

Research on the Relationship between Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism in the Mid to Late Tang Dynasty

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ABSTRACT

This article comprehensively explores the relationship between Xichuan Jiedushi and Buddhism during the mid to late Tang Dynasty through a comprehensive investigation of internal and external classics, Buddhist relics, and field survey data, following the traditional cataloging method of seeking books based on categories and studying studies based on books. Jiedushi was not only the provincial governor during the middle and late Tang Dynasty, but also a synonym of a local administrative district. The predecessor of the Jiannan West Jiedushi, Jiannan Jiedushi, was one of the earliest Jiedushi established in the Tang Dynasty. Due to its developed economy and close proximity to the Guanzhong area, Jiannan West became an exceedingly important region of Tang Dynasty. Thus its significance was evident. At the same time, the flourishing of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty reached its peak, affecting all fields. Under the influence of Buddhism, the bureaucrats and scholars generally worshipped Buddhism, among which included all the Jiannan West Jiedushi. In addition, under the bureaucratic system of Tang Dynasty, most Jiannan West Jiedushi were literary giants, which had significant influence on the formation and development of Chengdu's urban culture in the middle to late Tang Dynasty. Especially in religious activities, they extensively participated in the interaction between Confucianism and Buddhism, and treated famous monks with civility. And during their tenure, they either donated funds to build temples, or converted their residences into temples, or ordained people as monks. They fully supported the development of Buddhism, which not only united people in Jiannan West, but also indirectly stabilized the Tang Dynasty's rule of Jiannan West. This article comprehensively considers the background of the times, the intervention of political rights, the interaction of social classes, and the customs of life. At the same time, it refers to the influence of local officials represented by the Xichuan Jiedushi on religious philosophy, aesthetic psychology, cultural arts, sculpture, and other factors during this period, in order to objectively and comprehensively depict the Buddhism of Bashu in the middle and late Tang Dynasty.

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1. Introduction

The Jiannan Jiedushi was officially established in the fifth year of the Kaiyuan era (717). And from the thirteenth year of the Kaiyuan era, the Jiannan Jiedushi concurrently held the position of Surveillance Commission, gaining control over military and civilian affairs. It was the earliest region within the Tang Dynasty to integrate military and political powers. After the AnShi Rebellion, the Jiannan region experienced continuous military turmoils. In order to prevent new unrest, the Tang Dynasty divided the Jiannan region into the Jiannan West region and Jiannan East region in February of the second year of the Shangyuan era (761). Then the Tang court merged the Jiannan West and Jiannan East into Jiannan region in the second year of the Guangde era (764) in order to consolidate southwest border defense. Afterwards, the Jiannan region was once again separated in February of the second year of the Shangyuan era (761) but quickly reunited. And in February of the second year of the Yongtai era (766), the central government of the Tang Dynasty once again decided to divide the Jiannan region into Jiannan West and Jiannan East, and appointed Du Hongjian as the Jiedushi of the Jiannan West, which declared the establishment of the Jiannan West.

The Jiannan West was the heartland of the Tang Dynasty and the frontier of the southwestern border defense. The stability of its governance directly affected the prosperity and decline of the Tang Dynasty, making its political and military position extremely important. And Chengdu is the capital of the Jiannan West region from the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, including the Yizhou General Administration, Yizhou Dudufu, and Yizhou Dadudufu. And as early as the early Tang Dynasty, *'Chengdu was known as the Southwest Capital and National Treasury, where all the wealth and abundance are concentrated, and it can assist the whole country as the treasure follows the river downstream'* (Zi'ang & Peng, 1960). After the AnShi Rebellion, the economic situation in the Jiannan remained one of the most stable during the Tang Dynasty: *'Since the AnShi Rebellion, only Jiannan had abundant tax collections and supplied the most treasuries'* (Fu, 1983). Until the middle Tang Dynasty, *'Chengdu is extravagant and luxurious as Yangzhou, hence they are called Yang-Yi'* (Xiangzhi & Yongxian, 2005). However, *'Yangzhou and Yizhou are the most famous towns today for their popularity and abundance, and Yang is considered first because of its influence. As for the popularity, scenery, silk, craftsmen, talents, and fertility of land, Yangzhou was less than half of Yizhou'* (Qiu, 1983). And Du Cong, who had been appointment as the Minister of the Central Secretariat, the Jiannan West Jiedushi, and the Huainan Jiedushi, expressed his sincere attachment and reluctance to leave Chengdu when he was transferred to Guangling, saying: *'I told my colleagues that there are three things that I am not satisfied with, ... The third is transferring from Jiannan West to Zhenling'* (Guangxian & Aiyuan, 1981).

