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Article

Temple Diplomacy, Sacred Rites, and Overseas Chinese During the Reign of Song Emperor Zhenzong (997–1022)

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Abstract: Throughout most of Chinese history, leaders viewed the migration and movement of their subjects beyond state borders as a symptom of poor governance. As a result, record keepers generally avoided addressing the topic of Chinese people traveling or residing overseas. There is, however, an exceptional moment in Chinese history that provides valuable insight into the early establishment of Chinese communities abroad. Facing political pressure after signing a humiliating peace treaty with foreign adversaries in 1005, the Song dynasty emperor Zhenzong (968–1022, r. 997–1022) utilized unconventional forms of religious diplomacy and revived ancient rites to shore up support for his rule. The Feng and Shan rites were the highest level of sacrifice that an emperor could undertake, and they were only carried out by several emperors prior to Zhenzong's reign. One of the requirements of this complex ritual was for the sovereign to attract foreign peoples from afar by his virtuous character, and so Zhenzong's reign witnessed major initiatives to attract foreign envoys from states such as Srivijaya (Sumatra), Dai Viet (northern Vietnam), Japan, and India. Zhenzong's reign also incorporated forms of diplomacy that originated in South and Southeast Asia, namely, the construction of temples in foreign states to enhance his spiritual authority. This essay will demonstrate that Emperor Zhenzong relied on Chinese merchants residing overseas to work with foreign leaders to coordinate the participation of foreign emissaries in such forms of temple diplomacy and in the Feng and Shan sacrifices. The significance of these events brought the activities of Chinese people trading and residing overseas to the attention of the Song court and its chroniclers, and as a result, we are left with the earliest indications of Chinese communities abroad in official Chinese histories.



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1. Introduction

The reign of Emperor Zhenzong 宋真宗 (968–1022, r. 997–1022) of the Song dynasty (960–1279) marks a period in which religious practices, diplomacy, and commerce converged to bring about significant trends that reverberated across China, Srivijaya (Sumatra), Dai Viet (northern Vietnam), Japan, India, and other states and regions throughout maritime Asia.¹ A wide geographical spread of religious, mercantile, and diaspora networks becomes apparent in textual sources from this time, due, in a large part, to Emperor Zhenzong's efforts to assert a position of supreme spiritual authority at home and abroad following a controversial truce with the Liao empire in 1005. Such a goal culminated in the Feng and Shan sacrifices—the most sacred and rare rites that a Chinese emperor could make.² By the time of the Song dynasty, these rites required the participation of foreign peoples, though it was preferable to bring in foreign envoys who could be advised on the intricacies of imperial Chinese ideology without the appearance that their sentiments and actions were being manipulated by the Song court. Thus, sea merchants from China and other coastal Asian states played an important role as middlemen in Zhenzong's spiritual and diplomatic initiatives, as well as in the initiatives of leaders throughout maritime Asia who wished to obtain greater wealth and status.

References to the activities of secular Chinese people overseas also begin to appear in Chinese texts that record the history of this period, though part of what might explain

the more visible presence of Chinese people during the early 11th century relates to a steady increase in their involvement in overseas trade beginning in the last century of the Tang dynasty (618–907) and continuing in the Five Dynasties period (907–979). Knowledge of the Chinese people who ventured overseas prior to Zhenzong's reign is gained mainly from documents produced outside of the purview of Chinese courts, such as from a very large body of Japanese primary sources (including official histories, diaries of monks and courtiers, and temple records), as well as from some references in Arabic-language sources.³ Even during and after the reign of Emperor Zhenzong, mention of these individuals in Chinese dynastic histories is quite rare, and scholars must look instead to personal notes, reference works, encyclopedias, and Buddhist histories if they wish to gain a broader understanding of the topic from Chinese sources. The increased clarity regarding the activities of Chinese people overseas at this time allows for an opportunity to better understand the genesis and evolution of certain diaspora groups that exercised a monumental influence across much of maritime Asia for centuries to come. As we shall see, the indications of Chinese people traveling abroad during Zhenzong's reign largely derived from his court's unique methods of diplomatic outreach, as well as its efforts to incorporate foreign peoples into major religious ceremonies.⁴ Beginning with the invocation of a historical precedent to dedicate a temple overseas in Zhenzong's honor, a range of similar instances of temple diplomacy followed, which largely distinguished the emperor's diplomatic policies from those of his predecessors.

Three main series of events will be analyzed in this article so as to form a sense of how the reign of Emperor Zhenzong ushered in new trends across the diplomatic and religious landscape of maritime Asia. These events are:

- (1) The participation of embassies in Zhenzong's birthday and New Year festivities between 1003 and 1004 (as well as several embassies that imitated those proceedings afterward);
- (2) The Feng sacrifices of 1008;
- (3) The Earth sacrifices of 1011.

Analysis of these three events will be followed by an examination of how Zhenzong's initiatives influenced affairs in the states of Dai Viet, Cōla, and Japan. Each of these case studies indicate a Chinese presence behind what were some of the most successful embassies to China during Zhenzong's reign, but they also raise questions about how Chinese people residing and trading overseas were alluded to in early Chinese-language texts. As such, this section will be followed by an analysis of historiographical issues present in the study of Chinese emigration. In particular, I will assess Song and Yuan (1271–1386)-period historical works to form an understanding of how and why the activities of Chinese people overseas were often insinuated, avoided, or ignored, rather than directly attested to in such texts. Despite the elusive nature of this topic, much of the textual evidence in this essay nevertheless relies upon Chinese-language historical works, and in some instances, I will include translations of these works to highlight certain points or provide awareness of contemporary perspectives. This article will conclude with consideration of the influence and legacy of Zhenzong's major religious ceremonies. Although much of the religious exchange at this time was conducted in accordance with Buddhist beliefs, we will see from the perspective of Chinese record keepers that imperial ideology, Daoism, and regional beliefs also factored into many of Emperor Zhenzong's initiatives that involved the outside world. We will also see that such trends evolved at times due to state initiatives, and at other times against the will of state leaders.

2. Zhenzong, Taizong, and the Shanyuan Treaty

Zhenzong was the third Song emperor, and the first who was born and raised inside the imperial palace. Unlike his uncle and father, Emperors Taizu 宋太祖 (927–976, r. 960–976) and Taizong 宋太宗 (939–997, r. 976–997), respectively, he played no major role in the conquests and expansion of the Song empire. Yet, by many accounts, he was an effective civil leader who was deeply engaged in matters of state throughout much of his

reign. Despite his lack of military background, he is noted in the histories as having personally led Song forces into battle against Liao forces during a war that threatened the very existence of the Song dynasty (Lau and Huang 2009, pp. 264, 266), and his rule possibly marked the apex of fiscal governance and economic prosperity for the Song state (Olsson 1974, p. 21; Hartman 2015, p. 23). When war with the Liao empire to the north ended with the signing of the Shanyuan Treaty in 1005, the prevailing sentiment at court was that a successful resolution was achieved. The sources state that negotiations were initiated by the Liao empire after its invading forces suffered a series of military defeats in Song territory,⁵ and the annual sum to pay off the more militarily powerful Liao state was merely a tiny fraction of the Song empire's total military and state expenditures.⁶ Many Song intellectuals either commented positively on the Shanyuan Treaty or understood its practical necessity, particularly because it ended warfare on the northern border and resulted in approximately 120 years of peaceful relations with the Liao empire.⁷

However, the sources also state that the treaty was criticized by some of Zhenzong's advisors one year after it was signed, and that such criticism was initially motivated by political opportunism. There were, likewise, those among later generations of literati who viewed the treaty as a humiliation, particularly since it marked an end to the expansion of the Song empire and its inability to annex the Sixteen Prefectures—a sizeable body of land along the northern Song border that was once an integral part of the Tang empire.⁸ The signing of this treaty also resulted in the Liao empire taking a position of equal status to the Song state in matters of diplomacy, which, together with the annual payments to the Liao court, were also viewed by detractors of the Shanyuan Treaty as matters of great humiliation.

When the dust settled and Liao forces had withdrawn from Song territory, the histories tell us that the high official Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025) made the most of an opportunity to depose his rival, grand councilor Kou Zhun 寇準 (961–1023), by convincing Zhenzong that signing the Shanyuan Treaty was a mistake. Prior to this, the records state that, at the climax of the war, when there was a very real possibility that the capital of Kaifeng would come under attack, Wang Qinruo advocated that Zhenzong retreat from the capital, whereas Kou Zhun advised Zhenzong to push on and personally lead troops on the battlefield. In the end, Kou Zhun's advice proved successful, and he was put in charge of negotiating the Shanyuan Treaty. After the treaty was signed, part of the impetus to depose Kou Zhun came from Wang Qinruo persuading Zhenzong that the treaty in fact brought shame to Zhenzong's rule in both the eyes of his subjects and of his foreign adversaries. Zhenzong took this criticism to heart, and developed a keen sense of resentment against the Liao empire and the arrangement that was negotiated between both states. Once convinced that the treaty would befoul his reputation, Zhenzong had Kou Zhun cashiered and began to welcome the calls of several advisors to “overawe foreign peoples and impress foreign states” (Lau and Huang 2009, p. 270; Deng 2021, pp. 292, 374–76).

As dramatic as these events might seem, there is, in fact, a wide range of records that support the idea that, for the remainder of his reign, Emperor Zhenzong's concern for his image at home and abroad went well beyond that of his predecessors. If a certain degree of reassessment is warranted regarding the narrative of Zhenzong seeking to “overawe foreign peoples”, it would be that such a concern also existed prior to the signing of the Shanyuan Treaty. As we shall see, even in the years before the treaty was signed, Zhenzong began to embrace religion as a means to induce reverence among foreign peoples and promote an image of his virtuous rule abroad. Rather, the perceived loss of respect after the treaty was signed appears to have inspired a much more ambitious approach to claiming status and legitimacy. This culminated in Emperor Zhenzong and his advisors undertaking the Feng and Shan sacrifices—grandiose rites that were conducted on only six occasions in Chinese history, as they were only to be initiated at a time when the empire had reached an exceptional state of peace and prosperity.

To understand the context for Zhenzong's religious and diplomatic initiatives, we can begin by looking at the reign of his predecessor and father, Taizong. Although the political

and diplomatic policies of both emperors were, in some ways, markedly different, Zhenzong is known to have generally sought to emulate his father's rule, and certain parallels are discernable. For instance, Taizong had also wanted to conduct the Feng and Shan sacrifices, and in 984, he made preliminary preparations to travel to Mount Tai (*Taishan* 泰山, in Shandong), the sacred site for the main sacrifice. Yet, when a fire demolished two halls in the imperial palace, Taizong could no longer claim that a perfect slate of favorable omens justified the rituals, and he was forced to abandon his plans (Olsson 1974, pp. 165–66).

