

Chapter 1

GENERAL PRESENTATION

This examination centers on three collections. Two of these are private: they belong to Patrice Fava (PF) and Yan Xinyuan 顏新元 (YXY). The third collection is the property of the Museum of Hunan (MH) and is therefore considered public.¹ These three collections include, respectively, 911, 1362, and 870 statuettes. The circumstances of their assembly differ significantly. The PF collection, begun in the 1990s, was made by buying statuettes in antique markets, in particular those in Beijing. The collection of YXY, according to the author's own account, was assembled in Hunan in the 1970s, primarily through bartering, or by recovering statuettes that the owners had thrown, for many reasons, and has continued through exchanges or purchases made by Yan Xinyuan during his wanderings in Hunan. The third collection, located in the museum, comes from a 1984 Changsha custom seizure of ten large boxes which contained hundreds of statues, originally intended for the Hong Kong antiques market. These were confiscated from their owner, condemned as illegal export of heritage property, and transferred into the care of the Museum in Changsha. Although the origins of these three collections are varied, they do have something in common: namely, they have all become objects of exchange and trade and, thus, have lost their original use and function. They are forever out of context.

Written materials, locally called *yizhi* 意旨 (literally “Our Will,” which we translate freely as “consecration certificate”), were inserted into a cache in the back of the statue during its consecration ritual. In most cases, these *yizhi* help to identify, locate, and date the statues. Moreover, they list the names of the statue's sponsors and sculptors (see Figure 1.1). They are therefore an invaluable source of information on the “civil status,” as it were,

1 Cataloguing numbers are as follows: “T” followed by four figures for the PF collection; “Y” followed by numbers for the YXY collection; type of 0017/C: 915, where the first four digits is a cataloguing number and the rest an inventory number, for the MH collection.

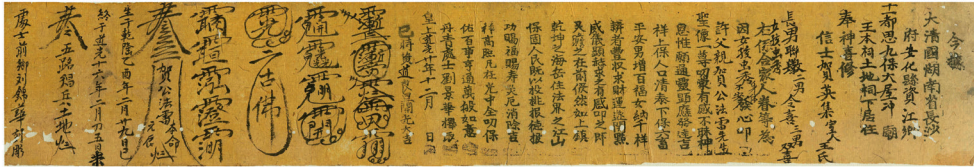
Talismans	Date	“Intention” (<i>yi</i>)	Patron names	Address
				
Sculptor name	Sculptor name	Statuette name		

Figure 1.1 Example of a consecration certificate, made for the consecration of a statuette for He *gong* Falei (1765–1836) by his son, daughter-in-law, grandsons, and granddaughter in 1840. (T0781) © EFEO

of these statues.² This notion of civil status must be taken quite literally in this case, and these certificates taken as archival documents. The latter, with all the richness but also the shortcomings that these kinds of sources present, offer concrete and raw facts, which do not require meta-analysis to be understood. When taken individually, however, these *yizhi* are largely silent. When taken as a whole, on the other hand, we may discern overarching information patterns emerging from the larger picture, precisely what is enabled by a computerized data bank. In this way, we can extract meaningful data, deduce relevant religious and sociological information. In this case, the number of *yizhi* available for analysis becomes a decisive criterion: the higher the number of documents, the more refined our conclusions.

But not all the statues are complete. Some were opened and emptied of their contents, either inadvertently or deliberately. In the latter case, it is often the owner who sells (or throws away) a statuette, de-consecrating it, opening its cover, and dumping its contents, which are then sometimes reused for a new statue. In other cases, it may be that the antiquarian rids the statue of its document in order to obfuscate its date of production, generally then taking the liberty of exaggerating its age in order to obtain a higher price. Even when empty, however, the statues are not void of all information: occasionally, their names are inscribed on their body, along with the name of the sculptor and the date of their consecration. Table 1.1 shows in detail the number of certificates and statues with such inscriptions.

Table 1.1 Quantitative analysis of statuettes’ data

Collection name	Total number of statues	Number of consecration certificates	Number of statues without certificate but with inscriptions
YXY	1,362	362	55
PF	911	826	11
MH	870	103	84
Total	3,143	1,291	150

2 More details on *yizhi* in Chapter 4, “Statues in Context.”

In terms of percentage, the documentation of the PF collection is by far the richest. That of YXY collection provides about 25% of the total information we have, and that of MH collection represents a little over 10%. These two latter collections contain a number of relatively large statues with inscriptions. When we compare the data of these three collections—specifically data regarding content, time, and place of creation—we find salient complementarities: while the PF collection includes a large number of “Daoist” statuettes, that of MH is remarkable for the prevalence of “Buddhist” statuettes.³ The YXY collection, which is of more humble origins, is remarkable due to the abundance of smaller and more uncouth “popular” pieces, including statues of hunters that almost totally absent in the other two collections.