The existence of the Jiannan West Jiedushi during the Tang Dynasty began in the second year of the Yongtai era (766) and lasted until the first year of the Kaiping era (907) of the later Liang dynasty. There were a total of 35 Jiannan West Jiedushis during this approximately 140-year period, among whom Duan Wenchang and Du Cong served as this position twice. The court attached great importance to the Jiannan West Jiedushi who usually served the successor of the prime ministers. And all the appointed Jiannan West Jiedushi were important members of the court, such as Du Hongjian, Cui Ning, Zhang Yanshang, Wei Gao, Gao Chongwen, Wu Yuanheng, Li Yijian, Wang Bo, Duan Wenchang, Du Yuanying, Li Deyu, Du Cong, Bai Minzhong, Gao Pian, etc.. After taking up the post at Chengdu, they also held the title of Chengdu Yin, serving as the highest-ranking administrative and military officials in Chengdu and the Jiannan West, wielding great power and authority. The development of Chengdu's urban economy and culture was closely related to these people. Thus, studying the relationship between the Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism in the mid to late Tang Dynasty provides excellent clue for us to observe Buddhism and society at that time.

2. The Relationship between Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism

During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism flourished to the peak and affected all fields. And officials and scholars widely revered Buddhism under the influence of Buddhism. Besides, religions were flourishing in the southwestern region during the Tang Dynasty, among which Buddhism was the most prominent. There were plentiful temples and pagodas built, and many eminent monks emerged. And Chengdu, the capital of the southwestern region, was the largest Buddhist center in the region. According to historical records such as '*Biographies of Eminent Monks*' and '*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*', there were as many as 43 temples in Chengdu during the Tang and Five Dynasties period alone. And it was found that most of the Jiannan West Jiedushi held reverence for Buddhism according to documentary statistics, and more than half of the thirty-four Jiannan West Jiedushi during the middle and late Tang Dynasty participated in Buddhist activities. During their tenure in Chengdu, they either donated funds to build temples, or converted their residences into temples, or honored Buddhist monks, or ordained people as monks, or sponsored the writing of scriptures, or attended Buddhist sermons actively, which promoted the development of Buddhism in the Jiannan region. This chapter mainly explores the relationship between the Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism, analyzes in-depth the Buddhist activities of the Jiannan West Jiedushi during their tenures, and examines the development of Buddhism in this region under the strong support of the Jiannan West Jiedushi.

2.1. Building Buddhist Temples

According to relevant literature such as '*New Book of Tang*', '*Old Book of Tang*', '*Biographies of Eminent Monks of Song Dynasty*' and local chronicles, there were numerous cases of Jiannan West Jiedushi funding or personally financing the construction of temples in Chengdu. For example, Jiedushi Lu Yuanyu built the '*Bodhi Temple*' near the Old Hejiang Pavilion at the confluence of the two rivers in the south of Chengdu City in the second year of the Zhide era (757). In the early years of the Dali era, Jiedushi Du Hongjian changed Shengxing Temple to Yongtai Temple and later built Baotang Temple where the eminent monk Wuzhu stayed for a period of time (Guangda, 2008).

Jiedushi Wei Gao used his salary to personally construct Baoli Temple between the twenty-seventh and twentieth years of the Zhenyuan era (801-804) (Shen, 2003). According to the '*Biographies of Eminent Monks of Song Dynasty*,' Liu Bi launched a rebellion in Jiannan West region after the death of Wei Gao, then Jiedushi Gao Chongwen put down the rebellion and renamed Baoli Temple as Yuanheshengshou Temple (Ning, 1987).

Jiedushi Duan Wenchang converted the former residence of his predecessor into Zifu Academy and arranged seven eminent monks to live there when he stationed in Chengdu for the first time (Deyu et al., 2000). Later, Zifu Academy became one of the 96 academy of Daci Temple that is the most famous Temples in Chengdu. And Duan Wenchang also wrote about the establishment of Puti Temple in response to the request of the monks, describing the history of Puti Temple in detail (Xu, 1975).

In the sixth year of the Taihe era (832), when Duan Wenchang served as Jiannan West Jiedushi again, he used his funds to rebuild Fucheng Temple, which had been destroyed by an invasion of Nanzhao Kingdom in the fourth year of the Taihe era (830). And he used 300,000 strings of cash as the basis for this operation when he planned the construction of the temple. There was a popular folk song in Chengdu that described Duan Wenchang's achievements of temple construction: '*In the past, the Fucheng temple was destroyed after Duan Wenchang left Chengdu, now it is rebuilt by Duan Wenchang when he came back. The people are safe, and the military is well-managed, just like this temple*' (Yuxi & Tuiyuan, 1989).