Taizong, much like his son, was also intent on bringing foreign peoples to his empire. In 987, his court dispatched eight eunuchs to lead four separate missions to the South Seas (*Nan Hai* 南海, a broadly defined term that could refer to all regions of the world to the south and west of the port city Guangzhou).⁹ The official histories indicate that these eunuch envoys engaged in tributary trade while abroad, though caution is warranted against assuming that the overall goal of these missions was to establish long-term tributary relations. When we consider that there was actually a notable decline in visits from Southeast Asian embassies after the eunuchs were dispatched in 987, we can consider motives beyond bringing in a constant stream of tribute-bearing envoys.¹⁰ A more reasonable assumption is that tributary trade was conducted by the eunuchs during their voyages, and that invitations were likewise extended to the states they visited to send trade ships to buy and sell goods at China's southern ports rather than at its capital. Taizong's court had very good reasons to encourage this form of trade. As scholars of tributary diplomacy in East Asia are generally aware, states that received tribute repaid such gifts with gifts of greater value than the gifts received. This was the price that the tribute-receiving country paid for tribute-bearing embassies to acknowledge a political status above their own. Indeed, close examination of the sources describing the 987 missions reveal that these missions were transactional in nature; the eunuchs were instructed to exchange gold and silks for goods that received the highest prices in Chinese markets—aromatics, medicines, and pearls. When foreign merchants freely brought such goods to Chinese ports, levies were issued on their import, which, for Song leaders, was an economically preferable option to wining, dining, and housing envoys in the capital and purchasing their goods at a premium. Although the Song empire was established in 960, it had only reached the peak of its territorial integrity by 979, and control over its newly conquered lands was a gradual process. In such a light, we can see that the 987 missions were intended to send a message that the empire had reached a secure state of consolidation and was open for business.¹¹

All of this is not to say that Taizong shunned South Seas diplomacy altogether. One rather interesting moment during his reign occurred in 992, when a sea merchant from Fujian named Mao Xu 毛旭 escorted a Javanese embassy to China.¹² This would appear to be one of the earliest instances in which a Chinese sea merchant was mentioned by name in Chinese dynastic histories. Also of interest is that the sources state that envoys attached to the mission provided their own tribute, which indicates that they were operating with some degree of autonomy from the Javanese king. Over the next century, only one or two embassies from Java are recorded as having arrived in the Song empire,¹³ so we should assume that, as with the 987 missions, the Java embassy was encouraged to conduct trade in the future that would be either private or semi-private (that is, with the involvement of state representatives, but not between states) after the mission. This position is further supported by the archaeological record of large quantities of Chinese ceramics dating to this time and slightly later that were found in various locations around Java (Ridho 1994, pp. 268–69). That such forms of trade between China and Java were fairly common is attested to when Mao Xu himself was described as having traveled to Java on previous occasions. As is evident in records covering Zhenzong's reign in the following decades, Mao Xu's position as a Chinese merchant working closely with governments overseas was not exceptional, but rather, he recognized an opportunity that other such merchants would also embrace.

3. Temple Diplomacy and Its Past Precedents

Of the embassies that arrived in China during the early part of Zhenzong's reign, one group stands out among others. In 1003, embassies claiming to represent the kings of Srivijaya (*Sanfoqi* 三佛齊, a confederacy that encompassed the island of Sumatra and much of the Malay peninsula), Dashi 大食 (commonly translated as "Arabia" but broadly representative of the Persian Gulf region), and Butuan (*Puduan* 蒲端, northeastern Mindanao, Philippines) sent tribute to the Song court at approximately the same time. In the sixth month, Dashi envoys were recorded as having given tribute at the Song court, and in the ninth month, they were recorded as having given tribute once again, together with envoys of Butuan (*SHY FY*, 4; and *SHY FY*, 7). Also in the ninth month, only two days before the Dashi–Butuan embassy paid tribute, envoys of Srivijaya gave tribute to the Song court.¹⁴ What sets these missions apart from others of this time is how favorably they were received by Emperor Zhenzong. Several months after paying tribute, envoys representing the three states were invited to the palace to celebrate Emperor Zhenzong's birthday festival (*Chengtian jie* 承天節) (*SHY FY*, 4).¹⁵ A banquet was held on this occasion, and ceremonial robes were bestowed upon the envoys as gifts. Then, in the following month, the envoys were invited to celebrate the Lantern Festival with Emperor Zhenzong to mark the arrival of the new year. A banquet was once again held, and the envoys were all provided with gifts of money (*SS*, juan 490; *WXTK*, juan 339; and *SHY FY*, 4).

Of particular interest during these visits was an arrangement made between Emperor Zhenzong and the envoys of Srivijaya. During their stay in Kaifeng, the envoys informed Zhenzong that their king, Cūḍāmaṇivarman, had built a Buddhist temple in Srivijaya dedicated to praying for the emperor's longevity. As such, a request was made to the emperor to provide both a signboard with a temple name, as well as a temple bell (*SS*, juan 489; and *Salmon* 2002, pp. 62–63).¹⁶ Zhenzong praised this idea and agreed to the requests, declaring that the name for the temple was to be *Chengtian wanshou* 承天萬壽 ("Heaven-Bestowed Longevity"). The name chosen here carried much significance, as it was the name of the emperor's birthday festival, and it also implied his right to rule through the Mandate of Heaven. Although the sources state that this interaction occurred in the ninth month when the Srivijaya envoys first arrived at court to give tribute, it would seem more likely that the name of the temple was provided during or shortly after Zhenzong's birthday festival several months later, in order to commemorate the participation of Srivijaya envoys on that occasion.

Claudine Salmon and Hans Bielenstein have both proposed that the *Chengtian wanshou* temple was constructed for a Chinese community in Srivijaya.¹⁷ There are many reasons to believe this was indeed the case, especially when considering that Srivijaya was a common destination for Chinese merchants. A particularly notable indication of a Chinese presence in Srivijaya would be a passage from the *Song shi* 宋史, which states "Sanskrit is used for writing in the state [of Srivijaya], and [Sanskrit] is on the ring that the king uses to imprint his seal. They also have Chinese writing, which they use for presenting missives to (the Chinese emperor)" (*SS*, juan 489; and *Salmon* 2002, p. 73). Here, we see an implication that Chinese people were residing in the kingdom and advising its king on matters of diplomacy. I have demonstrated elsewhere that high levels of literacy were common among Chinese sea merchant groups beginning in the late Tang and continuing well into the Song dynasty, as many of these individuals were members of locally prominent families with access to formal education, and some were even unsuccessful candidates for civil service examinations (*Sattler* 2025). Such individuals were able to use their education to assist with matters of diplomacy and government in states such as Dai Viet 大越 and Koryŏ 高麗 (Korea). We may also draw a parallel here with the example of Mao Xu advising the Java embassy to China one decade prior to Srivijaya's embassy in 1003–1004.

A variety of Chinese sources produced slightly later and outside the purview of the Song court also discuss the presence of Chinese merchants in Srivijaya. In these instances, we see that many of the 12th-century Chinese merchants who sailed to Srivijaya were from the Quanzhou and Xinghua areas of Fujian province (*Salmon* 2002, pp. 75–76).¹⁸ In addi-

tion, the *Pingzhou ketan* 萍洲可談 states that “(When) Chinese people go to Dashi, (they first) arrive at Srivijaya to repair their ships and trade goods. Merchants from afar congregate there, and for that reason it is most prosperous” 華人詣大食，至三佛齊修船，轉易貨物。遠賈輻湊，故號最盛。¹⁹ The archeological record likewise provides ample evidence of high volumes of trade between Sumatra and China. Huge quantities of Chinese ceramics—many dating to the early 11th century—have been recovered in the areas of Palembang and Jambi, with lesser amounts found in other locations throughout Sumatra (Manguin 1993; Ridho 1994, pp. 268–69; Miksic 2009). Wrecks of trade ships dating from the ninth to thirteenth centuries have also been discovered in the surrounding waters. These ships carried cargoes ranging from tens to hundreds of thousands of Chinese ceramic items.²⁰

It was previously believed that some of the envoys that Srivijaya sent to China during the 10th and 11th century had Chinese names. A close inspection of the meanings of the given names of these envoys, as well as a search in the *China Biographical Database* to examine the commonality of their names among hundreds of thousands of Chinese names, reveals that this was, in fact, not the case.²¹ Most of the names of Srivijayan envoys appear to be transcriptions of Arabic-language names, while other names might be of people native to Malay- or Javanese-speaking regions within or near the greater dominion of the Srivijaya polity. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Chinese record keepers, in some instances, took liberties in transcribing Chinese names with characters that connote foreign origins.

What initially stands out most from an examination of sea-borne diplomatic missions in this period is indeed the prevalence of individuals with Arabic names representing not just Dashi, but also Southeast Asian states such as Srivijaya and Champa. For instance, seven individuals with Arabic names represented five embassies from Srivijaya between 976 and 1017, and five embassies from Champa had representatives with Arabic names between 960 and 1011 (Chaffee 2018, p. 125). From this information, it is evident that such missions had persisted for some time prior to Zhenzong’s reign, and likely extend as far back as the Five Dynasties period—an era for which there are fewer textual sources that shed light on South Seas diplomacy and trade. Dashi seafarers cooperated with other Southeast Asian states as well, such as the aforementioned joint embassy with Butuan in 1003–1004. On that occasion, both groups were connected to such a degree that Chinese records have conflicting accounts on whether it was Dashi or Butuan that presented a parrot as a special item of tribute (*XZTCB*, juan 55; and *SHY FY*, 7).

As for the ethnicity of these Dashi visitors, an examination of Arabic-language texts of this period reveals that long-distance sea merchants in West Asia were largely Persian. Nevertheless, it is likely that some of the individuals described as “Dashi” people in Chinese sources were Arabs or Indians as well. One rather interesting Arabic-language source written at approximately the same time as when the 1003–1004 embassies took place describes the crew of a ship with a Persian captain. The *Aja’ib al-Hind* tells the story of a merchant ship traveling from Siraf to China, stating that the captain took “a crowd of merchants with him from every country”. Some of the nationalities of the men aboard the ship are indicated in the midst of a storm:

In a night that was so long, without hope of rescue, a prey to the violence of the gale, in a sea that boiled, beaten about by frightening waves, on a ship that leapt and plunged, shuddered and trembled, the passengers said farewell to one another, and each of them prayed according to his religion, for there were men from China, India, Persia, and the islands (*Aja’ib al-Hind*, pp. 13–14).

This source aligns with Chinese records for Zhenzong’s reign and earlier that reveal a rather complex multi-ethnic composition of embassies coming to pay tribute. Though we cannot discount the possibility of a distinct separation between ethnically mixed merchant ships and ethnically mixed state embassies at this time, the close parallel between Chinese and Arabic-language sources suggests that a large portion of the Dashi and Southeast Asian embassies were comprised of merchants. The fervor to engage in commerce is certainly attested to toward the end of the 1003–1004 embassies, when Butuan envoys

were caught breaking rules prohibiting private trade, as they purchased a great deal of Chinese wares, gold, and silver at city markets to bring back to their country (*SHY FY*, 4). Although not unheard of for foreign envoys to do so in the longue durée of Chinese history, this was still a flagrant violation of protocol. In the end, Zhenzong ruled that the envoys were to be treated with leniency under the rationale that such distant people were unaware of China's rules.

In many ways, the 1003–1004 embassies played a major role in imitating past precedents and in establishing new precedents. This is particularly revealing when considering the request of Srivijaya envoys for a temple name and a temple bell. For instance, in 998, just one year into Zhenzong's reign, Dashi envoys were also recorded as having acquired a large bell in China for use overseas (*SHY FY*, 4). In this instance, the bell was acquired in Guangzhou along with 1,300 strings of copper coins.²² This was a violation of rules that prohibited the outflow of precious metals and currency, though the adept way in which the Dashi envoys handled the situation resulted in Zhenzong allowing for an exception in their favor. These envoys made an appeal using terms and concepts rooted in imperial Chinese ideology to claim that they had traveled a long distance across the sea to seek out the emperor's virtue, and that the purchase was intended to spread loyalty and sincerity rather than for earning profit (for more on this ideology, see [Sattler 2021](#)). Clearly, the envoys were being advised by those with a keen understanding of Chinese political conventions.

