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A Study of the Life of Monk Dalang of the Early Qing Dynasty and His Contribution to Water Conservancy in Sichuan (Shu)

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Abstract: The Dalang Weir (irrigation system) has benefited local people in the Chengdu Plain since its completion in the early Qing Dynasty. After extensive research of historical background details, and channeling scenes of the Weir construction, and sifting through relevant literature in combination with chronicles, chorography, and tablet inscriptions from the Ming and Qing dynasties, assembled evidence indicates that the Weir was built during the autumn of the first reign to the spring of the second reign of Emperor Kangxi. The Weir is an important expansion of the famous Dujiangyan Irrigation System and after analyzing and assessing the value of the project under the principle of “making the past serve the present,” it is also proof of a Buddhist Monk’s active participation in a public welfare undertaking. In addition to inheriting the basic logic of Shu’s water culture cultivated by Yu the Great, King Bieling of Shu, and Li Bing during their water control activities, it implies the spirit of joint efforts of officials and the populace to society and posterity. Monk Dalang, the initiator of the project, therefore, deserves great respect from later generations for his outstanding merits and virtues as well as his significant contribution to society.

Keywords: Buddhism, studies of Shu, water conservancy, Dalang

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If one intends to study Bashu (Chongqing and Sichuan) water culture and check historical records about water conservancy in the Ming and Qing dynasties, he or she is bound to find something about a monk called Dalang. It is because the Dalang Weir (“the Weir”) was named after his Buddhist name. The intake of the Weir was set on the current Jinma River of Wenjiang, Chengdu. Since its completion over 300 years ago, it has played an important role in water conservancy and constitutes a key part of the Dujiangyan Irrigation System. It is the only existing ancient water conservancy project that draws water directly from the Minjiang River for the section from Baopingkou (mouth of treasure vase) on the left bank in the Chengdu Plain to the river estuary at Pengshan. As there are few articles studying Dalang and his contribution to water conservancy (Long, 2004), it is necessary to explore his accomplishment by academic standards. His contribution proves that Buddhism and Buddhists took an active part in public welfare undertakings during special historical periods and made outstanding contributions to society.

The Life of Monk Dalang and the Historical Background of His Contribution

Although there is some information about the life of Ch’an Master Dalang recorded and distributed over the past 300 years, details are inadequate, so special studies were needed. Since this paper is mainly concerned with his contribution to water conservancy, a brief introduction is indispensable here. Dalang was born in 1616, with the secular name of Yang Jinxi, which was in the 44th year of Ming Emperor Wanli’s reign, in a place which is in present-day Chongqing. In the fifth year of Qing Emperor Shunzhi’s reign, he had his head shaved and became a monk at Tianfeng Mountain. In the 13th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign (1656), he started to observe Vassa. In February of 1689, which was the 28th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, he passed away at the age of 74, during meditation. It was Ch’an master Shuyunchan who tonsured him. In the end, Dalang became the only inheritor of the mantle of Ch’an master Shexiangne (Fu, 1981). The temples where he once resided include Sanseng Temple in Shuangliu, Yuantong Temple in Chengdu, and Longzang Temple in Xinfan. His contribution to water conservancy was made when he resided in Shuangliu. In the 17th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign (1660), he moved from Xinghua Temple at Wuzhong Mountain in Dayi to Sansheng Temple. When autumn began in the 18th year, he was invited to return to Wuzhong Mountain. In the first year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign (1661), he was invited by Yuan Jingxian, magistrate of Shuangliu County to reside in Sansheng Temple again. From the autumn of that year to the spring of the next year, he raised enough resources and completed the Weir project. Thereafter, “he lived in a thatched hut on the side of Jinhua Bridge,” and wove straw sandals and offered them, for free, to people “for totally three years” (Jia & Chen, 2010). In October of the fourth year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign (1665), “he was invited by Yuan Buchang, Prefect of Chengdu, to become the abbot of Yuantong Temple.” In

the fifth year (1666), he retreated at Longzang Temple of Xinfan (Long, 2004, p. 818). Local people were very grateful to him for his remarkable contribution to water conservancy, so they petitioned twice for granting him a certain title. In the 11th year of Emperor Yongzheng's reign, the Qing court conferred on him the title of "Most Benevolent and Boundless Ch'an Immortal Perfected Purple Yang." In the sixth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, he was bestowed with an additional title of "Ch'an master Jinghui" (serenity and kindness).

