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Localization, Globalization and Glocalization

Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and
Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond

Edited by
Jinhua Chen and Ru Zhan

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Localization, Globalization and Glocalization: Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond

Guest Editors

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About the Editors

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Preface

This volume offers an in-depth exploration of Buddhism's historical transmission, transformation, and Sinification, framing these phenomena as paradigms of intercultural and transcivilizational exchange in Asia. Tracing its trajectory from India to China and beyond, the studies in this volume situate Buddhism not merely as a religious import but as a dynamic agent of cultural, philosophical, and institutional transformation. Through this lens, the study of Buddhism's intercivilizational adaptation illuminates some of the many challenges, processes, and possibilities present in cross-cultural interactions throughout history. By examining the process of Sinification and the actors involved, the studies in this volume reveal how Buddhism's encounters with Chinese civilization created a distinctive and enduring cultural synthesis, the impact of which extends throughout East and Southeast Asia.

The East and the West have maintained economic and cultural exchanges since antiquity, ranging from Alexander the Great's introduction of Greek culture into India—seen in Gandhāran Buddhist art—to the circulation of Roman coins in Han Dynasty China and the arrival of Christianity in Tang China. Among the constant cultural exchanges and flow of ideas within Asia, the significance of Buddhism's introduction into China in the first centuries of the common era is difficult to overstate.

Alongside such material and cultural exchanges, these historical encounters could also be fraught with tensions arising from political, economic, linguistic, and cultural differences. Some scholars, such as Samuel P. Huntington (1927–2008), have emphasized the potential for conflict between civilizations and portrayed cultural clashes as nearly inevitable. Such perspectives, however, can overemphasize confrontation and neglect the historical prevalence of cooperation, adaptation, and synthesis. The history of Buddhism provides many examples in which cross-cultural engagement has been a driving force in the advancement human civilization.

A global historical perspective shows that the initial import of Buddhism into China occurred within a broader web of interactions linking East Asia to Central and South Asia. The Han Empire's influence extended into Central Asia and created multiple channels for the flow of ideas, goods, and people. In this context, Buddhism emerged as one among many cultural agents participating in these exchanges. Buddhism and its proponents faced a prolonged period of negotiating the religion's place within the indigenous philosophical, religious, and social traditions already at play. By the seventh century, through the efforts of translators, sponsors, and their networks, this process produced a distinctive Chinese Buddhist tradition characterized by novel doctrinal interpretations, ritual practices, and institutional frameworks. Chinese Buddhism subsequently spread across East and Southeast Asia, establishing a pan-Asian sphere of influence that adopted classical Chinese as its *lingua franca*.

The Sinification of Buddhism involved complex transformations and divergences across multiple domains, including philosophy, religious practice, textual exegesis, and institutional organization. Though core doctrines—such as the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Way, dependent origination, and the threefold training in discipline, concentration, and wisdom—remained intact, exegetical traditions evolved significantly. Early Chinese interpreters often struggled to render Indian concepts in indigenous terms, resulting in initially clumsy translations that were subsequently refined into sophisticated philosophical systems. Chinese Buddhists often aimed to integrate Indian teachings with Confucian and Daoist thought, creating a hybrid intellectual framework that exemplified cultural fusion. Thanks to this hybridity, Buddhist teachers in China often possessed extensive knowledge of both Indian and Chinese traditions and became crucial intermediaries in the cross-cultural transmission of ideas. Over time, Chinese Buddhists not only translated and interpreted Indian texts, but they

also composed original works of apocrypha, doctrinal treatises, institutional codes, and historical narratives, thereby generating a corpus of Buddhist literature distinct from Indian and Tibetan textual traditions.

Sinification also manifested in popular religious practices and the construction of sacred spaces. Because the concerns of non-elite adherents related more to devotional practices than to abstract doctrine, Indian Buddhist rituals blended with indigenous Chinese cults, techniques associated with the Huang-Lao school, and practices related to immortality and ancestor worship. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas—especially the Buddhas of the Three Ages and the Four Bodhisattvas—were central figures in these practices and became the focal point of worship. Over time, Bodhisattva cults developed their own institutional and theoretical frameworks, incorporating local practices like mountain worship and creating a uniquely Chinese sacred geography. In turn, this new landscape of pilgrimage attracted worshippers from across East and Southeast Asia and even from India, Buddhism's birthplace and home to its own network of sacred sites. Through this process, the religious focal point of Buddhism gradually shifted from India to China.

Institutional adaptation was another critical component of the Sinification process. Indigenous Chinese religions, unlike those of India, lacked a monastic system. The translation of Vinaya texts into Chinese during the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479) introduced Indian monastic codes to a Chinese readership, but their implementation in China encountered challenges in the form of cultural differences and state regulations. Questions as seemingly trivial as dining behavior—posture, the use of utensils, or ritual gestures—became points of contention. Over time, Chinese Buddhists adapted monastic codes of conduct to local conditions, such as Chan Buddhism's addition of agrarian labor to monastic routines, reflecting Chinese sociocultural realities. Despite occasional controversies and setbacks, the Sinification of Buddhism proved inexorable. Successful institutional adaptation in Chinese Buddhism demonstrated the compatibility between imported religious structures and indigenous cultural norms.

The successful establishment and entrenchment of Buddhism in China relied on the mutual fascination between Indian Buddhist teachings and Chinese culture. Chinese society shaped the religion's philosophy, practices, and institutions, producing a form of Buddhism imbued with Chinese characteristics. This local adaptation enabled Chinese Buddhism to exert profound influence on neighboring East and Southeast Asian regions, creating a transregional religious network that reinforced the centrality of Chinese cultural and linguistic forms.

This volume situates the Sinification of Buddhism within a broader framework of global history, offering case studies that resonate with contemporary concerns about globalization and cultural interaction. By examining historical patterns of conflict and conciliation, indigenization, and transregional transmission, these studies provide a nuanced understanding of how cultures can have productive interactions despite differences in language, ideology, and political organization. Several contributions also explore the concept of "glocalization," highlighting Buddhism's capacity to localize while maintaining transregional connections—a model of cultural adaptation that offers insight into contemporary global challenges.

Key themes addressed in this volume include the following: patterns of intercultural and intercivizational interaction as revealed by Buddhism's cross-border transformations; the indigenization and globalization of Buddhism throughout world history; the reconstruction of sacred spaces in Asia; glocalization as a method for studying transcultural transmission; the formation and transformation of pan-Asian textual communities; the role of commercial networks in facilitating Buddhist transmission; and the geopolitical implications of Buddhism's spread across Asia. Through these perspectives, the studies in this volume illuminate the complex processes by which religions,

cultures, and civilizations intersect, influence, and adapt to one another over time.

By situating the history of Buddhism within a global context, this work demonstrates that cultural transmission is not a unidirectional process but rather a dialogical, interactive, and often contested phenomenon. The Sinification of Buddhism thus serves as both a historical case study and as a conceptual lens to examine broader dynamics of intercultural exchange, adaptation, and coexistence. Scholars and readers interested in the history of religion, cultural exchange, global history, and the processes of localization and globalization will find in this volume rich accounts of how ideas, practices, and institutions travel, transform, and generate new cultural horizons.

Most of the articles collected in this volume were first presented at the international conference entitled “Sinification, Globalization or Glocalization: Paradigm Shifts in the Study of the Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond” (執兩用中: 東西方文明碰撞中的佛教中國化與國際化), held at the University of Hong Kong from August 9 to 12, 2023. The conference brought together scholars from diverse disciplinary and regional backgrounds to explore new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of Buddhism across cultural, historical, and geographic boundaries. The enthusiastic discussions that took place during the conference provided the intellectual foundation for the present volume.

The co-editors of this volume wish to express their sincere gratitude to the sponsor of the conference, Dr. Charles Yeung 楊釗博士, whose foresight and generosity made possible the conference and its outcomes, including the subsequent Special Issue in *Religions* and its reprint. We are equally grateful to the dedicated staff of the Glorison Charitable Foundation 旭日慈善基金, under Dr. Yeung’s leadership, for their professionalism, commitment, and tireless efforts in facilitating both the organization of the conference and the publication of this volume. Their support was instrumental at every stage of this multi-year project.

Jinhua Chen and Ru Zhan

Guest Editors

Article

The Emergence and Spread of Relic Veneration in Medieval China: A Study with a Special Focus on the Relics Produced by Miracles

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Abstract: Miracle tales are almost the sole source for the investigation of the emergence and spread of the relic cult in the early phase of Chinese Buddhism. The earliest excavated relic casket dates back to 453 CE, over four centuries after Buddhism was introduced to China. Through a critical textual analysis of *Ji Shenzhou Sanbao Gantonglu*, it is evident that the initial form of relic veneration was based on miraculous responses. Legends about imperial relic worship before the 3rd century are all later fabrications. Two archeological finds—the alleged relic murals in a Han tomb at Horinger, Inner Mongolia, and the stūpa-shaped bronze vessel in Gongyi, Henan—are not directly related to relic veneration. Based on the available evidence, it is tentatively concluded that relic worship first emerged around the 3rd century in the vicinity of Luoyang, the capital of the Western Jin, and later spread to the south of the Yangtze River after the Yongjia chaos. The early worshippers included both monks and lay Buddhists, such as merchants and lower-ranking officials. Royal interest in relics did not arise until the 5th century. The rise of relic veneration in China occurred two or three centuries later than that in Gandhāra, from which Chinese Buddhism was significantly influenced. Compared to the cult of images or scriptures, relic veneration also emerged relatively late in China. The reluctance to adopt relics as worship objects can be partly explained by (the mahāyāna) Buddhist doctrines and the Chinese cultural mentality.

Keywords: relic veneration; miracle tales; Daoxuan; stimulus–response

1. Introduction

As a unique mode of existence after the Buddha entered his *parinirvāṇa*, relics have always been at the center of Buddhist devotion. Current studies on Buddhist relics in East Asia are mainly confined to the fields of art history and archeology. These studies were concerned with the form of reliquaries, the procedure of the relic interment,¹ and the political performance of the relics in imperial ceremonies (refer to J. Chen 2002a, 2002b). However, when examining archeological remains, the deposits within relic caskets largely escape scholarly attention, and the mode of relic production is even more rarely discussed. Before the rise of imperial patronage, there was a relatively long period during which relic worship was disseminated among the lower social strata. The unique manner in which the relics appeared and the social identity of the earliest relic worshipers are the primary concerns of this paper.

It is worth noting that the earliest excavated relic casket in China dates back to the year of 453 CE. If one considers the fact that Buddhism was introduced to China around the 1st century CE, there are many miracle tales that provide arguably the sole source of how relic veneration emerged and spread in the following several centuries.

Buddhist scholars, when talking about the Chinese relic tradition in its earliest phase, often cited later accounts casually or equated the legends with historical facts. Since the narratives of miracles have undergone a series of copying, alterations, and additions to the plot, it is necessary to treat these documents with caution.

2. Buddhist Miracle Tales as a Distinct Genre

Buddhist miracle tales have traditionally been classified under the genre of *zhiguai* 志怪 narratives (“records of anomalies”). The authors believed that they were recording the events that actually took place. An eyewitness to the event was usually mentioned towards the end of each story. The conception of “zhiguai” is in sharp contrast to the fictional narratives known as *chuanqi* 傳奇 (legends), which were considered as purely imaginative literature and flourished in the Tang. On the other hand, the authors of anomaly writings were fully aware of the supernatural nature of the events they described, which differed from historical works.

Although the origin of the supernatural tales can be traced back to antiquity, *zhiguai* as a genre flourished during the Jin dynasty (266–420). The Buddhist motif first appeared in a collection of supernatural tales with the title *Xunshi linggui zhi* 荀氏靈鬼志 [*Xun’s Records of Spirits and Ghosts*], which was compiled around the mid-Eastern Jin period (c.350s). Approximately in the same period, Xie Fu 謝敷 (313–362) began to collect the miracle manifestations promoting the cult of Avalokitesvara. After a temporary loss, Fu Liang 傅亮 (374–426) reconstructed seven stories and added some new accounts. The corpus was further expanded over the subsequent decades by two other authors. Most collections of supernatural tales compiled in the six dynasties do not survive in their complete form, which could only be restored from the treatises or compendia. The only exception is the above-mentioned three collections of Avalokitesvara miracle tales, which were copied successively in one single scroll in Kamakura, Japan. The manuscript is now preserved at *Shoren-in* temple 青蓮院 in Kyoto, Japan (Makita 1970).

Among the collections devoted to the Buddhist motif exclusively, *Xuanyanji* 宣驗記 [*Records Proclaiming Manifestations*] is a milestone work. The collections of Guanyin miracles by Fu Liang and Zhang Yan 張演, though composed a few decades earlier, are relatively sparse in terms of the number of entries they include. Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, Prince of Linchuan 臨川王 during the Liu Song dynasty, was well known for his fondness for gathering scholars and literati. Buddhist miracle tales appeared in two collections that were compiled under his name, i.e., *Youming lu* 幽明錄 [*Records of the Hidden and Visible Worlds*] and *Xuanyan ji*. The two works differ markedly in their aims. According to Li Jianguo 李劍國, “the former is a collection of miscellaneous strange and wondrous tales, which belongs to the secular anomaly writings, whereas the latter is devoted to the Buddhist miracle tales exclusively” (J. Li 2011, p. 485). *Xuanyan ji* is listed in the bibliographical catalog of *Sui Shu* as containing 15 fascicles, which is a considerable length. Unfortunately, only some 30 stories survive.² Judging from the extant entries, there is no hint that the authors had organized the stories according to various themes.

In the late 5th century, Wang Yan 王琰 (fl. 454–501) compiled *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 [*Signs from the Unseen Realm*], which is the largest collection of miracle tales that comes down to us and the most representative of this genre composed in the six dynasties. The preface preserved in *Fayuan Zhulin* 法苑珠林 [*A Forest of Pearls From the Dharma Garden*] reveals the structure of the entire work. By the end of the preface, the author declares,

For receiving and mirroring the feelings of intimacy, there is nothing that surpasses the ceremonial image. Many auspicious confirming signs emanate from them.... In the case of manifestations involving sūtras and stūpas, the meanings and proofs are of the same sort [as those of images]. The cases should not be

gathered in another cycle, so I have arranged those stories right after the miracles of the images. 夫鏡接近情，莫踰儀像，瑞驗之發，多自是興。……若夫經塔顯効，旨證亦同。事非殊貫，故繼其末。³

Clearly, *Mingxiang ji* organized the miracle tales according to different sacred objects. The vast majority of the stories are miraculous manifestations of Buddha images, followed by those of the Buddhist scriptures and stūpas (including the relics).

The three-volume *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantonglu* 集神州三寶感通錄 [Collected Records of Miracles Relating to the Three Treasures in China, T no.2105, henceforth *GTL*], was compiled by Daoxuan in the first year of the Linde 麟德 era of Tang (664).⁴ This work follows the framework of *Mingxiang ji*, where the stories are arranged under different sacred objects, albeit with a revised order. The preface states that the book “begins with the manifestations of relics and stūpas, followed by a list of divine images descending [to the mortal realm], and concludes with sacred temples, auspicious scriptures as well as holy monks”.⁵ Here, the order of the images and relics has been reversed. The first fascicle is devoted to the miracles of the relics, which is further divided into three categories: first is the relics under the stūpas built by king Aśoka; second is so-called “Miraculous Responses of the Relics in the Divine Land *Cīna-sthāna*”; and lastly, the relics bestowed during the Renshou campaign of relic distribution.

The adjusted order of sacred objects undoubtedly reflects Daoxuan’s 道宣 sustaining interest in relic worship. Several months before he died, Daoxuan established an ordination platform, of which the relic was the crucial unit.⁶ In the mysterious conversations with celestial beings that took place after the establishment of the ordination platform, a recurring theme was the omnipresence of relics of Kāśyapa Buddha throughout the Chinese territory. The tooth relic was claimed to have been delivered by Nezha, son of Vaiśravaṇa, who achieved the greatest fame in Chang’an and far beyond (Strong 2004, pp. 185–87).

The tripartite classification reveals Daoxuan’s insight into the entire tradition of relic veneration in China. It implies three different ways of invoking and performing the relics, and roughly corresponds to the periods in which the three types of relics were most favored and prevalent. In other words, they represent three traditions of relic worship in China, from the relics produced by miracles, through the Aśoka relics, and finally to the relic distribution campaign of the Sui dynasty. The present study primarily focuses on the first subcategory. I will give some brief remarks on its distinction from the Aśoka relics and its impact on the relic distribution campaign during the Sui dynasty.

3. Historical Survey of Several Legends

Concerning the introduction and earliest history of the relic worship, there are some legends that have been accepted as historical facts by modern scholars on some occasions. The most widely circulated accounts are documented in the first three entries under the title “Miraculous Responses of the Relics in Divine Land *Cīna-sthāna*” in fascicle 1 of *GTL*. A critical examination of the historical sources casts doubt on the authenticity of these accounts and thus presents a scenario of the rise and development of relic veneration with more precision.

3.1. The Relics in a Buddho-Daoist Contest in Front of Emperor Ming of Later Han

The commonly accepted tradition asserts that Chinese Buddhism started with a dream by Emperor Ming of the later Han. This event became a popular theme in later sources, the number of which, prior to Daoxuan, amounts to fourteen. Previous studies have examined the intertextual relationships among various sources (Maspero 1910, pp. 95–130; Tang 1983, pp. 11–21). We shall not repeat their arguments here. Suffice it to say that the relic miracle only occurred in the *Han faben neizhuan* 漢法本內傳, compiled in

the early Tang dynasty.⁷ The apocryphal text relates a contest between the monks and the Daoist priests, when the Buddha's relics emitted a radiance. This episode is purely a piece of fiction because institutionalized Daoism emerged in the 3rd century.

3.2. *The Relics Under a Stūpa to the West of the Imperial Palace of the Emperor Ming of Wei*

Another widely circulated legend deals with a miracle witnessed by Emperor Ming of the Wei dynasty (r. 205–239) when he intended to destroy a Buddhist stūpa. The *GTL* recounts that:

During the reign of Emperor Ming of Wei, there were originally three temples in Luoyang. One of them was located to the west of the palace. When people hoisted the banners on the pinnacle of the temple, they would be able to observe the view within the palace. The emperor was upset and intended to dismantle the temple. At that time, a few foreign monks resided in the temple. They brought a golden plate filled with water to store the relics, which emitted a five-colored brilliance, with flames continuously rising. The emperor exclaimed, "If it were not for the divine power, how could this be?" Therefore, he built a hundred rooms [around the stūpa] to the east of the road, and named the temple as the official Buddhist shrine/vihara. 魏明帝洛城中，本有三寺。其一在宮之西，每繫幡剎頭，輒斥見宮內。帝患之，將毀除壞。時外國沙門居寺，乃齋金盤盛水，以貯舍利，五色光明，騰焰不息。帝歎曰：“非夫神効，安得爾乎？”乃於道東造周閭百間，名為官佛圖精舍云。⁸

The narrative seems to be a revised version of a passage from the "Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism" in the dynastic history *Weishu* 魏書 [*The History of Northern Wei*]. The term "official Buddhist shrine" (*guanfotu* 官佛圖) does not appear in *Weishu*. The *Weishu* narrative ends with the sentence that is not found in Daoxuan's work: "the site of the stūpa was excavated to form a Mengfan Lake, in which lotus flowers were planted".⁹ This description clearly indicates the location of the stūpa, which provides us with clues to explore the circumstances in which this legend was created.

First, it should be noted that the term "official Buddhist shrine" in *GTL* is obviously a later interpolation. The "official Buddhist shrine" or the official monastery generally refers to monasteries funded by the state, in contrast to those temples donated by individuals.¹⁰ From the Han to the early Jin dynasties, it was illegal for Chinese citizens to be tonsured as monks; thus, the existence of the state-sponsored monastery was improbable.

The narrative in *Wei shu* is also questionable. Emperor Ming of Wei 魏明帝 did commission a large-scale construction of the imperial palace in Luoyang. The connection between Mengfan lake and the emperor was further corroborated by a local gazetteer *Henan zhi* 河南志 [*Gazetteer of Henan*], compiled by a 19th-century historian Xu Song 徐松.¹¹ In addition, Zhang Zai 張載 (fl. 280–289) provided a more detailed description of this area in his "Rhapsody on Mengfan Lake".¹² According to his words, water flowed into the lake from the Qianjin canal to the north of the city and then went eastward into the inner palace complex.¹³ There were red lotus flowers in the lake, where the emperor often took a boat excursion.

However, Buddhist architecture is not attested by contemporary descriptions. It was not until the Northern Wei dynasty that the former Mengfan lake became the site where the Changqiu temple was established. The founder of this temple was Liu Teng 劉騰, the head of palace domestic service (*Changqiu ling* 長秋令). *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 [*A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*] states that the temple had a three-story stūpa adorned with shining golden umbrellas. There was an annual procession of statues in April at this temple, with thousands of beholders. It can be imagined that the tall stūpa was very striking for the residents of Luoyang. The episode of the towering stūpa over-

looking the palace is presumably rooted in the experience of the Northern Wei rather than the former Wei. Actually, we find a similar episode in which the emperor of the Northern Wei forbade his subjects from ascending the stūpa in Yongning monastery 永寧寺.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it is hardly conceivable that such a towering Buddhist structure would have been established in close proximity to the palace precincts.

3.3. *The Relics Obtained by Kang Senghui*

The Sogdian monk Kang Senghui 康僧會 (229–280) struck the relics to demonstrate their miraculous power, prompting the sovereign to construct the Jianchu monastery 建初寺 (literally meaning the initial establishment). This event was traditionally considered the beginning of Buddhist history in South China and is arguably the earliest evidence of relic veneration in China. Of the three legends we discussed so far, the apocryphal character of this tradition is the least discernible. There are four versions of this account before Daoxuan, which can be categorized into three groups according to their dates of composition.

The earlier records are the three passages from *Xuanyan ji* and the lesser-known *Wu lu* 吳錄 [*Records of Wu*], as cited in *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 [*Treatise on Refuting the Heresies*]. Both texts recount how Kang Senghui, facing the tyrannous sovereign Sun Hao 孫皓, obtained the relics *ex nihilo* after pious prayers, and that the relics remained intact when people struck them with hammers. Sun Hao established a monastery to the north of the grand market, which was thus called Dashi monastery 大市寺. *Xuanyan ji* tells another story that Sun Hao was punished for his profane deeds and finally received the five-precept ordination. And *Wu lu* documents the discussions between Kang Senghui and the sovereign on the affinities and differences between Confucianism and Buddhism.

The narrative in the biography of Kang Senghui in *Chusanzang jijì* 出三藏記集 [*A Collection of Records of Translating the Tripitaka*, T no.2145) by Sengyou 僧祐 represents an intermediary state. Sengyou appeared to be attempting to weave the independent episodes into a coherent narrative. In the earlier account, Sun Hao was converted to Buddhism after his conversation with Kang Senghui. In order to make the subsequent penalty for Sun Hao's evil deeds reasonable, he inserted the phrase "although the sovereign heard the true Dharma, his brutal nature could not overcome his cruelty".

In Sengyou's version, the holiness of the relics is remarkably developed:

At that time, Sun Quan had the actual control of the region east of the Yangtze River, where Buddhism had not yet been established. Kang Senghui wished to spread the great Dharma, and thus he traveled eastward. In the tenth year of the Chihu era (247), he arrived in Jianye, where he built up a thatched hut, and established statues to practice the way. An official reported, "There is a foreigner who has entered the country and claims to be a monk, with unusual attire. This matter shall be inspected and verified". Quan said, "I have heard that Emperor Ming of Han had a dream of a deity, who was called Buddha; is what he believes in and worships a tradition passed down from that era?" He immediately summoned the monk for questioning, asking for any miraculous signs. Kang Senghui replied, "Though the Tathāgata has passed away for more than a thousand years, his body remains as relics manifest miracles in all directions. In ancient times, King Aśoka built as many as eighty-four thousand stūpas. The prosperity of stūpa and temples vividly demonstrates the immense influence of the Buddha". Quan thought his words was exaggerated and thus said to the monk, "If you can obtain the relics, I will build a stūpa for them. If you are caught cheating, beware of the consequences under the national law". (Omitted) On the evening of the 21st day, there was still nothing to appear. Everyone was terrified. After the fifth watch of the night, suddenly there was a sound like a bell

from the bottle. Kang Senghui went to see for himself and indeed found the relics. The next morning, he presented them to Sun Quan, and all court officials gathered to watch. The five-colored light radiated, illuminating the bottle. Quan held the bottle with hand and poured it into a bronze plate, and the plate shattered where the relics struck. Quan stood up with solemn surprise, “what a rare auspicious sign!” 時孫權稱制江左，而未有佛教。會欲運流大法，乃振錫東遊。以赤烏十年（247）至建業，營立茅茨，設像行道。有司奏曰：“有胡人入境自稱沙門，容服非恒，事應驗察。”權曰：“吾聞漢明夢神，號稱為佛，彼之所事，豈其遺風耶？”即召會詰問，有何靈驗。會曰：“如來遷跡忽逾千載，遺骨舍利神曜無方。昔阿育起塔，乃八萬四千。夫塔寺之興，所以表遺化也。”權以為誇誕，乃謂會曰：“若能得舍利，當為造塔。如其虛妄，國有常刑。”（中略）三七日暮，猶無所見。莫不震懼。既入五更，忽聞瓶中鎗然有聲，會自往視，果獲舍利。明旦呈權舉朝集觀，五色光爛，照耀瓶上。權手自執瓶，瀉于銅盤，舍利所衝，盤即破碎。權肅然驚起曰：“希有之瑞也。”

The monk further said, “The divine power of the relics is not merely their luminous appearance; they are not to be burnt by the conflagration at the end of a *kalpa*, nor can they be shattered by the strike of a diamond scepter”. Sun Quan ordered a strong man to strike them with an iron anvil and hammer. As a result, both the anvil and hammer were dented, while the relics remained unscathed. Sun Quan was deeply convinced and filled with awe. He immediately ordered the construction of a stūpa. Since this is the beginning of the Buddhist monasteries, the temple was named Jianchu si, and the place was called the Buddha district. From then on, the great Dharma flourished in the region east of the Yangtze River. 會進而言曰：“舍利威神，豈直光相而已，乃劫燒之火不能燔，金剛之杵不能壞矣。”權命取鐵槌砧，使力士擊之，砧槌並陷，而舍利無異。權大嗟服，即為建塔以始有佛寺，故曰建初寺，因名其地為佛陀里，由是江左大法遂興。¹⁵

Here, it is Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252), the founder of the Wu kingdom, rather than the notorious last emperor, who asked for a manifestation of relic miracle and who ordered the first Buddhist monastery to be built. The name of the monastery has also changed from *Dashi si* to the glorious *Jianchu si*. In my view, the intention behind such alterations is clear: to trace the royal patronage of Buddhism and the relic worship tradition of South China back to the moment when Sun Quan declared the independence domain from the unified Han empire. In addition, Keng Senghui’s description of the relics mentions the legend of the Aśokan stūpa and their indestructibility despite the apocalyptic fire, which shows a glaring anachronism. The Buddhist literature recounting King Aśoka’s distribution of the relics was translated no earlier than the 4th century,¹⁶ while the latter detail, to the best of my knowledge, is alluded to in a passage in *Buddhacarita*, traditionally attributed to Aśvaghosa, which was translated in the 5th century.¹⁷ It is very likely that the scholar-monks, if not Sengyou himself, interpolated these episodes based on the newly translated Buddhist scriptures.

The biography of Kang Senghui in *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks, T no.2059] represents an even more complicated narrative. The most significant alteration here is the insertion of Zhi Qian’s 支謙 biographical sketches. Zhi Qian was very important to the early history of Chinese Buddhism, but *Gaoseng zhuan* should not include a biography of a lay Buddhist. The solution is to incorporate his life account into the biography of a monk. The author may have encountered trouble when piecing together the two biographies. A colophon preserved in *Chu sanzang jiji* clearly verifies that Zhi Qian arrived in South China earlier than Keng Senghui did and served as an official in the Wu court.

As a consequence, before Kang Senghui's initial encounter with Sun Quan, the sovereign must have known about Buddhism. The relic miracle, if it really happened so early, is not the beginning of Buddhism in South China. Huijiao, the author of *Gaoseng zhuan*, added one more sentence to bridge the potential contradiction: "At that time, the land of the Wu kingdom was newly imbued with the great Dharma, but the transformation was not yet complete".

Based on the analysis above, I would like to make some remarks. First, drastic changes in Kang Senghui's biographical account occurred in the late 5th century. The heroic Sun Quan as a protagonist, the name of the monastery as Jianchu, and the scriptural allusions of the relic miracle, these elements appeared for the first time in Sengyou's narrative.

Second, while the Daishi monastery witnessed repeated miracles during the Jin and Song dynasties, these records were absent in earlier sources. When the famous Śrīmitra, known as the High-seat Monk, arrived at Jiankang in the Yongjia 永嘉 era (307–313) of the Jin dynasty, the biography written by a contemporary lay disciple attests that he "stayed at the grand market", rather than "settled in the Jianchu monastery".¹⁸ It seems that no temple existed at this site until the beginning of the fourth century. This detail also explains why the monk practiced ascetic deeds in the cemetery and why people eventually built a temple there.

Third, the account of Sun Hao's penalty for his evil deeds is obviously fictional. In the story, he knew the existence of the Buddha from his palace consort. This episode contradicts the fact that he claimed to perform a bathing ceremony earlier. Kamata Shigeo has noticed a passage in *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, which testifies that Sun Chen 孫綝 (?–258), an obscure sovereign of Wu, "destroyed the Buddhist shrines and executed the [Buddhist] priests", and that the Changgan monastery was damaged in this persecution.¹⁹ Kamata suggests a hypothesis that the story of Sun Hao was created in the model of Sun Chen (Kamata 1985, pp. 212–14). In Sengyou's biography, we have seen similar manipulations, which is a common phenomenon in the miraculous writings.

To what extent should we accept the episode of Kang Senghui's test for the relics? Even if we envisage a possibility of a nucleus of historical facts despite all of the later alterations, this event could only occur towards the end of the Wu kingdom, rather than in the beginning.

Through a detailed analysis, the authenticity of the three legends appears to be questionable. A common feature is that the protagonists are all emperors, and they all emphasize the significance of the beginning. The dream of Emperor Ming of the later Han signals the beginning of Chinese Buddhism; the relics of the Jianchu monastery signal the beginning of the Buddhist tradition in South China. The invention of the official shrine with the stūpa reflects a revivalist enthusiasm of the Northern Wei to continue the Han-wei tradition in Luoyang.²⁰

4. Two Archeological Excavations Re-Examined

4.1. The Mural Paintings of Relics in an Eastern Han Tomb at Horinger 和林格爾, Inner Mongolia

In 1971, a tomb with mural paintings was discovered at Horinger, Inner Mongolia. The occupant of the tomb was proven to be a military governor of the later Han dynasty. The tomb was first reported by Yu Weichao 俞偉超 in the 1980s, who claims that the paintings feature a number of Buddhist themes, such as the white elephant and the lotus. The focus of controversy concerns a now-vanished inscription on the eastern ceiling wall of the antechamber, which reads *sheli* 猗猗. Yu argues that this is a phonetic transliteration of the word *śarīra*, which is usually written as 舍利 in Buddhist literature.

The paintings disintegrated before the photo techniques were used. Yu Weichao relies on his assumption based on a personal memory of Li Zuozhi 李作之, a staff member of the Museum of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. According to Li,

In the area slightly below the King Father of the East to the north, there is a depiction of a pan-like vessel, within which “four globular objects” remained. To the upper right of this depiction, there is a two-character inscription that reads “sheli 舍利” (Weichao Yu 1980, pp. 68–72).

This discovery has been cited by many scholars to be evidence of the existence of the relic cult in the later Han. Erik Zürcher developed Yu’s argument by pointing out more allusions to the relics in Buddhist scriptures and literary works (Zürcher 2014a, pp. 355–56).

On the other hand, there are scholars who doubt whether the emendation of the more complicated inscription “舍利” to the simple “舍利” is justifiable (Ruan 1987, pp. 205–12). The controversy has been clarified as more murals with similar inscribed paintings were unearthed. Art historians have convincingly proved that the identification of the inscription of 舍利 as a Buddhist relic is tenable. The corresponding visual representation of 舍利 is an auspicious animal, thus rejecting any Buddhist interpretation (Kim 2014; Zhu 2020).

4.2. The Stūpa-Shaped Bronze Vessel at Gongyi 鞏義, Henan

The second excavation was carried out under similar circumstances. In 1972, while digging a reservoir in the southeast of the village for the *Zhitian* 芝田 commune, a cellar was discovered. According to the report by the local museum, “the cellar is 2 m deep from the ground, with a large pottery jar placed right in the middle, filled with red and green stone beads weighing about 50 kg approximately. Around the jar, there are 71 pieces of bronze vessels stacked, weighing some 80 kg; in addition, there are two pieces of iron vessels, weighing about 50 kg”. The bronze vessels were included in the collection of the Gongxian museum in 1980. A striking discovery among the bronze vessels is a stūpa-shaped artifact.

This stūpa-shaped bronze artifact is 50 cm tall in total and hollow inside. It consists of two parts: the body of the stūpa and the base, which are detachable. The base is square and features four holes on its surface. The body of the stūpa comprises a cylindrical drum and a hemispherical dome, connected by a single string pattern. The superstructure is decorated with a four-pointed shape that flares out in a square form. The lower edge of the drum has three supporting nails that fit into the holes of the base (Figure 1). The authors of the archeological report judge that this piece is “unique in shape, which was never seen in Han dynasty tombs, but was similar to the decorative items on the stūpas after the Wei and Jin dynasties” (Gongxian Wenhua Guan 1974, p. 123).

This artifact did not attract scholarly attention until 2019, when Huang Pan 黃盼 conducted a detailed analysis. She examined the date of the production of the bronze vessels at the same site and speculated on the possible uses of the stūpa-shaped bronze ware. Judging from the shapes and decorations, the owners of these artifacts are mostly from the royal or noble classes.

Huang cited a passage from *the Sūtra on Lady Yuyue*, which mentions that the lady made jeweled curtains with well-adorned embroidery, chanting the hymns around the stūpa²¹, and argued that the curtain hooks and jewels were used in conjunction with a bronze stūpa model, which constitutes rare evidence of stūpa worship practices in the later Han (Huang 2019, pp. 11–34).



Figure 1. Stūpa-shaped bronze vessel excavated in Gongxian county²² (photograph by the author).

For our purposes, it is important to point out that the bronze vessel is not likely to be a reliquary. If we compare the Gandharan reliquaries to the shape of a miniature stūpa, the standard form is half-hollow to receive a nested casket and has a hollow base as a relic container (Jongeward 2012, p. 70). In contrast, the base of the bronze vessel from Gongyi is hollow underneath. Because there is no support for containing the relic deposits (Figure 2), the stūpa-shaped vessel is presumably a votive stūpa or had other uses, but it is by no means a reliquary.²³



Figure 2. The base of the bronze vessel (photograph by the author).

5. The Relic Veneration in Its Earliest Phase—With a Comparison to the Gandhāran Tradition

Excluding the questionable items discussed above, we have compiled all the stories from the second section of fascicle one of the *GTL*, along with additional accounts that tell how the relics were miraculously obtained, as detailed in Appendix A.

The stories, 21 in total, are arranged in the chronological order of the events they depict. Entries that cannot be accurately dated are placed after the datable ones. We try to make some observations through an analysis of the materials.

5.1. *The Mechanism of Stimulus Response and Its Significance*

As we have demonstrated above, Daoxuan categorized the miracle tales of the relics into three types: relics obtained through spiritual response, relics established by King Aśoka, and relics bestowed in the distribution campaign in the Renshou period of the Sui dynasty. By examining the entries under the title “Miraculous Response of the Buddha’s Relics Within the Holy Land of Cīnasthāna” along with the additional accounts in Appendix A, a striking feature becomes readily apparent: the emergence of relics, or rather, the process of their production, is often invoked through the devout prayer of believers from the void; the origin of the relics in terms of actual time and space—such as specific famous temples in India, the Western Regions they may hail from, or their connection to the historical Buddha Sakyamuni—is not the primary focus that substantiates the authenticity of the relics. In his study of relic veneration in medieval Europe, Patrick Geary states,

The identification of false relics and the determination of genuine claims ultimately rested on very pragmatic, functional evidence: if the relics worked, that is, if they were channels for supernatural intervention, then they were genuine. If they did not, they were not authentic, regardless of the strength of external evidence (Geary 1986, p. 178).

This remark is also applicable to the earliest miracle tales of relics in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. In the preface to his work on miraculously produced relics, Daoxuan enumerates a series of sacred sites housing Buddha relics across India and the Western Regions, and the relics enshrined within the Aśokan stūpas. To some extent, these sites could be supported by the external evidence. In contrast, the relics examined in the present study are governed by an entirely distinct mechanism. Daoxuan describes these relics as “manifesting in diverse forms during their specific spiritual response processes, and emerging based on the circumstances”. Here, it is emphasized that the relics described in the earliest miracle tales, their manifestation or disappearance, all obey the principle of “spiritual response”. The supernatural forces in the invisible realm perceive (*gan* 感) human beings’ devotional practice or karmic merit and respond (*ying* 應) accordingly.²⁴ Unlike the Christian tradition of relics, “spiritual response” is not only a basis for determining the authenticity of relics but also the driving force that brings them into existence. As the narrator summarizes in the story of Xu Chun [15], “as a rule, one may gain the relics with reverence, and lose them with negligence”.

Another characteristic related to the one above, which I call “the proliferation of relics”, forms a stark contrast to the understanding of relics found in mainstream Buddhist scriptures. In classical descriptions, the paucity of relics is a recurring theme. According to *the Mahāparinibbhāna-suttanta*, the relics produced after Sakyamuni’s cremation led to a dispute among eight kings. To resolve the conflict, a Brahmin lay follower named Droṇa evenly divided the relics into eight parts. The *Aśokāvadāna*, which was supposedly written in the 2nd century, narrates that King Aśoka excavated the relics that were previously buried by the seven kings (all but the share of Rāmagrāma) and constructed eighty-four thousand stūpas, spreading throughout Jambudvīpa. The principle of distribution was that a region with a population of more than one hundred million households could receive one share of the relics. However, a problem stood out. The people of Takṣaśilā, which had a population of 3.6 billion, requested to build 36 stūpas, leading to a shortage of relics. In response, King Aśoka threatened to slaughter 3.5 billion of the populace, and only then

did the Takṣaśīlans withdraw their request, settling for only a single stūpa (Strong 2004, pp. 116–22, 124–48).

On the other hand, if we look at the earliest accounts of relic miracles in Chinese Buddhism, they could be acquired through devotional practices, during fasting ceremonies, or by the power of karmic merit on ordinary occasions. In the examples of An Fakai 安法開 [05] and Meng Jing 孟景 [06], the protagonists were obviously well aware of the tradition that it is necessary to install the relics beneath the stūpa prior to its construction, yet they found themselves in the predicament of lacking relics. Eventually, they were able to effortlessly overcome this scarcity through the conduct of rituals. In the story of Xuchun [15], the relics became divisible and proliferated.

If the Aśokan relics represent a tradition that emphasizes divine provenance, and relics produced through spiritual response can increase in quantity, then the Renshou distribution campaign of relics clearly merges these two traditions. According to *Sheli ganying ji* 舍利感應記 [*The Account of the Stimulus and Responses*] by Wang Shao 王邵 (d. ca. 610), Emperor Wendi of the Sui obtained a pack of relics from a mysterious Brahman monk. Later, the emperor and the monk Tanqian each counted the relics many times by putting them on the palms of their hands. Each time, they arrived at a different number and could not determine it.²⁵ In the tenth month of the year 601, the emperor ordered the construction of one stūpa in each of the 30 prefectures to enshrine the relics (J. Chen 2002a, p. 89). Apparently, this movement imitates the deeds of King Aśoka's construction of 84,000 stūpas. And the design of the stūpa follows exactly the model of Aśokan stūpas. At the same time,

The emperor Wendi and his empress often found relics in their food. They floated one in a silver bowl of water and presented it to the officials; in a moment, they suddenly saw (it split into) two that were swirling to the right and joined together. On bestowing some clams (*xian* 蜆) to two of his royal concubines (*guiren* 貴人) and two princes, Yang Zhao 楊昭 (579–606) and Yang Jian 楊暉, the emperor ordered them to check the clams carefully. It turned out that each of them found a relic inside one of the clams. In less than twenty days, nineteen “relics” in total were found in the palace alone. Most of these emanated rays of light. From then on, both the clergy and laity offered to the court whatever they believed to have been relics. Hearing of the emperor's suspicion of their authenticity, some śramaṇas tested the “relics” with hammers. Thirteen of them turned out to be grains of jade, while the true relics remained undamaged. 每因食於齒下得舍利，皇后亦然。以銀盃水浮其一，出示百官，須臾忽見有兩右旋相著。二貴人及晉王昭、豫章王暉蒙賜蜆，勅令審視之，各於蜆內得舍利一。未過二旬，宮內凡得十九，多放光明。自是遠近道俗，所有舍利率奉獻焉。皇帝曰：“何必皆是真。諸沙門相與推試之，果有十三玉粟。其真舍利鐵甲而無損。”²⁶

Here, the emperor Wendi of Sui and his wife obtained relics from food, a motif frequently found in the miracle tales of the Southern dynasties, as seen in Appendix A items [14], [15], [17], and [19]. In order to test the authenticity of relics, people often make them float on water and observe a clockwise rotation. This plot is also recorded in Appendix A items [03], [07], [10], [12], and [13]. I do not find doctrinal justifications for these practices.²⁷ The similarities in these episodes indicate that the examples from the Sui dynasty clearly inherit the traditions of the Southern dynasties.

Upon analyzing the large-scale relic distribution movement during the Sui Dynasty, it becomes evident that the principles of distribution and the architectural design of the stūpas were modeled after the traditions of Aśokan relics. Meanwhile, the rituals for producing or testing relics still followed the tradition of miracle-produced relics that had been prominent in the Southern dynasties.

5.2. The Chronological Range and the Geographical Distribution

The protagonists Zhu Changshu 竺長舒 [01] and the wife of Zhou Song 周嵩, with the natal surname Humu 胡母 [02], were the earliest examples of relic worship in China. We know from *GTL* that Zhu Changshu lived at the beginning of the Jin dynasty, while *Guang Shiyin Yingyan Ji* 光世音應驗記 [*Miracle Tales of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin*] reports that his ancestors may have been Central Asian merchants. During the Yuankang 元康 period (291–299), they settled in Luoyang (Dong 2002, p. 3). It is probable that the relics were brought to Luoyang by their ancestors from the Western Regions, no later than the end of the 3rd century.

Lady Humu lived in Luoyang as well. There is an episode in *Gaoseng zhuan* that she obtained a Buddhist sūtra written on silk from the Central Asian monk An Huize 安慧則, who resided at the Dashi temple (the temple near the great market) in Luoyang. This event took place on the eve of the Yongjia Turmoil (317).²⁸ The relics she possessed might have been acquired in the same period. Based on the two examples, we have arrived at the statement that relic veneration emerged in the vicinity of Luoyang, the capital, around the turn of the 3rd to 4th century.

After the collapse of the Western Jin, the monk Fayan 法顔, son of Zhu Changshu, and lady Humu, carried the relics to the Jiangxia 江夏 prefecture and Jiankang 建康, respectively. And notice the fact that the monks who constructed the stūpas in Guangling 廣陵 and Yuhang 餘杭 [04][05] are all from the north, let alone the famous Dao'an 道安 together with his disciple Tanyi 曇翼. Jiangling 江陵 and Guangling, which frequently appeared in the miracle tales, are the focal points for the influx of immigrants seeking refuge. These accounts vividly illustrate the spread of the relic cult to the populous urban sites in Southern China.

The vast majority of the miracle tales happened in the south, with only one exception [21]. The protagonist Lu Zai 陸載 was originally from the south. In a battle with northern troops, he was captured and subsequently served in the court of the Northern Wei.²⁹ Though the descendants of this family held prominent positions in the northern regimes, they deliberately maintained their customs and cultural identity.³⁰ In his later years, Lu Zai chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* and frequently obtained the relics thereafter. The pattern of stimulus–response echoes the episode of Xu Chun, among others. Lu's worship of relics is in line with the tradition from the south.

The absence of miracle tales in the north is quite puzzling. Relic worship had already been established in the 3rd century in Luoyang. And archeologists have unearthed numerous reliquaries that date back to the Northern dynasties.³¹ The excavations are the testimony of highly advanced techniques in the north, and the lack of miracle narratives³² probably reflects the differing conceptions of relic veneration during the periods of division or a rupture between the northern regimes and the unified empire.

5.3. The Practitioners and the Royal Patronage

The initial practitioners of relic veneration consisted of monastics and laity. Relics may have been passed down within families, donated to the monasteries [01], or they might have been taken from monasteries to be venerated at home by lay followers [09]. The cult of relics is not confined to the monastic community or the circle of lay people.

During the reign of the Jin dynasty, practitioners were commoners or lower-ranking officials in most cases. High-rank officials (the governor of Guangzhou in [09]), members of the royal family (Prince of Linchuan in [12]; Empress Dowager Chen in [18]), and the emperor (Emperor Ming of the Song in [17]) began to figure in the miracle tales of the Liu Song dynasty. Here, we observe a tendency for social dissemination that originates from the grassroots level and ascends.

The fact that Emperor Ming of the Liu Song dynasty was the first emperor in the south to venerate relics is no accident. In Chinese history, there have been many monarchs who showed kindness to Buddhist monks and supported Buddhist monasteries. It is the act of receiving the ordination that signifies the monarch's complete conversion, which signals a new phase in the development of Buddhism. Emperor Ming of the Song was the first emperor to receive the Bodhisattva precepts.

We should keep in mind the fact that relic veneration emerged around the turn of the 3rd to 4th century (in Luoyang), and the period when the relic worship attracted the interest of a monarch for the first time was around the year 460. This half-century period is the period when Chinese Buddhist relic worship permeated from the folk to the court. If we compare this chronological framework to the case in the Gandhāran tradition, of which Chinese Buddhism had a sustained and strong influence, it would yield some insights.

Richard Salomon conducted an exhaustive survey of the inscribed reliquaries in the greater Gandhāra region. The earliest example is the Shinkot reliquary, which bears several inscriptions. The earliest inscription dates from the reign of the Indo-Greek king Menandros/Menander around the mid-second century. And the majority of the reliquaries are from the first century CE. From the reign of Kushan emperor Huvishka in the mid-second century CE onward, the number reduces significantly (Jongeward 2012, p. 165). As for the royal patronage, we find numerous inscriptions of the reliquaries written by the regional Saka subordinates, such as the Apraca king and the Odi king, in the last half of the first century BCE and the early decades of the first century CE.³³

Previous scholars may have drawn upon the extant evidence of early Chinese Buddhism, with an eye on the development of Buddhism in Gandhāra or the Indian subcontinent. The scenario they suggest is that the rise of relic veneration in Chinese Buddhism coincides with or comes a step behind the development in Gandhāra (Palumbo 2014, p. 294). Here, I repeat the points we discussed above, excluding the unreliable literary evidence and the excavations unrelated to our topic, and another picture emerges. The rise of relic veneration in China postdates the counterpart in Gandhāra for two or three centuries, and the royal veneration of relics comes 400 years later than in the Gandhāra region.

Before any attempt to propose an explanation, I would like to call to attention a classic hypothesis by Erik Zürcher and re-evaluate the content and nature of Buddhist practices in the court during the earliest phase of Chinese Buddhism. In a seminal study, Zürcher distinguishes Buddhism in the later Han dynasty as consisting of three well-defined spheres: "first, a hybrid cult centered upon the court and the imperial family; secondly, the first nucleus of 'canonical' monastic Buddhism, and, in the third place, the diffuse and unsystematic adoption of Buddhist elements in indigenous beliefs and cults" (Zürcher 2014a, p. 354). He defines the court Buddhism as centered upon devotional practice, with monks acting in the guise of ritual specialists. In another essay written later in his career, he repeats his points that royal patronage played a crucial role in the history of Buddhism but asserts that "court Buddhism developed in the last decades of the fourth century CE, some three hundred years after the first recorded existence of Buddhism in Chinese soil" (Zürcher 2014b, p. 587). In his view, court Buddhism became fully developed in some of the northern states at the turn of 4–5th century; the development in the south was a gradual process due to its cultural isolation. A leap forward from the mid-5th century onwards was driven by the arrival of foreign monks from the maritime route.

This raises the question of how to evaluate the change in Buddhism in the circle of the imperial court during the four centuries. Our observation on the rise and spread of relic veneration could shed some light on this problem. As shown above, Zürcher based his assumption on the misinterpretation of some evidence. Any evidence related to relic worship before the 3rd century should be excluded. It is not difficult to discover that image

worship stands at the center of the devotional practice in the earliest phase of Chinese Buddhism. Regarding the dream of Emperor Ming, though not to be accepted as historical fact, if we consider the fact that the earliest version of this story appeared in the *Treatise of Mouzi*, composed in the 2nd century, it still reflects the contemporary conception of Buddhism. Emperor Huan of the later Han is said to “have set up a well-decorated canopy to enshrine the Buddha and Laozi”.³⁴ It is still the visual representation that touches the monarch. Another famous example is the huge golden image cast by the warlord Zuorong in the period of the Three Kingdoms.

In contrast, there is no evidence that the monarch showed any interest in Buddhist doctrines, nor did they read the translated scriptures or promote the worship of sutras. The monarch’s interest in Buddhist doctrines emerged in the mid-period of the Eastern Jin dynasty, under the circumstance of witty debates among the scholar monks and literati intellectuals, known as *qingtan* 清談 (philosophical conversations), which I will deal with in another article. The enthusiasm for copying scriptures still arose later in the middle to late period of the Six Dynasties.³⁵

6. Concluding Remarks

This paper attempts to use miracle tales as the primary historical source to examine how relic veneration emerged in medieval China. I argue that relic veneration first appeared around the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries in the vicinity of Luoyang, the imperial capital, and then gradually spread to the south. The social strata of the worshippers expanded from obscure monks and lower-ranking officials to the royal family. Relics produced by miracles were the result of pious worship and were divisible. This contrasts sharply with the relic legends recorded in Buddhist scriptures, where relics are often objects of contention among believers.

Through critical analysis of the various layers of narrative accounts, we have confirmed that the first three entries of miraculously obtained relics in the *Ji Shenzhou Sanbao Gantonglu* show signs of later interpolation. This rules out the possibility of relic veneration existing during the later Han to Three Kingdoms period. The absence of relic worship implies that in the early stages of Buddhism, the objects of worship in the court circle were primarily Buddhist statues, not relics. This picture also raises another curious question: the different sequences in which various objects of veneration were accepted.

It is commonly accepted among scholars of Indian Buddhism that the Buddhist *sangha* was full of schisms, conflicts, and rivalries. Different sects claimed the superiority of some practices over others. When talking about Chinese Buddhism, as a receptacle of the ideas and practices from the Indian or Central Asian traditions, perhaps we should also pay attention to the potential competition between diverse practices. Different practices have met with varying degrees of acceptance in their integration into Chinese society. The relic veneration has never been a topic of controversy in the polemic works during the six dynasties. However, the fact that its rise and development occurred in a particularly late period probably implies the silent resistance it may have encountered. Relic veneration, as a marginal practice, secondary to image worship, could partly be explained by mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines, which claim the superiority of scriptures over relic worship, or the aversion to the bodily remains of the deceased, which is deeply rooted in the Chinese cultural mentality.

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Abbreviations

- T* *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*; see (Takakusu and Watanabe 1924–1934).
X *Man shinsan dainihon Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經; see (Kawamura 1975–1989).
 Waseda Daigaku Daigakuin Tōyō Bijutsushi 早稻田大學大學院東洋美術史 [The East Asian art History Seminar at Waseda University]. 2014. *Bijutsu shiryō to shite yomu Shū*
GTL tr. *shinchū sampō Kantsū roku—Shakudoku to kenkyū* (5–7) 美術史料として読む『集神州三寶感通錄』—釈読と研究（五~七） [Reading *Jishenzhou sanbao gantonglu* As the Source Material of Art History]. Tokyo: East Asian Art History Seminar.

Appendix A. The Accounts of Relics Obtained Through a Miracle

This collection is mainly based on the entries in the second section of fascicle one of *GTL*, except for those that are of questionable authenticity. It further includes the relic-related narratives scattered in *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (*Biographies of the Renowned Monks*), *GAOSEN ZHUAN*, and other miraculous tales during the Six Dynasties. The stories, 21 in total, are arranged in the chronological order of the events they depict. Entries that cannot be accurately dated are placed after the datable ones.

For *GAOSEN ZHUAN*, I have consulted the excellent Japanese translations by Yoshikawa Tadao in collaboration with Funayama Tōru, and for *GTL*, the translation by the East Asian Art History Seminar at Waseda University.³⁶ Both translations provide ample annotations, which are very helpful. For *Mingxiang ji*, another core text for our purposes, I borrowed the English translation by Robert Company,³⁷ with only minor modifications.

While *MSZ* does not survive in a complete form, we still find one text entitled *Meisōdeshō* 名僧傳抄 (*Excerpts from MSZ*, X no.1523) in the *XZJ*. This text, as previous studies demonstrated, is a result of modern editing. It comprises three collections of biographies, namely the *Meisōden shijishō* 名僧傳指示抄, the *Meisōden yōbunshō* 名僧傳要文抄, and the compendium of the Maitreya cult, *Miroku Nyorai kannōshō* 彌勒如來感應抄. These three collections were compiled by the Japanese monk Sōshō 宗性 (1202–1278) living in the Heian period, and the manuscripts are preserved in the Tōdaiji Library.³⁸ The *XZJ* edition contains many errors and is therefore not reliable. Some puzzling expressions are the result of misreading the characters. I am grateful to the Tōdaiji Library for providing photos of the manuscripts. In several cases, I suggest the appropriate interpretation based on the manuscripts.

