the mother had a dream encounter with Yongming Yanshou and that his name was later changed to Lian 濂, further cementing the connection.³⁰

What is not contested by the many literati contributors to this fundraising circular is whether there were Ming dynasty reincarnations of Yongming or whether reincarnation itself was even verifiable. Qian Qianyi's calculations, Xie Bi's visual assessments, and the assertions of other literati discussed below, further underscore the importance to them of sifting through rebirth claims and karmic connections in their historical determinations of the provenance of the Shanji copy. From the literati perspective, the full artifact, consisting of the blood-writing of the *Huayan Sutra* in eighty-one *juan* together with the preface and praise verses by Song Lian, was viewed as a devotional object whose value was derived in part from the belief that this was, indeed, Yongming Yanshou's project, which he saw to completion through two subsequent reincarnations. The vast majority of blood-writing projects are attributed to a single monk, only. That so many highly educated literati were willing to entertain the possibility of an intergenerational project reveals just how seriously they took the possibility of reincarnation and how important it was to them that they make the right historical determination with respect to the life and reincarnation of such an esteemed monk like Yongming Yanshou. Without the two bookends—Yongming and Song Lian—the value of this blood-written copy drops precipitously.

²⁸ This particular text does not comment on whether Song Lian is a reincarnation of Shanji. The text only states that both Shanji and Song Lian are reincarnations of Yongming Yanshou. *Yongming daoji* 永明道蹟 (X no. 1599, vol. 86, 59a18a19).

²⁹ Chen Jiru never attained the level of a presented candidate in the Metropolitan examinations. He was, however, a well-connected literatus who made a living by teaching, writing in various genres for money, and compiling volumes of his work and others for publication. See Jamie Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639): The Background to Development and Subsequent Uses of Literary Personae* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

³⁰ See the biography of Song Lian in *Yongming daoji* 永明道蹟 (X no. 1599, vol. 86, 59b6-b7). For a short description of the *Yongming daoji*, see Jennifer Eichman, *A Late Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship: Spiritual Ambitions, Intellectual Debates, and Epistolary Connections* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 174-175.

Controversial Moves: How Wang Daokun Acquired the Shanji Copy

In the second half of Xie Bi's postface, he gives us one, albeit benign, version of how the text came into the possession of Wang Daokun 汪道昆 1525-1593 (h. Nanming 南明, z. Yuqing 玉卿; 進士 1547), the son of a Huizhou salt merchant.³¹ A government official at home among elite literati, Wang Daokun's interest in the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* constitutes only one small part of his extensive engagement with Buddhist monks, temples, texts, and practices during the final twenty years of his life. A wealthy collector who valued calligraphy, he had in his possession at least three blood-written copies of the *Huayan Sutra*.

In Xie Bi's retelling, the Bantang Monastery had fallen into disrepair, and for this reason, some monks traveled to Mt. Jiao with Wang Zijian 汪子建 (d.u.),³² a clan relation of Wang Daokun, and were able to convince Daokun to take possession of the work and store it at his abode, Zhaolin 肇林, for safe keeping. Wang Daokun, however, was not without scruples. He had his younger brother write up a contract stating that the text would be removed only temporarily and that if the temple could revive itself, this precious work of calligraphy would be returned to Suzhou and the Bantang monastery. Xie Bi wrote:

Some 230 years later in 1586 [after] the temple had already met with misfortune, having fallen into disrepair, Vice Prefect Wang [Daokun] traveled around the Wu

³¹ Wang Daokun is best known in contemporary scholarship for his writings on Huizhou family lineages, female chastity martyrs, literary dramas, and Huizhou culture. For a brief biography in English (pp. 84-89) and for a detailed consideration of Wang Daokun's writings (pp. 83-111) and a greater consideration of Huizhou merchant culture, see Guo Qitao, *Huizhou: Local Identity and Mercantile Lineage Culture in Ming China* (University of California Press, 2022). There are a considerable number of Chinese secondary sources, many of which Guo Qitao cites, see the bibliography.