Beyond this example, we may see that the main model for Srivijaya's 1003–1004 embassy was a diplomatic mission from the Pallava domains (South India) to the Tang empire in 720. At that time, Central Asia was beset by fierce geopolitical competition, and Tang leaders wished to diplomatically contain Tibet and fend off the expanding presence of Muslim armies (*Jiu Tang shu*, juan 198; and [Sen 2003](#), pp. 26–27). Pallava envoys visiting the Tang court asked for and received Emperor Xuanzong's 唐玄宗 (685–762, r. 712–756) blessing to dispatch war elephants and cavalry against Muslim and Tibetan forces. When the envoys asked Xuanzong (whom Zhenzong modeled his own reign after) to name this army, the Tang emperor "was much in approval" of the request. He declared that the army was to be named "the Army of Cherishing Virtue" (*Huaide jun* 懷德軍). Very much like the 1003–1004 embassy, the envoys also informed Xuanzong that their king was building a temple "for the state", and they requested a temple signboard. Xuanzong decreed that the temple was to be named "Submitting to Suzerainty" (*Guihua* 歸化). Here, we see the precedent that was invoked when Srivijaya envoys planned their 1003–1004 embassy to China. Knowledge of such a precedent would have come from those with a Chinese education who were well-versed in historical texts. Yet, it was not just members of the Srivijaya embassy who were aware of such precedents. Zhenzong and his officials were also aware of the historical connections that were being established, and their acknowledgement of the precedent is evident when they granted military titles to the Srivijaya envoys in 1003. They chose terms that harkened back to the 720 mission, such as the "General who Submits to Virtue", (*Guide jiangjun* 歸德將軍) and the "General Transformed by Affection" (*Huaihua jiangjun* 懷化將軍), which used the same four characters that were used in the 720 titles (*huai* 懷, *de* 德, *gui* 歸, and *hua* 化), although the characters were rearranged to form the new titles (*SS*, juan 489). As for the remnants of the "Guihua" temple mentioned in the 720 mission and its current location, although there is still no definitive identification from archaeological surveys, it might possibly have had some connection to the Shore temple complex in Tamil Nadu, which was constructed at approximately the same time.²³

There is no indication that temple diplomacy, as we have seen thus far, was a creation of the administrations of Xuanzong and Zhenzong, as such a form of diplomacy was initiated by non-Chinese states in both the 720 and 1003–1004 missions. It is more likely that these practices originated in and around the Indian Ocean region and circulated with the spread of Buddhism. This is attested to by examples of such forms of diplomacy being practiced solely between non-Chinese states. For instance, in around 860, the Srivijaya king, Bālaputra, donated funds to build a monastery in the Nālandā area of the Pāla empire (East India) for the use of pilgrims from Srivijaya. In turn, the Pāla king, Devapāla, donated

tax revenue and manpower from nearby villages for the monastery's upkeep (Cœdès 1975, p. 109; Sen 2003, p. 107; Acri 2016, p. 18). There is also the example of Cūḍāmaṇivarman (the Srivijaya king who built a temple in Zhenzong's favor in 1003) and his son building a temple in the Nākappattīnam area of the Cōla domains (South India) in 1005. This temple was named after Cūḍāmaṇivarman, though the Cōla king, Rājarāja, is recorded as having donated the tax revenues from a village for its upkeep soon after it was constructed. Later, in around 1090, a new charter was granted by a Cōla king in support of the temple.²⁴ Interestingly, in 1018, the Cōla king is recorded as having received large gifts of "Chinese gold" from Srivijaya for a temple staffed by Brahmans (Sen 2003, p. 67; Kulke 2009, p. 6). Considering the dispersed and incomprehensive condition of written records from India and Southeast Asia, such forms of diplomacy appear to have been fairly common in those areas.

One final aspect of earlier instances of temple construction abroad is a 10th-century report of "Chinese temples" (*Han si* 漢寺) in the Nālandā area of East India. The monk Jiye 繼業, who departed for Nālandā in 964, reported five such temples in his travel diary, including one called the "China West temple" (*Zhina xi si* 支那西寺), which he described as "ancient" (*gu* 古) (*Jiye Xiyu xingcheng*; and Sen 2003, pp. 106–07). Claims of state sponsorship for these temples do not appear to be extant, and it is not clear whether this is because their construction was initiated solely by Buddhist monks and lay Buddhists or simply because the historical record for the 10th century (and to a lesser degree, the Tang dynasty) is greatly diminished.

We can also consider the precedents that the 1003–1004 embassies established. Only one month after Zhenzong granted a temple bell and signboard to the Srivijaya envoys, and in the same month that the envoys from Srivijaya, Dashi, and Butuan were enjoying New Year celebrations in the emperor's presence, an embassy from the Xiliangzhou 西涼州 (Wuwei, central Gansu) Tibetans arrived at the Song court to pay tribute. While in the capital, word of the favorable treatment granted to the Srivijaya envoys had no doubt reached the ears of the Xiliangzhou envoys, as they too came forth with a similar request for assistance regarding one of their temples. The record states:

In the 1st year and the 1st month of the Jingde reign (1004), the envoys Situowan and petty officer Zheng Yanmei were sent to give tribute of three thousand foreign horses from the Liugu tribe. They also sent war prisoners. Situowan is (their leader) Pan Luozhi's nephew. Pan Luozhi also stated that the Hongyuan temple is in a poor state, and he asked for craftsmen and the bestowal of gold leaf and resplendent silks to renovate it. (Emperor Zhenzong) decreed that it would be arduous for the palace craftsmen to make such a long journey, (though) the remaining requests would be granted (*SHY FH*, 5).

景德元年正月。遣使廝拖完，押衙鄭延美，以六谷蕃馬三千疋，來貢。且獻捷。廝拖完即潘羅支之甥也。潘羅支又言洪元寺壞，乞給工匠及賜金碧，絹綵，修繕之。詔以尚方工匠難以遠去。餘從其請。

Then, only three months later, an embassy from the Sha-Guazhou 沙瓜州 (Dunhuang, west Gansu) Uighurs arrived at Zhenzong's court with a similar request. Their visit is recorded as follows:

In the 1st year and 4th month of the Jingde reign (1004), (the local leader Cao) Zongshou sent envoys bearing gifts of fine quality jades and horses as tribute. In addition, he also stated that a monk from his region by the name of Huicang was requesting a title, as well as a sum of 100,000 pieces of gold leaf to repair statues in the Longxing and Lingtu temples. It was requested that these be bestowed. In addition, a request was made for artisans who could cast (temple) bells, and Han Chinese who were skilled at inlaying pearls. On arrival to (the Uighur) domain, they would transmit their skills. (The emperor) decreed that a title be bestowed to Huicang and the gold leaf be apportioned. Everything else was refused (*SHY FY*, 5).

景德元年四月。宗壽遣使以良玉名馬來貢。且言本州僧惠藏乞賜師號，龍興，靈圖二寺修像，計金十萬箔。願賜之。又乞鑄鐘匠及漢人之善藏珠者，至當道傳授其術。詔賜惠藏師號量給金箔。餘不許。

Finally, in late 1007, the khan of the Ganzhou 甘州 (central Gansu) Uighurs sent a monk and a nun to give horses as tribute. The monk “wished to build a Buddhist temple in the capital to pray for the emperor’s long life, and requested a temple signboard” 欲於京城建佛寺祝聖壽，求賜名額。 The request was denied (SS, juan 490; and *Yu hai*, juan 154).

We may see here that during and after the Srivijaya embassy of 1003–1004, envoys from polities along China’s northwestern borders believed that hosting a population of skilled Chinese subjects and seeking patronage for Buddhist temples were initiatives that could elicit a favorable response from Emperor Zhenzong. However, requests by foreign entities for Chinese subjects were quite unusual in the several centuries leading up to Zhenzong’s reign, a fact Zhenzong was likely made aware of by his advisors. Zhenzong was initially inclined to only offer support for temple projects, while refusing requests for Chinese subjects to leave his empire, though after several years, even a request for temple patronage was denied.

4. The Feng and Shan Sacrifices

By 1008, Emperor Zhenzong and some of his top advisors were conceiving more ambitious means to employ spiritual authority at home and abroad. Such plans are evident in the rather infamous ordeal in which Zhenzong and several advisors claimed that holy texts affirming Zhenzong’s mandate for universal rulership had descended from Heaven and had come into their possession. Known to scholars both past and present as the “Heavenly Texts” (*Tian shu* 天書), these items were sporadically “discovered” throughout the realm for the remainder of Zhenzong’s reign (Lau and Huang 2009, pp. 270–73; Cahill 2021; Deng 2021, pp. 372–90). Many scholars today see these texts as obvious fabrications by sycophants who were using the opportunity to further ingratiate themselves with Zhenzong. It is also widely believed that the discovery of these texts and the subsequent Feng and Shan sacrifices were efforts to regain respect abroad following the signing of the Shanyuan Treaty.²⁵ These views were highlighted by Song- and Yuan-period historians, such as Sima Guang, who maintained that the Mandate of Heaven was invoked through the texts with the intent of awing foreign peoples—initially the Liao empire—into submission after Zhenzong began to develop misgivings regarding the treaty. Indeed, it was the night before Liao ambassadors arrived at court to congratulate Zhenzong on his birthday festival that the emperor claimed to have been visited during his sleep by an ancestral deity who foretold the discovery of the texts. Heavenly Texts were discovered in the palace just over one month later, and two days after that, the Liao envoys were present in a ceremony to offer libations to them (Deng 2021, p. 377). Extant sources recognize that at least one court official remonstrated to Zhenzong in terms that strongly implied the texts were fabricated for political ends. Nevertheless, the texts were used to justify the holding of the Feng and Shan sacrifices shortly after they were first discovered, and veneration of the texts continued until the time of Zhenzong’s death in 1022.

Deng Xiaonan marks 1008 as the beginning of a twelve-year period in which Emperor Zhenzong frequently deviated from established patterns of government in a marked effort to direct a new course for his reign (Deng 2021, pp. 336, 372). She states that “The Emperor’s ‘receiving in person the talismanic mandate’ became the starting point of and the ‘free pass’ allowing the offerings of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the construction of temples and shrines, and the enactments of lost rituals” (Deng 2021, p. 385). Patricia Ebrey also recognizes a turning point that began with the discovery of Heavenly Texts in early 1008, and points out that Zhenzong used this discovery to issue an edict for establishing a network of Daoist temples named *Tianqing guan* 天慶觀 in every prefecture in the empire (Ebrey 1997, pp. 52–53). As significant as this turning point was, it was also guided by past precedent. We might observe here that Zhenzong’s actions once more paralleled

those of Tang Emperor Xuanzong, who not only set the precedent for engaging in temple diplomacy with Indian envoys in 720, but also established his own empire-wide network of Kaiyuan temples (*Kaiyuan si* 開元寺) in 738 (Ebrey 1997, pp. 49, 52–54).²⁶ Perhaps more significantly, Xuanzong was the last emperor to conduct the Feng and Shan sacrifices prior to Zhenzong, having performed them in 725. On that occasion, it was Turkish tribes along the northern border who posed the greatest military threat, though Xuanzong was able to elicit their participation in the Feng and Shan sacrifices, as well as that of other foreign peoples (Twitchett 1979, pp. 387–88). So closely did Zhenzong model his rulership after that of Xuanzong that one official even remonstrated against using the Tang emperor as a guiding example, as the end of Xuanzong’s rule gave way to the extremely destructive An Lushan rebellion (Cahill 2021, pp. 17, 19–20).