00

振旦神州佛舍利感通序

原夫大聖謀權，通濟為本，容光或隨緣隱，遺景有可承真。故將事拘尸，從於俗化，入金剛定，碎此金軀，欲使福被天人，功流海陸。至於牙齒髮爪之屬，頂蓋目精之流，衣鉢瓶杖之具，坐處足蹈之迹，備滿中天，罕被東夏。而齒牙髮骨，時聞視聽。昔育王土中之塔，略顯於前，而偏感別應之形，隨機又出，自漢洎唐，無時不有。既稱靈骨，不可以事求，任緣而舉，止得以敬。及通信之士，舉神光而應心；懷疑之夫，假琢磨而發念。所以討尋往傳，及以現祥，故依續序，庶有披者，識釋門之骨鯁，萬載之後，難可塵沒矣。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，*T* no.2106, 52.410a22-b5）

Preface to the Miraculous Response of the Buddha's Relics Within the Holy Land of Cīnasthāna

The Great Sage's strategic use of expedient means took universal benefit as the foundation. The bodily radiance might vanish depending on the circumstance, yet the traces left behind can still carry the truth. As Buddha was about to approach the city of Kuśīnagarā, he conformed to the worldly ritual of passing away, entering the Vajra Samadhi, and shattering this golden body. The intention is to spread blessings to heavenly beings and humans, and to let the merit prevail across the seas and lands. Therefore, Buddha's relics, such as teeth, hair, nails, skull, and eyeballs, as well as objects like robes, bowls, bottles, and staffs, along with traces of sitting and footsteps, are abundant in Madhyadeśa but rarely reach the eastern lands (i.e., China). The teeth, hair, and bones were occasionally heard and witnessed (by the pilgrim monks). While the stūpas established by King Aśoka within the central territory were listed above, the relics, which manifested in various forms in their specific processes of spiritual response, emerged according to the circumstances. From the Han to the Tang, there was never a time without them. Since the relics are called holy bones, they are not subject to worldly pursuits; instead, they emerge through karmic conditions and command our utmost respect. Enlightened practitioners worship the divine radiance to affirm the faith within their hearts; skeptics, through repeated contemplation, arouse their good thoughts. Hence, I have sought out the records of the past and the auspicious signs till the present, arranging them in a coherent sequence. Hopefully, readers may recognize the indestructibility of the Buddhist Dharma, which will not easily be buried by dust even after ten thousand years. (GTL1, T no.2106, 52.410a22-b5)

01

晉初竺長舒，先有舍利，重之。其子為沙門，名法顏，每欲還俗。笑曰：“是沙石耳，何足何貴？”父投之水，五色三匝，光高數尺，遂不還俗。長舒死後，還發俗念，輒病委頓，卒為沙門，以舍利安江夏塔中。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.410c14-18）

At the beginning of the Jin dynasty, there was a man named Zhu Changshu³⁹ who had relics (inherited from his ancestors). He cherished them greatly. His son, being a monk named Fayān, always desired to return to secular life. He laughed and said, “These are simply sand and stones, what's so precious about them?” His father threw the relics into the water, and they became five-colored and revolved for three circles,⁴⁰ emitting a light that reached several *chi* in height. Seeing this, the son did not return to secular life. After Changshu's death, whenever the secular thoughts arose, he would become sick and listless. He finally became a monk and installed the relics in a stūpa at Jiangxia prefecture.⁴¹ (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.410c14-18)

02

一說云：周嵩婦胡母氏有素書《大品》⁴²，素廣五寸，而《大品》一部盡在焉。又并有舍利，銀甕貯之，並緘于深篋。永嘉之亂，胡母將避兵南奔，經及舍利自出篋外，因取懷之，以渡江東。又嘗遇火，不暇取經，及屋盡火滅，得之於灰燼之下，儼然如故。（《冥祥記》，《法苑珠林》卷一八引，T no.2122, 53.417b11-17）

Another story goes as follows. The wife of Zhou Song was of the Humu clan. They owned a copy of the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom* written on pure silk. Although the strip of silk was only five cun wide, the entire sutra fit on it. The family also owned a relic, which they safeguarded in a silver vase. Both sutra and relic were kept stored in a deep chest. During the disorder of the Yongjia period (317),

when the Humu clan was about to leave hastily to flee south to avoid the advancing enemy troops, the sutra and the relic both emerged of themselves from the chest. The family thus carried them on their persons when they fled and crossed the river to the southeast. They also once had an outbreak of fire. There was no time to retrieve the sutra. But although the entire household was consumed in flames, they later found the sutra completely intact beneath the ashes.⁴³ (*Mingxiang ji*, as cited in *Fayuan zhulin* 18, T no.2122, 53.417b11-17)

03

晉大興（318–321）中，於潛董汪信尚木像，夜有光明。後像側有聲投地，視乃舍利，水中浮沈，五色晃昱，左右行三匝。後沙門法恒看之，遙起四五，投恒懷中。恒曰：“若使恒興立寺宇，更見威神。”又耀于前。於即恒建寺塔於潛，入法者日以十數焉。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.410c18-23）

法恒於像前得舍利事。（《名僧傳說處》第二十五，X no.1523,77.362a9-10）

During Daxing era (318–321) of the Jin dynasty, Dong Wang, a native of Yuqian county,⁴⁴ worshipped a wooden statue, which emitted radiance at night. Later, a sound was heard from the side of the statue as if something had dropped on the ground. Upon inspection, it was found that there were relics floating and sinking in the water. They shone with five colors, swirling around three circles.⁴⁵ When a monk named Faheng looked at them, they rose four to five feet high⁴⁶ and fell into his arms. Faheng said, “If I were to build a temple, I pray to see more divine power”. The relics shone even more brightly in front of him. Thereupon, Faheng built a temple with stūpa in Yuqian, and the number of people entering the Dharma increased by tens each day. (*GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52.410c18-23)

The account that Fa Heng obtained relics in front of a statue. (the topical notes from *MSZ* juan 25, X no.1523, 77.362a9-10)

04

晉大興（318–321）中，北人流播廣陵，日有千數。有將舍利者，建立小寺立剎⁴⁷，舍利放光，至于剎杪，遂感動遠近信心云。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.410c23-26）

During the Daxing era of the Jin dynasty (318–321), there were thousands of northern immigrants arriving at Guangling prefecture⁴⁸ every day. A man who carried relics established a small temple and erected a stūpa. The relics emitted light that reached the pinnacle of the central pillar, thereby inspiring the faith of people both near and far. (*GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52.410c23-26)

05

晉咸和（326–334）中，北僧安法開，至餘杭欲建立寺。無地欠財，手索錢貫，貨之積年，得錢三萬，市地作屋，常以索貫為資。欲立剎無舍利。有羅幼者，先自有之，開求不許。及開至寺禮佛，見幼舍利囊已在座前。即告幼，幼隨來，見之喜悅，與開共立寺宇於餘杭云。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.410c26-411a2）

During the Xianhe period of the Jin dynasty (326–334), a monk from the north named An Faka arrived in Yuhang county⁴⁹ with the intention of establishing a temple. Lacking land and funds, he manually tied the coins with strings.⁵⁰ With the income from this service, he accumulated a sum of thirty thousand over many years, which he used to purchase land and construct buildings. He desired to erect a stūpa but did not have any relics. There was a man named Luo You who already possessed some, but he declined Fakai's request. How-

ever, when Faka visited the temple to worship the Buddha, he saw that the relic pouch of Luo You was already in front of the Buddha's throne. He immediately informed Luo You, who followed him [to the temple]. Luo was delighted to see the relics. They finally established a temple in Yuhang county in collaboration. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.410c26-411a2)

06

晉咸康（335–342）中，建安太守孟景，欲建刹孟寺，於夕聞床頭鏘然，視得舍利三枚。景立刹。時元嘉十六年（439）六月，舍利放光，通照上下，七夕乃止，一切咸見。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411a2-6）

During the Xiankang era of the Jin dynasty (335–342), Meng Jing, the governor of Jian'an prefecture,⁵¹ intended to build a temple called the Mengs' Temple. One night, he heard a ringing sound by his bedside and found three relic beads. Jing thus erected the stūpa. In June of the sixteenth year of the Yuanjia era (439)⁵², the relics emitted light illuminating the entire stūpa, which lasted for seven nights. Everyone witnessed this miracle. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.411a2-6)

07

（曇翼）後還長沙寺，復加開祐造大塔，并丈六金像。未有舍利，祈請累年，忽爾而得。即集僧尼五百人，燒香讚唱，請一鉢水，以汎舍利，舍利右旋，五色光耀，清徹滿室。（《名僧傳抄·曇翼傳》，X no.1523, 77.352c5-8）

群寇既盪，復還江陵，修復長沙寺。丹誠祈請，遂感舍利。盛以金瓶，置于齋座。翼乃頂禮立誓曰：“若必是金剛餘蔭，願放光明。”至乎中夜，有五色光彩，從瓶漸出，照滿一堂。舉眾驚嗟，莫不以翼神感。當于爾時，雖復富蘭等見，亦迴偽歸真也。（《高僧傳》卷五《曇翼傳》，T no.2059, 50.355c13-19）

(Tanyi) later returned to Changsha monastery⁵³. He expanded the monastery and further constructed a great stūpa together with a six *zhang* high golden statue. There were no relics at first, but after years of prayer and request, they suddenly appeared. Tanyi summoned five hundred monks and nuns, burned incense, and chanted eulogies. He asked for a bowl of water and made the relics floating. They revolved clockwise, and the brilliant lights of five-color filled the room with clarity and radiance. (“biography of Tanyi” in *Meisōdenshō*, X77. 1523.352c5-8)

After the invaders had been quelled, he returned to Jiangling prefecture⁵⁴ and restored the Changsha monastery. With sincere prayers, he obtained the relics through his pious action. They were placed in a golden vase on the altar for the abstinence ritual. Tanyi then bowed and made a vow, saying, “If this is indeed the remaining of Buddha's Vajra body, may it emit light”. By midnight, a five-colored radiance gradually emerged from the vase, illuminating the entire hall. The mass was astonished and marveled, all attributing this to Tanyi's divine stimulus. At that time, even if [the non-believers like] Pūraṇa-kāśyapa⁵⁵ saw this scene, he would also turn from falsehood to the true dharma. (*Gaoseng zhuan* juan 5, T no.2059, 50.355c13-19)

08

道安令弟子銅佛像，頂上有一舍利，晃然放光，照於室內事。（《名僧傳說處》卷五，X no.1523, 77.360a3-5）

有一外國銅像形製古異，時眾不甚恭重。安曰：“像形相致佳，但髻形未稱。”令弟子爐冶其髻。既而光焰煥炳，耀滿一堂。詳視髻中，見一舍利，眾咸愧服。安曰：“像既靈異，不煩復冶。”乃止。識者咸謂安知有舍利，故出以示眾。（《高僧傳》卷五《道安傳》，T50.2059.352b17-22）

The story that Dao'an ordered his disciple to [recast] a bronze Buddha statue, which had a relic on top that shone brightly, illuminating the room. (the topical notes from MSZ juan 5, X no.1523, 77.360a3-5)

There was an ancient and peculiarly shaped foreign bronze statue, which at that time was not highly revered by the people. Dao'an said, "The statue's form is quite good, but the hair-knot is imperfect". He ordered his disciples to recast the statue's hair-knot. Afterward, the statue's radiance was resplendent, illuminating the entire hall. Upon closer inspection, they found a relic bead within the *uśniṣa*. The mass felt guilty and was filled with respect [for the master]. Dao'an said, "Since the statue is holy and extraordinary, there is no need for further treatment". Thus, the mass no longer proposed to recast the statute. The wise men believed that Dao'an knew about the existence of the relic from the beginning and deliberately revealed it to the public. (*Gaoseng zhuan* 5, T50.2059.352b17-22)

09

晉義熙元年（405），有林邑人，嘗有一舍利，每齋日放光。沙門慧邃隨廣州刺史刁遠在南，敬其光相欲請之。未及發言，而舍利自分為二。遠聞心悅，又請留敬，而又分為三。遠欲模長干像，寺主固執不許，夜夢人長數丈告曰：“像貴宣導，何故悞耶？明報聽模。”既成，遠以舍利著像髻中。西來諸像放光者，多懷舍利故也。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411a7-14）

In the first year of the Yixi era of the Jin dynasty (405), there was a person from the kingdom of Linyi⁵⁶ who once had a piece of relic that radiated on the abstinence days. The monk Hui Chu, following Diao Kui, the governor of Guangzhou, to the south, he was marveled at its luminous appearance and wished to request it. Before he could speak, the relic spontaneously divided into two. Upon hearing this, Kui was delighted and continued to request to keep the respect, and it divided further into three. Kui wished to cast a statue modeled after the one at Changgan monastery, but the abbot firmly refused. One night, the abbot dreamed of a person several *zhang* tall who said, "The statue is precious for propagation, why are you so stingy? Go and tell him that he is permitted to duplicate a statue". Once it was completed, Diao Kui installed the relic in the statue's *uśniṣa*. Those statues from the west that emitted light were because they often contained the relics. (*GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52.411a7-14)

10

以宋永初三年（422），始至江陵，住長沙寺。旬日之中，得一舍利。形質雖小，光色異常。以鉢水汎之，遙漾右轉，乍浮乍沈，光藻炳煥。眾皆驚此神奇，嗟歎盈路。（《名僧傳抄·曇摩蜜多傳》，X no.1523, 77.355b4-6）

曇摩蜜多旬日之中得一舍利，形質雖小，光色異常事。（《名僧傳說處》卷十九，X no.1523, 77.361b7-9）

以宋元嘉元年（424）展轉至蜀，俄而出峽，止荊州，於長沙寺造立禪閣。翹誠懇惻，祈請舍利，旬有餘日，遂感一枚。衝器出聲，放光滿室。門徒道俗莫不更增勇猛，人百其心。（《高僧傳》卷三《曇摩蜜多傳》，T no.2059, 50.342c25-29）

In the third year of the Yongchu era of the Song dynasty (422), he eventually arrived in Jiangling and resided at Changsha monastery. Within a dozen of days, he obtained a relic bead. Though small in form and substance, it had extraordinary luster and colors. When placed in a bowl of water, it drifted⁵⁷ and revolved clockwise, floating and sinking intermittently, with a radiant and splen-

did light. Everyone who was astonished by this miracle crowded in the streets, with sighs of amazement. (“the biography of Dharmamitra” in *Meisōdenshō*, X no.1523, 77.355b4-6)

The account that Dharmamitra obtained a relic bead within a dozen of days, which had extraordinary luster and colors, though small in form and substance. (the topical notes from *MSZ* juan 19, X no.1523, 77.361b7-9)

In the first year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (424),⁵⁸ Dharmamitra eventually traveled to the region of Shu.⁵⁹ After a short stay, he left the gorges and settled in Jiangling, where he built a meditation pavilion at the Changsha monastery. He prayed for the relics with utmost sincerity, and finally obtained one relic bead more than ten days later. The relic bead struck the vessel with a sound, lightening the entire room. His disciples, monastics and the laity alike, were even more courageous and pious. (*Gaoseng zhuan* 3, T no.2059, 50.342c25-29)

11

宋元嘉六年（429），賈道子行荊上明，見芙蓉方發，聊取還家。聞華有聲，怪尋之，得一舍利，白如真珠，焰照梁棟。敬之，擎以箱盛，懸于屋壁。家人每見佛僧外來，解所被，躍坐案上。有人寄宿不知，污慢之，乃夢人告曰：“此有釋迦真身，眾聖來敬。爾何行惡？死墮地獄，出為尼婢，何得不怖？”其人大懼，無幾癩死。舍利屋地生荷八枚，六旬乃枯，歲餘失之，不知所去。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411a15-22）

In the sixth year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (429), Jia Daozi traveled to Shangming monastery in Jingzhou,⁶⁰ where he saw a few burgeoning lotus flowers. He casually plucked some and took them back home. Upon hearing a sound from the flowers, he was curious and searched, finding a relic bead as white as a pearl. The flame from the relic illuminated the beams and rafters. He paid homage to it and placed it in a chest, hanging it on the wall of his house. When Buddhist monks from other places visited, Jia’s family would take off their outer garments and let them sit on the table. Once a man who stayed overnight was unaware and besmirched the relic, showing no respect. Then he dreamed of someone telling him: “Here resides the true body of Sakyamuni, to which all saints pay homage. Why did you commit such evil deeds? You will die and fall into hell, and to be reborn as a female slave.⁶¹ It is horrible, isn’t it?” The man was greatly frightened and soon died of leprosy. Eight lotus flowers grew on the ground surrounding the relic house, and withered after sixty days. More than one year later, they finally disappeared, no one knew where they went. (*GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52.411a15-22)

12

宋元嘉八年（431），會稽安千載者，家世奉佛。夜有扣門者，出見十餘人著赤衣，運材積門內，云官使作佛圖，忽無所見。明至他家齋食，上得一舍利紫色，椎打不碎。以水行之，光明照發，便自舉敬，常有異香。後出欲禮，忽而失之。尋覓備至，半日還得。

臨川王鎮江陵，迎而行之，雜光間出。佐吏沙門，咸見不同。王捧水器呪曰：（詞多如別辯之）呪訖，輒應聲光出。夜見百餘人，遶舍利屋燒香，特如佛狀。及明，人及舍利俱失矣。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411a23-b3）

In the eighth year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (431), there was a man named An Qianzai from Kuaiji prefecture, whose family had believed in Bud-

dharma for generations. One night, there was a knock on the gate. When he stepped out, he saw more than ten people dressed in red carrying wood and loading it inside the gate. They claimed to have been commissioned by the government to build a stūpa,⁶² and suddenly vanished from sight. The next day, when he went to the house of another person for an abstinence meal, he found a relic of purple-gold color right on top of the food, which could not be shattered even when struck. When floating on the water, it moved with a brilliant light shining. He thus picked it up and paid homage to it, which always had an unusual fragrance. Later, when he intended to take it out for worship, it suddenly disappeared. After a thorough search, it was found again after half a day.

When the Prince of Linchuan was to be the local official in Jiangling prefecture, he welcomed the relic to accompany him. On his journey, multi-colored lights intermittently emerged. Both the officials and the monks had different visions. The prince held a vessel full of water and chanted a spell (the words, which were quite lengthy, have been recorded elsewhere), and upon finishing the spell, lights immediately glowed in response. At night, he saw more than a hundred people surrounding the house that enshrined the relic, burning incense, as if they were worship the Buddha. By dawn, both the people and the relic were gone. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.411a23-b3)

13

宋元嘉九年（432），尋陽張須元家設八關齋，道俗數十人，見像前花上似冰雪，視得舍利數十。便以水行之，光焰相屬。後遂失之。數十日開厨更視，獲牙奩，中有白氈，裹舍利十枚，光焰屬天。諸處咸來請之。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411b4-8）

In the ninth year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (432), a man named Zhang Xuyuan from Xunyang⁶³ convened an Eight Precepts abstinence assembly⁶⁴ within his family. Dozens of lay and monastic participants saw something like ice and snow on the flowers in front of the statue. As they took a closer look, they discovered tens of relic beads. They then placed the relics in the water, and as a result, they moved with a continuous flame and light. After a while, the relics vanished. Dozens of days later, when they opened the kitchen⁶⁵ to look again, they found an ivory box containing ten relic beads wrapped in white fine cloth, with a shining flame reaching to the heavens. People from all places came to request them. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.411b4-8)

14

宋元嘉十五年（438），南郡凝之隱衡山，徵不出，奉五斗米道，不信佛法。夢見人去地數丈，曰：“汝疑方解。”覺，及悟，旦夕勤至，半年禮佛。忽見額下有紫光，瑞光處得舍利二枚。剖擊不損，水行光出。後於食時，口中隱齒，吐出有光。妻息又獲一枚。合有五枚。後又失之，尋爾又得云。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411b9-15）

In the fifteenth year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (438 AD), a man named Ningzhi from Nanjun Prefecture⁶⁶ lived a secluded life in Mount Heng. He refused to serve in the government when summoned, and practiced the Daoist Way of the Five Pecks of Rice, not believing in Buddhism. Once he dreamt of a man rising several *zhang* above the ground, saying, “Your doubts will soon be resolved”. Upon waking, he was enlightened and became diligent in his practice day and night, worshipping Buddha for half a year. Suddenly, he saw a purple light under his forehead, and where the auspicious light shone, he found two relic beads.

They could not be damaged by striking, and emitted light when moving in water. Later, during a meal, he felt something in the shape of a tooth hidden in his mouth. When he spat it out, he saw it shining. His wife and children also obtained one for each. In total, there were five relic beads. Later, they were lost, but soon found again. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.411b9-15)

15

宋元嘉十九年（442），高平徐椿讀經，及食，得二舍利，盛銀瓶中。後看漸增，乃至二十。後寄廣陵令馥，私開之空甕。椿在都忽自得之，後退轉皆失。舍利應現，值者甚多，皆敬而得之，慢而失也。（《集神州三寶感通錄》卷上，T no.2106, 52.411b16-20）

In the nineteenth year of the Yuanjia era of the Song dynasty (442), there was a man named Xu Chun from Gaoping prefecture.⁶⁷ When he had recited the scripture and started his meal, he found two relic beads and placed them in a silver vase. Later, he checked the relics and noticed the number gradually increased to twenty. He later entrusted them to governor of Guangling prefecture, named Fu. Fu opened the vase privately, and found it empty. Xuchun found them in the capital soon afterwards. Later, his devotion declined and the relics were gone.

There were numerous witnesses to the manifestation of relics. As a rule, one may gain the relics with reverence, and lose them with negligence. (GTL 1, T no.2106, 52.411b16-20)

16

本姓高，涼洲人也。志力勇猛。聞弗樓沙國有佛鉢，鉢今在罽賓臺寺，恒有五百羅漢供養鉢。鉢經騰空至涼洲，有十二羅漢，隨鉢停六年，後還罽賓。僧表恨不及見，乃至西踰蒼嶺，欲致誠禮。并至于實（=寘）國。值罽賓路梗，于實（=寘）王寄表有張志，模寫佛鉢與之，又問：“寧復有所願不？”對曰：“讚摩伽羅（=藍）有寶勝像。外國相傳云最似真相，願得供養。”王即命工巧，營造金薄像，金光陝高一丈，以真舍利置于頂上。僧表接還涼州，知涼土將亡，欲反淮海。經蜀欣平縣，沙門道汪求停鉢像供養，今在彼龍華寺。（《名僧傳抄·道表傳》，X no.1523, 77.358b13-23）

造金薄像以真舍利置于頂上事。（《名僧傳說處》第二十六，X no.1523, 77.362b1-2）

[The monk Daobiao] was surnamed Gao, a native of Liangzhou.⁶⁸ He was passionate and courageous. He heard that the Buddha's alms bowl, originally in the kingdom of Puruṣapura,⁶⁹ was now preserved in the imperial Monastery of Jibin,⁷⁰ where it was venerated by five hundred arhats. The bowl once flew through the air to Liangzhou, accompanied by twelve arhats who stayed for six years before returning to Jibin. Regretting not being able to see it, Sengbiao traveled to the west and crossed the Pamir mountains. He wished to pay his respects [to the bowl] with sincerity and to visit the kingdom of Kotan. When the road to Jibin was blocked, the king of Kotan wished for him to be ambitious in propagating [Buddhism],⁷¹ so he ordered the craftsman to draw a picture of the bowl and asked, "Is there anything else you wish for?" He replied, "There was a statute in Tsarma Vihāra.⁷² The foreigners said that it bears the closest resemblance to the true appearance, so I wish to [make a copy of the statue and] worship [on my return]". The king immediately ordered craftsmen to cast a gilded image, with a golden light that was one *zhang* tall,⁷³ and the genuine relics on the top. The monk received it and returned to Liangzhou. Knowing that the territory of Liang was about to be conquered, he wished to withdraw further to the region

between Huaihe river and the sea.⁷⁴ When he passed through Xinping County in the region of Shu,⁷⁵ the monk Daowang requested to stop and venerate the bowl and the statue, which are now still in the Longhua monastery there. (the biography of Daobiao from *Meisōdenshō*, X no.1523, 77.358b13-23)

The account of placing the genuine relics at the top of a gilded statue. (the topical notes from *MSZ* juan 26, X no.1523, 77.362b1-2)

17

宋太宗明皇帝至治克昌，口誦《般若》，造丈八金像四軀，鑄不成，改為丈四，立即圓滿，莊嚴成就，還高丈八。旦食解齋，爰感舍利。造弘普中寺以召名僧。（《辯正論》卷三，T no.2110. 52.503a7-9）

Emperor Ming of the Song dynasty (r. 466–472), with the ancestral title of taizong. The period [under his reign] was peaceful and prosperous. He chanted the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* and had planned to cast four golden statues, with the height of 1.8 *zhang* for each, which turned out be a failure. When the height was reduced to 1.4 *zhang*, the statues were completed all of a sudden, with splendid ornaments, and restored to 1.8 *zhang* again. When the emperor had the meal in the morning after the abstinence day, the relics emerged with the power of his devotion. He also built the inner Hongpu monastery⁷⁶ to house renowned monks. (*Bianzheng lun* 3, T no.2110, 52.503a7-9)

18

晉建元寺，建康太清里⁷⁷，寺基本宋北第。元徽二年（474）宮人陳太妃⁷⁸造寺塔。舍利靈應相仍，每夕放光。（下略）（《法苑珠林》卷三九，T no.2122, 53.594b2-8）

The Jianyuan Temple of the [eastern] Jin dynasty, was located in the *taiqing* district of Jiankang. Its foundation was originally the residence of the nobles near the northern palace gate during the Song dynasty.⁷⁹ In the second year of the Yuanhui era (474), the Empress Dowager Chen constructed the temple with a stūpa, where the relics manifested the miracles incessantly, shining every night. (*Fayuan zhulin* 39, T no.2122, 53.594b2-8)

19

張導之母吐焰暉盤（張導母王氏，素篤信。四月八日齋食，感得舍利。流光出口，暉映食盤。出《宣驗記》也）（《宣驗記》，《辯正論》卷七引，T no.2110, 52.539c8-9）

Zhang Dao's mother exhaled the flames illuminating the plate. (Zhang Dao's mother, with her natal surname Wang, was deeply devout. On the eighth day of the fourth month, when taking her abstinence meal, she obtained the relics with the power of her devotion. The radiant light flowed out of her mouth, illuminating and reflecting upon the plate. Originally from *the Records Proclaiming Manifestations*. (*Xuanyan ji*, as cited in *Bianzheng lun* 7, T no.2110, 52.539c8-9)

20

本姓凡，燉煌人也。……每中食，輒得舍利。諸有起塔者，皆給與之。自爾以後，氣力康勝。復得十年，年至六十餘，卒竹林寺。（《名僧傳抄·道韶傳》，X no.1523, 77.355c16-18）

道韶得舍利起塔事。（《名僧傳說處》第二十，X no.1523, 77.361b16-17）

[The monk Daoshao] was originally surnamed Fan, a native of Dunhuang. ... Whenever he had a meal at noon, he would acquire relics. When someone in-

tended to erect a stūpa, he would provide them with relics. From then on, he became strong and healthy. Ten years later, he passed away at the Bamboo Forest Temple at the age of over sixty. (the biography of Daoshao from *Meisōdendshō*, X no.1523, 77.355c16-18)

The account that the monk Daoshao acquired relics with the power of his devotion and established the stūpas. (the topical notes from *MSZ* juan 20, X no.1523, 77.361b16-17)

21

魏太子中庶子御史中丞陸載（載本吳人，為宋咸陽王義真行軍大都督史。後沒赫連，因即仕魏。有才調，善談諺，為魏朝貴公所見稱重，而性愛虛靜，常以佛法為意。每讀眾經，讚揚玄旨。末年精到，經字放光，口誦《法華》，時感舍利。）（《辯正論》卷三，T no.2110, 52.515c26-516a2）

Lu Zai, the Crown Prince's Assistant Minister and Deputy Censor-in-chief of northern Wei. (Lu Zai was originally a native of the Wu region and served as the grand commandant for the army of Prince Xianyang of the Song, Yi Zhen. Later, he was captured by the Helian troops and subsequently became an official in the northern Wei court. He was talented, known for his witty conversation, and was highly regarded by the nobles of the Wei court. However, he had a fondness for tranquility and devoted to the Buddhist dharma. He always read the scriptures and unveiled the profound meanings. In his later years, he became even more dedicated, so that the characters of the scriptures radiated. While reciting the *Lotus Sutra*, he would sometimes feel the presence of relics.) (*Bianzheng Lun* 3, T no.2110, 52.515c26-516a2)

Notes

- 1 For comprehensive studies on relic burial in China, see (Ran 2013; Zheng 2016; Wei Yu 2018; J. Gao 2019). In addition, (Mukai 2020) section II and (Shen 2018) chapter 3 are devoted to a discussion of relic caskets.
- 2 For the entries of *Youming lu* and *Xuanyan ji* restored by modern scholars, see (J. Li 2011, pp. 483–86, 586–90).
- 3 *Fayuan zhulin* juan 14, T no.2122, 53: 388c20-29.
- 4 I am immensely indebted to the Japanese annotation performed by the East Asian Art History Seminar at Waseda University, *Bijutsu shiryō to shite yomu Shū shinchū sampō Kantsū roku—Shakudoku to kenkyū (1–15)* 美術史料として読む『集神州三寶感通錄』—釈讀と研究（一–十五）(Tokyo: East Asian Art History Seminar, 2011–2023), especially vol. 5, henceforth *GTL tr.*
- 5 *GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52: 404a17-18: 初明舍利表塔，次列靈像垂降，後引聖寺瑞經神僧。
- 6 For the design and function of the ordination platform, see (Ōchō 1941, pp. 15–41; McRae 2005, pp. 68–100).
- 7 *Han faben neizhuan* 漢法本內傳 [Inner Transmission Regarding the Origin of the Dharma in the Han Dynasty], incorporated in *Poxie lun* 破邪論 [Treatise on Refuting the Heresies] juan 1, T no.2109, 52:480a22-24: 佛舍利光明五色，直上空中，旋環如蓋。遍覆大眾，映蔽日輪。For the date of this apocryphal text, see (Yoshioka 1970, pp. 276–308; Yoneda 2007, pp. 119–36).
- 8 *GTL* juan 1, T no.2106, 52:410b12-17.
- 9 *Weishu* 114.3028-29: 佛圖故處，鑿為濛汜池，種芙蓉於中。
- 10 The earliest usage of *guansi* 官寺 can be found in the *Biography of Fotucheng*, *Gaosengzhuan*, juan 9: 澄與弟子自官寺至中寺（Cheng went from the official temple to the central temple with his disciples.) (T no.2059, 50.384b1) Furthermore, from three instances in *Xu Gaosengzhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks], it can be clearly determined that there was a distinction between state-sponsored and privately funded temples during the late Northern dynasties period. See *Xu Gaosengzhuan*, juan 9, “Biography of Ling Yu” (T no.2060, 50.496a2-4); juan 25, “Biography of Yuantong” (T no.2060, 50.648 a16–18); juan 27, “Biography of Pu’an” (T no.2060, 50.681b14-16).
- 11 *Henan zhi* 1.66.
- 12 *Mengfan chi Fu* 濛汜池賦 [Rhapsody on Mengfan Lake], composed by Zhang Zai 張載 (fl.280–289) and later incorporated in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚[#]. See *Yiwen leiju* 9.173.
- 13 For an archeological survey of the water supply system, see (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2018, pp. 37–38).
- 14 (Fan 1978, pp. 4–5): 與太后共登之，視宮內如掌中，臨京師若家庭。以其目見宮中，禁人不聽升。
- 15 *Chu sanzang jijī* 13, T no.2145, 55:96b5-c1.

- 16 For the acceptance of the Asokan legends in medieval China, see (Palumbo 2014).
- 17 *Fo suoxing zan* 佛所行讚 [*Buddhacarita or In Praise of Buddha's Acts*] *juan* 5, T no.192, 04:52a28-b2:內絕煩惱火，外火不能燒，雖燒外皮膚，金剛真骨存。香油悉燒盡，盛骨以金瓶，如法界不盡，骨不盡亦然。Also refer to (Schopen 1997).
- 18 *Gaозuo biezhuan* 高座別傳 [*Biography of the High Seat Monk*], included in the notes of (J. Yu 2006, p. 119).
- 19 *Sanguo zhi* 64.1449: 又壞浮屠祠，斬道人。 *Liangshu* 54.790–91: 吳時有尼居其地，為小精舍，孫綝尋毀除之，塔亦同泯。吳平後，諸道人復於舊處建立焉。
- 20 For a panoramic view of the revivalist zest to retrospect the Han-wei heritage, refer to (Wei 2023).
- 21 *Foshuo yuyenu jing* 佛說玉耶女經 [*Sūtra on Lady Yuye*], T no.142a, 02: 864b27-28: 彫刻錦繡，作珠寶帳，懸繒幡蓋，燒眾名香，遶塔歌頌，聲徹十方。
- 22 In terms of dimensions, the base is 18 cm high and 22–24 cm wide. The body of the stūpa is 23 cm high with a diameter of 14 cm. The superstructure is 9 cm high and 8 cm wide.
- 23 (Mukai 2020, pp. 39–44) held the same opinion in his analysis of the vessel, but he did not mention the Gandharan precedents of the reliquaries as miniature stupas.
- 24 “*ganying*” is not only an important concept in Buddhist narrative but also a long-standing tradition in pre-Buddhist Chinese philosophy. Robert Sharf provides a systematic survey of this concept, see (Sharf 2005, pp. 77–136).
- 25 *Guang hongmingji juan* 廣弘明集 [*An Expansion of the Collection for Glorifying and Elucidating [Buddhism]*] *juan* 17, T no.2103. 52.213b26-29: 皇帝昔在潛龍，有婆羅門沙門來詣宅，出舍利一裹曰：“檀越好心。故留與供養。沙門既去，求之不知所在。其後皇帝與沙門曇遷，各置舍利於掌而數之，或多或少，並不能定。
- 26 *Xu gaosengzhuan*, *juan* 18, “the Biography of Tanqian”, T no.2060, 50.573c1-2. The memorial of Xuzhou許州 mentioned a work entitled *Yuwang zaota benji* 育王造塔本記, *Guang hongmingji*, *juan* 17, T no.2103, 52.219b27. *Guang hongmingji juan*17, T no.2103, 52:216b28-c6. The English translation is from (J. Chen 2002a, p. 106), note 49, with minor modifications.
- 27 It is plausible that the relics in food imply that the abstinence ritual could make the Buddha manifest before the worshiper, while the rotation of the relics on water imitates the clockwise circumambulation surrounding the stūpa (a place where the relics are enshrined). However, to the best of my knowledge, no scholarly treatises or Vinaya literature have provided explanations for these phenomena.
- 28 *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [*Biographies of the Eminent Monks*] *juan* 10, T no.2059, 50:389b13-17: 後止洛陽大市寺，手自細書黃縑，寫《大品經》一部，合為一卷。字如小豆，而分明可識，凡十餘本。以一本與汝南周仲智妻胡母氏供養。For the transmission of the manuscript, see (Z. Chen 2020, pp. 31–33).
- 29 *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 [*Treatise on the Orthodoxy of Buddhism*] *juan* 4, T no.2110, 52:515c27-28: 為宋咸陽王義真行軍大都督史，後沒赫連，因即仕魏。
- 30 For the descendants of the northern branch of the Lu family, see (S. Gao 2013, pp. 26–29).
- 31 Refer to the appendix of (J. Gao 2019, pp. 327–28).
- 32 Though there are records of relic miracles which took place in Northern China, the paradigm of worship of the Asokan relics is different, which I will discuss elsewhere.
- 33 The domain of the Apracas was probably centered in Bajaur and the Odi in the Swat Valley; refer to (Neelis 2010, pp. 17–19).
- 34 *Hou hanshu* 7.320: 飾芳林而考濯龍之宮，設華蓋以祠浮圖、老子。
- 35 For a study of copying scriptures as a devotional practice, see (Murata 2013).
- 36 For the Japanese translations of *Gaoseng zhuan*, see (Yoshikawa and Funayama 2009–2010). *GTL* 1, T no.2106, 52.404a17-18.
- 37 Refer to (Campany 2012).
- 38 For the manuscripts and the modern edition of *MSZ*, see (Kasuga 1936).
- 39 According to *Guang Shiyin Yingyan Ji*, by Fu Liang傅亮 (374–426), Zhu Changshu’s ancestors were Westerners, who possessed goods and were wealthy. They resided in the Jin territory, and during the Yuan Kang period (291–299), they settled in Luoyang. Fu Liang also records a miracle tale related to the cult of Guanyin, which, as pointed out by Sato Taishun, is the earliest known miracle tale of Guanyin to date. See *GTL tr.*, 38, note 36. See also Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 98–99, item 13.
- 40 The Japanese translators render this phrase as “the light revolved for three circles”, and further cite the descriptions in Buddhist scriptures and visual representations in Buddhist art, in which the light goes in a cursive line; see *GTL tr.*, 38–39, note 38. However, based on the descriptions of the relics in other miracle narratives, I am inclined to believe that here the subject of the verb “revolve” is the relics.
- 41 Jiangxia prefecture is located east of present-day Yunmeng county, Hubei province.
- 42 *Gaoseng zhuan* testifies that this sūtra, written on silk, was obtained from the Central Asian monk An Huize, who resided at the Dashi temple (the temple near the great market) in Luoyang. See *Gaoseng zhuan* 10, T50.2059.389b13-17. On the transmission of the manuscript, see (Z. Chen 2020).
- 43 See Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 110–11, item 21, with slight modifications.
- 44 Yuqian county is located near present-day Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.
- 45 The parallel passage in *Fayuan zhulin* reads “右行三匝” (rotating clockwise for three circles). *Fayuan zhulin* 40. T53.2122. 601a17.

- 46 The Japanese translators notice that the parallel passage in *Fayuan zhulin* reads “遂騰踊高四五尺”([the relics] bounced up four or five *chi* in height) juan 40, T no.2122, 53.601a17-18, see *GTL tr.*, 39–40, note 41.
- 47 The term “刹” is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word “*chattera*”, which refers to the umbrella-shaped structure at the top of a stūpa; see (Karashima 2017). It can also represent a generic term encompassing the central pillar of a stūpa, the stūpa itself, or even the entirety of the monastic complex, according to the context. (Kosugi 1980) argues that during the Six Dynasties, there was a common practice to insert a short wooden stake into the ground as a marker before constructing a stūpa. This wooden stake was called “*cha*”. See *GTL tr.*, 43–44, note 45. I translate “*cha*” as stūpa or the central pillar of the stūpa according to different contexts.
- 48 Guangling prefecture is located in present-day Yangzhou, Jiangsu province.
- 49 Yuhang county is located near present-day Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.
- 50 The Japanese translators render this phrase as “made money boxes with his hands”(手ずから錢差しを作る); see *GTL tr.*, 40. I suggest that the verb 索 means to thread together, and 錢貫 as a noun refers to the string of coins rather than the container.
- 51 Jian’an prefecture is located near present-day Jian’ou, Fujian province.
- 52 It is somewhat astonishing that the miracle of the relics occurred nearly a hundred years after the founding of the temple. However, it can be confirmed that the year 439 was not the date when Meng Jing built the temple.
- 53 The Changsha monastery was founded by Tanyi and was famous for the enormous “Aśoka Image”, as is narrated in *GTL 2, T* no.2106, 52.415b8-416b23.
- 54 Jiangling prefecture is located in present-day Jingzhou, Hubei province.
- 55 Pūraṇa-kāśyapa is one of the six heterodox teachers seen in the “Disciples Chapter” of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*.
- 56 The kingdom of Linyi is located in the eastern part of the Indochina Peninsula, which roughly corresponds to the central coastal region of present-day Vietnam.
- 57 The *XZJ* edition reads this phrase as “遙淥”(literally meaning distant green), which is difficult to understand. The second character in the manuscript appears to be 漾 (漾), which means to drift on the water. And the first character 遙 might have been a mistake or a variant of 搖 (to rock back and forth); therefore, I interpret the phrase as a compound word.
- 58 The date of Dharmamitra’s arrival at Jiangling, as narrated in *Gaoseng zhuan*, differs from that in *MSZ*. Here, Huijiao may have followed the date recorded in *Chusanjang jiji*; see Dharmamitra’s biography in *Chusanjang jiji* juan 14, T no.2145, 55.105a17-18.
- 59 The region of Shu refers to present-day Sichuan province.
- 60 The Japanese edition is punctuated between “上” and “明”, thus interpreting the whole sentence as “[Jia Daozi] walked alongside the Jingxi. At dawn of the second day...” (荆溪のほとりをいった。明けがたに), *GTL tr.*, 47. I suggest that 上明 was the name of a monastery located in Jingzhou. When Fu Jian’s army invaded the city of Jiangling, Tanyi, the disciple of Dao’an, had sought refuge at Shangming monastery. The fact that the lotus flowers were growing within the monastery partly explains the emergence of the relics.
- 61 The text reads 尼婢 (a Buddhist nun or a maid). It is confusing why being reborn as a nun is the evil retribution. The Japanese translation notes a variant reading in *Fayuan zhulin* as “奴婢”(female slave). I follow this reading in my translation.
- 62 浮圖, or 浮屠, was originally a phonetic transcription associated with “Buddha”, and the two words were used interchangeably. In later sources, especially literary works, the term usually refers to the stūpa or a Buddhist monastery or temple. See (Kaneko 1993; Junko Miyajima 2006).
- 63 Xunyang prefecture is located near present-day Jiujiang, Jiangxi province.
- 64 A one-day abstinence that lay Buddhists are supposed to undergo to uphold the Eight Precepts on six days of the month, the 8, 14, 15, 23, 29, and 30 of the lunar calendar.
- 65 The Japanese translators point out that the term “*chu*廚” can denote kitchen (くりや) or box/cabinet(はこ、ひつ), *GTL tr.*, 59, note 75. Here, I agree with the Japanese translation, which renders the term as a kitchen, since the story occurred during the Eight Precepts abstinence ritual, which is closely connected with food.
- 66 Nanjun prefecture is located in present-day Jiangling county, Hubei province.
- 67 Gaoping prefecture is located close to present-day Jining, Shandong province. The Japanese translators have identified the location in Longhui county, Hubei province, which is incorrect. The family of Xu was a prestigious clan in this area.
- 68 The administrative center of Liangzhou was located in present-day Wuwei, Gansu province.
- 69 Puruṣapura is located close to the city of Peshawar, in present-day Afghanistan.
- 70 The term “臺”(literally meaning a terrace) usually denotes the inner city where the central government and the imperial palace are located. Therefore, I translate the term “臺寺” as the imperial monastery. Kuwayama Shōshin argues that in 4th–5th century sources, the term “*jibin*” designated the greater Gandhāra area, including Swat, Taxila, Peshawar, and Haddā. See (Kuwayama 2006).
- 71 The meaning of this sentence is not clear. I interpret the word “寄” as the verb to wish, and “張志” as the ambition of propagating, but neither is the common usage in classical Chinese.

- 72 “羅” must have been a mistake for “藍”. The phrase has been correctly identified by Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 and Zhang Guangda 張廣達 as the Tsarma monastery in Khotan, which was frequently mentioned in documents in Chinese, Khotanese, and Tibetan. See (Zhang and Rong 1993).
- 73 I cannot find any appropriate interpretation of the word “陝”.
- 74 This was the core region under the Southern dynasties’ rule.
- 75 Xinping county is located to the northeast of present-day Chengdu, Sichuan province.
- 76 “Hongpu” might have been a mistake for “Puhong”. The term “zhong” seems to imply that the monastery is situated within the imperial palace or a residence. Later in the Southern Qi, Prince Xiao Ziliang convened several assemblies for doctrinal discussions at the Puhong monastery; see (M. Li 2021).
- 77 Taiqingli was located six *li* to the southwest of Shang Yuan county of the Tang. Emperor Wu of the Liang had established a Jietuo temple here in the tenth year of the Tianjian era 天監 (511). *Jiankang Shilu* 17.676-77.
- 78 Empress Dowager Chen, whose personal name was Miaodeng, was originally a daughter of a butcher’s family in Jiankang. She was entitled as a noble consort during the reign of Emperor Ming of Song; see *Songshu* 41.1296.
- 79 The term “北第” (northern residence), as explained by Yan Shigu 顏師古 in his commentary on *the Book of Han*, refers to “the residences close to the northern palace gate”, indicating the mansions of noble families and distinguished officials.

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Article

The Transmission and Textual Transformation of the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 from the 6th to 13th Centuries

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Abstract: The *Shisong lü* 十誦律, translated in the early 5th century, remains the only complete version of this Buddhist Vinaya text preserved to date and represents the first Vinaya text translated into Chinese. This Vinaya text introduced standardized terminology that significantly influenced subsequent translations of Vinaya texts and profoundly impacted Chinese Buddhism during the Six Dynasties period. Due to its complex translation history, the text is bifurcated into two lineages: the Northern lineage, featuring an initial 58-scroll version (without a preface), and the Southern lineage, with an expanded 61-scroll version (including a preface). This study examines the two oldest extant manuscripts of the *Lüxu* 律序 (*Preface to the Shisong lü*) from the Southern lineage—one from the Dunhuang collection currently preserved in Japan and the other from the Nara Japan. Through intensive comparisons with woodblock editions, these manuscripts from Dunhuang, and ancient Japanese manuscript Buddhist canons, this study not only traces the textual evolution of the Southern lineage of the *Shisong lü* from the 6th to the 13th centuries but also offers new insights into both the historical development and the relationship between these two lineages of the text. Methodologically, this paper provides inspiration for textual criticism of the Vinaya in particular and Buddhist studies in general.

Keywords: the *Shisong lü* 十誦律; *Lüxu* 律序; textual criticism; lineages of texts; Buddhist canons

The **Daśa-bhāṇavāra-vinaya* (alt. **Sarvāstivādavīnaya? *Daśādhyāya-vinaya*) was translated in the early 5th century into Chinese as the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (*The Ten Recitation Vinaya*). Since then, the *Shisong lü*, as the first Chinese Vinaya text, has remained the only complete version of this Buddhist Vinaya (see Hirakawa 1960, p. 128). Although it has been less influential in the history of Chinese Buddhism when compared to the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (*Dharmaguptaka-vinaya; The Four Part Vinaya*), the *Shisong lü* significantly influenced later Chinese translations of Vinaya texts by introducing standardized terminology¹. The translation of the *Shisong lü*, which is discussed in detail below, was complicated and significant. This complexity led to the text bifurcating into two lineages shortly after the completion of the translation: the Northern lineage, based on the initial 58-scroll draft translated in Chang'an (present-day Xi'an, Shaanxi), and the Southern lineage, represented by an expanded 61-scroll version completed in Shouchun 壽春 (present-day Shouxi, Anhui). Both lineages have textual witnesses. Given the *Shisong lü*'s diversity in textual sources, scholars have shown particular interest in its transmission and textual transformations, exploring the respective evolutions of the two lineages and their relationship. This paper aims to contribute to this field by examining these aspects in greater detail.

Textual studies on the *Shisong lü* have evolved through two distinct phases. In the earliest stage, Japanese scholar Hirakawa Akira, with his seminal articles, established foundational methodologies and offered new insights into the text. Notably, he highlighted discrepancies in the historical records from the Six Dynasties and Sui-Tang periods regarding the relationship between the Southern and Northern lineages as well as the origins of the *Lüxu* 律序 (the Preface to the Vinaya) (Hirakawa 1960, p. 128). His detailed analysis of the Northern lineage manuscript of the *Shisong lü* (S.797), found among the Dunhuang

manuscripts, revealed significant differences in division, content, linguistic style, and terminology when compared to later canonical texts (Hirakawa 1963, pp. 545–51). In recent years, Chinese scholars have made substantial contributions to this field. They have discovered 70 fragments of Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts, thereby facilitating comparative studies that clarify the relationship between two lineages of texts (see Wang 2021, pp. 84–95; Liu 2021b, pp. 7–18; Liu 2022, pp. 27–43). By analyzing a range of sources from the Six Dynasties to the Five Dynasties period—including biographies of monks, scripture catalogs, and phonetic glossaries—and by utilizing diverse textual resources like woodblock editions of the Buddhist canons and ancient Japanese manuscript Buddhist canons from the Nara, Heian, and Kamakura periods², these scholars have explored variations in the organization of Southern lineage texts and the underlying reasons for these differences (see Wang 2022, pp. 26–40).

Evidently, the depth and variety of the primary material have essentially shaped our understanding of how Buddhist scriptures are transmitted and transformed over time. In line with this, the present paper takes full advantage of the two oldest extant manuscripts of the *Lüxu* (Preface to the *Shisong lü*) from the Southern lineage—one from the Dunhuang collection currently preserved in Japan and the other from the Nara Japan. This study consists of three sections. It begins with an examination of the significance of the *Lüxu* in the textual study of the *Shisong lü*, emphasizing how changes in the position of the *Lüxu* within the *Shisong lü* reflect the general evolution of the *Shisong lü* itself. The second section introduces representative texts of the first scroll of the *Lüxu*, including manuscripts from the Southern Dynasties, Nara Japan, and various woodblock editions, so as to provide a foundational understanding for comparative analysis. The final section presents an comprehensive comparison of the first scroll of the *Lüxu* across different versions of the *Shisong lü*, tracing changes in content, structure, and terminology to reveal patterns of textual evolution of the Vinaya text from the 6th to the 13th centuries. This paper will offer new insights into the development of the southern lineage of the *Shisong lü* and into the relationship between the southern and northern lineages of it. Methodologically, it will provide inspiration for the textual criticism of the Vinaya in particular, and of Buddhist studies in general.

1. The Significance of the *Lüxu* in the Study of the *Shisong lü*

The translation of the *Shisong lü* was eventful, and the translated manuscript was bifurcated into two textual lineages since the early 5th century. On the seventeenth day of the tenth month in the sixth year of the Hongshi 弘始 era of the Yao Qin 姚秦 dynasty (404 AD), Punyatāra 弗若多羅 (fl. 404), a Buddhist monk from Central Asia, recited the text in Sanskrit, while Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (343–413) provided the Chinese rendition. Unfortunately, Punyatāra's untimely death from illness left the project incomplete, with only about two-thirds of the text translated³. The following year, Dharmaruci 曇摩流支 (fl. 405) arrived in Chang'an 長安, and he, at the request of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) at Mount Lu 廬山, collaborated with Kumārajīva to complete the initial Chinese draft. This draft had 58 scrolls, but it remained unedited before Kumārajīva's death in the eleventh year of the Hongshi era (409 AD)⁴. Fortunately, Vimalākṣa 卑摩羅叉 (?–413), Kumārajīva's Vinaya teacher, was in Chang'an at the time. After Kumārajīva's death, Vimalākṣa traveled to the Eastern Jin territory and completed an expanded version consisting of 61 scrolls by revising the initial draft at Shijian Monastery 石澗寺 in Shouchun⁵. Due to this complex translation history, the *Shisong lü* has two traditions in its texts, with the initial 58-scroll draft establishing the northern lineage and the expanded 61-scroll version establishing the Southern lineage. Both lineages have surviving texts: the Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts primarily represent the Northern lineage (non-canonical texts) (See Hirakawa 1963, pp. 545–51; Wang 2021, pp. 26–40; Liu 2021a; Liu 2021b, pp. 7–18; Liu 2022, pp. 27–43), while the woodblock editions as well as Japanese manuscript Buddhist canons embody the Southern lineage (canonical texts).

Disputes and debates have persisted regarding the relationship between these versions. Early sources from the Southern Dynasties, such as the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biogra-*

phies of Eminent Monks) and *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collection of Records about the Translation of the Tripitaka), viewed the Southern lineage as a revision of the Northern lineage, without specific reference to the “Preface to the Vinaya”.⁶ During the Sui Dynasty, works such as the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 (Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures) by Fajing 法經 (fl. 594) and the *Lidai Sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 (Records of the Three Treasures throughout the Successive Dynasties) described the Southern lineage as a “retranslation” or “alternative translation” of the Northern lineage⁷. However, during the Tang Dynasty, a more balanced perspective emerged, notably through the *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (Kaiyuan Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures), which compared two Northern lineage versions (with 58 and 59 scrolls) to one Southern lineage version (with 61 scrolls)⁸ and claimed that the 58-scroll “Ten Recitations” was jointly translated by Punyatāra, Kumārajīva, and others, while the 3-scroll *Lüxu* was augmented by Vimalākṣa⁹. Among modern scholars, Hirakawa Akira supported the historical view from the Southern Dynasties, suggesting that the Southern lineage was a reconstruction, noting that the Northern lineage also contained content corresponding to the “Preface to the Vinaya”, albeit structured differently. This suggests that it is unlikely that Vimalākṣa originally translated it. Conversely, Chinese scholars have argued that the 58-scroll “Ten Recitations” in the Southern lineage was revised based on the Northern lineage, while the 3-scroll *Lüxu* was indeed an original translation by Vimalākṣa (see Wang 2021, pp. 84–95; Liu 2022, p. 42).

Notably, it turns out that the *Lüxu* is pivotal for discussions about the relationship between the two lineages of the text and the evolution of the Southern lineage. The *Shisong lü* of the Southern lineage comprises two parts: the *shisong* 十誦 (Ten Recitations) and the *Lüxu*. The “Ten Recitations” section has ten chapters, with each recitation in one chapter. The first to the sixth recitations deal with precepts for monks, and the seventh deals with those specifically for nuns. The “Eighth Recitation” addresses additional regulations, the “Ninth Recitation” Upavasatha’s questions, and the last miscellaneous regulations. The “Preface to the Vinaya”, also known as the “Preface to the *Shisong lü* 十誦律序” or simply the “Vinaya Preface 毗尼序”, documents the background, process, and narratives associated with the compilation of the three Piṭakas, with a special focus on the Vinaya. This preface is organized into three scrolls. The first scroll encompasses the first section, the “Dharma of Tripitakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhikṣus 五百比丘集三藏法”, and the primary part of the second section, the “Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus 七百比丘集滅惡法”. The second scroll covers the ending part of the second section and the third section, “The Section of Miscellaneous Vinayas 毗尼雜品”. Finally, the last scroll contains the fourth section, “The Causal Section 因緣品”.

Changes in the position of *Lüxu* have punctuated the evolution of the Southern lineage. Evidence from the Six Dynasties through the Sui-Tang periods shows that the combination of the newly added *Lüxu* with the inherited “Ten Recitations” from the Northern lineage was not entirely stable but instead exhibited a discernible pattern. According to the positions of the *Lüxu*, we can categorize the Southern lineage *Shisong lü* into three distinct types: *Lüxu danzhi* 律序單置 (Preface Independently Placed), *Lüxu houzhi* 律序後置 (Preface Post-Placed), and *Lüxu qianzhi* 律序前置 (Preface Pre-Placed). The emergence and alternation among these three configurations mark four distinct phases in the evolution of the text.¹⁰

1. First phase (Six Dynasties period): Known as the *Lüxu danzhi* type, where the *Lüxu* was independent from the “Shisong (Ten Recitations)” (see Wang 2022, pp. 28–30). The last recitation, also called the “Tenth Recitation” or alternatively the “Virtuous Recitation 善誦” or the “Vinaya Recitation 毗尼誦”, concluded this section.
2. Second phase (Sui and early Tang periods): This period introduced the *Lüxu houzhi* type, where the *Lüxu* was appended at the end of the “Tenth Recitation”, collectively referred to as the “Virtuous Recitation”.¹¹ Notably, the definitions of the “Virtuous Recitation” and the “Vinaya Recitation” shifted during this phase. While the “Virtuous Recitation” still referred to the last recitation, it now included both the “Tenth

Recitation” and the “Preface to the Vinaya”. In contrast, the “Vinaya Recitation” specifically referred to the “Preface to the Vinaya”.

3. Third phase (early Tang to the Kaiyuan era [713–741]): the *Lüxu xianzhi* type emerged, positioning the *Lüxu* after the “Ninth Recitation” and before the “Tenth Recitation”.
4. Fourth phase (the middle to late Tang dynasty and the Five Dynasties period): This phase saw a return to the prominence of the *Lüxu houzhi* type, largely due to the influence of Zhisheng 智昇 (fl. 730) in his *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu*¹². Zhisheng not only highly recommended the previously popular *Lüxu houzhi* type but also significantly impacted the naming and perception of the “Preface to the Vinaya”. He renamed it the “Vinaya Preface 毗尼序”, replacing the second phase’s “Vinaya Recitation” and effectively restoring the “Vinaya Preface” from “recitation” back to “preface”.¹³

The *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* had a profound impact on the compilation of Buddhist scriptures and canons following the middle Tang period. Its influence was such that later editions of the Buddhist canon edition, from the late Tang through the Five Dynasties period, recognized the *Lüxu houzhi* type as orthodox¹⁴. Moreover, subsequent editions during the Song, Jin, and Goryeo periods continued to include this arrangement, referring to the preface in question as the “Vinaya Preface 毗尼序”. These insights into the evolution of the *Shisong lü* text draw on historical sources from the Six Dynasties to the Sui and Tang periods. This paper seeks to trace the developmental trajectory of the *Shisong lü* text through a comparative study of the first scroll of the *Lüxu*.

2. Representative Texts of the First Scroll of the *Lüxu*

In this paper, our discussion is specifically focused on the first scroll of the *Lüxu* both for its inherent significance and for practical reasons. The first scroll includes a manuscript from the Southern Dynasties discovered in Dunhuang, another from the Nara period in Japan, and various woodblock editions. By comparing these texts from different periods and types, we can concretely validate hypotheses regarding the evolution of the *Shisong lü* text. Now let us first introduce several representative texts of the first scroll of the *Lüxu*.

The first and foremost is a Dunhuang manuscript. As of 2021, Chinese scholars have cataloged 54 pieces of Dunhuang manuscripts and 14 Turfan manuscripts that are related to the *Shisong lü*. Among them, only four small fragments (Äx.16098...Äx.16427, Äx.18578...Äx.9278) have been identified as part of the *Lüxu* (see Liu 2021b, pp. 70–71). Recently, however, it came to my attention that among Japan’s newly designated nationally important cultural properties, there is a Dunhuang manuscript of the *Lüxu* (No. 951) that is owned by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. Given that this manuscript concludes with a dedication from the Southern Liang dynasty, hereinafter we refer to it as the “Liang version”. The Liang version is 20 sheets in total: the first sheet, slightly damaged, has 25 remaining columns, while sheets 2 through 19 each have 31 columns, and the 20th sheet contains 26 columns. In addition to the 606 columns of the main text, the manuscript has an end title indicating “the First Scroll of the *lüxu* 律序卷第上”. Additionally, it features a two-column colophon, which reads: “In the fourth month of the fourth year of the Putong era in the Liang Dynasty (523), the mao (i. e. rabbit) year, the Canon of Inexhaustible Righteous Dharma, copied the Vinaya for circulation and making offerings 梁普通四年太歲卯四月正法無盡藏寫律流通供養”. Transcribed just over a hundred years after the translation of the *Shisong lü*, the Liang version is relatively complete in terms of content, and the manuscript is well-preserved and features clear and neat handwriting. As the only surviving manuscript of the *Lüxu* from the Liang dynasty, its literary value is immeasurable.

Next, let us consider an imperial manuscript from the Nara Japan. During this time, many scripture-copying projects were carried out by the official scripture-copying institution, but only two that received the highest endorsement from the government were officially designated as “imperial authorized 敕定” canons. The first is the “Scriptures/Canon [copied] at the behest of Empress Kōmyō’s 光明皇后御願經”, also known as the “Scriptures/Canon [with the Imperial Wish Text dated] on the first day of the fifth month [of

the twelfth year of the Tenpyō 天平 era (740)] *Gogatsutsuitachikyō* 五月一日經”, transcribed between the fifth year of the Tenpyō era (733) and the eighth year of the Tenpyō Shōhō 天平勝寶 era (756). The second is the “Scriptures/Canon [copied] at the behest of Emperor Shōtoku 稱徳天皇御願經”, also known as the “Jingo-Keiun Canon 神護景雲經”, which was transcribed between the second year of the Tenpyō Hōji 天平寶字 era (758) and the third year of the Jingo-keiun 神護景雲 era (770)¹⁵. Notably, in these two imperial canons that served as the foundation for the Japanese manuscript canon, the texts of the *Shisong lü* feature the *Lüxu* (Scrolls 55–57) positioned at the end of the “Ninth Recitation” and before the “Tenth Recitation”. This arrangement is a distinctive characteristic of the “Preface Pre-Placed” type. In history, although such editions remained popular until the Kaiyuan era of the Tang Dynasty, they gradually disappeared from China by the end of the Tang Dynasty and the beginning of the Five Dynasties period. Consequently, Japanese manuscripts are a crucial supplement to the Chinese editions by preserving variations and traditions no longer available in their country of origin¹⁶. Coming back to the first scroll of the *Lüxu*, although it is missing in the May 1st Canon collection (Scroll 55), a manuscript from the Jingo-Keiun Canon collection (hereinafter referred to as the “Jingo version”) is preserved at the Ishiyama-dera 石山寺 Temple in Shiga Prefecture, Japan. The Jingo version is complete, clearly handwritten, and well-preserved. It consists of 28 sheets, each containing 24 columns with 17 characters per column. Notably, the scroll concludes with an “Imperial Wish Text” dated May 13th of the second year of the Jingo-Keiun era (768), which significantly enhances its historical textual value.

Finally, we turn our attention to the woodblock editions of the Buddhist canons. Produced in the Song, Jin, and Yuan Dynasties (including Goryeo), these canons are categorized into three main lineages. The Central Plains lineage comprises the Kaibao Canon 開寶藏, the Goryeo Canons 高麗藏 (both the first and second editions), and the Jin Canon 金藏. The Northern lineage includes the Khitan Canon 契丹藏, while the Southern lineage features the Fuzhou Canons 福州藏 (including the Dongchan 東禪 and Kaiyuan 開元 editions), the Sixi Canon 思溪藏, the Qisha Canon 磧砂藏, and the Puning Canon 普寧藏 (see Chikusa 2000, pp. 281–89). Among them, the Khitan Canon, which represents the Northern lineage, has long been lost. Nevertheless, by referencing the records in *Xin zan yiqiejing yuanpin cilu* 新續一切經源品次錄 from the end of the Tang Dynasty and the *Xin ji zangjing yinyi suihan lu* 新集藏經音義隨函錄 from the Five Dynasties, we can infer the internal structure of the Khitan edition, including the *Shisong lü*. This edition likely represented a mature 61-scroll *Lüxu houzhi* type, consisting of 58 scrolls of the “Ten Recitations” and 3 scrolls of the “Preface to the Vinaya” (see Chi 2021). Not only did it adhere to the ideal form revered by the *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu*, but it also represented the mainstream text in the Northern region during the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods.

Within the Central Plains lineage, several editions of the *Shisong lü* are preserved: the Kaibao edition, of which only 1 scroll (Scroll 46) has survived (see Fang and Li 2010); the Goryeo Initial edition, with 15 scrolls remaining (Scrolls 12–15, 18–19, 42–45, and 48–52)¹⁷, the Goryeo Re-carved edition, which is complete with 61 scrolls¹⁸; and the Jin edition, preserved with 54 scrolls (Scrolls 1–2, 4–7, 9–20, 22–36, 39–43, 45, and 47–61)¹⁹. This lineage also exemplifies a 61-scroll *Lüxu houzhi* type, consisting of 59 scrolls of the “Ten Recitations” and 2 scrolls of the “Preface to the Vinaya”, which significantly differs in structure from the Northern lineage previously mentioned. Notably, there are minor variations in the first six recitations of the “Ten Recitations”, with only one notable difference occurring in the “First Recitation” (at the boundary between Scrolls 3 and 4). However, the differences become pronounced in the last four recitations. For example, the Central Plains editions include an additional scroll in the “Seventh Recitation” (Scrolls 42–47), compared to the Northern edition (Scrolls 42–46). This additional scroll causes a shift in the numbering of scrolls starting from the “Eighth Recitation” onwards. Apart from a few exceptions (Scrolls 50–52), the division of scrolls also varies across these editions. Additionally, in the Central Plains editions, the three scrolls of the *Lüxu* are compressed into two scrolls: the first scroll is incorporated into Scroll 60, while the second and third scrolls are combined into Scroll 61.