His profile shows that he lived during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. He made his contribution to water conservancy when he was in the prime of life—at the age of 47 or 48. The historical background for his initiation of the project, however, was complicated. The Bashu region was devastated at that time after suffering from four decades of chaos, wars, massacres, plagues, and other natural disasters. Historical records show that starting from the first year of Emperor Tianqi's reign of the Ming Dynasty, there had been a large-scale rebellion occurring in Gulin of Sichuan and Guizhou. Chengdu had been besieged for over 100 days and local people had been suffering. Then a riot took place in Shaanxi in the first year of Emperor Chongzhen's reign. The fighting extended swiftly to neighboring regions so that all of Sichuan became a battlefield that was occupied consecutively and looted recklessly by different rebel forces from the sixth year of Ming Emperor Chongzhen's reign to the 17th year of Qing Emperor Shunzhi's reign (1660). During this period, Sichuan was also subject to famine and plagues. According to *Wu Ma Xian Sheng Ji Nian* (Chronicle of Mr. Wuma), there was a large-scale famine in Sichuan in the fourth year of Qing Emperor Shunzhi's reign (1647) and "They started to know that the bitterness of hunger was more miserable to people than the cruelty of battles." It was recorded that in the fifth year, the famine became more severe (Fu, 1981, Vol. II, pp. 117–122).

It is hard for modern people to imagine the bleak and arid scene resulting from four decades of natural disasters and man-made calamities. When Yan Yunzhao, who was an imperial scholar, conferred in the Wuxu year of Qing Emperor Shunzhi (1658) accompanied his friend to Sichuan to take office, he wrote a poem to depict what he saw. "The recent uprising is going to its doom and the west of Sichuan sheds blood like water. People lead a hard and toilsome life here. The population is decreasing and invaders are so many." When Zhang Dedi went to Sichuan to take the post of governor in the first year of Qing Emperor Kangxi's reign, he entered the area from northern Sichuan through Guangyuan and described what he saw as, "When I look around on my way, I see only groves of the bush all the day. There is no sign of cooking for every tens of miles away." He arrived at Luzhou via Shunqing and Chongqing and then went upstream by boat. He wrote his observation as, "We heard no other voices of humans when we sailed for a whole day. We saw only empty mountains and dense bamboo forests far away" (Jia & Chen, 2010, p. 61). The scene in the Chengdu Plain was very bad as well. Take Wenjiang, one of its counties as an example. "The seat of the County was burned down and lay in ruins too" (CCCLG Book 6, 2017, Vol. 1 Establishment, p. 13). It was recorded that

“When a census was conducted in the 16th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign, there were only 32 households, including 31 men and 23 women. Wild plants grew everywhere as if heaven had just been separated from the earth” (ibid, Vol. 3, Civil Administration, p. 40).

Monk Dalang, as a survivor and witness of this miserable period, thus becoming more benevolent with his understanding of the pains. On the other hand, historical records show that in the 17th year of Qing Emperor Shunzhi’s reign (1660), the Dujiangyan Irrigation System was renovated, the Dacheng Hall of the Confucius Temple in Chengdu was restored, and the prefectural city was constructed. The completion of these structures evidenced that the political situation in Sichuan had become stable. The population in Chengdu and even in the entire Sichuan province started to soar under favorable policies for pacifying exiles and promoting migration. The rebound in agricultural production and social economy inevitably led to a sharp rise in the demand for water conservancy. Therefore, when Dalang was invited to stay in the Sansheng Temple again in the first year of Qing Emperor Kangxi’s reign, it is supposed that he did not have much hesitation to initiate the project as he went ahead with raising resources for construction of the Weir. Based on further study, it seems that at the beginning he still had some wavering moments, at least at the time he was still in Wuzhong Mountain after receiving the invitation from Yuan Jingxian, he must have inquired inwardly about this issue again and again, as shown in his poem below:

“With the pure land in Xinghua Temple, should I observe Vassa to remain stable?