1. Cataloguing

In order to cross analyze all the statuettes, they were categorized using a computerized relational database that featured custom formats, entries, and function options. Each statuette and its contents were assigned a data-card with two parts. The first part provided the statuette’s cataloguing number, its place of origin, its place of acquisition, the identity of the person to whom it was dedicated, as well as information on the material aspects of the statuette: its size, clothing, headgear, physical attributes—such as its “mudra” (*shoujue* 手訣)—its color, a precise description of the quality and physical state of the sculpture, as well as other details pertinent to the different stages of its manufacture. The first part of the data-card information also included an inventory of the objects found in the cache in the back of the statuette, including consecration certificates, medicinal packets, paper money, etc. The second part of the data-card information consists of an inventory of all information regarding the consecration certificate (Figure 1.2), beginning with the nature of the writing itself (whether handwritten or printed), the address of the sponsor(s), the sponsor name(s), the name of their religious lineage, the reason for the consecration, a description of the talismans, the name of the sculptor, and the date of the consecration. Two final columns of data were dedicated to various notes and remarks and, when relevant, addressed any interpretative ambiguities that may have arisen (see Figure 1.2). This two-part method of data-entry made it possible for all aspects of the statue’s physical and historical provenance to be further explored at a later date. To facilitate this, the computer program was designed to make all data fields searchable. The protocol followed for the cataloguing of all three collections was identical, with the exception of certain guidelines for which improvements were discovered during the cataloguing process.

3 See Alain Arrault, “Analytic Essay on the Domestic Statuary of Central Hunan: The Cult to Divinities, Parents and Masters,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 36 (2008): 10–16; Alain Arrault and Michela Bussotti, “Statuettes religieuses et certificats de consécration en Chine du Sud,” *Arts asiatiques* 63 (2008): 39–42.

<i>Cote</i> (編號): T0781	<i>Collection</i> (收藏者): FH
<i>Lieu d'acquisition</i> (來源): 北京	
<i>Provenance</i> (出處): 湖南省安化縣	
<i>Nom et identité de la statue</i> (神像名): 賀公法雷 先生 <父親> 賀公法雷(符、籙)	
<i>Biog.</i> (生平): (1765) 生於乾隆乙酉年二月廿九日巳 (1836) 終於道光十六年二月刀(初)五日[未] (符、籙)	
	
<i>Inscriptions</i> (題記): 賀公法雷先生(像座正面)	
<i>Taille</i> (雕像尺寸): 通高: 29.5 cm 像高: 24.2 cm 底座前高: 5.3 cm 寬: 13.2 cm 厚: 7.7 cm	
<i>Posture</i> (姿態): 坐姿	
<i>Atributs</i> (器物): 符水碗(左手) 令牌(右手)	
<i>Mudra</i> (手勢): 三山訣(左手)	
<i>Description</i> (描述): 像為木質，圓雕，刻工一般。像體保存基本完整。有通喉時留下的從臍箱到頭的管洞(喉管)，外觀也可以看到鼻、耳處的小孔洞。體表已熏黑，只能辨出紅、黑、黃色漆迹。漆有幾處剝落，露出漆下木料本色。人像額頭、兩邊眼角各有三道皺紋，嘴角兩側各有兩道皺紋。頭戴道士帽，身內穿長衫，腰繫帶，外穿圓領、四繫扣、寬袖禱子。座背刻成交椅狀，刻出椅背、扶手、椅腿。	

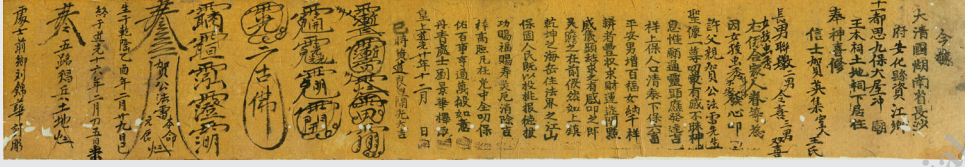
Cache (贓箱): 意旨(一紙) 藥(一袋)
Yizhi Cote numérotation (意旨編號及序號): T0781