Lastly, the *Shisong lü* within the woodblock canons from the Southern lineage is remarkably well-preserved, notably in the earliest Fuzhou Dongchan edition (Kunai-chō shoryō-bu shūzō kanseki shūran n.d.). This edition also adheres to the 61-scroll “Preface Post-Placed” type, comprising 58 scrolls of the “Ten Recitations” and 3 scrolls of the “Preface to the Vinaya”. In this version, the *Lüxu* is divided into the first, second, and third scrolls, which are simply annotated as “Nine”, “Ten”, and “Eleven” (corresponding to scrolls 59, 60, and 61, respectively). Compared to the Northern edition, the Dongchan edition exhibits only minor differences in the division of scrolls for the “Third Recitation” (at the boundary between Scrolls 19 and 20), the “Ninth Recitation” (at the boundary between Scrolls 53 and 54), and the “Tenth Recitation” (at the boundary between Scrolls 55 and 56). The division of other scrolls is mostly consistent. In conclusion, while all versions of the *Shisong lü* in the woodblock canons all represent a 61-scroll *Lüxu houzhi* type, each edition displays unique characteristics. Consequently, this paper selects the Dongchan, Jin, and Goryeo Re-carved editions of the first scroll of the *Lüxu* (hereinafter referred to as the “Dongchan version”, “Jin version”, and “Goryeo version”) for comparative analysis with the two manuscripts, the “Liang version” and “Jingo version”.

3. Comparative Study on the First Scroll of the *Lüxu*

For a long time, scholars have had two major concerns in their discussions on the *Shisong lü* text: the relationship between the Northern and Southern lineages and the evolution of the Southern lineage. For the relationship, scholars have achieved preliminary progress through comparative studies between Dunhuang manuscripts and canonical versions. Regarding the second issue, given that previous studies have primarily focused on structural changes, textual variations need further analysis. Against this backdrop, centering on the first scroll of the *Lüxu*, especially the Liang version, and through detailed comparisons with representative texts from different periods, including the Jingo version, the Dongchan version, the Jin version, and the Goryeo version, hopefully, we can trace the trajectory of the Southern lineage’s evolution.

3.1. The Chronological Order of the Textual Sources

To identify the patterns of textual evolution, it is essential to first establish the chronological order of the textual sources. We shall begin by considering the dates of copying or carving various texts. The dating inscription indicates the Liang version was copied in 523, making it the earliest extant manuscript of the *Lüxu*. The Jingo version lacks a dating inscription, but since the Jingo-keiun Canon was copied around 758–769, it should be second in antiquity after the Liang version. The Dongchan version includes an engraving inscription dated the fifth year of the Shaosheng 紹聖 era (1098), making it the oldest extant woodblock edition of the *Lüxu*. The Jin version and Goryeo version do not have dating inscriptions, but judging from the era of the Canon’s carving, the former likely dates between 1149 and 1173 and the latter between 1233 and 1248. While the Liang version and Jingo version are manuscripts reflecting the text feature of their times, determining the textual basis of the woodblock editions is more complex due to the absence of direct sources. Thus, a comparison of textual content across these versions is crucial to ascertain the chronological order of their sources.

The earliest recorded notice of discrepancies between woodblock editions was made by Sugi 守其 (fl. 1247) and others responsible for collating the Re-carved Edition of the Goryeo Canon. They documented these differences in the 20th scroll of their *Collation Supplementary Records* 校正別錄, highlighting variations in Scroll 5 of the *Shisong lü* between the Khitan edition 丹本 and the Goryeo Initial edition 國本 and the Kaibao edition 宋本²⁰.

Notably, The Khitan edition contained three additional large passages:

1. Where the Goryeo and Song editions contained only the phrase “up to the thirtieth day all as above mentioned 乃至三十日皆如上說”, with 9 characters, the Khitan edition expanded this to 1269 characters.

2. For the section spanning “from the twelfth day to the thirtieth day also as above mentioned 十二日乃至三十日亦如上說”, the Goryeo and Song editions had only 12 characters, while the Khitan edition again extended this to 1269 characters.
3. In another instance, while the Goryeo and Song editions repeated the same 12 characters as before, the Khitan edition expanded this to 1341 characters.

These three substantial additions found in the Khitan edition were incorporated into the Goryeo Re-carved edition.

This collation note highlights two significant facts:

1. There are at least three discrepancies between the Kaibao and Khitan editions. The Kaibao edition simplifies the text by using only a few characters for each of the three instances, thereby avoiding repetition. In contrast, the Khitan edition includes full repetitions of the text without omissions.
2. There was a shift in editorial attitudes between the Initial and Re-carved editions of the Goryeo Canon. The Initial edition favored the concise style of the Kaibao edition, while the Re-carved edition aligned more closely with the comprehensive detailing found in the Khitan edition.

Scroll 5 of the Jin Canon reveals that the three passages abovementioned are also presented in abbreviated form, which appears to be a characteristic of the Central Plains lineage. Turning our attention to the Jiangnan editions, the Dongchan edition serves as a pertinent example. It not only abbreviates the aforementioned three passages but also shortens two additional passages to 12 characters each. In contrast, these two passages contain 1349 characters and 1021 characters in the Jin and the Re-carved Goryeo editions, respectively. This pattern suggests that the Jiangnan editions characteristically abbreviate all five passages. Thus, comparisons of Scroll 5 reveal that, among the woodblock editions, the Jiangnan edition is the most concise, followed by the Central Plains edition, while the Northern edition is the most complete. From this comparison, several inferences can be drawn:

1. The content of the Northern edition is the most complete, probably because it relied on Northern manuscripts from the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods.
2. The Jiangnan edition is the most concise and shows the greatest deviation from the Northern edition, suggesting that its source manuscripts from the Jiangnan region are the earliest.
3. The Central Plains edition occupies a middle ground in terms of text complexity, indicating that its source manuscripts from Yizhou 益州 are older than those of the Northern edition but more recent than those of the Jiangnan edition.

Upon examining the Central Plains edition of the *Lüxu*, it is evident that both the Jin version and the Goryeo version exhibit signs of modification. In particular, the Jin version displays localized alterations on the existing wooden blocks, whereas the Goryeo version has undergone a more extensive re-typesetting process, resulting in significantly more modifications. Differences between the two editions include variations in formatting elements such as head titles, subtitles, and translator names, and there are 62 textual differences between them. These discrepancies are likely due to the Goryeo version’s reliance on the Khitan edition.

When these versions are compared with the Jiangnan edition, represented by the Dongchan version, only 6 out of the 62 identified textual differences are common between the Goryeo version and the Dongchan version. In contrast, a substantial 49 differences align with the Jin version and the Dongchan version. This pattern indicates that the Goryeo version, influenced by the Khitan edition, not only diverges from the Central Plains tradition but also significantly distances itself from the Dongchan version. Positioned between the Central Plains and Northern editions, the Goryeo version thus represents a relatively newer textual form, reflecting a distinct evolutionary path in the manuscript tradition.²¹

To decide whether the Donchan edition or the Jin edition is older, a direct comparison with the Liang version is effective. The findings are as follows:

1. Between the Liang version and the Dongchan version, there are 74 differences, with 56 of them unique to the Liang version.
2. Between the Liang version and the Jin version, there are 178 differences, with 86 unique to the Jin version.
3. Additionally, there are only 16 common differences between the Liang and Jin versions.

This analysis reveals that the textual content of the Dongchan version is closer to that of the Liang version, which is the oldest extant *Lüxu*. This suggests that the Dongchan version and its source manuscripts from the Jiangnan region are quite early. In contrast, the Jin version shows more divergence from the Liang version, indicating that the Central Plains edition, from which the Jin edition is derived, is slightly later. Furthermore, the textual source of the Goryeo version, heavily influenced by the Khitan edition and its Northern origins, is presumably even later.

Regarding the Jingo version, in addition to the 52 unique differences found in the Liang version, there are 106 textual differences between the two manuscripts. Of these 28 differences are unique to the Jingo version, 2 are shared with the Dongchan version, and the remaining 76 are shared exclusively with the Jin version. Notably, these 76 shared differences between the Jingo version and Jin version are the same as those shared between the Liang and Dongchan editions.

This analysis shows that the Dongchan version is more closely aligned with the Liang version than the Jingo version. Conversely, the Jingo version is closer to the Jin version than to the Dongchan version. Consequently, tracing the textual lineage from the oldest extant version, the Liang version, the sequence is as follows: the Dongchan version is the next closest, followed by the Jingo version, with the Jin version’s source coming later. The sources of the Khitan edition and the Goryeo version are the most recent in this lineage.

3.2. The Changes in the Textual Content of the *Lüxu*

After having determined the chronological order of the textual origin among the five texts on the first scroll of the *Lüxu*—the Liang version, the Dongchan version, the Jingo version, the Jin version, and the Goryeo version—we now turn to structural changes across these texts. Let us first list and compare the head titles, translator names, subtitles, and end titles of each version (see Table 1).

Table 1. Structural Changes between the Five Versions of the *Lüxu*.

| | Liang Version | Dongchan Version | Jingo Version | Jin Version | Goryeo Version |
|-------------------|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| Head title | (missing) | 十誦律毗尼序卷上 (九) The First Scroll of the Vinaya Preface to the <i>Shisong lü</i> (Nine) | 十誦律卷第五十五 The Fifty-Fifth Scroll of the <i>Shisong lü</i> | 十誦律善誦毗尼序卷上第六十 The Sixtith and the First Scroll of the Vinaya Preface to the Virtuous Recitation of the <i>Shisong lü</i> | 十誦律卷第六十善誦毗尼序卷上 The Sixtith Scroll of the <i>Shisong lü</i> , the First Scroll of the Vinaya Preface to the Virtuous Recitation |
| Translator | (missing) | 東晉三藏卑摩羅叉續譯 Extended Translation by Tripiṭaka Master Vimalākṣa of the Eastern Jin Dynasty | (none) | 五百比丘結集三藏法品第一 Dharma of Tripiṭakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhiksus, First. 三藏卑摩羅叉續譯 Extended Translation by Tripiṭaka Master Vimalākṣa | 東晉罽賓三藏卑摩羅叉續譯 Extended Translation by Tripiṭaka Master Vimalākṣa from Kashmir during the Eastern Jin Dynasty |

Table 1. Cont.

| | Liang Version | Dongchan Version | Jingo Version | Jin Version | Goryeo Version |
|------------|--|--|--|---|---|
| Subtitle 1 | (missing) | 五百比丘集滅善法 Dharma of Tripiṭakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhikṣus | 毗尼序五百比丘集 三藏法(善誦) Dharma of Tripiṭakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhikṣus, the Virtuous Recitation | (none) | 五百比丘結集三藏 法品第一 Dharma of Tripiṭakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhikṣus, First |
| Subtitle 2 | 七百比丘集滅惡法 第二 Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second | 七百比丘集滅惡法 第二 Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second | 七百比丘集滅惡法 第二 Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second | 七百比丘集結滅惡法 第二 Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second | 七百比丘集滅惡法品 第二之二 Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second |
| End title | 律序卷第上 The First Scroll of the <i>lüxu</i> | 十誦律毗尼 序卷上(九) The First Scroll of the Vinaya Preface to the <i>Shisong lü</i> (Nine) | 十誦律第九誦卷 第五十五 The Fifty-Fifth Scroll, the Ninth Recitation of the <i>Shisong lü</i> | 十誦律卷第六十 The Sixtith Scroll of the <i>Shisong lü</i> | 十誦律卷第六十 The Sixtith Scroll of the <i>Shisong lü</i> |

Firstly, the Liang version lacks the beginning portion, approximately one sheet, making unclear its head title and Subtitle 1. An examination of its content reveals that the first half comprises the “Dharma of Tripiṭakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhikṣus”, while the latter half includes the “Dharma of Eliminating Evils Collected by Seven Hundred Bhikṣus, Second”. This structure aligns with other versions. The end title is labeled as the “First Scroll of the *lüxu*”, notably omitting the phrase “Ten Recitations”. This absence indicates that it is a standalone volume, not part of a sequentially numbered series, reflecting the characteristic “Preface Independently Placed” type found in sources from the Southern Dynasties.

Next, although the content structure of the Dongchan version is consistent with other versions, its head and end titles, the “First scroll of the Vinaya Preface to the *Shisong lü* (Nine) 十誦律毗尼序卷上(九)”, are somewhat unusual. The character “Nine” likely corresponds to the generic scroll number “Fifty-Nine”, suggesting a specific adjustment made in the Dongchan edition. I speculate that the textual source of the Dongchan edition of the *Lüxu* may be quite old, possibly originating from a “Preface Independently Placed” text akin to the Liang version. Nonetheless, the Dongchan edition appears to have modified the title. Particularly, the term “Vinaya Preface 毗尼序” in the titles may have been added by the Dongchan editors, given that the term “Vinaya Preface” did not appear before the *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* and that the textual content of the Dongchan version suggests its source could be traced back to the Southern Dynasties.

Furthermore, the Jingo version is labeled as the “Fifty-Fifth Scroll of the *Shisong lü*”, and its end title reads the “Fifty-Fifth Scroll of the *Shisong lü*, the Ninth Recitation”. This title reflects that ancient Japanese scripture’s classification under the “Preface Pre-placed” type from the Kaiyuan era of the Tang Dynasty, where the first scroll of the *Lüxu* is typically numbered fifty-five. This titling provides critical information: while Tang-era scripture catalogs only mention that the “Preface Pre-placed” type includes this preface in Scrolls fifty-five to fifty-seven at the end of the “Ninth Recitation” and before the “Tenth Recitation”, the Jingo version explicitly confirms that “Preface Pre-placed” type has indeed incorporated the *Lüxu* into the “Ninth Recitation”.

Additionally, the use of the term “Virtuous Recitation” in the subtitle of the Jingo version supports the notion that the “Preface Post-placed” type predates the occurrence of the “Preface Pre-placed” type. Not only does the latter, as mentioned in the scripture

catalogs, place the *Lüxu* at the end of the “Tenth Recitation”, but it also integrates the *Lüxu* with the “Tenth Recitation” into the final section of the *Shisong lü*, termed the “Virtuous Recitation”. This explains why, even after attributing the *Lüxu* to the “Ninth Recitation”, the term “Virtuous Recitation” was still being used.

Finally, while the Jin version and the Goryeo version exhibit characteristics of the “Preface Post-Placed” type, they adopt a distinct practice of positioning the first scroll of the *Lüxu* on scroll sixty. The Jin version bears obvious signs of modification, notably with the phrase “The Vinaya Preface to the Virtuous Recitation” and the subtitle “Dharma of Tripitakas Collected by Five Hundred Bhiksus, Section One” being minutely carved, likely during a re-carving of the original text. From this, it can be inferred that the early Central Plains editions might have used the same title for both the head and tail, referred to as “The Sixtieth Scroll of the *Shisong lü*”.

The Jin version, the Goryeo version, and their inherited Central Plains versions reflect a slightly later development of the *Lüxu houzhi* type. This version definitely positions the *Lüxu* after the “Tenth Recitation”, severing its previous association with any specific recitations. This evolution confirms a restoration of the *Lüxu houzhi* type but with notable differences from the early Tang version. While the early Tang version treated the *Lüxu* as equivalent to the sections of the “Ten Recitations”, often collectively referred to as the “Virtuous Recitation”, or simply as the “Vinaya Recitation”, the mid-Tang period and later versions adopted the terms “Vinaya Preface” or “Vinaya Preface to the Virtuous Recitation”, shifting the designation from “recitation” back to “preface”.

After having conducted these comparisons, we now move further to examine the variations in wording, expression, and terminology among the different versions of the text. In addition to individual errors unique to each version, notable differences include variant characters, phonetic loan characters, and homophones (e.g., 燃 = 然, 伎 = 妓, 惠 = 慧, 曼 = 蔓, 坐 = 座, 胡 = 踰, 申 = 伸, and 壇 = 檀). These variations not only affect the text’s readability but also its interpretation, reflecting shifts in translation strategies over time. An analysis of these differences reveals that the wording and vocabulary of the Liang version and the Dongchan version are relatively similar, suggesting a close textural kinship. In contrast, the Jingo version appears to be transitioning toward the linguistic characteristics of the Jin version, indicating a shift in language and style.

As far as the main differences among different versions are concerned, we can illustrate them with specific examples. First comes the differences between handwritten and engraved versions. There are a total of 20 differences between the Liang and Jingo versions, and the Dongchan and Jin versions, most involving variant characters or characters that are similar in shape or sound. Among them, the following two differences are the most significant and warrant particular attention (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Most Significant Content Differences between the Five Versions of the *Lüxu*.

| Texts | The First Instance | The Second Instance |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Liang version and Jingo version | 三菩伽言：“大德梨婆多！不益縷邊尼師檀淨，實淨不？” 答：“不淨”。 | 橋陳如得已，故名阿若橋陳如。 |
| Dongchan version | 三菩伽言：“大德梨婆多！不益縷邊尼師檀 ^{*1} 淨，實淨不？” 還問：“云何不益縷邊尼師檀？” 答：“毘耶離諸比丘作不益縷邊尼師檀。” | 橋陳如得已，以初得故，故名阿若橋陳如。 |
| Jin version | 言 ^{*2} ：“是事淨為淨不？” 答：“不淨。” | 橋陳如得以初得故已，故名阿若橋陳如。 |

Notes: ^{*1} In the Dongchan version, all instances of the character “檀” (typically meaning sandalwood) are replaced with “壇” (which usually means platform or altar). ^{*2} The character “言” (meaning “to speak” or “words”) is absent in the Jin version.

Regarding the first instance, the Liang and Jingo versions include only the first question and its answer, whereas the Dongchan and Jin versions intersperse an additional second question, a second answer, and a third question between them. These additions essen-

tially decompose the first question into two distinct queries, providing individual answers to each. Evidently, this modification is to clarify and elaborate on the original content. As for the second instance, the Liang and Jingo versions only state “僑陳如得已，故名阿若僑陳如” (Kaundīnya has attained; therefore, he was named Ājñāta-kaundīnya). In contrast, both the Dongchan version and the Jin version each inserted the phrase “以初得故” (since initially attained) after “已” (already). This modification provides a smoother narrative transition that enhances the flow and contextual understanding of the text.

Finally, we shall examine the differences in terminology among the various versions. This issue is not only present in the *Lüxu* but also extends throughout the text of the *Shisong lü*, particularly within the Southern lineage, where there is notable inconsistency in the terminology of proper nouns. A comparative analysis of the *Lüxu* reveals that the earlier a text is the more pronounced inconsistency it displays in the translation of proper nouns and that later texts made efforts to correct or standardize the terminology. Six examples can be found below:

1. Translation of *vinaya*: In the Liang version, *vinaya* is rendered as “比尼” in 24 instances and “毗尼” in 20 instances. The Dongchan version, however, contains discrepancies, where “比尼” is mistakenly rendered as “比丘” in one instance and as “毗壇” in another, with the remaining instances correctly rendered as “毗尼”. Both the Jingo version and the Jin version modified one occurrence of “比尼” to “阿毗壇” (corresponding to “毗壇” in the Dongchan version), while consistently rendering the rest as “毗尼”.
2. Translation of *prāyaścittika*: In both the Liang version and the Dongchan version, *prāyaścittika* is rendered as “波夜提” in 10 instances and as “波逸提” in 3 instances. In the Jingo version, two occurrences of “波夜提” are altered to “波逸提”, while the Jin version changes one additional instance of “波夜提” to “波逸提”. This coexistence of both “波夜提” and “波逸提” within the *Shisong lü* has been noted by Hiraakawa Akira. He points out that the original *Shisong lü* predominantly used “波夜提” (corresponding to the Sanskrit term *prāyaścittika*), whereas “波逸提” was the translation initially used in the *Sifen lü*, and the amalgamation of these two translations likely resulted from later textual revisions (Hiraakawa 1960, p. 182). This example illustrates a key factor influencing changes in terminology in the Southern lineage of the *Shisong lü*: the reverse influence of later Chinese-translated Vinaya texts, such as the *Sifen lü*. Such influences indicate a complex intertextual dynamic that shaped the development of Buddhist canonical texts in China.
3. Translation of *nirvāṇa*: In both the Liang version and the Dongchan version, *nirvāṇa* is translated as “涅槃” in 11 instances and as “泥洹” in 1 case. The Jingo version incorrectly changes this single “泥洹” to “涅槃”, while the Jin version standardizes all 12 occurrences to “涅槃”.
4. Translation of *Kālodāyī*: In the Liang version and the Dongchan version, *Kālodāyī* is translated as “黑憂陀耶” in one case and as “迦樓陀夷” in two. The Jingo version maintains “黑憂陀耶” but changes “迦樓陀夷” to “迦留陀夷”. Conversely, The Jin version standardizes all occurrences as “迦留陀夷”. It is worth noting that “黑憂陀耶” is a rare translation for *Kālodāyī*.
5. Translation of *Mahākāśyapa*: In the Liang version, Dongchan version, and the Jingo version, *Mahākāśyapa* is rendered as “摩訶迦葉” in 40 instances and as “大迦葉” in 14 instances. The Jin version modifies 4 occurrences of “摩訶迦葉” to “大迦葉”.
6. Translation of *ksama*: In the Liang version, the Dongchan version, and the Jingo version, *ksama* is rendered as “懺悔” in 9 instances and “悔過” in 4 instances. In both the Jin version and the Goryeo version, three occurrences of “悔過” are changed to “懺悔”, with one instance remaining as “悔過”.

4. Concluding Remarks

This study of the *Shisong lü* has significantly deepened our understanding of its evolution within the extensive corpus of Chinese Buddhist texts. It makes full use of two previ-

ously underexamined manuscripts of the Southern lineage of the Vinaya text. Specifically, by focusing on content changes in the “Preface to Vinaya” (*Lüxu*) and through extensive comparisons with woodblock editions, manuscripts from the Dunhuang collection, and ancient Japanese hand-copied scriptures, this study successfully traces the textual evolution of the Southern lineage, revealing its developmental stages, and identifying patterns of textual transformations from the 6th to the 13th centuries. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into the relationship of the two lineages of the *Shisong lü* and their corresponding impact on Buddhist practice.

Although this case study is confined to a single scroll, it has made significant contributions to the textual criticism of the Vinaya and has prompted deeper philosophical inquiries. It emphasizes the importance of revisiting and unifying translations from Sanskrit, highlighting how subsequent translations can retroactively influence earlier Vinaya texts. These findings underscore the urgency for further exploration of the Vinayas’ evolution. Future research should delve deeper into the interrelationships between different versions and their translation techniques. As the field of Buddhist textual studies evolves, a thorough understanding of the texts’ characteristics, origins, and interconnectedness becomes increasingly paramount.

Methodologically, this study of the *Shisong lü* underscores the critical role of diverse textual resources and the necessity of understanding their historical, geographical, and lineage-specific characteristics. Through meticulous investigations and comparative analyses, it has not only enriched our understanding of a singular Buddhist text but has also significantly advanced the broader discourse on textual transmission, evolution, and interpretation within Buddhist studies. Specifically, it draws attention to the intricate processes behind the adaptation and transformation of religious texts, the dynamic interaction between different textual traditions, and their impact on the development of Buddhist thought and practice across Asia.

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Notes

- 1 For an in-depth study of Buddhist terms in Chinese translation, see Funayama (2022).
- 2 For more detailed accounts of early Japanese Buddhist manuscript cultures and their associated ritual practices, see Lowe (2014a, 2014b, 2017).
- 3 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 2. 333a20-23. *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 3. 20a28-b2.
- 4 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 2. 333a27-b16. *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 3. 20a28-b2.
- 5 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 2. 333b26-c4. *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 3. 20b18-21.
- 6 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 2. 333b29-c4. *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 3. 20b19-21.
- 7 *Zhongjing mulu*, T no. 2146, 55: 5. 140b4-6. *Lidai sanbao ji*, T no. 2034, 49: 14. 119a29-b1.
- 8 *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T no. 2154, 55: 4. 516a17-18; 3. 507a17-21.
- 9 *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T no. 2154, 55: 10. 576c6-7; 13. 618b21-22.
- 10 For a more comprehensive analysis of the four distinct phases in the evolution of the *Shisong lü*, see Chi (Forthcoming).
- 11 *Lidai sanbao ji*, T no. 2034, 49: 7. 70c20-27. *Da tang neidian lu*, T 49, no. 2149, 3. 246c11-18.

- 12 *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T no. 2154, 55: 13. 618b24-25.
- 13 *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T no. 2154, 55: 3. 507a2-3.
- 14 *Xin zan yiqie jing yuan pinci lu* KI 80: 20. 284-319; *Xin ji zangjing yinyi suhan lu* K 63: 15.114. See Chi (2021, pp. 25–59) and Wang (2022, pp. 31–32).
- 15 For the definition of “imperial authorized” canons, see Yamashita (1999b, esp. 455 and 473) and Yamashita (1999c, pp. 31–33). For an in-depth study of imperial authorized canons in the Nara Japan, also see Yamashita (1999a, 2000).
- 16 For the overview of Japanese manuscript editions of the *Shisong lü*, see Chi (Forthcoming).
- 17 KI 37: 447-38: 393.
- 18 K 62: 246-63: 728.
- 19 Z 37: 166-38: 243; J 54: 405-56: 526.
- 20 *Gaoli guo xin diao dazang jiaozheng bielu*, KI 81: 20. 407–420.
- 21 For a more detailed discussion and comparison of the woodblock editions of the *Shisong lü*, see Chi (Forthcoming).

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Abbreviations

- K = *Gaoli Dazangjing* 高麗大藏經 [Korean Re-carved Edition of Buddhist Canon]. vols. Edited by Yuwai hanji zhenben wenku bianzuan chuban weiyuanhui 域外漢籍珍本文庫編纂出版委員會 (comp.). Beijing: Xinzhuang shuju 線裝書局, 2004.
- KI = *Gaoli Dazangjing chuke ben jikan* 高麗大藏經初刻本輯刊 [Collection of Korean Initial Edition of Buddhist Canon]. 80 vols. Edited by Yuwai hanji zhenben wenku bianzuan chuban weiyuanhui 域外漢籍珍本文庫編纂出版委員會 (comp.). Kunming and Beijing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe and Renmin chubanshe 西南師範大學出版社、人民出版社, 2013.
- T = Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled during the Taishō Era (1912–26)]. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (v. 5.2) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (<http://21dzk.lxn--u-uky-i9ac.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php>, accessed on 1 May 2024).
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Article

From Marginalization to Localization: Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism's Adaptive Strategies in Theravāda Myanmar

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Abstract

Tension between the Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhist schools has persisted since early Buddhist times and remains a complex issue. However, recent decades have seen growing joint religious activities and cultural exchanges between followers of these traditions. This paper examines the presence and experiences of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monastics in Myanmar, where Theravāda Buddhism predominates. Given the limited research on Chinese Buddhism's expansion beyond East Asia, this study addresses an important gap by focusing on Myanmar's unique sociocultural context. The paper is divided into two main parts. The first provides a historical overview of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism's evolution in Burma during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second, more extensive, section utilizes fieldwork data to analyze the contemporary experiences of Chinese monastics living as religious minorities in a predominantly Theravāda and ethnically Burmese environment. Relations between the two Buddhist communities have improved since the mid-20th century, despite ongoing institutional marginalization. Key factors include second-generation bilingual monastics, international Buddhist exchanges, and joint charitable activities. The Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association's response to the March 2025 earthquake near Naypyidaw, including substantial aid to Theravāda monasteries, illustrates how humanitarian crises can generate cooperation across sectarian boundaries. Through examining these interactions, challenges, and identity negotiations, this study offers a detailed account of how Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monastics navigate Myanmar's religious landscape as a minority tradition.

Keywords: religious minority; monastic identities and recognition; contemporary Theravāda Buddhism; Myanmar; contemporary Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism; Sino-Burmese monastics

1. Introduction

The examination of the developmental trajectory of modern Chinese Buddhism in Myanmar is inextricably linked to the historical context of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia,¹ with Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism being introduced to Myanmar from Mainland China during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This phenomenon aligns with the general observation that Buddhist practices tend to follow Chinese diaspora communities (Lai et al. 2008, p. 96). Chern (2009, p. 61) emphasizes the crucial role of monastics in facilitating cultural exchange between China and Southeast Asia, noting that the establishment of monasteries or temples often follows Chinese monastic migration, subsequently attracting Chinese immigrant communities. The dissemination and development of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism in various Southeast Asian countries have been significantly in-

fluenced by overseas Chinese, both monastics and laity (e.g., Tan 2011; Ashiwa and Wank 2005; Chern 2009; Hue 2013; Dean 2018; Chia 2020).² This pattern of religious expansion aligns with Nattier's (1997, p. 78) concept of 'Baggage Buddhism,' which is characterized by its initially monoethnic membership and dual function as both a religious institution and a community support network. However, the transplantation of Mahāyāna Buddhism into predominantly Theravāda countries through immigration or commercial activities has resulted in unprecedented cross-traditional interactions. These interactions encompass communication, conflicts, adaptation, and potential integration between the two Buddhist traditions. The marked differences between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism, particularly in terms of ritual practices and monastic lifestyles, warrant closer examination.

While the phenomenon of Mahāyāna–Theravāda border-crossing has garnered significant attention within Buddhist Studies, ethnographic research on Chinese Buddhism beyond traditional East Asian Mahāyāna territories remains limited. This paucity of research is particularly pronounced in the context of Myanmar, partly due to the country's isolationist policies prior to 2010. The subsequent opening of Myanmar to the international community presented a valuable opportunity for scholars to empirically investigate its Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist community. Most of the fieldwork data were collected in 2018 and 2019, i.e., before the military coup that established Myanmar's current regime.

Several studies have provided preliminary insights into the evolution and integration of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism within Myanmar's predominantly Theravāda societal context, particularly focusing on the period preceding the 2021 military coup. Notable contributions include Wu's (2006) case study on Chinese Buddhism in Myanmar, which examines the historical development and contemporary challenges faced by Chinese Buddhist monasteries in Yangon. Additionally, Chen and Feng (2016, pp. 57–62) explore the historical and current interdependencies between Chinese Buddhism and the Chinese community in Myanmar. Duan (2015, pp. 43–71) further investigates the influences of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism on the religious practices and ethnic identities of Sino-Burmese laity in Mandalay, emphasizing varying degrees of localization and cultural assimilation. Most significantly and recently, Taiwanese scholar Wei-Yi Cheng has substantially contributed to the research on Chinese Buddhist nuns in Shan State, Myanmar. In her article 'Identity in Transnational Buddhism,' Cheng (2022) critically examines the complexities of identity within transnational Buddhist contexts. Her case study highlights a Chinese Buddhist nun navigating intersecting identities as an overseas Chinese, a Mahāyāna monastic, and a Buddhist nun to build transnational support networks that transcend national boundaries. This study partially builds upon Cheng's work by examining how Chinese Mahāyāna monastics in Yangon and Mandalay negotiate their religious and ethnic identities within Myanmar's predominantly Theravāda society, providing complementary insights into the processes of localization, adaptation, and cross-traditional dialogue in contemporary Buddhist communities.

Given the predominance of lay Theravāda Buddhists in Myanmar, constituting approximately 88% of the national population,³ this study seeks to explore the impact of the local Theravāda ethos on Chinese Mahāyāna monastics' experiences as members of a religious minority. This study provides an integrated analysis of the following central themes:

1. The historical development and evolution of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Myanmar.
2. Contemporary Chinese monks' religious experiences within Myanmar's Theravada Buddhist society: the ongoing development of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Myanmar; the dynamics of interaction between Chinese and Burmese monastic communities; and the marginalization and disadvantaged position that Chinese monks face as a religious minority in Myanmar.

Methodologically, this study employs a multifaceted approach combining historical, textual, and fieldwork methods, as advocated by Overmyer (2004, p. 4), who posits that “knowledge of history and texts can enrich field observation, and field observation can often provide a sense of context for past practices.” The primary qualitative methods utilized were interviews and observation, supplemented by analysis of historical writings and doctrinal texts from Mandalay and Yangon. While bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī constituted the main interviewees, the study also incorporated a formal interview with a senior local Burmese–Chinese layman. Additionally, viewpoints on Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism held by non-Chinese Theravāda Buddhist laypeople of various ages were collected via email correspondence to ensure a comprehensive representation of the current situation.

Yangon and Mandalay were selected as the primary fieldwork sites due to their significant ethnic-Chinese populations,⁴ predominantly descendants of early overseas Chinese migrants from Fujian, Guangdong, or Yunnan (Li 2015)⁵. This selection also aligns with the study’s multiple-case approach, which, according to Yin (2009, p. 53), tends to yield more robust and convincing findings than single-case studies. However, cognizant of Stake’s (2005, p. 451) observation that sample sizes in multiple case studies are typically “much too small to warrant random selection,” this study employed purposive sampling of specific Chinese monasteries to ensure variety and a balanced overview, particularly given the research focus on nuanced, localized differences in religious practices. In total, eleven face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were conducted in Burmese Chinese monastic institutions: seven in Yangon and four in Mandalay. This sampling strategy aims to capture the regional variations in ‘desinicization’ and assimilation observed in postwar Myanmar, particularly the marked differences in Chinese language use and cultural outlook between the Yunnanese Chinese in Mandalay and their Hokkien/Cantonese counterparts in Yangon (Li 2015). This methodological approach enables a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics shaping Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist experiences in Myanmar’s predominantly Theravāda context, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of religious minority experiences and cross-traditional interactions in Southeast Asian Buddhism. Thus, total of eleven face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were conducted in Burmese Chinese monastic institutions, seven in Yangon and four in Mandalay, at the sites shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview sites by region.

| Yangon | Mandalay |
|---|--|
| Shifang Guanyin Si 十方觀音寺 (one interviewee) | Jingming Chan Si 淨明禪寺 (one interviewee) |
| Zangjing Lou 藏經樓 (one interviewee) | Dongmiu Guanyin Si 洞繆觀音寺 (one interviewee) |
| Daben Chan Si 達本禪寺 (one interviewee) | Yunnan Association 雲南會館 (one interviewee) |
| Luohan Si 羅漢寺 (one interviewee) | Jin Taw Yan 金多堰 (one interviewee) |
| Zhonghua Si 中華寺 (one interviewee) | |
| Miaoyin Si 妙音寺 (one interviewee) | |
| Mahā Kusalā Yāma International Meditation Centre 靈鷲山緬甸法成就寺國際禪修中心 (two interviewees) | |

2. The Evolution of Chinese Buddhism in Myanmar: A Historical Perspective

The historical record pertaining to Chinese Mahāyāna monks' lives and work in 20th-century Mandalay and Yangon is comparatively rich, offering a more comprehensive dataset than that available for other cities or time periods. Meei-Hwa Chern's research underscores the pivotal role of monastics in the history of cultural interaction between China and Southeast Asia (Chern 2009, p. 61). This interaction typically follows a pattern: the arrival of Chinese monks in a new location often leads to the establishment of monasteries or temples, which subsequently attract groups of Chinese immigrants. A salient example of this phenomenon is the Amarapura Guanyin Temple (洞繆觀音寺), the oldest Chinese Buddhist temple in upper Burma. Historical records indicate that it was initially constructed between 1773 and 1774 in Amarapura, a suburb of Mandalay, by Yunnanese merchants. Following its reconstruction in 1838–46, the temple became a residence for Chinese monks, illustrating the enduring link between monastic presence and immigrant communities (Yuan 2019, pp. 106–13; Li 2015, pp. 3–4). Besides the Amarapura temple, two other key hubs for Mandalay's Chinese community are the Yunnan Association (雲南會館) and Jin Taw Yan (金多堰). Founded in 1876 by Yunnanese immigrants, the Yunnan Association includes temples for Confucius, Guan Yu, and Guanyin, and acts as a place for religious ceremonies and cultural gatherings.⁶ Jin Taw Yan, located along the Irrawaddy River, has grown into Myanmar's largest Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist temple. It is known for its traditional Chinese architecture and serves as both a charitable organization and a centre for cultural exchange.⁷ Together, these sites not only keep alive Chinese religious and cultural traditions but also stand as important symbols of the Chinese community's history and unity in Mandalay.

The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon has historically served as a significant pilgrimage site for Chinese monastics (Wu 2006, pp. 16–18). This phenomenon led to the establishment of Chinese Buddhist monasteries in the vicinity, primarily to accommodate the increasing number of Chinese pilgrim monks. Despite their initially limited scope, these dedicated spaces facilitated the dissemination of Mahāyāna traditions in Burma. *Longhua* Temple (龍華寺), constructed in the 1890s, is widely regarded as the first Chinese Buddhist monastery in Yangon (Leguan Shih [1959] 2012, pp. 98–101; Wu 2006, pp. 19–21; Kan 2019, pp. 43–44). Several renowned masters, including Ven. Xuyun,⁸ Ven. Maio-Shan,⁹ and Ven. Ci-hang (慈航, 1893–1954),¹⁰ visited or resided in this monastery between the late 1890s and early 1930s, prior to its seizure by the Burmese government. However, an examination of *Longhua* Temple's construction history and eventual closure suggests its limited integration into the sociocultural context of Theravāda-majority Myanmar. Historical records indicate that Ven. *Xingyuan* (性圓), a late Qing dynasty Hokkien monk, established *Longhua* Temple near the Shwedagon Pagoda solely as temporary accommodation for Chinese pilgrim monks, rather than as a centre for propagating Mahāyāna Buddhism in Burmese society (Luo 1922, p. 3). This narrow focus may explain the monastery's failure to attract local Burmese Theravāda Buddhists. Ven. Leguan's¹¹ experiences in 1950s Yangon provide further insight into the cultural dissonance between Chinese and Burmese monastic traditions. His accounts suggest that local Burmese often did not recognize Chinese monks as legitimate clergy due to differences in practices, such as robe colour and adherence to fasting and alms-begging rules (Leguan Shih 1977, pp. 150, 174). In some instances, local laypeople severely criticized those who did not observe these practices, even regarding them as laity.¹² Yet, as Bei Yin Deng (Deng 2023) demonstrates, Chinese Buddhist monastics in Yangon engaged in activities well beyond pilgrimage or temporary residence. Her research documents how Chinese monastics facilitated the procurement and circulation of marble Buddhist images between Burma and China, creating vibrant cultural ex-

changes and transnational networks. These practices enriched the religious landscape and fostered deeper forms of integration that extended beyond monastic or doctrinal boundaries (Deng 2023, pp. 32–34). This historical context provides crucial insights into the challenges faced by Chinese *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in establishing itself within Myanmar's predominantly *Theravāda* Buddhist society, highlighting issues of cultural misunderstanding and limited integration.

Historical sources indicate that the relationship between *Longhua* Temple's monks and their local *Theravāda* counterparts was characterized by significant tension. According to Leguan Shih ([1959] 2012, p. 100), Ven. *Xingyuan*, *Longhua* Temple's founder, was reportedly a disciple of a local Burmese master and leased land from Burmese monks for a forty-year term, initially constructing a small shack. With support from overseas Chinese Buddhists, this structure was later developed into *Longhua* Temple. While relations between Burmese and resident Chinese monks remained amicable under Ven. *Xingyuan*'s leadership, his successor's apparent disdain for the *Theravāda* tradition led to growing antagonism. Consequently, Burmese monks began viewing *Longhua* Temple merely as their rightful property, awaiting the lease's expiration. They eventually obtained a court order to seize and close the monastery, forcing all Chinese resident monks to vacate (Leguan Shih [1959] 2012, pp. 100–1). A 1947 fundraising prospectus for *Shifang Guanyin* Temple (十方觀音寺) suggests that dietary differences between Chinese and Burmese monks led to their incompatibility, despite shared Buddhist beliefs (Wu 2006, p. 20). Ven. Leguan Shih (1977, pp. 154–55) noted that early overseas Chinese monks in Burma, considering themselves *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas, avoided contact with local '*Hīnayāna*' practitioners. Conversely, some Burmese monks refused to recognize Chinese monastics as true disciples of Buddha, sometimes even labelling them as heretics. In an earlier period, Ven. Cihang (C. Shih 1931, p. 17) observed Burmese monks in Yangon mocking Chinese monastics for their appearance and attire, dismissing them as mere vegetarians (*zhaigong* 齋公) rather than true monks.

These accounts suggest that longstanding prejudices and misunderstandings have both caused and resulted from a lack of cross-traditional dialogue, a problem that can be traced back to early Buddhist history. The Second Council, occurring approximately a century after the Buddha's death, is considered to have caused the first schism in the Buddhist *samgha* between the *Mahāsāṃghikas* and the *Sthaviras*, who held divergent viewpoints and practices (Geiger 1912, p. ix; Skilton 2001, p. 47; Prebish 1974, pp. 239–54). This historical context highlights the deep-rooted challenges in fostering understanding between different Buddhist traditions in Myanmar, which have persisted into modern times. The perpetuation of these prejudices and misperceptions underscores the need for increased cross-traditional dialogue and understanding in contemporary Buddhist communities.

The early 20th century Burmese political landscape significantly influenced Chinese monastics' religious practices and spiritual cultivation. The majority of Chinese monks who arrived in Yangon during this period were primarily engaged in pagoda pilgrimages, indicating a focus on practical Buddhism rather than scholarly dharma propagation. Faced with limited local Burmese support, these monks sustained themselves by offering chanting and repentance services, a practice reminiscent of the "monks on call" (*yingfu seng* 應赴僧) phenomenon prevalent during the Qing dynasty and early republican period (Welch 1967, pp. 179–205; 1968, pp. 264, 235, 347). Ven. Leguan Shih (1977, pp. 144–45, 158) critiqued several Chinese Buddhist monasteries established after *Longhua* Temple's closure for their reliance on performing funerary rites in Yangon as a means of livelihood. This shift in religious practice was further intensified following Burma's independence, when the government implemented foreign-exchange controls that significantly impacted overseas remittances to China. Consequently, the ethnic Chinese community increasingly sought

the services of overseas Chinese monks for Buddhist ceremonies to liberate their deceased parents, a practice deeply rooted in Confucian traditions of ancestral veneration. The revenue generated from these funerary services facilitated the construction and expansion of new Chinese Buddhist monasteries in Yangon. Myanmar's economic policies marked a defining moment in the evolution of certain Chinese Buddhist institutions (e.g., *Shifang Guanyin Si* 十方觀音寺), driving their transformation into systems primarily focused on performing liturgy and rites, particularly funerals. This transformation exposed Chinese Buddhist monasteries to severe criticism, not only from Chinese Mahāyāna practitioners like Ven. *Leguan* but also from the country's Theravāda majority, who lacked a tradition of releasing the deceased.¹³ Theravāda criticism often arises from doctrinal differences and misunderstandings. One elderly Theravāda monk dismissed a Chinese monastery in Yangon that performs funeral ceremonies as simply 'a place dealing with ghosts'. In addition, some prominent Theravāda monks have also publicly criticized the large-scale merit-making ceremonies and funeral rites typical in Burmese–Chinese communities. The Chinese diaspora sees these rituals as essential acts of filial piety, but Theravāda practitioners consider them unorthodox or impure. These clashes reveal the religious tensions facing Chinese Mahāyāna institutions in Myanmar's Theravāda-dominated contexts. Ven. *Leguan* argued that this shift led to a gradual erosion of the authentic value and spirit of Buddhism within the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition in Burma (later Myanmar). He posited that the tradition had become entangled with superstitious practices to accommodate the funerary needs of the overseas Chinese laity. These perceived superstitious practices further exacerbated existing barriers between overseas Chinese monks and the local population, who had limited understanding of the monks' religious ideals or interests (Wu 2006, p. 114).¹⁴ This historical context provides crucial insights into the complex interplay between economic policies, cultural practices, and religious adaptation among Chinese Buddhist communities in Southeast Asia.

3. Religious Minorities in a Theravāda State: Structures of Exclusion and Stigma

While the previous section traced the historical evolution of Chinese Buddhism in Myanmar, this section examines how historical patterns of marginalization persist in contemporary forms, creating structural challenges that Chinese Mahāyāna monastics must navigate daily. The relations between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhists have improved in recent years; however, Burmese monks' historical hostility continues to impact the development of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism in Myanmar. A key factor is the intense veneration that Burmese monks receive from the local laity. Melford Spiro (Spiro 1970, p. 396) observed that there is probably no other clergy in the world that receives as much honour and respect as the Buddhist monks of Burma. Burmese monks exert profound influence over the lay population, maintaining close and interdependent relationships with them.

This influence exemplifies what Antonio Gramsci (1971) termed cultural hegemony, a form of social control operating not through force or coercion, but through the consent of the dominated. In Myanmar, Theravāda Buddhism maintains its dominance through what Gramsci described as intellectual and moral leadership. This creates a worldview that appears natural and inevitable to both dominant and subordinate groups. The laity's veneration of Theravāda monks is not merely religious devotion, but also a hegemonic apparatus legitimizing one form of Buddhism while marginalizing others.

This hegemonic control extends beyond formal religious institutions into the fabric of everyday life. It shapes what is considered authentic Buddhism in Myanmar society. Several informants provided insight into how Theravāda monks shape public perceptions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. One elderly Burmese–Chinese layperson recounted that, during

visits to Theravāda monasteries in Yangon, preachers often criticized Mahāyāna rituals, especially funeral practices such as burning paper houses, as impure. However, such criticisms have lessened in recent years, likely due to increased religious exchanges. Similarly, a young ethnic Chinese man noted that he was raised to see Theravāda Buddhism as the true Buddhism due to its rationality, contrasting it with the more devotional and irrational Mahāyāna tradition. Another well-educated Burmese man, a lay disciple of a Chinese master, expressed respect for Chinese Buddhism, although his parents held negative views due to differences in fasting rules, attire, and the bodhisattva ideal. These examples reflect the enduring influence of anti-Mahāyāna sentiments expressed by influential Burmese monks, which shape local perceptions of Chinese Buddhism.

At a 1990s offering event witnessed by a research informant Feng-Yng Wu (Wu 2006, p. 117), Theravāda monks were seated above ethnic-Chinese monks. The latter were not allowed to eat until the Burmese monks had finished. This reflected the unequal religious status of Burmese–Chinese monastics in Theravāda-majority Myanmar. In other words, the event organizer clearly declined to recognize Chinese monks and nuns as legitimate monastics by arranging inferior seating and dining privileges.

A similar incident occurred during a 2018 religious exchange. The Chinese delegation, led by the president of the Shanghai Buddhist Association, was seated along the sides of the room, while Burmese monks occupied the prestigious central seats. This spatial arrangement underscores the power imbalance between Theravāda and Mahāyāna communities. It aligns with Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the relationship between physical and social space, where power is manifested through spatial distribution (Bourdieu 1996, p. 12; 1985, p. 724).

Regarding doctrinal disputes and local hostility, Feng-Yng Wu (Wu 2006, pp. 115–16) found that Burmese monastic modernists who studied Mahāyāna sūtras were often disapproved of and ostracized by traditionalists in Yangon. This is largely due to the belief among local Theravāda practitioners that Mahāyāna was not taught by the Buddha (*dasheng feifo shuo* 大乘非佛說). For example, the late Ven. Mahāsī Sayādaw (1904–1982) dismissed Mahāyāna teachings, particularly the bodhisattva path, as illogical and incompatible with Theravāda doctrine (Sayādaw 2011, pp. 34–35). Several informants shared difficulties faced by Mahāyāna Buddhist monastics in Myanmar. One senior Burmese–Chinese nun noted that approximately 30% of conservative Theravāda monks do not recognize Chinese bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs as legitimate monastics. Another monk in Mandalay explained that doctrinal differences, especially regarding nirvana and the bodhisattva path, make inter-religious dialogue challenging. Most importantly, a Burmese–Chinese monk in Yangon revealed persistent tensions between Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions:

One old Theravāda monk directly commented that my dharma brother is from a monastery dealing with ghosts, when both were invited to a Chinese family’s Buddhist chanting. This shows a superficial understanding of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. The claim that Mahāyāna Buddhism was not taught by the Buddha is common in Myanmar, and the controversy between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism dates back to early Buddhism. We consider ourselves self-liberating monks, original Buddhism. We have the Avatamsaka sūtra and the prajna paramita sūtras, which they do not. That is why they make their claim. It is a mutual controversy.

This labelling as a monastery that deals with ghosts reflects Erving Goffman’s (1963) concept of stigma, a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. In this framework, stigma operates through relational language rather than attributes themselves. The Theravāda monk’s comment transforms Chinese Buddhist funeral practices into a mark of deviance, creating a spoiled identity. This stigmatization involves three elements: first, identifying a difference (fu-

neral rituals); second, linking this difference to negative stereotypes (dealing with ghosts rather than proper Buddhism); and third, separating us (legitimate Theravāda practitioners) from them (questionable Mahāyāna practitioners).

Through this discourse, Chinese Buddhism is placed outside the boundaries of normal Buddhist practice in Myanmar, regardless of its doctrinal legitimacy or historical authenticity. This incident occurred within a common practice among ethnic-Chinese families in Myanmar, who invite monks from both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions to funeral rites. It highlights enduring doctrinal disputes rooted in divergent scriptural canons and the challenges of inter-Buddhist dialogue in Myanmar's religious landscape.

These findings reveal that recognition of religious identity extends beyond doctrine to include social capital distribution. Burmese–Chinese monastics experience subtle othering in daily religious practices, from seating to dining, demonstrating how ethnic and sectarian boundaries shape unequal power relations within a shared Buddhist tradition. Yet marginalization shapes but does not determine these communities' religious lives. The following sections examine how Chinese monastics navigate these constraints—sometimes through deliberate strategy, often through the improvisations of daily survival. Whether learning to greet Theravāda visitors in Burmese, organizing earthquake relief, or maintaining ties with monasteries in Taiwan, these practices reveal how religious minorities create possibilities within constraint.

4. Contemporary Chinese Buddhist Monastic Experiences in Myanmar

Following an examination of the structural inequalities that Chinese Mahāyāna monastics face in Myanmar, the subsequent section will focus on their lived experiences and adaptive practices. The ethnographic data reveal more than a mere story of marginalization; rather, it provides a more nuanced account of negotiation, accommodation, and creative response. This analysis explores how religious minorities navigate and overcome institutional constraints to preserve their traditions and establish new relationships across sectarian boundaries. It does so by examining three interrelated dimensions: the contemporary landscape of Chinese Buddhism in Myanmar; the evolving dynamics of Theravāda–Mahāyāna interactions; and the transformative role of charitable activities.

4.1. Chinese Buddhism in Contemporary Myanmar: Contextual Landscape

This subsection examines the challenges faced by Chinese Buddhism in contemporary Myanmar, drawing on existing literature and recent ethnographic fieldwork. It begins by acknowledging the complex political and socio-cultural landscape of Myanmar. Ethnographic research conducted in Yangon and Mandalay indicates an improvement in the treatment of Burmese–Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhists, particularly regarding their monastic status, since the early to mid-20th century. Spiro (1970, p. 398) noted that Burmese monks and their families enjoyed tax-exemption privileges, a benefit that was not extended to Chinese monastics at that time (Leguan Shih 1977, p. 173). Recent fieldwork suggests that Chinese Mahāyāna clerics are now exempt from taxation, indicating a degree of progress. However, disparities persist in the religious status accorded to Burmese–Chinese monastics compared to local Burmese monks, both by the Myanmar government and the public. A salient example of this disparity is the issue of monastic identity cards. Kawanami (2013, p. 117) explains that the Supreme Sangha Council issues detailed identification certificates (*hmatpontin*) as official proof of monastic status. These certificates contain comprehensive information, including national registration numbers, personal details, and monastic education levels. However, Wu (2006, p. 116) notes that these cards are only available to Theravāda Burmese monks, not to their Burmese–Chinese Mahāyāna counterparts. Informants suggest that the root of this issue lies in the de-recognition of Chinese Mahāyāna

Buddhism by Myanmar's Department of Religious Affairs, despite similarities in practices such as head-shaving, wearing monastic robes, and observing *vinaya* rules.¹⁵ This lack of official recognition denies Chinese clergy certain privileges and benefits granted to Burmese monastics. Fieldwork conducted in 2018–2019 uncovered diverse and sometimes contradictory views within the Chinese monastic community regarding official documentation. Table 2 categorizes these perspectives, illustrating how monastics strategically evaluate the trade-offs between state recognition and religious autonomy.

Table 2. Typology of Chinese Mahāyāna monastics' perspectives on monastic identity cards in Myanmar.

| Perspective Type | Core Position | Perceived Benefits | Perceived Costs | Strategic Rationale |
|------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Ambivalent | Mixed: Desires recognition but fears constraints | Official legitimacy; Facilitated administrative processes | Government surveillance; Financial audits; Mobility restrictions | Weighs practical needs against autonomy concerns |
| Autonomist | Opposed: Values freedom over recognition | Self-governance; Exemption from state oversight; Operational flexibility | Lack of official status; No institutional support | Prioritizes religious independence over social legitimacy |
| Accommodationist | Supportive: Seeks integration despite barriers | State recognition; Equal status with Theravāda clergy | Doctrinal examination requirements; Potential identity dilution | Willing to adapt to gain mainstream acceptance |

Source: Interview data collected in Yangon and Mandalay, 2018–2019.

The typology presented above corresponds with broader patterns of state-sangha relations in Myanmar. As Kawanami (2013, pp. 117–18) demonstrates, the mandatory registration system for Theravāda monastics functions as a mechanism of both mobility control and political surveillance. The absence of Chinese Mahāyāna monastics from this regulatory framework, however, produces an unintended consequence: while excluded from official recognition, they simultaneously escape the intensive state oversight that characterizes Theravāda monastic life. This finding suggests that religious marginalization in Myanmar operates through administrative exclusion rather than direct suppression, constituting a form of governance through 'benign neglect' that constrains legitimacy while preserving operational autonomy.

This administrative marginalization generates a structural paradox for Chinese Mahāyāna communities. As a minority immigrant religion, Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism receives insufficient state support, necessitating self-reliance.¹⁶ Roberts (2016, p. 139) aptly notes that 'existing formulations of national culture explicitly exclude immigrant populations, making it difficult [...] for Chinese practices to be included in the official conception of the nation-state.' Yet fieldwork data reveals that within monastery walls, Chinese clerics exercise considerable autonomy in appointing leadership and conducting rituals, freedoms that their surveilled Theravāda counterparts may not enjoy. Roberts' (2016, pp. 135–39) research on ritual ceremonies in Chinese temples further demonstrates how this marginalization operates through spatial restrictions rather than outright prohibition.¹⁷

The political dimensions of this exclusion reflect calculated governance strategies. Myanmar's elevated support for Theravāda Buddhism serves as a 'protective umbrella' with invisible political purposes, rooted in the regime's apprehension regarding Burmese monastics' documented capacity for political mobilization (Smith 1965; Spiro 1970, pp. 378–95; Gravers 2012, pp. 1–33; Walton 2015, pp. 507–30; Kawanami 2016, pp. 31–55). In contrast, Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism's political invisibility renders it essentially irrelevant to state security concerns. Fieldwork data reveals neither political support for nor paranoia about Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, echoing its lack of religious recognition from local Burmese monks and laity. This irrelevance paradoxically becomes a form of protection:

ignored rather than suppressed, permitted to exist precisely because it poses no perceived threat to political order.

4.2. *Interfaith Dynamics: Theravāda and Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist Identities and Interactions*

The opening of Myanmar to global networks has dramatically reshaped interactions between Chinese Mahāyāna and Burmese Theravāda Buddhist communities. Religious ceremonies and cultural exchanges now occur with a frequency unimaginable during the decades of isolation, marking a profound shift in inter-traditional relations. Yet these contemporary developments cannot be understood without grappling with the philosophical tensions that have long divided these traditions. Theravāda Buddhism claims the mantle of orthodoxy, positioning itself as the authentic preservation of the Buddha's original teachings (Swearer 2006). This stance contrasts sharply with Mahāyāna's embrace of the bodhisattva ideal and its promise of universal liberation. While Theravāda practitioners pursue individual enlightenment through careful study and practice of the Buddha's direct instructions, Mahāyāna adherents aspire to save all beings—a divergence that reflects fundamentally different conceptions of Buddhist soteriology (Williams 1989, pp. 1–33). These competing visions have fueled centuries of doctrinal debate and mutual criticism. Mahāyāna scriptures themselves participate in this polemic: texts like the Medicine Buddha Sūtra and the Brahmā's Net Sūtra champion the bodhisattva path while dismissing what they characterize as the narrow aspirations of *śrāvakas* and *pratyeka-buddhas* (Thanh et al. 2001, p. 20; Muller 2012, p. 337).¹⁸ Through such scriptural authority, Mahāyāna Buddhism has long perpetuated its characterization of rival paths as “Hīnayāna”—the inferior vehicle (Keown 2003, p. 107; Wang 2005, p. 172 n2). Against this backdrop of historical antagonism, the lived experiences of Chinese Mahāyāna monastics navigating Myanmar's Theravāda-dominated landscape demand careful attention. How do contemporary relationships between these monastic communities compare to the fraught encounters Ven. *Leguan* documented in the mid-twentieth century? What new forms of Buddhist dialogue and cooperation might be emerging despite or perhaps because of these longstanding divisions? The mutual prejudices and misperceptions between Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners can be seen as both causes and consequences of the longstanding lack of cross-traditional understanding and dialogue. However, recent advances in information networks and Myanmar's growing global engagement have facilitated an increasing number of interactions between these two Buddhist traditions. These interactions take place through diverse channels, including religious ceremonies and cultural exchanges.

Religious activities in Myanmar include significant events such as the veneration of the Buddha's Tooth Relic, which took place in 1955, 1994, and 1996 (Wu 2006, pp. 65–68). While these events hold considerable religious and cultural significance, scholars caution against interpreting such nationwide relic veneration solely as positive or productive phenomena. Schober (1997) provides a comprehensive analysis of the political and cultural dynamics surrounding the state-sponsored tours of the Chinese Tooth Relic in Myanmar, highlighting how these rituals function as instruments for legitimizing political authority and constructing national identity under the military regime. For example, the 1994 procession was a complex ritual performance that intertwined traditional cosmological Buddhist symbolism with contemporary state interests, thereby creating a ritual community reflecting competing conceptions of Burmese history, culture, and political power (Schober 1997, pp. 218–43). Moreover, the relic tours cited by Wu occurred over three decades ago; more recent tours, initiated by both Myanmar and China, may offer additional insights into the evolving meanings and contested significance of these events within the current sociopolitical context.