When I meditate to reflect, a tempest may sometimes come over, causing swarms of fish with golden scales to suddenly jump out of water.”

At that time, people lived in destitution and society was in urgent need of a revival. Seeing this, Dalang could not detach himself from mundane sufferings. He thought that participating in social affairs and doing something required by the times were also a way to practice the worldly dharma of Buddhism. He questioned himself, “If the ultimate goal of Buddhists is to liberate sentient beings, can I achieve that simply by understanding Ch’an and meditating?” In this poem, the master convinced himself that his decision was right. After residing in Sansheng Temple of Shuangliu and reading the *Zun Su Xing Lu* (Practices of Venerable Old Monks), he compared his conduct with theirs and felt ashamed of himself because he had not yet made any contributions. The feeling of nihilism was so strong that he made up his mind that he would not make his monastic life meaningless through inaction (Long, 2004, p. 818).

The poem on the true meaning of the pure land written by Dalang when he was in Wuzhong Mountain implied to a certain degree his determination to construct the Weir. It can be concluded that before he stepped out of the mountain, he had already been ready in his mind to do something beneficial to society and the people. The poem itself also shows an auspicious sign and the joy of Ch’an. It is exactly a reflection that his practice of Buddhism had already reached a certain high level.

Dalang's Full Participation into the Weir Construction

The first time Dalang was conferred a title by the Qing court for his contribution to water conservancy was during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng, but the first record of the Weir project, discovered to date, was written by Liu Yuan (1768–1855) who was born in the reign of Emperor Qianlong. The title of the article is *Dalang Yan Ji* (Records of Dalang Weir), hereinafter referred to as “the Records” (CCCLG Book 4, 2017, Vol. 4, Art and Literature: Records, p. 372). Various documents in later ages about the Dalang Weir were all derived from this article. Although this article has some errors and deficiencies, it is very precious since it is the first record and was written by Liu Yuan, acclaimed as a “renowned Confucian scholar in western Sichuan.” Liu was born in a place within the irrigation area of the Dalang Weir and is also buried there. His home was near the Sansheng Temple. Therefore, since he was quite respectful to the venerable Ch’an Master Dalang for benefitting the local people, it was natural for him to pay much attention to and understand what Dalang had done. But his article also shows his inadequacy in obtaining necessary information: first, he did not mention the secular name of Dalang; second, he failed to mention the dates of birth and death, and place of origin of Dalang; third, he stated that Dalang had resided in Sansheng Temple in his later years but described nothing or was just utterly ignorant about his days in Longzang Temple of Xinfan. It is sure, however, that he had relatively specific observations and references. Otherwise, how could he know Dalang’s friendship with Yuan Jingxian and Yuan Buchang? He even quoted two poems made by Dalang and included in his article many details about how Dalang raised the resources for constructing the Weir. Let us take the timeline of the Records as the axis to explore the details of the Weir project in combination with derivative documents of later dynasties and the topography of the irrigation area.

The Reason for Dalang’s Water Conservancy Project

The area irrigated through the Weir is located between the Jinma River and the Yangliu River which run north to south. The location stated in the Records—south of the Liujiang River (Yangliu River) and east of the Jinma River—is inaccurate. In the *Min Guo Shuangliu Xian Zhi* (Local Chronicles of Shuangliu County During the Republic of China Period), the location was corrected to be to the “west of the Yangliu River” (ibid, Vol. 3, Biographies of Skillful Craftsmen, p. 360). Topographically speaking, the irrigation area looked like the lower half of a narrow islet divided from the Chengdu Plain by the Yangliu River. From south to north, it was under the jurisdiction of Wenjiang, Shuangliu, and Xinjin counties respectively. The records show that “the river flowed low, and the bank was high so that the water could not be diverted for use.” In previous dynasties, this area once relied on the Shazi Weir which diverted a tributary (called the Shazi River) from the Yangliu River for irrigation, but only part of the area could benefit from that weir due to limited coverage. Once the Yangliu River rose