³² Wang Daokun rarely mentions this person, who must have been part of the extended clan. At times, other texts refer to him as a *shanran* 山人, a mountain recluse or ascetic. Most references to Wang Zijian appear in titles to parting poems written after an event as is the case for a poem written by the poet-monk (*shiseng* 詩僧) Ruyu 如愚 (d.u.), an acquaintance of Feng Mengzhen. None of these sources offers more than a fleeting view. Zijian is mentioned once traveling on a boat with Feng Mengzhen in 1591, and once by Li Weizhen in the capacity of travel around Lake Taihu. Li Weizhen refers to both Wang Zijian and Mao Baosun 毛豹孫 as *shanren* 山人. Li Weizhen 李維楨, "Taihu liang Dongting youji 太湖兩洞庭游記," in *Dami shanfang ji* 大泌山房集 juan 60.2 (Rare Book, 1611: Hishi copy held at the East Asian Library and Gest Collection, Princeton University. Original held at the Naikaku Bunko, Tokyo); Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, *Riji* 日記, juan 51.7, in *Kuaixue tang ji* 快雪堂集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, *jibu* 集部, vol. 164, p. 723 (1616 Reprint, Jinan: Qi Lu shushe chubanshe, 1997). Shi Ruyu 釋如愚, "Xiari Xu Chirong Lin Bosheng jinwu, Wang Zijian shanren tong jizhong Xiangting fenyun 夏日許穉榮林伯升金吾汪子建山人同集衆香亭分韻," in *Konghua ji* 空華集 1.18, selected by Long Yong 龍庸, edited by Zhou Rudeng 周汝登, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, *jibu* 集部 vol. 191 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe chubanshe, 1995-1997).

region. He prostrated before the sutra and looked upon it with great reverence, sighing at the rarity of such a work. Not long after, while resting at Mt. Jiao, his relative Wang Zijian arrived along with a temple monk who implored him to assume temporary custody of the sutra and send it to Zhaolin Abode where officials could provisionally see to its safekeeping. The Vice Prefect encouraged this. In addition, he ordered his younger brother Zhongjia to give the monks a [written] pledge that, in the future, if they were able to somewhat revive the monastery, the sutra would again return to its original casement. The monk also sent the Zhi'er Stupa³³ to Layman Wang to house at his Banji Abode.³⁴

二百三十餘年，寺運式微，萬曆丙戌 (1586)，汪司馬公遊吳，頂禮瞻仰，嘆為希有。尋憩焦山，宗人汪子建以寺僧來，願以是經權寄肇林精舍，暫藉宰官護持，司馬告之，且命其弟仲嘉與約。他日，寺僧稍能興復，仍復歸其原函。寺僧亦以雉兒塔寄王居士半偈菴。

In 1602, the monk Tanxu had the karmic conditions to come to my local area and the monastery monk's grand-disciple Mingde also vowed to retrieve the sutra. At that time officials, laymen, monks, and others praised their accomplishment [in reviving the monastery]. They sent a letter to Zhongjia, and Zhongjia honored the agreement. This sutra and the stupa were both returned. These past sixteen years went by very quickly, like the man from Chu who retrieved his bow and the meeting of swords at Yanjin, is this not inconceivable!