Beyond relic veneration, *samgha* offering ceremonies have played a significant role in fostering engagement between different Buddhist traditions. A notable example is the 6th Southeast Asia Sangha Offering Puja held in Yangon in 2018, organized by Ciguang Si, a Taiwanese monastery. This event featured collaboration between the monastery's abbot, Ven. Hui Kong, and a local Burmese–Chinese Buddhist nunnery, resulting in substantial donations and offerings to over one thousand monastic students at the Insein Ruama Pariyatti Institute. The ceremony concluded with a joint assembly involving the Pāli College's dean, Sayadaw U Tiloka Bhivamsa, 1187 local Theravāda monks, and Burmese–Chinese Buddhists for communal chanting and dialogue.¹⁹

Monastic delegations have also been instrumental in promoting cultural exchange and dialogue between Theravāda and Mahāyāna communities. In February 2017, the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism of Chunghua organized a three-day conference in Myanmar focused on advancing harmony and dialogue between these traditions. Furthermore, in January 2018, a delegation led by Ven. Huiming, president of the Shanghai Buddhist Association, visited Myanmar's National *Samgha* Committee Chairman, Venerable Bamaw Sayadaw Dr. Bhadanta Kumarabhivamsa. This meeting led to preliminary plans for establishing the Myanmar-China Buddhist Foundation aimed at fostering international religious cooperation.²⁰ While these official exchanges represent one dimension of inter-traditional contact, the perspectives of eleven Burmese–Chinese monastics interviewed during fieldwork reveal what factors they perceive as most significant in improving Theravāda–Mahāyāna relations. Religious minorities' perspectives on majoritarian attitudes often reveal dynamics invisible to dominant groups. The following analysis leverages Burmese–Chinese Mahāyāna monastics' unique positionality to map shifting patterns of sectarian engagement in contemporary Myanmar. As a transition is made from the institutional initiatives previously discussed to the grassroots perspectives that follow, Table 3 synthesizes observations from eleven monastic interviews into a framework of six key factors. These factors emerged inductively from the fieldwork, revealing how peripheral communities experience and interpret religious rapprochement through various dimensions of contact.

The patterns emerging from Table 3 suggest that personal encounters abroad have proven far more effective than institutional initiatives in transforming Theravāda attitudes toward Mahāyāna Buddhism. When monks return from studying in the UK or travelling to Taiwan and mainland China, they bring back more than knowledge; they carry embodied experiences that help change negative perceptions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Direct dialogue has similarly enabled Burmese–Chinese monastics to address persistent misconceptions, particularly the false assumption that they, like *Yiguan Dao* (一貫道) members, are permitted to marry and conduct business. Yet these transformative mechanisms depend on something more fundamental: the ability to communicate.

The significance of this linguistic dimension becomes clear through everyday monastic interactions I observed during fieldwork. At Zhonghua Si (中華寺), near the Shwedagon Pagoda, I regularly witnessed a middle-aged Burmese monk entering the main hall to offer flowers, an act that might seem unremarkable until one considers the historical context. What enables this transformation? Among other factors, the Burmese–Chinese abbess's ability to greet him in Burmese, to exchange pleasantries, creates a social space where religious recognition becomes possible. I also observed similar dynamics when Theravāda monks instructed young Burmese–Chinese *śrāmaṇerīs* in Pāli at Zhonghua Si. These teaching sessions revealed not only unprecedented cooperation between the two Buddhist traditions but also highlighted the crucial role of language. These pedagogical relationships, unthinkable for the previous generation, exist because second and third generation Burmese–

Chinese śrāmaṇerīs, born locally and raised as bilinguals, possess the linguistic foundation in Burmese necessary to learn Pāli from Theravāda instructors.

Table 3. Burmese–Chinese monastics’ perspectives on evolving Theravāda–Mahāyāna relations in Myanmar.

| Key Factor | Nature of Change | Evidence of Progress | Persistent Barriers | Overall Assessment |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Taiwanese Buddhist Visits | More Buddhists from Taiwan coming to Myanmar (Nun A) | Some Burmese gradually accepting Chinese monastics as legitimate | Acceptance process still gradual | Catalyzing gradual acceptance |
| Theravāda Monks’ Travel | Theravāda monks studying/visiting to Taiwan, Mainland China, UK (Nuns B, E; Monks B, C) | UK-educated monk: “there is no difference between Mahāyāna and Hinayāna. All worship Sakyamuni Buddha” (Nun D); some monks defend Burmese–Chinese monastics to lay disciples | Older masters who never travelled remain opposed | Most significant factor |
| Language Breakthrough | Second-generation bilingualism (Nun C) | Theravāda monks visiting temples show respect; Direct communication now possible | First-generation could not communicate | Foundation for dialogue |
| Misconception Corrections | Direct dialogue about practices (Monk C) | Theravāda monks surprised Chinese observe 250 vs. 227 precepts; Yiguan Dao marriage/business stereotypes dispelled | Some still see Theravāda as “main ideology” (Monk B); Limited interactions persist (Nun D) | Personal contact essential |
| Official Exchanges | PRC annual invitations (Nun E, Monk C) | High-ranking Theravāda monks officially visiting China | Impact on grassroots unclear | Government-level recognition |
| Technology Impact | Information opening through tech (Nun E) | Burmese monks starting to accept Mahāyāna through digital exposure | Not mentioned by others | Emerging influence |

Source: Interview data collected in Yangon and Mandalay, 2018–2019.

What my informants explicitly stated, these observations confirmed through concrete examples: language serves as the invisible infrastructure enabling all other forms of religious exchange. First-generation Chinese monastics who immigrated from China, trapped in linguistic isolation, could neither defend their practices nor build relationships with Theravāda counterparts. Their successors, raised bilingually, navigate fluidly between traditions. This shift from communicative isolation to dialogical engagement represents more than practical adaptation. It embodies what Eisen and Laderman (2015) identify as the essential knowledge required for cultural border-crossing. Through language, Burmese–Chinese monastics transition from being objects of suspicion to becoming more recogniz-

able or acceptable participants in Myanmar's Buddhist landscape in comparison to the past history.

Eisen and Laderman's concepts of acculturation and assimilation help explain what I observed in the field. Recent-generation Burmese–Chinese monastics, having been raised within Burmese society and possessing bilingual proficiency, exhibit varying degrees of acculturation while maintaining their Mahāyāna identity. Unlike their predecessors who dismissed Hīnayāna as inferior, these bilingual monastics see less contradiction between the traditions. This shift has opened doors for dialogue that were previously closed, allowing Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism to slowly find its place in Myanmar.

Travel has been equally transformative for Theravāda monks. Myanmar's long isolation under military rule created an insular religious environment where unfamiliar practices were easily dismissed. But when these monks visit Taiwan or China and see Mahāyāna Buddhism thriving, something shifts. Direct experience breaks down prejudices that arguments cannot touch. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Of course, not everyone changes their mind. Entrenched stereotypes persist, particularly among older monks who never travelled. Still, between the bilingual younger generation and the worldly experiences of travelling monks, Burmese–Chinese monastics enjoy far better standing in Myanmar's Buddhist community than they did even a generation ago. This is not just a local story; it suggests how Buddhist communities worldwide might bridge their historical divisions through personal encounters rather than theological debates. This evolution in inter-Buddhist relations not only reflects the changing dynamics within Myanmar's religious landscape but also underscores the potential for increased dialogue and cooperation between diverse Buddhist traditions in an increasingly interconnected global context.

While language breakthrough and personal encounters have proven effective in improving inter-traditional relations, the 2025 earthquake revealed an even more powerful catalyst for Buddhist unity: compassionate action in times of crisis. The following section examines how charitable cooperation has emerged as a transformative force in Theravāda–Mahāyāna relations.

4.3. Compassion Beyond Boundaries: Charitable Activities as Bridge Between Buddhist Traditions

The transformation of Theravāda–Mahāyāna relations through charitable engagement represents a striking departure from the antagonistic encounters documented in earlier periods. Unlike their predecessors who faced ostracism and misunderstanding in the 1950s, contemporary Burmese–Chinese monastics have strategically employed philanthropic activities to negotiate their minority status and forge meaningful connections across sectarian divides.

The nuns who provided information revealed diverse approaches to charitable engagement, reflecting different resources and aspirations. One nun articulated a strategic vision, stating that Chinese Buddhism possesses the economic capacity and some resources to assist Myanmar in addressing its needs in sectors such as education, healthcare, and disaster relief. The undertaking of charitable work can be considered a form of outreach. Local people become aware of the existence of Chinese Buddhism here, which gradually increases familiarity and acceptance. The act of offering a donation leaves an impression on the recipient. Another nun described another approach: "I don't actually lead charitable initiatives. However, when such donations are received from Hong Kong, we assist in ensuring their delivery to those who are genuinely in need. We lack the time, energy, and local networks to organize these activities ourselves." Therefore, she channels funds through Theravāda senior monks: "They have the experience and connections. We trust them to deliver aid where it's needed." These different approaches significantly reveal

how charitable activities serve multiple functions for Chinese monastics: a hoped-for path to recognition, a practical means of contributing despite limitations, and a way to build collaborative relationships that sidestep doctrinal disputes. Whether strategically planned or emerging from necessity, such activities create what both nuns recognized as crucial ‘contact zones’ where sectarian identities temporarily recede.”

This strategic deployment of charity finds empirical support in multiple contexts. The educational engagement between Amarapura Guanyin Temple’s abbot and Burmese monks exemplifies this pattern. Through the Free Monastic Middle School of Maha Gandhayon Monastery, they jointly provide education for impoverished local children. A partnership characterized by remarkable harmony that culminated in reciprocal visits to Foguangshan in 2017.²¹ Pin Chen’s (2015, pp. 25, 33, 41) ethnographic work in *Tachileik* provides additional evidence of charity’s transformative potential. Her research documents how Guanyin Si’s philanthropic activities for the poor and needy led Burmese people to develop a good impression of Chinese Buddhism, effectively shortening the distance between ethnic Chinese and other ethnicities. Such findings resonate with my own observations that charitable giving functions as a culturally legible form of Buddhist practice that transcends doctrinal differences, enabling rapid establishment of goodwill across communal boundaries.

As demonstrated by the examples provided, routine charitable activities can result in the gradual establishment of inter-traditional cooperation. However, it is important to note that crisis moments have the capacity to significantly accelerate these processes, thereby transforming tentative connections into concrete forms of solidarity.

The March 2025 earthquake near Naypyidaw catalyzed an unprecedented demonstration of inter-traditional Buddhist cooperation through humanitarian response. The Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association of Myanmar, established in 2014, orchestrated relief operations spanning multiple provinces—Naypyidaw, Pyinmana, Mandalay, Sagaing, and Inle Lake—that fundamentally challenged existing sectarian boundaries. Their systematic approach encompassed immediate disaster assessment, resource mobilization, and long-term reconstruction commitments that revealed sophisticated organizational capacities often overlooked in Chinese Buddhist institutions.

The scale and inclusivity of their response merit detailed examination. Among the monasteries receiving reconstruction funds, the majority were Theravāda institutions—a remarkable departure from historically segregated religious philanthropy. The Association allocated substantial funds for the severely damaged Maha Muni Pagoda, alongside comparable support for numerous Theravāda sites. Their comprehensive aid package addressed multiple dimensions of disaster recovery: emergency supplies meticulously selected for monsoon conditions (tarpaulins, mosquito nets, flashlights, preserved foods); differentiated household assistance calibrated to need (200,000 kyats for structural collapse, 300,000 kyats for bereaved families); educational continuity measures including 20 million kyats for the Confucian school and targeted support for examination candidates; and sustained medical services reaching hundreds through mobile clinics.

Whilst the relief effort under discussion was unidirectional as opposed to collaborative in the conventional sense, the grassroots responses documented on the Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association of Myanmar’s Facebook page reveal significant forms of social recognition. The Association’s medical teams provided assistance across sectarian lines, reaching Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Hui communities across religious boundaries. Despite the fact that they had lost their homes and possessions, disaster victims expressed their gratitude for the assistance and care they received. For example, one patient said: ‘Usually when buying medicine outside, we buy the cheapest ones, thinking as long as it can cure the illness. But the Buddhist Association’s medical team provides the best qual-

ity medicine, ensuring everyone's health. We are truly grateful from the bottom of our hearts.' It is noteworthy that a number of survivors proffer peanuts and beans to Chinese Buddhist relief workers and assisting monks, thereby expressing profound respect and gratitude. These spontaneous acts of reciprocity suggest that while the material aid flowed in one direction, symbolic recognition moved in the other, transforming charitable giving into a form of mutual exchange that transcended sectarian boundaries.

The financial magnitude of 719 million kyats distributed between March and June 2025 reflects more than material generosity. This sustained engagement generated continuous interaction between previously isolated religious communities, creating what informants identified as crucial 'personal contact.' The Association's non-discriminatory approach, supporting both Chinese temples and Theravāda institutions, enacted a practical ecumenism that decades of interfaith dialogue had failed to achieve. Through humanitarian aid, shared Buddhist values of compassion (*karuṇā*) and skillful means (*upāya*) found concrete expression, generating mutual recognition and respect across sectarian lines.²²

This evolution from doctrinal competition to unilateral compassion that generated reciprocal recognition illuminates broader theoretical implications for understanding religious boundary negotiation. Following Bourdieu's (1985, 1996) field theory, charitable activities can be understood not merely as material aid but as a distinct field of practice wherein religious capital accumulates through service rather than doctrinal orthodoxy. Within this field, Chinese Buddhist minorities can demonstrate legitimacy through culturally valued forms of merit-making that resonate across traditions. Through these philanthropic engagements, the Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association of Myanmar has effectively constructed cross-sectarian cooperation and recognition within Myanmar's multi-religious, multi-ethnic society, facilitating a redistribution of power and legitimacy. The 2025 earthquake response thus represents more than humanitarian aid—it exemplifies an emerging paradigm for Buddhist ecumenism predicated on charitable action rather than theological reconciliation. This shift from debate to action, from competition to compassion, suggests new possibilities for addressing historical religious divisions not only within Myanmar but across the global Buddhist community. The field of charitable practice becomes a space where religious minorities accumulate both religious capital and symbolic power, transcending doctrinal differences through shared values of compassion and service.

5. Conclusions

This research joins the growing effort to understand Buddhism in Southeast Asia beyond the well-documented Theravada tradition. Ethnographic studies of Myanmar's Buddhism have largely focused on Theravāda practices (Spiro 1970; Schober 2010; Kawanami 2013), leaving Chinese Mahāyāna communities relatively unexplored. Following McDaniel (2010), Hansen (2014), and Jack Chia's (2020) call for broader perspectives, I examine how Chinese Buddhist practices unfold in contemporary Myanmar, contributing to our understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism at its margins. The ancient tensions between Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions persist, yet recent decades have brought unexpected openings. Religious exchanges and joint activities hint at possibilities for genuine cross-traditional understanding, though progress remains tentative. What makes this analysis distinctive is its use of sociological theory to unpack religious minority dynamics. Bourdieu's field theory reveals how charitable work becomes a space where Chinese Buddhists accumulate religious capital without engaging in doctrinal debates. Through Gramsci's lens, we see Theravāda dominance maintained not through force but through everyday consent and cultural assumptions. Goffman helps us understand the small, daily negotiations through which Chinese monastics manage their stigmatized identity. The 2025

earthquake proved particularly revealing; crisis moments, it seems, can spark cooperation that years of dialogue could not achieve. Shared compassion succeeded where theological discussions had failed. My fieldwork reveals a complex picture. Yes, Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism faces real challenges in Myanmar, from lack of official recognition to everyday microaggressions, yet these communities show remarkable creativity in navigating their position. Charitable activities have emerged as particularly effective, creating spaces for positive encounters between traditions. Meanwhile, the rise in bilingual Burmese–Chinese monastics and the eye-opening effects of travel on Theravāda monks suggest that linguistic bridges and personal experiences matter more than formal interfaith initiatives. These findings remind us that Southeast Asian Buddhism is far more diverse than often acknowledged. Chinese Buddhist communities in Myanmar are not simply adapting or resisting; they are actively reshaping both their own tradition and the broader religious landscape through daily interactions, charitable work, and quiet persistence. Their strategies offer lessons for understanding religious minorities everywhere—survival often depends less on confrontation or assimilation than on finding creative ways to build relationships across differences.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviation

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 85 vols, Edited by Junjirō Takakusu 高楠順次郎 and Kaigyoku Watanabe 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.

Notes

¹ For a detailed discussion of the history of Chinese emigration worldwide from ancient times to the present century, see Kuhn (2008).

- 2 This study adheres to the pinyin system for transcribing Chinese names, place-names, and terms, in line with contemporary academic conventions. However, exceptions have been made for Taiwanese authors or masters, whose personal romanizations, as they appear in their published works or websites, have been retained. Similarly, overseas Chinese names and place-names in Singapore and Malaysia, which predominantly utilize Hokkien romanization, have been preserved in their original form to maintain cultural authenticity.
- 3 According to a U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom report in 2018: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/BURMA-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf> (accessed on 29 September 2024).
- 4 While a detailed examination of the religious life and activities of Yangon's ethnic-Chinese community lies beyond this paper's scope, one significant primary source merits mention: the *Qingfugong Baizhounian Qingdian Jinian Tekan* (慶福宮百週年慶典紀念特刊, Special Commemorative Issue for the Centennial Celebration of Qingfu Temple), compiled by the Burmese–Chinese community in the 1960s.
- 5 Broadly speaking, most of the Yunnanese in Myanmar live, and have always lived, in Mandalay, whereas Yangon Chinatown has been shared since colonial times between the Hokkien and the Cantonese Chinese. Owing to regional variation in the degrees of 'desinicization' and assimilation in postwar Myanmar, there has been a marked division in the use of the Chinese language by these two places' ethnic Chinese (Li 2015), with Yunnanese Chinese's language proficiency and cultural outlook having been more durable than that of their Hokkien/Cantonese counterparts in the south of the country.
- 6 For more information on the Yunnan Association in Mandalay, please refer to the website: <https://mhwmm.com/mianhuashetuan/58659.html> (accessed on 22 September 2025).
- 7 For more information on Jin Taw Yan, please see the website: <http://www.msxy.ynu.edu.cn/msxy/info/1025/3039.htm> (accessed on 22 September 2025).
- 8 Venerable Xuyun 虛雲 (c. 1840–1959) was a prominent Chinese Chan Buddhist master, recognized as one of the most influential Buddhist teachers of the 19th and 20th centuries. For comprehensive biographical information, refer to Hunn (1988), H. H. Shih (2003), and Campo (2017, pp. 99–136). According to Zhang (2017, p. 142), Ven. Xuyun composed a verse about *Longhua* Temple following his revisit to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, praising its magnificence and the multitude of worshippers seeking enlightenment.
- 9 Venerable Maio-Shan 妙善 (d. 1935), also known as the living Buddha of Gold Mountain (金山活佛), was renowned for his ascetic practices and spiritual cultivation. His religious life and dharma propagation in both China and Yangon are associated with numerous extraordinary narratives. For an English language introduction to Master Maio-shan, see the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association's publication (accessed on 9 July 2024): <http://www.drbachinese.org/vbs/publish/419/vbs419p016.pdf>.
- 10 Venerable Ci-hang 慈航 (1893–1954) was a notable monk and the first Buddhist mummy (also referred to as flesh body bodhisattva 肉身菩薩) in Taiwan. For detailed discussions on Buddhist mummification, consult Gildow and Bingenheimer (2002, pp. 87–127) and Travagnin (2006, pp. 77–100). Ven. Ci-hang adhered to Ven. Taixu's concept of renjian fojiao (Humanistic Buddhism), which advocates for monastic engagement with the broader community. He established Taiwan's first Buddhist college following the Republic of China government's retreat to the island. For further information, see Cheng-tsung Kan (1996, pp. 87–127).
- 11 Venerable Leguan 樂觀 (1902–1987) was a monk renowned for his commitment to national protection and the defence of Buddhism (護國衛教). During the War of Resistance against Japan, he advocated for the formation of a Monastic Rescue Crew (僧侶救護隊) to provide medical assistance to injured soldiers. His writings encompass various works on Buddhism and national defence-related political issues. Following the People's Republic of China's establishment in 1949, Ven. Leguan conducted anti-communist religious activities in Yangon.
- 12 It is important to note that this study aims to provide a balanced investigation of Chinese monastics' religious experiences in Burma's past. Due to the scarcity of historical resources on Chinese Buddhism in modern Burma, Ven. Leguan's account serves as a key reference, despite including subjective judgments that some in the Buddhist community have deemed overly critical or irrational (S. Y. Shih 1999, pp. 84–85; H. Y. Shih 2017, p. 276). This reliance on personal narratives necessitates a critical approach, as emphasized by Runyan (1986, p. 182), who distinguishes between "life histories as lives in the world, and life histories as accounts of lives." Wen-Chin Chang's research on Yunnanese migrants' stories further illustrates the potential for "fragmentation, inconsistency, and contradiction" in such accounts (Chang 2014, p. 10).
- 13 For an overview of death and burial for laypeople and monastics in Burma, see Spiro (1970, pp. 248–54, 398–400). For a description of the funeral of a Burmese *Thilá-shin* nun, see Kawanami (2013, pp. 127–28).
- 14 This phenomenon was not unique to Myanmar; similar trends were observed among Chinese monks who migrated to Malaysia and Singapore in the 19th century. In these contexts, monks were primarily engaged in funeral-ritual services for Hokkien or Cantonese immigrants, rather than dharma propagation (Chern 2009, p. 76; Hue 2013, p. 112).
- 15 It is noteworthy that this situation differs from that in Thailand, where Chinese monks, despite being a religious minority (comprising only 1.5% of the population), enjoy equal status with local Thai monks and are respected by the royal family and laity (Wu 2017, p. 171).

- 16 Historical precedents demonstrate that religious communities can flourish without state patronage, as evidenced by Protestant denominations in post-1820s America.
- 17 Roberts (2016, pp. 135–39) documents how political pressures have restricted Hungry Ghost Day ceremonies at Yangon’s Chinese Kuanyin Temple, illustrating the constraints on Chinese religious expression in urban Myanmar.
- 18 T14.n450, pp405a18-a20: “Fourth Great Vow: I vow that in a future life, when I have attained Supreme Enlightenment, I will set all who follow heretical ways upon the path to Enlightenment. Likewise, I will set those who follow the [*Śrāvaka(yāna)*] and [*Pratyeka-Buddha*] ways on the Mahayana Path” (Thanh et al. 2001, p. 20). T24.n1484, pp1006c19-c23. Mahāyāna practitioners are said to transgress minor precepts if they only practice *śrāvakas* and *Pratyeka-Buddha*: “8th minor precept: My disciples, if you turn away from the eternally abiding scriptures and the code of morality of the Great Vehicle, declaring that these are not Buddhist teachings; and if instead you accept and maintain the wrong views of adherents of the two vehicles or non-Buddhists, along with all of their prohibitions and scriptures and moral discipline based on mistaken views, then you have committed a minor transgression of the precepts” (Muller 2012, p. 337).
- 19 For more information, see <http://www.merit-times.com.tw/NewsPage.aspx?unid=462411> (accessed 20 June 2025).
- 20 For more information, see <http://mm.china-embassy.org/chn/zmgx/whjl/t1527165.htm> (accessed 20 June 2025).
- 21 For details, see <https://www.merit-times.com.tw/NewsPage2.aspx?unid=488897> (accessed 20 June 2025).
- 22 Documentation from the Association’s official Facebook page (March–June 2025) indicates substantial financial disbursements for disaster relief, with funds allocated across emergency aid, infrastructure reconstruction, and educational continuity programmes. Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association of Myanmar, Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063793338167> (accessed 21 June 2025).

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Article

A Prolegomenon to the Visual Language of Dance in Gandhāra

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Abstract: Pre-modern Indian subcontinent provides a treasure trove of art historical data in the form of stone sculptures and reliefs to study dance. While significant steps towards understanding the literary and visual language of dance have been made, artistic production from Gandhāra (the ancient region broadly covering the northwestern part of the subcontinent) largely remains absent in scholarly discussions. Ancient Gandhāra readily lends itself to a global approach as an active participant alongside the so-called ancient Silk Roads connecting the Mediterranean regions with China. Furthermore, as part of the Buddhist pilgrimage routes, Gandhāra also developed ties with Buddhist sites located further east and participated in the spread of Buddhism to China. Within this context, this article discusses the most common dance depicted in Gandhāran art to understand how artists represented dance in the static medium. Using this dance as an illustration, this article also argues that the iconographic conventions of the Gandhāran artistic repertoire for dance are shared outside the region, notably in Kizil, which is located alongside the northern branch of the Silk Roads.

Keywords: dance; Gandhāra; India; Kizil; body; theater

1. The Language of Dance in the Indian Subcontinent

It is customary to begin any systematic study on dance in the Indian subcontinent with the earliest authoritative texts codifying performances. As the most important text, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* or the ‘Treatise on Theater’ has been the object of dance-related studies since the 1930s.¹ The *Nāṭyaśāstra* consists of thirty-six or thirty-seven chapters addressing different aspects of theater and can be dated roughly between the second century BCE and the second century CE. Its authorship is attributed to the mythical Bharata who introduced the art of *nāṭya* (sometimes translated as dance-theater, drama or play) to humans to combat the moral degradation of society. This *nāṭya* comprised different elements such as rituals, music, and dancing.

Dance or *nṛtta* is dealt with in Chapter 4 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* using highly technical instructions and mythological narratives. Often placed in opposition to mimetic dance (*nṛtya*), *nṛtta* is defined as an abstract dance that does not contain narrative content.² The *Nāṭyaśāstra* outlines how *nṛtta* consists of 108 *karaṇas* (units of dance) comprising limb movements and hand gestures (*hasta/mudrā*).³ The various combinations of the *karaṇas* provide larger choreutic sequences called the *aṅgaharas*, which consist of 32 linear measurements, poses and stances. These sequences, when they appear in other mediums, such as paintings and sculptures, can be identified as dance.⁴

The study of art historical evidence in the light of *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s *karaṇas* has certainly led to the development of nuanced methodological approaches. Traditionally, *karaṇas* were thought to be static poses; however, it is now accepted that they are part of a whole movement consisting of a beginning, the course of the movement, and an end. This is particularly useful when studying the representation of dance in sculptures where only static poses can be identified. On this understanding, Vatsyayan astutely remarked that ‘the plastic can capture only a single moment in a continuous flow of movements and only suggests through the arrested image the moment before or after’.⁵ If the *karaṇas* in plastic arts are a series of movements, then images represent a snapshot of different moments

associated with dance.⁶ This allows for an unlimited number of representations of dance movements in sculptures that stem from the different stages of the 108 *karaṇas*.⁷

Such codified dance movements found in texts from the Indian subcontinent find a limited echo in the corpus of Gandhāran art, which is commonly associated with the ancient region of Gandhāra (Figure 1). The corpus of Gandhāran art consists mainly of schist and stucco reliefs and statues dating broadly from the first to the fourth century CE.⁸ The dance movements found in Gandhāran reliefs do not correspond to the descriptions found in Indic texts. However, viewing ‘petrified’ static poses of dance in art as part of dynamic performances is useful in our context where the primary source of information is stone reliefs. In order to systematically study dance, this article will show that the representation of dance in Gandhāran art was highly motivated by particular visual conventions. When studied together, reliefs belonging to diverse geographical and chronological periods present a limited repertoire of movements associated with dancing figures.

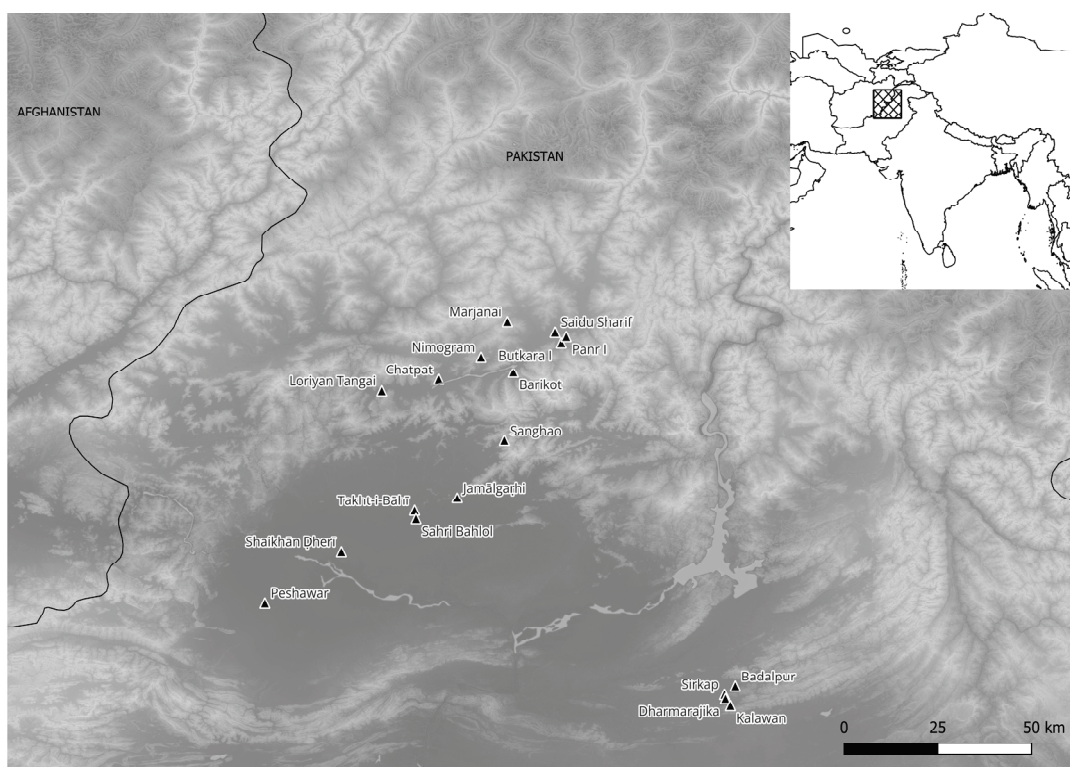


Figure 1. Important Buddhist Sites in the Gandhāran region. Source: author (in collaboration with Adam Wijker).

As a prolegomenon to dance in Gandhāran art, the present article examines one form of dance executed by both male and female figures on schist reliefs.⁹ Multiple forms of dance are depicted in Gandhāran art, such as the ‘Persian snap’, and this article engages with a dance that I provisionally label as ‘Indic’.¹⁰ The iconographic conventions related to the Indic dance studied in this article have a strong relationship to dance imagery from major sites such as Sānchi and Bhārhut. In comparing the representations of our Indic dance with images from other Indian Buddhist sites, we can see that the dancing figures wear similar costumes and perform variations of the same movement.

I wish to illustrate this striking similarity using two examples: Figures 2 and 3. See the dancer centrally depicted in Figure 2, which is from Gandhāra, and likely from the Swāt Valley, and the two dancers on the bottom register in Figure 3, which is from the Bhārhut *stūpa*: these figures execute the same movement. Moreover, both these dances occur in courtly settings, although their purpose varies. In Figure 2, a female dancer performs in the palace of Siddhārtha and in Figure 3, female dancers perform in the palace of Indra.

We will encounter Figure 2 once again in this article, so let us turn to an interesting detail in Figure 3. An inscription found on the dome of Indra's palace identifies the scene as the *cūdāmaha* (literally, the festival of the hair crest). It suggests that the dance is taking place as part of a festive celebration. The focus of the dance is the hair relic, indicated by Prince Siddhārtha's turban, located under the inscription.¹¹ Despite the different purposes of the dances, even a cursory glance at Figures 2 and 3 reveals that the conventions used to depict dance in these images are nearly identical. Only stylistic and aesthetic elements related to the figures' costume and jewelry differ, but these can be explained based on regional choices made by the artists.

Due to their similarities, I have tentatively labeled the reliefs depicting the variations of this dance movement as 'Indic'. This label does not presuppose the existence of an authentic performance group that was associated with a specific Indian ethnicity. It simply allows us to define a distinct corpus of data and contrast it with other dance forms that have already received some attention in scholarly studies. Representations of this Indic dance are the focus of the first section, and so the label should be viewed simply as a shorthand to differentiate between numerous dance movements appearing in Gandhāran art whose origin and existence cannot easily be clarified using the available data.



Figure 2. Siddhārtha surrounded by female musicians and a dancer, a relief likely from the Swāt Valley (c. 1st century CE). Islamabad Museum, Islamabad, Pakistan. Source: Zong Zixiao.



Figure 3. Female figures dancing alongside male musicians around the Buddha's turban from the Bhārhut stūpa (c. 2nd–1st century BCE). Indian Museum, Kolkata, India. Source: Author.

In the second section, Gandhāran reliefs will be compared to a wall painting found in Kizil with a dancing female figure. This section will argue that at least some iconographic conventions related to the representation of dance from Gandhāra may have also been adapted by artists along the ancient Silk Roads. This comparative study provides yet another dimension to the dynamic interactions occurring between Gandhāra and Kuča via the long-distance religious and mercantile routes.

I am aware that the scope of this article only allows me to address a handful of examples. They are not meant to be representative of all dance movements found in Gandhāran art. They can only provide a small glimpse of dance based on the visual corpus of this astonishingly multicultural region. A complete inventory of dance movements in Gandhāran art is still a *desideratum*. While I eagerly await such a study, my modest goal in this article is to present a preliminary analysis of selected reliefs for further exploration.

Before examining the representation of dance in Gandhāran art, it is important to establish what I mean by this term. Dance is intentional, rhythmic, and stereotypical bodily movements that can be observed and identified as a special category of behavior. In Gandhāran art, the presence of abstract dance can be detected based on the position of the body and the limbs of the figures performing it. The dancing figures in art are usually depicted frontally; however, some images present the dancer from the back, perhaps indicating turns and perspectives. In visualizing our Indic dance, the figures commonly stand with their lower limbs crossed or one of them lifted upwards. For example, in Figure 4, a female dancer performs alongside a male musician with a harp. The female dancer has her lower limbs crossed in a posture that is commonly associated with dancing figures. The dance occurs on a relief depicting the *Candakinnara jāataka*, in which a *kinnara* (mythical beings) couple's tranquil life is tragically interrupted by a lustful king. The *kinnaras* harmony in their forest abode is communicated by their dance and musical performances.

Regarding the upper limbs, dancing figures usually hold one or both arms away from the body. We must keep in mind that non-dancing figures also perform gestures that are similar to dancing figures. However, they are rarely accompanied by musicians, which is the case when dance is represented. Moreover, the arrangement of the dancer's body normally deviates from its central axis based on their limb movements. Such an arrangement can be favorably compared to the *tribhaṅga* or the triple bend pose. With this background, we will see in the following sections how the Indic dance in Gandhāran art comprises a limited (re)combination of arm and leg movements that are repeatedly highlighted by the reliefs.¹²



Figure 4. Detail of a relief depicting the *Candakinnara jātaka* with a female dancer and a male musician with a harp, from Loriyan Tangai (c. 2nd–3rd century CE). Indian Museum, Kolkata, India. Source: Author.

2. Finding Dance in Gandhāra Art

The Indic dance in Gandhāran art commonly occurs as part of courtly entertainment, festive celebrations, and decorations of panels depicting the Buddha's life story. The most common context within which this dance can be identified is the palace of Prince Siddhārtha, the future Buddha Śākyamuni. The visualization of Siddhārtha's luxurious palace life, such as in Figure 2, often includes dancers and musicians who entertain the prince.¹³ Usually female dancers, accompanied by musicians, perform in front of the Siddhārtha and his wife, Yaśodharā, and form part of the sensual world that is later abandoned by the prince. Similarly, dance also occurs as a form of courtly entertainment for the *nāgas* (serpent divinities having a human form with a snake hood, Figure 5). Since the *nāgarāja* (*nāga* king) is a royal figure in his own realm, he is often entertained by *nāginī* musicians and dancers.

As we have already seen in Figure 3, which comes from Bhārhut, dance can also be identified in Gandhāran reliefs depicting festivals and processions. During such events, dance occurs around a range of objects such as the Buddha's turban, *stūpas* (hemispherical monuments sometimes containing relics), reliquaries, and the Buddha himself (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Relief with *nāginīs* dancing around the *nāgarāja*, provenance unknown (c. 2nd–3rd century CE). Musée National des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet, Paris, France. Source: Author.

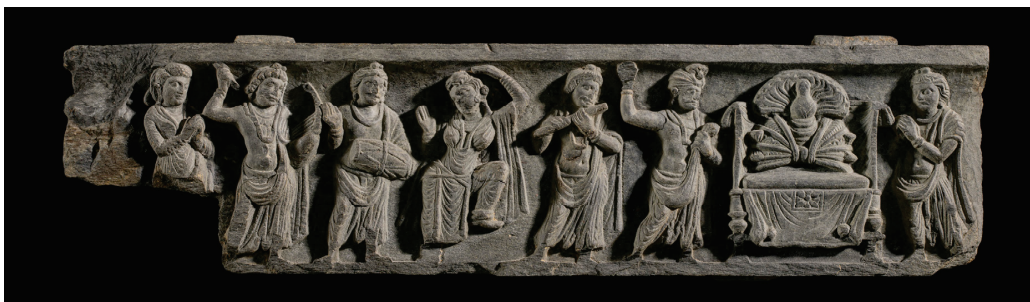


Figure 6. Relief with Siddhārtha’s turban, provenance unknown (c. 2nd–3rd century CE). Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada. Source: Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.

Besides these two contexts—courtly and festive celebrations—dancing figures also decorate architectural elements such as frames of niches and door jambs. These figures, both male and female, as we will see, perform the same variations of the Indic dance movements found in the other two contexts despite their decorative function.

Some of the datable reliefs with dancing figures in Gandhāran art come from Butkara I, one of the largest and longest-used Buddhist sites in Gandhāra. Relative dating and stratigraphy suggest that the site was used from the early third century BCE to the tenth century CE. Its foundations may have been associated with the Dharmarājikā *stūpas* built by the Mauryan King Aśoka (c. 304–232 BCE), and its later enlargement may be related to the Oḍirājas, a group of local Gandhāran potentates who controlled the Swāt Valley in the first century CE.¹⁴ The site, built mainly using local schist, is dominated by a large *stūpa* called the Great Stūpa. The systematic development of the site can be understood based on the different building periods of this Great Stūpa.¹⁵ During these building periods, the Great Stūpa was surrounded by over 227 smaller monuments including *stūpas*, *vihāras* (shrines), and columns (*stambha*), some of which were decorated with reliefs.

In Butkara I, at least six bas-reliefs preserve figures performing the Indic dance with relatively few variations. They can be broadly dated between the first and the third century CE based on their stylistic features. Four out of six reliefs depicting dance preserve small-sized figures within architectural settings. We will see how this architectural frame enhances the impression of the movement and restricts it to the available space. In these cases, the figures are also placed in relation to musicians either within the same architectural frame or in associated registers.

The most elaborate example of dance from Butkara I is a relief depicting two male figures under an elaborate arch (Figure 7). It is part of the category of images belonging to the *stile disegnativo* or drawing style. This style can be dated to the first century CE which coincides with the Saka-Parthian era as well as the local Oḍirājas.¹⁶ The main characteristics of this style are the frontal depictions of figures, flat treatment of volume, and dense lines for

drapery. According to Filigenzi, these characteristics ‘show the dependence on more or less coeval Indian iconographies, evidently held as authoritative models’.¹⁷ This may further explain the striking similarity between the representations of dance in drawing style and in other Indian Buddhist sites.



Figure 7. Musician with a harp and a dancer under an arched gateway from Butkara I (c. 1st century CE). Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome, Italy. Source: O. Bopearachchi.

The relief depicts two male performers standing in front of an elaborate *caitya* arch, perhaps symbolizing a gateway. Gateways in Gandhāran art are commonly used to frame devotees, both monastic and lay, as they engage in a variety of veneration activities. They occur more frequently in the Swāt Valley, and reliefs from Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I preserve some of the most elaborate versions of these arches. However, the arches have only been identified in art and similar arches have not been unearthed at Gandhāran sites. The lack of *caitya* arches in the archeological record has led Brancaccio to convincingly argue that they were an imaginary space in art rather than a reference to contemporary architectural elements.¹⁸ The artists in Swāt were likely aware of central Indian architectural and artistic traditions and used certain elements to create new visual spaces with meaning. The *caitya* arches in Gandhāran art act as framing devices for devotional practices and make allusions to relic shrines located in the Buddha’s homeland. As zooming devices, they keep our vision focused on the figures and their actions while simultaneously placing them within a symbolic space located beyond the Swāt Valley. The figures, for their part, perform activities associated with contemporary praxis, and embed the local within the broader Buddhist landscape.

Returning to Figure 7, the two male figures are dressed similarly; they both wear a turban and a pleated lower garment.¹⁹ Their elaborate jewelry, such as the long-weighted earrings and necklaces, as well as their rich drapery, reveal their wealthy status.²⁰ The male figure on the left holds an arched harp with a plectrum and strokes the strings of the instrument. The figure to the right performs the dance that we will also encounter in subsequent examples. Moreover, it can also be favorably compared to the representations of dance found in other Indian Buddhist sites such as the dancing figure accompanying the Bodhisattva on a relief from Amarāvati (Figure 8). While performing this dance movement, the figure’s right arm is arched above his head and his hand reaches over his turban. His left arm is bent close to his torso and his lower limbs are crossed. His body is not haphazardly depicted but is balanced by distributing his weight to the side toward which the face is turned. Such a posture in response to music does not seem to be accidental. We will see how figures represented this way are not in the throes of movement but carefully executing a topical dance.



Figure 8. Relief depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha, starting from the Tuṣitā heaven, the descent, and the dream of Māyā from the Amarāvati *stūpa* (c. 1st century CE). Indian Museum, Kolkata, India. Source: Author.

Several relief fragments from outside of the Swāt Valley dating from roughly after the second century CE present the same dance movement. For example, a relief panel of unknown provenance depicts a musician and a dancer under an elaborate pavilion (Figure 9). The courtly setting of the dance can be inferred based on the architectural elements and the relief may be related to scenes of Siddhārtha’s sensual palace life.²¹ Moreover, the performance occurs in front of an audience that is also part of the figural space. The presence

of well-dressed female figures observing the dance from their balconies further emphasizes that the dance was performed for members of the royal palace. When compared with Figure 7, only a few negligible differences such as the dancer's gender and musical instrument emerge. Despite these differences between Figures 7 and 9, the dance remains strikingly identical. Their similarity suggests that artists deliberately used the same iconographic conventions to visually depict dance over a long period of time.



Figure 9. Female dancer accompanied by a female musician within an elaborate pavilion, provenance unknown (c. 2nd–3rd century CE). Musée National des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet, Paris, France. Source: Author.

The other five reliefs from Butkara I dated roughly between the second and third century CE take up the same movement, using limited variations, to depict dance. Apart from the gender and clothing of the figures, little to no difference can be identified in the arrangement of the limbs and gestures from a technical perspective. For instance, a relief panel divided into two registers depicts a dance in one of them.²² The two registers likely depict two distinct stories from the Buddha's biography; however, the present state of the relief only allows for a tentative identification. On the upper register, figures stand around an enthroned mound in veneration. We can suggest that the mound represents the relics of the Buddha and is perhaps related to the events after the *mahāparinirvāṇa*. On the bottom register, a variation of the Indic dance is depicted. On the left, a seated royal couple watches female musicians and a dancer perform. This scene can be favorably identified as courtly entertainment happening in Siddhārtha's palace. The dancer, depicted on the right, is viewed only from the back and is wearing a pleated lower garment. Based on the perspective of the scene, the dancer faces her audience, the royal couple. Despite the poor condition of the relief, we can reconstruct some aspects of the dance movement. She is depicted with her left leg slightly raised above the ground, and the position of her right shoulder suggests that her right hand was raised above her head. A strikingly similar movement occurs on a relief in which the Buddha is welcomed by a group of musicians and a dancer. Based on its stylistic and iconographic features, the relief likely comes from

the Swāt Valley and can be dated to the first century CE (Figure 10). At the center of the relief, a male figure wearing a pleated lower garment performs the same dance movement found in the aforementioned relief from Butkara I. Moreover, the perspectives are also identical; both dancers are turned away from the viewer.



Figure 10. A dancer and musicians welcome the Buddha (c. 1st century CE). Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, Germany. Source: Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

The repetitive iconography of dance can be further illustrated based on other reliefs from Butkara I such as a door jamb relief.²³ In its present state, the relief preserves three pairs of figures in different registers. In the middle of the fragment, a pair of dancers perform within an elaborate architectural setting. The pair comprises a poorly preserved male figure with a half-wrapped mantle and a female dancer wearing a pleated lower garment and long earrings. The female dancer's right hand is raised above her head and her upper body is arched by leaning towards the left. Her left hand is held close to the body. Her lower limbs are also carefully arranged, and her feet are crossed to further accentuate the gracefulness of her movement.

The variations of this dance are numerous, for example, a door jamb relief which depicts two dancing figures from Butkara I (Figure 11). The relief is divided into three registers. A female figure plays a long flute on the upper register as two female figures perform the same dance in two consecutive registers. Despite the difference in perspective, the leg and arm positions seem to be derived from the Indic dance. To explain this, let us

look closely at the actions performed within both registers. The dance, read from top to bottom, is executed by the right side followed by the left side. It is identical and the only difference between the two registers is the side of the limbs that are activated. The two figures have their feet crossed and one of their hands is raised above their head.

The presence of the same dance in two consecutive registers suggests some effort was made by the artists to depict a sequence. Repeating the same dance starting with the right side and then followed by the left creates the impression of bilateral symmetry. By representing it side by side, the visual language emphasizes the continuous yet uniform actions of the figures.²⁴ In comparison, this symmetry is also highlighted by the two dancers in Figure 3, who execute the same movement on either side of the seated *nāgarāja*. Such representations are particularly interesting and, as in the case of Butkara I relief, reveal the existence of multiple perspectives of the same dance on smaller decorative figures.

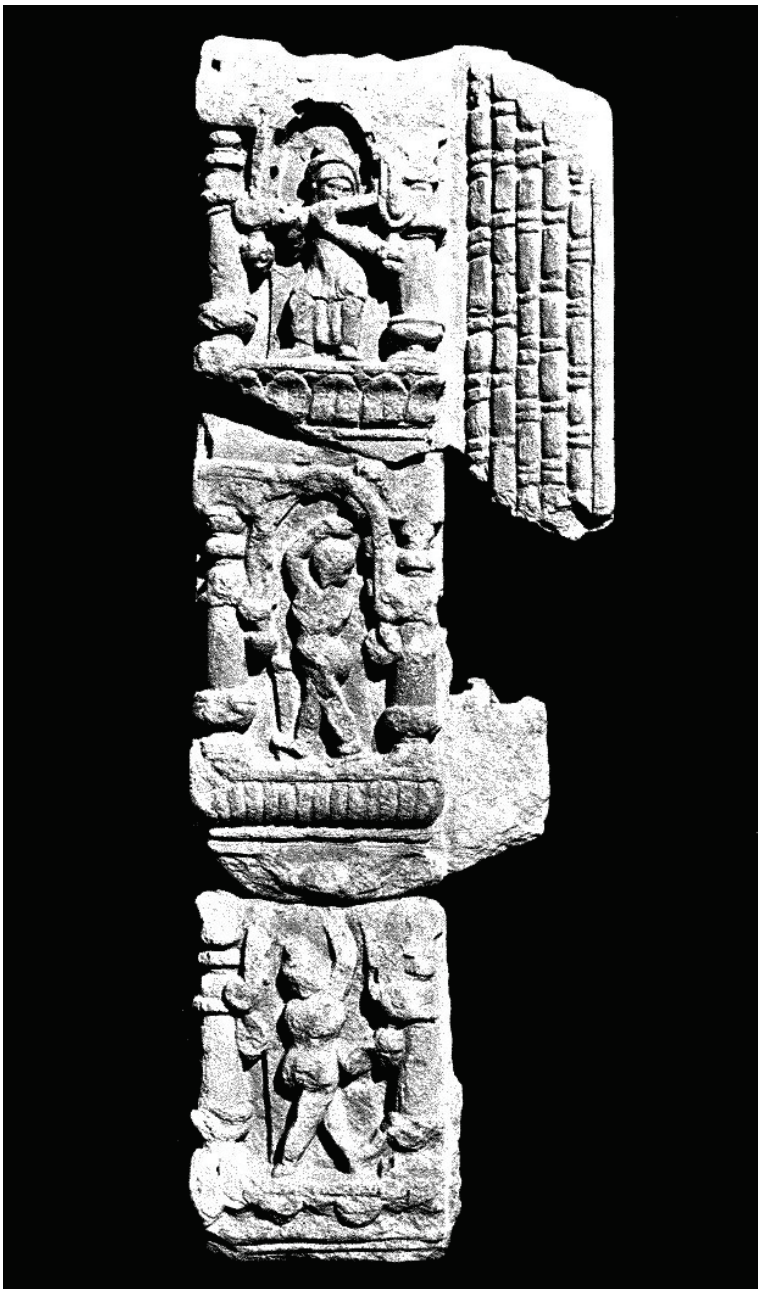


Figure 11. Musician and two dancers in separate registers from Butkara I (c. 2nd century CE). Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome, Italy. Source: Faccenna, 1962–1964, Pl. CDXCVIII (Inv. No. 4258).

The role of dance as a form of entertainment is evident, but why does dance appear as part of decorations? Buddhist texts identify dance as part of festivals organized to commemorate important events in the Buddha's biographies.²⁵ Already in the biographical texts, the use of dance to venerate the Buddha shows a blueprint for how it may have become an important element of relic rituals. Following the Buddha's *mahāparinirvāṇa*, festivities (*mahas*) for his relics occurred and the Mallas performed *sarīrapūjā*²⁶ with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes.²⁷ Once his relics were interred within a *stūpa*, devotees were encouraged to perform similar acts of reverence and gain spiritual merit.²⁸ The visual representation of such dances performed by the Mallas around the Buddha's relics can also be found in Bhārhut (Figure 12). The relief uses the visual conventions for dance that we have already examined in Gandhāran art. Female figures, presumably belonging to the Malla clan dance and perform music in front of elephants transporting the Buddha's relics. The dancers and musicians can be seen as part of an elaborate procession organized around the first distribution of relics following the Buddha's funeral.



Figure 12. Female figures dancing alongside the procession of relics on elephants from Bhārhut *stūpa* (c. 2nd–1st century BCE). National Museum, New Delhi, India. Source: O. Bopearachchi.

While images show us dance, the texts usually do not describe the dance performed by the devotees. However, they repeatedly mention it as an activity related to lay devotees during festivals. In one such festival described in the *Avadānaśataka*, singing and dancing were so enthusiastically conducted by the devotees that the *stūpa* was covered by dust after the festival and required further cleaning.²⁹ Our Gandhāran reliefs such as Figure 7 could speak of the joyous and uplifting mood associated with such passionate performances. In light of these literary descriptions, if we consider that Buddhist sites were locations for veneration and performances, figures under arches and other architectural spaces may refer to dance as an offering albeit in a highly idealized manner. Similar to figures making offerings such as lamps and flowers, the male performers in Figures 7 and 11, for instance can be viewed as making an offering of their music and dance. Through their performances, figures in stone venerate the Buddha and his relics perpetually and imbue the sacred area with a festive ambiance.

The use of such evocative festive imagery within the sacred area may also be considered as part of the broader communicative strategy used by the *saṃgha*. Pagel's study of Buddhist texts such as *avadānas* has convincingly demonstrated that well-organized song, dance and theatrical performances as part of Buddhist festivals were also exploited for

commercial reasons.³⁰ Festivals were used as a tool to strengthen the ties between the lay and monastic communities through merriment and economic exchanges. Their success was determined by their ability to attract crowds which are usually described in the range of ‘several hundred thousand’. Merchants used the opportunity provided by the festivals to sell their goods to the gathering. Some of the goods sold in the festival markets and the resulting profit, may very well have been donated to the *saṃgha*. In these cases, texts emphasize the religious and commercial opportunities created by festivals that could be exploited by the *saṃgha* to enrich itself. Viewing our images in the light of these descriptions of festivals, one cannot help but suspect that the reliefs depicting dance recalled the substantial religious and commercial interest of the broader community that viewed them. Dance imagery in this context could have acted as a concise visual reminder of the opportunities for merry-making and merit-making created by the festivals.

3. Visual Convention of Dance at Kizil Cave 83

Even though we cannot definitively connect the dance movements depicted in Gandhāran art with contemporary praxis, other related evidence shows that the iconographic and stylistic conventions related to dance resonated within a wide geographical and cultural *milieu*. One such evidence comes in the form of a wall painting depicting a dance performance and found in Kizil Cave 83, the Treasure Cave or Schatzhöhle C. The square cave with a domed ceiling is part of a compact group of grottos comprising Caves 82, 83, 84 and 85. The caves derive their name from a treasure found in a deep pit.³¹ Caves 83 and 84 possess paintings of the *Sonderstil* or Special Style due to the delicate contours, expression and slit eyes of the figures.³² This style closely follows Indic painting traditions and can be dated to the early development of the site, around the fourth century CE. The paintings also provide a consistent overlap during the period in which Buddhist activities in Gandhāra continued to develop. Keeping in mind the active role of Gandhāra and Kuča within the early trade routes connecting Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent, it is not surprising to see the same dance depicted at Kizil in Cave 83.³³

The domed ceiling of Cave 83 was destroyed, and the paintings on the side walls were poorly preserved by the time of Albert Grünwedel’s expeditions in 1906. The most well-preserved painting was on the back wall, and it depicts a dance (Figure 13). The painting, commonly interpreted as the legend of King Rudrāyaṇa, is dominated by an enthroned royal figure who watches a female dancer. The story is present in the *Divyāvadāna* or *Divine Stories*, a compendium of Indian Buddhist stories in Sanskrit that were compiled as early as the first century until the eighth century CE.³⁴ The popularity and influential nature of individual *āvadānas* amongst Buddhist communities in various parts of the subcontinent is also attested by their representations in art. Moreover, the *āvadānas* were also included in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, a Buddhist school that flourished in the Indic northwest during the first centuries CE.

For the present study, a general synopsis of the *Rudrāyaṇa-avadāna* is sufficient. This *avadāna* consists of connected sub-stories that recount several events related to King Rudrāyaṇa ruling the great city of Roruka with his favorite queen Candraprabhā, his son Śikhaṇḍin and his chief ministers. It starts with the friendship between Rudrāyaṇa and Bimbisara in which the latter sends the former an image of the Buddha. These events are followed by Rudrāyaṇa allowing his harem women to listen to *dharma* talks. Every day, the *dharma* talks were delivered for an unknown period. One day, when the King expertly played the veena while the Queen danced, he saw a sign that foretold the imminent death of Candraprabhā. Upon hearing the signs, Candraprabhā became a *bhikṣuṇī* and was born in the *Cāturmahārājika* (Four Great Kings) heaven. After some important religious breakthroughs, she showed her divine self to the King and he decided to renounce everything including his kingdom to his son. The *avadāna* continues with several events related to their son Śikhaṇḍin and ends with a moral lesson against evil.

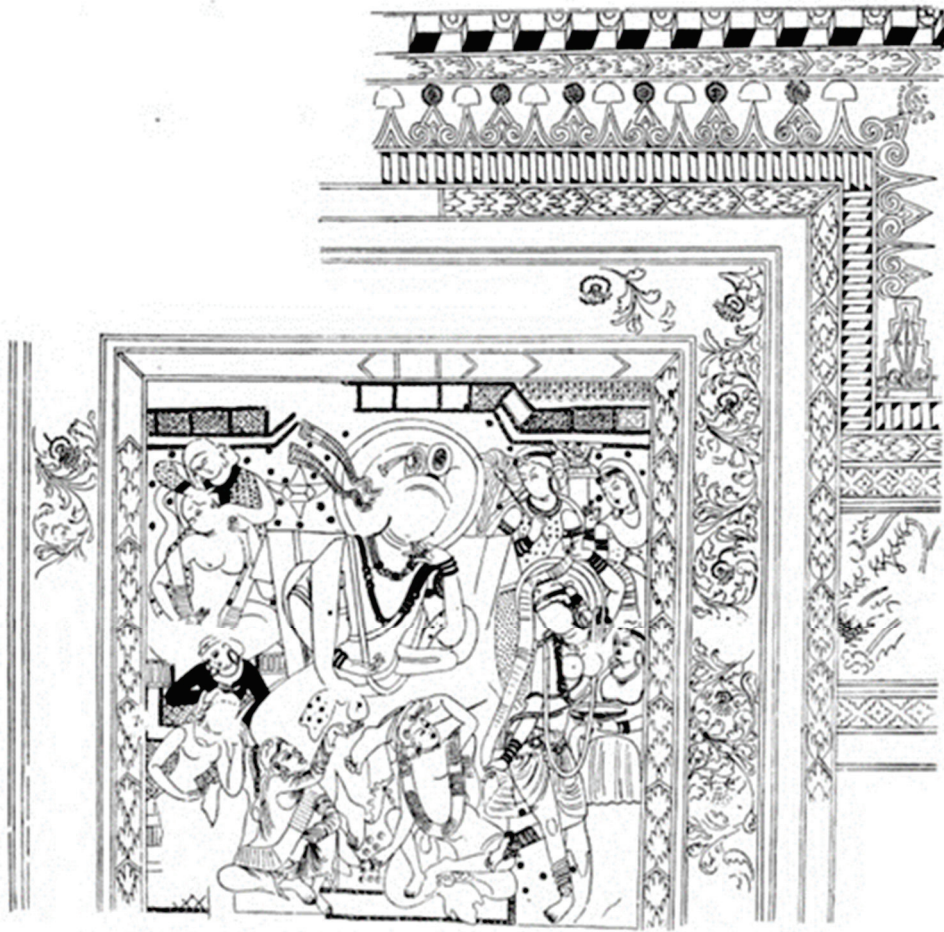


Figure 13. Wall painting depicting the dance of queen Candraprabhā, from Cave 83 (Treasure Cave C) at Kizil (c. 4th century CE). Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, Germany. Source: Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

For the identification of the painting in Cave 83, one of the most important moments of the story with the Queen Candraprabhā dancing in front of the King is persuasive. Under an elaborate architectural frame often related to decorative motifs in Roman art, King Rudrāyaṇa watches as Candraprabhā dances. Several courtiers and well-dressed women surrounding the royal couple also watch the performance. The painting likely shows us the moment in which the King saw signs foretelling the Queen's imminent death. The bodily posture of Candraprabhā is depicted in a type of *tribhaṅga* that we have already come across in Gandhāra art. This posture lends the body a certain flexibility and emphasizes her movement. Her left leg is bent at the knee and is lifted as it is about to be placed behind her right leg. Her left hand is also raised above her head. Her body is curved toward the right and her head is bent down. Within her palms, she holds a long garland that is undulated as she performs her dance. Her lower body is covered by a rich, transparent, diaphanous garment that further amplifies her dance. The texture of the garment also provides a glimpse of her bejeweled girdle clasped around her hip. Besides the girdle, she wears many ornaments including bracelets, earrings, anklets, and necklaces, all of them fitting for a dancing Queen in the palace.

The dance in the Kizil painting finds close parallels with dancing female figures in Gandhāran art, for example, with Figure 14. On this relief, we are confronted with a similar movement with little variation. A female figure, who is partially preserved, is depicted with an arm extended along the length of the body and another arched above her head. Despite the damage to the surface, we can trace that the figure likely held a long garland between her hands. Moreover, the lower limb movement is not fully preserved. How-

ever, based on the painting and other representations of dance in Gandhāran art, we can suggest that the dancer's leg movements were derived from conventional imagery and so, her feet were likely crossed. She performs this dance under a pavilion supported by a Gandhāran-Corinthian column and for an audience. Besides the iconographic conventions of dance, the architectural context and the elaborately dressed figures surrounding the dancer reveal that we are looking at a performance at the court, perhaps within the palace of Siddhārtha.³⁵



Figure 14. Female dancer accompanied by other female figures, provenance unknown (c. 2nd–3rd century CE). Musée National des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet, Paris, France. Source: Author.