to flow over the weir and the Jinma River had inadequate flow, then the area irrigated through the Shazi Weir would be in shortage of water. In the 17th year of Emperor Shunzhi's reign, Dujiangyan, the irrigation system deserted for ages was successfully restored. At that time, the Jiang'an River (Weir) and the Yangliu River needed to be dredged and have new ditches dug (ibid). Therefore, when Dalang resided in Sansheng Temple again in the first year of Emperor Kangxi's reign, people in the entire irrigation area had a strong desire to get the issue of water shortage solved. This situation weighed heavily on Dalang's mind, so he decided to initiate a water conservancy project to satisfy local people's needs. The situation of the water shortage and the reason for launching this project are proven by documents of later dynasties which state that the Shazi Weir "could not provide enough water for irrigation" and "water there often dried up." The *Epigraph on the Dagoba of Ch'an Master Dalang* states that "For a-hundred-li^① distance from Wenjiang to Xinjin, tens of thousands of *qing*^② of farmland located high had no water to irrigate" (Long, 2004, p. 818), which described the scale in detail.

Alms-Begging for water conservancy: the Records states that: "Dalang aimed to dig ditches to benefit the local people, but he was concerned that they would not support the project. So, he went to the involved places as a mendicant. He called on houses door by door only to ask people to sign their names on a donation roster instead of receiving money or food directly. If he was rejected, he would sit or lie down on the household's doorstep for days and be determined not to leave until the owner of the house finally agreed to sign." These words show clearly that he did not beg for money or grain but only for people's commitment to donate available resources for construction. Therefore, he asked for signatures as the guarantee of their promises. "He went about to the involved places" means that he had in his mind the layout of the ditches. "He called on houses door by door" shows that he was begging for donations of land for construction. "He would sit or lie down on the household's doorstep for days and be determined not to leave" reflects his persistence and resilience and that he would never give up until his goal was achieved. Certainly, his perseverance and actions also played a role in convincing and mobilizing the local people. In a nutshell, he made the survey, land acquisition, and mobilization at the same time by means of his unique alms-begging and solved many difficult issues encountered during the project with this single approach. This method not only stands for a touching part of the Weir project, but also an exceptional approach in the ancient and modern histories of water conservancy at home and abroad.

During Emperor Guangxu's reign, people petitioned again to the Qing court for conferring on him a title. In the *Li Bu Jin Zhou Wei Zun Zhi Jie Fu Cou Shi* (Report by the Ministry of Rites on Reviewing the Case for Obeying), places and characters were elaborated more clearly on his contribution for land acquisition and construction. It also proved that during that time,

① One *li* is equivalent to about 500 meters.

② One *qing* is equivalent to 6.6667 hectares.

the water channels of the Weir “went through the farmland of Du and Song families living in the Liujiahao Community of Wenjiang” (CCCLG, Book 6, 2017). *She Feng Jinghui Ch’an Shi Ci Tang Ji* (A Record of the Memorial Hall for Ch’an Master Jinghui) written by Gu Fuchu also goes into such detail and praises his “sincerity and devotion which had successfully influenced the two families to become willing and generous enough to provide their fertile farmland for public use” (ibid).

In the *Min Guo Shuangliu Xian Zhi*, it is stated that “When Dalang surveyed the topography for the water channels, he found that one section had to cross the farmland of the Song and Du families in the Liujiahao Community of Wenjiang. It seemed that the land could not be purchased so he begged the owners for many days. Once he obtained their consents, he requested the deadline for applying digging tools” (CCCLG Book 4, 2017, Vol. 3, Biographies of Skillful Craftsmen, p. 360). This description agrees with the original information written in relevant texts of the late Qing Dynasty but adds some details about raising labor resources and even tools.

