



## **A Study of Stone Carving Workers in Tang Dynasty -- Taking Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu as Examples**

Liu Yuhan

Philippine Christian University Center for International Education, 1004, Manila City, Republic of the Philippines.  
Email: 467988271@qq.com

**Abstract:** The Tang Dynasty was an extremely prosperous period of stone carving culture in Chinese history, and the stone carvings in this period were not only rich in content but also huge in volume, resulting in a large number of classic inscriptions and calligraphic works. In this paper, we first study the background of the development of stone carving in Tang Dynasty and the general situation of the carvers in Tang Dynasty, then we further explore the stone carving career of Shao family, and finally we take Shao brothers and Liu Gongquan as examples to analyze the relationship between calligraphers and carvers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and study the Shao brothers as an example of the Tang carvers' group, to affirm the important contribution of the Shao brothers to the calligraphy of Tang inscriptions, and to determine that the prosperous development of Tang stone carving was a result of the joint efforts of the calligraphers' group and the carvers' group.

**Keywords:** Tang Dynasty inscription, stone carving, Shao brothers, Liu Gongquan

### **Introduction**

Stone carving refers to stone products such as stone tablets or cliffs engraved with words and designs. In the field of calligraphy, it refers to all kinds and shapes of stone carvings. Stone carvings include stone tablets, tombstones, cliffs, pagodas, statues and other inscriptions. The Tang Dynasty was the most powerful and unified feudal dynasty in Chinese history, and the art of stone calligraphy during this period was also highly accomplished. In the Tang Dynasty, as one of the creators of stone carvings, the carver group received unprecedented attention, they were given official positions by the rulers, and were allowed to engrave their names on the stone carvings. The prosperous development of stone carving art in Tang Dynasty could not be separated from the existence of the engraver group, however, most of the calligraphy theory researchers, when studying the ancient classic inscriptions, did not pay enough attention to this group of engravers. This paper selects the famous engraver Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu brothers of the Tang Dynasty as the object of study, so as to expect to discover and draw the group face of engravers in the Tang Dynasty.

### **Literature Review**

Currently for the Tang dynasty carver Shao brothers research is not rare, Zeng Yigong's "stone carving Kaogonglu", Cheng Zhangchan's "stone carving carver research" and so on have mentioned, but the length used are very short. Cheng Zhangchan's "as material culture of stone carving literature" in the book of the third chapter, section III "from the new Shao Jianhe epitaphs to see the status of the Tang dynasty carver's identity" and Li Hao's "new discovery of the Tang dynasty carving and epitaphs of the Shao Jianhe collation of the study" should be the only two articles dedicated to the study of Shao Jianhe so far there is no article dedicated to the study of the carver Shao Jianchu. The above mentioned articles are almost all the literature about Shao Brothers of the Tang Dynasty carvers. This paper further studies Shao Brothers of the Tang Dynasty carvers according to the above information, and establishes the contribution of Shao Brothers to the calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty inscriptions by summarizing the works of Shao Brothers, and by studying the interactions between Shao Brothers and Liu Gongquan, a famous calligrapher.

### **Research methods**

Literature analysis method: Collecting relevant theoretical data on Chinese stone carvings and carvers' groups, and organizing and analyzing these literatures. Literature includes Ouyang Xiu's Jigu Lu and Zhao Mingcheng's Jinshi Lu of the Northern Song Dynasty, Chen Si's Baoqi Congzhu of the Southern Song Dynasty, Wang Chang's Jinshi Zuijie of the Qing Dynasty, and Ye Changchih's Yishishi, etc., which lays a solid foundation for the implementation of the research in this paper.

Case study method: through the selection of representative cases of Tang dynasty engravers, a detailed study to analyze the social status of Tang dynasty engravers in the current world and the contributions made, so as to draw more specific and reliable conclusions.

### **1.Stone Carvings and Groups of Carvers in the Tang Dynasty**

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The Tang Dynasty is a very important period in Chinese history, its culture and art have far-reaching influence all over the world, this is also the most prosperous period of stone carving culture in Chinese history. The stone inscriptions carved in the Tang Dynasty are called Tang Bei, which are not only rich in content and huge in volume, but also of high value to the study of the calligraphy art, social culture and other aspects of the Tang Dynasty.