The Feng and Shan sacrifices were the most grandiose and spiritually significant rites that an emperor could perform in the Chinese political realm. Only an emperor whose reign was marked by peace, prosperity, and favorable omens could undertake these rites, and as such, only six emperors are recorded as having conducted them.²⁷ The purpose of these rites was for the ruler to announce to Heaven and Earth that his empire was unified and at peace, and that he had fulfilled the Mandate of Heaven. The sacrifices were, accordingly, an extremely expensive undertaking, with the court, its many attendants, and multiple foreign embassies traveling long distances to accompany the emperor as he sacrificed to Heaven on Mount Tai, and later to Earth in Fenyin 汾陰 (Shanxi). The total costs amounted to several times the annual salaries of Song government officials (Golas 2015, p. 148, citation no. 19), with the main expense being the giving of gifts to both foreign and native participants. Compared to other sacrifices, the gifts bestowed during the Feng and Shan sacrifices were particularly lavish (Golas 2015, p. 193).

Nearly all of the embassies that participated in the Feng sacrifices in the tenth month of 1008 represented states already familiar to us thus far. For instance, Srivijaya envoys were granted a position of privilege near Emperor Zhenzong and the sacrificial altar during the proceedings. The record states that gifts were “very generously” bestowed on them afterward (SS, juan 489; and Salmon 2002, p. 64). Dashi envoys were also present, though this time as part of a joint embassy with Champa (SS, juan 490). The most prominent of the envoys were two Dashi ship captains, one of whom presented a jade tablet to Zhenzong, with a claim that it was obtained in Western India (*Xitian* 西天) by an ancestor five generations removed. The ship captain also claimed that he was instructed to “guard this with care, wait for a sage emperor in China to perform the Feng and Shan rites, and then present it as tribute” (XZTCB, juan 70; and Chaffee 2018, p. 132). Here, the links between Dashi, Champa, India, and those with knowledge of Chinese political conventions are again reminiscent of the *Aja’ib al-Hind’s* description of people from China, India, the Persian Gulf, and maritime Southeast Asia working together on merchant ships. The captain was rewarded with a large range of export goods and luxury items, and a banquet was held for the Dashi and Champa envoys upon returning to the capital (SS, juan 490; and SHY L, 45). Also present for the sacrifices were envoys of the Xiliangzhou Tibetans and the Ganzhou Uighurs. Both groups, we may recall, had previously engaged in temple diplomacy with Zhenzong, with mixed results (SS, juan 7).²⁸

Preparation for the sacrifices, commonly referred to as the “Earth” or “Fenyin” sacrifices, began in 1010, and the ceremonies took place early in the following year.²⁹ These were the second of the two major ceremonies that comprised the Feng and Shan sacrifices. For these rites, the emperor offered sacrifices to the Earth deity Houtu 後土 in Fenyin, and continued his claim of bringing his empire to a state of total pacification. The Ganzhou Uighurs and Xiliangzhou Tibetans once more participated in the rites, as well as envoys from Dashi. A Dashi ambassador with the title *Guide jiangjun* 歸德將軍 was granted a privileged position next to Zhenzong during the proceedings (SS, juan 8; SS, juan 490).³⁰ Butuan envoys, who we may recall were present with Zhenzong for his birthday and New Year celebrations in 1003–1004, also participated in the Earth sacrifices, and their ambassador received a gift of armor and banners, as well as the title *Huaihua jiangjun* 懷化將軍 (SHY

FY, 4). Newcomers to this celebration included the Qinzhou 秦州 (east Gansu) Uighurs, the Xixia 西夏 (Tanguts), and envoys from Wuxun 勿巡 (Oman), Sanmalan 三麻蘭, and Pupo 蒲婆 (SS, juan 8; SHY FY, 4). It is not clear where these last two areas were located, though throughout the duration of the Song dynasty, they only ever sent envoys on this one occasion.

5. Embassies from Dai Viet, Cōla, and Japan

5.1. Dai Viet

One additional state that sent envoys for the Earth sacrifices was Dai Viet. This polity was undergoing significant political unrest in the years leading up to the sacrifices, which ultimately resulted in the captain of the palace guards seizing control of the state in a coup d'état and establishing the Ly Dynasty (1010–1225). This man, Ly Cong Uan (Ch. Li Gongyun) 李公蘊, is described in early accounts as being a Fujian person (*Min ren* 閩人), and in later accounts as being from Vietnam.³¹ Scholars have long debated Ly Cong Uan's origins, though my own position is that these sources are not necessarily contradictory. The most plausible explanation is that he was a person with Fujianese ancestry who was born and raised in Vietnam. This case can be made based on accounts of his early life which state that he was born and raised in the heartland of Giao, an area inhabited by a large Chinese population (Taylor 2013, pp. 52–53, 59–60). Such accounts also state that he received both a Buddhist and secular Chinese education.³² If there is one problematic aspect of Ly Cong Uan's stated origins, it would be from the later accounts that emphasize his upbringing by Buddhist monks rather than his supposedly adoptive family. Although monks might have played a major role in the early education and upbringing of Ly Cong Uan, Keith Taylor has highlighted that the Ly family was very influential even before Ly Cong Uan assumed power, and the sovereign gave ranks to his father, mother, uncle, brothers, and other family members upon taking the throne (Taylor 1986, p. 162, 2013, p. 62). This suggests that Ly's family was actively involved in his life and assisted in putting him into positions of power. The emphasis on the Buddhist establishment in his life appears to reflect a bias of later record keepers, especially when we consider hagiographic narratives of Ly Cong Uan being conceived from intercourse between a divine being and his mother inside a temple, then being given up for adoption at the age of 3 (Taylor 2013, p. 60). Rather, Chinese factions had remained involved in Vietnamese politics since the Tang empire lost effective control over the region in the late 9th century. Since *Mengxi bitan* states that “fellow countrymen set up the Min (Fujian) person Ly Cong Uan as sovereign” 國人共立閩人李公蘊為主, we have strong indications that such factions were responsible for his rise to power (*Mengxi bitan*, juan 25).³³ Indeed, when Ly Cong Uan's new government was formed, it was staffed by educated sojourners from Fujian with knowledge of statecraft—many of whom appear to have been sea merchants (*WXTK*, juan 330).³⁴

Ly Cong Uan sent envoys to the Song empire in 1010 immediately after having taken the throne. This was enacted with the implicit understanding that Song leaders might use the coup d'état as a pretext to invade the country. Indeed, some Song officials called for such a move, though Zhenzong was not inclined to have his armies devastated by malaria and diverted from the northern border (Taylor 2013, p. 61; and *XZTCB*, juan 73). The Earth sacrifices at Fenyin offered the perfect opportunity to foster friendly relations between both states, not only to avert war at a sensitive time, but also to boost the political legitimacy of both leaders and engage in trade. Initially some of Zhenzong's officials were critical of establishing a relationship with Ly Cong Uan after he had betrayed the royal family that he was sworn to protect. Zhenzong countered by stating that Ly Cong Uan was merely following in the footsteps of the former king, who had come to power under similar circumstances (*XZTCB*, juan 73). As the ceremonies unfolded, Zhenzong proceeded to bestow all of the former Dai Viet king's titles on Ly Cong Uan “so that sacrifices could be made at Fenyin and tribute paid” 以祀汾陰修貢. In turn, the Dai Viet envoys were sent back with gifts of robes, gold vessels, and silver (*Yu hai*, juan 154; and *An-nan chi luoc*, juan 12).

We may see some interesting indications revealing that the Earth sacrifices made a pronounced impact on Ly Cong Uan's envoys, and that details of the ceremony were passed along to the Dai Viet king. Five years after Zhenzong's Earth sacrifices were completed, Ly Cong Uan conducted his own version of the Earth sacrifices, which exhibited ritual practices quite similar to those described in Chinese accounts.³⁵ Moreover, on the night that these sacrifices were made, Ly Cong Uan claimed to have been visited in a dream by a powerful historical figure who shared his surname, much like Zhenzong was visited by an ancestral deity prior to the appearance of the Heavenly Texts. Also like Zhenzong, Ly Cong Uan had images of this figure installed in shrines and worshipped in every province of his state (Taylor 1986, p. 165; and *Dai Viet su ky toan thu, ban ky* 本紀 2).

5.2. Cōla

Beyond the case of Dai Viet, there is an additional example which demonstrates that Zhenzong's grand sacrifices left a lasting impression among participants and that word of these rites traveled far and wide. Word of such sacrifices spreading abroad is evident in the records of an embassy from Cōla (South India) that arrived in the Song capital in 1015. This was the first of several embassies that Cōla sent to China during the Song dynasty, and, thus, there was much political value in Zhenzong receiving tribute from a distant state that had not previously recognized the heavenly mandate of Song emperors. This embassy arrived at court in the ninth month, and presented a missive from their sovereign Rājarāja to Zhenzong, as well as tributary gifts of pearls and green glassware (SS, juan 489; see also Sattler 2025). This missive, written with an expert grasp of formal Chinese, spoke of an unnamed sea merchant who had arrived to the Cōla court to tell its king:

The realm under Heaven belongs to the Great Song. The two emperors [Taizu and Taizong] established the (dynasty's) foundation, (then) a sage [Zhenzong] inherited the throne. (He) ascended the great mountain to hold the Feng sacrifices, conducted the rites and sacrifices at Fenyin, petitioned to the supremely virtuous, and was entrusted with a mandate from the Lord of Heaven. As such, (the emperor's) subjects now enjoy an era of peace and prosperity, in which auspicious words are happily heard.

鉅宋之有天下也。二帝開基，聖人繼續，登封太岳，禮祀汾陰，至德升聞，上穹眷命。臣昌期斯遇，吉語幸聞。

The record goes on to say that, when Rājarāja heard the words of the sea merchant, he replied that there had been no tempests at sea for ten years, and that, according to their traditions, this meant that there was a sage in China. Such was the reason that Rājarāja dispatched his embassy.

We may make some interesting observations from this. First, the "ten years" mentioned in the letter mark the exact span of time that had transpired since the signing of the Shanyuan Treaty between the Song and Liao empires. We may also recall that peace throughout the realm was a prerequisite for conducting the Feng and Shan sacrifices. Second, we may observe that the traditions which the letter referred to were once again precedents that were recorded in Chinese history books. The historic parallel in this instance was an account in the *Nan shi* 南史, which described diplomatic missions sent by the king of the Sumatran state of Gantuoli 幹陀利 to the southern Chinese Liang empire at the beginning of the 6th century (*Nan shi*, juan 78; and *Dong Xiyang kao*, juan 3). The account states that the king was visited by a monk in a dream who told him that:

China presently has a sagely monarch. After ten years, (there will be a period of) great Buddhist efflorescence. If you send envoys to give tribute and practice the rites in veneration, then (your) land will be bountiful, (your people) happy, and the (arrivals of) traveling merchants will multiply a hundredfold.

中國今有聖主，十年之後，佛法大興。汝若遣使貢奉禮敬，則土地豐樂，商旅百倍。

In addition to highlighting parallels of ten-year waiting periods and premonitions of sage rulers in China, this example also demonstrates that the Indian missive used a precedent from a kingdom formerly in the Srivijaya area. This was a reversal of the Srivijaya envoys earlier in Zhenzong's reign using the precedent of Indian envoys initiating temple diplomacy with Tang China. Furthermore, we may recall the Feng sacrifices in 1008, in which a Dashi ship captain offered as tribute a jade tablet from West India in accordance with instructions that foretold the coming of a sage emperor in China. In addition to being told of a sage ruler in China, the Gantuoli king's gift of tribute was a jade plate. The two 11th-century parallels with this early precedent provide yet another example of embassies during Zhenzong's reign being advised by those with knowledge of Chinese histories, while also alluding to cultural norms and religious practices native to Southeast and South Asia.