³³ The name of this particular stupa was misunderstood by many late Ming literati. Some sources like, Yu Chunxi's 虞淳熙 (1553-1621) stupa epitaph for Yongming Yanshou, take the name literally and describe this as a stupa for a bird, most likely a quail. However, other sources claim that Zhi'er was the name of a child in the Eastern Jin (317-420) who died sometime after he heard the monk Daosheng 道生 (355-434) recite the *Lotus Sutra*, and thus, a stupa was built for him at this temple. Yet another source says that a quail who heard the monk recite, appeared in the monk's dream and said that it would be reborn as a child; it is this quail-turned-child for whom the stupa was built. See Yu Chunxi 虞淳熙, "Shou chanshi sudubo bian 壽禪師窣堵波辨," in *Nan bing Jingci si zhi* 南屏淨慈寺志, 772, in *Zhongguo Fosi Shizhi Huikan* 中國佛寺史志彙刊, 1st series, vol. 17-19 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju · Danqing tushu gongsi, 1980-1994); Wei Xian 魏憲, "Bantang shousheng jiaosi chongxiu taji 半塘壽聖教寺重修塔記 in *Wudu fa sheng* 吳都法乘, 1118-1119; for a correction to Yu Chunxi's views, see the untitled explanation in Li Rihua 李日華 (1565-1635), *Liu yan zhai erbi* 六研齋二筆, *juan* 2.27-28, in *Yingyin wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, *zibu* 子部 10, vol. 867, 604-605 (Reprint: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 1983-1986).

³⁴ Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535-1614; z. Baigu 百谷) had an abode he named Banji 半偈.

萬曆壬寅 (1602)，曇旭比丘有緣吾土，而寺僧孫徒明德有願還經，一時宰官、居士、開士等並贊成其勝，移書仲嘉，仲嘉謹如約，此經既還，塔亦歸附。十六年間，彈指去來，楚人之弓³⁵，延津之劍³⁶，豈可思議哉！³⁷

Xie Bi sheds light on both how this text traveled to Zhaolin Abode and when it was returned to Suzhou. He is clearly elated by the ability of the monks Tanxu 曇旭 and Mingde 明德 to repair the temple. He likens the Wu literati ability to retrieve what they lost to the classic example of the man of Chu who lost his bow, yet was able to find it himself. Both Xie Bi and Qian Qianyi make it clear that the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* was a valued part of their Wu cultural heritage and for this reason it belonged in Wu. Just as the two swords were reunited, so were the Shanji copy and the stupa when they were returned to Bantang Monastery.

Other sources do not dispute the general outline provided by Xie Bi, but several sources are more judgmental and dispositive in their depictions. The entry on this history in the *Tiger Hill Gazetteer* (*Hufu zhi* 虎阜志) claims that a degenerate monk sold the work to Wang (不肖僧以經質錢于汪司馬).³⁸ As to the price Wang may have paid, there is one tantalizing clue in the travel writings of Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1546-1623). Feng Mengzhen's *Daily Chronicle* (*Riji* 日記) entry for the twenty-fourth day of the second month of 1602, states that it took fifty taels to buy it back:

Thereupon, we took a small boat to the other side of [West] Lake and anchored it at Chishan pier where we clambered onto the shore and proceeded to visit the Liutong Monastery (Six Supranormal Powers Monastery). There we happily viewed

³⁵ This idiom aptly sums up Qian Qianyi's feeling that one should take care of one's own and refers to the story of the king of Chu who lost his bow and said that a man of Chu would find it (楚人失弓，楚人得之).

³⁶ As for the phrase, *Yanjin zhi jian* 延津之劍, this idiom is derived from the story of the reuniting of two swords called respectively, Longquan and Tai'e. The swords were originally together, but Lei Huan 雷煥 (d.u.) separated them when he sent only one of them to Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300). Both swords eventually end up at different times in the same river where they are transformed into two intertwined dragons, and thus, are reunited. The phrase is used to express how fortunate or auspicious it is when two things that have been separated are somehow, mysteriously reunited. For the *locus classicus* of this story, see "Zhang Hua zhuan 張華傳," in *Jinshu* 晉書 36:1075.

³⁷ Xie Bi, "Xindu Xie Bi ba," *Hufu lu* (J no. B110, vol. 21, 675b3- 675b7).