China's stone carving art developed to its peak in the Tang Dynasty for several reasons. The first is an institutional reason. Cao Cao in Jian'an ten years (205 AD) promulgated the "ban on monuments", since then in the Wei, Jin and Southern Dynasties of more than 380 years banning the monument has become the prevailing system, and later on until the Sui Dynasty and reissued the system of erecting monuments, officially announced the end of the ban on monuments system, which laid the foundation for the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty stone carvings; the second is the cultural background of the reasons. The Tang Dynasty is the heyday of Chinese cultural development, this period of literature, music, painting and other art forms have reached an unprecedented level, in which poetry is an important part of the history of Chinese literature, the emergence of a large number of excellent poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, etc., the prosperity of the development of culture for the Tang Dynasty stone carvings provide a rich cultural connotation; the third is the reason for stone carving technology. Tang dynasty carved stone inscription technology is more mature than the previous generation, in this period appeared official carver, the official position for the "jade book official", whether it is the official carver or civil carver, can achieve fine carving techniques, clear handwriting, skillful knife, which laid the foundation for the development of the art of stone carving in later generations; Fourth, the development of Buddhism brought about by the impact of the development of Buddhism. The development of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty reached a peak since the introduction of China, according to the "Old Tang Book" records, the Tang Dynasty registered temples totaling more than 5,000 temples, temples more than built stone monuments, while Buddhism in order to expand the publicity and influence, often asked the scholar for the late monks to write monuments and epitaphs, monuments in the temple mostly by the world of calligraphy written by professional carvers chiseling, which also promotes the development of the art of stone carving; Fifth, the emperor of the Tang Dynasty respected. Tang dynasty emperor's respect. Tang dynasty emperors advocate monument, Tang Taizong Li Shimin is good at calligraphy, is the first emperor in Chinese history personally write a monument, he wrote the "hot spring inscription" is the history of Chinese calligraphy in the first line engraved monument, Tang Xuanzong Li Longji personally wrote the "Xiyue Taihuashan monument preface", followed by Wu Zetian and other emperors are good at calligraphy, and also attaches great importance to the writing of the monument. As a result, the Tang Dynasty masters of engraving masters gathered, new and endless famous monuments, in quantity and quality have been unprecedented development, so that the stone culture in the Tang Dynasty reached its heyday.

Since the pre-Qin Dynasty, there have been many craftsmen specializing in engraving monuments, but most of the monuments before the Tang Dynasty did not leave the name of the engraver, and it was not until the Tang Dynasty that the words "stone publisher", "stone engraver", "stone engraving official", "engraving official" and so on appeared in large quantities on the monument engraving. Officer", "engraving official" and other words. This kind of engraver will be engraved in their own names on the monument above the behavior is called "thing le work name", the purpose is to facilitate managers to check the quality of products. At the same time, the rulers of the Tang Dynasty established the position of carver in the governmental institutions, namely "Jade Book Officer". All these proved that compared with the previous generation, the Tang people paid much more attention to the carvers. In order to better show the calligraphy in the stone carving of the penmanship and charm, many works of calligraphy masters are by skilled carvers for publication, such as "the Tang Dynasty great calligraphers Ouyang Xun, Chu Suiliang, their monumental carvings, part of the engraving from the hands of the famous engraver Wan Wenshao; the late Tang Dynasty, Liu Gongquan written by the monumental inscriptions, most of the Shao Jianchu, Shao Jianhe brothers hand-engraved! "[1]

The engravers of the Tang Dynasty were roughly divided into three categories. The first category is belongs to the government official carver in the province of "Yu Ce officer", such as carving "Xuan Mi tower monument" Shao Jianhe, Shao Jianchu brothers, carving "wang gongsu tombstone" Chen from Jian, carving "Wei Xiaoben tombstone" of strong deposit and so on. The second category is the folk production of stone monument tombstone stonemasons, such as chiseling "Wang Yiyuan Tombstone" fish Yuanbi, chiseling "Dao Yin master monument" Chang Changshou and Fan Su, chiseling "Duo Bao Pagoda monument" Shi Hua, chiseling "three graves record monument," Li Guang and so on. The third category is the lower level officials who can be seen carving stones occasionally, such as Zhu Jingzang, who chiseled and carved the Huairenji Wang Xizhi's Sacred Teaching Preface Stele.

Carver in the inscription in the format of the general official position plus the name and then add "carve", "engraved", "publication" and other words meant for the publication of the inscription, such as in the "Tang late Zen Dade evolution of the public pagoda inscription", Shao Jian and the inscription of Shao Jian and the inscription for "in the province of stone officer Zhaowu school captains guarding the capital Zhoucheng province folded on the pillar Shao Jian and engraved word". Or carver's place of origin plus name plus "carve", "engraved", "publication" and other words meant for publication, such as in the "Duo Bao Pagoda Stele", Shi Hua's inscription is "Henan Shi Hua engraved". Or directly after the name plus "carve", "engraved", "publication" and other words meaning publication, such as "Du Gongchuo Stele" in the engraver's inscription as " Wanbaozhe engraved words", this style of inscription is the most common.