Ultimately, the Cōla embassy received great favor from Emperor Zhenzong. During Zhenzong's birthday festival, the Cōla ambassador requested that his group gather with the monks of the Qisheng 啟聖 Chan temple to pray for the emperor's long life, similar to how Srivijaya envoys proclaimed that they had constructed a temple to pray for Zhenzong's long life eleven years earlier. The records state that when the embassy departed, "gifts were generously bestowed" 賜物甚厚.

5.3. Japan

In addition to the Cōla envoys' visit to the Qisheng temple, there are more indications that efforts to conduct the Feng and Shan sacrifices did not mark the end of temple diplomacy during the later part of Zhenzong's reign. In 1012, an embassy arrived from Japan to the great surprise of Zhenzong's court (*Shishi leiyuan*, juan 63; and *Fozu tongji*, juan 44). Until this time, Japanese leaders had showed no interest in conducting formal diplomacy with the Song empire, and had only cautiously maintained diplomatic relations with the state of Wu-Yue during the tenth century (Sattler 2024). Upon arrival at Zhenzong's court, the envoys spoke of an auspicious aura that had appeared in the eastern part of Japan, and that traditions held that such an omen signified the emergence of a sage emperor in the Central Plains (China). Zhenzong was delighted to hear of the favorable omen, and decreed that a temple should be built in Japan. The name of the temple was to be Shen'guang 神光 (Divine Light).³⁶

Scholars of Japan will immediately (and correctly) recognize that this is a problematic account. Japanese primary sources make no such description of an embassy sent to the Song empire at this time, nor any desire to send one. In fact, this was a time when the Heian court was disengaging from public duties, all the while courtiers and religious institutions increasingly took private control over tax revenues and regional administration. Not only was there no will to send an embassy to China, but the means for sending the grandiose embassies of past centuries most likely no longer existed. Needless to say, there is much of interest that can be gained from analyzing such an account.

To begin, the sources that provide this account are not official histories. One of the sources, the *Shishi leiyuan* 事實類苑, is a 12th-century book of anecdotes, and the sole reason that the embassy is mentioned is to tell of an embarrassing ordeal that occurred during the closing ceremonies of the embassy's visit.³⁷ The other source is the 13th-century Buddhist history work *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, which is a valuable source of information pertaining to overseas exchange that does not appear in official histories. Although less detailed, this account does provide information not included in the *Shishi leiyuan*, such as a specific date for when the embassy arrived, which suggests that both accounts were based on earlier records. There is a good reason for why such records were never referenced in official histories. I would propose that sometime after the occurrence of these events, it became clear to Chinese record keepers that this embassy was not an official delegation, and that the Japanese state had no intent to send one to China. This begs the question of why an embassy was sent, and who exactly were its envoys. False claims of state representation for the sake of tributary trade are not uncommon in the long durée of diplomatic history in East

Asia. In fact, only fourteen years after these events, another embassy was sent from Japan to the Song empire (Enomoto 2007, p. 82; and SHY ZG, 44). In 1026, an embassy arrived in Mingzhou (Ningbo), with its chief envoy claiming that he had come to bring tribute on the orders of the governor of Dazaifu 太宰府 (the government office responsible for overseeing the administration of the island of Kyushu, as well as maritime customs). However, a close examination by Song officials revealed that this man lacked the documentation necessary to conduct diplomacy on behalf of his country, and it was deemed inappropriate that he proceed to the Song capital. The Song court decreed that should the envoy wish to sell his tributary goods, they would be purchased in Mingzhou at the going rate.³⁸

This envoy, Zhou Liangshi 周良史 (986–?), was the son of a Chinese father from Taizhou 台州 and a Japanese mother.³⁹ Although Zhou Liangshi and his family were connected to political figures in both Japan and China, extant records reveal that he was a sea merchant by occupation. That he was denied his attempt to pay tribute at court is likely because the court understood this, and did not think that he actually represented the Japanese government. We may also note that this event occurred during the regency of Empress Liu (*Liu Huanghou* 劉皇后, 969–1033, r. 1022–1033), several years after Emperor Zhenzong had passed away.⁴⁰ The difference in outcomes between both embassies would seem to be that Zhenzong was more inclined to accept such claims. Indeed, there are indications that the Japanese embassy of 1012 was organized by some of the same people who organized the 1026 embassy. For instance, Japanese sources record that Zhou Liangshi's father, Zhou Wenyi 周文裔 (962–?), arrived in Japan in the ninth month of 1012, which would align temporally with the return of the Japanese "embassy" from the Song empire (*Taigai Kankeishi Sōgō Nenpyō Henshū linkai* 1999, p. 118). Zhou Wenyi also appears to have been on Zhou Liangshi's ship to China in 1026, as he departed Japan in approximately the same month as Zhou Liangshi.⁴¹

In addition to demonstrating the continued spread of temple diplomacy and Emperor Zhenzong's lenient conduct toward foreign visitors, this event also carries implications for how we are to consider the presence of Chinese and mixed-Chinese people residing in Japan. The most significant of such communities was located in Hakata (present-day Fukuoka). Although many textual sources discuss Chinese people living or traveling there, and evidence of a burgeoning Chinese community is likewise supported by the archaeological record, the earliest direct reference to such a community dates to the late 11th century. Yamazaki Satoshi has argued that Zhou Liangshi and Zhou Wenyi were among an early wave of Chinese people who formed a diaspora community in Hakata, and the accounts of their embassy in 1012 lend further support to this position. The construction of a Buddhist temple would have strengthened a nascent Chinese community in their area of residence. Indeed, a study of early settlement in Fujian revealed that temples played a significant role in forming Chinese communities in regions that Chinese people did not previously inhabit (Clark 1990, p. 38). Similarly, temples often formed the symbolic and organizational centers of overseas Chinese communities across maritime Asia—as they still do today. As other scholars have demonstrated, a wide range of evidence reveals that temples in Hakata likewise held fundamental roles for the city's overseas Chinese communities.⁴²

6. Analyzing Emigration in Chinese Texts

A thorough understanding of either religious diplomacy or overseas migration during Zhenzong's reign requires detailed knowledge of both topics due to their close relation. Consideration of the nature of extant sources for this period does allow for additional insights, particularly those that pertain to the individuals who advised embassies on the ideological and religious values that guided Zhenzong's court. Thus far, we have seen a range of indications that Chinese people were present in or advised many of the embassies examined, yet, despite their valuable roles in the diplomatic processes of this time, the sources do not make any comment on whether individuals in these embassies could speak or write Chinese, were once subjects of the Song empire, or could trace their ancestral homeland to territory within either the Tang or Song empires. This leads to the distinct im-

pression that Chinese record keepers—particularly those who were producing documents for government use—did not wish to explicitly acknowledge that Chinese people were emigrating to foreign countries. There were, of course, tactful ways of making insinuations, such as stating that Chinese writing existed in Srivijaya or leaving unnamed the merchant who explained to the Cōla king that all under Heaven belonged to the Song empire. One suspects that the most common course of action was to simply not address the matter in any way. For instance the *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 talks of the tribute of horses that the Xiliangzhou Tibetans paid to the Song court in 1004 and states that an edict declared that they be compensated for their value, but the source makes no mention of the Tibetans' request to renovate a temple and receive Chinese artisans (XZTCB, juan 56). A more glaring omission is the Japanese embassy of 1012, which appears to have been purged from official histories.

Outright denial was also a valid course of action. In a remarkably rapid turn of events, the Dai Viet leader Ly Cong Uan's status at the Song court transitioned from that of a usurper to a sovereign, with all of the titles of the previous king being bestowed upon him. Zhenzong dismissed concerns among advisors about recognizing Ly Cong Uan as a legitimate ruler, and only one year after taking the throne, Ly Cong Uan's envoys participated in the Earth sacrifices at Fenyin. Yet, when these concerns were initially brought to Zhenzong's attention, he reportedly stated that the Vietnamese leader was a "southern barbarian not worthy of reprimand" 蠻夷不足責 (XZTCB, juan 73). Although the Song court was cognizant of the Dai Viet state's complex demographics and political intricacies (such as the existence of Chinese factions within their ruling class), it was more expedient for Emperor Zhenzong to dismiss Ly Cong Uan's actions as those of someone unaware of Chinese moral conventions in order to receive Dai Viet envoys for a ceremony that was of great personal significance.

Even when we examine the sources that remark on Ly Cong Uan's Fujianese heritage, it is evident that such observations did not derive from a sense of pride among Chinese writers. Rather, these observations were made merely in the context of describing the political apparatus of the Dai Viet state, and they were generally made with negative connotations. For instance, one of the descriptions of Ly Cong Uan's heritage was made in the context of discussing an official from Guangxi who had attempted to betray the Song empire. This man believed that he could do so by appealing to sympathetic officials in Vietnam with Fujianese ancestry, knowing also that the Ly dynastic line was from that region of China (XZTCB, juan 273).

Analysis of the names of foreign envoys also yields some interesting observations. Usually only the names of one or two ambassadors or envoys were recorded in descriptions of embassies, though in several instances, we see Chinese names listed for figures who were minor embassy officials. One example would be the petty officer (*yaya* 押衙) Zheng Yanmei 鄭延美, who accompanied the Xiliangzhou embassy to China in 1004 (SHY FH, 5). Another is of a certain administrative assistant (*panguan* 判官) named Chen Yi 陳義, who was listed along with two ambassadors with Arabic names for the Champa embassy to China in 1011 (SHY FY, 4). An earlier Champa embassy for the year 999 was led by a certain Chen Yao 陳堯 according to the *Song hui yao jigao* 宋會要輯稿, though in the *Song shi*, this name is listed as Zhu Chenyao 朱陳堯 (SHY FY, 7; and SS, juan 489). It is quite unusual under any circumstance to see two surnames followed by a given name, and one wonders how this discrepancy occurred. In the 998 Dashi mission to Song China, there is another administrative assistant recorded with the Chinese name Wen Mao 文茂 (or alternatively, the Chinese given name Wenmao), though elsewhere, he is recorded with the more seemingly foreign names of Wenshu 文戍 and Wenwu 文戊 (SHY FY, 4; WXTK, juan 339; and SS, juan 490, respectively). Clear-cut examples of ranking envoys with Chinese names would be those of the Kucha ambassador Li Yanfu 李延福 who gave tribute in 1010 and of the Champa vice ambassador Liu Gongzuo 劉公佐 who gave tribute in 1015 (SS, juan 490; and SHY FY, 7). The prevalence of Chinese and Arabic names among Champa

envoys is addressed in a comment made regarding the 1011 Champa embassy that the administrative assistant Chen Yi belonged to. Here, the record states:

(The Champa) king stated that since the land does not yield much in the way of produce or rice, he often wants rare and unusual goods. And so he often desires that pearls of high value be submitted (to him), and uses them for paying tribute. It is for this reason that he deals with special envoys. These envoys visit every nearby foreign state (*SHY FY*, juan 4).⁴³

其王又言本國地毛不壯，土產無精，常思奇異，而供王每欲殊珍，而作貢。所以特遣使。使遍詣鄰蕃。

There is no explanation for why these envoys were considered “special”, though the implication is evident to those who recognize that a minor official in the embassy under discussion held a Chinese name. Finally, as one would expect, Chinese names were also relatively common among Vietnamese embassies. However, considering the long history of Chinese states governing the area, this does not allow us to distinguish between native or assimilated peoples and those who belonged to Chinese diaspora communities. In all of the above examples, the only inference we have that these people were ethnically Chinese or claimed Chinese ancestry is that they had Chinese names. The record keepers were reluctant to provide any additional details.