³⁸ In Qian Qianyi's funeral epitaph for the compiler of the *Wudu fasheng* 吳都法乘, Zhou Yongnian 周永年 (1582-1674), he claimed that the text was 100 *juan*. The *Siku quanshu* copy preserved only twelve *juan*, whereas there is a Buddhist temple gazetteer collection that includes a forty-two *juan* version. There are also other recensions of varying length. The *Hufu zhi* 虎阜志 text cited here claims to be a citation from the *Wudu fasheng*, but this particular story is not in any of the recensions of that gazetteer that I have seen. For this untitled text see the *Hufu zhi* 虎阜志 10.18.

the blood-written copy of the *Huayan Sutra* Scholar Song wrote in his previous life. The Bantang Sheng Shou Monastery monk Shanji copied it beginning in the *zhizheng* period of the Yuan dynasty. His calligraphy was like that of Zhao Weiguo, clear block script without deviation for eighty fascicles. . . . As for this text, the temple monk sold it to the Vice Prefect Wang [Daokun]. In proclaiming our desire for its return, my generation made it possible for the monk Tanxu to pay fifty taels to buy it back. Because of this, the Yongzhen monastery gate will not be disgraced again. The monk Tanxu remained for a meal. The abbot said

遂乘小舟，絕湖赤山埠，登岸，過六通寺，隨喜宋學士前身血書《華嚴經》。元前至正，半塘聖壽寺，僧善繼所書。書法似趙魏國，端楷不苟，八十卷 . . . 此經，寺僧質于汪司馬，余輩唱願，俾曇旭以五十金贖之。以永鎮山門不可再辱，曇旭留齋，主僧曰 . . .³⁹

Fifty taels was a hefty sum. If Wang Daokun did indeed purchase the text for that sum, the temple monks would have been able to use these funds to support themselves and begin repairs to their dilapidated monastery. Feng makes note of the calligraphy and compares it favorably to that of another famous calligrapher, Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322, epithet Weiguo 魏國). He also mentions the monk Tanxu who was clearly part of their entourage, and that they remained at the monastery for a meal, presumably at noontime. But the entries in the *Daily Chronicle* tend to be short and choppy and Feng rapidly moves on to other topics. Feng does not shed any light on why the text was at Liu Tong Monastery 六通寺 and not at Zhaolin Abode. Since the text was returned to Bantang Monastery in 1602, perhaps it was available for viewing en route to that destination or it had already been turned over to Tanxu who shared it with them.

With respect to the repair of the Bantang Monastery, there is some evidence that Qian Qianyi himself was quite invested in supporting this endeavor, as was the prolific writer and government official Li Weizhen 李維楨 (1547-1626), the author of other short prefaces and postfaces on blood-writing.⁴⁰ Li Weizhen's preface to a Bantang Monastery

³⁹ Feng Mengzhen's recounting of Song Lian's mother's dream adds nothing new, and thus, I have left it out. Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, *Riji* 日記, *juan* 59.3, in *Kuaxue tang ji* 快雪堂集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, *jibu* 集部, vol. 165, p. 47 (1616. Reprint, Jinan: Qi Lu shushe chubanshe, 1997).

⁴⁰ Li Weizhen wrote many merchant biographies, a lucrative practice. He also weighed in on various government matters, composed poetry, and participated in the compilation of the *Shenzong Veritable Records* (*Shenzong shilu* 神宗實錄). Xie Bi is listed among the editor-readers of Li Weizhen's collected

donation circular created by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639) and the scholar-official Fan Yunlin 范允臨 (1558-1641; h. Zhangbai 長白, *jinsi* 1595)⁴¹ opens by telling the reader that, when on a boat trip, Qian Qianyi stopped at Bantang Monastery where he saw the sutra repository.⁴²

Whether the Shanji copy was given to Wang Daokun for safekeeping or whether something more nefarious unfolded in how he came to possess it depends on one's point of view. That Feng Mengzhen would list such a specific sum of money for the repurchase further indicates that there is a larger story to be told—one that requires further information on the costs of repair and efforts to solicit donations—a story beyond the scope of this project. What is not in dispute is that the monastery was dilapidated and in need of repair. Having made the repairs, the Shanji copy was procured through the efforts of several energetic monks and their literati supporters so that it could be returned to Suzhou.