In Gandhāra and Kizil, we find the Indic dance executed within the luxurious courtly setting. Whether it was Siddhārtha's splendid palace or King Rudrāyaṇa's court, both the stone reliefs and the mural painting present strikingly similar bodily posture in association with this dance. Based on their similarity, we can suggest that artists in Kizil relied on a popular iconographic convention to represent dance. They may have looked for an existing iconographic model that was already established in Gandharan art within the courtly context to represent the dance of Queen Candraprabhā. Thus, the iconographic conventions typically associated with courtly dance performances in both Gandhāra and Kuča suggest, in my opinion, that some elements of the visual language related to dance were likely shared by artists over a large geographic and chronological zone. They reveal that dance imagery conformed to artistic conventions and the dancing figures were symbols for dance in general rather than an illustration of a particular dance performance. Based on the striking uniformity between Cave 83 and Gandhāran reliefs, we can identify the presence of similar conventions, and add dance imagery to the growing list of similarities between the two regions.³⁶

4. Preliminary Conclusions

Our knowledge of dance in Gandhāra relies entirely on the iconographic record. Based on the images alone, I would not dare to conclude that dances in art were observable in reality since we lack any other type of evidence to support such a claim. However, the analysis of a specific type of dance, here associated with Indic conventions, allows us to arrive at some preliminary conclusions. The repetition of similar dance movements in visual art over four centuries and within different regions in Gandhāra and elsewhere, in my opinion, suggests that artists used specific visual conventions to represent dance. This suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that the artists focused on a limited combination of arm and leg movements to convey dancing. These movements, I suspect, became topical and began to be associated with dance as a general category of performance in visual art. The representation of such movements were likely visual cues used to evoke the world of dance performances in general, rather than a particular event, in the mind of the viewers. The devotee, as an audience familiar with the visual language and perhaps influenced by contemporary experiences, would have understood these 'petrified' dances despite the limited recombination of movements.

The dance imagery commonly used in Gandhāran art may have also influenced the artists at Kizil, as suggested by the mural painting in Cave 83. The painting depicting Candraprabhā's dance reveals that the artistic conventions associated with dance in the Indian subcontinent may have also been utilised in the Tarim Basin. The use of the Indic dance at Kizil sheds light on the constructed nature of dance imagery in both sculptures and mural paintings in the early centuries CE. Their striking similarity may have stemmed from the fact that dance postures in art were part of prescribed elements, lending dance imagery a level of uniformity within a wide geographical area. The artists at Kizil may have adopted the pre-existing elements associated with dance and deployed them to enhance the courtly setting of the narrative. In the case of the painting in Cave 83, the choice made by the artists was likely facilitated by recombining a limited set of arm and leg movements that were already consistently associated with Siddhārtha's palace in Gandhāran art.

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Notes

- 1 Later texts such as the *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavagupta provide a wealth of information regarding Sanskrit drama and dance in Kashmir around the 11th century CE. As this is not relevant to our present context, I do not discuss this text. However, an important analysis of this text alongside the *Nāṭyaśāstra* can be found in (Ganser 2022), ‘Theatre and Its Other’.
- 2 (Iyer 1993), ‘A fresh look at *nṛtta*’.
- 3 *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4.30cd. The relationship between movements of dance and emotions as conceived within *bhāvas* and *rasa* is addressed in (Ganser 2020), ‘Incomplete mimesis’.
- 4 The dance is associated with the Śiva *tāṇḍava*, a cosmic dance creating a cycle of birth and rebirth. Dance also requires symmetry and balance that can be associated with practices of yoga ((Ganser 2023) ‘Dance as Yoga’). For the connection of different temple sculptures and *karaṇas*, see (Vatsyayan 1977), ‘Indian Classical Dance’, 106–154.
- 5 (Vatsyayan 1977), ‘Indian Classical Dance’, 5.
- 6 (Subrahmanyam 2003), ‘Karaṇas: Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia’. A reconstruction of the *karaṇas* was also made by Padma Subrahmanyam and is available at https://archive.org/details/dli.pb.natyashastra.1/Natyashastra.1_1.m4v (accessed on 12 July 2023).
- 7 The numerous possibilities make it very challenging to identify the exact *karaṇas*, if they were intended to be represented in art. This issue is further aggravated when the objective of the visual program was not to represent the *karaṇas* systematically. This is the case in Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebid, Karnataka. The interpretation of these dance sculptures can be found in (Tosato 2017) ‘The Voice of the Sculptures’.
- 8 The origins of the visual language of dance, at this stage, cannot be traced to textual treatises on the theme such as the *karaṇas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. However, this does not mean that dance and its associated arts such as theater were not, to some extent, codified. Some traces of codification in a text, which is now lost, are mentioned by the grammarian Pāṇini and was called the *Naṭasūtras* or the Aphorisms for Actors (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* IV.3.110). The famed Sanskrit grammarian is considered to have been born in Gandhāra, in Śalātura (near Peshawar, Pakistan), and likely lived in the region around the fifth century BCE. This presents the possibility that some type of codified performance existed within our context and was known to the author of the text. For an overview of theater in Gandhāra, see (Brancaccio and Liu 2009), ‘Dionysus and drama’.
- 9 One of the main problems of studying dance sculptures is that dance like music, as a performance art, is rendered through different mediums of other arts such as images and texts. On the other hand, musical instruments has been studied in some detail and notable works on this theme are (Goldman 1978), ‘Parthians at Gandhāra’; (Nettl 1991), ‘But What Is the Music?’; and (Lo Muzio 1989), ‘Classificazione degli strumenti musicali’.
- 10 Western iconographies in the representation of dance are examined in (Lo Muzio 2019), ‘Persian ‘Snap’.
- 11 Siddhārtha cuts off his hair and removes his turban before achieving enlightenment as they were a symbol of his former attachments as a prince. According to (Lüders 1963), ‘Bharhut Inscriptions’, p. 94, based on texts such as the *Nidānakathā*, *Mahāvastu*, *Lalitavistara*, and the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, it is the anniversary of this event that is celebrated by the thirty-three gods heaven as the festival of the hair-lock.
- 12 The formulaic representation of limb and arm movements and their combinations in Indian art is also the focus of (Fukuroi 2008), ‘Dancing Images in the Gōpuras’.
- 13 Similarly, dancing along with song and music as an entertainment occurs in Śuddhodana and Māyā’s court (*Mahāvastu* I.99), and later in Siddhārtha’s Palace (*Lalitavistara* XII. 33; *Buddhacarita* II. 30) and indeed, music and dance were used to unsuccessfully prevent the Great Renunciation (*Lalitavistara* XIV.1). In the *Yichu pusa benqi jing* 異出菩薩本起經 (Sūtra [of] the great renunciation; Sanskrit: Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra), translated by Nie Daozhen 聶道真, the dancing girls were put to sleep during the renunciation by the four heavenly kings (T. no. 188. 619b-c). It is a customary part of the royal court in *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (539) and the *nāgā* court in *Vidhurapaṇḍita-jātaka* (545) and also appears as form of seduction in the *Cullapallobhana-jātaka* (263).
- 14 For a comprehensive introduction to the local dynasties, the Apracarājas and the Oḍirājas ruling Bajaur and Swāt respectively, see (Salomon 2007), ‘Dynastic and Institutional Connections’.
- 15 (Faccenna 1980–1981), ‘Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan) 1956–1962’.
- 16 (Filigenzi et al. 2003), ‘At the Origin of Gandhāran Art’.
- 17 (Filigenzi 2019) ‘Forms, Models and Concepts’.
- 18 (Brancaccio 2007), ‘Gateways to the Buddha’.

- 19 It is not farfetched to suggest that the elaborately styled musician and dancer, richly draped and wearing turbans and heavy jewelry may have been part of the performative imagery interconnected with the aristocratic habitus of the court. Indeed, the interaction between art and the court within Gandhāra using, amongst others, the representation of dance and musical performances has already been argued by (Galli 2011), ‘Hellenistic Court Imagery’ but is limited to the Graeco-Roman elements. Needless to say, the local kingdoms were substantially Indic.
- 20 It should be noted that the iconographic conventions related to clothing and jewelry are also part of donors and devotee figures in the Swāt Valley. The iconographic conventions of the figure and the lack of individualizing features present the possibility that they are donors (or devotees). For more on this analytical category see (Lakshminarayanan 2023), ‘Towards Investigating the Representation of Gandhāran Female Donors’.
- 21 For a short description of court performances see (Mehta 1999), ‘Sanskrit Play Production in Ancient India’, 286.
- 22 (Faccenna 1962–1964), ‘Sculptures from the Sacred Area’, Pl. CCCXCVII (Inv. No. 87).
- 23 Ibid, Pl. CCCLI (Inv. No. 2871).
- 24 This is also an element of modern Indian classical dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi. However, questions on their connection to historical forms of dance in India has been raised in (Ganser 2011), ‘Thinking Dance Literature’.
- 25 (Schopen 2014), ‘Celebrating Odd Moments’.
- 26 This was the funeral to worship the *sarīra* (body) of the Buddha. Prior to the Buddha’s *nirvāna*, he instructed Ananda, his foremost disciple, not to be preoccupied with the *sarīrapūjā* and to permit the lay followers to perform them. Scholars have misunderstood this to mean that *bhikṣus* were entirely forbidden from performing *sarīrapūjā* and that such worship belonged solely in the realm of lay followers. Schopen convincingly demonstrated that this passage did not relate to relic worship and that *sarīrapūjā* meant the funeral ceremonies that were performed before the cremation of the body. Over time, the term *sarīrapūjā* began to acquire the meaning of relic worship and was no longer understood as a funeral ceremony. For more on this issue, see (Schopen 1997), ‘Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks’, p. 100, and (Werner 2013), ‘The Place of Relic Worship in Buddhism’.
- 27 *Dīgha Nikāya XVI*.
- 28 In the *vinayas*, the focus is commonly on the behavior of monks and nuns and not on the components of the celebration. The references and the context in which prohibitions occur are provided in (Liu 2018), ‘Reciting, Chanting, and Singing’. References to worship by performances including dance occur in the *Mahāvastu* (I. 268; I. 304; II. 17). Much later, in the *Mahāvamsa*, King Bhātikābhaya offered the *stūpa*, flowers, perfumes, lamps, water, gold jewelry of impressive sizes and plays, and dances as donations (XXXIV. 60). Similarly, his brother ascended to the throne after him and built a *stūpa* to which he provided various gifts to a *stūpa* including singing, music and dancing (XXXIV. 78). Presumably, this meant that he hired musicians, singers and dancers for the *stūpa*. A parallel practice in Central Asia can be confirmed by manuscript fragments found during Paul Pelliot’s excavations in 1970 in Duldur-akhur. The documents belonged to the Samantatir monastery and detail the incomes and expenses of a *stūpa* in coins. The fragments list the expenses of the *stūpa* such as perfumes and wheat milling and also include musicians. For a detailed description of these expenses, see (Ching 2014), ‘Perfumes in Ancient Kucha’. At the same time, the texts also exalt people who abstain from dance, for example, in the *Mahāvastu* (I. 326) and the *Divyāvadāna* (XXVIII. 10–20) in relation to the potter Ghaṭikāra and Vitaśoka, respectively, and in echo of Siddhārtha’s own non-enjoyment of music and dance prior to the renunciation (*Mahāvastu* II. 145).
- 29 *Avadānaśataka* I. 361.15f in (Speyer 1906–1909), ‘Avadānaśataka’.
- 30 (Pagel 2007), ‘Stūpa Festivals in Buddhist Narrative Literature’. A dance performance by *yavanikās* (foreign women?) also occurs as part of a post-birth ceremony in a Gāndhārī *avadāna* but it is likely not associated with the Buddhist cult. A translation and analysis of this text is available in (Falk and Steinbrückner 2022), ‘Avadāna Episodes’, pp. 50–51.
- 31 (Grünwedel 1920), *Alt buddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan*, p. 100
- 32 (Waldschmidt 1933), ‘Über Den Stil der Wandgemälde’.
- 33 Some nuanced comparisons between Gandhāran art and paintings from Kuča are (Santoro 2004), ‘Gandhara and Kizil: The Buddha’s Life in the Stairs Cave’ and (Zin 2012), ‘Buddhist Narrative Depictions in Andhra, Gandhara and Kucha’.
- 34 (Rotman 2017), ‘Divine Stories’, pp. 287–341
- 35 This last remark cannot be fully substantiated since this part of the relief is entirely missing. However, until a better interpretation can be arrived at, the courtly setting of this performance remains a valid hypothesis.
- 36 The close relationship between Gandhāran art and Kizil paintings in their earliest phase strengthens this possibility. For studies on this theme see (Santoro 2004), ‘Gandhāra and Kizil’ and (Lakshminarayanan 2021), ‘Globalization and Gandhāra Art’.

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Article

From Aniruddha to Upāli—Examining the Compilation of the *Sutra of the Buddha’s Mother* and the Formation of Chinese Buddhist Scriptures

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Abstract: *The Sutra of the Buddha’s Mother* (*Fomu jing* 佛母經), a Chinese Buddhist scripture, is closely linked to the *Mahāmāyā Sutra* (*Mohe Moye jing* 摩訶摩耶經). However, there is a significant difference between the two *sutras* regarding the narrative story of the Buddha’s nirvana and meeting with his mother, namely the difference in the disciple who travels to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to inform the Buddha’s mother. The substitution of Aniruddha with Upāli could be attributed to Upāli’s inclusion in Tang dynasty commentaries on “Ānanda Asking the Buddha Four Questions,” where he is depicted as a prominent disciple in the gathering prior to the Buddha’s nirvana. This narrative preference was also reflected in the *Mohe Moye jing*. To a certain extent, this confusion reflects the process of ‘between translation and composition,’ or the compiling and mixing of various texts from different *sutras* and sources to create a new scripture in the Chinese context. In the nirvana images, which contain the inscriptions, the presence of Upāli becomes an important symbol for identifying the classical texts on which the frescoes were painted.

Keywords: *Sutra of the Buddha’s Mother*; *Mahāmāyā Sutra*; Buddhist Apocryphal *Sutras*

1. Introduction

The *Fomu jing* 佛母經 [*Sutra of the Buddha’s Mother*, T2919], a Chinese-written scripture or *sutra*, describes the story of the Buddha ordering his disciples to ascend to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to invite the Buddha’s mother to meet him before his nirvana. Scholars have investigated and compiled sixty existing documents and fragments, which can be divided into six systems (numbered below as A, B, C, D...) of the sources of this *sutra*.¹ From the richness of its surviving texts,² and the *sutra*’s long span of time in formation, we can gain a glimpse of how widely this *sutra* circulated throughout its history. Additionally, it has been confirmed that the large-scale mural found in the Dunhuang grottoes portraying the scene of the Buddha’s nirvana bears close links to this *sutra*, highlighting its popularity well into the Tang dynasty.

Numerous scholars have suggested a connection between the origin and development of the *Fomu jing*³ and the *Mohe Moye jing* 摩訶摩耶經 [*Mahāmāyā-sutra**, T383], also possibly compiled in China.⁴ By conducting a systematic comparative study of these two *sutras*, this study identifies many similarities between them. However, significant differences persist in the details, such as the nightmares of the Buddha’s mother, what the Buddha said after his rebirth, and the mourning and grief of the Buddha’s mother, among others. Additionally, one aspect overlooked by scholars but deserving greater scrutiny is the disciple who conveyed the news of the Buddha’s nirvana to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.⁵

The reasons for this difference are complex. In various Buddhist commentaries of the Tang and Song dynasties, the *Mohe Moye jing* was also quoted under the name of *Dashu jing* 大術經 to explain the reason why ‘Thus I have heard’ was placed at the beginning of the *Sutra*. On one hand, Upāli appeared among the monks who let Ānanda to ask four questions before the Buddha’s nirvana. On the other hand, the *Dashu jing* was mixed into the *sutra*

that recorded this matter. Upāli thus appeared in the assembly before the Buddha's nirvana and even became a key figure. This statement may have been widely accepted at the time the *Fomu Jing* was written, so when the scripture was compiled, the role of informer to the Buddha's mother was changed from Aniruddha to Upāli.

2. From Aniruddha to Upāli

In T383, Aniruddha informed the Buddha's mother about the Tathagata's entry into nirvana. However, in the various systems of the *Fomu Jing*, Upāli takes the role. This subtle difference is a crucial indicator of which *sutra* the murals in Dunhuang grottoes cave 148 and cave 44 depicting the Buddha's nirvana are based on. Coincidentally, in the *Konjaku Monogatarishū* 今昔物語, *Tenjiku* section, which is a collection of folktales from Japan's Heian Period (794–1185), it was Ānanda who informed the Buddha's mother. Nevertheless, at the end of the *Konjaku Monogatarishū* 今昔物語, it suggests that the story is from the *Fo lin muzi xiangjian jing* 佛臨母子相見經 [the *Sutra of Buddha [Nearing Nirvana] and the Reunion between Mother and Son*], noting that the source is the second juan of the *Mohe Moye jing*. Ānanda is a recurring character in the *sutra* and holds significant importance in the Buddha's nirvana; thus, it is not difficult to understand this change happening throughout the transmission of the *Konjaku Monogatarishū*. In comparison, the reason why Upāli, who does not appear in the *Mohe Moye jing*, holds a distinguished position in the *Fomu jing* may be more complex and difficult to explain.

Before discussing how Upāli became the informant disciple in the *Fomu jing*, it may be worthwhile to examine another crucial instance where he appears, which is when Buddha delivered the Dharmas. Unlike the consistent context of the informant role, there are variations within different versions of the *Fomu jing* concerning the documentation of how the Buddha instructed things following his nirvana.

In system A, the Buddha first instructed all the righteous Dharmas to Upāli, all the *sutra* collections to Ānanda, and all the 'pure precepts' to Kāśyapa, and said, "If Kāśyapa were to come, tell him that the Buddha will not meet him" 若迦葉來，道佛不見。 In the subsequent texts, the Buddha inquired where Ānanda was and learned that he was placed under a spell by demons. The Buddha commanded Mañjuśrī to rescue Ānanda using a spell (*dhāraṇī*). Ānanda was rescued and brought to the Buddha's location where he explained why he was trapped and confessed that he did not need to live this life for a kalpa. After this paragraph, the phrase "Thus have I heard" ["如是我聞"] appears in the *sutra*, and mentions the time and location of the Buddha's nirvana, as well as his arrangement of Dharmas to the public: "All the *sutra* collections were entrusted to Ānanda, all the pure precepts were entrusted to Kāśyapa". 一切經書，付囑阿難。戒律文章，悉付迦葉。 Although Upāli was still the one who went up to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and informed the Buddha's mother, he was not instructed with any *sutras* or Dharmas. Thus, the repeated and contradictory content in the same *sutra*, with the different writing structure, indicates that the so-called system A is indeed the product of two textual sources or scriptures bound by the phrase "Thus have I heard".⁶

The first part of the text of system A can be identified as being derived from the Chapter C on Kauṇḍinya of the Northern edition of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* 北本大般涅槃經. Upon thorough comparison, it becomes evident that the latter is an abbreviated rendition of the former.

The preceding texts of system B are no longer extant and thus cannot be analyzed.

In system C, the record of how the Buddha assigns *sutras* and perceptions is identical to the second part of system A. On the other hand, system C adds "now I have been invited by the demons" 今已受天魔所請 to the messages that the Buddha requested Upāli to report.

System D does not mention how the *sutras* and perceptions are instructed. A significant difference in system D from other systems is that Kāśyapa and Ānanda do not meet the Buddha. This implies that Upāli is the only disciple in the scene and, therefore, is highlighted. Moreover, system D is the most widely accepted of all six systems.

When considering the process of changing the informant from Aniruddha to Upāli, the first part of system A in the *Fomu jing* suggests it may be related to the Buddha's instructions before his nirvana. However, two issues arise.

Firstly, as a Chinese scripture, the so-called line stating “[the Buddha] instructed all the righteous Dharmas were entrusted to Upāli, all the *sutra* collections were entrusted to Ānanda, and all the pure perceptions were entrusted to Kāśyapa” is different from the consensus of traditional Buddhist narratives.

It is generally believed that Upāli should be instructed with the ‘upholding Dharmas’. This statement can be observed in various Buddhist scriptures.

For instance, as mentioned in the *Za ahan Jing* 雜阿含經 [Skt. *Samyukta Āgama*]: “At that time, the Venerable Upāli and other monastics were walking in the area, obeying all the restrictions of Dharmas”.⁷ The *Zengyi Ahan jing* 增壹阿含經 [Skt. *Ekottarika Āgama*] also states, “Upāli was the best at upholding Dharmas, never violated or breached any restrictions”.⁸ In the commentary book of the *Ekottarika Āgama*, *Fenbie Gongde Lun* 分別功德論 [Skt. *Puṇyavibhaṅga*], the author made a further explanation of Upāli being the best disciple at upholding Dharmas. His first was the court barber, wherein he shaved the heads of royalty and wealthy families; the Buddha preached to him about the Dharmas so that he became an Arhat and, therefore, was admired by others. It also emphasized “since Upāli was ordained by the Buddha, he never violated the Dharmas, therefore he was the best.” At the same time, this scripture recorded another story: “Upāli asked the Buddha permission to drink alcohol for another sick monastic”. After this monastic recovered, Upāli preached and helped him attain enlightenment. The Buddha, therefore, praised him as “really good at upholding Dharmas,” and entrusted him Dharma collections.⁹

Secondly, it is worth noting that most versions of the *Fomu jing* available today do not contain the deception of Upāli being instructed with Dharmas as in the first part of the system A. In other systems, Upāli appears to have naturally existed among the important disciples who were present around the Buddha before his nirvana. This contrasts with the previous scriptures' records regarding the Buddha's nirvana. Through the previous discussion, it is evident that Aniruddha, Ānanda, and Kāśyapa are the only disciples of the Buddha who are explicitly named, apart from Subhadra, the last disciple, and the fan-bearer Brahmana. Of the three, Aniruddha is notable for being the first disciple with “clairvoyance” and an important preacher after the Buddha's nirvana. This is why in the *Mohe Moye jing*, he was tasked to go to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to meet the Buddha's mother. But how did Upāli, who is not featured in other works, raise the question of how and why he was included? This topic deserves further discussion and investigation.

3. *Dashu Jing* and “Ask four Questions”

Generally, classical Chinese texts are compiled from various works from previous generations, not limited to a specific *sutra*. These scriptures may have different records on a particular issue and may have variations during the process of transmission. This situation could be the reason for the substitution from Aniruddha to Upāli.

Firstly, various Buddhist commentaries commonly use the alternative name *Dashu Sutra* 大術經 when referring to the content of *Mohe Moye jing*. For example, Huizhao 慧沼 of Dayun temple in Zizhou wrote *Nengxian Zhongbian Huiji Lun* 能顯中邊慧日論 (c. 714): “Furthermore, the *Dashu Sutra* was completed after the Buddha's nirvana; [the Buddha] preaches the Dharmas to his mother is not it harder to believe but more thorough? And it stated that the Buddha came back alive from nirvana to repay his mother's kindness. Ānanda asked for the name of this teaching and was answered “the *Sūtra of Buddha [Nearing Nirvana] and the Reunion between Mother and Son*”, to proclaim for the next generations. This *sūtra* can explain the concept of repaying kindness”.¹⁰ From Huizhao's summary, it is certain that the *Dashu Sutra* is the same as the *Mohe Moye jing*. Another example can be found from Zhizhou's 智周 writing the *Fahua jing xuanzan sheshi* 法華經玄贊攝釋: “Question: According to *Dashu Sutra*, the Buddha repaid his mother's kindness, expounded the Dharmas to his mother in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, such words were said only when Buddha was fac-

ing death. Now the time is separated, how can we understand it? Answer: It begins from expounding the Dharma in the heaven, till the golden coffin was reopened. It all constitutes one sutra. Just like the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, there are plenty of examples in this category”.¹¹ Moreover, in Ruli’s 如理 collection *Cheng weishi lun shuyiyuan* 成唯識論疏義演, it states: “Just as *Dashu Sutra* states, the Buddha ascended Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, preached Dharmas to his mother. When he came back, he preached the *Nirvana Sutra* and entered nirvana. Queen Māyā already descended, so the Buddha rose from the golden coffin and preached to his mother. Although there are repeated preaches, there is a clear time progress. All of the Buddha’s preachings to his mother are compiled in the *Dashu Sutra*”.¹² In Qifu’s 栖復 work *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集, he made a clear explanation of two names of the sutra: “Where the preaches from, the *Dashu Sutra*, is the *Mohe Moye jing*. ‘Maha’ translates to ‘Da’, while ‘Māyā’ translates to ‘Shu’, signifying ‘Queen Māyā’ is the mother of the Buddha, known as ‘Dashu’. He ascended to heaven, lived for three months, preached for ninety days, making the *Dashu Sutra*”.¹³

Secondly, the *Dashu Sutra* was referenced in commentaries in the Tang and later periods to elucidate the origin of the *sutra*’s opening phrase “Thus have I heard”. Kuiji writes in his work *Amituo Jing Tongzanshu* 阿彌陀經通贊疏: “The origin of this phrase is found in the *Dashu Sutra*. When the Buddha approached nirvana, Upāli and Aniruddha asked Ānanda to ask four questions: Firstly, who would be the teacher of monastic after the Buddha? Secondly, where should they reside? Thirdly, how to punish deviant monastics? Fourthly, what should be included at the beginning of all the *sutras* and collections? The Buddha answered: after my nirvana, take Pratimuksha as your master; stop at the four foundations of mindfulness; deviant monastics should not be beaten or scolded, just ignore them; put “Thus have I heard” in the beginning of all *sutras* and collections”.¹⁴ Also in Kuiji’s 窺基 work *Miaofalianhua jing xuanzan* 妙法蓮華經玄贊 it states: “the *Dashu* and other *sutras* talk about the origin”.¹⁵ In the *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集, Qifu 栖復 explains, that other *sutras* include the *Cremation Sutra* 闍維經, *Lü zang zhuan* 律藏傳, *Fu fa zang zhuan* 付法藏傳, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra* 智度論 indicating that the *Dashu Sutra* and the other so-called scriptures are mixed to construct a comprehensive summary and annotation”. In the *Renwang Huguo Bore Boluomiduo Jing Shu* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經疏 Liangben 良賁 writes that “It was the *Dashu Sutra* that recorded disciples asking the Buddha four questions”.

However, in the current version of the *Mohe Moye jing*, it does not include the section where four questions are asked and the phrase “Thus have I heard” is also not present at the beginning.

In Yurong’s 遇榮 work, the *Renwangjing shu fahengchao* 仁王經疏法衡鈔 where he cites the *Dashu Sutra*, there are also plots that we do not see in today’s *Mohe Moye jing*.

“The Buddha said to Ānanda, ‘Go to the back of the garden and practice meditation’. Following the instructions, Ānanda proceeded to sit under a tree and contemplated. As he fell asleep, he dreamed that there was a tree with a flourishing crown and towering trunk. All living beings are dependent on this tree to gather flowers and eat fruits in order to maintain life. Suddenly a strong wind blew the tree down, and all the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits were scattered. Ānanda was startled and alarmed, knowing that the dream was ominous. So he went to the Buddha and recounted his dream. The Buddha responded: ‘I will enter the phase of annihilation, I have asked you three times and you still haven’t answered, so why bother talking about dreams?’ Ānanda wept inconsolably and was utterly helpless. Aniruddha told Ānanda: ‘Everything is impermanent and subject to destruction. The supreme Dharma king is about to fade away. The deepest Dharma river will evaporate, the light of the Dharma will soon be extinguished. The Dharma mountain will collapse, the Dharma boat will sink, the Dharma bridge will all be destroyed, the Dharma building will fall, the Dharma tree will break, good friends will be gone, the great terror will come, the Buddha’s day will be gone. You should not be worried like ordinary people; our master, the Buddha, has collected three Dharma treasures through all his hard work and gave them to you. If you are depressed, forget the taste of the Buddha’s true

nectar, emotionlessly drifting in the storm of life and death, how can you escape from the sea of suffering? You can ask the Buddha about the future. How can being depressed help you? Once you are away from the supreme lord, who should you turn to if you still have doubts? Ānanda answered: 'I am worried and troubled; how can I ask for advice?' The venerable Wumie (Aniruddha) requested Ānanda to ask four questions in addition to asking whether Buddha could remain in this world instead of entering nirvana. Ānanda followed and said to the Buddha: 'If Buddha demises, all saints would lose their dignity. Just like there are only stars without the moon in the night. If the Buddha is alive, all saints would be dignified, just like the moon is encircled by all the stars in the night.' The Buddha answered Ānanda: 'Meetings are followed by separations, life is followed by death. I have been invited to reach nirvana and I have chosen to accept. If you have other questions, just ask, I will answer.' Therefore Ānanda asked four questions: who would be the teacher of monastics? Where to reside? How to publish deviant monastics? What to put in the beginning of all the sutras and collections?"¹⁶

This passage is also found in Qifu's 栖復 *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集, but is not attributed to the *Dashu Sutra*. A comparison between the two works reveals several similarities, but Qifu's text provides more detailed information than Yurong's. The words that Aniruddha told Ānanda, from "supreme Dharma" to "the Buddhist days are coming to an end", mostly are similar to so-called "sound from the void" from Dharmakṣema's 曇無讖 *Da Boniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 [Skt. *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*].¹⁷ Examining its content, the first part describes that Ānanda had a nightmare, dreamed about a strong gust of wind toppling a tree. The Buddha informed him he had entered the phase of annihilation. This narrative can also be found in *Fang deng bo ni huan jing* 方等般泥洹經 and the *Sutra of the Four Children Absorption* 四童子三昧經, but it is absent from the *Mohe moye jing*.

While books and commentaries in the Tang dynasty mixed the story of Ānanda asking four questions into the *Dashu Sutra*, it also caused confusion about who was involved. People who believed it was Upāli who asked Ānanda to ask Buddha had different references to the scriptures. For example, Kuiji's 窺基 (632–682) *Miaofalianhua jing Xuanzan* 妙法蓮華經玄贊 states that when the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, he allowed disciples to ask questions and doubts, at the time, Upāli and Aniruddha requested Ānanda to ask four questions.¹⁸ In *Da Boreboluomiduo jing boreliqufen shuzan* 大般若波羅蜜多經般若理趣分述贊, he also wrote "[the] *Da Zhidu Lun* said it was Aniruddha who let Ānanda ask four questions, the *Da Bei jing* 大悲經 [Skt. *Mahākaruṇā-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*] said it was Upāli; now they said both Aniruddha and Upāli requested Ānanda to ask."¹⁹ Meanwhile, by the Tang dynasty, other scholars had also identified this issue. In the *Shizhu miaoyan pin* 世主妙嚴品 of the *Xu Huayanjing Lueshu Kandingji* 續華嚴經略疏刊定記, Huiyuan 慧苑 (673-?) pointed out that "some scholars said, in the *Da Bei jing* 大悲經 [Skt. *Mahākaruṇā-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*], it was Upāli who let Ānanda ask questions; but I have examined the scripture and did not find the original text".²⁰ Another example is Qifu's collection, the *Fahua Jing Xuanzan Yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集, which states: "Question: the *Nirovana Sutra* stated Aniruddha let Ānanda ask the questions, the *Zhi du lun* 智度論 [Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*] claimed that Upāli requested Ānanda to do so, why is there a difference in the two texts?" Answer: Both Upāli and Aniruddha were present at the gathering, both of them requested Ānanda to ask questions, so there is no conflict with each sutra making such a statement. Question: why couldn't Aniruddha and Upāli ask the Buddha themselves? Answer: Ānanda was the head of the gathering, so he approached the Buddha and asked".²¹ However, in the *Da zhidu lun*, we can see that Aniruddha asked Ānanda to ask the Buddha, not Upāli.

In summary, commentaries and texts in the Tang dynasty had multiple mystifications: Firstly, Upāli is involved in the story of Ānanda asking the Buddha four questions; that is, Upāli is presented in the gathering before the Buddha's nirvana as an important disciple. Second is their source of reference, including the *Dashu Sutra*. For example, Daoyin 道胤 (668–740) wrote the *Yuzhu Jinggong bore boluomi jing xuanyan* 御注金剛般若波羅蜜經宣演, which says: "The origins are *Mohe moye jing*, *Da bei jing*, *Zhi du lun*, etc. The story is described in detail in these sutras. In the *Da bei jing*, Upāli asked Ānanda to ask the Buddha; in

the *Dashu* and other sutras Aniruddha asked Ānanda to ask. In fact, both of them requested Ānanda together, different sutras made different statements".²² The same explanation can also be seen in the *Fahua jing xuanzan jueze ji* 法華經玄贊決擇記.²³ Dingbin 定賓, who was invited to Luoyang in 733, wrote in his work *Sifen lü Shu shi Zongyi ji* 四分律疏飾宗義記: In fascicle 2 of the *Zhi du lun*, it states that Aniruddha requested Ānanda to ask questions; in the *Da bei jing* 大悲經, Upāli did so; in the *Dashu Sutra*, both Aniruddha and Upāli asked Ānanda. So, in different sutras, they have different descriptions.²⁴ The *Yulanpen jing shu xiao heng chao* 盂蘭盆經疏孝衡鈔 written in the Song Dynasty stated: "[the] *Dashu Sutra* recorded that the Buddha was invited and nearing his entry into nirvana, Ānanda was deeply sorrowed. Upāli and other disciples requested Ānanda to ask questions about the arrangements after the Buddha's death, which is referred to as the so-called "ask[ing of the] four questions".²⁵

4. The Images of the *Fomu jing* and Upāli

It has been estimated that there are currently 20 extant sutra illustrations from the Tang dynasty in China.²⁶ The inclusion of the illustration stele of the Nirvana Sutra sponsored by Dong Ruxiang 董如相 and others at Dongdu Village 董杜村, Anyi County, brings the total number to 21. While Māyā is absent in the Dunhuang Caves 120, 225, and 185, she is represented in the illustrations of eight other caves, i.e., Cave ④ 332 from the early Tang dynasty, Caves ⑤ 130, ⑥ 39, ⑦ 46, and ⑧ 148 from the high Tang dynasty, as well as Caves ⑨ 44, ⑩ 92, and ⑪ 158 from the mid-Tang dynasty.

Cave 332, built during the early Tang dynasty, features a sequential illustration of the *Nirvana Sutra*, notably emphasizing episodes centering around the Buddha's mother, Queen Māyā. These include the revealing of Buddha's death to her, her coming as a mourner, her wailing at the coffin, the Buddha's rebirth and teaching to her, and her return to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. As previously noted, one of the main differences between the *Mahāmāyā Sutra* and the *Fomu Jing* is the bearer of the sad tidings. Inscriptions, which served to recapitulate the subject matter of the images, took form during the high Tang dynasty, influenced by earlier nirvana paintings. The presence of inscriptions clearly identifying the messenger of the Buddha's death allows us to ascertain that the *Fomu jing* is among the scriptures illustrated in these caves. Cave 148 from the high Tang period is one of the caves featuring cartouches identifying "Upāli" as the messenger.

In 776, the 11th year of the *Dali* era (766–779) under the reign of Emperor Daizong of Tang, the Li family of Dunhuang constructed Cave 148 and made a sequential illustration of the nirvana paintings over the cave's southern, western, and northern walls.²⁷ This cave has close relations with Cave 332, as its patron, Li Dabin 李大賓, was the grandnephew of Li Kerang 李克讓, the patron of Cave 332. Cave 332 was built in 698, the first year of the *Shengli* era (697–700) under the reign of Empress of Wu, at a pivotal historical juncture when the Tubo had already seized control of several prefectures in the Hexi and Longyou regions, with Shazhou and Guazhou facing peril. The Li family's belief in nirvana likely had a bearing on the thematic choices for the caves' paintings.

The illustration of the Nirvana Sutra comprises 66 episodes organized into ten groups.²⁸ The painting of "the Buddha entering nirvana" on the western wall portrays Upāli's ascent to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to spread word of the Buddha's death, alongside the scene of the Buddha's mother arriving on clouds to mourn her son, situated between a pair of sala trees. In the upper right corner, an inscription reads "Upāli went to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to inform Māyā that the World-Honored One entered the nirvana yesterday" 優波利往忉利天報摩/耶夫人如來昨日入般涅槃 (Figure 1), corresponding to the image in the upper left of Figure 2.



Figure 1. Nirvana image in Mogao Cave 148.

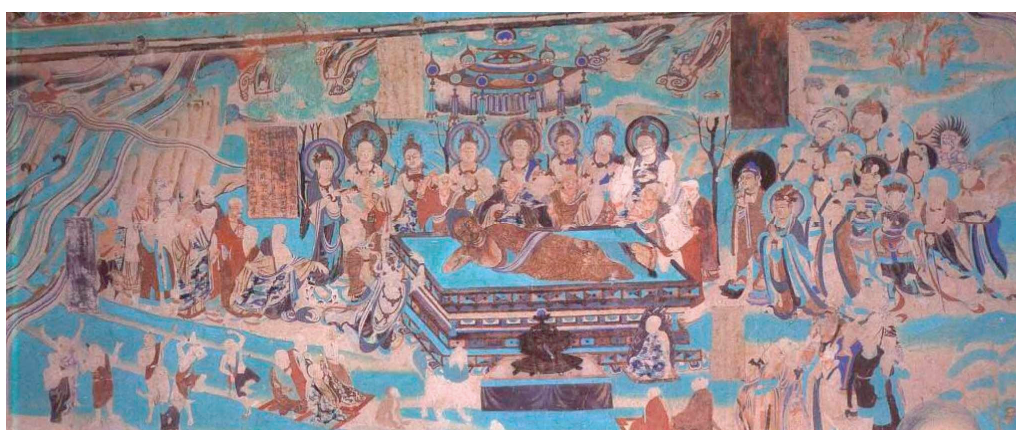


Figure 2. Mogao Cave 148: The image of entering Nirvana.

During the mid-Tang period, Dunhuang endured Tubo occupation and governance for over six decades, coinciding with the construction of Caves 44, 92, 158, and 185, all featuring illustrations of the nirvana sutras.

The illustration mural within Cave 44, situated in the middle of the western wall, was painted during the mid-Tang period, albeit damaged and incomplete. The composition centers on Śākyamuni, with Māyā and her three attendants depicted on the southern side of the chamber. Adjacent to them, on the right, are five lines of inscriptions describing the six nightmares the Buddha's mother had the night before. On the right side of the inscriptions are Māyā and two attendants, facing Upāli (Figure 3), with an eight-line inscription

referencing Upāli's announcement of the Buddha's nirvana (Figure 4), which is largely the same in text as the fourth version of the *Fomu jing*.²⁹



Figure 3. Illustration of Māyā joining the mourning in the nirvana sutras in Mogao Cave 44 (1).

1. ...asked where the sage had come from and why he appeared so haggard, pale, 問聖人從何方來？ 顏容憔悴， 面色無光。
2. and timid. At that time, Upāli sobbed and cried hoarsely. 狀似怯人。爾時優婆離哽咽聲嘶，
3. After a long time, he spoke that “Mother of the Buddha! Mother of the Buddha! My great teacher, the Tathagata 良久乃語， 告言：“佛母！ 佛母！ 我如來大師
4. has relinquished his Dharma body and entered nirvana at midnight yesterday. Therefore, 昨夜子時， 舍大法身， 入般涅槃， 故
5. he sent me here to tell his retinue. “When the mother of the Buddha heard these words, 遣我來， 告諸眷屬。” 爾時佛母聞此語
6. she punched her whole body, like the collapse of Mount Sumeru, with blood all over her body. 以 [已]， 渾身自撲， [狀似] 須彌山崩， 遍體血現。
7. Like a scarlet Palāśa flower, she suffocated and fell to the ground. Then two goddesses 如波羅奢花， 悶絕擗地。時有二天女， 將
8. came and sprinkled water on her and she took a long time to recover. 水灑之， 良久乃蘇。



Figure 4. Illustration of Māyā joining the mourning in the Nirvana Sutra in Mogao Cave 44 (2).

Depiction of the Nirvana motif and scenes featuring the Buddha’s mother are still preserved within the Mogao Caves built during the Five Dynasties period, including Cave 61, constructed between 947 and 951 under the auspices of Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠, military commissioner of the Returning to Righteousness Army, and his wife. Spanning the lower sections of the southern, western, and northern walls are 128 illustrations depicting various episodes from the Buddha’s life, accompanied by a total of 128 inscriptions distributed across 33 screens. The ninth screen on the lower part of the northern wall illustrates “the resurrected Buddha delivering a sermon.” In the four-line inscription on the left we read (Figure 5):

1. At that time, as instructed by the World-Honored One, Upāli ascended to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to inform Māyā of his nirvana. 爾時優波離奉世尊敕語往忉利天請摩耶以聞世尊滅
2. Māyā raised her hands in the air and pounded her chest like five Mounts Sumeru torn asunder. Blood cascaded over her body. She swooned and fell to the ground, and did not awake until after a long, deep coma. 度渾墀自撲如五須彌山崩遍體血現悶絕擗地良久乃惺（醒）爾
3. When the mother of the Buddha came from the heaven with her attendants to the sala tree grove, she saw that the golden coffin had been buried. 時佛母將諸眷屬從天下來至娑羅林間乃見金棺收斂已

4. When this was finished, she mournfully circumambulated the coffin dozens of times, lamenting, "How distressing, how awful this is!" 畢悲泣繞棺凡數十匝唱言嗚呼苦哉嗚呼苦哉



Figure 5. Image of Nirvana in events of the Buddha’s life in Mogao Cave 61 (1) URL (accessed on 1 November 2023) <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/cave/10.0001/0001.0001.0061>.

The text within the inscriptions is almost identical with that found in S.4270v.

Gong Weizhang 公維章 named S.4270v as “Copy of the Original Inscriptions of the Image of Nirvana in the Events of the Buddha’s Life in Mogao Cave 61” 莫高窟第 61 窟《佛傳·涅槃圖》榜題底稿抄件, arguing that it is a copy rather than the original manuscript due to its omission of the screen number and its placement on the back of a paper, likely undertaken by a monastery student as part of his daily copying exercise.³⁰

A close reading shows that the content of the cartouche text originated from the *Fomu jing*.

We can also see that the imagery depicted within the inscriptions, such as the Buddha’s mother’s descent from heaven, the coffining, and her circumambulation, were painted on the upper part of the eighth screen. This intentional separation of text from imagery within the screen form not only aligns with prevalent painting practices of the era but also reflects the stylization of the Dunhuang mural creation under the Cao family’s Returning to Righteousness Army regime. In terms of details, the Nirvana painting in Cave 61 exhibits clear influence from the illustration of the *Nirvana Sutra* found in Cave 148 from the high Tang dynasty, as discussed earlier (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Image of Nirvana in events of the Buddha's life in Mogao Cave 61 (2).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, in the texts and commentaries from the Tang and Song dynasties discussing the origin of the phrase “Thus have I heard” and the story of Ānanda asking the four questions, a slightly confusing albeit widely accepted theory has emerged: The *Dashu Sutra*, which is the *Mohe Moye jing*, included a plot with Upāli requesting Ānanda to ask questions. These texts and commentaries have combined and mixed narratives from previous scriptures and constructed a scenario in which Upāli, Aniruddha, and Ānanda are all gathered at the Buddha's nirvana. Since the *Fomu jing* has been popular since the middle of the eighth century,³¹ the compiled version of it has added an array of contexts from other sutras based on the *Mohe Moye jing*. Hence, in that situation, it was not surprising that Upāli was added to the gathering before the Buddha's nirvana and was appointed to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to inform Buddha's mother.

Furthermore, in the examples provided, we analyzed the transition from Aniruddha to Upāli within visual representations. This detail plays an indicative role in showing the compilation process of the *Fomu jing*, reflecting an eclectic mix of various scriptures and annotations. Particularly notable are the illustrations depicting the Buddha's life, characterized by extensive inscription texts, revealing the complexity of the scripture on which they were based. In this context, Upāli appears as a telltale marker of the illustrated scripture. Thus, elucidating the process and potential motives behind the transition from Aniruddha to Upāli holds profound importance not only for understanding the formation of Chinese scriptures but also for gaining unique insights into the visualization of Buddhist scriptures in ancient China.

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Notes

¹ See M. Wang (2021, pp. 168–73).

² For information on the manuscripts of the *Fomu jing*, refer to (Imre Galambos 2020, pp. 62–64).

³ As for the *Fomu jing*, Japanese scholar Keiki Yabuki 矢吹慶輝 introduced it in the book *Meisa yoin kaisetsu* 鳴沙餘韻解説 [Explanations of the Meisa Yoin], and Kawasaki Michiko 川崎ミチコ also made relevant research; refer to Kawasaki (1987). Li Jining 李際寧 compared the differences of the nightmare, heavenly daughter's name, mourning, impermanence, saying, and so on in different versions of the *Fomu jing* and thought that it was influenced by the Central Asian background in the process of merging

with the *Mahāmāyā Sutra* to form a new scripture. At the same time, it also combines Buddhist reincarnation thought, Chinese traditional gratitude thought, and filial piety. Refer to J. Li (1996). Du Doucheng 杜斗城 and Zhang Ying 張穎 pointed out that the *Mahāmāyā Sutra* and the *Fomu jing* were regarded by Dunhuang people at that time as important scriptures for eliminating disasters and praying for blessings, especially the latter had become an important part of writing scriptures for “my wife”; refer to Du and Zhang (2012). Li Xiaorong 李小榮 noticed that there are great differences in words among the four editions of the *Fomu jing* and pointed out that these editions were written not by one person but according to different needs; refer to X. Li (2012).

- 4 As for *Mahāmāyā Sutra*, Tanjing 曇景 of Southern Qi Dynasty was regarded as its translator in all previous dynasties. However, some scholars have questioned the nature of the *sutra*. Refer to Masanobu (1954).
- 5 Although Kawasaki Michiko 川崎ミチコ noticed this difference, she did not further explore the reasons for its formation; see Kawasaki (2019).
- 6 See (J. Li 1995, pp. 376–77).
- 7 *Za ahan Jing*, T no. 99, 2: 115b11-13.
- 8 *Zengyi Ahan Jing*, T no. 125, 2: 557c19-20.
- 9 *Fenbie Gongde Lun*, T no. 1507, 25: 46b13-c22.
- 10 *Nengxian Zhongbian Huiri Lun*, T no. 1863, 45: 412b14-18.
- 11 *Fahua Jing Xuanzan Sheshi*, X no. 636, 34: 31c16-19.
- 12 *Cheng Weishi Lun Shuyiyuan*, X no. 815, 49: 480c22-481a1.
- 13 *Fahua Jing Xuanzan Yaoji*, X no. 638, 34: 313b8-10.
- 14 *Amituo Jing Tongzanshu*, T no. 1758, 331b6-14.
- 15 *Miaofalian hua Jing Xuanzan*, T no. 1723, 34: 662a5-6.
- 16 *Renwangjing Shu Fahengchao*, X no. 519, 26: 442a16-b13.
- 17 *Da Boniepan Jing*, T no. 375, 12: 723a27-b4.
- 18 *Miaofalian hua Jing Xuanzan*, T no. 1723, 34: 662a7.
- 19 *Da Boreboluomiduo Jing Boreliqufen Shuzan*, T no. 1695, 33: 27a24-25.
- 20 *Xu Huayanjing Lueshu Kandingji*, X no. 221, 3: 598a11.
- 21 *Fahua Jing Xuanzan Yaoji*, X no. 638, 34: 314b9-12.
- 22 *Yuzhu Jinggangboreboluomi Jing Xuanyan*, T no. 2733, 85: 19b15-18.
- 23 *Fahuajing Xuanzan Juezeji*, X no. 637, 34: 154c1-3.
- 24 *Sifenlv Shushi Zongyiji*, X no. 733, 42: 291b5-8.
- 25 *Yulanpenjing Shu Xiaohengchao*, X no. 375, 21: 540b14-16.
- 26 See (C. Wang 2021, pp. 39–46).
- 27 Regarding the Nirvana Sutra transformation in Cave 148, many scholars have noted its connection to the earlier Cave 332. In her research, Sonya S. Lee meticulously discusses these two caves excavated by the Li family in one chapter; see Sonya S. Lee (2010). After a thorough analysis of the composition and related scenes, Toyama Kiyoshi 外山潔 pointed out that the “rebirth preaching” in Cave 332 is believed to be based on the *Mohe Moye jing*. See Toyama (2002). However, the appearance of Upāli clearly proves that the classical source of the Nirvana image in Cave 148 is the *Fomu Jing*. Kishida Yuri 岸田悠里 conducted a detailed analysis of the scenes related to the *Fomu Jing* in Caves 148 and 61 but did not notice the relevant content in Cave 44, see Kishida (2014). Similarly, Yasuda Haruki 安田治樹 believes that the Nirvana images from the Tang and Song periods in the Mogao Caves are more consistent with the *Fomu Jing*; see Yasuda (2019).
- 28 Cf. (He 2000, pp. 89–93). For colored images, see (Dunhuang Academy 2000, Figure 147).
- 29 See (Duan and Fan 2006, Figure 130).
- 30 See (Gong 2010, p. 28).
- 31 About the period when the *Fomu Jing* was popular refer to Kaji (1991).

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Article

Sacred Resurgence: Revitalizing Buddhist Temples in Modern China

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Abstract: This paper examines the construction and maintenance of Chinese Han Buddhist temples in modern China against the backdrop of societal transformation. Initially, it analyzes the profound impact of social changes since the mid-19th century on Buddhist monasteries, including political turmoil, economic development, and urbanization. Furthermore, the paper explores how temples were reconstructed and revitalized within this historical context, highlighting the monastic community's unwavering commitment to protecting the Dharma and ensuring its enduring presence. Additionally, this paper also explores the role of charismatic monks in enhancing the sanctity of temples and the influence of Buddhist institutional frameworks on the dynamics of state and society. The study employs a multifaceted analysis to understand the complex interplay between temple construction, economic development, and the cultural heritage of Buddhism in China.

Keywords: modern Buddhism; temple space; temple construction; charismatic monks

1. Reconstruction of Buddhist Temple Spaces in Social Transformation

The social transformation of China in modern times, particularly since the late Qing Dynasty (1840–1912) and the Republican period (1912–1949), marks an era of transition from a traditional agrarian civilization to a modern industrial one. Traditional culture emphasizes on “benevolence仁” at the core of its social value system, “authority權” at the core of its social control system, and “adherence to the classics and understanding of the way遵经明道” at the center of its knowledge system. These deeply ingrained values have been thoroughly overturned under the influence of Western politics, culture, religion, and economic modernity. The traditional worldview of “Family-Governed Monarchic Country家天下” has been completely shattered (Dong 2016, p. 163). The social structure has evolved from a static, isolated rural model to a dynamic, interconnected urban patterns. Social organization has transitioned from rigid uniformity to flexible diversity. Social systems have shifted from moralistic clan-based governance to rational legal structures, and interpersonal relationships have transformed from patriarchal clan leadership to contractual interactions (Chen et al. 2005, p. 23). These changes are not only reflected in various aspects of social life but have also profoundly influenced the construction and development of Buddhist temples. Since the mid-19th century, there has been a shift in the trend of Buddhist temples, transitioning from a decline to a gradual resurgence. During the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) 太平天國運動, numerous temples experienced destruction, with monks being displaced, leading to substantial material and spiritual harm to Buddhist temples. The portrayal of Buddhist temples in the travel accounts of foreign scholars during this time often presented a picture of deteriorating structures, desolation, and monks who had forfeited their previous dignity (Williams 1883; Thomson 1898). In the descriptions provided by John Macgowan (1835–1922), a British missionary, regarding the Bailu Temple 白鹿寺 in Hunan, one discerns the monks' indulgence in opium and their lack of religious fervor, intimating a spiritual decay amongst Buddhists (Macgowan 1912). Similarly, Japanese scholars Naito Konan (1866–1934) and Kuwabara Jitsuzo (1871–1931), during their visits to Hanshan Temple 寒山寺 in Suzhou and Kaiyuan Temple 開元寺 in Xi'an,

observed the neglect of the temples and the dilapidation of historical relics (Kuwbara 2007; Naitō 2007). These descriptions not only showcase the decline of the physical environs of the Buddhist temples but also reflect a crisis of culture and spiritual belief.

While the conflict wrought considerable destruction upon the temple spaces, the ensuing eras of Tongzhi 統治 and Guangxu 光緒 (1862–1908) witnessed a significant amount of restoration and reconstruction efforts, with records indicating that some of the rebuilt temples were even grander in scale than before. Taking the Wuhan 武漢 as an example, from the Tongzhi era to the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution (1911) 辛亥革命, a total of 46 temples were either reconstructed or newly built. Between the Xinhai Revolution and the Japanese occupation of Wuhan, there were 95 temples for which records of construction or major repairs exist. Throughout the entire Republican period, the number of temples that were either newly constructed or rebuilt amounted to 196 (Wu 2017, p. 14). According to the records in the local gazetteer, in the Jiangnan region 江南地區,¹ between 1850 and 1900, 174 temples were destroyed, and a total of 348 temples were built, making this one of the most active periods of temple construction since 600CE (Eberhard 1964, pp. 264–318). Among the Jinshan Temple 金山寺 Jiaoshan Temple 焦山寺, Baohuashan 寶華山 and Tianning temples 天寧寺 in Jiangsu; Huacheng Temple 化城寺, Ganlu Temple 甘露寺, Baisui Palace 百歲宮 and Yingjiang Temple 迎江寺 in Anhui; and Jingshan Temple 徑山寺, Lingyin Temple 靈隱寺 and Liuhe Pagoda 六合塔 in Zhejiang were expanded the most (see Table A1). Baohuashan became fully operational in 1885, while the Mahavira Hall of the Lingyin Temple, the largest temple in Hangzhou, underwent comprehensive renovation in 1911, with expenditures amounting to an impressive 150,000 taels of silver (Fitch 1929, p. 29). Dinghushan 鼎湖山, the largest temple in Guangdong, was rebuilt in 1878. Another notable example is the reconstruction of Chanyuan Temple 禪源寺 on West Tianmushan 西天目山. Despite the neighboring region being ravaged by the Taiping Rebellion and suffering extensive destruction, Chanyuan Temple was remarkably reconstructed within five years, emerging with grandeur. In 1913, upon visiting Tianmu Mountain, the Scottish diplomat Reginald Johnston noted the temple's exceedingly prosperous condition (Johnson 1913, p. 276). During his 1911 visit to Mount Wutai 五台山 in Shanxi, the German sinologist Heinrich Hackmann remarked, "It seems to be undergoing a revival, for I observed numerous temples being meticulously restored" (Hackmann 2013, p. 25). When Bishop Huntington visited Jiuhuashan 九華山 in 1920, he found that the condition of the temples and roads had greatly improved since his previous visit five or six years earlier (Letter of November 28, 1920, from Bishop D. T. Huntington to Lewis Hodous, in the Hodous Collection, Hartford Theological Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, as cited in Welch 1968, p. 316).

The aforementioned details reflect the regional construction of temples. In response to the state of Buddhist temple construction in China in the decades following the Taiping Rebellion, Professor Gregory Adam Scott, a specialist in modern Chinese history, has compiled and analyzed an extensive collection of local gazetteers. He established a historical database on temple destruction and reconstruction, unveiling the specific circumstances of the wartime devastation endured by Buddhist architecture and the subsequent post-war restoration efforts.²

Scott's research indicates that in the decade commencing from 1864, despite the reconstruction efforts typically taking place 10 to 22 years after the destruction, the restoration of temples progressed at a modest but steady pace, primarily driven by local monks and the lay populace. Scott's discovery aligns with sociologist Wolfram Eberhard's (1909–1989) 1964 assertion that the last of the four historical peaks in temple construction in China occurred between 1850 and 1900.³ In contrast, sinologist Holmes Welch (1921–1981) offers a unique viewpoint, highlighting that the flourishing of modern temple construction represents a phase in the long-term "monastic cycle" rather than being solely driven by the spontaneous efforts of Buddhists or a distinct revival movement. He argues that the construction of temples in modern times does not exhibit any uniqueness compared to a century earlier (Welch 1968, p. 98). While Welch's critique provides valuable insights into

the historical and architectural development of religious buildings, it also has its limitations, particularly in focusing on the history of specific temples and the patterns of spatial changes in modern Buddhist temples. To fully understand the characteristics of reconstruction and construction of modern Chinese Buddhist temples, a more comprehensive observational perspective is required. This encompasses, but is not limited to, considerations of the temples' geographical locations, new forms and functions, and the composition and motivations of those involved in their rebuilding. Through the analysis of these dimensions, one can more accurately grasp the relationship between temple space and societal transformation, showcasing the distinct spatial characteristics of modern Buddhism, thus offering a richer and more diverse perspective for understanding the vitality of Buddhism in contemporary China.

2. Patterns of Spatial Changes in Modern Buddhist Temples

2.1. Regional Differences: The Impact of Economic Development on the Evolution of Buddhist Temple Spaces

A comprehensive overview of the spatial distribution changes in modern Chinese temples, whether through destruction or construction, reveals a close correlation with the economic development patterns of the new era. Earlier research by Eberhard suggested that, although the peak periods of temple construction were not directly linked to economic factors, economic fluctuations nonetheless remained a significant influence on temple architectural activities. Taking the Taiping Rebellion as an example, temples in the Jiangnan region, particularly in areas like Suzhou 蘇州, Shanghai 上海, and Hangzhou 杭州, suffered extensive damage, with destruction rates ranging from one-fifth to one-third. This was primarily due to the economic prosperity and abundance of temples in these regions, making them targets in the warfare as many temples were used as military fortifications or destroyed. The wealth of temples in the economically prosperous Jiangnan region ironically made them resources to be contested during the conflict.

Looking at the temple damages caused by the Temple Property for Education Movement 廟產興學運動, the extent of destruction in the temples of North China far exceeded that of Jiangnan, with a destruction rate of up to 90%, compared to 40–50% in Jiangnan. North China, being economically less developed compared to Jiangnan and having a weaker consciousness for the protection of traditional religious architecture during the modernization process, coupled with a more tense political environment than the South, saw a large number of temples requisitioned under the government's policy of converting temple property to fund education. Additionally, the degree of temple destruction exhibited a distribution pattern that gradually decreased from "metropolises–county towns–market towns–villages".⁴ This diversity reflects the unevenness across different regions in terms of economic development, policy implementation, and modernization demands. In Shanghai, the temples most thoroughly destroyed during the conversion of temple properties for educational purposes were predominantly located in the city center, accounting for 72.9% (414 out of a total of 568). Of these, only 13.3% (76 temples) were converted into schools (Ouyang and Zhang 2010, p. 153). Temples situated in the city center, being located on high-value land, were more likely to be demolished or repurposed to meet the demands for commercial and educational land use, resulting in a greater degree of destruction.