Thus, there exists a contradiction that must be resolved. By all appearances, Zhenzong was not only willing to accept state embassies that were, in some capacity, supported by Chinese people living or trading abroad, but all indications suggest that such embassies in fact received preferential treatment. Yet, Chinese record keepers went to great lengths to avoid addressing the topic of Chinese people living abroad. Even when asked to allow Chinese artisans to migrate to other states, we see the rare instances that Zhenzong refused requests from foreign envoys. Although the court regarded such people as a precious resource, material value was never a deterrent in Zhenzong’s diplomatic exchanges. Rather, we must consider other factors that prohibited the migration of subjects outside of the Song realm, particularly the extent to which imperial Chinese ideology valorized the notion of virtuous rulers attracting distant peoples. In addition to making the claim of a sovereign ruling all under Heaven, the political value of demonstrating moral preeminence was what incentivized Zhenzong to bring foreign envoys to his birthday and New Year celebrations, as well as to his grand sacrifices. Moreover, just as righteous rulers were meant to attract subjects from afar, instances of an emperor’s subjects leaving the realm under his direct governance in search of profit or a better life demonstrated an ideological failure on the part of the emperor and his advisors. It also served as a moral threat to record keepers and historians concerned with how precedents might be established, especially when the outward migration of imperial subjects could be looked upon in a positive light or as receiving implicit or explicit approval from an emperor.

The value of attracting foreign peoples from afar is commonly highlighted in records throughout most of imperial Chinese history, and Zhenzong’s reign was no exception. In defense of the Dashi embassy of 998 breaking regulations, the emperor stated that, after traveling across the sea to pay tribute, they had “proclaimed their captivation and admiration (of him) from afar” 傾心遠慕於聲明 (*SHY FY*, 4). In the case of the Cōla embassy of 1015, the envoys greatly exaggerated the travel time it took them to reach China from South India, stating that they traveled for approximately three years (*SS*, juan 489). Indeed, the envoys stated that they “wish to declare the sincere admiration of distant peoples” 願以表遠人慕化之誠. Zhenzong’s advisors were well-versed in the history of diplomacy between Chinese empires and South Asian states, yet no comments were made on this discrepancy. Likewise, the journey of the Japanese “embassy” of 1012 was described with a metaphor for long and arduous travel (*tihang* 梯航). Such trips could indeed prove dangerous, though the sea crossing between Japanese and Chinese ports was usually accomplished in less than one week (*Shishi leiyuan*, juan 63). These statements were grounded in rhetoric that was intended to resonate with the Song court, though they nevertheless

offer some insight into the importance of space and moral forces in imperial ideology. In sum, record keepers and historians were largely motivated to emphasize the distant journeys of foreign peoples to the Song domain and to minimize discussion of the movement of Song subjects abroad, especially when they were in the service of foreign states. This maintained an image that the Song state functioned in accordance with the moral standards set by previous dynasties.⁴⁴ Zhenzong likewise had to rule within this ideological framework, though he made extensive use of Chinese middlemen whose roles facilitating diplomatic exchange were often either thinly veiled or entirely unconcealed.

It was also a sensitive point of fact that Chinese people were living in inland regions near the northern and northwestern borders of the Song empire. Nevertheless, their existence could be openly addressed under the assumption that such populations remained in place after the fall of the Tang dynasty—as opposed to those peoples migrating there during the reign of Song emperors. Keeping in mind that polities near the northwestern border of the Song empire were quite successful in their diplomatic initiatives and were present at Zhenzong's major ceremonies, we should also consider the possibility that members of Chinese communities in those areas played a role in advising their diplomatic missions. Indeed, the Song–Yuan historian Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1245–1322) did point out that there were large Chinese populations residing in the northwestern area (*WXTK*, juan 337), and we have already seen that some envoys from the region had Chinese names. Yet, if Zhenzong was indeed willing to take advantage of members of Chinese communities advising embassies from polities to the northwest, he was most certainly against encouraging any sort of migration from the Song empire to those areas. As we have also seen, Zhenzong and his advisors were more willing to part with a hundred thousand pieces of gold foil than they were with Chinese subjects.

This is, perhaps, best understood by comparing inland Chinese communities located outside of the Song empire with overseas Chinese communities. One such distinction was that the Chinese people who traveled overseas at this time and in later periods were mainly from the southeastern areas of present-day Fujian and Guangdong, whereas many of the Chinese residing in areas beyond the north and northwestern borders were native to the regions where they lived. Northern Chinese held different customs from those in the southeast to begin with, and the leaders of the states they lived in each had various policies for governing and assimilating populations of those who viewed themselves as Chinese. Those leaders also understood that, at any given time, there were officials in the Song court who held designs of ruling over Chinese populations beyond Song borders (Levine 2009, pp. 505–8; Tackett 2017). In contrast, a vastly greater quantity of export wares were shipped by sea rather than by land, so the economic benefits of hosting sea merchant diaspora communities in coastal polities resulted in a common dynamic throughout maritime Asia in which native leaders did their utmost to attract foreign merchants. With such opportunities, there were more incentives for Chinese people to travel overseas.

Another distinction is that the Song empire had particular reasons to be apprehensive about Chinese people living in the northern regions. States like Liao and Xi Xia 西夏 were known to prize knowledge of Chinese customs, statecraft, and military strategy, and as such, made extensive use of ethnic Chinese people from within their territories to staff their governments.⁴⁵ While the Song government during Zhenzong's reign appeared to oppose all forms of Chinese migration abroad, migration beyond the northern borders in particular posed a potentially existential threat. Not only did South Seas states pose no such military threat (border skirmishes with Dai Viet notwithstanding), but their geographic location and dependence on Chinese trade meant that there was no risk that these states would become vassals of the Liao empire. Although Zhenzong's successors perhaps more prudently prioritized diplomacy with northern states due to the military threat of the Liao and Xi Xia states, in encouraging tributary relations with South Seas states, Zhenzong was able to amass political capital and legitimacy to offset a loss of standing in the northern regions. Thus, positive relations were maintained with coastal states hosting overseas Chinese diaspora communities, and we do not see any attempt to curtail or dissuade migration to

those areas, even though such migration violated long-held ideological conventions. This preference for sea connections is likewise evident in an instance when the Dai Viet king asked to establish border markets in 1009, but Zhenzong declined in favor of continuing a monopoly of sea trade via port cities (*XZTCB*, juan 72).

From the analysis thus far, it is apparent that indications of Chinese people staffing or advising embassies follow a pattern that aligns with the main sea routes of this time. Dai Viet, Champa, Srivijaya, India, and Arabia (Dashi) were the states or regions situated along a trade route that connected the Persian Gulf to China. Since the middle of the Tang dynasty, if not earlier, this was the most significant trade route throughout maritime Asia. Other major trade routes included those between China and Korea, as well as between China and Japan. Not only were Chinese merchants trading in those two areas during the 11th century, they were also establishing trade diasporas there. Although textual sources from Srivijaya, Java, and India for this period are much less extensive than those of East Asian states, there is still much promise in analyzing and comparing descriptions of diverse *entrepôt* communities in recovered inscriptions from those areas. Arabic-language books also hold much potential.

7. The Legacy of Zhenzong's Initiatives

The degree of leniency, expediency, and generosity that was extended to tributary embassies which demonstrated a keen understanding of Zhenzong's desired spiritual, ideological, and geopolitical order, was by no means typical of Chinese rulers. Following Zhenzong's death, the regency of Empress Liu initiated a change in policy that marked a return to the traditional expectations of diplomatic relationships. In particular, embassies that could offer little more than compliance during major ceremonies or melodramatic approbation quickly dwindled in number. For instance, Butuan is only ever recorded as sending three embassies throughout the Song dynasty, and all arrived during Zhenzong's reign. Although Dashi is recorded as having frequently sent embassies from early in the Song dynasty—and ten embassies specifically during Zhenzong's reign—it does not appear that they sent embassies from the time of Zhenzong's death in 1022 until the year 1055. Srivijaya did send an embassy during Empress Liu's regency in 1028, though following this, it did not send any other embassies until 1079. Likewise, Champa, which sent approximately eleven embassies during Zhenzong's reign, sent one embassy during Empress Liu's regency in 1029 and did not send any others until 1050. Dashi, Srivijaya, and Champa were three of the four states that sent the most embassies to China during the early Song dynasty (the other being Dai Viet), so their sudden decline in tributary missions is a testament to the significant change in policy that occurred during the regency of Empress Liu. John Chaffee also noticed this trend, and related it to a very interesting memorial from the prefect of Guangzhou in 1016:

The embassies with their envoys, vice-envoys, subordinate officials, and assisting officials should be limited to 20 [representatives] for Arabia [Dashi], Cōla, Srivijaya, and Java, and 10 for Champa, Tambralinga (Danliumei 丹流眉), Borneo, Guluo 古邏 [Kalah, present-day Kedah], and the Philippines (Moyi 摩逸), and they should be given documents for their travel. Guangzhou foreign guests who falsely substitute for them should be found guilty (Chaffee 2018, p. 131).⁴⁶

This translation allows for two points. First, near the end of Zhenzong's reign, there was already a desire among officials to curtail the extravagant receptions offered to foreign embassies. Second, we see that officials were aware that some of the individuals claiming to be envoys were actually residents of diaspora communities within China. Nevertheless, there does not appear to be any significant change in policy until after Zhenzong's death. When recalling that Empress Liu and her court refused to recognize Zhou Liangshi's attempt at diplomacy on behalf of Japan, we know that she was not inclined to deal with merchants misrepresenting their status. Considering that Zhou Liangshi was directed to conduct trade at one of China's commercial ports, we can also assume that merchants representing Dashi, Srivijaya, Champa, and other South Seas states were resigned to doing the

same. Only in the case of Dai Viet do we see a continued reception of embassies, though this can be attributed to the Song court's intent to maintain cordial relations with a state that it shared an oft-contended land border with.

All of this is not to say that Empress Liu sought a complete reversal of her late husband's policies. Jinah Kim's enlightening work on Chinese iconographies in India reveals that, toward the end of her life, the empress regent dispatched a Buddhist embassy to the state of Magadha (East India). The purpose of this embassy was to construct a pagoda in Bodhgaya, in honor of Zhenzong's father Taizong (Kim 2022, pp. 195–97. See also Gongkatsang and Willis 2013, pp. 434, 437–38). The stele to commemorate this pagoda is still extant, and has an inscribed date of 1033. Its inscription tells of a certain monk named Huaiwen 懷問 who was in charge of overseeing the pagoda's construction. Although apparently not mentioned in official Chinese histories, the *Fozu tongji* discusses this voyage, as well other voyages undertaken by the monk Huaiwen 懷問. In a passage for the year 1031, it states:

The monk Huaiwen has previously visited India. He built a pagoda for Emperor Zhenzong at the side of the Buddha's Diamond Throne (in Bodhgaya). Today he wishes to go there once more on behalf of the empress dowager and present emperor (Renzong 宋仁宗, 1010–1063, r. 1033–1063) to build a second pagoda (*Fozu tongji*, juan 45).⁴⁷

沙門懷問嘗往天竺。為真宗皇帝建塔於佛金剛座之側。今欲再往為皇太后今上更建二塔。

This passage goes on to state that an inscribed stele would be placed at the bottom of the pagoda and that Huaiwen's request was approved. Thus, this passage tells us that not only had Zhenzong previously sent his own Buddhist embassy to India to build a pagoda there, but that Empress Liu was in favor of continuing this initiative and permitted the construction of a second pagoda. This supports Kim's position that the empress dowager was personally motivated to construct the pagoda for the sake of honoring Zhenzong's father and securing his passage to the heavenly realm. Moreover, such a project is consistent with Empress Liu's extensive efforts to expand a cult of statues of imperial ancestors in the Song empire, to initiate the construction of temples dedicated to Zhenzong, and to place images of Zhenzong in existing temples (Ebrey 1997, pp. 51–58).