Later References to the Shanji Copy:

The Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* continued to inspire literati viewers well into the mid-seventeenth century, as well as in later periods.⁴³ Some of these viewers sought to elevate other lesser known blood-writing projects, whether of the *Huayan Sutra* or other sutras, through association with this copy. Despite the power and authority enjoyed by the monk Yongming in late Ming contexts and the debates outlined above concerning his reincarnations, later references all but obscured his role. In subsequent prefaces and postfaces the vast majority of literati writers privileged Song Lian as the central figure, but kept an oblique reference to the intergenerational provenance. Occasionally a work would mention Shanji, but Yongming's name only appears in longer explanations.

This was certainly the case for postfaces written by the Ming loyalist-turned-monk Tao Ru'nai 陶汝鼐 (1601-1683; 進士 1633) who said, "In the past when I visited the

writings, the *Dami shanfang ji* 大泌山房集. For a description of some of Li Weizhen activities, see Ying-shih Yu, *Chinese History and Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 254, 297.

⁴¹ Fan Yunlin was well-known for his calligraphy some of which is housed in various museums worldwide. See for instance, the album leaf letter, in the John B. Elliott Collection, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey.

⁴² Li Weizhen, "Ti Shousheng si muyuan ce 題壽聖寺募緣冊," in *Dami shanfang ji*, *juan* 130.49.

⁴³ There are many other postfaces written by literati viewers of the Shanji copy from the late Qing through the Republican Era, including by such prominent figures as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). For some of this material, see Yin Wenhan 尹文漢, "Zhongguo gudai cixie shujing zhi feng—jian lun Jiuhua shan Haiyu heshang xieshu *Huayan jing* 中國古代刺血書經之風—兼論九華山海玉和尚血書《華嚴經》," *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 vol. 1 (2016): 114-119.

Bantang Monastery in Suzhou, I saw the *Huayan Sutra* the Honorable. Song had written over three lifetimes (昔過吳門三塘寺，見宋公三世書《華嚴經》. . .).⁴⁴ And in another postface, Tao Ru'nai wrote, “In the past, only after three lifetimes was Song Jinglian able to complete the writing out of a single copy of the *Huayan [Sutra]* (昔宋景濂書《華嚴》一部，三世始成).”⁴⁵ In both instances the reference to three generations or three lifetimes was only comprehensible to those who already knew the backstory. As for the 1630 Suzhou provincial gazetteer, it recorded only that “at the beginning of the dynasty, Song Lian from Jinhua was reborn and copied the *Huayan Sutra* in blood (國初，金華宋濂再生血書《華嚴經》),” with no ensuing explanation or comment.⁴⁶

With respect to the usage of Shanji's name, Li Weizhen, who had traveled to Suzhou to see the Shanji copy, incorporated two references to the work in a preface he wrote for a monk who had copied the *Lotus Sutra* in blood. The monk, Rong 榮, hailed from Hubei province as did Li Weizhen, but like many monks, he had traveled from monastery to monastery seeking Buddhist instruction. In this pursuit, he was tonsured under Xuelang Hongen 雪浪洪恩 (1545-1608) and received some Chan training under Zhuhong at Yunqi Monastery 雲棲寺 (Cloud Dwelling Monastery), yet despite training under such eminent monks, he did not achieve their level of renown.⁴⁷ After he arrived in Nanjing, he copied the *Lotus Sutra* in blood by collecting blood from the blood vessels on the underside of his tongue. Upon completion an unidentified group of scholar-officials asked Li Weizhen to compose a postface.⁴⁸ Li Weizhen's last official post was in the Ministry of Rites in Nanjing, so perhaps this is when he saw the Rong copy. Wanting his readers to fathom the superb quality of the Rong copy, Li Weizhen compared it to the Shanji copy:

⁴⁴ The copy cited here has Santang si 三塘寺, but this is a graphic error and should be Bantang si 半塘寺. I have thus translated it accordingly. Tao Ru'nai, “Nanyue Zhengguang zunzhe xieshu Huayan jing ba 南岳正光尊者血書《華嚴經》跋,” in *Tao Mi'an xiansheng wenji* 陶密庵先生文集, in *Rongmu tang heji* 榮木堂合集 35 juan, in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊, *jibu* 集部, vol. 85 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997-2000), 628.

⁴⁵ Tao Ru'nai, “Mingxiu biqiu shoushu Huayan jing ba 明修比丘手書《華嚴經》跋,” in *Siku jinhui shu congkan*, 628.

⁴⁶ See *Suzhou fuzhi* 蘇州府志, 9.36, in *Da Ming yitong mingsheng zhi* 大明一統名勝志, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, *shibu* 史部 vol. 167, 526 (1630 Reprint; Jinan: Qi Lu shushe chubanshe, 1995-1997).

⁴⁷ Li Weizhen only provides one name for this monk, which makes it difficult to track down any biographical information. Rong hailed from Huangzhou, met a number of famous monks, and appears to have also met Qian Qianyi. Li Weizhen wrote that a number of donors built him an abode (*jingshe* 精舍), but offers no names.

⁴⁸ Li Weizhen's words were added at the end of Rong's copy much in the spirit of a colophon. Written in the style of a postface, the text would have received wider circulation through its publication in Li Weizhen's collected works.

Recently when traveling around Suzhou, I saw the Yuan dynasty monk Shanji's blood-written copy of the eighty-one fascicle *Huayan Sutra* and praise text by Song Wenxian at the Shousheng Monastery; those near and far venerate this Dharma treasure! Now I have also viewed this monk [Rong's] blood artifact and moreover he hails from my native province, Chu. Although I dare not compare his copy to the Wenxian one, I was happy [he did it] since Chu has never had such an event. For this reason, I added a few words after those of other officials and scholars.

余頃遊吳中壽聖寺，見元僧善繼血書華嚴經八十一卷，宋文憲為讚，遠邇尊奉法寶！今又見上人血蹟⁴⁹，且出吾楚，雖不敢比文憲，竊喜得未曾有。因綴數言，諸薦紳學士之後。⁵⁰

Li Weizhen's self-effacing proclamation notwithstanding, he is careful to mention his trip to Bantang Monastery and the comparison to guide readers toward greater appreciation if not veneration for the Rong copy and to place it within a storied tradition of blood-writing. Li may have hoped the association would further elevate the stature of this relatively unknown monk. Invoking the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* as an exemplary model even when the copyist was focused on a different scripture affirmed the value of this ascetic practice, elevated lesser known works and monks, and kept references to the Shanji copy in circulation, thus further inscribing its own relevance.

That Li Weizhen, Wang Daokun, and others made the pilgrimage to see the Shanji copy further demonstrates that such texts were so worthy of veneration that they warranted a stop on a literati trip around a region, suggesting that blood-writing texts drew practitioners and others to the monasteries and temples that housed them. Such a powerful draw surely enhanced the prestige of Buddhist establishments, resulted in monetary donations, and the writing of more prefaces, and postfaces. Much has been made in previous scholarship about the cult of the book. Mahayana scripture often included prescriptive language that encouraged practitioners to treat scripture as the sacred repository of the Buddha's words and to worship the texts as an embodiment of the Buddha. That be as it may, it was the blood-writing copy studied here that drew late

⁴⁹ *Xueji* 血蹟 means, literally, blood traces. But here it is used in the sense of a treasured object or artifact.