## **2. A Study of the Family Engraver Community as Represented by the Shaw Group**

Unlike the previous generation, the Tang Dynasty engravers to the family as a group of characteristics is very obvious, and burin engraving technology within the family for inheritance. Representatives of the family in the Tianshui area of the Qiang family, Hongnong area of the Yang family, the Qinghe area of the Zhang family, etc., and by Shao Qi, Shao Jianhe, Shao Jianchu, Shao Zongyi, Shao Zongjian, Shao Zonghou, etc. Shao family formed. Most of the carvers in the Shao family were "Yu Ce Officials" in the Central Book Department, among which the two brothers, Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu, were the most accomplished.

According to "Shao Jianhe Tombstone", "great-grandfather Guang, grandfather Qi, father Jun", because "qi" and "qi" sound the same, so "Shao Jianhe Tombstone" will "qi" mistakenly written "qi", Shao qi is Shao Jianhe, Shao Jianchu brothers grandfather "Shao qi". "Shao Qi is the grandfather of Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu brothers, Shao Qi. Shao Qi participated in the publication of the following inscriptions: Tombstone of Ma Jingshang in the seventh year of Yuanhe (812 AD), Tombstone of the late Tang Emperor Dong Fujun in the tenth year of Yuanhe (815 AD), Tombstone of the late Tang Lady Tian in the twelfth year of Yuanhe (817 AD).<sup>[2]</sup>

Shao Jianhe was a well-known "Yu Ce official" in the Tang Dynasty, and the carvings he participated in and kept his name in are, in chronological order, the Diamond Sutra carved with Qiang Yan in the fourth year of the Changqing period (824 A.D.), the Bell Tower Inscription of Huiyuan Guan in the first year of the Kaicheng period (836 A.D.), the Fu Lin Stele in the third year of the Kaicheng period (838 A.D.), the Xuanmei Pagoda Stele in the first year of the Huichang period (841 A.D.), and the Xuanmei Pagoda Stele in the third year of the Huichang period (843 A.D.), carved with Shao Jianchu. In the first year of Huichang (841 A.D.), he and Shao Jianchu engraved the Xuanxie Pagoda Stele; in the third year of Huichang (843 A.D.), he and Shao Jianchu engraved the Divine Strategist Stele; and in the fourth year of Huichang (844 A.D.), he engraved the Inscription on the Pagoda of the late Tang Zen Dade Yen Gong.

Shao Jianchu was also a well-known "Yu Ce official" in the Tang Dynasty, and he engraved a greater number of tablets and records than Shao Jianhe. Shao Jianchu's works of stone carving, in chronological order, include the Xuanxie Pagoda Stele engraved with Shao Jianhe in the first year of Huichang (841 A.D.), the Taihe Post in the third year of Huichang (843 A.D.), the Monk Du Shun's Record of the Journey in the Sixth Year of Dazhong (852 A.D.), the Zen Master Guifeng Tinghui Stele in the Ninth Year of Dazhong (855 A.D.), and the Buddhist Sutra of Prajnaparamitra and Heart Sutra engraved with a poem by the monk in the Ninth Year of Dazhong (855 A.D.). The Heart Sutra of Prajna Paramita and a picture of Buddha's salutation, the Tombstone of Qing Wang Li Yi in the 14th year of Dazhong (860 AD), the Tombstone of Liu Zunli in the 9th year of Xiantong (868 AD), the Tombstone of the late Consort De Wang in the 12th year of Xiantong (871 AD), the Tombstone of Liu Zhongli in the 14th year of Xiantong (873 AD), the Tombstone of Wang, the Wife of Ma Gongdu, in the 2nd year of Qianfu (875 AD), and so on. According to the above information, it can be found that Shao Jianchu's first two official participation in official stone carving activities were under the leadership of Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianhe, which can be regarded as one of the ways to pass on the skills within the Shao family. In Shao Jianhe's Tombstone, Shao Jianchu is described as "his younger brother, Jianchu, who was able to carry on his work without damaging his reputation". This is not only the affirmation of Shao Jianchu stone carving skills, but also confirms the inheritance of stone carving skills within the Shao family.