Joint Efforts of Officials and the Populace for Channeling

During the first year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, Yuan Jingxian, magistrate of Shuangliu County, invited Dalang to dwell in the Sansheng Temple. As the chief of the county, he did not even have an office, so he had to “lodge in the temple” (ibid, Vol. 1, Temples, p. 264). So, he actually lived with Dalang under the same roof. This was an extraordinary scene in which officials underwent hardships and shouldered the same missions with the populace. There were other similar scenes in Chengdu in those days, as stated in the *General History of Chengdu*: In the early Qing Dynasty, Pengxian County featured a small population and vast areas of barren lands; Li Zhiji, the county magistrate, having no office available so “he lived with local people and they opened up wasteland and grew grain along the Yeya River” (Chen & Li, 2011, p. 192). Another piece of evidence comes from the *Daoguang Xinjin Xian Zhi* (Local Chronicles of Xinjin County During Qing Emperor Daoguang’s Reign), which mentions that “when [Chang Jiujing] served as the magistrate of Xinjin County in the third year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, the population was so scarce that when men and women went to farm, they had to send their children to the magistrate office so that the officials there could take care of them and they got their children back after finishing their work in the evening. When crops ripened, they shared rice with officials and praised the latter for their ‘parental’ behaviors” (CCCLG Book 11, 2017, Vol. 31, Administrative Achievements of Officials, p. 326). It is under such an historical background and atmosphere that many great works can often be made. In this sense, Dalang’s project is an effort made and completed under dire circumstances, and important because water conservancy played a significant role in ancient agricultural societies. Dalang chose to initiate such a project to solve a crucial issue concerning people’s livelihoods. That is why he was able to gain great support from the local people.

The Records state that “the plan of channeling was soon proposed to the magistrates of Wenjiang and Xinjin,” “the magistrates recruited craftsmen to offer support,” and “then ditches were dug from Wenjiang to Xinjin.” All the information documents official and public support for his proposal so that the project could be completed with joint efforts. The *Chronicles of Shuangliu* state that “the ditches covered a distance of over three *li* and the project was carried out day and night. When the weir was finally built, everyone thought its completion could be attributable to some divine power” (CCCLG Book 4, 2017, Vol. 3, Biographies of Skillful Craftsmen, p. 360). Though the description is somewhat overstated, it depicts the busy construction scene and acknowledges that the Weir cannot have been built so smoothly without joint efforts.

Years of Construction

The Records state that “It was in the Gengzi year during the reign of Emperor Shunzi that Dalang initiated the project. At that time, Shuangliu County was merged into Xinjin County, and Yuan Jingxian, magistrate of Xinjin, was a friend of Dalang. That was why they could make their contributions to the project.” In fact, some information in the above description is not accurate: first, historical data shows that it was not in the Gengzi year that Shuangliu County was merged into Xinjin County. In the *Daoguang Xinjin Xian Zhi*, it is stated that “as Shuangliu County had a scarce population but vast land, it was merged into Xinjin County in the sixth year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign” (CCCLG Book 11, 2017, Vol. 2, Evolution, p. 215). In the *Min Guo Shuangliu Xian Zhi*, it is also mentioned that “Shuangliu County was cancelled in the sixth year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign” (CCCLG Book 4, 2017, Vol. 2, Officials, p. 305). Therefore, it is obvious that Shuangliu County was not merged into Xinjin County in the 17th year of Emperor Shunzi’s reign. Second, it was not in the Gengzi year that Dalang and Yuan Jingxian completed this project through their joint efforts. Historical facts show that Yuan “served as the magistrate of Shuangliu County starting from the first year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign” (ibid). Therefore, it is incorrect to mention him as the magistrate of Xinjin. The *Dalang Ch’an Shi Ta Ming* (Epigraph on the Dagoba of Ch’an Master Dalang) also states that “In October of the *yisi* year, Yuan Buchang, Prefect of Chengdu, invited Dalang to be the Abbot of Yuantong Temple.” Here, *yisi* refers to the fourth year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign. Before going to Yuantong Temple, Dalang had stayed at a hut near Jinhua Bridge for three years to weave and offer straw sandals to the local people, for free. Based on this information, we can infer that he had resided in Sansheng Temple until the second year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign. Could he start the project after he went to stay at a hut near Jinhua Bridge? This was highly impossible because Jinhua Bridge was located northwest to the southern provincial trunk road, ten *li* away from the east of the county” (Yang, 1967, III, Vol. 31, Geology—Ferries and Bridges 12, p. 1304). Sansheng Temple however “was located 15 *li* away from the west of the county seat” (CCCLG Book 4, 2017, Vol. 1, Temples, p. 263) while the intake of the Weir lay in the Wenjiang

County and to the northwest of Sansheng Temple. With scores of *li* between the places, how could he participate in the project every day? Therefore, we can conclude that it is true that Dalang and Yuan Jingxian collaborated to complete the project, but they did not achieve it in the Gengzi year but most likely from autumn of the first year to the spring of the second year of Emperor Kangxi's reign. Over thousands of years, the period from autumn to spring of the next year has always been a crucial time for water conservancy construction in the Chengdu Plain, and even in other parts of China.