⁵⁰ The *Dami shanfang ji* includes several pieces Li wrote about blood-writing. Li Weizhen, "Ti Rong shangren juan 題榮上人卷," in *Dami shanfang ji*, juan 127.42-43.

Ming literati visitors to Bantang Monastery, not its repository of ink-copied or woodblock print texts.

In Conclusion:

The prefaces and postfaces analyzed here reveal a robust literati interest in the Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* and in blood-writing more generally. Originally scattered throughout the collected writings of individual literati, some of these sources were republished in *The Record of Protecting the Dharma*, a compilation that was included in the Jiaxing Canon. As the prefaces and postfaces for the Shanji copy and for other blood-writing projects written by Tao Ru'nai, Li Weizhen, Xie Bi and others come to light, they bring to the fore social connections among literati whose shared Buddhist interests would otherwise be obscured. Many late Ming literati read Buddhist scriptures and Chan discourse records. Many also visited numerous Buddhist monasteries and smaller temples. Yet very few literati writings discuss reincarnation so directly, let alone attempt to use Buddhist historical criteria to work out an intergenerational succession as seen here in the writings of both Xie Bi and Qian Qianyi.

That there were literati who cared deeply about provenance and successive reincarnations is significant for how we understand late Ming literati beliefs about the rebirth of famous monks and literati, their dream appearances, their karmic connections, and the standards for determining truth claims. Late Ming and early Qing viewers of the Shanji copy understood that the karmic responsibility for the completion of this endeavor was shared cross three generations. Not only did the literati accept this possibility, in their writing of postfaces for other blood-writing projects, they often linked those projects to the Shanji copy, which, in effect, raised the stature of both copies. The practice reinforced the important of the Shanji copy, keeping it in the public eye, and elevated other lesser known monks and their work by association with this venerated artifact.

The Shanji copy of the *Huayan Sutra* functioned as an object of veneration and worship. Primary sources whether by Song Lian, Qian Qianyi, or the other literati named here describe their prostrations, burning of incense, and offerings of flowers to this blood scripture. Viewed as Dharma treasures, such works put a monastery on the map, drew pilgrims, and generally elevated the profile of the places that were fortunate enough to have them. Literati also admired the quality of the calligraphy and the luminous sheen of the blood, neither of which could be appreciated without in-person viewing.

Although this study provides a detailed analysis of the reception of only one blood-written copy with an unusual backstory, it should be noted that there were many other monks engaged in blood-writing of the *Huayan Sutra* and of other sutras. These works and their prefaces and postfaces remain to be studied as does the history of the reception of the Shanji copy from the mid-Qing onwards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks for the invitation to present this research at the 2023 International Conference on Huayen Buddhism and to the Huayen Lotus Association, and to Chen I-Biau 陳一標, Chen Ying-shan 陳英善, Shi Jianrong 釋堅融, and other members of this institute for their kindness and understanding as well as their willingness to read some of these materials with me. I would especially like to thank Dr. Tu Yen-chiu 涂艷秋 for her insightful comments and for encouraging me to present at this conference. I would also like to thank the many scholars who discussed this material with me, those who offered sound editing advice, and those who helped me track down various difficult to find primary sources, among which are James A. Benn, Alia Goehr, He Yingtian, Martin Ching Kit Wu, and Lin Sheng-tsai. I would like to offer a special thanks to Princeton librarian Joshua Seufert for helping me find many obscure references.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

- J *Jiaxing da zangjing* 嘉興大藏經, CBETA rpt. of *Jingshan zangban banzang* 徑山藏版藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1987).
- X *Xu zangjing* 續藏經, CBETA rpt. of *Shinsan Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經 [Newly Edited Great Japanese (Republication of the) Supplement to the Chinese Buddhist Canon] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975–1989), rpt. of *Dai Nippon zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經 150 vols. Eds. Maeda Eun 前田慧雲 and Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧 (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905-1912). In following the conventions of *CBETA*, I use X not Z.