The observation of the connection between temple construction and economic development provides a foundation for understanding the role temples have played in the reconstruction process of the new era. Beginning in the Tongzhi period, with the transformation of the economic structure, China's economic and cultural centers gradually shifted eastward. The economies of southern coastal cities and the Yangtze River basin rose rapidly, with merchants and capitalists providing financial support for the reconstruction of temples. The rapid development of urbanization also spurred interest in and reconstruction of temples, particularly in the southern regions, which excelled in post-disaster reconstruction. Taking Shanghai as an example, as a trading port, a significant increase in temple activities occurred after its opening, demonstrating that economic vitality played a

promotive role in temple reconstruction. Of the 73 Buddhist temples documented in Shanghai, a diverse range of funding sources have been incorporated, showcasing the varied origins of these temples: 8 were commissioned by the imperial court, 30 were generously donated through alms, 15 were contributed by devout believers, 13 were privately constructed by affluent individuals, and 7 originated from miscellaneous sources (Shanghai Yearbook 1935, p. 4). The data illustrate the significant influence that the upper echelons of society exert on temple construction at both the economic and cultural levels. Shanghai's temples, positioned as core areas in the reconstruction process, starkly contrast with the severe damage they sustained during urbanization, showcasing the dual impact—both destructive and facilitative—of economic development and urbanization on temple construction. As a bustling commercial hub, Shanghai's high land prices and concentrated resources lead to the destruction or conversion of existing temples to meet new commercial, educational, and other needs during urban expansion. However, it is precisely the vibrancy of the economy and the rapid pace of urbanization that also concentrate funds and attention, thereby driving the repair and construction of new temples. This phenomenon vividly demonstrates the “double-edged sword” of economic development on temple construction activities.

In stark contrast to the expanding spaces of Buddhist temples in the southern cities, the construction status of temples in the north presents a different picture. When the Western observer, Mr. Bradt, a professor of philosophy from Williams College, visited China to survey temples during 1923–1924, he observed a vibrant Buddhist community along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, from Jiujiang 九江 to Ningbo 寧波. However, as his journey extended to northern provinces such as Beijing, Shaanxi 陝西, and Jilin 吉林, he encountered dilapidated temples and monks lacking in knowledge.

Taking the Buddhist temples in Beijing as an example, the temples in Beijing were primarily of smaller scale, known as “descendant temples or family temples 子孫廟”, with fewer large temples compared to Jiangnan. According to Master Tanxu 倓虛 and local monks, Beijing had over 1000 temples, of which there were only about 70 large monastic complexes and over 2000 smaller temples. During the Republican period, there was a noticeable decline in the number of Buddhists in Beijing, with an average of only 3–6 individuals per temple, and even the larger temples with Buddhist colleges, such as Fayuan Temple 法源寺, Bailin Temple 柏林寺, and Guangji Temple 廣濟寺, did not have more than 50 individuals. By comparison, the population of modern Beijing grew from approximately 760,000 in 1908 to about 1.51 million in 1948; yet, the number of monks and nuns saw almost no increase, accounting for less than 0.3% of the total population (Zhang 2016, p. 67).

Although the number of temple buildings remained stable, many were in disrepair. The Japanese scholars who organized the compilation of Beijing Chronicles in the Late Qing Dynasty (清末北京志資料 Qingmo Beijing Zhi Ziliao) also made the following evaluation after personally inspecting the temples in Beijing: “Temples that were once famous in ancient times have undergone many changes, with many now barely worth visiting, and the old large monastic complexes have been abandoned, having no value... The degradation of temples outside the city is even more severe than within the city, with some being used as schools, military barracks, factories, or even storage warehouses 古時曾經著名的寺廟, 幾經變遷, 今之幾無可觀者居多, 且舊時之大伽藍現已荒廢, 多為無賽脂之價值... 外城寺刹的荒廢程度比內城更為嚴重, 有的寺刹已作為學堂, 有的已充當兵舍, 有的改作工廠, 有的甚至充當倉庫” (Zhang 1994).

The decline of Buddhist temples in Beijing serves as a lens through which to view the societal transformations of modern China. During the imperial era, Beijing's temples not only conducted various Buddhist ceremonies for the royalty but also served as lodging for officials from other regions upon their arrival in the capital. The imperial court placed significant emphasis on the temples, not only allocating funds for the renovation or reconstruction of key temples but also bestowing generous regular donations upon monks and nuns, sufficient to sustain thousands of clergy members. However, following the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the modernizing Republic government, adhering to Sun Yat-sen's “Three

Principles of the People 三民主義”, adopted a policy of separating religion and state in its management of temples. This left temples, which had primarily served the Buddhist needs of the royal family, with little relevance, deprived of government funding and, conversely, subjected to compulsory participation in public welfare and charitable activities, leading to their evident decline. (Zhang 2016, pp. 69–70). Moreover, the conservatism of the political situation in the north and the issue of ancestral temples also made the reconstruction of temples particularly challenging, leaving them much to be desired compared to those in the Jiangnan region.

Table 1 presents the 1930 survey on the number of monks in various regions, clearly illustrating the differences between Buddhists in the north and the south. The contrast between temples in the north and south highlights the regional differences in economic growth, cultural heritage, and religious activities across China.

Table 1. Distribution of Monks and Devotees in Southern and Northern Chinese Provinces (1930) (Image source: Helch, p. 251).

| Southern Cities | Monks | Devotees | Northern Cities | Monks | Devotees |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|-----------------|-------|----------|
| Jiangsu (江蘇) | 914,000 | 1,139,540 | Shandong (山東) | 2890 | 5730 |
| Zhejiang (浙江) | 643,000 | 1,367,800 | Henan (河南) | 2450 | 4070 |
| Hunan (湖南) | 44,600 | 64,100 | Hebei (河北) | 1780 | 12,120 |
| Fujian (福建) | 28,900 | 96,870 | Shaanxi (陝西) | 780 | 3490 |

Observations of the relationship between temple construction and economic development reveal the complex role temples have played in the socio-economic transformations within Chinese society. The economic prosperity of the south provides ample funding for temple reconstruction, allowing Buddhist culture to flourish with its unique charm, whereas the north faces challenges in temple maintenance and the transmission of Buddhist culture due to policy restrictions and insufficient economic support.

2.2. Urban Buddhism and the Evolution of Temple Spaces

Within urban Buddhism, lay followers constitute the largest group of adherents to the Buddhist faith. They tend to participate in devotional activities like vegetarianism, releasing captive animals, and performing acts of charity. While these practices may not directly align with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, they genuinely mirror the prevailing urban Buddhist environment during the Republic era (Shao 2017, p. 309). The escalating demand for religion among the public has subsequently led to a rise in the number of temples within urban locales. This urban demand for Buddhism is also mirrored in the proliferation of smaller-scale Buddhist spaces, such as An 庵 (small chapels) and Miao 廟 (small temples) rather than the more expansive Yuan 院 (large monasteries). This trend is not only linked to the economic aspects of temples but also correlates with the distribution of their founders. Eberhard’s studies have found that when the number of government-sponsored temples increases, the count of temples established by monks tends to decrease, and vice versa. Government-sponsored temples are typically large monastic complexes, seldom involving smaller forms such as An or Miao. Due to financial constraints, temples initiated by monks often adopt the form of An or Miao more frequently. In addition, the amount of land donated by devotees to the temples had a significant impact on the scale of the temples. Before 1250, the land donated to temples by devotees typically amounted to around 300 mu 畝.⁵ Afterward, it averaged between 20 to 30 mu. It was during this time period that temples in the form of Yuan began to decrease, while those in the form of An started to increase. If viewed in relation to the donations, the smaller parcels of donated land were ideally suited to the existence of buildings in the form of An (Eberhard 1964). As the government’s interest in building temples has diminished in modern times, the reconstruction of Yuan which require more financial resources has decreased, and the restoration of Miao and An has occurred relatively more frequently. Taking Nanjing Buddhist

temples as an example, the number of Buddhist temples and monks in Nanjing remained at a relatively high level during the Republican period. After the Taiping Rebellion, the number of monks gradually recovered and peaked before 1937. According to a survey in 1936, there were approximately 450 temples in Nanjing, and the numbers of Buddhist temples, monks, and devotees were all no less than those in Nanjing in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Nanjing Municipal Government Administrative Statistical Report (Annual of 1935)—Nanjing Municipal Government Secretariat, Statistical Office 1937, p. 103). From the perspective of urban structure, the large temples in Nanjing were mostly located in the suburbs, such as the Great Baoen Temple 大報恩寺, Linggu Temple 靈谷寺, Tianjie Temple 天界寺, Qixia Temple 棲霞寺, and Jinghai Temple 靜海寺; medium-sized temples, such as Jiming Temple 雞鳴寺, Chengen Temple 承恩寺, Xianglin Temple 香林寺, Jinling Temple 金陵寺, Qingliang Temple 清涼寺, Waguan Temple 瓦官寺, and Jiufeng Temple 鷲峯寺, along with a greater number of Miao and An, were more distributed in densely populated urban areas, and Miao and An were more numerous than Yuan. Although Miao and An in the city did not possess as many monks, nuns, or extensive real estate and land as Yuan, they provided pragmatic functions for urban residents, such as ceremonies for weddings, funerals, illness healing, exorcisms, and places for celebrations and birthdays. The archives of the Nanjing Buddhist Confession Association 南京市經懺聯合會 show that the temples registered to hold Buddhist confession rituals in the city are concentrated in the southwestern district of the city (Shao 2017, p. 118). Hence, it is evident that while urbanization has indeed impacted temple spaces, the power of faith has ensured that temples continue to exist in various forms within people's lives, fulfilling the spiritual needs of devotees. All these reflect the enduring presence of religion and faith in human society, regardless of the changing times.

3. Monks' Motivations for the Buddhist Temple Construction

3.1. Emotional Appeal: The Revitalization and Construction of Temple Spaces in Jiangnan Region by Charismatic Monks

The revitalization of Buddhist temples in modern China has led to mass participation activities such as Buddhist statue-making and pagoda-building, which have profoundly affected the material and cultural space of society. "Such rapid reconstruction required massive financial support from Buddhist devotees and protection from government officials. It is unlikely that their support and protection would have been forthcoming unless the religious practice of the monks had retained the respect of the community. This is one reason why in China, wealth was an index of religious vitality. The largest and richest monasteries were the highest in moral strength and seriousness of purpose. Such monasteries were found above all in Kiangsu 江蘇 and Chekiang 浙江" (Welch 1968, p. 251). The success of these monasteries was predicated on the monks' capacity to earn widespread respect and acknowledgment for their religious observance. Charismatic religious leaders, distinguished by their compelling personal magnetism and unwavering adherence to religious precepts, were particularly adept at securing this recognition and respect.

According to the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), a charismatic leader born out of a crisis possesses a unique "supernatural" endowment, encompassing both physical and spiritual attributes. This endowment is based on the spirit of unattached striving and the capacity for heroic selflessness in the individual (Weber 2016, p. 254). In a sense, the evolution of the history of Buddhism in China is remarkably marked by a developmental path dominated by a group of eminent monks who possessed outstanding charisma and cultivation achievements (Li and Liu 2007, p. 223). These monks, known as "holy monks 聖僧", demonstrated outstanding ability and leadership in both spiritual practice and temple construction.

Following the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the four renowned Chan temples in the Jiangnan region—Zhenjiang Jinshan Temple 鎮江金山寺, Ningbo Tiantong Temple 寧波天童寺, Yangzhou Gaomin Temple 揚州高旻寺, and Changzhou Tianning Temple 常州天寧寺—suffered complete destruction by fire. Subsequently, amidst the concerted efforts of

the eminent monks belonging to each temple, a resurgence flourished. These eminent monks were often the abbots of their respective temples. The abbot, historically revered with titles such as elder 長老, spiritual guide 教化主, one with discerning insight 有道眼, and paragon of venerable virtues 有可尊之德, is esteemed for both moral integrity and seniority 德腊俱高者. In the traditional monastic setting, governance is distinctly personal in nature, with the abbot serving as the pivotal enforcer of the monastic system. Under the leadership of these abbots, the Chan temples not only rebuilt but also realized revival and promotion in religious and cultural aspects.

For instance, Guanxin Xianhui 觀心顯慧 (1810–1875), the abbot of Jinshan Temple, demonstrated an indomitable spirit and profound knowledge, persisting in teaching his disciples even after the temple was burned down by war. He earned the deep respect of notable figures such as Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) and Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), securing their financial support for the temple's reconstruction. Later, through the profound contributions and meticulous efforts of Dading Miyuan 大定密源 (1824–1907), Changjing Michuan 常靜密傳, Xinglian Mifa 性蓮密法, and Yinru Mizang 隱儒密藏, a systematic reformation of Chan regulations was undertaken successively. Thus, Jinshan Temple emerged as the preeminent monastery of Chinese Chan Buddhism. A similar circumstance also unfolded at the Gaomin Temple in Yangzhou. The Gaomin Temple also suffered a catastrophe during the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom period. In the aftermath, the abbot Deci Hengyan 德慈恆演 embodied unparalleled resilience, “his heart as unyielding as diamond, demonstrating forbearance that surpassed ordinary measure 鐵石心硬比金剛, 忍辱力超諸數外”. Amid the most challenging conditions, he devotedly sought solace in solitude. Later, the abbot Yuelang Quanding 月朗全定 (1855–1915) made an outstanding contribution to the resurgence of Gaomin Temple. During the Republican period, under the vigorous efforts of the abbot Laiguo Miaoshu 來果妙樹 (1881–1953), Gaomin Temple established regulations and rectified its discipline, significantly bolstering its sectarian influence and projecting its renown far and wide (Yu 1995, p. 99). It is noteworthy that these eminent monks, while dedicated to the reconstruction of their temples, also committed themselves to the preservation and flourishing of the Dharma lineage. For example, Chan Master Wuyuan 悟圓 from Jinshan Temple revived Haichao Temple 海潮寺 in Hangzhou during the Jiaqing period; Master Faren 法忍 from Jinshan revived Bore Temple 般若寺 in Chishan 赤山, Nanjing, during the Guangxu period; Jingxin 淨心 from Jinshan revived Tiantong Temple 天童寺 in Ningbo; Renzhi 仁智, the first seat in Jinshan, revived Xianqin Temple 顯親寺 in Yixing 宜興; Qingzong 清宗 of Tianning Temple revived Shizi Zhengzong Temple 獅子正宗寺 in Tianmu Mountain; and Fayi 法一, the first seat in Gaomin Temple, revived Shiziling 獅子嶺 in Nanjing (Li 2010, p. 1812). While reconstructing the temples, the monks spread the Dharma lineage or used the Dharma lineage to gather the strength to overcome difficulties and foster the prosperity of the temple together, unifying, from the historical perspective, the revival of the temples and the continuation of the Dharma lineage.

Master Xuyun 虛云 (1840?–1959) stands as yet another distinguished exemplar within this developmental trajectory. As a venerable Chan master affiliated with five different Chan lineages, Master Xuyun devoted his life to the establishment or restoration of at least fourteen temples, leaving an indelible mark on the religious landscape of China. His efforts were particularly concentrated in the provinces of Yunnan, Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi. In Yunnan, he played a key role in revitalizing a series of temples, including Xizhu Temple 西竺寺, Zhusheng Temple 祝聖寺, Yingxiang Temple 迎祥寺, Xingyun Temple 興雲寺, Huating Temple 華亭寺, Luoquan Temple 蘿荃寺, Songyin Temple 松隱寺, and Shengyin Temple 勝因寺, each serving as a testament to his dedication to the Chan tradition. His influence extended to Fujian, where he played a pivotal role in the rejuvenation of Yongquan Temple 湧泉寺. In the provinces of Guangdong, Xuyun's contributions were equally significant, with his involvement in the restoration of Nanhua Temple 南華寺, Dajian Temple 大鑿寺, Yuehua Temple 月華寺, and Yunmen Temple 雲門寺, which have become emblematic of the region's Buddhist heritage. Additionally, his work in Jiangxi

province with the Yunju Shan 雲居山 complex further underscores his commitment to preserving and promoting Chan Buddhism.

In addition to revitalizing the temples, Xuyun placed a greater emphasis on the revitalization of the intrinsic spirit of Buddhism. He tried to change family-owned temples with monks breaking precepts and violating fasts into Chan temples through strict discipline, the implementation of statutes, and the teaching of precepts to truly restore the vitality of Buddhism. In 1933, General Hanhun Li 李漢魂, director of the appeasement of northern Guangdong, invited Xuyun to revive Nanhua Temple, a famous temple in Guangdong. Nanhua Temple is where the real body of the Sixth Patriarch lies. At that time, the Temple had already severely declined; i.e., “(The descendants and disciples) each lived in the village with their family members, plowing and herding livestock, without any differences from other farmers... Slaughtering and cooking, gambling and smoking, human and animal excrement all existed. Except for the Ancestral Hall, the Pagoda and a part of the Sucheng An, which are slightly intact, the Mahavira Hall and scripture buildings were all destroyed, and there was no place to accommodate the abbot and monks (子孫徒眾) 各攜家眷住於村莊耕植牧畜, 無殊俗類。... 宰殺烹飲, 賭博吸煙, 人畜糞穢, 觸目掩鼻, 廕除祖殿, 寶塔及蘇程庵一部份稍為完整外, 其大殿, 經樓, 方丈, 僧素均皆摧朽, 容眾無所” (Xuyun 2009, p. 148). After Xuyun went to Nanhua, he immediately began to strictly rectify the precepts. After ten years of hard work, i.e., building temples, buying more property, and promoting the Dharma and the monks, Xuyun finally revived the tradition of the Sixth Patriarch and built Nanhua Temple into the largest temple in Guangdong. After rebuilding Nanhua, Xuyun went to Yunmen Temple in Shaoguan, Guangdong, in 1943 to rejuvenate the temple’s venerable traditions. The revival of Yunmen Temple occurred “during the Second Sino-Japanese War, i.e., the Japanese occupied most parts of China, fires were spreading across the country, and financial resources were limited, with construction difficulties and a lack of materials and personnel; therefore, the revival was ten to a hundred times harder than that for Nanhua Temple 時值抗戰軍興, 倭寇深入, 烽火漫於全國, 財力限於一隅, 物質缺乏, 人事周章, 建設艱難, 固有十百倍於南華時代者” (Cen 2009a, p. 188). Xuyun overcame all types of difficulties by “gathering a handful of workers, blasting his own stones, burning his own bricks and tiles, felling his own timber, building his own construction, exploring his own lacquer, making his own statues, reclaiming his own land, and planting his own seeds 集少數工人, 自爆石, 自燒磚瓦, 自伐木材, 自建造, 自探漆, 自造像, 自開墾, 自種植” (Cen 2009b, p. 213). Xuyun established the Yunmen Dajue Farm 雲門大覺農場 to encourage the monastic community towards self-sufficiency, moving away from reliance on rent income, alms solicitation, incense offerings, and the conducting of repentance rituals for sustenance. Through the unrelenting efforts of Xuyun and his assembly, Yunmen Temple ultimately emerged as a major monastery in Lingnan 嶺南,⁶ second only to Nanhua Temple.

3.2. Sustaining the Sacred: The Role of Dharma Transmission in Revitalizing Jiangnan’s Buddhist Temples

The foregoing discussion highlights the pivotal role played by eminent monks in the reconstruction of temples and the revival of Buddhism. The Monastic Rules of Monk Baizhang by Imperial Order 敕修百丈清規 states that “If the abbot cannot function properly, the temple will be abandoned and ruined, and the impact will continue for many years; therefore, the temple will be ruined for decades 苟非其人, 一寺廢蕩, 又遺黨於後, 至數十年蔓不可圖” (Taishō Tripitaka, Vol. 48, Sutra No. 2025, p. 1119, p. 1119). This underscores the critical influence of the abbot’s personal decisions on the operation of the monastic system. In the modern tradition of Jiangnan Chan temples, the method of succession for the abbot is predominantly through the Dharma scroll transmission system 法卷傳法 (Welch 1963). Initially, Dharma transmission referred to the “Entrustment of the Dharma 付囑傳法”, where the abbot selects disciples with profound spiritual aptitude or clear insight into the nature of mind to receive the teachings. With the influence of Chinese clan systems on Buddhism, Dharma transmission evolved into a method

for recruiting disciples and preserving ancestral rules and enterprises: “In the old days, the testamentary transmission of the Dharma is for the inheritance of the Dharma, with a whisk of origin, so that the heir can go to various places to expound and develop, having no initial relationship with the present abbot of the temple; once there is no abbot, the heir can also be invited to fill in the abbotship. However, the true nature of the transmission of the Dharma is gradually being lost, and no one can hold the abbotship unless he is a direct heir 古之付囑而為法嗣, 授以源流拂子, 使往諸方闡化, 與本山住持無初關係; 然本山一旦缺席亦可受請遞補, 後代漸失本真, 非親授嫡嗣不能據座” (Zhenhua 1944, p. 3). The characteristic feature of the Dharma transmission system in modern Jiangnan Chan temples lies in its internal lineage within the Dharma family, resembling a familial succession from father to son, thus creating a dynastic mode of transmission. The abbot holds significant control over the temple’s property and management, a practice that, akin to ruling a family or a clan, has profoundly impacted the stability and longevity of the temple’s organizational system.

However, the method of appointing abbots through Dharma transmission has been criticized in modern times. Some highly respected monks in the religious community strongly oppose linking the transmission of Dharma with the position of abbot, as they believe it introduces a very personal relationship into the public sphere.⁷ Nonetheless, some scholars argue that the concentration of administrative power and familial responsibility might be one of the reasons why some Chan temples were able to remain prosperous during the Republican period when other temples were declining. Chinese religious history scholar Zhang Xuesong believes that the traditional clan system of the monastic community should not be completely abandoned because it underpins monks’ renunciation, identity construction, the acquisition of religious legitimacy and sanctity, and even the attainment of sectarian identity. Traditional Chinese Buddhism has been a longstanding “family business”, with temple property being a critical aspect of the Dharma transmission system. Dharma transmission and sectarian succession represent a cultural identification, legitimizing the tremendous achievements Buddhism has made over thousands of years. A temple may be destroyed by natural or man-made disasters, but as long as there is a lineage and succession, a sect can ensure its future with outstanding individuals emerging in subsequent generations to rejuvenate the sect and restore the temples. This was particularly evident in the Jiangnan Buddhist community after the Taiping Rebellion. Although the modernization of temple properties posed a significant challenge to Buddhism, the religion saw a resurgence in the 1920s and 1930s and again after the Cultural Revolution in China. The Dharma transmission system ensures the purity of the Buddhist “bloodline”, requiring even new and heterogeneous elements to undergo the rite of Dharma transmission before entering mainstream Buddhism, thereby preserving its self-identity over millennia (Zhang 2015, p. 206). Hence, it is evident that the revitalization of Buddhist temples in the Jiangnan area and the traditional operation of their monastic Dharma transmission system are closely intertwined as a continuation of cultural and spiritual heritage.

3.3. *Disciplinary Practice: The Core Assurance of the Sacredness of Buddhist Temple Spaces*

The construction of physical space is often accompanied by the reshaping of mental boundaries. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the maturity of a religion or school depends to a large extent on the maturity of the institutional system (Huang 2008, p. 54). The precepts are the institutional guarantee of the sanctity of Buddhism and have a core value in the sacred constructional system of Buddhism. Samantapasadika 善見律 clearly states that “Vinaya is the life of the Dharma; if Vinaya abides, so does the Dharma 毗尼藏者, 是佛法壽, 毗尼若住, 佛法亦住”. In modern times, these aforementioned charismatic monks have also realized that the maintenance of the soundness of the internal sacred system of Buddhism is the foundation of the long-term existence of the Dharma and even the practice of Buddhism; therefore, the reconstruction of a temple is often accompanied by the revitalization of the precepts. Eminent monks who adhered to the traditional system, such as Xuyun and Laiguo, all committed themselves to the pu-

rification and regulation of both monastic ethos and discipline. During the Republican period, several temple regulations appeared, such as the “Gaomin Si Four Departments Regulations 高旻寺四寮房規約”, credited to Master Laiguo in 1932, the “Five Regulations 五條規約”, credited to Master Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940) of the Pure Land School for the Lingyanshan 靈岩山 in Suzhou in 1937, the “Four regulations 四條規矩”, credited to Master Xingci 興慈 of the Tiantai School for the Fazang Temple 法藏寺 in Shanghai in 1942, and the “Eternal Record of Yunqi Temple 雲棲寺萬年簿記” for Yunqi Temple in Yunnan (1930), the “Reestablishment of the Residential and Seating Regulations at the Yongquan Temple in Gushan 鼓山湧泉寺重訂安單規則” for Yongquan Temple in Fujian Province (1930), and the “Three Comprehensive Regulatory Framework 三大全面規範” of the Dajue Temple 大覺寺 in Guangdong, credited to Xuyun.

The revival of Buddhist precepts and institutional frameworks represents a long-term endeavor that brings together religious and political elites in a shared commitment to the pure ideals of the monastery. This approach is adept at addressing specific issues that arise within monastic communities and is capable of integrating creatively with the institutional innovations of Buddhism.

4. Summary

This paper focuses on the revival of traditional Chinese Han Buddhist temples since the modern era. Through a comprehensive analysis from multiple perspectives, the main factors influencing the dynamic changes in temple construction activities include: the country’s economic prosperity, shifts in political power, urbanization, the charisma of eminent monks, and the religious inclinations of the ruling or elite class. Although these factors do not directly correlate with the increase or decrease in temple construction, they are often considered significant indicators of changes in the number of temples. Amid significant societal transformations, the flourishing of trade ports in coastal cities, the rise of industry and commerce, and the emergence of revolutionary consciousness, these phenomena collectively mark a new historical starting point. In this context of spatial transformation, the layout of modern Buddhist temples exhibits that those in the south surpass those in the north in terms of destruction and reconstruction speed, and the number of temples in cities exceeds those in mountainous and forested areas yet urban temples tend to be smaller in scale. Regarding the motives behind temple construction, the efforts often revolve around organizing the monastic community, restoring discipline, and promoting the spirit of the sects, reflecting the Buddhist monks’ unwavering dedication to the preservation and transmission of the Dharma. In this process, the charisma of eminent monks and the emphasis on discipline during construction significantly enhance the sanctity of the Buddhist monastic space.

A thorough examination of the spatial transformations in modern Buddhist temples also calls for a renewed comprehension of the concept of “revival”: the reconstruction of temples after the Taiping Rebellion is not merely a process of regaining vitality but has significantly shaped Buddhist culture. The restructured spaces of modern temples do not simply revert to their pre-Taiping Rebellion status; rather, propelled by the prevailing momentum of the era, they transform into a more stable ecosystem. Similarly, the revival of Buddhism is not a straightforward return to the status quo but represents a crucial opportunity to construct new forms of Buddhism and its new societal functions.

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Appendix A

Table A1. List of Temples Mentioned in the Paper (A–Z).

| English Name | Chinese Name | Province | Region |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------------|
| Baohuashan Temple | 寶華山寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Baisui Palace | 百歲宮 | Anhui | Southern |
| Bailin Temple | 柏林寺 | Beijing | Northern |
| Bailu Temple | 白鹿寺 | Hunan | Central-Southern |
| Baotong Temple | 寶通寺 | Sichuan | Southern |
| Chanyuan Temple | 禪源寺 | Zhejiang | Southern |
| Chengen Temple | 承恩寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Dajue Temple | 大覺寺 | Guangdong | Southern |
| Dajian Temple | 大鑿寺 | Guangdong | Southern |
| Kaiyuan Temple | 開元寺 | Shaanxi | Northern |
| Jiming Temple | 雞鳴寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Jinshan Temple | 金山寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Jinling Temple | 金陵寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Jingshan Temple | 徑山寺 | Zhejiang | Southern |
| Jiaoshan Temple | 焦山寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Jinghai Temple | 靜海寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Jiufeng Temple | 鷲峯寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Ganlu Temple | 甘露寺 | Anhui | Southeastern |
| Gaomin Temple | 高旻寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Guangji Temple | 廣濟寺 | Beijing | Northern |
| Hanshan Temple | 寒山寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Huacheng Temple | 化城寺 | Anhui | Southern |
| Huating Temple/Yunqi Temple | 華亭寺/雲棲寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Lingyin Temple | 靈隱寺 | Zhejiang | Southern |
| Linggu Temple | 靈谷寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Liuhe Pagoda | 六和塔 | Zhejiang | Southern |
| Luoquan Temple | 蘿荃寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Nanhua Temple | 南華寺 | Guangdong | Southern |
| Qixia Temple | 棲霞寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Qingliang Temple | 清涼寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| The Great Baoen Temple | 大報恩寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Tianning Temple | 天寧寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Tiantong Temple | 天童寺 | Zhejiang | Southern |
| Tianjie Temple | 天界寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Xingyun Temple | 興雲寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Xianqin Temple | 顯親寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Xizhu Temple | 西竺寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Xianglin Temple | 香林寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Yingjiang Temple | 迎江寺 | Anhui | Southern |

Table A1. Cont.

| English Name | Chinese Name | Province | Region |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| Yingxiang Temple/Boyuan An | 迎祥寺/鉢孟庵 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Yongquan Temple | 湧泉寺 | Fujian | Southern |
| Yunmen Temple | 雲門寺 | Guangdong | Southern |
| Yuehua Temple | 月華寺 | Guangdong | Southern |
| Yunju Temple | 雲居寺 | Jiangxi | Southern |
| Fayuan Temple | 法源寺 | Beijing | Northern |
| Waguan Temple | 瓦官寺 | Jiangsu | Southern |
| Shengyin Temple | 勝因寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Songyin Temple | 松隱寺 | Yunnan | Southern |
| Zhusheng Temple | 祝聖寺 | Yunnan | Southern |

Notes

- ¹ In modern Chinese history, the “Jiangnan region 江南地區” referred to the areas south of the Yangtze River, including parts of present-day Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.
- ² The dataset was part of a research workshop on Chinese chorography, computer data analysis and visualization held from 1 to 19 August 2016 at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. The processing of full-text data from 11 chorographies revealed that religious buildings (temples, monasteries, etc.) had been either destroyed or reconstructed between 1850 and 1949. In total, there are 423 entries representing 584 instances of destruction or reconstruction. The data are part of a three-year research project, Buddhist Reconstruction in China, 1866–1966, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the University of Edinburgh. The related research results are presented in detail in his new book, Scott (2020).
- ³ Eberhard chose Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Anhui 安徽, and parts of Hunan 湖南 and Hubei 湖北 to represent central China and Fujian and Guangdong to represent the coastal areas of southern China. In total, 43 districts were selected from more than 1000 districts, and information on more than 10,000 temples was processed to serve as data for the preliminary study. Please see Eberhard (1964).
- ⁴ Written by Paul R. Katz and translated by Tingyou Chen, *Spatial Characteristics of the Temple Destruction Movement in Modern China—Focusing on the Jiangnan Metropolis 近代中國寺廟破壞運動的空間特征—以江南都市為重心*, edited by Katz and Goossaert (2005), pp. 1–38.
- ⁵ The term “畝” (mǔ) is a traditional Chinese unit of area measurement, which is commonly used in the context of land area. It is equivalent to approximately 0.0667 hectares or about 0.165 acres.
- ⁶ Lingnan 嶺南, historically, refers to the southernmost region of China, which is characterized by its unique geography, climate, and cultural identity.
- ⁷ Daniela Campo and others also referenced the stringent selection criteria that esteemed monks such as Tanxu 倓虛, Yinguang 印光, Xingci 興慈, and Xuyun 虛雲 applied when ordaining disciples. For further details, please refer to Ji et al. (2016, pp. 137–50).

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Article

Did Wu Zetian Name “卐” as “Wanzi”? A Historical Reassessment

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Abstract: While scholarly works often attribute the pronunciation of “卐” as “wan” to Empress Wu Zetian in 693, associating it with the meaning “auspicious myriad virtues”, a closer examination of the history of “卐” in Chinese Buddhist translations suggests otherwise. The more accurate transliterations and translations of *svastika* emerged much later than the term “Wanzi” and had very limited influence. The connection between “卐” and “Wanzi” more likely appeared during the early transmission of Buddhism to China, when people used the accepted cursive form of “萬” to approximate the shape of the *svastika* symbol. However, as this rationale gradually became obsolete over time, the legend that “Empress Wu Zetian decreed that ‘卐’ be pronounced as ‘wan’” arose during the Song dynasty and has persisted to this day.

Keywords: *svastika*; history of Chinese characters; “Wanzi”; early Chinese Buddhist translations

1. Introduction

The auspicious symbol *svastika* (“卐” or “卐”) is frequently depicted in Buddhist scriptures, as well as in various artistic forms such as paintings, sculptures, and decorative patterns, representing one of the “Thirty-Two Marks” or “Eighty Minor Characteristics” of the Buddha.¹ In Chinese, this symbol is referred to as “Wanzi 萬字” (“the character of ten thousand”). It can be considered a variant form of the Chinese character “萬”. Phonetic variants of “Wanzi”, such as the Japanese “まんじ” (*manji*) and the Korean “만자” (*manja*), have become the recognized names for the *svastika* symbol in these respective Asian languages.²

Given that the Chinese character “萬” (ten thousand) bears no intrinsic semantic connection to the *svastika*, numerous dictionaries and scholarly works attempt to explain this association in different ways. These sources frequently reference Fayun’s 法雲 (1088–1158) *Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集 [Collection of Explanations of Translation Terms] (compiled in 1143), which cites the *Huayan yinyi* 華嚴音義 [The Sound and the Meaning of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*] to suggest that this symbol was first officially recognized as a Chinese character during the second year of the Changshou 長壽 era (693 CE) of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705 CE), who established its pronunciation as “wan”.³

(1) ... 華嚴音義云：“案卐字，本非是字。大周長壽二年主上權制此文，著於天樞，音之為萬，謂吉祥萬德之所集也。經中上下據漢本總一十七字，同呼為萬，依梵文有二十八相云云。”⁴

... The *Huayan yinyi* states: “The character ‘卐’ was not originally a (Chinese) character. In the second year of the Changshou era during the Great Zhou Dynasty, Empress (Wu Zetian) provisionally established it as a (Chinese) character, inscribing it on the Heavenly Pivot and assigning it the pronunciation ‘Wan’ to signify the gathering of auspicious myriad virtues. In the Chinese translations of the scriptures, this symbol is consistently referred to as ‘Wan’, with seventeen instances in total across the texts. According to the Sanskrit text, there are twenty-eight distinct marks” and so on.

The claim that Empress Wu Zetian established the pronunciation of “卐” as “Wan” had gained widespread influence since then, but we should not accept this account with-

out caution. A thorough review of the sources cited by the *Fanyi mingyi ji*—specifically Huiyuan’s 慧苑 (673–743 CE) *Xinyi da fangguang fo huayan jing yinyi* 新譯大方廣佛華嚴經音義 [The Sound and the Meaning of the New Translation of the Mahāvaiṣṭavya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra] (also known as *Huiyuan yinyi* 慧苑音義 [Huiyuan’s Dictionary] or *Huayan yinyi* 華嚴音義, compiled around 732 CE⁵)—reveals certain discrepancies. In his explanation of the phrase “𠄎字之形” (the form of the “𠄎” symbol) as it appears in Śikṣānanda’s 實叉難陀 (652–710 CE) translation of the T279 *Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 [Mahāvaiṣṭavya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra], Huiyuan clarified that the “𠄎” symbol was originally not a Chinese character. He further indicated that this term in the T279 corresponded to various symbols in the Sanskrit *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. When comparing the extant version of *Huiyuan yinyi* with its citation in the *Fanyi mingyi ji*, it becomes evident that Fayun’s reference is directly drawn from Huiyuan’s work. This is apparent both from the title “*Huayan yinyi*” and from the closely aligned phrases, such as 經中上下據漢本總一十七字同呼爲萬 (“in the Chinese translations of the scriptures, this symbol is consistently referred to as ‘Wan’, with seventeen instances in total across the texts”) which are notably consistent between the two texts. However, one critical discrepancy warrants attention: the passage in Fayun’s text regarding Wu Zetian is *entirely absent* in Huiyuan’s work:

(2) 【𠄎字之形】今按梵本，𠄎字乃是德者之相，元非字也。然經中上下據漢本總一十七字同呼爲萬，依梵文有二十八相，即八種相中四種相也。謂室利鞞瑠、難提迦物多、塞嚩悉底迦、本囊伽咤，又有鉢特忙、斫訖羅、拔折羅等三相。雖於《花藏》《迴向》二品中有，以其可識無謬，故此不列在數。又有盍句奢相，此經總無，故亦不列。其一十七相既非萬字，又非一色之相，今顯異同，謂第八卷有一室利鞞瑠相，第九卷有三相：初難提迦物多，次室利鞞瑠，後亦室利鞞瑠。第二十三有一相，謂塞嚩悉底迦，第二十七有五種相：初室利鞞瑠，次塞嚩悉底迦，次難提迦物多，次室利鞞瑠，後難提迦物多。第四十八有三相：一塞嚩悉底迦相，二室利鞞瑠，三室利鞞瑠。第五十七、五十八、六十三、六十五等各有一室利鞞瑠相。若謹依梵本，總有二十八相，具顯如《刊定記》說也。⁶

[The form of the “𠄎” symbol]: According to the Sanskrit originals, the “𠄎” is a mark signifying virtue and is not inherently a character. However, in the Chinese translations of the scriptures, this symbol is consistently referred to as “Wan”, with seventeen instances in total across the texts. According to the Sanskrit text, there are twenty-eight distinct marks, of which four correspond to the eight types of auspicious symbols. These include Śrīvatsa, Nandikāvarta,⁷ Svastika, and Pūrṇaḥaṭa, among others. Additionally, there are three other marks: Padma, Cakra, and Vajra. Although the *Huazang* [Flower Treasury] and *Huixiang* [Dedication of Merit] chapters include some of these marks, they are not listed here to avoid confusion as they are clearly identifiable. The Aṅkuśa mark, which does not appear in this sutra, is also omitted. As for the seventeen marks mentioned in the Chinese text, they are neither “Wan” characters nor a single type of mark. The differences are as follows: The eighth volume mentions one Śrīvatsa mark; the ninth volume contains three marks: first, Nandikāvarta; second, Śrīvatsa; and lastly, Śrīvatsa again. The twenty-third volume has one mark, identified as Svastika. The twenty-seventh volume contains five marks: first, Śrīvatsa; second, Svastika; third, Nandikāvarta; fourth, Śrīvatsa; and finally, Nandikāvarta again. The forty-eighth volume mentions three marks: first, a Svastika mark; and then two instances of Śrīvatsa. Volumes fifty-seven, fifty-eight, sixty-three, and sixty-five each contain one Śrīvatsa mark. According to the Sanskrit originals, there are twenty-eight marks in total, as clearly detailed in the *Kandinji* [Supplementary Record of the Commentary on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra].

The initial question we must address is whether the additional references to Empress Wu Zetian in the *Fanyi mingyi ji* were introduced by Fayun during his compilation or whether they reflect content that has been lost from the extant *Huayan yinyi* by Huiyuan. A thorough investigation of all instances where the *Fanyi mingyi ji* cites the *Yinyi* works of

Xuanying 玄應 (active 645–c. 661/663 CE⁸), Huilin 慧琳 (737–820 CE), and Huiyuan 慧苑 reveals that Fayun consistently abridged the original content, often summarizing rather than strictly quoting the texts.⁹ This pattern casts significant doubt on the authenticity of the passage concerning Wu Zetian. It seems only plausible if this narrative did not originate from *Huiyuan yinyi*, but was instead introduced by Fayun from another source—perhaps an annotation or commentary that was erroneously incorporated into the main text.

Further evidence supporting this hypothesis lies in a subtle wording difference between the two texts. In *Huiyuan yinyi*, the statements “the ‘卍’ symbol was originally not a Chinese character” and “in the Chinese translations of the scriptures, this symbol is consistently referred to as ‘Wan,’ with seventeen instances in total” are connected by the conjunction “however” (然), indicating a clear semantic relationship (...元非字也, 然經中上下據漢本總一十七字同呼為萬...). In contrast, Fayun’s version omits this conjunction after inserting the narrative about Wu Zetian, likely to avoid a grammatical inconsistency introduced by the interpolation. This detail suggests that the reference to Wu Zetian was not part of Huiyuan’s original text but rather an addition by Fayun.

More direct evidence can be found in Huiyuan’s commentary on the newly translated *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, titled *Xu huayan jing lue shu kandingji* 續華嚴略疏刊定記 [Supplementary Record of the Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra] (referred to as the *Kandingji* at the end of example 2). In this work, Huiyuan explicitly stated that the designation of the symbol “卍” as the “character of ten thousand” (萬字) arose from an error made by ancient translators who misunderstood the reading and meaning of the Sanskrit term. Notably, he made no mention of any role played by Empress Wu Zetian in this interpretation:

(3) 其相梵名室利靺瑤，此曰吉祥海雲。眾德深廣，利物如雲，海雲即吉祥，吉祥即海雲。古人誤譯“洛刹曩”為“惡刹擲”，遂謂相為字，又以相表利物深廣多故，稱之為萬。理實此中無萬無字，唯云“金剛莊嚴臆室利靺瑤相”，其“萬字”之言都為謬妄爾。¹⁰

This symbol is called Śrīvatsa, which in Chinese means “Auspicious Ocean Cloud”, [because] its numerous virtues are profound and vast, benefiting all beings like clouds. The “ocean cloud” is auspicious, and auspiciousness is the “ocean cloud”. In ancient times, translators mistakenly read *lakṣaṇa* as *akṣara*, leading them to refer to this symbol as a “character” (字). Furthermore, since this pattern represents profound and widespread benefits to all beings, they called it “ten thousand” (萬). However, from a logical standpoint, this is neither “ten thousand” nor a “character”. It is simply the “vajra-adorned mark of Śrīvatsa on the chest”. The claim that it represents the “ten thousand character” is entirely mistaken.

Huiyuan was a disciple of Fazang 法藏 (643–712), who was directly involved in the new translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. If the designation of the symbol “卍” as a Chinese character, read as *Wan*, had indeed originated from an edict by Empress Wu Zetian, it is hard to imagine that he would have rendered such a straightforward and unequivocal conclusion. Moreover, Huiyuan’s direct critic, Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), explicitly referenced Huiyuan’s commentary (example 3) in his *Da fangguang fo huanyan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏 [Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra], yet he offered no criticism regarding this particular issue.¹¹

Another piece of evidence can be found in the slightly later work *Yiqiejing yinyi* 一切經音義 [The Sound and the Meaning of All Scriptures] by Huilin 慧琳 (also known as *Huilin yinyi* 慧琳音義 [Huilin’s dictionary], compiled before 808 CE¹²), which incorporates Huiyuan’s annotations on T279 and briefly references Huiyuan’s explanation in his own annotation on the term “卍字之文” in Volume 20 of the T310 *Da baoji jing* 大寶積經 [Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra]. In his annotations, Huilin not only omitted any mention of Wu Zetian’s alleged decree that “卍” be recognized as a Chinese character “Wan”, but he also explicitly refuted this claim, further claiming that referring to “卍” as “Wan” was erroneous:

(4) 卍字之文：梵云“室哩(二合)末蹉(倉何反)”。唐云吉祥相也。有云萬字者，謬說也。《花嚴經》第八卷中具說此相等亦非是字也，乃是如來身上數處有此吉祥之文、大福德之相。¹³

The symbol “卍”: In Sanskrit, it is pronounced ‘Śrīvatsa’. In the Tang language, it is referred to as an auspicious sign. Some have claimed that it is the character “Wan”, but this is an incorrect statement. (In *Huayan yinyi*'s annotation of) the eighth volume of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, it is clarified that the symbol is not a character, but rather an auspicious mark found in various places on the body of the Tathāgata, signifying great merit and virtue.

The claim that Wu Zetian decreed the pronunciation of “卍” as “Wan” is largely absent from Tang dynasty historical records and seems to have originated predominantly from Song dynasty sources,¹⁴ casting doubt on its credibility. Thus, the precise timing and underlying reasons for the designation of “卍” as “Wanzi” requires further rigorous scrutiny and analysis.

2. The Initial Naming of “卍” in Chinese Translations

From the chronological perspective of Chinese Buddhist translations, the use of the character “萬” (or “万”) to represent the “卍” symbol on the Buddha’s body appears quite early. This practice can be traced back to the translations of Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 222–252 CE). The following are some examples from relatively early translations:

(5) 披襲相太子，見有三十二相：軀體金色，頂有肉髻，其髮紺青……毛右旋，一一孔一毛生，皮毛細軟，不受塵水，胸有萬字。¹⁵

(Asita) uncovered the prince’s inner garment to examine him and observed that he possessed the thirty-two major marks: his body was of a golden hue, a fleshy protuberance adorned the top of his head, his hair was deep blue, ... each hair curled to the right, with a single hair emerging from each pore, his skin and hair were fine and soft, impervious to dust and water, and a svastika symbol was present on his chest.

(6) 時阿夷以偈答王言：“今觀太子身……頰車如師子，四牙萬字現……是以眉間毫，白淨如明珠。”¹⁶

At this moment, Asita responded to the king with a verse: “Now, observing the prince’s form... his jaw is like that of a lion, (with large, white) four teeth and the svastika symbol appearing (on his body)¹⁷... therefore, the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows is pure and radiant, like a luminous pearl”.

(7) 是時，父王慙懃再三，重問相師：“汝等更觀太子三十二相，斯名何等？”時諸相師即披太子衣，說三十二相：“……十六、胸有萬字……是為三十二相。”¹⁸

At that time, the king earnestly inquired of the physiognomists again: “Look once more at the thirty-two marks of the prince, what are they?” The physiognomists then unveiled the prince’s robe and revealed the thirty-two marks: “...sixteenth, the svastika symbol on the chest... these are the thirty-two marks”.

Aside from the Buddhist translations, the earliest reference in Chinese literature to the svastika symbol on the chest of a Buddha image appears in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks] completed in 519 CE. In this text, the svastika is also referred to as “Wanzi”:

(8) 初僧護所創，鑿龕過淺，乃鑿入五丈，更施頂髻，及身相克成，瑩磨將畢。夜中忽當萬字處，色赤而隆起。今像胸萬字處，猶不施金鏤，而赤色在焉。像以天監十二年春就功，至十五年春竟。¹⁹

Initially, Senghu carved a shallow niche, but later deepened it to five zhang, adding a topknot and completing the bodily features. As the polishing was about to be finished, suddenly, in the middle of the night, at the site of the svastika symbol, the area turned red and raised. Even today, the svastika symbol

on the chest of the statue remains unadorned with gold but retains its reddish color. The statue was completed in the twelfth year of the Tianjian era and finished in the fifteenth year.

When used as a decorative motif on objects, the symbol “卍” is also referred to as “Wanzi”:

(9) 彼畫鉢中作菡桃蔓蓮華像，佛言：“不應爾。”彼鉢中作萬字，佛言：“不應爾。”彼畫鉢作己名字，佛言：“不應爾。”²⁰

The monks painted on the bowl an image of a grape vine and lotus flower, to which the Buddha said, “This is inappropriate”. They then painted the svastika symbol, to which the Buddha again said, “This is inappropriate”. They painted their own names, and the Buddha said, “This is inappropriate”.

While pre-Tang Chinese texts frequently refer to the svastika as “Wanzi”, it is important to consider the possibility that these references may have been altered in subsequent periods. Since most extant versions of ancient Chinese literature were copied or printed long after their original composition—particularly given that many editions of the Buddhist canon were produced during the Song and Yuan dynasties—it raises the question of whether the designation of the svastika as “Wanzi” might have been a post-Tang modification. There are numerous textual variants in the examples cited earlier. For instance, in example (5) from the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 [The Sutra on the Auspicious Signs and Previous Lives of the Prince] by Zhi Qian, the Qisha edition (磧砂藏), Song edition (思溪藏), and Imperial Household edition (宮內廳本) use “卍”, while the Dunhuang manuscript (Dunhuang 187) and Japanese manuscripts from Kongō-ji 金剛寺 and Shichi-ji 七寺 use “萬”. In this context, Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the T186 *Puyao jing* 普曜經 [Lalitavistara] is largely consistent in expression with its parallel text, the earlier *Taizi ruiyuan benqi jing* translated by Zhi Qian,²¹ and its Korean edition (高麗藏) and Jin edition (趙城金藏) use “卍”, while the Song, Qisha, and Imperial Household editions use “卍”. However, the Fangshan stone inscriptions (房山石經) and the *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 [Compendium of Divergent Aspects of the Sūtras and Vinayas]²² cite it as “萬”.

However, if we were to rely on the account in the *Fanyi mingyi ji* and argue that the term “Wanzi” was not used to refer to “卍” before the Tang dynasty—suggesting that all variants of “萬” are post-Tang corrections of “卍”—such a claim would be highly suspicious. There is substantial evidence that “卍” was referred to as “Wanzi” well before the Tang dynasty and that this term carried an inherent connection to the number ten thousand in the mind of Chinese readers. This is exemplified by Emperor Jianwen of Liang 梁簡文帝, Xiao Gang 蕭綱, in his inscription “Wujun shixiang bei” 吳郡石像碑 [The Stone Statue Stele of Wu Commandery]:

(10) 千輪足起，萬字胸書。²³

A thousand-spoked wheel on the feet, a svastika symbol inscribed on the chest.

It describes the image of a Buddha statue with the “卍” symbol on the chest and a thousand-spoked wheel mark on the feet. The inscription mentions “the fourth year of Zhongdatong 中大通” and “Prince Linghou of Linru 臨汝靈侯” (the posthumous title of Xiao Yuanyou 蕭淵猷), suggesting that the composition was written after 533 CE and before Xiao Gang’s death in 551 CE. This paired phrase was later adapted by Yancong 彥琮 (557–610 CE) in his *Tongji lun* 通極論 [Treatise on Reaching the Ultimate]: 開萬字於胸前，躡千輪於足下 “Displaying the svastika on his chest and treading on the thousand-spoked wheel beneath the feet”.²⁴ Although this widely admired passage is sometimes cited with “萬” rendered as “卍” in its many iterations,²⁵ the use of “Wanzi” (萬字) and “Qianlun” (千輪) as a parallel couplet in this prose clearly indicates that the author referred to the svastika symbol on the Buddha’s chest as “Wanzi” and believed it to be, at least in a literal sense, related to the number ten thousand.

This practice of linking the svastika symbol with the number ten thousand can also be observed in certain Chinese Buddhist translations:

(11) 下生於人間，而得大人相，胸字有萬數。以此相好故，無有諸疾病，若在家出家，常得受快樂。若獲剎利種，得王四天下；若出家學道，得成無上尊，純受上妙樂。²⁶

Descending to the human world, he attains the great man's marks, with the svastika symbol on his chest. Because of these auspicious marks, he is free from all ailments. Whether a householder or a monastic, he always experiences happiness. If born as a kshatriya, he rules over the four continents; if he leaves home to pursue the Way, he attains supreme honor and enjoys the highest pleasures.

As previously discussed, the svastika on the Buddha's chest was originally a symbol of auspiciousness and was not inherently connected to numerical values. However, in example (11), to conform to the five-character line structure of Chinese verse, the character “數” was added after “萬”, clearly indicating that the svastika on the Buddha's chest was understood in relation to the number ten thousand. This interpretation did not originate in India but rather reflects a deeply ingrained Chinese cultural perspective that did not hinder the understanding of the translation.

Example (11) is from the T579 *Youpoyi jingxing famen jing* 優婆夷淨行法門經 [Upāsikā's Pure Practices Dharma Gate Sūtra]. It is listed in extant Buddhist canons as having an unknown translator, with a note that “Sengyou's catalog records it as an ‘alternative translation from Liang’ appended to the Northern Liang catalog (僧祐錄云安公涼土異經附北涼錄)”. This identification likely stems from the fact that the *Chu sanzang ji ji* includes a text called the *Jingxing jing* 淨行經 in its *Xin ji An Gong Liangtu Yijing Lu* 新集安公涼土異經錄 [A revised catalog of alternative Buddhist texts from the Liang region, based on Master Dao'an's collection] Hayashiya (1941, pp. 997–1001) suggested that the language of T579 was influenced by the translations of Kumārajīva (344–413 CE) and that it was unlikely to be the same text as the *Jingxing jing* from Dao'an's 道安 (312–385 CE) time. Nonetheless, Sui dynasty catalogs, including the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 [Catalogue of Scriptures] by Fajing 法經²⁷ (compiled in 594 CE), *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 [Catalogue of Scriptures] by Yancong 彥琮²⁸ (compiled in 602 CE), and the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 [Record of the Three Jewels Through the Ages] by Fei Changfang 費長房²⁹ (compiled in 597 CE), all list the *Youpoyi jingxing jing* as a two-scroll text with an unknown translator. Even if this text postdates Dao'an and Sengyou, it was at least translated before the Sui dynasty.

The svastika symbol on the Buddha's body was referred to as “Wanzi” in Chinese as early as the Three Kingdoms period, suggesting that this rendering was adopted from the earliest instances of the symbol's appearance in Chinese Buddhist translations. In many pre-Tang sources, the svastika was commonly referred to as “Wanzi”, leading to its association with the number ten thousand. This connection had already become deeply ingrained in the popular consciousness well before the reign of Empress Wu Zetian.

3. Efforts to Restore the “Correct Translation”

Starting with Kumārajīva's 鳩摩羅什 (344–413 CE) translations, the svastika symbol on the Buddha's body began to be labeled by new terms. In earlier translations, the svastika had consistently been called “Wanzi” (萬字), with textual variants such as “卍字” or “卐字”, and no alternative names were recorded. However, Kumārajīva introduced new terms for the symbol, referring to it as “de zi 德字” (virtue character) or “de xiang 德相” (virtue mark), a practice that was later adopted by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664 CE) in his translations as well:

(12) 是時世尊從三昧安詳而起，以天眼觀視世界，舉身微笑，從足下千輻相輪中放六百萬億光明，足十指、兩踝、兩躡、兩膝、兩髀、腰、脊、腹、脅、背、臍、心胸德字、肩、臂、手十指、項、口四十齒、鼻兩孔、兩眼、兩耳、白毫相、肉髻，各各放六百萬億光明。³⁰

At that time, the World-Honored One arose calmly from samādhi and, using his divine eye, gazed upon the world. He smiled subtly, emitting six hundred million billion rays of light from the thousand-spoked wheels on his feet. Each of

his ten toes, two ankles, two calves, two knees, two thighs, waist, spine, abdomen, ribs, back, navel, the “virtue character” on his chest, shoulders, arms, ten fingers, neck, mouth with forty teeth, two nostrils, two eyes, two ears, the white tuft between his eyebrows, and the cranial protuberance each emitted six hundred million billion rays of light.

(13) 八十者手足有德相。³¹

The eightieth (minor mark), his hands and feet bear the “virtue mark”.

(14) 世尊手足及胸臆前俱有吉祥喜旋德相，文同綺畫，色類朱丹，是第八十。³²

The World-Honored One’s hands, feet, and chest bear auspicious, joyous turning “virtue marks”, patterned like brocade and colored like vermilion; this is the eightieth [minor mark].

The above examples (12) through (14) depict various auspicious signs on the Buddha’s body. In the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines],³³ the term “德字” corresponds to *śrīvatsa*,³⁴ while “德相” and “吉祥喜旋德相” correspond to *śrīvatsa-svastika-nandy-āvarta*,³⁵ all referring to the “卍” symbol located on the Buddha’s chest or limbs. Both “德字” (virtue character) and “德相” (virtue mark) are semantic translations, with “德” (virtue) conveying meanings of “auspiciousness” and “blessing”.³⁶ Translating the auspicious symbol “卍” — particularly its Sanskrit term *svastika* — as “德” is semantically more appropriate. In contrast, the association between the numeral “萬” and *svastika* is less evident in terms of meaning. Consequently, the *Yiqiejing yinyi* by Huilin dismisses the term “萬字” as an “incorrect statement”, likely reflecting this semantic consideration.

It is intriguing that, despite Kumārajīva’s newly coined translations often replacing earlier renditions by translators like An Shigao, Zhi Qian, and Dharmarakṣa and becoming the standard for later translations,³⁷ the translation of “卍” as “德” (virtue) did not gain widespread acceptance. Even though Xuanzang, another highly influential translator, also adopted Kumārajīva’s terminology, this particular translation did not take hold. This suggests that the practice of reading the symbol “卍” as “Wan” was likely already well established before Kumārajīva’s time.

Even in Buddhist translations and Chinese writings postdating Kumārajīva, the “卍” symbol continued to be frequently referred to as “Wanzi”. There are also examples where translators combined the terms “德” and “萬” in their translations, possibly as an attempt to reconcile the old and new translation methods:

(15) 自有衆生樂觀如來胸德字萬印³⁸相，三摩尼光相者。³⁹

Some beings find joy in gazing upon the “virtue character/Wan mark”, on the chest of the Tathāgata, from which radiates the light of three maṇi jewels.

(16) 云何觀如來頸相、缺瓮骨滿相、臆德字相、萬字印相?如是圍繞諸光畫中，是名佛頸出圓光相、胸德字文、萬字印中，缺瓮滿相、腋下珠相。⁴⁰

How should one observe the Tathāgata’s neck mark, the complete supraclavicular mark, the “virtue/Wan character” mark on the chest? ... Thus, surrounded by various lights and patterns, these are known as the Buddha’s neck-radiating mark, the “virtue/Wan character” on the chest, and the complete supraclavicular mark, with the pearl mark under the arm.

(17) 爾時世尊智慧觀察現在大衆，非肉眼觀，如師子王奮迅視眄，呵呵大笑，頂上肉髻放無量光，肩脊腰髀胸卍⁴¹德處及諸毛孔，皆放一切無量光明，如空中虹、如日千光，如劫盡時大火熾然猛炎之相。⁴²

At that time, the World-Honored One observed the present assembly with wisdom, not with physical eyes, but with the gaze of a lion king aroused in vigor, and laughed. From the topknot on his head, he emitted countless rays of light, and from his shoulders, ribs, waist, thighs, chest, where the “卍” virtue symbol

is, and from all his pores, he emitted boundless light, like a rainbow in the sky, like the thousand rays of the sun, like the blazing fire at the end of a kalpa.

Additionally, some Buddhist translations from the Tang and Song dynasties began to include phonetic translations of Śrīvatsa or Svastika:


(18) 三者臆前有室利婆瑳像。 ⁴³


Third, the “Śrīvatsa” symbol on the chest.

(19) 足現千輻輪、莎悉帝迦相。 ⁴⁴

The thousand-spoked wheel and the svastika marks appear on his feet

Some scholars argue that the reading of “卍” as “Wan” is related to phonetic translation. ⁴⁵ A commonly cited argument is based on Zanning’s 贊寧 theory of the “six rules of translation (六例)” in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty]:

(20) 謂譯字譯音爲一例……初則四句：一譯字不譯音，即陀羅尼是；二譯音不譯字，如佛胸前卍字是；三音字俱譯，即諸經律中純華言是；四音字俱不譯，如經題上  二字是。 ⁴⁶

The first aspect of translation concerns whether to “translate” ⁴⁷ the script or the sound. This aspect can be summarized in four statements: 1. “Translate” the script but not the sound, as in the case of dhāraṇī. 2. “Translate” the sound but not the script, as in the case of the “卍” symbol on the Buddha’s chest. 3. “Translate” both the sound and the script, as in the case of the purely Chinese expressions found in various sutras and vinayas. 4. “Translate” neither the sound nor the script, as in the case of the  characters ⁴⁸ found in the titles of some scriptures.