Significant Benefit of the Project

The Records state that, "Water was diverted from Wenjiang to Xinjin, covering a distance of over 100 *li* and irrigating tens of thousands of *qing* of farmland." In the *Imperial Order on the Journey of the Provincial Administrative Commissioner: Report of Investigation in Detail According to Official Reply*, it is stated that, "So far it has been used for nearly 200 seasons. Both officials and people have participated in the project and expanded it with branch ditches so that the scale of the weir is increasing," and "benefiting tens of thousands of *mu*^① of farmland in the three counties" (CCCLG Book 6, 2017). In the *Foreword to the Inscription for Monk Dalang Conferred as Ch'an Master Jinghui on the Back of the Tablet*, written by Huang Yungu, it is stated that, "Ditches were dug and the weir was built to irrigate tens of thousands of *mu* of farmland, benefiting the three counties endlessly" (ibid). In the *Report by the Ministry of Rites on Reviewing the Case for Obeying Imperial Decree*, it is detailed that, "The river water was diverted for about three *li* to reach Xifeng Bridge, one of the places marking the boundary of Shuangliu County. After joining with the Shazi River, it diverged into many branches to irrigate 50 to 60 thousand *mu* of farmland in Shuangliu and Xinjin. Later it was reinforced and expanded to irrigate hundreds of thousands of *mu* of farmland" (ibid). In the above quotes, neither the project scale nor the irrigation area is clearly stated. But all the writers of the above texts shared the same understanding that the Weir was indeed a water supply project. Dalang's contribution was mainly reflected in his initiation and preliminary planning of the project, and actual water diversion for about three *li*. The expansion of the irrigation area was a significant result from joint efforts of officials and people of later generations who continued the project and built new branch ditches.

Behind the intention to credit the project solely to Dalang, despite later generations' efforts for several hundreds of years, and to emphasize the large scale of the project was most likely because people worried that if the scale was not large enough, then Dalang would not deserve the titles of "Most Benevolent and Boundless Ch'an Immortal Perfected Purple Yang" and "Jinghui" conferred by the Qing court. This is obviously over-scrupulous. Dalang's virtue lies in his initiation of the project. As to other merits, such as his good deeds to society, his courage

① One *mu* is equivalent to nearly 667 square meters.

to overcome obstacles, and his action on his own to beg alms for the construction, they are all just highlights of his contribution to the Weir project. Of course, it is fair to say that the project is of great significance. After all, it has benefited this area for hundreds of years and still useful today.

Evaluation of the Weir Project: Saving the Lives of People and Benefiting Generations

All water conservancy projects in history deserve respect from later generations. Peng Renzhan, a scholar from Xinjin of Chengdu in the Qing Dynasty wrote his insightful opinions on water conservancy as: “Anyone who contributes to water conservancy in fact does something like saving the lives of ten thousand people and benefiting ten thousand generations. Anyone who protects the lives of ten thousand people will be regarded as a great man for his contributions. Any project that can benefit ten thousand generations will be acclaimed by people forever.” It is mentioned in the *Book of Changes* that, “To be able to long continue shows the virtue of the wise and able man; to be able to become great is the heritage he will acquire.” Had it not been for such wise and able men, such great works could not have been completed.” (CCCLG Book 11, 2017, Vol. 40, Art and Literature II, p. 458). It is true indeed. The Weir is undoubtedly a project “saving ten thousand lives and benefiting ten thousand generations.” With such a long history, it is a legacy of water conservancy culture and worthy of extensive study.