Buddhism in Chengdu suffered a major blow during the Huichang era, then Jiedushi Li Hui rebuilt the destroyed Konghui Temple and renamed it Shengshou Temple, which became the second largest temple in Chengdu just inferior to Daci Temple (Xuequan & Zhijian, 1984). And Jiedushi Bai Minzhong funded the renovation of Shengshou Temple again in the sixth year of the Dazhong era (852). Besides, In the ninth year of the Dazhong era (855), Bai Minzhong also rebuilt the destroyed Xinxiang Temple during the Huichang era and invited the famous monk Farun to host the construction (Yun, 2003). During the second to the sixth year of the Dazhong era (848-852), The former Jiedushi Du Cong also assisted in rebuilding the various temples destroyed during the Huichang era such as Jingzhong Temple (Xiufu et al., 1982). And a shrine was built in Jingzhong Temple to commemorate Du Cong in the late Tang and Five Dynasties period.

The Jiedushi Wu Hanglu also built Tianwang Temple near his office. As recorded in the *'Yizhou Famous Painting Record'*, it states: *'Now, under the Daan Tower at the north gate of the government office, there is Tianwang Temple built by Wu Hanglu when he stationed in Chengdu.'* (Xiufu et al., 1982). Cui Anqian, who was nominated to Jiannan West Jiedushi in the fifth year of the Qianfu era (878), was a devout Buddhist who only ate vegetarian food and abstained from meat. In the book of *'Beimeng Suoyan'*, it mentions that *'Cui Anqian revere Buddhism and has vegetarian diet. During his three years in Chengdu, only eat a lot of vegetable food, which is similar to Emperor Wu of Liang'* (Guangxian & Aiyuan, 1981). And he requested the emperor to rename Jianyuan Temple as Zhaojue Temple. In addition, the master Xiumeng, who was the first generation of Caodong sect and resided in Zhaojue Temple, was bestowed with a purple robe because of the request (Tian, 2003). Zhaojue Temple still stands in the northern suburbs of Chengdu and is known as the *'number one Zen Buddhism in Jiannan West'*, and was announced by the State Council of the People's Republic of China as a key Buddhist temple in Han ethnic areas in 1983.

In the second year of the DaJiannan Westn era (891), Wang Jian became the Jiannan West Jiedushi and later proclaimed himself the King of Jiannan West. And he built a new temple in Daci Temple in the first year of the Qianning era (894), which was recorded: *'at the beginning of Qianning era, Wang Jian found that the Buddhist hall in his mansion was not strict enough and the meditation room was not spacious enough, so he built the Yanxiang Academy on the east Daci Temple'* (Xiufu et al., 1982).

2.2. Carving Buddhist Statues

Besides actively constructing Buddhist temples in Chengdu, most Jiannan West Jiedushi also actively carved Buddhist statues to promote Buddhism in the regions under their jurisdiction, among which Wei Gao is the most typical representative. Wei Gao was a famous officer general during the middle Tang Dynasty, he takes up the post of Jiannan West Jiedushi and held important positions such as the magistrate of Chengdu in the first year of the Zhenyuan era (785). During his twenty-first year tenure, He made remarkable contributions to stabilizing the southwestern minority tribes and repelling their invasions. Especially against Tubo and Nanzhao, great achievements have been made, which led to the stability of Jiannan West, Yunnan, and Tibet, and promoted social stability, economic development, and consolidation of the political rule of the Tang Dynasty.

During his tenure in Jiannan West, Wei Gao actively promoted Buddhism and carved Buddhist statues to promote the development of Buddhism. To finish the giant Maitreya Buddha statue at Lingyun Temple in Jiazhou was his first construction of statue and temple. In the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, there was a temple called Bao'en Temple on Jiuding Mountain in Jiazhou, which later changed its name to Lingyun Temple. In the early years of the Kaicheng era, Monk

Haitong lived in the temple on the Jiuding Mountain, under which the Min river, Qingyi river and Dadu river converged to make the flow turbulent. Thus, Monk Haitong decided to carve a large Maitreya Buddha statue, wishing to control the turbulent river flow and bless passing boats. However, as the construction of the Buddha statue was massive, Monk Haitong passed away before its completion. In the twenty-seventh year of the Kaiyuan era (739), Zhanqiu Jianqiong became the Jiannan West Jiedushi and continued the unfinished project. But he was reassigned to the position of Minister of Revenue and left for the capital in the fifth year of the Tianbao era (746), leaving the construction of the Maitreya Buddha statue unfinished. In the first year of the Zhenyuan era (785), Wei Gao was appointed as the Jiannan West Jiedushi and the magistrate of Chengdu. He prepared to continue the construction that there was still a considerable amount of work remaining, with more than half of the Buddha statues yet to be completed (Gao & Xianzhao, 2004). In the fifth year of the Zhenyuan era, Emperor Dezong issued an edict to repair the Buddha statue. Wei Gao immediately took action and used his own salary to continue the construction on a large scale. *'He used fifty thousand coins from his salary to cover the expenses, ordering workers to used red clay to highlight the features and decorated it with gold'* (Gao & Xianzhao, 2004). Under the leadership of Wei Gao, the construction of the renowned Maitreya Buddha statue was finally completed in the nineteenth year of the Zhenyuan era. Wei Gao also specially wrote *'Record of the Maitreya Buddha Statue at Lingyun Temple in Jiazhou'* and had it engraved on the cliff next to the Buddha statue to commemorate this event. He described the majestic and solemn appearance of the Maitreya Buddha statue as follows: *'With its feet taking shape, lotus flowers blooming, it appears to have descended from heaven or surged from the ground. It has all the necessary features and is exquisite in appearance'* (Gao & Xianzhao, 2004). After thousands of years, the Great Maitreya Buddha statue in Leshan (Jiazhou) still stands at the confluence of the Min River, Qingyi River, and Dadu River now, quietly guarding the land of Jiannan region.