Dimensions (尺寸): 8.2 x 47.7 cm
Nature du document (意旨簡述): 刻本
Adresse (地址): 湖南省長沙府安化縣資江鄉十一都思九保
Noms de temples (廟名): 大屋冲廟王本祠土地祠
Commanditaires (信士): 賀英集 室人 王氏 長男 聯[墩] 二男 令喜 三男 双喜 女孩 虫秀 右係合家人眷等 <奉神喜修信士>
Secte (教派): 無
Motivations du culte (意): 為因女孩虫秀身體不安, 發心叩許... (刻)叨蒙有感, 不昧神恩, 惟願通靈顯應, 發達吉祥, 上保人口清泰, 下保六畜平安, 男增百福, 女納千祥, 耕者豐收, 求財運遂, [開]點威儀顯赫, 求之有感, 叩之即靈, 瞻之在前, 儼然如上, 鎮乾坤之海嶽, 住法界之江山, 保固人民既以投桃報德報功, 賜福賜壽, 災厄消除, 吉祥高照, 凡在光中, 全叨保佑, 百事亨通, 萬般如意。
<p>Écritures talismaniques (符、籙):</p> <p>18個符籙: 1. 紫微 2. (雨+漸+帝) 3. (雨+天罡) 4. (雷) 5. (雨+金光) 6. (雨+鬼+A) 7. (雨+鬼+三光) 8. (雨+鬼+明) 9. (雨+開) 10. (雨+光) 11. 古佛 12. 太陰 13. 太陽 14. 上元 15. 中元 16. 下元 17. (勅令[]賀公法雷 本命 元辰 天罡) 18. (勅令 五路猖兵土地 天罡)</p>
<p>Auteur (sculpteur, officiant, ...) (刊造人):</p> <p>劉景華 <丹青處士> 劉錦華[刻]彫 <處士前[卿]></p>
Date (年代): (1840) 擇取皇上道光廿年十二月日巳時黃道良旦開光大吉
Remarques (附注): 無
Problèmes (問題): 無

Figure 1.2 Sample of a completed data-card (T0781)

2. Quantitative Data

The consecration dates of the pieces found in the PF and MH collections span from the early 17th century to the 1990s, with a significant proportion distributed over the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴ In contrast, the consecrations of the statues in the YXY collection primarily took place in the 20th century, specifically from the beginning of the century to the 1990s (180 of the 249 pieces can be dated with certainty). While the statuettes of PF and MH collections are predominantly from Anhua 安化 and Xinhua 新化, those of YXY collection come from the districts of Ningxiang 寧湘, Anhua, and Xiangxiang 湘鄉.⁵ In addition to studying these large-scale differences between collections, we also found significant information by attending to small-scale differences. In fact, it is precisely by contrasting these collections with an eye to their differences that we can compensate for the idiosyncratic proclivities of individual collectors in order to glean the more objective, overarching trends. In other words, this method guards against the tendency to mistake any one collector's selection—which inevitably reflects the subjective interests of the individual collector—as being representative of the whole.

Taken together, the addresses associated with statuettes in these three collections show that the largest number of pieces comes from Anhua district, followed in descending order by the districts of Ningxiang, Xinghua, Yiyang, Xiangxiang, Shaoyang, Wugang, and Longhui (see Table 1.2 and Map 1.1).

4 See Arrault, "Analytic Essay on the Domestic Statuary of Central Hunan," 7; Arrault and Bussotti, "Statuettes religieuses et certificats de consécration," 38.

5 For the geographical distribution of statuettes of PF and MH collections, see Arrault, "Analytic Essay on the Domestic Statuary of Central Hunan," 7; Arrault and Bussotti, "Statuettes religieuses et certificats de consécration," 37. The breakdown by districts of XYZ collection is: Ningxiang (165), Anhua (62), Xiangxiang (19), Yiyang (3), Xinhua (2). In contrast to the first two collections, in this case there are no statuettes from the Southern part of Hunan, that is to say, Shaoyang, Longhui, etc. For a distribution of all statuettes, see Map 1.1, p. 16.

Table 1.2 Geographical distribution of the statuettes (PF, MH, and YXY collections)

Place name	Number of occurrences	Place name	Number of occurrences
Anhua 安化	376	Changning 常寧	2
Ningxiang 寧鄉	277	Lianyuan 漣源	2
Xinhua 新化	189	Hengyang 衡陽	1
Yiyang 益陽	52	Xiangtan 湘潭	1
Xiangxiang 湘鄉	43	Loudi 婁底	1
Shaoyang 邵陽	13	Yuanjiang 沅江	1
Wugang 武岡	8	Liling 醴陵	1
Longhui 隆回	4	Hunan 湖南省	7
Xinning 新寧	3	Sub-total	981

Jiangxi Province (PF)	Guangxi Province (PF)	Hubei Province (YXY)
Chongren 崇仁: 1 Fengcheng 豐城: 4 Linchuan 臨川 (Fuzhou 撫州): 1 Tonggu 銅鼓: 1 ⁶	Guanyang 灌陽: 1 Quanzhou 全州: 2 ⁷	Zigui 秭歸: ⁸ 1
7	3	1

Total entries: 981 + 7 + 3 + 1 = 992⁹

- 6 Tonggu is located in northwest Jiangxi, a short distance from the northeast boundary of Hunan. Linchuan, Fengcheng, and Chongren are located in central Jiangxi, within a radius of about 50 km from each other.
- 7 These two localities are situated in northern Guangxi province, a few kilometers from the southern border of Hunan.
- 8 Zigui, west of Yichang 宜昌 city, is located southwest of the current Hubei Province, about 150 km from the southern border of Hunan.
- 9 The total number of localized statuettes is less than the total number of *yizhi* (1,291, see Table 1.1) due to the fact that certificates have incomplete addresses, which show neither the province nor the district.

Map 1.1 Geographical distribution of statuettes in Hunan Province