Chinese temple building projects in India continued into later generations, though there do not appear to be indications of any such initiatives being conducted at the behest of the Chinese state. The *Daoyi zhilue* 島夷誌略 talks of a wood and brick pagoda built in Nākappattīnam (South India) by Chinese people. It had a Chinese inscription which dated its construction to 1267, but made no mention of who constructed it.⁴⁸ There is much evidence to suggest that this was the same brick pagoda that was dismantled by Jesuits in 1867.

In the case of Srivijaya, although trade was limited to China's southern ports after Zhenzong's reign, there was an instance of Srivijayans receiving permission from the Song court to restore a Daoist temple in Guangzhou in 1070 (Salmon 2002, pp. 66–69). Similar to the monastery that the Srivijaya king, Bālaputra, established in Nālandā during the 9th century, the Srivijayans purchased land in the region to support the temple complex. The complex was also provided with a library, a fasting hall, and a pavilion for a large bell. The inscribed stele from which this information is obtained states that, due to these charitable works, ships from Srivijaya "were now able to reach their destination points without incident". The restoration was completed in 1079, which also marked the first year that Srivijaya envoys paid tribute at the Song court since the single attempt to do so during Empress Liu's regency (*XZTCB*, juan 299).⁴⁹ Of particular significance is that the temple which the envoys chose to restore was one of the Tianqing temples that Emperor Zhenzong had established during his reign.

The Chengtian wanshou temple that Srivijaya envoys brought to the attention of the Song court in 1004 was built in homage to emperor Zhenzong. The name was originally derived from Zhenzong's birthday festival (*Chengtian jie* 承天節), which was an occasion

during which he frequently chose to receive foreign embassies. Moreover, the meaning of *Chengtian* (“entrusted by Heaven”) obviously held much personal significance to Zhenzong, as we have seen that, throughout much of his reign, he was concerned with asserting the legitimacy of his position as the Son of Heaven. It may come as no surprise then that the Chengtian wanshou temple was not the only temple with such a name constructed in a major maritime entrepôt. In 1007, only four years after the Srivijaya temple was constructed, a Chengtian temple (*Chengtian si* 承天寺) was established in the Fujian port city of Quanzhou (*Ba Min tongzhi*, juan 77), which was fast becoming one of the most important hubs (along with Guangzhou) for the South Seas trade.⁵⁰ This happened to be the same year that a spirit medium, who was previously a merchant from southwest Fujian, took up residence in the imperial city and began transmitting revelations and predictions from the ancestral deity to Emperor Zhenzong.⁵¹ Only two to three years later, a mosque was built in Quanzhou, which, taken together with the naming of the Chengtian temple, presents another strong indication of interconnections and cooperation between Chinese, Dashi, and Southeast Asian peoples at this time.⁵²

Also worth noting is that the same temple name (Ch. *Chengtian si*, Jp. *Jōtenji* 承天寺) was given to one of the temples in the major Japanese trade hub of Hakata, which was host to a large Chinese diaspora. *Jōtenji* was established in 1242 by the Chan/Zen monk Enni 圓爾 (1202–1280) after returning from his studies in China, and from its very inception, it was deeply integrated in trade between China and Japan.⁵³ Considering its construction over two centuries after the passing of Zhenzong, the temple was most likely named after its counterpart in Quanzhou, which is suggested by the fact that the other temple that Enni was involved in establishing in Hakata, *Sōfokuji* 崇福寺, also shared the name of a Quanzhou temple.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we should not dismiss the possibility that Chinese sea merchants provided the names for these temples, especially since they financed the construction of *Jōtenji*, and possibly *Sōfokuji* as well. As for the Chengtian wanshou temple in Srivijaya, there does not appear to be much information on this complex following the 1003–1004 mission. We do know that Palembang, generally thought to be the center of power in Srivijaya at that time, hosted a community of thousands of Chinese inhabitants by the early Ming dynasty (*Dong Xiyang kao*, juan 3). It would seem that the only subsequent information about this temple comes from an early 17th century history, in which the author states simply that “The signboard was bestowed during the Song. Today (the temple) is in ruins” 宋時賜額。今廢。 (*Dong Xiyang kao*, juan 3). Archaeologist Edmund Edwards McKinnon wrote that there was once a temple located along the Musi River in the Palembang area known as the *Negeri Pangkalan Cina* (“Port of China”) (Edwards McKinnon 1985, p. 21). After inquiring with local scholars, I was told that there are no longer any traces of this temple.

8. Conclusion

When we consider the grandiose rites that Emperor Zhenzong conducted, as well as the temples in major entrepôts across maritime Asia that were named in his honor, received his patronage, or were built in continuation of his policies, it becomes apparent that Zhenzong established a legacy in overseas exchange that was only superseded during the reigns of early Ming emperors. Yet, this was a complex relationship with the outside world that employed both an extensive use of historic precedent and strategies that were atypical of past dynasties. For example, the Song court was willing to make use of Chinese people living abroad for their own foreign policy goals, but they were unwilling to acknowledge this, and in some instances, they were steadfast in not allowing or openly supporting the migration of Chinese people abroad. Such circumstances during Zhenzong’s reign provide rare insight into the activities of Chinese people overseas, particularly in the capacity of advising and assisting rulers across maritime Asia in matters that pertained to lucrative tributary trade with China. Chinese sea merchants also assisted Emperor Zhenzong in bringing foreign embassies to China in ways that supported the image that he wished to cultivate at home and overseas. This diplomatic activity involved the establishment of

temples across various regions in Asia in order to foster strong relationships between Zhenzong's court and both the envoys of foreign rulers and the merchant groups that claimed to represent foreign rulers. Such methods were atypical in Chinese history until this time, and it appears that they were mainly employed during Zhenzong's reign and in instances that invoked his legacy after his passing. Yet, underlying the rituals and rhetoric was a fundamentally transactional system of relationships. Influence, legitimacy, and reputation were being purchased to support domestic, geopolitical, and religious goals. Ultimately, Zhenzong understood that his rivals could claim a comparable status in terms of political or military strength, and so he used every means at his disposal to ensure that his spiritual position on Earth was rivaled by none.

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Abbreviations

SHY FY	Song hui yao jigao: Fanyi 蕃夷
SHY L	Song hui yao jigao: Li 禮
SHY ZG	Song hui yao jigao: Zhiguan 職官
SS	Song shi
WXTK	Wenxian tongkao
XZTCB	Xu zizhi tongjian changbian

Notes

- ¹ On the term “maritime Asia” and its varied usage in academic circles, see [Acri \(2019\)](#).
- ² On these rites in Chinese history, (see [Olsson 1974](#), pp. 165–75; [Loewe 1978a](#), p. 172; [Loewe 1978b](#), pp. 664–65; [Bodde 1978](#), pp. 68, 73; [Weschler 1985](#), pp. 154, 170–95; [Ge 1995](#), pp. 68–69; [Lewis 1999](#); [He 2005](#); [Wyatt 2008](#), pp. 87–89, 102–03 (and citation no. 30); [Choi 2017](#), pp. 15–37; [Cahill 2021](#), pp. 12–16).
- ³ For English-language scholarship on the presence of Chinese people overseas, Wang Gungwu initiated discussion on the early activities of Chinese sea merchants in his pivotal work, recently published as [Wang \(1998\)](#). Geoff Wade has shed a great deal of light on maritime exchange in [Wade \(2009\)](#), while also recognizing the presence of Chinese merchants in maritime Asian trade at this time. Other valuable contributions include [Salmon \(2002\)](#), and [Chin \(2011\)](#). As a result of the abundance of Japanese primary sources discussing Chinese merchants, scholarship on this topic in Japan is more plentiful. Notable works include ([Mori 1975](#); [Yamauchi 2003](#); [Enomoto 2007](#); [Yamazaki 2010](#); [Watanabe 2012](#); [Tanaka 2012](#)). English works that discuss Chinese merchants and Chinese communities in Japan include ([Kawazoe 1990](#); [Batten 2006](#); [von Verschuer 2006](#); [von Glahn 2014](#); [Y. Li 2023](#); [Sattler 2024](#)).
- ⁴ In contrast to the increasing visibility of secular Chinese abroad, the overseas activities of Buddhist monks and non-Chinese merchants at this time have been fleshed out in much greater detail. See, for instance, the recent contributions of [Acri \(2016\)](#), and [Chaffee \(2018\)](#).

- ⁵ Lau and Huang (2009, pp. 264, 266), and Deng (2021, pp. 372–76). On the treaty, see Tillman (2005), and Lau and Huang (2009, pp. 262–70). For the Liao dynasty and the history of Song–Liao relations, see (Ang 1983; Wang 1983; Twitchett and Tietze 1994; Tackett 2017).
- ⁶ Lau and Huang (2009, p. 268) state “It was estimated that the annual payments amounted to only 1 or 2 percent of the Sung military expenditures required during war times, and to merely 0.3 to 0.5 percent of the total state expenditures. Moreover, these payments were easily offset by the surpluses acquired from the seven new border markets that were established”.
- ⁷ Tillman (2005, p. 144). A large part of the success of the treaty derived from the leadership of Song minister Wang Dan and his efforts to maintain peaceful relations. See Wyatt (2008).
- ⁸ Among such critics were Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (Lau and Huang 2009, p. 267) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (Tillman 2005, p. 145).
- ⁹ SS, juan 186; and SHY ZG, juan 44. See also (Wheatley 1959, p. 24; Wolters 1986, pp. 36–37; Wade 2009, p. 225). Wheatley interprets the *Song shi* text as intending “to induce ‘foreign traders of the South Sea and those who went to foreign lands beyond the sea to trade’ to come to South Chinese ports on promise of special import licenses”. This would seem to be an inaccurate translation. The text reads: 雍熙中，遣內侍八人齎敕書金帛，分四路招致海南諸蕃。商人出海外蕃國販易者，令並詣兩浙司市舶司請給官券，違者沒入其實貨。 My translation of this text is “During the Yongxi period (984–987), eight palace attendants were dispatched to give imperial missives (as well as) gold and silks. (These groups) were allotted four routes, (with the purpose of) eliciting (tribute) from the various foreigners of the South Seas. Merchants who departed to trade in foreign countries overseas were ordered to visit the Liangzhe Maritime Trade Superintendency offices to request permits to do so. Violators were to have their goods confiscated”. I believe that the last two sentences of this translation refer to an entirely different issue, which was that merchants from the Liangzhe region who were trading in Japan at this time were evading taxes and levies issued by the Song government. The entry in the *Song hui yao jigao* does not discuss merchants or the Liangzhe offices, which further suggests that these were two separate issues. On these merchants from the Liangzhe region and their deteriorating relations with the Song government, see (Sattler 2024). Regarding the term “Nan Hai”, its precise definition varied in usage. The monk Yijing 義淨 (635–713) considered the area of Nan Hai to encompass what we now regard as the archipelagic and coastal regions of Southeast Asia up to (but not including) India. See *Nan Hai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳. The term used in the text describing the eunuchs was actually “Hai Nan” 海南, which I believe is synonymous with “Nan Hai” in this instance, though later the term came to more commonly refer to the island of Hainan to the south of Guangdong province.
- ¹⁰ By my count, there were approximately 22 embassies from maritime Southeast Asia that arrived from the beginning of Taizong’s reign in 976 to the eunuch missions in 987. From 987 to the end of Taizong’s reign in 997, there were 12 missions. See Hartwell (1983).
- ¹¹ On state revenue derived from sea trade at this time, see Wheatley (1959, p. 24).
- ¹² On the 992 embassy, see *Yu hai*, juan 154; *WXTK*, juan 332; and *SHY FY*, p. 4. This mission is also discussed in (Clark 1991, pp. 123–24; Salmon 2002; Wade 2009; Chin 2011; Sattler 2024). My examination of primary sources for this essay was greatly facilitated by the near-comprehensive lists of diplomatic embassies sent to China compiled in Hartwell (1983), and Bielenstein (2005).
- ¹³ Hartwell (1983, p. 182) lists only an embassy that arrived in the period between 1068 and 1077, whereas Bielenstein (2005, p. 66) states that “(a 1014) edict referred to the arrival of envoys from She-p’o (Java)”.
- ¹⁴ For more on this and other Srivijaya embassies, see Claudine Salmon’s excellent essay, Salmon (2002). For the primary sources which detail this embassy, see *SHY FY*, 4; *SHY FY*, 7; *XZTCB*, juan 55; *SS*, juan 489; *SS*, juan 490; and *WXTK*, juan 339.
- ¹⁵ This was celebrated on the second day of the twelfth month.
- ¹⁶ These signboards were displayed on the front of the main hall of a temple complex, as is still common for Chinese and East Asian temples today.
- ¹⁷ Salmon (2002, pp. 62–63), and Bielenstein (2005, p. 75). Salmon thinks it could have been either for the sole use of a Chinese community, or for the use of a Chinese community as well as the greater public.
- ¹⁸ People with ancestral or linguistic links to these areas are commonly referred to as “Hokkien”.
- ¹⁹ *Pingzhou ketan*, juan 2. This personal account dates to around 1119, but contains information that was collected around two decades earlier. See also Wolters (1983, p. 55).
- ²⁰ See (Flecker 2002; Krahl et al. 2011; Kwa 2012; Liebner 2014; Chong and Murphy 2017).
- ²¹ China Biographical Database. Harvard University, Academia Sinica, and Peking University. <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb/home> (last modified April, 2024).
- ²² One string contained 1000 or slightly less than 1000 coins.
- ²³ I am grateful to Louis Coplestone, who brought the existence of this temple complex to my attention in a personal communication.
- ²⁴ See (Cédès 1975, pp. 141–42, 158; Chattopadhyaya 1965, pp. 90–91; Kulke 2009, p. 6; Seshadri 2009, p. 127).
- ²⁵ Olsson (1974, pp. 161, 164, 171–72); Q. Li (2008, pp. 82–100); Choi (2017, pp. 18–19, 31–32); and Deng (2021, p. 376). One outlier is Cahill, who is not inclined to view the emergence of the Heavenly Texts primarily as a reaction to the increasing power and status