Wei Gao also repaired the statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva in Daci Temple that is the largest temple in Chengdu during the Tang dynasty in the twenty-seventh year of Zhenyuan era (801). Besides, he built the Avalokitesvara Hall and wrote *'Record of the Rebuilding of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva in Daci Temple'* specifically to commemorate this event (Gao, 2004). Through reconstruction, the grandeur of Daci Temple was restored, and Wei Gao described the appearance of the Bodhisattva as follows: *'Looking at its left side, it dominates the splendor of Huayang. In the middle, it captivates the magnificence of Chengdu. The Min River bathes its front toes, while the Jade Wall adorns its western side. It epitomizes the blessed land and attracts goodness from all directions. How could its architecture not be grand and its divine abode not be in perfect order'* (Gao, 2004).

Pagodas are special type of structure in Buddhism, usually made of stone or metal, used to store Buddhist relics called sarira. Sarira is usually the remains or belongings of Buddhas or eminent monks, believed to possess sacred powers and thought to bring protection and blessings. Thus, Pagodas are considered symbols of Buddhist faith and hold significant religious meaning. Paying respects and constructing pagodas are ways for people to show their devotion and gratitude to the Buddhas. *'Biographies of Eminent Monks of Song Dynasty'* recorded a miraculous experience between Wei Gao and pagoda: *'In the twenty-first year of his tenure, he greatly revered Buddhist scriptures and constantly chanted Buddha's name with a Buddha bead in hand. He trained a parrot to recite scriptures. When it died, there were sarira found after cremation'* (Ning, 1987). The fact that the parrot could chant Amitabha and yielded more than ten pieces of sarira after cremation greatly shocked people at that time. Therefore, Wei Gao built a parrot pagoda on Sanxue Mountain in Jintang County, Chengdu at the request of monk Huiguan, and wrote *'Record of the Parrot Pagoda in Jiannan West'* to commemorate this event.

2.3. Honoring Buddhist Monks

Besides focusing on merits and virtues, all Jiannan West Jiedushi also paid attention to the interaction between Confucianism and Buddhism, and showing respect to renowned monks. During the Kaiyuan era of the Tang Dynasty, the prince Wu Xiang of Silla traveled to Jiannan region and paid respects to Zhi Shen, who was the fifth patriarch of Zen. And later Wu Xiang became the Dharma heir of Monk Chu. In the first year of the Tianbao era, Jiedushi Zhangqiu Jianqiong invited Master Wu Xiang to Jizhong Temple in Chengdu to give lectures on Zen Buddhism to a large number of believers, leading them to enlightenment (Sichuan Buddhist Association, 1992). And in the first year of the Dali era (766), Prime Minister Du Hongjian was appointed as the Jiannan West Jiedushi. After arriving in Chengdu, he sent envoys to invite Master Wu Zhu, who was the disciple of Master Wu Xiang, to move from Baiya Mountain to Konghui Temple in Chengdu, ordering the monks from various temples in Chengdu to welcome him. Besides, Du Hongjian also summoned the excellent Three-Religion scholars of Chengdu to Konghui Temple to listen to Master Wu Zhu's lectures on Zen Buddhism. On the Dharma seat, and he repeatedly engaged in discussions about the three phrases of '*no memory, no thought, no delusion*', which was passed down from Wu Xiang. He had joyful conversations with many monks, sharing the same purpose (Sichuan Buddhist Association, 1992). Afterwards, Du Hongjian welcomed Master Wu Zhu to reside in Baotang Temple in Chengdu to continue spreading his teachings. In the second year of the Dali era (767), Cui Ning succeeded Du Hongjian as the Jiannan West Jiedushi and invited Master Huiwu, a disciple of Wu Xiang, to reside in the Bodhi Temple.