Zanning’s theory is often cited as one of the specific reasons why Wu Zetian designated the 卍 symbol as “萬字”, with the pronunciation of “萬” being (partially) similar to the Sanskrit word *svastika*. ⁴⁹ However, upon closer examination, there are several issues with how Zanning’s theory should be understood. The renowned scholar Yinke Chen (2001, p. 283) suggested that there may be a textual inversion in the phrases “譯字不譯音 (translate the script but not the sound)” and “譯音不譯字 (translate the sound but not the script)”, as the dhāraṇī mantras in Buddhist scriptures are typically transliterated phonetically rather than semantically. ⁵⁰ Even if Yinke Chen’s conjecture is correct, the connection between the concept of “translating the script but not the sound” and the “卍” symbol remains quite challenging to understand.

The key to addressing this issue lies in understanding that the concept of “譯” in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* differs from the contemporary notion of “翻譯” or “translation”. To comprehend Zanning’s notion of “譯”, it is crucial to consider his statement: 譯之言易也，謂以所有易所無也 “Translation implies change; it means substituting what is available for what is lacking”. ⁵¹ Therefore, his theory of “譯字 (translating the script)” or “譯音 (translating the sound)” should not be viewed as a case of textual inversion. Instead, it should be interpreted as “altering the script while preserving the pronunciation when translating dhāraṇī” and “retaining the symbol while changing the pronunciation when translating the ‘卍’ symbol on the Buddha’s chest”. This explanation actually indicates that the “卍” (*svastika*) and its Chinese pronunciation “wan” have no phonetic connection.

When considering the historical development of translating the “卍” symbol in Chinese Buddhist texts, it becomes evident that the full phonetic transliterations derived from the Sanskrit names *śrīvatsa* or *svastika* appeared relatively late, and their pronunciation differs significantly from the Chinese “Wan”, ⁵² and the transliterations (such as the previously mentioned “室利婆瑳” and “莎悉帝迦”) do not use the character “萬”. Therefore, “wan” should not be considered as an abbreviated transliteration of these terms.

4. The Rationale Behind the Naming of “卍” as “Wanzi” in Chinese

As discussed earlier, the Sanskrit names for the “卍” symbol, such as *śrīvatsa* and *svastika*, whether in their phonetic transliterations (“室利婆嗟” and “莎悉帝迦”) or semantic translations (“德字” and “德相”), appeared relatively late. Moreover, there is no evident connection between these terms and the Chinese word “萬” in terms of pronunciation or meaning. This raises another significant question: why was the symbol “卍” regarded as a “character” in Chinese? In Huiyuan’s commentary, he attempted to attribute this issue to early translators’ errors (see example 3 above). While it is true that early translations were often based on Middle Indic languages rather than standard Sanskrit, leading to occasional confusion or mistakes,⁵³ the overwhelming and widespread designation of “卍” as a “character” (rather than sporadic or alternative instances) is difficult to attribute solely to the confusion between *lakṣaṇa* and *akṣara*. Furthermore, early translators consistently rendered *lakṣaṇa* correctly as “*xiang* 相” (“sign, mark, characteristic”),⁵⁴ and there is no verifiable evidence of cases where it was misunderstood as *akṣara*.

The reason the auspicious symbol “卍” came to be known as “Wanzi” likely stems neither from phonetic nor semantic translation but rather from the use of the character “万”, a popular form of the numeral “萬” at the time, to visually mimic the shape of “卍”. The character “万”, which is now the simplified form of “萬”, has a long history in the development of Chinese script, appearing as early as the Oracle Bone Script from the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE). However, at that time, “万” was merely an ancient form of the character “𠂔”. Due to the phonetic similarity between “𠂔” and “萬” in Old Chinese,⁵⁵ “万” began to be used as a phonetic loan character for “萬” as early as the Warring States period (475–221 BCE).⁵⁶ In the Han dynasty, the character “万”, representing the numeral, also gave rise to forms like “𠂔”.⁵⁷ These variants of “万” and “𠂔” as popular forms of “萬” continued to be used after the Han dynasty and appear in Dunhuang manuscripts as well as in printed editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon from the Song dynasty onwards.⁵⁸ Table 1 below illustrates the early forms and usages of “万”:

Table 1. Early Forms and Usages of the Character “万”.






| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Shang Dynasty |  | | | |
| | The form of the character “万” in the <i>Shi</i> group small-script oracle bones (Inscription No. 20824). (Zongkun Li 2012, p. 1219) | The form of the character “万” in the anonymous group oracle bones (Inscription No. Tun 0062). (Zongkun Li 2012, p. 1219) | The form of the character “万” in the Huayuanzhuang East oracle bones (Inscription No. Hua 226). (Zongkun Li 2012, p. 1219) | |
| Warring States period |  |  |  |  |
| | A copper seal from the Yan state, engraved with the characters “万千”. (Zhang 2021, p. 136) | A copper seal from the Yan state, engraved with the characters “万”. (Zhang 2021, p. 137) | The knife-shaped coins of the State of Yan have the combined character “八万” (eighty thousand) on the reverse side. (Wu 2006, p. 247) | The knife-shaped coins of the State of Qi bear the character “万” on the reverse side. (Wu 2006, p. 149) |

Table 1. Cont.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Han dynasty | | | | |
| | The character “万” in the Juyan bamboo slips, found in the phrase 凡七万五千四百廿九 (“a total of 75,429”) (Slip No. 261·27A, 261·13A). (Y. Li 2014, p. 934) | The character “万” in the phrase 奉錢万二千 (“salary of 12,000”) from the Juyan newly discovered bamboo slips (Slip No. E.P.S4.T1: 14B). (Bai 2014, p. 976) | The character “万” in the phrase 万年 (“ten thousand years”) from the Jianshui Jinguan bamboo slips (Slip No. 73EJT9: 136). (Ren 2014, p. 334) | The character “万” in the phrase 万六百三十三 ^(a) (“10,634”) from the Jianshui Jinguan bamboo slips (Slip No. F3: 259). |
| Dunhuang Manuscript | | | | |
| | The character “万” in 万錢 (“ten thousand coins”) ^(b) | The character “万” in 孤山高万仞 (“The solitary mountain rises ten thousand ren”) ^(c) | | |

^(a) The character “四” (four) written as “三” is a characteristic of the Xinmang bamboo slips, and this form appeared after the 3rd year of Shijian’guo 始建國 (11 CE). See J. Li (1989). ^(b) P.2524 Yu Dui語對. ^(c) S.126 Taizi Rushan Xiudao Zan 太子入山修道贊.


The earliest extant Chinese statues featuring the “svastika” symbol can be traced back to the Northern Wei dynasty (see Jin 2016, pp. 190–91), revealing that the “svastika” symbol on the Buddha’s chest can either be the counterclockwise “卍” (Figure 1) or the clockwise “卐” (Figure 2). The latter resembles the popular forms of the Chinese characters “万” and “万” (as shown in the red-highlighted illustration: ).



Figure 1. Partial view of the statue of Śākyamuni carved by Tanfu 譚副, featuring an incised svastika symbol (“卍”) below the neck. The statue was likely sculpted during the Northern Wei dynasty, specifically between the Huangxing 皇興 and Taihe 太和 periods in the latter half of the 5th century CE. It was unearthed during an archaeological excavation in early 2012 in Beiwuzhuang 北吳莊 Village, Xiwen 習文 Township, Linzhang 臨漳 County, Hebei Province. For related studies, see He (2020).



Figure 2. Partial view of the stone-carved standing statue of one Buddha and two bodhisattvas from the second year of the Zhengshi 正始 era of the Northern Wei dynasty (505 CE). The Buddha in the center has an incised svastika (“卐”) on its chest. The statue is housed in the Saint Louis Art Museum, USA.

The “卐” symbol in Buddhism was originally an auspicious motif rather than a character, but its designation as “Wanzi” (literally “character Wan”) in Chinese, rather than later translations like “Virtue Mark” (德相) or “Śrīvatsa Image” (室利婆瑘像), suggests that the symbol was named based on its resemblance to the shape of a Chinese character. This approach is similar to how modern Chinese uses terms like “十字架” (cross), “八字眉” (arched eyebrows), or “丁字路口” (T-junction). The practice of using Chinese characters to depict shapes was common in medieval times, with literature often using the phrase “...字” to express this concept:

(21) 鰲目凹陷者，及厭下有王字形者，不可食之。⁵⁹

Turtles with sunken eyes or with a “Wang (王)”-shaped mark on their undersides should not be eaten.

(22) 世云堯眉八采，不然也，直兩眉頭甚豎，似八字耳。⁶⁰

It is said that Emperor Yao’s eyebrows had eight different colours; however, this is not true. His eyebrows were simply very vertical, resembling the character “Ba (八)”.

(23) 君不見西陵田，縱橫十字成陌阡。⁶¹

Have you not seen the fields of Xiling, crisscrossed into quadrants shaped like a character “Shi (十)”?

Although the form of the character “万” and the complete pattern of “卐” differ in certain details, the former serves as a rough approximation of the latter. In the process of abstracting and representing natural patterns through written characters, such degrees of distortion are often unavoidable and, once conventionalized, tend to be widely accepted. This can be seen in examples 21 to 23, as well as in analogous expressions in other languages, such as the terms “A-line skirt” and “C-clamp” in English. Another supporting piece of evidence is that even during the period when 卐 was widely recognized as a Chinese character pronounced “wan”, various alternative forms of the symbol continued to appear in literature, such as 卐, 卐, 卐,⁶² 卐, 卐, 卐, 卐,⁶³ 卐,⁶⁴ 卐.⁶⁵ This suggests that even in the post-Tang Dynasty periods, the precise details of the “卐” symbol remained unclear to many Chinese, leading them to partially distort its shape according

to their habits of writing Chinese characters. Given that the reading of “𠄎” as “wan” certainly emerged before the Tang Dynasty, it is quite likely that early translators or believers chose a relatively similar, though imperfect, Chinese character to approximate its form.

The practice of referring to the svastika symbol on the Buddha’s body as “万字” may not only be attributed to its resemblance to the Chinese character but could also be connected to an ancient Chinese belief that the appearance of characters on a person or animal often signified divine will. This belief has existed since pre-Qin times. In the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, for instance, it is recorded that when Zhongzi 仲子 (?–721 BCE), the daughter of Duke Wu of Song 宋武公 (?–748 BCE), was born, she had characters on her hand reading “to become the wife of the Duke of Lu (為魯夫人)”. Consequently, the people of Song followed the divine mandate and married her to Duke Hui of Lu as a secondary wife.⁶⁶ Similarly, Tang Shu 唐叔 (reigned 1042–? BCE), the first ruler of the Jin state, was born with the character “虞” (Yu) on his palm, and thus he was named Yu.⁶⁷ Likewise, Ji You 季友 (?–644 BCE), a minister in the state of Lu, was named because he was born with the character “友” (You) on his hand.⁶⁸ The *Shiji* 史記 also recounts an instance where a divine tortoise naturally manifested a long inscription on its shell: 甲子重光，得我者匹夫為人君，有土正，諸侯得我為帝王 (“On the day of the Jiazi, a solar halo appeared. Whoever gains me on this day, though a commoner, will become a ruler; possessing the mandate of the earth, those who gain me among the nobility will become kings”). Although we cannot conclusively verify through existing literature that the svastika on the Buddha’s body was called “Wanzi” due to this same idea, it ultimately became associated with a similar concept: by the Song dynasty, “萬字” came to be understood literally as “the gathering of all auspicious virtues (ten thousand virtues)”.

As for the records in texts such as the *Fanyi mingyi ji* since the Song dynasty, which claim that Wu Zetian first used the “卍” symbol to represent the character “萬” on the “Heavenly Pivot”,⁶⁹ this may reflect a post hoc interpretation that emerged after the original connection between “𠄎” and “万” had been forgotten. The “Heavenly Pivot”, a commemorative bronze pillar completed in the second year of the Yanzai 延載 era (695 CE),⁷⁰ bore the inscription 大周萬國頌德天樞⁷¹ “The Heavenly Pivot Commemorating the Praise of Virtue by All Nations of the Great Zhou”. If the account recorded in the *Fanyi mingyi ji* has some degree of truth, we might speculate that the “萬” character on the Heavenly Pivot could have been written as “卍”.⁷² This suggests that Wu Zetian may accept the already established equivalence between “卍” and the Chinese character “萬” (see Shi 1984), rather than being the origin of the practice of pronouncing “卍” as “wan” in Chinese. Moreover, the first batch of characters promulgated by Empress Wu Zetian in 689 CE included a new form for “月” (moon), which was written as “𠄎”. As previously discussed, the representation of “卍” within this new character underwent a transformation due to the ambiguous recollection of this symbol by Chinese writers, combined with the habitual practices of Chinese calligraphy. This resulted in the emergence of alternative forms such as “𠄎”, “𠄎” and “𠄎” (see Zhang et al. 2022, p. 2569). Empress Wu Zetian’s decision to utilize the “𠄎” in creating the new character for “moon” was likely inspired by the idea that the svastika on the Buddha’s chest could emit light. Additionally, it is visually connected to the new character for “日” (sun), which was written as “☉”. However, this new form for “月” has no relation to the pronunciation (wàn) or meaning (ten thousand) of “萬”.

It is also worth noticing why the *Fanyi mingyi ji* includes the claim, purportedly sourced from the *Huayan yinyi*, that Wu Zetian was the first to pronounce “卍” as “wan”. This likely stems from a combination of two historical factors: Wu Zetian’s enthusiasm for creating new forms of Chinese characters and her deep reverence for the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Wu Zetian sent envoys to Khotan to seek out the Sanskrit original and, in 695 CE, organized the retranslation of the eighty-volume *Xinyi da fangguang fo huayan jing* 新譯大方廣佛華嚴經 (T279) by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀, Bodhiruci 菩提流志, and Yijing 義淨. The new characters introduced during Wu Zetian’s reign, along with the newly translated T279, spread to neighboring countries, and ancient manuscripts of the T279 from the Nara and Silla periods in Japan and Korea frequently feature these new characters.⁷³ The Japanese monk

Myōgaku 明覺, in his work *Shittan Yōketsu* 悉曇要訣 [Essentials of Siddham] (compiled circa 1101 CE), also addressed the script issues found in the *Huayan jing* of his time:

(24) 彼經中多用古文，星字作○形、日字作☉形、地字作壑等是也。故萬字古文作卩形歟？但天竺卩形本非字也，乃是印形，其形自當漢土萬字古文，故云萬字歟？如十字羯磨，羯磨形似十字，故云十字羯磨，或直云十字印，非以十字即爲羯磨，十字是此土字形，非西土字，然三藏傳漢土時，以此土十字令知羯磨形歟？

That scripture often uses ancient scripts, such as a “○” for the star, a “☉” for the sun, and “壑” for the earth. Thus, the ancient script for “萬” might have been “卩”? But in India, the “卩” symbol is not a character; it is a symbol. Its form likely resembles the ancient Chinese script for “萬”, which is why it is called “Wanzi”. Just as a cross-shaped karman resembles the Chinese character “十”, so it is called as “Shizi jiemo”, or simply “Shizi yin”. This does not mean that the Chinese character “十” is the karman itself; “十” is a Chinese character, not an Indian one. However, when the Tripitaka was transmitted to China, the shape of Chinese character “十” was used to represent the karman form”.

Although the characters for “star” and “sun” cited by Myōgaku from the *Huayan jing* are derived from the new script introduced during Wu Zetian’s reign and not from ancient Chinese characters, and although the symbol “卩” is likewise not an ancient form of the character “萬”, it is noteworthy that Myōgaku was among the first to discern a visual connection between the Buddhist symbol “卩” and the Chinese character “萬 (万)”.⁷⁴ This observation was indeed insightful, yet it is unfortunate that this perspective has not garnered the scholarly attention it merits. Similarly, the modern Japanese scholar Morohashi Tetsuji correctly observed the connection between the character “万” and the *svastika* (Morohashi [1955] 1999, p. 104). However, due to the incomplete availability of materials such as oracle bone inscriptions at the time of his writing, Morohashi mistakenly reversed the order of their development and the causal relationship between the two. He incorrectly posited that the vulgar character “万” was a derivative form of the *svastika* and, like most lexicographers, attributed the naming of the *svastika* to Empress Wu Zetian.

5. Conclusions

The well-accepted view, found in dictionaries and scholarly works, that the Buddhist “卩” symbol was referred to as “Wanzi” in Chinese, by the decree of Empress Wu Zetian during the construction of the Heavenly Pivot, is not reliable. The connection between “卩” and the Chinese character “萬” likely originated from the visual resemblance of the symbol “卩” to the popular forms of the numeral “萬” in its variants “万” and “𠂇”. This translation appeared early and was widely used in the Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, and it is probable that this interpretation was established and widely accepted when Buddhism was first introduced to China. As a result, even though influential translators like Kumārajīva and Xuanzang translated the Sanskrit term *svastika* as “德相” (virtue mark), they could not change the public’s habit of reading “卩” as “Wanzi”. This practice, through the spread of Chinese Buddhism, eventually influenced surrounding regions.

Over time, as the original rationale for the connection between “卩” and “万” was gradually forgotten, and given that Empress Wu Zetian was both an ardent patron of Buddhism and used the “卩” symbol in creating new characters during her reign, the legend arose that “Empress Wu Zetian designated this symbol as a Chinese character, inscribed it on the Heavenly Pivot, and assigned it the pronunciation as ‘Wan,’ which signified the gathering of auspicious myriad virtues”. This story was recorded in works such as the *Fanyi mingyi ji* and has continued to influence interpretations to this day.

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Notes

- 1 The svastika (卍 or 卐), as a decorative motif, predates Buddhism and was widely present across various cultures worldwide (see Mackenzie 1926, pp. 1–46; Rao 1993, pp. 1–16). This article does not aim to explore the global history and symbolism of the svastika; instead, it focuses specifically on the phenomenon within the Sinographic cultural sphere, where the symbol “卍” is treated as a written character and referred to as “Wanzi”.
- 2 The Middle Chinese (roughly from the 3rd to the 12th century CE) pronunciation of “萬” is reconstructed as /m̩jɛn/ by Karlgren (1957, p. 121) and /muan^h/ (Early Middle Chinese) or /v̩jyan/ /va:n/ (Late Middle Chinese) by Pulleyblank (1991, p. 318). The terms used in Japanese and Korean to refer to the svastika reflect the phonetic state of the Chinese character *Wan* at the time it was borrowed. In Japanese, the *svastika* is called “まんじ” (*manji*), and the corresponding kanji are typically written as “萬字”, “万字”, or “卍字”. In Korean, the *svastika* is referred to as 만자 (*manja*), while an additional variant, 완자 (*wanja*), reflects a later stage of Chinese pronunciation (National Institute of the Korean Language 1999). Both Japanese and Korean adopted the Chinese term “萬字” to refer to the svastika, treating 卍 as a character and pronouncing it identically to the Chinese loanword “Man/Wan” (萬, meaning “ten thousand”). This indicates that the names for the svastika in these two languages were borrowed from Chinese during the spread of Chinese Buddhist scriptures.
- 3 This explanation has been adopted by numerous authoritative dictionaries, including the *Hanyu da zidian* 漢語大字典, *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, *Ci yuan* 詞源, *Ci hai* 辭海, and the Japanese *Kōjien* 広辞苑. It is also referenced in several Chinese or Japanese Buddhist dictionaries, such as the *Foguang Dictionary* 佛光大詞典. While some other Buddhist dictionaries, like the *Mochizuki Buddhist Dictionary* 望月佛教大辭典, do not explicitly explain the reasoning behind the pronunciation of “卍” as “Wàn”, they nonetheless draw upon the *Fanyi mingyi ji* as a source for their interpretations. For the latest discussion on this issue, see Duan (2022, pp. 246–49), where an interesting connection is drawn between the form of the svastika and the numeral for ten thousand in Khotanese. However, it is unfortunate that the author still bases the argument on the preconceived notion that Empress Wu Zetian decreed the pronunciation of the svastika as “wan”.
- 4 T54, no. 2131, p. 1147, a4–6.
- 5 For an examination of the compilation date of Huiyuan’s *Huayan yinyi*, see R. Huang (2020, p. 3).
- 6 Following this passage, Huiyuan specifically explained the meanings of the terms such as Śrīvatsa, Nandikāvarta, and Svastika in Chinese. The version included in Huilin’s 慧琳 Yiqiejing yinyi 一切經音義 added illustrations of these symbols (T54, no. 2128, p. 437, b7–17). For the annotated edition of Huiyuan yinyi, see R. Huang (2020, pp. 37–39).
- 7 =Skt. Nandyāvarta, see Edgerton (1953, p. 290).
- 8 Kanda (1933) was the first to systematically examine the life and dates of Xuanying, with subsequent contributions from Chinese scholars adding further insights on this issue. For the most recent study on Xuanying’s life, works, and a summary of previous research, see Wang and Fan (2022).
- 9 Fayun referenced their works a total of 25 times. Given that Fayun frequently drew upon multiple sources when providing explanations, he consistently sought to condense the quoted material as much as possible. This tendency to compress the content is evident when comparing the original text from the *Huayan yinyi* with the corresponding excerpts in the *Fanyi mingyi ji*.
Huayan yinyi: 乾闥婆城: 此云尋香城池, 謂十寶山間有音樂神, 名乾闥婆。切利諸天意須音樂, 此神身有異相, 即知天意, 往彼娛樂, 因以此事, 西域謂諸樂兒亦曰乾闥婆。西域樂兒多為幻伎, 幻作城郭, 須臾如故, 因即謂龍所現城郭為乾闥婆也。(T54, no. 2128, p. 446c12–14)
Fanyi mingyi ji: 靜苑《華嚴音義》云: 西域名樂人為乾闥婆, 彼樂人多幻作城郭, 須臾如故, 因即謂龍所現。(T54, no. 2131, p. 1098b26–c3)
- 10 X03, no. 221, p. 803, b12–17.
- 11 靜法云: 室離鞞瑤本非是字, 乃是德者之相, 正云吉祥海雲。眾德深廣如海, 益物如雲, 古來三藏誤譯洛刹曩為惡刹攞, 遂以相為字, 故為謬耳。今義通此相以為吉祥萬德之所集成, 因目為萬, 意在語略而義含, 合云萬相耳。(T35, no. 1735, p. 583, a4–9).
- 12 For a philological discussion on the dating of the compilation of Huilin’s *Yiqiejing yinyi*, see Xu (2009, pp. 93–94).
- 13 T54, no. 2128, p. 378, a23–24.

- 14 In the Northern Song text *Shoulengyan yishu zhujing* 首楞嚴義疏注經 [Commentary on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*] by Zixuan 子璇 (Master Changshui 長水大師, 965–1038), this legend is also recorded: 則天長壽二年, 權制此字, 安于天樞, 其形如此。卍音爲萬字, 佛胸前有此之形。然八種相中, 此當第一, 謂吉祥萬德之所集也。(T39, no. 1799, p. 841, a17–19). This account closely aligns with the version cited in the *Fanyi mingyi ji*. Similarly, in the Southern Song text *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 [The Comprehensive Record of the Buddhas and Patriarchs] by Zhipan 志磐, this account is mentioned, with the author also attributing the source to the *Huayan yinyi*. However, since *Fozu Tongji* also references the *Fanyi mingyi ji*, it is likely that Zhipan’s citation of the *Huayan yinyi* was based on the *Fanyi mingyi ji* rather than an independent source.
- 15 *Taizi ruiyin benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 translated by Zhi Qian during 222–253 CE. T03, no. 185, p. 474, a8–16.
- 16 *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經, T03, no. 184, p. 464, c8–p. 465, a11. The dating of this translation is disputed. Zürcher (Zürcher [1972] 2007, pp. 104–5; 1991) argued that the sutra was translated during the Eastern Han dynasty, while scholars such as Kawano (1991) and Nattier (2008, pp. 104–7) suggest it may have been translated during the Eastern Jin dynasty. According to Dao’an, as cited in the *Chu sanzang ji ji*, the *Xiuxing benqi jing* was “recently produced in the South and merely supplements the *Xiao benqi* (南方近出, 直益小本起耳)”, indicating that its translation likely predates the completion of the *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理衆經目錄 [Comprehensive Catalogue of Scriptures] (374 CE).
- 17 The content in parentheses was added by me. Although the original text seems to suggest that “the svastika symbol appears on the four teeth”, a comparison with other Buddhist narratives, particularly the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, which is closely related to the *Xiuxing benqi jing*, reveals that this literal interpretation lacks support in parallel texts. It is more likely that the translator condensed the content significantly to fit the four-character structure typical of Classical Chinese.
- 18 *Chang Ahan jing* 長阿含經 translated by Buddhayasas 佛陀耶舍 and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 in 413 CE, T01, no. 1, p. 5, a26–b18.
- 19 T50, no. 2059, p. 412, b6–12.
- 20 *Sifen lu* 四分律 translated by Buddhayasas 佛陀耶舍 and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 during 410–412 CE, T22, no. 1428, p. 953, a9–11.
- 21 In the T186 *Puyao jing* (T03, no. 186, p. 496, a26), the terms “萬字” or “卍字” correspond to “*śrīvatsa-svastika-nandy-āvarta-*” in the Sanskrit parallel Lal 7.52, which roughly translates to “auspicious svastika-shaped joyous spiral”. However, unlike in Dharmarakṣa’s Chinese translation, the *Lalitavistara* describes the auspicious svastika mark as appearing on the Buddha’s hair. For the critical edition, see Hakazono (1994, p. 488).
- 22 T53, no. 2121, p. 15, c13.
- 23 For the critical edition, see Xiao and Dong (2015).
- 24 T52, no. 2103, p. 114, a23–24.
- 25 For instance, in the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Imperial editions of *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 [The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Law], this passage uses “卍”. However, in the Korean Canon, the character is still rendered as “萬” (T53, no. 2122, p. 343, b16–17).
- 26 Translator unknown, *Youpoyi jingxing famen jing* 優婆夷淨行法門經, T14, no. 579, p. 958, a23–28.
- 27 T55, no. 2146, p. 120, b29–c1.
- 28 T55, no. 2147, p. 154, b29.
- 29 T49, no. 2034, p. 112, b15.
- 30 *Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 [Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra] translated by Kumārajīva, T08, no. 223, p. 217, b10–16. Seng Rui’s 僧叡 “Dapinjing xu” 大品經序 [Preface to the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra] (T55, no. 2145, p. 53, b3–11) records that this text was translated between the fifth and sixth years of the Hongshi era (403–404 CE).
- 31 T08, no. 223, p. 396, b9.
- 32 *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 [Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra], translated by Xuanzang, T06, no. 220, p. 969, a5–6.
- 33 For the critical edition, see Kimura (1986–2009).
- 34 Śrīvatsa is an auspicious symbol used in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and other traditions. The term means “beloved of Śrī”, referring to Vishnu in Hinduism, where it appears as a triangular mark on his chest. In Buddhism, it is one of the eight auspicious symbols (*aṣṭamaṅgala*), often depicted as an endless knot symbolizing the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion. It is also one of the secondary marks (*anuvyañjana*) of a superhuman being (*mahāpuruṣa*), sometimes found on the soles of the Buddha’s feet. Regarding the development and significance of the Śrīvatsa symbol in Indian art, see Srivastava (1979). For its definition in Buddhism, see Buswell and Lopez (2013, p. 853). For the corresponding term in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, see Ogihara (1974, p. 1357).
- 35 Svastika typically refers specifically to the symbol “卍”. Max Müller pointed out that it derives from the blessing phrase *su asti* (“may you be well!”) with the addition of the nominal suffix *-ka* (see Schliemann 1880, pp. 346–47). In Buddhist scriptures, *śrīvatsa* and *svastika* are often mentioned together as a compound word, sometimes further followed by *-nandy-āvarta* (meaning “joyous spiral”). Although these terms may refer to different patterns and symbols in varying contexts—especially Śrīvatsa, which is notably versatile—in Buddhist scriptures, they can all be used to denote the symbol “卍”.
- 36 Besides its common meaning of “virtue” or “merit”, the term “德 (德)” can also signify “blessing”, which may explain why Kumārajīva chose it to represent the svastika. For example, in the *Li ji* 禮記 [Book of Rites], *Ai gong wen* 哀公問: 哀公曰: “敢問人道孰爲大?” 孔子愀然作色而對曰: “君之及此言也, 百姓之德也, 固臣敢無辭而對, 人道政爲大。” (Duke Ai asked, “May I ask,

what is the greatest aspect of the Way of man?" Confucius solemnly responded, "For your lordship to inquire about this is indeed a blessing for the common people. As a minister, how dare I not respond? The greatest aspect of the Way of man is governance." Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 commentary explains, "De (德) here is synonymous with blessing (德猶福也)". Kong Yingda 孔穎達 further elucidated, "百姓之德也"者, 德謂恩德, 謂福慶之事, 言君今問此人道之大, 欲憂恤于下, 是百姓受其福慶。"The phrase 'the blessing of the common people' refers to the grace and blessings they receive. It means that when the ruler inquires about the greatest aspect of the Way of man, intending to show concern for the people, the people will receive blessings and good fortune as a result".

37 For example, Kumārajīva's phrasing replaced the old rendering "聞如是" with "如是我聞" ("Thus have I heard"), "善權" with "方便" ("expedient means"), "勞" with "煩惱" ("afflictions"), and "無央數" with "無量" ("immeasurable").

38 Kumārajīva often used the term "印" to mean "pattern" or "image", likely influenced by the Sanskrit word *mudrā*. In the T475 *Weimojie suo shuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 [Vimalakīrtinirdeśa], the term "寶印手菩薩" (*ratna-mudrā-hasta-*) is explained by Sengzhao in his *Zhu weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 [Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sutra] as follows: 什曰: 印者相也。手有出寶之相, 亦曰手中有寶印也。"Master Shi(=Kumārajīva) said: Yin (印) refers to a sign. The hand has the sign of producing treasures; It is also called the hand with a precious seal." (T38, no. 1775, p. 330, c5–6). Here, the term "德字萬印" refers to the characters or images of "德" and "萬".

39 *Guanfo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經, translated by Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅, T15, no. 643, p. 648, b24–26. The *Chu sanzang ji ji* records that the eight-volume *Guanfo sanmei jing* 觀佛三昧經 was translated between 418 and 429 (T55, no. 2145, p. 11, c11–24). Although Yamabe (1999) suggests that it might be an apocryphal text compiled sometime after the early 5th century, there is little doubt that it is later than Kumārajīva's T223 and other works.

40 T15, no. 643, p. 659, b7–16.

41 In the present passage, the Korean edition uses 卍, while the Song and Imperial Household editions use 万.

42 *Ru lengqie jing* 入楞伽經 translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (active circa 508–537 CE), T16, no. 671, p. 517, b13–17.

43 *Dasheng baifuxiang jing* 大乘百福相經 translated by Divākara 地婆訶羅 (613–687 CE), T16, no. 661, p. 329, c13–14.

44 *Huguo zunzhe suo wen jing* 護國尊者所問大乘經 translated by Dānapāla 施護, T12, no. 321, p. 11, c19–20.

45 For a detailed discussion, see Rui (2017, pp. 205–72), who, based on Zanning's *Song gaoseng zhuan*, argues that the pronunciation of the Chinese character "萬" is similar to "svastika", and thus it represents an abbreviated transliteration. However, Rui's analysis primarily focuses on the historical imagery of this symbol and contains some errors in interpreting *Huilin yinyi* and *Song gaoseng zhuan*. Furthermore, his book traces the use of "卍" as a Chinese character back to the Western Han dynasty (with specific discussion particularly concentrated in Rui 2017, pp. 252–53). It should be noted that this judgment is mainly based on Wang Renshou's 汪仁壽 (1875–1936) *Jinshi dazidian* 金石大字典. Given that the quantity of excavated documents available today far exceeds that of Wang's time, the claim that "卍" was regarded as a Chinese character and pronounced as "wan" during the Western Han lacks corroborative evidence and has no philological basis. Rui (2017) also references another character form that may

be linked to Wanzi, specifically a problematic character "𠄎" that appears following the entry for "卍字之形" in the *Huiyuan yinyi* (see K32, no. 1064, p. 345, c11), which is likewise included in the *Huilin yinyi* as "𠄎" (see T54, no. 2128, p. 437, b9). This character is referred to as "梵書萬字" in *Huiyuan yinyi*. Its precise representation is challenging to interpret, particularly given its variant forms, which suggest that significant alterations may have occurred during transcription or engraving. Nevertheless, it is clear that Huiyuan distinctly differentiated it from the svastika, referred to as "吉祥海雲", affirming that the "梵書萬字" is fundamentally different from the "Wanzi" we are discussing and bears no relation to it. Considering that Huiyuan indicated in the entry for "卍字之形" that it is "not a character for ten thousand" ("非萬字", see example 2 in this article), I speculate that "梵書萬字" (𠄎 or 𠄎) may refer to the Sanskrit term for "ten thousand" (for instance, *ayuta*) as rendered in Brahmi script.

46 T50, no. 2061, p. 723, b11–17.

47 It is important to note that the term "translate" is placed in quotation marks here because Zanning's notion of "譯" differs conceptually from the modern understanding of "翻譯" in Chinese or "translate" in English.

48 For the latest discussion on the origin and nature of this unique symbol, see Zhao (2024).

49 For example, Rui (2017, pp. 205–72) and the entry on "卍字" in the *Foguang da cidian*.

50 Xuanzang, in his theory of the "Five Categories of Terms Not Translated (五種不翻)", outlined five situations where transliteration using Chinese characters is preferred over semantic translation, the first of which is "due to being esoteric, such as *dhāraṇī*." (祕密故, 如陀羅尼. T54, no. 2131, p. 1055, a13–18). Zanning's theory is a continuation of Xuanzang's approach.

51 T50, no. 2061, p. 711, a19.

52 Considering the phonetic form of "萬" in Middle Chinese (with a reconstructed pronunciation such as /m̩iɛn/ by Karlgren (1957, p. 121) and /muan^h/ by Pulleyblank (1991, p. 318)), there are significant phonetic discrepancies between it and *svastika*, which include the following: (i) Syllable count—*Svastika* has three syllables, while "萬" consists of only one. An exhaustive review of Zhi Qian's transliteration practices (see Zhouyuan Li 2020) shows that he always rendered N-syllable Sanskrit words into Chinese as N or N-1 characters (due to the frequent elision of final vowels in Middle Indic languages; see, for example, Brough 1962, p. 81 §22, p. 82 §24; Bloch [1914] 1970, pp. 54–61 §37–42). For trisyllabic words in Sanskrit, Zhi Qian always transliterated

them as Chinese trisyllabic or disyllabic words. (ii) The phonetic difference between “萬” and *sva*-(*stika*) is substantial. Firstly, the final *-n* in /m̩jən/ is lost, and secondly, *sva*-(*stika*) (along with its various Middle Indic phonetic variations such as *sua*-, *su*-, *svu*-, and *spa*-) still differs significantly from the pronunciation of “萬” in Middle Chinese. Even considering the sound shift *sva*->*sma*->*ma*-, which I have *not* found in transliterations from the Eastern Han to the Three Kingdoms period, the probability that such an unlikely series of phonetic shifts would coincide and be universally accepted by early translators is so small as to be negligible.

- 53 Many scholars have discussed the issue of source languages in early Buddhist translations, including but not limited to Coblin (1983), Karashima (1992, p. 119; 2006; 2010b, p. 17), Boucher (1996, p. 185; 1998, pp. 489–94), and Nattier (2004, 2006, 2007).
- 54 For example, see Ogihara (1974, p. 1140) and Karashima (2010a). Ogihara (1974, p. 1140) specifically mentions the confusion between *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣmaṇa*.
- 55 The characters “𠂔” and “萬” in Old Chinese share the same initial consonant (the *m*-initial) and rhyme group (the *yuan* 元 rhyme group). Their reconstructed pronunciations according to Zhengzhang (2003, pp. 434, 500) are /meen / and /mlans/, respectively.
- 56 For a detailed examination of the evolution and origins of the character “萬”, refer to Lin (2012), Tang (2001, p. 611), D. Huang (2007, p. 2840), Ji (2014, p. 701), and Wang and Zhao (2023), among others.
- 57 This type of character form may have resulted from the influence of the cursive script for the character “萬”. See H. Li (2021).
- 58 In the previously mentioned examples (6), the character “萬” is rendered as “𠂔” in the first and second print editions of the Korean edition as well as in the Jin edition.
- 59 *Jingui yaolie fanglun* 金匱要略方論 [Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet] composed by Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景 (150–219), see Fan (2022, p. 251).
- 60 *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 [The Master Who Embraces Simplicity] by Ge Hong (283–343 CE), see Ming Wang (1985, p. 347).
- 61 The third poem of *Xinglu nan* 行路難 [Traveling Through Hardships] by Wu Jun 吳均 (469–520 CE), see Lu (1983, p. 1728).
- 62 The three variations 𠂔, 𠂔, and 𠂔, were recorded in *Longkan shoujing* 龍龕手鏡, compiled by the Liao dynasty monk Shi Xingjun 釋行均.
- 63 The five variations 𠂔, 𠂔, 𠂔, 𠂔, and 𠂔 were recorded in *Xinji zangjing yinyi suihanlu* 新集藏經音義隨函錄, compiled by Kehong 可洪 of the Later Jin dynasty.
- 64 This form is found in the title *Xiong you wanzi jing* 胸有卮字經, as listed in Volume 4 of Jingtai’s *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 [Catalogue of Various Scriptures] in the Korean edition.
- 65 This usage appears in the Korean edition of Huiyuan’s *Huayan yinyi*, under the entry “Wanzi zhi xing 卮字之形” (“The Shape of the Svastika”).
- 66 《左傳·隱公》：宋武公生仲子，仲子生而有文在其手，曰“爲魯夫人”，故仲子歸于我。生桓公而惠公薨，是以隱公立而奉之。（“Duke Wu of Song fathered Zhongzi. At birth, Zhongzi had a mark on her hand that read ‘To be the wife of the Duke of Lu,’ and so she was given in marriage to the Duke of Lu. She bore Duke Huan, and when Duke Hui passed away, Duke Yin ascended to the throne and was entrusted with her care.”).
- 67 《左傳·昭公元年》：當武王邑姜方震大叔，夢帝謂己：“余命而子曰虞，將與之唐，屬諸參，而蕃育其子孫。”及生，有文在其手曰“虞”，遂以命之。（“When Yijiang, the consort of King Wu, was pregnant with Taishu, she had a dream in which the Heavenly Emperor told her, ‘I have named your son Yu and destined him to rule over the state of Tang, under the influence of the star Shen, and his descendants will flourish and multiply.’ When the child was born, the lines on his palm formed the character ‘虞,’ so he was named Yu.”).
- 68 《左傳·閔公二年》：成季之將生也，桓公使卜楚丘之父卜之……及生，有文在其手曰‘友’，遂以命之。（“When Cheng Ji was about to be born, Duke Huan asked the father of the diviner, Bu Chuqi, to perform a divination... When the child was born, there was a ‘友’ character on the palm of his hand, so he was named You accordingly.”).
- 69 For details on the construction and eventual abandonment of the Heavenly Pivot, see Forte (1988).
- 70 There are numerous variations in the specific year across different sources. According to records in *Datang xinyu* 大唐新語 and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, the “second year of Changshou” mentioned in *Fanyi mingyi ji* might be a mistake for the “third year of Changshou” (694 CE, which is also the first year of Yanzai) or the “second year of Yanzai” (695 CE).
- 71 According to *Datang xinyu: Wenzhang* 大唐新語·文章, the inscription on the Heavenly Pivot differs slightly, reading “大周萬國述德天樞”.
- 72 The Heavenly Pivot bronze pillar was destroyed by Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 in the second year of the Kaiyuan 開元 era (714 CE) and no longer exists.
- 73 For a detailed discussion, see Liang (2011).
- 74 Another figure who may have been among the earliest to recognize the resemblance between the *svastika* and the Chinese character “萬” was Chengguan 澄觀. In his *Da fangguang fo huayan jing shu*, he explicitly noted the similarity in shape (寶悉底迦者，具云塞縛悉底迦，此云有樂。若見此相必獲安樂，其形如萬字，具於《音義》，今寶形似此。 T35, no. 1735, p. 684, a28–b1). If we adopt a more cautious approach, however, we must acknowledge that this statement may be overly brief, and while Chengguan

referenced the *Yinyi* (i.e., the *Huayan yinyi*), a work that he appeared to endorse, it did not, in fact, hold this view (see example 2 above, with example 3 as further reference). Given that Chengguan was usually a fierce critic of Huiyuan, this creates a certain ambiguity in interpreting Chengguan's precise stance on this issue.

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Article

A Re-Examination of Pelliot Tibétain 1257: A Workbook for Chinese Learning Tibetan?

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Abstract: Pelliot tibétain 1257, a manuscript discovered in Dunhuang and now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, contains a Bilingual Tibetan–Chinese glossary that compiles some of the most fundamental Buddhist terminology and vocabulary excerpted from the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*. The Tibetan terms within this glossary were initially completed by one person, while the Chinese terms were subsequently filled in by three individuals. This vocabulary list may have served as a workbook prepared by a Tibetan teacher for Chinese students learning Tibetan vocabulary. The workbook, with Chinese vocabulary filled in by Chinese students, remained in their possession and use thereafter. The learning of Tibetan by these Chinese individuals in Dunhuang was likely closely related to the Buddhist sutra-copying project initiated by the Tibetan king at that time.

Keywords: Dunhuang; Pelliot tibétain 1257; bilingual Tibetan–Chinese glossary; workbook

Historically, Dunhuang was a region where diverse ethnicities coexisted and blended together. Han culture predominated, establishing Mandarin Chinese as the lingua franca. There was also a circulation of foreign cultures and languages, especially during the period of Tibetan occupation from 786 to 848 AD, when Tibetan also became an official language alongside Chinese. The question of how beginners accepted and learned Tibetan or Chinese as new languages is thus a topic worthy of exploration. Indeed, the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts in the last century has sparked considerable scholarly interest in this issue. Several scholars, including F. W. Thomas and G. L. M. Clauson¹, have concentrated their discussions on a particular type of material, namely bilingual and transliteration materials, which are crucial for understanding the historical process of Sino–Tibetan integration. Notably, many bilingual texts serve as educational materials for beginners, providing valuable insights into the learning process of Chinese or Tibetan for novices. As an example, the Tibetan–Chinese glossary Pelliot tibétain 1257 (hereafter, P.T. 1257), which is discussed in this paper, represents a bilingual vocabulary list of significant research value for understanding the linguistic and cultural exchange between these two traditions. Digital images of the manuscript are found at the websites of the Gallica Digital Library (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>, accessed on 3 June 2024) and the International Dunhuang Project (<http://idp.bl.uk/>, accessed on 3 June 2024).

The manuscript P.T. 1257 consists of (1) ten sheets, each approximately 30 cm in width and 40 cm in length², and (2) a cover made by joining two sheets, with the first sheet measuring 30.6 cm in width and 49 cm in length, and the second sheet measuring 30 cm in width and 45 cm in length. The bottoms of these sheets were once secured together with a bamboo stick³. This stick, now broken into two segments, measures 16.9 cm and 12 cm in length, respectively⁴.

The first set of ten sheets actually contains two distinct sections. The initial segment, spanning sheets 1 and 5–10, is a “*Tibetan–Chinese Bilingual Vocabulary List*” that includes a range of Buddhist technical terms or Buddhist terms with numeric correspondence, as well as excerpts from the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*⁵. This glossary contains approximately 570 entries, with the Chinese terms provided above and their corresponding Tibetan terms listed below. The vocabulary is systematically organized into word families, each beginning

with a “headword” followed by its “derivatives”. For instance, the term for “Four Great Continents” is illustrated with a headword 四部洲/*glIng bzhi* (10.3.6) and its derivatives 東弗於大/*shar gyI lus 'phags gling* (10.3.7), 南閻浮提/*lha'I 'dzam bug* (10.4.1), 西俱耶尼/*nub gyI bal glang spyod* (10.4.2), and 北越單/*byang gI sgra myi snyan* (10.4.3), each representing different aspects of the concept⁶. The other section consists of the “*Tibetan-Chinese Bilingual Buddhist Scripture Catalogue*”, covering sheets 2–4. These two sections exhibit distinct scribal characteristics. The Tibetan–Chinese bilingual entries in the “*Tibetan-Chinese Bilingual Vocabulary List*” are arranged horizontally from left to right, while the “*Tibetan-Chinese Bilingual Buddhist Scripture Catalogue*” features Tibetan script arranged horizontally, with Chinese characters presented in various writing forms. Furthermore, the calligraphic strokes of both the Tibetan and Chinese sections are notably distinct. Consequently, it is evident that they were not executed contemporaneously. The primary focus of this study is the first part, the bilingual glossary.

In the academic history of research, it is possible that the earliest to take note of P.T. 1257 was none other than Paul Pelliot himself, who brought this manuscript to France. In *The Northwestern Dialects of Tang and Five Dynasties*, published in November 1933, Luo (1933, p. 12) mentioned that Pelliot had referred to this manuscript as a potential research material. Pelliot also promised to send him the plates later⁷. However, this manuscript does not appear to have been utilized in Luo’s subsequent research, so it remains unknown whether Pelliot fulfilled his promise. Over a decade later, Lalou conducted the first thorough investigation of P.T. 1257 while compiling the catalogue of the Tibetan documents from Dunhuang housed in the Lalou (1950, p. 94), disclosing the physical characteristics of the manuscript. Fujieda (1961, p. 291) and Drège (1984, pp. 196–98) subsequently conducted examinations of its binding form. As research on the Tibetan documents from Dunhuang progressed, it was not until the 1970s that scholars began to focus their studies on this manuscript. Ueyama (1976) was the first to suggest that this manuscript may have been produced during the process of development into the *Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa* (*Mahāv yutpatti*). Hakamaya (1984), in his study of the Tibetan translation of the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*, examined the related vocabulary in P.T. 1257 and posited that they might have been extracted from the Tibetan translations of the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra* such as S.T. 194 and 683. Kimura (1985) conducted a systematic examination of the vocabulary in the manuscript, confirming that these terms were all Old Tibetan translations collected during the mid-to-late eighth century reign of the Tibetan King Khri song lde brtsan (r. 742–97 CE). Akamatsu (1988) analyzed the Buddhist scripture titles in P.T. 1257, and suggested that the list might be a catalog of Tibetan translated scriptures and treatises preserved in a Dunhuang temple. Apple and Apple (2017) revisited this manuscript with a comprehensive study, revising some of the conclusions drawn by previous researchers.

Collectively, their research focuses on three main issues: the antiquity of the vocabulary, the dating of the manuscript, and the users of the text. Despite extensive discussions, a definitive consensus has not been reached. Regarding the age of the vocabulary, it is generally agreed that the vocabulary largely consists of Old Tibetan translations used during the reign of Tibetan King Khri Srong lde brtsan (r. 742–97 CE) in the mid-8th century⁸. However, Hakamaya (1984, p. 178) posits that the vocabulary may indeed incorporate a subset of the new standard translation terminology promulgated by the imperial edict of 814 CE, such as the translation of “如來” as “*de bzhin gshegs pa*” (6.4.5) and “*yang dag par gshegs pa*” (7.3.2), as well as the translation of “成所作智” as “*bya ba nan tan gyI ye shes*” (10.2.3). Secondly, regarding the dating of the manuscript, the majority of scholars concur that it was composed around the year 814, coinciding with the promulgation of the new vocabulary. However, considering the potential existence of later translation usages observed by Hakamaya, the assertion that the manuscript must have been completed prior to 814 may be somewhat overly absolute. Subsequently, the matter of the manuscript’s users has not been rigorously discussed, with previous scholars holding divergent opinions. Some have conjectured that the manuscript may have been in circulation among Chinese monks learning Tibetan, while others believe it was used by Tibetan monks learning

Chinese. Moreover, their research has been predominantly within the realm of linguistics, lacking more in-depth historical and philological perspective. Consequently, there is still room for further discussion on this manuscript. The present study primarily endeavors to address the following questions:

1. The calligraphic characteristics of the Chinese vocabulary on each sheet and the original sequence of the sheets.
2. The sequence of Tibetan and Chinese vocabulary in the glossary.
3. Discrepancies between Tibetan and Chinese translations of the same term in the manuscript, and instances where Chinese translations are missing.
4. The nature of the glossary and its users.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, there are also some areas for improvement in the academic transcriptions of this manuscript, particularly with regard to the transliteration of Tibetan script. However, due to space limitations, a detailed enumeration will not be pursued here. The author's contemplations on these matters are currently in a preliminary stage and are subject to refinement. I kindly invite feedback and correction from esteemed scholars in the field.

1. The Calligraphic and Layout Form Characteristics of Chinese Vocabulary, and the Original Arrangement Order among the Sheets

Previous scholars have regarded this *Tibetan-Chinese Bilingual Vocabulary List* as a whole. For instance, Spanien and Imaeda (1979) posited that the sequential arrangement of the glossary's sheets is from 10 to 4, thereby overlooking the differences that exist within its internal components. Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 76–77) have endeavored to ascertain the sequence of the sheet based on the continuity of vocabulary meanings, yet their efforts were not systematic. Furthermore, they posited that this manuscript contains at least five or seven distinct styles of Chinese calligraphy, but they did not specify how to distinguish between these handwritings, nor did they detail what content was written in each style. We believe that relying solely on calligraphy may entail significant risks, as some calligraphic styles may not exhibit strong individual characteristics. In fact, in addition to calligraphy, the vocabulary list also exhibits various significantly different layout forms, which can aid in understanding the complex writing process of this manuscript and in determining who wrote which parts⁹.

The first sheet, line 1 to the seventh column of the eighth line on the eighth sheet, and sheets 9–10 display a high distinctive layout style, where all Chinese phrases, irrespective of their length, are written from top-to-bottom along the left side. Additionally, the calligraphy strokes within these sections are notably uniform, with the characters presenting a consistent slant. This particular style of writing is tentatively classified as Type A. Across these sections, there are a total of 327 instances where Type A script is employed, with 7 instances of omitted Chinese characters.

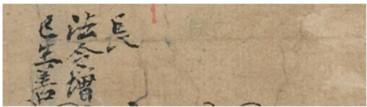
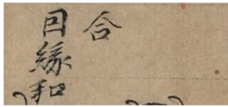
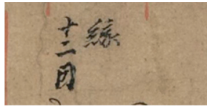
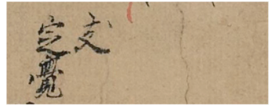
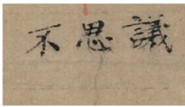
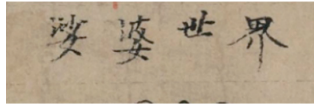
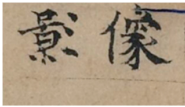
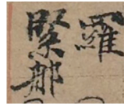


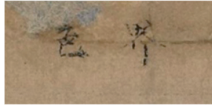
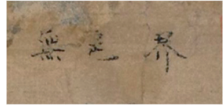
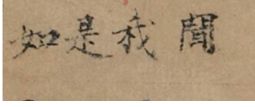
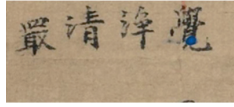
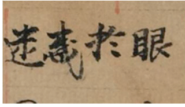
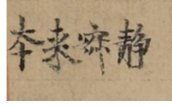
On the seventh sheet and below the eighth column of the eighth line on the eighth sheet, the direction of Chinese character writing is determined based on the available space and the length of the vocabulary, with characters being written vertically or horizontally. The calligraphic strokes are relatively uniform, characterized by straight strokes. We tentatively classify this writing style as Type B. There are a total of 115 vocabulary entries written in this manner, with 8 instances where Chinese characters are missing.

Sheets 5 and 6 exhibit a relatively unique writing style characterized by consistent calligraphy, with almost all vocabulary written horizontally, except for a few individual words. We tentatively designate this as Type C. There are a total of 126 vocabulary entries in this style, with 30 instances of missing Chinese characters. However, upon closer examination of the content, Type C can be further divided into two subtypes. The first subtype comprises the first and second lines on the sixth sheet, which contain Buddhist technical terms, referred to as C1. In C1, the headwords of all word families are written vertically, while the derivatives are written horizontally. There are a total of 20 vocabulary entries in this subtype. The second subtype, C2, consists of vocabulary excerpts from

the *Samḍhinirmocana-sūtra*, encompassing sheet 5 and the third line and below on sheet 6. There are a total of 106 vocabulary entries in this subtype, with 30 instances of missing Chinese characters.

To present the differences among the various types more intuitively, I have selected four examples from each type to include in Table 1.

Table 1. Variations in writing styles across different types.

| | Example 1 | Example 2 | Example 3 | Example 4 |
|---------|---|---|--|---|
| Type A |  |  |  |  |
| | 1.10.3 已生善法令增長 | 8.4.9 因緣和合 | 9.3.5 十二因緣 | 10.10.3 定覺支 |
| Type B |  |  |  |  |
| | 7.6.6 不思議 | 7.8.3 娑婆世界 | 8.8.8 影像 | 8.11.9 緊那羅 |
| Type C1 |  |  |  |  |
| | 6.1.1 headword 三界 | 6.1.2 derivatives 欲界 | 6.1.3 derivatives 色界 | 6.1.4 derivatives 無色界 |
| Type C2 |  |  |  |  |
| | 6.3.1 如是我聞 | 6.6.1 最清淨覺 | 5.3.2 迷惑於眼 | 5.9.4 本來寂靜 |

Therefore, considering the combined factors of calligraphic strokes and layout styles, it is likely that at least three individuals were responsible for the Chinese vocabulary section. If the Tibetan vocabulary section was attributed to a separate individual, then this bilingual vocabulary list was completed by at least four contributors.

Sheet 8 features at least two distinct writing styles, A and B, suggesting that they were collaboratively executed by different individuals. The transition points between Type A and Type B are marked by the terms “中阴身/*nga phung bar ma*” (8.8.7) and “影像/*gzugs brnyan*” (8.8.8). These words, along with seventeen others from “虚空/*nam ka*” (8.7.5) to “风轮/*rlung gl khrul 'khor*” (8.9.9), form a word family, all relating to “虚空” (emptiness). This implies that the last few words of Type A and the first few words of Type B belong to the same word family. The cessation of copying by the scribe of Type A at 8.8.7 seems to be a somewhat arbitrary choice, unrelated to the word family or the spatial distribution of the lines.

Next, let us examine the original sequence of the individual sheets. The current physical order of P. T. 1257 appears chaotic, indicating that it is not the original order among the sheets. However, based on the analysis of the calligraphy and layout styles discussed in the preceding text, combined with the content written on the sheets, we can approximately reconstruct the original arrangement and sequence of transcription among the sheets.


The sequence of the first, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth sheets may be directly related. Firstly, the relationship between the eighth and seventh sheets, as well as between the tenth and ninth sheets, can be easily determined. The order of the eighth and seventh sheets can be established because the selection of terms on both sheets predominantly appears in the form of word families. The last line of the eighth sheet lists “天龍八部” (eight kinds of demigods), but only mentions the first seven, whereas the first word of the first line on the seventh sheet is the eighth sect, “魔¹⁰猴羅伽 (Mohoraja)/*lto phyen chen po*”. The

determination of the sequence of the tenth and ninth sheets follows the same method as for the eighth and seventh sheets. The last entry on the tenth sheet is “八聖道 (the Noble Eightfold Path)/*phags pa'I laM brgyad*” (10.11.9), and the first entry on the ninth sheet corresponds to the content of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Secondly, the connection between Sheet 1 and Sheet 10 can be reasonably established. Both Sheets 1 and 10 deal with the concept of Buddhist technical terms. The first sheet has already elaborated on the category of “four”, with the last group being “四顛倒 (Four inverted beliefs)/*phyIn cI log bzhi*” (1.10.4). Although the first line of Sheet 10 is incomplete, evidence suggests that the missing content, as indicated by the surviving Tibetan letters “*sgo nga las skye ba*” (卵生, anḍa-ja, birth from eggs) and the remaining complete phrase “*化生 (upa-pāduka, birth by transformation)/rdzus te skye ba*”¹¹ indicate that the missing content is “四生 (catu-yoni, four types of birth): 胎生 (jarāyu-ja, birth from the womb), 濕生 (samsveda-ja, birth from dampness), 卵生 (birth from eggs)”, which also falls under the Dharma numerical classification of “four”. Therefore, sheets 1 and 10 are also logically connected in terms of content continuity.

Again, the relationship between sheets 9 and 8 is not easily determined, but there is a certain correlation between them. The vocabulary from the 7th line onwards of the 9th sheet and that of the 8th sheet can be categorized into multiple groups, with the terms within each group predominantly being synonyms, while the adjacent pairs of groups tend to consist largely of antonyms. The final group of Sheet 9 consists of the words “任運成就 (to accomplish something by letting it occur naturally)/*lhun gyIs grub*” and “通達 (understand thoroughly)/*khong du chud*”, which are synonyms and form a small group. The first group on Sheet 8 consists of the words “*bar du gcod pa* (hinder)”¹² and “障 (block)/*bsgrIbs pa*”, “覆 (cover)/*gyog pa*”, and “蓋 (cover)/*bkab pa*”, which are synonyms and also form a small group, but they are antonyms of “任運成就” and “通達”. Therefore, it is plausible that the ninth and eighth sheets are sequentially related.



Lastly, upon meticulous examination by the author, a specific symbol “” is observed preceding the first word of the first line on the first sheet. This symbol is not part of the letters for the initial word “*dge' ba*”/善 (virtue), but rather the Tibetan initial mark (Yig Mgo Mdun Ma), which is a symbol traditionally written at the beginning of a document. Therefore, it can be confirmed that Sheet 1 is the starting point of the Type A content. This can also be corroborated by the content itself, as the content from the first line to the second column of the third line on this sheet belongs to the “two” category of Buddhist technical terms, followed by the “three” category, indicating that this should be the foremost content of such lexical entries.

The first sheet, the eighth sheet, the ninth and tenth sheets, and the sixth and fifth sheets all contain terminology excerpts from Volume One of the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*. Therefore, the sequence of these terms within the Buddhist scripture can be utilized to ascertain the relative order of these sheets. However, the order of the seventh sheet in relation to the sixth sheet appears to lack a direct connection, as the last few lines of the seventh sheet contain groups of terms that form antonyms, while the first and second lines of the sixth sheet belong to the category of technical terms starting from “three”. Therefore, they exhibit distinct characteristics. Nonetheless, given that there are six narrow strips of paper devoid of any writing between the seventh and eighth sheets, it can be inferred that there are at least six missing sheets between the seventh and eighth sheets. Therefore, at present, the possibility of a connection between the sixth and fifth sheets and the other sheets cannot be ruled out abruptly.