According to Song Chen Si's Baoguishu Congzhi, an engraver named Shao Jian engraved the Six Translations of the Vajra Sutra in the sixth year of the Dahe reign (832 AD), which was written by Tang Xuandu Jishu Wangshu.<sup>[3]</sup> Engraver signing name always have the habit of omitting a word of the double name, such as Tianshui strong family of strong deposit, strong deposit chapter two people at the same time served in the province for the jade book officer, name only one word difference, it is likely to be the same person. Shao Jian and Shao Jianchu two people belong to the same era, and the name is the same as the first two words, so Shao Jian should be one of the Shao brothers. According to the engraving of the monument is the time of six years (AD 832), at this time Shao Jian and has begun to participate in the official stone engraving activities and Shao Jianchu has not yet been involved in the author speculates that the "Tang XuanDu set of WangShu six translations of the Diamond Sutra" chiseling and engraving of the Shao Jianhe.

The children and nephews of the Shao brothers still inherited the family's stone carving business. In the eighth year of the reign of Xian Tong (867 AD), Shao Zongyi engraved the Tombstone of Princess Langning, and in the twelfth year of the reign of Xian Tong (871 AD), Shao Zong engraved the Tombstone of Dixiong's Wife, Luo, of which Shao Zongyi was the son and nephew generation of Shao Jianhe and most probably the son and heir of Shao Jianchu. The name of Shao Zong, however, is suspected to be missing a character, and the next character is unrecognizable because of the wear and tear of the inscription. Shao Zong and Shao Zongyi two people in the same period, and the name is only one word difference, so it is possible that it is the same person. Cheng Zhang Chan also think Shao Zong is Shao Zongyi, in the "stone carving carver research" said "Shao Zong official title and Li Ying similar, Shao family and long in stone carving, so Shao Zong, Shao Zongyi is probably also engraved in the province of the Yu Ce official."<sup>[4]</sup>

Shao Zongjian was the son of Shao Jianhe, and he participated in the stone carvings that retained his name, such as the Tombstone of Dong Yi's Wife Shi and the Tombstone of Zhang Yanmin in the sixth year of the Qianfu reign (879 A.D.) Shao Zongjian was a "Jade Book Officer" of the royal carvers, along with his father, Shao Jianhe, and his uncle, Shao Jianchu. According to the Qing Dynasty Ni Tao's Six Artistic Records, Volume 79, a Tang Dynasty calligrapher named Shao Zonghou wrote Chi reset the Seven Ancestors Pagoda Temple Stele.<sup>[5]</sup> Chi reset the Seven Ancestors Pagoda Temple Stele was built in the 26th year of the Tang Dynasty (738 AD), and was given its name by Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty. The word "Chi" in the name of the monument in ancient China means an order given by the emperor, and the

word "reset" suggests that the monument was set up after the construction of the Seven Ancestors Pagoda and was generally not "reset" for a short period of time. Generally speaking, it would not be "reset" within a short period of time. Shao Jianhe's dates of birth and death were from 796 to 858 A.D. Therefore, according to the time clues, Shao Zonghou, who wrote the "Imperial Edict to Replace the Seven Ancestors' Pagoda Stele," and Shao Zonghou, the third son of Shao Jianhe, should be the same person.

### **3.The Shaw Brothers' Cooperation with Liu Gongquan**

The Tang Dynasty is the most prosperous era of China's monumental stone carving development, many calligraphers write monuments, these calligraphers create a piece of excellent monumental calligraphy, almost inseparable from the skilled carver, so in the Tang Dynasty monumental carving not only engraved with the name of the person who wrote the text and the book of Dan, will also be engraved with the name of the carver. Carver and calligrapher based on travel, interaction, formed a kind of mutual promotion, mutual achievement of benign interaction. There are even some excellent carvers who have mastered the most suitable carving method for a certain calligrapher's works during their long-term cooperation with him, and this method of carving is able to show and restore the artistic style of the calligrapher to the greatest extent possible. As Yu Ji said in "Seal Sculpture - Gift to Zhang Chun", "This year in the capital, there is a Zhejiang people called Jing Shan, from Wu Xing Gong the longest time, but favors the long Wu Xing style."<sup>[6]</sup>The meaning of this sentence is that the carver formed a high degree of tacit understanding in the process of long-term cooperation with Wu Xing Gong, and this high degree of tacit understanding is manifested in the fact that the stone carvings have greatly restored the calligraphic style of Wu Xing Gong, while at the same time accomplishing the reputation of the carver's high level of skill. Generally speaking, carvers who can embody the calligraphers' artistic style are often able to establish a long-term and stable cooperative relationship with the calligraphers. For example, Zhao Mengfu of the Yuan Dynasty had long designated Mao Shaozhi, a famous engraver of monuments, as his engraver, and there is a saying that "those who ask for a monument in Zhao Meng's handwriting will not be able to write if they are not engraved by Mao." The saying goes. Mao Shaozhi engraved Zhao Mengfu's works, including the Shanzhu Gong Shinto Monument, the Xu Xizai Shinto Monument, and the Zhang Liusun Daoxing Monument.