In addition, Wei Gao dedicated his later years to Southern Zen Buddhism, and he studied Buddhism at Jizhong Temple in Chengdu under the guidance of the famous monk Shen Hui, which was also a disciple of Wu Xiang. Historical records indicate that Wei Gao greatly admired Shenhui: *'He was most devoted to Shen Hui. Wei Gao mourned deeply when Shen Hui passed away....Wei Gao erected a monument to commemorate him and inscribed his own words to honor the Zen tradition'* (Ning, 1987). And the well-known Monk Guang Xuan was also highly regarded by Wei Gao. They often exchanged poems and verses with each other. Their mutual exchange of verses in Chengdu was commemorated by a poem entitled '*To Monk Guangxuan in Jiannan West, Singing Together with Lord Wei*' composed by the renowned poet Liu Yuxi. When Jiedushi Du Yuanying was appointed, he heard that Monk Zhi Xuan had profound knowledge of Buddhist teachings, so he ordered Monk Zhi Xuan to give lectures on the Dharma at the PuXian Pavilion of Daci Temple, with tens of thousands audiences. During the Tang Dynasty, the Vinaya texts were extensive and complicated. The eminent monk Huai Su of the Vinaya wrote '*Annotated Notes on the Fourfold Vinaya*' and '*Gleanings from the New Vinaya Commentary*' consisting of twenty volumes to promote the classics of the Vinaya sect. Wei Gao frequently read Vinaya scriptures while leisure in military affairs when he governed Jiannan West, and he used his own salary to support the circulation of the Vinaya classics. *'He used his own salary had forty copies of the 'New Vinaya' and thirty copies of the 'Lotus Sutra Commentary' written, which were distributed by eminent monk Guang Yi'* (Gao, 2004). And Wei Gao wrote '*Record of Teaching the Vinaya at Baoyuan Temple*' to commemorate this event. In the eighth year of the Dazhong era (854), the great monk Yong An visited the residence of the Jiannan West Jiedushi, and Jiedushi Bai Minzhong arranged for Yong An to be settled in Shengshou Temple in Chengdu and fulfilled his requests.

When Jiedushi Wang Jian was appointed as the king of Jiannan West, he personally went to pay respects to a monk came from the Western regions and resided in the Sanxue Academy of Daci Temple. And when the eminent monk Guan Xiu came to Chengdu, Wang Jian '*presented him with a purple robe, treated him as a distinguished guest, invited him to stay in the monastery, and showed him extreme respect*' (Yi, 2003). Besides, Wang Jian built the Longhua

Monastery at the residence of Guan Xiu and appointed Guan Xiu as the abbot. In the third year of the Tianfu era of Emperor Zhaozong (903), Wang Jian led officials to attend the lectures on Buddhism at Daci Temple gave by Guan Xiu. Then Guan Xiu composed a poem titled '*King of Jiannan West Entering Daci Temple to Listen to the Sermon*' as an offering. Due to Wang Jian's appreciation, Guanxiu wrote several poems to dedicate, including '*Express deep affection to the King of Jiannan West*,' '*King of Jiannan West Climbs the Pagoda of Fugan Temple three*,' In one of the poems of '*King of Jiannan West Climbs the Pagoda of Fugan Temple three*', Guan Xiu praised Wang Jian as follows: '*In this world, joyfully ascending the golden pagoda; in a previous life, surely nurturing the body of a king*' (Xiu & Yongfeng, 2006). Apart from showing great respect to Guan Xiu, Wang Jian held Zen Master Xiu Meng in high regard. He not only treated Xiu Meng with the same respect as his own uncle but also petitioned Emperor Xizong of Tang to grant Xiu Meng the title of '*Great Master Liaojue*.' In the seventh month of the fifth year of the Tianfu era (905), Monk Liu Benzun, who was the founder of secret sect of Western Jiannan West, performed rituals in the Yujingfang in Chengdu. Afterwards, Wang Jian sent messengers to offer consolation and summoned Liu Benzun to discuss Buddhism: '*rectify the temple, request recitation of mantras and lighting of bright lights. provide support and offerings for three days, give money, silk, and incense*' (Jue, 2004).

3. The Reasons for the Worship of Buddhism by the Jiannan West Jiedushi

From a social-class perspective, the Jiannan West Jiedushi were the highest-ranking officials in the region and belonged to the upper class. They held significant influence over public opinions. However, they were deeply devoted to Buddhist theories and actively engaged in Buddhist activities. On an individual level, their reverence for Buddhism was a matter of personal belief. In terms of their social role, their political responsibilities also decided their attitude towards Buddhism. As officials, it was their duty to govern the territory, and as parents of citizens, it was their responsibility to care for the people. After the introduction to China, Buddhism was integrated into Chinese society and became one of the ideological systems with a large number of followers. Thus, it became crucial to handle Buddhism and its related issues for long-term stability and faith. Therefore, the attitude of the Jiannan West Jiedushi towards Buddhism was shaped by various reasons. Due to text limitations, I will briefly introduce three main perspectives on their worship of Buddhism.