of the Liao state, but rather argues that Zhenzong was driven by his religious convictions. She believes that such a narrative was concocted by orthodox historians to slander the Daoist initiatives of Zhenzong and his advisors. See Cahill (2021).

- 26 As Ebrey points out, a key difference was that the *Kaiyuan si* were ecumenical institutions which, unlike the *Tianqing guan*, were not intended to portray the emperor or the ancestors as deities.
- 27 For the 1008 Feng sacrifices, see (Olsson 1974, pp. 165–75; Weschler 1985, pp. 170–95; Ge 1995; He 2005; Wyatt 2008, pp. 87–89; Choi 2017, pp. 15–37; Cahill 2021, pp. 12–16). For the earlier instances in which the rites took place, see (Bodde 1978, pp. 68, 73; Loewe 1978a, p. 172; Loewe 1978b, pp. 664–65; Weschler 1985, pp. 170–95; Ge 1995, pp. 68–69; Lewis 1999). For debates on their Zhou dynasty origins, see (Weschler 1985, pp. 154, 171–72; Lewis 1999, pp. 53–55, 58; Wyatt 2008, pp. 87, 102–3 (citation no. 30)). The participation of foreign peoples in these rites can be dated at least as far back as Tang Gaozong's 唐高宗 (628–683, r. 649–683) sacrifices in 666, which included embassies of "the Turks, the kingdoms of Khotan, Persia, India, and Japan, and the Korean states of Silla, Paekche, and even Koguryo". See Weschler (1985, p. 186). Going back as far as the time of Confucius, there were those who conducted the Feng and Shan or similar sacrifices but were ridiculed or regarded as illegitimate due to merely ruling petty domains or not even ruling as actual sovereigns.
- 28 Either the Ganzhou embassy of 1007 was requested to remain in China until the Feng sacrifices were held, or an embassy was sent not long after the previous embassy was dispatched.
- 29 For these sacrifices, see (Olsson 1974, pp. 169–70; Wyatt 2008, pp. 87–88; Cahill 2021, p. 17).
- 30 This ambassador was probably the ship captain Tuopoli 陶婆離, who was present in the Feng sacrifices, though here the name that is recorded is Tuoluoli 陶羅離.
- 31 For early descriptions of Ly Cong Uan as a Fujianese person, see *Mengxi bitan*, juan 25; *XZTCB*, juan 273; and *WXTK*, juan 330. For the later assertion that he was from Vietnam, see *An-nan chi luoc*, 12. I am inclined to support James Chin's argument that the *Mengxi bitan* description is more reliable than the *An-nan chi luoc* description, because the former is only 58 years removed from the life of Ly Cong Uan, whereas the latter is several centuries removed. See Chin (2011, p. 162, citation no. 10).
- 32 Taylor (1992, pp. 139–40), and Taylor (2013, pp. 59–60). See additional discourse on Ly's life in Taylor (1986).
- 33 Ly Cong Uan's predecessor was likewise put on the throne by a faction from the Giao area. See Taylor (2013, pp. 52–54).
- 34 One 1076 account also states "Fujian and Guangnan (Guangdong) people are going to Jiaozhi (Dai Viet) to conduct commerce, and it has been said that some remain there to hold government positions" 福建、廣南人因商賈至交趾，或聞有留於彼用事者。 See *XZTCB*, juan 273, and (Clark 1991, p. 124). See also (Sattler 2025).
- 35 The details of Ly Cong Uan's Earth sacrifices are provided in Taylor 1986, p. 165. The earth deity Houtu was also worshipped in Vietnam at this time, which is discussed in *ibid.*, p. 160.
- 36 This name is a clever allusion to a verse of the late Tang poet Han Wo 韓偓. His poem of the Shen'guang temple pagoda in Fuzhou, where he was living in exile, contains the line "Auspicious vapors by the Sun Palace give rise to a royal crown; (my) degrading eyes open in attempt to view Fusang (Japan)" 日宮紫氣生冠冕，試望扶桑病眼開. This poem was, in turn, inspired by a poem of a certain late Tang poet named Zhou Pu 周朴, which describes the seawater near the Shen'guang temple: "Sea water flows out to the frontiers of Wa (Japan); the patterns of the sky crown the city of Fuzhou" 海水旋流倭國野，天文方戴福州城. Both poems are preserved in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, in juans 680 and 673, respectively. This example shows that those who planned the embassy were familiar with the historic precedents of omens portending a sage ruler, as well as with Tang poetry.
- 37 *Shishi leiyuan*, juan 63 states: "Court affairs were put on hold for the day so that the emperor could personally send (the Japan envoys) off. The foreign envoys (thereupon) pleaded with him to order a literatus to write the inscription for the temple signboard. At the time, even though there was by chance a literatus present who finished first in the imperial examinations, his understanding of characters was not very strong and (rather) ordinary at best. The scholar Zhang Junfang was sought as a replacement, as he was a talented student of the ancient ways. The emperor summoned him to promptly compose the temple signboard. (However), at the time Zhang was still a junior official, and was drunk at the Fanlou Restaurant. People were dispatched all over the capital to find him but were unable to do so. All the while, the foreigners waited with eager anticipation at the palace gate". 朝辭日，上親臨遣，夷使面乞令辭臣撰一寺記，當時直者雖偶中魁選，詞學不甚優，居常止以張學士君房代之，蓋假其稽古才雅也。既傳宣，令急撰寺記。時張尚為小官，醉飲於樊樓，遣人遍京城尋之不得，而夷人在閤門翹足而待。 The account goes on to state that following the event, running jokes were made at court at Zhang Junfang's expense.
- 38 At this time, Mingzhou was one of the most significant ports in China. Nevertheless, the reigns of Taizong and Zhenzong corresponded with a precipitous decline for sea merchants and export ceramics producers in the region, as the establishment of Maritime Trade Superintendency (*Shibosi* 市舶司) offices in Mingzhou and Hangzhou at the end of the tenth century resulted in an upsurge of activity from merchants and producers from other parts of southeast China, particularly those from southern Zhejiang and Fujian. See Sattler (2024).
- 39 For more on Zhou Liangshi and his family, see Yamazaki (2011), and Sattler (2021).
- 40 For the regency of Empress Liu, see Chaffee (2001).
- 41 Taigai Kankeishi Sōgō Nenpyō Henshū linkai (1999, pp. 122–23). Japanese records do not discuss both men together, though they usually only record the names of one or several merchant leaders for any given trade ship.

- ⁴² (Kawazoe 1990, pp. 402–4; Batten 2006, pp. 128–30; von Glahn 2014, pp. 276–79; Y. Li 2023, pp. 121–26). In addition to being centers of worship, such temples were locations to plan and coordinate social functions, and they often took key roles in major financial transactions.
- ⁴³ The entry goes on to state that these “special envoys” acquired a Dashi lion in Srivijaya by way of India, which they gave as tribute to the Song court.
- ⁴⁴ For the influence of contemporary politics on Song- and Yuan-period historians, see Hartman (2021).
- ⁴⁵ For the Xi Xia, see Dannel (1994, p. 170). For the Liao, see Tackett (2017, pp. 18–19, 171–72).
- ⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that there do not appear to be records of Danliumei, Borneo, Guluo, and Moyi giving tribute until this time, and Java is not recorded as having sent tribute since 992.
- ⁴⁷ A third embassy that included Huaiwen and a group of other monks was dispatched in 1039. For this, see *Fozu tongji*, juan 45.
- ⁴⁸ *Daoyi zhilue juan 1* (Sen 1995, p. 34; Kulke 2009, p. 13; Seshadri 2009). A drawing of the pagoda, made in 1846, is included on *ibid.*, p. 116.
- ⁴⁹ Note that the embassy was recorded as having come to China together with an embassy from Jambi, whereas previous missions were simply recorded as coming from Srivijaya.
- ⁵⁰ This was done by changing the temple’s previous name Nanchan si 南禪寺. The temple remains there in the present day. On the efflorescence of Quanzhou, see Clark (1981, 1991).
- ⁵¹ *Songchao shishi*, juan 7; Davis (2001, p. 68), and Hymes (2015, p. 605). This was the deity who later that year visited Zhenzong during his sleep to foretell of the Heavenly Texts.
- ⁵² Clark (1981, pp. 216–17, 1991, pp. 122–23, 139). Clark demonstrates that although a mosque was built in Quanzhou in the middle of the 8th century, it no longer existed and was forgotten by the early 11th century. The mosque built between 1009 and 1010 was considered to be the first of several built in Quanzhou during the 11th and 12th centuries.
- ⁵³ On the establishment of Jōtenji, see (Kawazoe 1990, pp. 402–4; Batten 2006, pp. 129–30; von Glahn 2014, pp. 275–76; Y. Li 2023, pp. 105, 107). This temple also still exists today.
- ⁵⁴ Chengtian si and Chongfu si (Jp. Sōfukuji 崇福寺) were, along with the Kaiyuan si 開元寺, among the oldest and most distinguished temples in Quanzhou. In the mid 960s the city wall was even extended to include Chongfu si within its confines. See Clark (1981, p. 144).

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