As Shi Rui said, "Famous calligraphers have their own commonly used engravers, some long-term engravers for a particular calligrapher engraving works, and gradually bring their style of engraving into the monumental engraving of other calligraphers."<sup>[7]</sup>Most of Liu Gongquan's ink inscriptions were engraved by the brothers Shao Jianchu and Shao Jianhe. The Tombstone of Shao Jianhe records the relationship and friendship between Liu Gongquan and the engravers, the Shao brothers, who were not only the palace stone engravers, but also the almost exclusive engravers of Liu Gongquan's calligraphy. The inscription says, "At that time, there were many important activities that required the erection of monuments and carvings, and on such occasions, Liu Gongquan was often appointed to write the inscriptions because of his high position in the imperial court and his high attainments in calligraphy. At this time, Liu Gongquan would invite Shao Jianhe to carve the monument, which is undoubtedly a high degree of recognition of Shao's chiseling and carving skills. The Shao family's real fame for stone carving began with Shao Jianhe, and Shao Jianhe's fame had a lot to do with the praise of Liu Gongquan, who was a calligrapher and a high-ranking official. Pei Tingyu in the Tang Dynasty, "East View Zuoji" article, "(Dazhong) twelve years on the first day of the first year, including the yuan to receive congratulations, the crown prince, Liu Gongquan is also eighty years old, then for the hundred officials first".<sup>[8]</sup>According to the tombstone of Shao Jianhe, Shao Jianhe died in the twelfth year of the Dazhong period, when Liu Gongquan was still in the post of the prince, Liu Gongquan was highly respected, and his appreciation of Shao Jianhe was enough to win Shao Jianhe a wide reputation in the literati class, and won a prominent position in the industry.

Liu Gongquan's Xuan Mi Pagoda Stele, the Bell Tower Inscription of the Great Tang Dynasty Huiyuan Guan, and the Fu Lin Stele were engraved by Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu, two brothers. Shao Jianhe engraved Liu Gongquan's works alone, such as Jiu Dou Shan Fu, Feng Su Bei of the official ministry, the Inscription of the Pagoda of the late Tang Zen Da De Yan Gong and Jiu Dou Shan Fu, etc. The Diamond Sutra was written by Liu Gongquan, and was engraved by the Qiang family of the Qiang family of the Tianshui area in cooperation with Shao Jianhe. Shao Jianchu alone engraved Liu Gongquan's Taihe Post, and there is also the Guifeng Dinghui Zen Master's Stele engraved by Shao Jianchu, the main part of which was written by Pei Huo, and Liu Gongquan inscribed the seal script portion of the stele's title. According to the record of "Tong Zhi 20", there are 54 kinds of stele inscriptions written by Liu Gongquan.<sup>[9]</sup>In addition to the above-mentioned Shao Brothers' stone carvings for Liu Gongquan, the remaining stone carvings may still be from the Shao Brothers' carvings.<sup>[10]</sup>Most of the inscriptions written by Liu Gongquan were engraved by two brothers, Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu, whose chiseling technology is like a high-definition digital camera, which highly reproduces Liu Gongquan's calligraphy on the stone tablets, so that Liu Gongquan's calligraphy can be praised for thousands of years, and copied and learned by the future generations. Therefore, the group of carvers and the calligraphers are not only the ordinary cooperative relationship, but also the two are growing together and accomplishing each other.

### **Conclusion**

The group of carvers was given unprecedented importance in the Tang Dynasty, and they were given official positions by the rulers and allowed to inherit them from generation to generation. The group of carvers, represented by the brothers Shao Jianhe and Shao Jianchu, were involved in the production of many of the classic inscriptions of the Tang dynasty.

Normally, a work of stone calligraphy is completed in at least three steps: composing, writing and engraving. The final artistic effect of a stone calligraphy work depends not only on the artistic attainments of the calligrapher, but also on the technical level of the carver, so the prosperity of stone carving in the Tang Dynasty was the result of the joint efforts of the calligrapher group and the carver group.

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