3.1. Inner Belief, Incorporating Confucianism into Buddhism and Cultivating One's Character

During the Tang Dynasty, Chinese Buddhism experienced a period of flourishing due to favorable circumstances. It gained widespread popularity and had a significant influence on society, permeating various fields. At that time, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism coexisted. Although Buddhism did not obtain the status of state religion, it still held considerable influence. In this context, the literati class of the Tang Dynasty inevitably developed intricate connections with Buddhism, and many Jiannan West Jiedushi during this period were deeply influenced by Buddhist thought. Some started to believe in Buddhism through interactions with monks, some were interested in Buddhist studies, and some integrated Buddhism into Confucianism to develop traditional Confucian thoughts. The relationship between the Tang Dynasty literati and Buddhism was close, but very few of them actually became monks. The literati admired the spiritual liberation of Buddhism, but Confucianism still remained the dominant ideology in their thoughts. The Confucian spirit of cultivating oneself and governing the country deeply influenced most of the literati, forming the foundation of their lives. Therefore, although the literati longed for the transcendence offered by Buddhism, they did not want to deviate from the proactive principles of

Confucianism. In the end, they adopted a flexible approach, embodying the spirit of both Confucianism and Buddhism, remaining involved in secular society while maintaining an transcendent mindset.

In addition, there was also a significant number of literati who sincerely believed in Buddhism, taking refuge in the Dharma. They actively engaged in various Buddhist activities, using their official positions to support and benefit Buddhism. For example, the famous poet Bai Juyi, who once served as a local official in the Bashu region, converted to Buddhism at an early age and studied the Hinayana, Madhyana and Mahayana Buddhism. According to his own poetry, it is known that he has read Buddhist scriptures such as the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Shurangama Sutra, the Vajra Sutra, the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Dharma Avatamsaka Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and so on. In the *'Inscription on the Stone Wall of the Fahua Academy of Suzhou Zhongxuan Temple'*, he counted the number of characters in *'eight commonly circulating Buddhist scriptures'* and summarized their respective themes, which demonstrated his highly proficiency in Buddhist scriptures.

Jiannan West Jiedushi such as Du Hongjian, Wei Gao, Duan Wenchang, and Bai Minzhong were devout Buddhists. During their spare time from official and military affairs, they read scriptures, built temples, and cast Buddha statues, greatly promoting the spread and development of Buddhism in the Jiannan region. Wei Gao summarized the benefits of his faith in Buddhism: *'I believe that human like to deviate from the path of virtue and seek shortcuts, so wise and holy figures instruct them with the sacred teachings and guide them on the path of progress. When their actions are fulfilled here, blessings will come to them in return, and the reasoning behind this is very clear'* (Gao & Xianzhao, 2004). As social existence determines social consciousness, Jiannan Xichuan Jiedushi lived in such a Buddhist environment, where everyone is inevitably influenced by longstanding social habits. They may have been influenced by what they hear and see, accepting it as the truth. And they may have been swept up by social trends, becoming accustomed to them without realizing. Thus, when their worldviews taken shape, they have already developed an attitude of belief in Buddhism.

3.2. Praying for Blessings and Benefiting Governance

The second reason for the worship of Buddhism by the Jiannan West Jiedushi was to pray for blessings for the country and its people. The famous scholar Su Shi of the Northern Song Dynasty once said: *'If the teachings of Shakyamuni are to be translated in China, they must rely on those who are proficient in Confucianism to spread them far and wide'*. This points out the fact that Buddhism can only spread in China through the translation of its scriptures, and therefore it must rely on Chinese culture. In order to expand and develop, Buddhism must adapt to the national conditions of China. At the same time, in order to counter the criticisms of Confucianism, it needs to address its own deficiencies to eliminate the targets of attack. As a result, Buddhism has to compare and absorb traditional Chinese culture, supplement, revise, and explain its own theories within the possible scope, gradually merging with traditional culture and becoming a religion with Chinese characteristics. Buddhism also makes comparisons and absorbs elements of Confucian rites and righteousness. Confucian teachings have penetrated Buddhism in terms of general principles and overall aspects, and there are also phenomena of commonality or convergence in some specific issues. In terms of content, Confucianism divides people into the wise and the foolish, while Buddhism categorizes sentient beings into various levels. Mencius proposed the theory of innate goodness, believing that everyone can become a sage like the giant Shun and Yao. The Chan sect believes that all sentient beings possess the same true nature, and as long as the delusions and clouds covering it are removed, they can all attain enlightenment and become Buddhas.