From the level of material culture, the Weir’s benefit is sustainable in that it is still useful to the local people in Wenjiang, Shuangliu, and Xinjin. Its main purpose, from initiation to completion, and through to modern times, is for agricultural irrigation. In the contemporary era, it is also used for diverting water for industrial consumption, urban landscaping, and ecosystem conservation. Therefore, it is of vital practical significance to Chengdu’s development as a park city. In 1970, water diversion of the Yangliu River was changed to be done at Qinglongzui of the Jiang’an River. From then on, the irrigation area of the Weir then naturally became a part of the irrigation system of Dujiangyan in modern times. Seen from this perspective, the Weir can be considered a key expansion conducted in the early Qing Dynasty for today’s Dujiangyan irrigation area. Then is the headwater of the Weir, which withdraws water from the Minjiang River, still valuable? The answer is Yes, for sure. It is because the segment of the Minjiang River from Baopingkou of Dujiangyan to the current intake of the Weir covers a distance of over 40 kilometers and features constant water flow even in non-flood seasons. How can we let such abundant water resources just flow away without our utilization? In recent years, because of riverbed entrenchment, the previous water intake of the Weir could not function properly, but the local water conservancy authority did not abandon the Weir, but relocated the intake upward along the existing levee to ensure that this age-old Weir can still play its role. Gu Fuchu

of the Qing Dynasty once boldly compared Dalang to Li Bing. He wrote “Water conservancy activities in Sichuan were first initiated by prefecture chief Li Bing. Though the significance of Dalang’s contribution cannot match his, considering Dalang’s work is beneficial to three counties and generations for hundreds of years, its significance is broad as well” (CCCLG Book 6, 2017). Now it seems that this comment is still within measure.

From the level of spiritual culture, the Weir project has rich connotations. First, from the perspective of water conservancy, Dalang carried on the basic logic of Shu’s water culture cultivated by Yu the Great, King Bieling of Shu, and Li Bing during their water control activities. The strategies that Dalang adopted were still the methods created by Yu the Great—“regulating the river at Minshan Mountain, channeling water to the east.” The fundamental principle was still to make the best use of topography to guide the water resources for human use. The concrete measures were still to divert water from the left bank of the Minjiang River for irrigating the Chengdu Plain (Xie, 2019, pp. 134–137). To put it in another way, the spirit implied by the Weir project was in line with that of Li Bing and the scientific features of Dujiangyan commonly referred to by us. Second, from the perspective of special historical background for its construction, the Weir project is a typical result of post-disaster reconstruction. During the dynasty change from Ming to Qing which was characterized by four decades of natural disasters and man-made calamities in this area, the Weir project was like flowers blossoming on a stretch of burned land. It was aimed at improving people’s livelihoods and it brought warmth and hope to them. Third, from the perspective of Dalang’s social status and actions, the Weir project is an historically unique and monumental work. Dalang shouldered the tough task, raised essential resources, and solved the difficulties of the project on his own, including land acquisitions, route surveys, populace mobilizations, and collection of tools and means of production. He made the project a great success and the project also fulfilled his commitment to himself. Fourth, from the perspective of the site of the project, the joint efforts of officials and the people were very important. Dalang’s activities included going to related communities to mobilize people. Since what he was going to accomplish was closely related to people’s livelihoods, and for their benefits, it stood to reason that the project won active support and positive responses from the local people.

After the completion of the Weir, Dalang did another benefaction. He personally wove and offered straw sandals for free at Jinhua Hut. This was an extension of his selfless contributions. He did this starting from the second year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign till he was invited to reside in Yuantong Temple by Yuan Buchang, Prefect of Chengdu in October of the fourth year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign. This conduct was highly acclaimed by people because it was done for three years in a row.

His endeavor to do good for society was reflected in his poem titled *Offer Straw Sandals for Free at Jinhua Hut* (CCCLG, Book 11, 2017, Manuscript Collection of Xinfan, Vol. 22, Poetry, p. 158):



“Don’t be afraid of the difficult roads in Sichuan as one is determined to climb thousands of mountains there without fear.

As a monk, I can help you with nothing else but straw sandals for free.”

It can be seen from the above evidence that Ch’an Master Dalang participated in social welfare undertakings with the benevolence, practiced the worldly dharma of Buddhism in his daily life, and achieved the lofty goal of benefiting the sentient beings with his actions.

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