From social perspective, as Confucianism became closely integrated with politics, its role as a belief system gradually diminished. Thus Buddhism and Taoism played a more significant role in providing spiritual guidance for the Chinese population. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why those officials who embraced Confucianism were enthusiastic about building temples and monasteries, as it filled the void in popular beliefs. Wei Gao, a renowned Tang Dynasty official who governed Jiannan West for 21 years, highly praised the enormous role of Buddhism in guiding people towards good deeds: *'During my seventeen years of service, I sought to praise the emperor's wisdom and contribute to the welfare of the people. Through the Buddhist teachings, I saw countless individuals turning to goodness without the need for punitive measures. This profound influence is evident. Moreover, the blessings and rewards are clearly manifested. By revering and upholding Buddhism, we follow the same principle.'* Buddhism had various benefits, including promoting royal authority and guiding people towards goodness. Thus, it was natural for the Jiannan West Jiedushi and other officials to support the development of Buddhism, which played a positive role in the promotion of Buddhist faith in the Jiannan region and cultivation of benevolence for the people. From an official point of view, Buddhism played an indispensable role and had significant influence in matters of faith, greatly assisting in establishing royal authority. From a philosophical perspective, Confucianism and Buddhism complemented each other. Besides, Buddhism and politics were also complementary.

3.3. Flourishing of Buddhism in the Jiannan Region during the Tang Dynasty

The Jiannan region was strategically located, bordering Hanzhong to the north and Jingchu to the south. Emperors Xuanzong and Xizong both sought refuge in Jiannan West and brought many eminent monks with them to propagate Buddhism, making Jiannan region a center for Buddhist activities at that time. Chengdu, the capital of Jiannan West, was not only the political, economic, and cultural center of the region but also an important center of Buddhism. The abundant resources, such as rich harvests and surplus crops, provided a solid material foundation for the development of Buddhism in the Jiannan region. The social context when the renowned monk Xuan Zang arrived in Jiannan West is *'peace in Jiannan West amid famine and chaos throughout the country'* (Hui Li, Yan Cong, 2022). And the prosperity of Buddhist affairs in Chengdu during the Tang and Song Dynasties were described in *'Record of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva at Daci Temple'* written by the renowned poet Su Shi: *'Chengdu, the great metropolis of the southwest, where Buddhist affairs prospered.'*

It was precisely because of the wealth in the Jiannan West region that temple construction, statue carving, and the promotion of Buddhist teachings could be easily accomplished. Besides, the political environment in the Jiannan region remained relatively stable from the Sui Dynasty to the Five Dynasties, thus major conflicts did not affect Jiannan West during this periods. This provided rare opportunities for the continued development of Buddhism in Jiannan West, and significant projects related to Buddhism, such as cave excavations and statue carvings, were completed within ample time. Moreover, the Jiannan West region served as an important transportation route between China and the Western. And Chengdu was a vital trade hub in the southwest, connecting the flourishing Buddhism of the Western regions in the northwest and the ancient *'Southern Silk Road'* to India in the southwest. These geographical factors indirectly stimulated and influenced the flourishing of Jiannan West. And It was inevitable that Jiedushi would be influenced by the thriving Buddhism in the area. Consequently, they became deeply devoted to Buddhist theories and enthusiastic about Buddhist activities consciously or unconsciously.

4. The Influence of the Relationship between Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism on Later Generations

As the leader of Jiannan West region, the Jiannan West Jiedushi actively advocated Buddhism, which inevitably had a profound influence on this region. There were two main aspects to this influence. Firstly, it greatly contributed to the flourishing of Buddhism in Jiannan West region during the middle to late Tang Dynasty. Under the guidance of the Jiannan West Jiedushi, combined with the long-standing stability and prosperity of this region, Buddhism rapidly developed in Jiannan West, making Chengdu a prominent center of Buddhism in the country. Secondly, it promoted the development of Chengdu's urban culture and social stability, consolidating political rule. The Jiannan West Jiedushi intentionally utilized Buddhism to educate the people, which furthered the region's stability and prosperity, ultimately strengthening the political rule of the Tang Dynasty.

4.1. Promoting the Development of Buddhism in Jiannan West Region

The Jiannan West Jiedushi had close relationships with Buddhism. They either embraced Buddhism, or befriended renowned monks, or sponsored the carving of Buddha statues, or constructed Buddhist temples. They actively promoted Buddhism, leading to the expansion of Buddhist influence in the Jiannan region and the development of various Buddhist sects in China. Their devotion to Buddhism and related activities took place primarily in the Jiannan West region, providing favorable conditions for the development of Buddhism in that area and laying a crucial foundation for the flourishing of Buddhism during the Song Dynasty. Historically, Jiannan West was the most prosperous region in Southwest China and one of the most significant areas for the spread and development of Chinese Buddhism, besides, it was also the convergence point of the Northern and Southern Silk Roads. Due to its advantageous political position, unique geographical location, and profound historical and cultural heritage, Jiannan West attracted a large number of literati, talented individuals, and esteemed Buddhist masters, becoming one of the most important regions for the cultural and literary development of Buddhism in the middle and later Tang Dynasty.

According to records '*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*' and '*Biographies of Eminent Monks of Song Dynasty*', there were 28 famous monks in the Jiannan West region during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, third only to Chang'an and Luoyang, and far beyond other provinces. Buddhist temples in Jiannan West were also prosperous during the Tang and Five Dynasties periods. According to existing documentary, there were a total of 354 Buddhist temples in the Jiannan West region during this time. Taking Chengdu as an example, within and around this city, there were around forty to fifty temples. Some of the temples known from historical records include Dashengci Temple, Shengshou Temple, Jingzhong Temple, Baoguang Temple, Baoli Temple, Longxing Temple, Zhengjue Temple, Jianming Temple, Duobao Temple, Konghui Temple, Baoyuan Temple, Longju Temple, Fuyuan Temple, Fuhua Temple, Fugan Temple, Fushou Temple, Fusheng Temple, Songxi Temple, Jinghui Temple, Faju Temple, Bodhi Temple, Ningyuan Temple, Shengni Temple, Caotang Temple, Baoxiang Temple, Baoxing Temple, Longhuai Temple, Shengye Temple, Jianchang Temple, Dayun Temple, Kaiyuan Temple, Yingtian Temple, Nanping Temple, Zhongxing Temple, Zifu Temple, Jinhua Temple, Shengxing Temple, Shitennoji Temple, Ningshu Temple, Zhaojue Temple, Jiaohua Temple, Miaoji Temple, Jingde Temple, and Fusheng Temple. And many of these temples were sponsored and built by the Jiannan West Jiedushi, such as Bodhi Temple, Shengshou Temple, Jingzhong Temple, Fucheng Temple, Xinxiang Temple, Baotang Temple. The supports and promotion of Buddhism by the Jiannan West Jiedushi and other officials contributed to the prosperity of Jiannan West Buddhism in the middle and later Tang Dynasty,

making Chengdu a destination for migrating monks and a center for propagating Buddhist teachings.

4.2. Promoting the Development of Urban Culture and Social Stability in Jiannan West Region

The Jiannan West Jiedushi worshipped and advocated Buddhism, which contributed to the development of urban culture in Chengdu and also benefited social stability and economic growth in the Jiannan region. Buddhism had flourished in the Jiannan region since the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and with the support of local administrative officials such as the Jiannan West Jiedushi, Buddhism gained numerous followers in Chengdu. The teachings of Buddhism, which emphasized doing good deeds, the cycle of life and death, and karma, resonated with the people at that time. Whenever renowned monks delivered teachings and propagated Buddhist doctrines in Chengdu, large crowds would gather to listen. For instance, when the monk Zhi Xuan gave lectures at the Daci Temple, there were reportedly over ten thousand listeners, most of whom were commoners (Ning, 1987). This shows the level of reverence that the people of Chengdu had towards Buddhism.

In addition, festivals are the most representative activities of local culture. Various celebration rituals and performances reflect social relationships and contribute to the exchange between different social groups, which can establish local stability and order. The vigorous promotion of Buddhism by the Jiannan West Jiedushi indirectly led to the emergence of Buddhist festivals in Chengdu during the middle and later Tang Dynasty. The people of Chengdu participated in activities during certain Buddhist festivals, making these festivals an integral part of local customs. For example, the 8th day of the second lunar month and the 8th day of the fourth lunar month were considered the Enlightenment Day and the Birth Day of Buddha, respectively. And people in the Chengdu region held significant events and ceremonies on these two days. Historical records state, *'The people of Jiannan West especially cherish the 8th day of the second lunar month and the 8th day of the fourth lunar month. When the time comes, people from all directions gather. all gallop to invite guests, and the monks are busy receiving guests, with no idle moments'* (Xuan, 2014). Even today, some temples in Chengdu, such as Wenshu Temple and Daci Temple, still hold major commemorative ceremonies on these two festival days, attracting a large number of local worshippers. Besides, Buddhist activities gradually became popular folk festivals during the middle and later Tang Dynasty, with all the monks from the local temple welcoming visitors and entertaining the public. According to records in *'Leisure Poems of Chengdu'* written by Tian Kuang: *'Chengdu had 21 major annual folk festivals during this period. Among them, ten of the festivals were associated with temple activities, accounting for half of the folk festivals in Chengdu.'* Festivals and celebrations are important reflections of urban prosperity and have close relationships with local economy and culture. The increase in Buddhist-related folk festivals in Chengdu during the middle and later Tang Dynasty reflected a strong local cultural identity, strengthening social bonds and personal identification among the local residents.

5. Conclusion

This article discussed the relationship between the Jiannan West Jiedushi and Buddhism during the Tang and Five Dynasties period. Through above research, it is evident that Jiannan West Jiedushi during the Tang Dynasty were often outstanding officials who had a significant impact on the formation and development of urban culture. Particularly in religious activities, they actively engaged in interactions between Confucianism and Buddhism, showing respect to renowned monks. And during their tenure, they either donated funds to build temples, or

converted their own residences into temples, or ordained people as monks. Their promotion of Buddhism not only won the hearts of the people in Jiannan West but also indirectly stabilized the rule of the Tang Dynasty over this region.

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