In summary, based on the current available analysis, it is only possible to provisionally arrange the aforementioned sheets into two groups, namely 1-10-9-8-7 and 6-5. The existing binding order is almost entirely different from the original sequence, suggesting that the binder may not have arranged the sheets in the original sequence, and may have even been unaware of the original sequence. However, the order of the last four sheets

(10-9-8-7) is exactly the reverse of the original sequence, implying that when the binder collected these documents, they may have still roughly maintained a certain order.

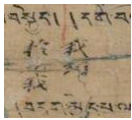
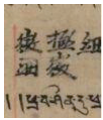
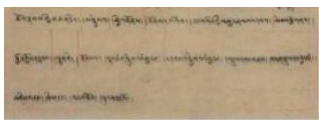
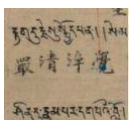
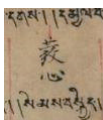
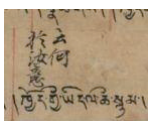
2. The Sequence of Tibetan and Chinese Vocabulary, and Red Lines in the Lexicon

Based on the observation that there are columns or sections of the lexicon section that have only Tibetan terms and also do not have any Chinese equivalent terms written above them¹³, Kimura (1985, p. 628) and Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 85–86) inferred that the original order of transcription for this lexicon was Tibetan followed by Chinese. While this inference is generally plausible, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation. Within this manuscript, there are three elements: Tibetan vocabulary, Chinese vocabulary, and red lines serving as separators between words¹⁴. Therefore, the inference of James Apple and Shinobu Apple only partially explains the general transcription order of the vocabulary list. Further questions arise: (1) the sequence of writing Tibetan and Chinese terms and the red lines, and (2) whether the Chinese vocabulary was filled in after all the Tibetan terms were written.

In addition to the evidence provided by James Apple and Shinobu Apple regarding the frequent vacancies in the Chinese vocabulary, the positional relationships among Tibetan vocabulary, Chinese vocabulary, and the red lines are also worthy of our attention. These positional relationships provide the most direct basis for refining our analysis of the sequence among the three elements.

Firstly, examining the general sequence among the three elements, Table 2 below lists the most exemplary instances from each sheet that illustrate the positional relationships between them.

Table 2. Positional relationships among Tibetan and Chinese vocabulary, and red lines.

| Position | Type | Plate | Description of the Triadic Positional Relationship | Explanation |
|-----------|------|---|---|--|
| 1.11.3 | A |  | The red line has encroached upon the second “我” character in “於無我我到”. | The red line was drawn after the Chinese vocabulary. |
| 5.6.4 | C |  | The red line has pressed upon the first two characters “微細” of “微細極微細”. | The red line in line 10 was drawn after the Chinese vocabulary in line 11. |
| 5.10–5.11 | |  | | These two lines contain only Tibetan vocabulary and red lines, with no Chinese vocabulary, indicating that the red line was drawn before the Chinese vocabulary was written. |
| 6.6.1 | C |  | The red line has encroached upon the character “覺” of “最清淨覺”. | The red line in line 5 was drawn after the Chinese vocabulary in line 6. |
| 7.5.5 | B |  | The red line has encroached upon the character “發” of “發心”. | The red line in line 4 was drawn after the Chinese vocabulary in line 5. |
| 8.5.2 | A |  | The red line has encroached upon the character “於” of “於汝意云何”. | The red line in line 4 was drawn after the Chinese vocabulary in line 5. |

Based on the statistical analysis presented in the table above, it can be observed that, with the exception of Sheets 9 and 10 where no clear positional overlap is observed among the three elements, nearly every sheet provides a typical case that illustrates the sequence of the three elements. It can be confirmed that the general order is as follows:

Tibetan vocabulary → *Chinese vocabulary* → *red line*

Furthermore, the occurrence of the red line from the previous line encroaching upon the Chinese characters in the next line on multiple sheets indicates that the scribes at least transcribed an additional line of Chinese vocabulary before drawing the red line. This sequence is observed across all types of script, suggesting that all scribes adhered to a similar order of transcription.

This is different from the general sequence mentioned earlier. This phenomenon may be explained in two ways: (1) Instead of drawing the red line after completing all the Chinese vocabulary, the scribes drew the red line after completing a portion of the Chinese vocabulary (possibly at least an additional line), and then extended the red line beyond the written Chinese vocabulary to include an additional section. (2) The last two lines may have been transcribed by a different individual from the rest of the manuscript, which would account for the observed difference in the sequence of drawing the red lines and filling in the Chinese vocabulary. Supporting the second explanation, there is evidence that the Tibetan vocabulary in the last two lines does not align with the preceding content; while the earlier content is excerpted from the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*, these two lines are Buddhist technical terms.

In summary, based on the above analysis, the general sequence of this vocabulary list is likely to be “*Tibetan vocabulary* → *Chinese vocabulary* → *red lines*”, and it is highly probable that the Chinese vocabulary and red lines were filled in after all the Tibetan vocabulary were written. However, the Chinese vocabulary may not have been written all at once, followed by the drawing of the red lines in a uniform manner.

3. The Phenomenon of Missing Words and the Proficiency of the Scribes in the Chinese Vocabulary List

Type A contains a total of 327 terms, among which there are seven instances where corresponding Chinese terms are not filled in, constituting approximately 2% (7/327) of the total number of terms, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Vacant Chinese vocabulary in Type A.

| | Position | Tibetan Vocabulary | Possible Chinese Vocabulary | Word Family |
|---|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 9.10.8 | <i>rI gpa</i> | 知 | 覺/ <i>tshor ba</i> |
| 2 | 8.1.1 | <i>bar du gcod pa</i> | 礙 | 障/ <i>bsgrlbs pa</i> |
| 3 | 8.2.1 | <i>dp yod pa</i> | 察 | 無量/ <i>tshad myed</i> , 不可測/ <i>dpag du myed</i> |
| 4 | 8.2.2 | <i>dpog pa</i> | 測 | 無量/ <i>tshad myed</i> , 不可測/ <i>dpag du myed</i> |
| 5 | 8.2.3 | <i>spong ba</i> | 舍離 | 已離/ <i>sprang pa'</i> , 離/ <i>bral ba</i> |
| 6 | 8.4.4 | <i>khyad bar</i> | 差別 | 別異/ <i>tha dad</i> , 各各/ <i>so so'</i> , 種種/ <i>sna tshogs</i> |
| 7 | 8.6.3 | <i>stI stang</i> | 敬重 | 供養/ <i>mchod pa</i> , 供敬/ <i>bkur stI</i> , 尊重/ <i>rI mgro'</i> , 敬/ <i>gus pa</i> |

Type B contains a total of 115 terms, among which there are eight instances where corresponding Chinese terms are not filled in, constituting approximately 7% (8/115) of the total number of terms, as shown in Table 4.

It is noteworthy that the term “*yI dags*” (7.4.4) was recorded in Type A, yet it was left unwritten in Type B. Considering the analysis provided earlier, which indicates that the scribe of Type B continued the transcription from the scribe of Type A, this suggests that before filling in the words, the scribe of Type B, despite having received the vocabulary list transcribed by the scribe of Type A, may not have verified the content entered by the latter. This phenomenon may imply that the scribe of Type B was independently filling

in the vocabulary list based on his own knowledge, and was not yet familiar with at least eight terms, including “*yi dags*”.

Table 4. Vacant Chinese vocabulary in Type B.

| | Position | Tibetan Vocabulary | Possible Chinese Vocabulary | Word Family |
|---|----------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 7.1.5 | <i>grul bum</i> | 鳩盤茶 | 羅剎/ <i>bar ba</i> ¹⁵ |
| 2 | 7.4.4 | <i>yi dags</i> | 餓鬼 | 地獄/ <i>dmyal ba</i> , 仙人/ <i>drang srong</i> |
| 3 | 7.5.1 | <i>rgya che</i> | 大 | 廣/ <i>yangs</i> |
| 4 | 7.10.7 | <i>gnod pa</i> | 不饒益 | 利益/ <i>phan ba</i> |
| 5 | 7.11.4 | <i>chos gyi dbang bskur pa</i> | | 種諸善根/ <i>dge ba'I rtsa bskrungs pa</i> ¹⁶ |
| 6 | 7.11.7 | <i>ngal tshul chan</i> | | 辯才/ <i>spobs pa'</i> |
| 7 | 8.9.7 | <i>mylg yor</i> | 光影 | 嚮 (響) ¹⁷ / <i>brag ca</i> |
| 8 | 8.10.5 | <i>gang latshogs pa</i> | | 有幾種/ <i>rnam pa du yod</i> ¹⁸ |

Type C contains a total of 126 terms, among which there are 30 instances where corresponding Chinese terms are not filled in, constituting approximately 23.8% (30/1265) of the total number of terms, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Vacant Chinese vocabulary in Type C.

| | Position | Tibetan Vocabulary | Probable Corresponding Translation ¹⁹ |
|----|----------|---|--|
| 1 | 5.1.3 | <i>rtsod pa'I smra ba</i> | 言辭所說 |
| 2 | 5.1.4 | <i>dnagos po myed pa</i> | 不成實 |
| 3 | 5.2.4 | <i>'di lta bur 'gyur ro</i> | 作如是 |
| 4 | 5.2.5 | <i>nan gyis reg chIng chags</i> ²⁰ | 堅固執著 |
| 5 | 5.3.1 | <i>sgyus byas pa</i> | 幻化事 |
| 6 | 5.3.4 | <i>gtI gmug gIs myos</i> | 癡妄 (?) |
| 7 | 5.5.2 | <i>gzhan dang gzhan ma yIn ba</i> | 有異 (?) |
| 8 | 5.5.3 | <i>'dod pa'I gdung ba</i> | 愚癡 (?) |
| 9 | 5.5.5 | <i>zIl gyis myI non par 'gyur</i> | 超過 (?) |
| 10 | 5.6.3 | <i>ngags dgon pa'I gzhongs</i> | 阿練若大樹林 |
| 11 | 5.7.2 | <i>log pa'I gnyen dang gnyen po</i> | 能治所治 |
| 12 | 5.7.3 | <i>zag pa dang bcas pa</i> | 有漏 |
| 13 | 5.8.2 | <i>dbyer myed pa'I mtshan nyId</i> | 無別異相 |
| 14 | 5.8.4 | <i>rtag pa yun du rtag pa</i> | 未生令生 |
| 15 | 5.8.5 | <i>brtan ba yun du brtan ba</i> | 生已堅住 |
| 16 | 5.10.1 | <i>byin gyis brlabs</i> | 執持 |
| 17 | 5.10.2 | <i>lhag ge</i> | 解了 |
| 18 | 5.10.3 | <i>goms pa</i> | 修習 |
| 19 | 5.10.4 | <i>lhan chIg sgyes ba'I mya ngan</i> | 集會菩薩 (?) |
| 20 | 5.10.5 | <i>brtags te sgyes pa'I mya ngan</i> | 善巧菩薩 |
| 21 | 5.10.6 | <i>'phzul dga' gnam</i> | 化樂天 |
| 22 | 5.10.7 | <i>gzhan 'phrul dbang shyed gnaM</i> | 他化自在天 |
| 23 | 5.11.1 | <i>mtshe ma gnam</i> | 兜率天 |
| 24 | 5.11.2 | <i>zIl dngar</i> | 甘露 (?) |
| 25 | 5.11.3 | <i>kha na ma tho ba</i> | 業障 |
| 26 | 5.11.4 | <i>ltas bzang po</i> | 吉祥 (?) |
| 27 | 6.5.1 | <i>rtag du rjesu spyod pa na</i> | 常所冀從 |
| 28 | 6.8.1 | <i>chos gyi 'dod pa dang bde bar phrad pa</i> | 趣求法樂 |
| 29 | 6.11.1 | <i>phul du bde ba thob pa</i> | 得第一現法樂住 |
| 30 | 6.11.2 | <i>yon chen po sbyangs pa</i> | 大淨福田 |

So, what are the reasons for these missing terms? There are essentially two possibilities: either the transcriber was unfamiliar with this Tibetan vocabulary, or was unsure of the appropriate Chinese translations for these terms. The former can be attributed to insufficient knowledge of Tibetan, while the latter can be ascribed to limited proficiency in Chinese. In fact, whatever the reason, this suggests that a standardized reference table with definitive answers was not available to the transcriber.

However, in the Type A section, the scribe of Tibetan terms exhibits a particular transcription habit: an additional slash is drawn between two word families, amidst the existing two slashes, to denote the separation between word families and to differentiate it from the separators used between derivatives. This practice can be observed, for example, between the word families “八聖道 (the Noble Eightfold Path)” and “十地 (Ten Grounds of Bodhisattva Path)” in the second line of Sheet 9 (see Figure 1B), and between the word families “十地” and “十二因緣 (the twelve causes and conditions)” in the third line of Sheet 9 (see Figure 1C). However, it is important to emphasize that this word family-level separator is unique to the Type A lexicon, and the scribe’s use of this separator is not entirely consistent. For instance, in the same ninth sheet, the fourth line between the word families “十二因緣” and “六入 (the six sense objects)” (see Figure 1D) does not use this symbol, indicating a considerable degree of arbitrariness in the use of this particular separator.

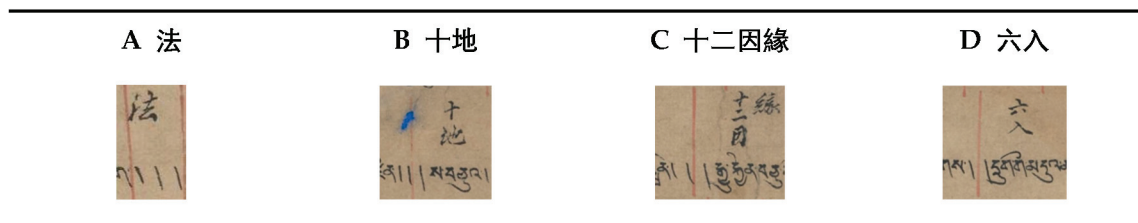


Figure 1. The transcription style of Type A.

In conclusion, the presence of a slash here does not indicate omission in the transcription of Tibetan term; rather, it is a fact that the term “chos” was not transcribed at all during the copying of the Tibetan vocabulary (see Figure 1B). What then prompts the Chinese scribe to write the character “法”? Was there a basis for this transcription? To address this question, it is necessary to examine the word family to which “法” belongs. This word family is “六塵 (six sense objects)/yul drug” (10.7.11), with its derivatives being “色 (form)/gzugs, 聲(sound)/sgra’, 香 (fragrance)/drI’, 味 (flavor)/bro’, 觸 (tangible objects)/rig, 法 (dharma)”.

Considering that these are some of the most fundamental Buddhist technical terms, the phenomenon of having the Chinese term “法” without a corresponding Tibetan term “chos” can be interpreted in two ways: (1) The Chinese scribe may have been aware of the omission of the Tibetan term, but since the red line had already been drawn at this point by the scribe responsible for drawing the red lines, the Chinese scribe supplemented it to maintain completeness. (2) The Chinese scribe may not have been aware of the omission of the Tibetan term, but due to their familiarity with Buddhist technical terms and the ample space available for the character “法”, coupled with the fact that the red line had already been drawn at this point, he filled it in out of writing habit. In this regard, the author leans more towards the second explanation, as evidence can be found elsewhere of this filler’s tendency to not strictly correspond with the Tibetan vocabulary due to inertia. Similar to the case in line 7 of Sheet 10, there is a word family “六根 (the six sense organs)/dbang po drug” listed. Its contents are as follows (see Table 6):

Table 6. The six sense organs.

| 六根 | 眼根 | 耳根 | 鼻 | 舌 | 身 | 意 |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| the six sense organs | eye | ear | nose | tongue | body | consciousness |
| <i>dbang po drug</i> | <i>dmylg</i> | <i>rna'ba</i> | <i>sna'</i> | <i>lce'</i> | <i>lus</i> | <i>yld</i> |

It can be readily observed that, in fact, in the spelling of Tibetan vocabulary, except for the root word “*dbang po drug*” (six sense faculties, 六根) which has the suffix “*dbang po*” (root, 根), the other six derivative terms actually do not have this suffix. However, in the transcription of Chinese terms, the first two terms, “眼根” (eye) and “耳根” (ear), do include the character “根”, while the following four terms (鼻, nose; 舌, tongue; 身, body; 意, consciousness) do not have the suffix. It is believed that the presence of “根” in the first two terms is due to the habitual writing behavior of the scribe. Subsequently, realizing that the Tibetan terms do not contain the suffix “*dbang po*”, the scribe ceased to write the character “根” for the latter four senses.

Similarly, on the tenth sheet, eleventh line, there is the word family for “七寶” (seven treasures) (see Table 7). In the Tibetan spelling of the vocabulary, only the root word “*rin po che bdun*” has the suffix “*rin po che*”, while the seven derivative terms are suffix-free. However, in the corresponding set of eight Chinese vocabulary terms, including both the root and derivative terms, six of them have the suffix “寶” (treasure), with the only two exceptions being “摩尼” (mani jewel) and “主藏神” (able ministers of the Treasury). These Chinese terms with the suffix “寶” are likely a manifestation of the scribe’s habitual writing behavior.

Table 7. The seven treasures.

| 七寶 | 象寶 | 馬寶 | 摩尼 | 女寶 | 輪寶 | 主藏神 | 兵寶 |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| seven treasures | elephants | dark swift horses | mani jewel | jewels of women | the golden wheel | able ministers of the Treasury | loyal generals |
| <i>rin po che bdun</i> | <i>bal glang</i> | <i>rta'</i> | <i>bnor bu'</i> | <i>bud myed</i> | <i>'khor lo</i> | <i>blon po'</i> | <i>dma'g</i> |

Let us now return to the extraneous character “法”. Based on the analysis presented above, I am inclined to posit that the scribe’s inclusion of the additional “法” was a result of habitual writing behavior.

This habitual writing behavior indicates that the scribe of the Chinese vocabulary was quite familiar with both the Chinese terminology and the Tibetan vocabulary pertaining to Buddhist Dharma numerical concepts.

The proficiency of the Chinese vocabulary scribe can be further understood through the following examples. In the vocabulary section, the term “*sangs rgyas*” appears five times, specifically in 1.3.2 “*覺/sangs rgyas*”²¹, 1.3.8 “*佛/sangs rgyas*”, 1.6.1 “*獨覺/rang sangs rgyas*”, 5.1.5 “*現正等覺/mngon bar sangs rgyas*”, and 9.11.5 “*佛刹/sangs rgyas gyl zhing*”. However, the corresponding Chinese translations are not consistent, employing both “覺” and “佛”. A similar case can also be observed with the term “*tshor ba*”, which appears four times in the vocabulary section, in 1.8.5 “*受念住/tshor ba dran ba nye bar gzhagpa*”, 9.4.4 “*受/tshor ba*”, 9.10.9 “*覺/tshor ba*”, and 10.5.9 “*受/tshor ba*”, using both “受” and “覺” as translations for “*tshor ba*”. What accounts for the variation in Chinese translations corresponding to the same Tibetan term?

Kimura (1985, p. 638) and Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 86–87) suggest that the emergence of this phenomenon may be due to some terms being translated from Sanskrit, while others are translated from Chinese. For instance, the translation of “*tshor ba*” as “受” (feeling) may be attributed to its origin from the Sanskrit term “*vedanā*”, whereas the Chinese translation as “覺” (awakened) could be a result of its derivation from Chinese Chan Buddhist terminology. James Apple and Shinobu Apple further infer that:

P.T. 1257 shows a lack of coordination between its translation terms while demonstrating a Tibetan interest in both Chinese based Chan terminology and Indic terminology. This

may indicate that the lexicon was not well organized or was haphazardly put together in its initial composition during a confusing time period before the imperial decrees of 814 CE.

The premise necessary for this explanation to hold is that those who filled in the Chinese vocabulary were able to accurately determine whether different instances of “*tshor ba*” were translated from Sanskrit or Chinese. However, this is clearly impossible, as these Tibetan terms, except for those excerpted from the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*, lack any textual context. Thus, based on a single isolated term, it is impossible to discern their nature. In the author’s view, the most plausible explanation is that the scribe of the Chinese vocabulary made appropriate translation choices based on the specific “context of the word family”.

For instance, among the five occurrences of the translation for “*sangs rgyas*”, three instances—1.6.1 “獨覺/*rang sangs rgyas*”, 5.1.5 “現正等覺/*mngon bar sangs rgyas*”, and 9.11.5 “佛刹/*sangs rgyas gyI zhing*”—can be considered to be fixed expressions that do not require extensive explanation. Section 1.3.2 “覺/*sangs rgyas*” and the preceding term “眾/*sems chan*” belong to the same word family. Given that the meaning of “眾/*sems chan*” is “sentient beings”, “覺/*sangs rgyas*” actually refers to a “full awakening” individual, which can be translated as either “覺” (awakened) or “佛” (Buddha). The translation for 1.3.8 “佛/*sangs rgyas*” must be “佛” (Buddha), as it is part of the same word family that includes 1.3.9 “法/*chos*” and 1.4.1 “僧/*dge ’dun*”, which corresponds to the fixed expression “佛, 法, 僧” (the Three Jewels) in Chinese. Similarly, among the four translations of “*tshor ba*”, 1.8.5 “受念住/*tshor ba dran ba nye bar gzhas pa*” is a fixed phrase. The translations for 9.4.4 “受/*tshor ba*” are associated with 9.4.3 “觸/*reg pa*” and 9.4.5 “愛/*sred pa*”, which are part of the “十二因緣/*rgyu rkyen bcu gnyis la*” (the twelve causes and conditions), thus “受” is the appropriate translation. For 9.10.9 “覺/*tshor ba*”, it is paired with 9.10.8 “*rIg pa*” (meaning “to know” or “awareness”), and therefore “*tshor ba*” can only be translated as “覺” (perception), which is synonymous with “知” (to know). Lastly, 10.5.9 “受/*tshor ba*” and 10.5.8 “色/*gzugs*” belong to the same word family, namely “五蘊/*phung po lnga*” (five groups of existence). Therefore, “*tshor ba*” in 10.5.9 can only correspond to the Chinese term “受”.

Upon comprehensive analysis, the author posits that it is the compilers of the Chinese lexicon who, based on varying contexts, employed diverse translations for the same Tibetan term. This demonstrates the compilers’ possession of a sufficiently rich knowledge of Chinese Buddhism.

4. Authorship and Nature of the Glossary

Finally, let us address the fourth question posed at the beginning of this paper regarding the authorship and nature of the glossary.

After conducting a comprehensive and systematic study of this manuscript, Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 108–9) suggested that, “This glossary could have been a draft of an official document that was offered to high-ranking Chinese monks by Tibetan authorities in order for both parties to communicate on topics related to Buddhism”, and that “it was copied and circulated by Tibetans among Chinese monks in Dunhuang in order for Tibetan monastic authorities to gain knowledge of Chinese equivalents for Tibetan terms”. The rationale for this conclusion is as follows: (1) The manuscript was written on new paper, not on re-used wastepaper, and received additional special care and treatment several times after the manuscript was initially composed; moreover, all Tibetan terms are written in a very tidy style with care and concentration. These factors suggest that P.T. 1257 seems to be treated well, as if it is a valuable property in a certain monastic community. (2) In this manuscript, the Tibetan vocabulary is written down first and is complete, yet some corresponding Chinese terms are missing.

It must be acknowledged that the conclusions they have drawn are imaginative, yet the arguments they present lack persuasiveness. Firstly, the papers were not particularly special, and the form was quite common at the time; utilizing a new sheet of paper to transcribe a glossary was not an action exclusive to official entities. Secondly, if we accept that this manuscript was commissioned and produced by the authorities for the use of Chinese

monks to learn corresponding Tibetan vocabulary, then it would be expected that they would select highly competent personnel to fill in the corresponding Chinese terms, ensuring the authority of the text they provided. However, as James Apple and Shinobu Apple themselves noted in their statistics, approximately 8% of the Chinese vocabulary section is missing. This is clearly contrary to their original intent. Therefore, the hypothesis put forward by James Apple and Shinobu Apple warrants a revisiting and further discussion.

In this bilingual glossary, aside from the omission of the corresponding Tibetan term for “法” (10.8.5), the remaining Tibetan terms appear to be entirely correct²². As observed by James Apple and Shinobu Apple, the calligraphy of the Tibetan terms is written in a very tidy and consistent style across the various sheets, suggesting that it was completed by an individual with a high level of proficiency in Tibetan. The Chinese vocabulary section, on the other hand, was filled out by at least three individuals in a relay manner, with varying levels of expertise. If the rate of missing terms is indicative of proficiency, then the levels of the scribes for Type A (2%), Type B (7%), and Type C (23.8%) decrease in sequence. Nevertheless, it is still evident that these three Chinese scribes were relatively familiar with the basic Buddhist terminology in Chinese, and their calligraphy was quite mature, indicating that they were not novices in Chinese. Conversely, their proficiency in Tibetan may have been more limited, as 45 Tibetan terms were left without corresponding Chinese translations. In other words, they were likely individuals for whom Chinese was their first language.

Thus, the question arises as to why, on the same manuscript with the Tibetan vocabulary already inscribed, three individuals would collaborate in relay to fill in the Chinese vocabulary. This question, which has not been raised in previous studies, is nevertheless a key issue in understanding this bilingual vocabulary list. This collaborative approach reminds the author of the fact that many Chinese manuscripts, including some for juvenile readers, were also completed by multiple contributors. The presence of multiple handwriting styles within a single manuscript is a phenomenon observable in numerous Dunhuang manuscripts. Additionally, there are also documents that are read by one person and written by another. For example, a manuscript of the popular Tang dynasty children’s primer “*Taigong Jiajiao*” (太公家教, *The Teaching of Taigong*) (P.2825) includes a colophon stating, “On the 15th day of the first month in the fourth year of the Dazhong era (850 CE), student Song Wenxian read, An Wende wrote”, 大中四年（850年）正月十五日，學生宋文顯讀，安文德寫 indicating that this juvenile reader’s book was collaboratively completed by two individuals. Consequently, the author surmises that the Chinese vocabulary in the P.T. 1257 bilingual glossary may have been accomplished in a similar fashion: through the collaborative efforts of three individuals who collectively held ownership of this manuscript.

Furthermore, this format, where one person initially writes Tibetan vocabulary and others subsequently fill in corresponding Chinese vocabulary, also easily brings to mind a type of student workbook found in Dunhuang manuscripts. In such workbooks, the teacher first writes down some exercises (such as Chinese characters) that need to be practiced after class, and then the students continue to fill in below the teacher’s handwriting. An example of such an opinion manuscript is P.4900V (see Figure 2) “The test for *Shang dafu*” (上大夫試文), where the teacher initially writes “上大夫丘乙己化三千七十士爾...” at the top of the paper with a brush dipped in vermilion ink, and then the students copy it in ink below, a practice known as “*Shun zhu*” 順朱, i.e., following the vermilion (Unno 2011). From a formal perspective, P.T. 1257 appears very similar to this: first, a Tibetan teacher writes Tibetan vocabulary on the manuscript, and then Chinese students fill in corresponding Chinese vocabulary above the Tibetan vocabulary.

Therefore, based on the above discussion, we believe that this bilingual vocabulary list is likely a workbook created by a Tibetan teacher for Chinese students to learn Tibetan vocabulary. This workbook is filled with Chinese vocabulary by Chinese students, and would have remained in their possession and use thereafter. The Chinese miscellaneous writings on the back of the vocabulary list, such as “大乘百法明門” and “大雲寺張闍和上”, indicate that this vocabulary list later circulated among the Chinese community in Dun-

huang. This fact could also serve as evidence that the vocabulary list was originally written and used by the Chinese.

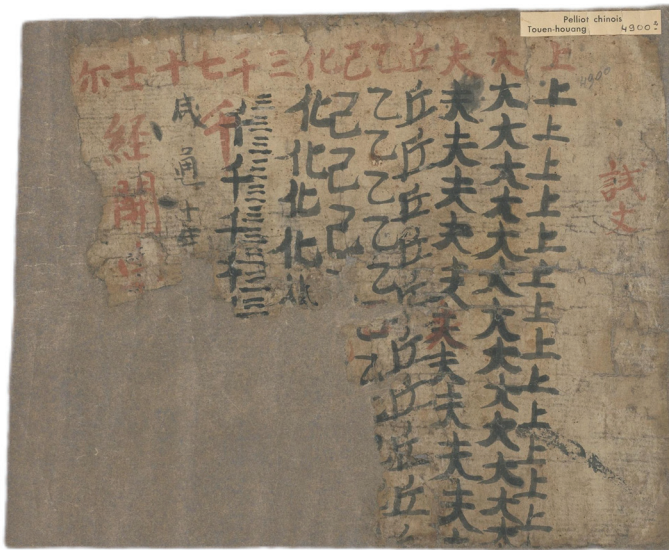


Figure 2. P.4900V. (Digital images of the manuscript are found at the website of Gallica Digital Library and International Dunhuang Project).

Of course, these so-called “Chinese students” were not young beginners, but rather individuals who were proficient in writing Chinese characters and possessed a considerable amount of knowledge about Chinese Buddhism. The approximate date of this bilingual vocabulary list—shortly before 814 CE—is also a significant issue that merits attention. By this time, it had been over a quarter of a century since the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang in 786 CE. During this period, many of the Dunhuang residents under Tibetan rule initially learned Chinese knowledge, only beginning to study Tibetan under specific circumstances and at specific times. This indicates that the Tibetan authorities did not enforce a uniform Tibetan education in the occupied regions.

So, under what circumstances did these Dunhuang residents, who already had considerable proficiency in Chinese, begin to learn Tibetan? Or rather, what was their purpose for learning Tibetan? I surmise that this should be related to the booming Tibetan sutra-copying business at that time. According to research, although large-scale sutra copying began during the reign of the King Khri-gtsug-lde-brtsan (802–38, ruled 815–36), the activity likely began to develop during the reign of his father, King Khri-lDe sRong-bTsan (761–815, ruled 798–815). This is because Buddhism experienced rapid development during his reign, and the translation of Buddhist texts made significant advancements. He promulgated the *Mahāv yutpatti*, which standardized Buddhist translation terminology for the first time.

Dunhuang was an important center for the Tibetan Empire’s Buddhist sutra-copying business, with the sutras copied in Dunhuang being sent to Tibet proper to be offered to the King (Ma 2009). Of course, for the local sutra copiers in Dunhuang, participating in the sutra-copying project initiated by the King not only meant fulfilling the political tasks assigned to them by the empire, but also meant they could receive sufficient economic rewards. According to Hao (1998, pp. 363–65), a monk in Dunhuang in the 9th to 10th centuries could earn 12 to 30 *shi* 石 (approximately 948 to 2370 kg)²³ of wheat per year by participating in Buddhist ritual activities, while the income from copying a single volume sutra was 1 *shi* of wheat (Zheng 2005, pp. 163–64). Therefore, it can be seen that participating in sutra-copying was significant for the economic livelihood of the copyists.

5. Conclusions

Building on the foundation of previous research, this paper conducts a systematic re-examination of the bilingual Tibetan–Chinese vocabulary list in P.T. 1217. By analyzing the interrelations among the vocabulary, the paper confirms the sequential order of the seven folios containing Tibetan–Chinese vocabulary, namely 1-10-9-8-7 and 6-5. In the analysis of the Chinese vocabulary section, the paper proposes a classification method different from previous studies, categorizing the terms not based on their content but on the form of transcription, which suggests that at least three individuals were involved in completing the Chinese vocabulary. By studying the Chinese vocabulary sections assigned to each individual, the author attempts to infer their levels of Chinese cultural proficiency, suggesting that the use of different Chinese translations for the same Tibetan word in different contexts demonstrates a rich knowledge of Chinese Buddhism among the scribes. Finally, the paper argues that this bilingual vocabulary list was likely a workbook created by a Tibetan teacher for Chinese students to learn Tibetan vocabulary. The workbook was filled with Chinese vocabulary by Chinese students, and remained in their possession and use afterward. The Chinese in Dunhuang likely began learning Tibetan due to the Buddhist sutra-copying project initiated by the Tibetan king at the time. Participating in the imperial sutra copying project was not only a political task, but also a lucrative activity for them to earn economic rewards.

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Notes

¹ See Thomas and Clauson (1926, 1927); Thomas et al. (1929); Thomas and Giles (1948).

² The lengths and widths of the different sheets vary slightly, but the discrepancies do not exceed 1 cm. Apple and Apple (2017, p. 70, n. 2) have also observed with precision that the widths at the top and bottom of some sheets are not uniform, with each sheet roughly taking on a trapezoidal shape. The primary instances of such trapezoidal forms are found in sheets 1, 2, 8, and 10, where the top is approximately 2 cm wider than the bottom. It is important to note that these “trapezoidal” sheets were not originally produced in this shape, nor were they intentionally modified during the transcription process. Instead, this shape resulted from their use after binding. For example, the top edge of the fourth sheet is wider than the adjacent portion within the same sheet because the edge was once clamped with a bamboo stick, which preserved its width over time. In contrast, the other parts were not protected by the stick and were consequently trimmed (as evidenced by the straight edge), likely by a sharp tool such as a knife.

³ Regarding the binding format in question, there exists a diversity of perspectives. Lalou (1950, p. 94) refers to it as the “rolled paper” (*livre roulé formé*), while Drège (1984, pp. 196–98) describes it as the “world-wind style” or “whirlwind binding”. In contrast, Fujieda (1961, p. 291, n. 66) posits that it resembles a “pamphlet booklet style”. The understandings of Lalou and Drège are less accurate, whereas Fujieda’s interpretation aligns more closely with the correct characterization.

⁴ In addition to the aforementioned sheets and bamboo stick, two pieces of fragments are also preserved from this manuscript, although they do not bear any text.

⁵ Kimura (1985) posited that it is also possible that a portion of the vocabulary is excerpted from the *Buddhabhūmi sūtra*. Concurrently, he categorized these terms into three distinct groups: (1) Buddhist terms with numeric correspondence, (2) miscellaneous terms, and (3) terms derived from the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*. However, the first two categories could be merged into a single category, which would encompass both as Buddhist technical terms.

⁶ For the sake of convenience, this paper employs the notation “A.B.C” to refer to the vocabulary located in column C of row B on sheet A. For example, “10.3.6” denotes the term “Four Great Continents” found in column 6 of row 3 on Sheet 10.

⁷ At the end of 1932, Paul Pelliot returned to China to investigate the recent developments in Chinese historical and literary studies, and to purchase general utility books. He traveled through Hong Kong and Shanghai, eventually reaching Beiping (now known as Beijing). In April 1933, Pelliot departed from Beiping and returned to France. Luo Changpei’s encounter and conversation

with Pelliot regarding the Tibetan documents housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France likely took place at the beginning of 1933.

8 For an examination of the historical development of Tibetan translation, refer to Simonsson (1957), Schaeffer (2004), and Van Schaik (2014).

9 Although Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 78–79) have recognized that in the lexicon section, the notation of Chinese writing exhibits variability, alternating between vertical and horizontal orientations (with horizontal text read from left to right) or employing a combination of these two modalities (where vertical lines are read from top to bottom, progressing from the left column to the right column), they have not correlated this diversity of script orientations with the possibility that the Chinese vocabulary section was copied by multiple scribes.

10 The character “魔” is generally written as “摩”.

11 The term is spelled as “*rdzu te skye ba*” by James Apple and Shinobu Apple.

12 The Chinese characters corresponding to “*bar du gcod pa*” are not written.

13 According to James Apple and Shinobu Apple’s analysis, Tibetan terms that occur where a corresponding Chinese equivalent term is not filled, and constitute around 8 percent of the total number of the terms.

14 In addition to the three aforementioned elements, each sheet of the glossary actually features approximately twenty-one horizontal “ink lines” and two vertical “ink lines” that are divided between the left and right margins of the paper. However, these lines are in fact the ruling of the paper, a task completed prior to the transcription of the glossary. In P.T. 1257, the Tibetan script employed is the Uchen script style. In the Buddhist scripture catalog section, each line of Tibetan script is written with a horizontal baseline, meaning that the horizontal line is the “head” of the script. In contrast, in the glossary section, the Tibetan terms are written within a ruled frame constituted by two horizontal lines above and below the text.

15 The term is spelled as “*bar bar*” by James Apple and Shinobu Apple.

16 The term is spelled as “*dge ba’I rtsa bskrung pa*” by James Apple and Shinobu Apple.

17 “響” should be written as “響”.

18 The term is spelled as “*rnam par du yod*” by James Apple and Shinobu Apple.

19 While the vocabulary in this section is primarily excerpted from Xuanzang’s translation of the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*, it does not strictly adhere to the order of the scripture, and some terms differ from those found in the extant versions. There are even terms that are not present in the extant versions or the versions unearthed from the Dunhuang Cave, such as “俱會一處/*lhan clg ’dus te khod* (5.5.1)”, which is rendered as “同一會坐” in the extant versions, and “眾所翼從/*dge ’dun rjesu dong ba na*”, which is not found in either the extant or Dunhuang versions. Therefore, in addressing the vacant terms here, this paper endeavors to identify the most probable corresponding words within the scripture. For some terms where there is significant uncertainty, a question mark (?) is added to indicate doubt. Regarding the Tibetan vocabulary in this section, Hakamaya (1984) and Apple and Apple (2017, pp. 88–93) have provided definitive evidence that the Tibetan terminology aligns closely with the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* from the Stein Dunhuang collection.

20 The term is spelled as “*nan gyI reg cIng chags*” by James Apple and Shinobu Apple.

21 Apple and Apple (2017, p. 111) transcription as “*sang rgyas*” is incorrect.

22 The sole point of contention pertains to the term “*yl dags*” (7.4.4), which appears to contain a slight orthographic error; it should be rendered as “*yl dwags*”. However, this seemingly erroneous spelling is also attested in other Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang, as exemplified by items such as P.T. 63 and P.T. 992.

23 During the Tang and Five Dynasties period, 1 *shi* was approximately equivalent to 79 kg.

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Article

The Making of a Monk: The Training of Śrāmaṇera (Novice Monks) in Dunhuang with a Focus on Scriptural Study

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Abstract: Monastic life begins with the ordination of novice monks, who start their formal training at this stage. The education of a novice involves both general cultural studies and specialized Buddhist training. However, the focus during the novice stage is predominantly on Buddhist education, which encompasses learning monastic discipline and studying Buddhist scriptures. The Dunhuang manuscripts offer a wealth of information, providing valuable insights into the training and education of novice monks in Dunhuang during the periods of Tibetan Occupation (787–848) and Guiyi Army (851–1036).

Keywords: Śrāmaṇera; novice monks; Dunhuang; monastic education

1. Introduction

Novice monks are vital members of the monastic community, and their education and training are pivotal to the future development of the monastery. The training of a novice monk encompasses both general cultural education and specialized Buddhist education. Specifically, Buddhist education, which is the primary focus during the novice stage, includes the study of monastic discipline and Buddhist scriptures. The Dunhuang manuscripts offer a wealth of information that sheds light on the education and training of novice monks. Given the space limitation, this article will specifically focus on the study of Buddhist scriptures by novice monks in Dunhuang during the Tibetan Occupation and Guiyi Army periods.

Buddhist monastic regulations stipulate that a śrāmaṇera (novice monk) should have two mentors.¹ However, historical practices in China sometimes deviated from this norm. For instance, Yijing 義淨 (635–713) criticized the Chinese ordination ceremony, noting that “after the shaving of the head, a śrāmaṇera might temporarily rely on just one teacher” 既蒙落發，遂乃權依一師。² This practice was also observed during the late Tang Dynasty in the Dunhuang region, where the actual practice of ordination might have deviated even more from the canonical stipulations than in central China. According to the Dunhuang manuscript P. 6005, titled “An Edict Issued to Monastic Officials for the Administration of Monastic Communities in Preparation for the Vassa Residence” 釋門帖諸寺綱管令夏安居帖, it was mandated that “Monks, nuns, novice monks, and novice nuns are required to observe the summer retreat, reside in monasteries, depend on a mentor for advancing their practice and studies, and perform the thrice-daily rituals of veneration and penance” 應管僧尼沙彌及沙彌尼，並令安居住寺，依止從師，進業修習，三時禮懺。The document also notes that “some novices within the monasteries may not yet have requested a mentor” 諸寺僧尼數內沙彌，或未有請依止，indicating that while all novices were theoretically required to have a mentor, sometimes referred to as a “master upon whom one relies” (*yizhi shi* 依止師), in practice, some did not. Despite these inconsistencies, the role of the mentor remains fundamental. According to Buddhist tradition, mentorship is crucial within monastic education, as it provides primary guidance for a novice prior to full ordination, significantly shaping their cultural and spiritual growth.

The study of scriptures by novice monks, under the guidance of a master (Skt. *acārya*), can be divided into two categories: firstly, reading and reciting scriptures, and secondly, copying scriptures. In addition to this, novices also engage in learning basic Buddhist knowledge and receive training in Buddhist liturgical practices. Below, we will elaborate on each of these aspects.

2. Reading and Recitation of Buddhist Sutra

The engagement of monks in the reading of scriptures is a fundamental duty for Buddhist monastics, and their training in reciting scriptures typically commences at the time of ordination. Since novice monks initially lack literacy skills or possess only rudimentary literacy, direct engagement with classical texts is challenging. During this phase, they often rely on their mentors for oral transmission or attend recitations led by experienced monks to familiarize themselves with the scriptures. As novice monks acquire a foundational level of cultural knowledge through monastic education and other channels, they gradually transition to independent reading and study of the scriptures. In ancient China, classical texts were devoid of punctuation, necessitating that learners of literature master punctuation skills as they embarked on their scripture-reading journey. This learning process unfolds gradually, with novices inevitably encountering errors initially, necessitating corrective guidance from their mentors. Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, a passage in the preface of Chapter Eight of the *Fahua jing* 法華經 [Skt. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*; Lotus *Sūtra*] (S. 2577) elucidates this pedagogical approach:

For the benefit of those who are learning to read this scripture but are unfamiliar with parsing the sentences, I provide the punctuation marks. I do not divide sections, nor do I discuss beginnings and endings. Usually, a sentence consists of four characters. If there are sentences exceeding four characters, then I begin by punctuating them; however, sentences consisting of precisely four characters remain unpunctuated. Regarding polyphonic characters, such as “為” (*wéi*) and “為” (*wèi*), “行” (*háng*), and “行” (*xíng*), I will also add a small vermilion dot adjacent to the character in question to distinguish its intended pronunciation and usage. It is my hope that future readers of this scriptural will not misconstrue this vermilion mark as a misplaced punctuation mark. 余為初學讀此經者，不識文句，故憑點之。亦不看科段，亦不論起盡，多以四字為句。若有四字外句者，然始點之；但是四字句者，絕不加點。別為作為，別行作行。如此之流，聊復分別。後之見者，勿怪下朱言錯點也。³

In this passage, the master says he would only punctuate sentences exceeding four characters while abstaining from punctuating those with precisely four characters. This indirectly suggests that he expected his disciples to have already known the punctuation rules for sentences with four-character structures.

Novice monks are expected not only to be able to read but also to memorize extensively common and significant Buddhist scriptures such as the *Fahua jing*, *Jin'gang jing* 金剛經 [Skt. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*; Diamond *Sūtra*], and *Xin'jing* 心經 [Skt. *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*; Heart *Sūtra*]. Under the ordination system, individuals who aspire to the monastic tonsure and renunciation of secular life are required to undergo a scripture recitation examination (*shijing* 試經) conducted by the central government. Although the standards for these examinations have varied over time, the minimum requirement has typically been approximately 150 sheets, equivalent to the size of the *Fahua jing* (Wu 2024). While monks during the period of the Tibetan Occupation and the Guiyi Army were not necessarily required to undergo such examinations, memorizing scriptures became a daily practice postordination.

Among biographies of monks, numerous recorded monks demonstrated exceptional abilities, such as being capable of “memorizing five sheets a day” 日通五紙 (approximately 2295 characters),⁴ “reciting a thousand verses a day” 日誦千言⁵—achievements that were beyond the reach of ordinary monks.⁶ Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, there are two

documents directly reflecting the pace of monks' daily recitation. One such document is BD 13683, which meticulously records a monk's daily recitation of the *Weimo jing* 維摩經 [Skt. Vimalakirti *Sūtra*].

Memorize two lines of the *Weimo jing* daily. On the 4th day of the eleventh month, recite until "kezhong debao" 可眾得寶. On the 16th day of the eleventh month, memorize until "wanfan tianwang" 萬梵天王. On the first day of the twelfth month, memorize until "ershi zhangzhe zi" 爾時長者子. On the sixteenth day of the twelfth month, memorize until "ershi sheli fo" 爾時舍利佛. On the first day of the first month, memorize until "fangta pin" 方他品. On the 17th day of the first month, memorize until "dizi pin san" 弟子品三. 《維摩經》日誦兩行. 十一月四日至“可眾得寶”, 十一月十六日誦至“萬梵天王”, 十二月一日至“爾時長者子”, 十二月十六日誦至“爾時舍利佛”, 正月三日誦至“方他品”, 正月十七日誦至“弟子品三”.

Based on this document, we can calculate the person's progress in reciting the *Weimo jing*: From the second to the 16th day of the 12th month, he recited from "wan Fantian wang" 萬梵天王 to "ershi zhangzhe zi" 爾時長者子, covering 831 characters over 14 days, averaging less than 60 characters per day (approximately three lines). From the 17th day of the 12th month to the third day of the first month of the following year, he recited from "ershi shelifo" 爾時舍利佛 to "fangbian pin" 方便品 covering 474 characters over 17 days, averaging 28 characters per day (approximately two lines). From the fourth to seventeenth day of the first month, he recited from "fangbian pin" to "dizipin san" 弟子品三 covering 1006 characters over 15 days, averaging 67 characters per day (approximately four lines). Typically, he recited only approximately 60 characters daily, which is roughly three lines, closely matching the description in the document of "reciting two lines a day." At times, he recited as few as 28 characters, only half the expected goal, indicating a relatively low study intensity.

The second document, P. 3092V, is titled "Notice from the Examination Division in the Jintu Monastery on the first day of the tenth month of the *wuzi* year (928)" 戊子年十月一日淨土寺試部帖. It records the directive from the Examination Division 試部 of the Metropolitan Monastic Authorities 都僧統司, which was the supreme institution responsible for the administration of the Buddhist monastic community in the Dunhuang region, to all monasteries under their jurisdiction. It required monks to recite scriptures, disciplinary texts, and doctrinal texts twice a month (on the new moon and full moon days) and includes the recitation results for 20 individuals.

1. Dingzhi: *Jin'gang jing*. Recite until "...listeng" on the 19th day of the tenth month; recite until "jifei pusa" 即非菩薩 on the first day of the 11th month. 定志: 《金剛經》十月廿九日誦至“□□□聽”, 十一月一日誦至“即非菩薩”
2. Huishen: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until "cheng Guanshiyin" on the 19th day of the tenth month; recite until "dazizai tian" 大自在天 on the first day of the 11th month. 惠深: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至“稱觀世音”, 十一月一日誦至“大自在天.”
3. Yuanying: *Baifa lun*. Recite until "Shiru (yi) xiaocheng" on the 29th day of the tenth month. 願盈: 《百法論》十月廿九日誦至“是汝(以)小乘”
4. Yuanqing: *Baifa lun*. Recite until "ru (er)wo zhi kong" on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "hongfa lisheng" on the first day of the 11th month. 願清: 《百法論》十月廿九日誦至“如(二)我之空”, 十一月一日誦至“弘法利生”.
5. Yuanji: *Guanyin jing* 願濟: 《觀音經》
6. Fayuan: *Dabei jing: Diyi* 法緣: 《大悲經第一》
7. Yuanjiao: *Fumu enzhong jing* 願教: 《父母恩重經》
8. Huide: *Pusa jie*. Recite until "Rufa xiuxing" 如法修行 on the 29th day of the tenth month 會德: 《菩薩戒》十月廿九日誦至“如法修行”
9. Baozhu: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until "Yi he yinyuan" 以何因緣 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "Jide jietuo" 即得解脫 on the first day of the 11th month 保住: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至“以何因緣”, 十一月一日誦至“即得解脫”

10. Jieding: *Shan'e yinyuan (guo) jing*. Recite until “Bao ...” on the 29th day of the tenth month 戒定: 《善惡因緣 (果) 經》十月廿九日誦至“胞□□□□”
11. Baoxing: *Jin guangming zuisheng [wang] jing: Diyi*. Recite until “Zashi tongzi” 雜事童子 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until “Shiren dang zaoyu” on the first day of the 11th month 保行: 《金光明最勝 (王) 經第一》十月廿九日誦至“雜事童子”, 十一月一日誦至“是人當澡浴”
12. Yuanan: *Guanyin jing* 願安: 《觀音經》.
13. Yuanxiu: *Yan shoujing lun*. Recite until “Huozuo luotuo shen” 或作駱駝身 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until [...] on the first day of the 11th month 願修; 《延壽經論》十月廿九日誦至“或作駱駝身”, 十一月一日誦至.
14. Huicong: *Jingang bore boluo [mi] jing*. 惠聰: 《金剛般若波羅 (蜜) 經》
15. Yuanjing: *Jin'gang jing*. 願淨: 《金剛經》。
16. Jishao: *Duo xinjing* 繼紹: 《多心經》。
17. Yuanding: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until “Jide jietuo” 即得解脫 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until “Jiexu duanhui” 皆須斷懷 on the first day of the 11th month 原定: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至“即得解脫”, 十一月一日誦至“皆須斷懷”。
18. Yuanhui: *Qianwen* 願惠: 《千文》
19. Yongjian: *Duo xinjing* 永建: 《多心經》
20. Shengjing: *Bayang jing*. Recite until “Huoru sifu” 獲如斯福 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until “Er rheng fodao” 而成佛道 on the first day of the 11th month (some words are missing hereafter) 勝淨: 《八陽經》十月廿九日誦至“獲如斯福”, 十一月一日誦至“而成佛道”。

We can calculate the recitation progress for Yuanqing 願清, Baozhu 保住, and Baoxing 保行 as follows: Yuanqing appears to have read the *Dasheng baifa mingmen lun kaizong yiji* 大乘百法明門論開宗義記 by Tankuang 曇曠, averaging 283 characters a day (approximately 17 lines). Baozhu recited 277 characters daily (approximately 16 lines), and Baoxing managed approximately 621 characters each day (roughly 37 lines). Shengjing's 勝淨 recitations from the *Bayang jing* 八陽經 are most likely from the *Tiandi bayang shenzhou jing* 天地八陽神咒經 [Sūtra of the Eight Sun Gods of Heaven and Earth]. However, since the passages he highlighted overlap in two sections of the text, it is not possible to determine precisely how much he read, with potential sections including approximately 526 characters (approximately 31 lines), 471 characters (approximately 28 lines), 396 characters (approximately 23 lines), and 341 characters (roughly 20 lines).⁷ Nonetheless, compared to the monk in Document BD 13683, their recitation pace is significantly faster, particularly for Baozhu and Baoxing, who were intensively preparing for an exam, thus dedicating much more effort.

Although it is unclear whether the monks mentioned in these two documents were novice monks, we can still surmise that the level of novice monks was roughly similar. From the second document, we can also discern the types of scriptures that were popularly recited around the year 928 in the Dunhuang monastic community. These included the *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 [Bodhisattva Sūtra] (i.e., the “Universal Gate Chapter” of the *Lotus Sūtra*, 普門品 with over two thousand characters) by four individuals, the *Jin'gang jing* 金剛經 [Diamond Sūtra] (over five thousand characters) by three individuals, the *Dasheng baifa mingmen lun kaizong yiji* 大乘百法明門論開宗義記 (over thirty thousand characters) by two individuals, the *Duo Xinjing* 多心經 [Heart Sūtra] (260 characters) by two individuals, a five-juan version of the *Dabei jing* 大悲經 [Great Compassion Sūtra] by one person, the *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經 [The Sutra of the Profound Gratitude of Parents] (over a thousand characters) by one person, the *Shan'e yinguo jing* 善惡因果經 [Sūtra on the Causes and Effects of Good and Evil] (nearly four thousand characters) by one person, the “Golden Light Sutra of Supreme Kings” (from the title, it appears to be the version by Yijing, totaling ten juans) by one person, the *Yan shouming jing* 延壽命經 [Sūtra on Prolonging Life] (nearly a thousand characters) by one person, and the *Tiandi bayang Shenzhou jing* 天地八陽神咒經 (over four thousand characters) by one person. The scriptures they chose were generally short and commonly known texts, including some that were popular in society but de-

nounced as apocryphal in Buddhist catalogs, such as the *Tiandi baiyang Shenzhou jing*, the *Fumu enzhong jing*, and the *Yan shouming jing*.

During the process of reading scriptures independently, novice monks often encounter unfamiliar characters. Therefore, many Buddhist texts append a list of difficult characters at the end of the *juan* to facilitate the learning of readers. For novice monks, initial literacy education typically begins with the most basic texts, like the *Shangdafu* 上大夫 and others. However, the guidance from monastic schools 寺學 or mentors in this regard cannot possibly cover all the characters used in the scriptures. Thus, after moving beyond basic literacy education, the literacy development of novice monks relies more on self-study. Their tools include the lists of difficult characters found at the ends of Buddhist texts or other reference books on phonetics and meanings. The Dunhuang manuscripts have preserved valuable evidence of how they learned and recorded these difficult characters. For instance, the recto of P. 2874 contains the *Shami qishier weiyi* 沙彌七十二威儀 [Seventy-two Departments of a Novice Monk] copied by a novice, followed by a phonetic and semantic copy on the verso. Similarly, the recto of P. 2948 features the “Difficult Characters of the *Lotus Sutra*” 法華經難字 which excerpts the difficult characters from the first six *juans*. Although it starts to mention *juan* 7, it does not continue, and spaces are left between the difficult characters, likely reserved for later phonetic annotations, indicating that this manuscript was an unfinished draft. This manuscript later circulated to others, but from the handwriting, it appears to be that of a novice. This novice wrote in the blank space following the difficult characters on the recto, “Iron spear: it can be read, by the *fanqie* method, by the initial consonant of *suo* 所 and the final by that of *zhuo* 卓. It may also be written as *shuoshuo* 稍擱 “(鐵梁: 所卓反, 亦作稍擱)” Additionally, the novice continued on the verso to copy both *juans* of the *Lianhua mian jing* 蓮花面經 [Lotus Surface Sūtra] and one *juan* of the *Fo chui banniepan lüeshuo jiaojie jing* 佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經 [Brief Exhortations of the Buddha’s Parinirvāṇa Sūtra] for phonetics and meanings. According to Xu (1991), these phonetics and meanings are derived from the *Xinji zangjing yinyi suihan lu* 新集藏經音義隨函錄 [Newly Compiled Record of Phonetics and Meanings in the Tripitaka] by Kehong 可洪 (fl. 10th c.) from the later Jin Dynasty (936–947), known as *Kehong yinyi* 可洪音義 [Kehong’s Notes on Phonetics and Meanings]. From this, we also know that the novice used Kehong’s work as a reference tool for consulting difficult characters and their phonetics and meanings. Xu (1991), J. Zhang (1996), and Y. Zhang (2008) have identified seven manuscripts of the *Kehong yinyi* in the Dunhuang documents (P. 3971, S. 5508, S. 6189, BD5639, in addition to excerpts (P. 2948), and abstracts (S. 3553, Dx. 11196)). Among these, S. 3553, which exhibits child-like handwriting, likely came from the hand of a novice, similar to P. 2948. Thus, among these eight items, at least S. 3553 and P. 2948 were used by novices, illustrating the role of these phonetics and meanings in the literacy learning process during their scripture study.

Sometimes, monks gather difficult characters into collections, which serve as specialized materials to be memorized. For instance, manuscript P. 3109, known as *Lüeza nanzi* 略雜難字 [Brief List of Miscellaneous Difficult Characters], has two annotations. The first, written on the verso, dates the manuscript to the 25th day of the fifth month of a *gengyin* year 庚寅年, noting it as a document for “brief list of miscellaneous difficult characters.” The second annotation, written on the recto, dates it to the eighth year of the Taiping Xingguo era 太平興國八年, which corresponds to 983 AD. Thus, the “*gengyin* year” would be 990 AD. The inscription on the verso displays superior calligraphy compared to the difficult characters in the text. This document also includes many practice characters, suggesting that it was either initially compiled by a novice monk or used by one. Such documents, detailing difficult characters and their phonetics, are also found in other texts like *Da Baoji jing* 大寶積經 [Maharatnakuta Sūtra] (P. 3332), *Da zhuangyan lun* 大莊嚴論 [Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra] (P. 3891), and *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 [Buddha’s Former Lives] (P. 3506). These learning aids play a crucial role in the educational journey of novice monks, serving as reference guides that support their continued learning beyond the initial stages of literacy and elementary education. Therefore, transcribing difficult characters and their

phonetics was an important self-learning technique for novice monks as they advanced in their studies.

It is important to note the use of codex during the learning process. These codexes are small and convenient, making them easy to carry around. According to statistics from Jean-Pierre Drège (1979), in the Stein collection, there are 155 codexes (including 11 Tibetan codexes from the India Office Collection), 120 in the Pelliot collection (with 21 being Tibetan codexes), one codex housed at the Musée Guimet, and approximately 60 codexes in Russian collections, totaling nearly four hundred codexes, most of which have been disassembled into half-page forms. Many of these codexes were used by novice monks as practicing or study books. For example, the *Sanke fayi* 三窠法義 [*The Meanings of the Teaching of the Tripitaka*] (P. 3861) and *Xiaosheng sanke* 小乘三科 [*Three Learnings of the Small Vehicle*] (Δx. 2822) are introductory Buddhist texts primarily used by novice monks learning the basics of Buddhism and Buddhist technical terms. Additionally, P. 3823 contains many practices and miscellaneous characters; its main content consists of difficult characters from Buddhist scriptures like the *Dafanguang shilun jing* 大方廣十輪經 [Skt. *Daśacakrakṣītigarbha Sūtra*; Ten Wheels Sūtra], *Da baojijing Daban jiepan jing* 大般涅槃經 [Skt. *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*], *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 [Skt. *Damamūka nidāna sūtra*; Sūtra of the Wise and the Fool], *Bao'en jing* 報恩經, and others.

3. Copying Scriptures

After learning the basics of writing and literacy from a mentor or through monastic education, some novice monks begin to copy scriptures on their own.

The tradition of novices copying scriptures has always existed, and one of the purposes of this copying is to facilitate their own learning. According to the colophon of the Dunhuang manuscript 甘博 001, which contains the “Chapter of Conduct Accordant with the Way” 道行品 and “Chapter of Nirvāṇa” 泥洹品 of the *Faju jing* 法句經 [Skt. *Dharma-pada*; *Dharma-phrase Sūtra*], this manuscript was used by the novice Jingming 淨明 from Shengping 升平 10 (368 AD) to Xian'an 咸安 3.10.20 (373 AD).

The manuscript Δx. 1277, characterized by its notably immature calligraphy, features the *Bao cimushi en'de* 報慈母十恩德 [Sūtra on Repaying the Ten Kindnesses to the Benevolent Mother] and is likely written by a novice monk. This manuscript may have been copied either as a calligraphy exercise or for personal recitation of the sūtra. Additionally, Shangtu 上圖 119 depicts another manuscript by the novice Jielun 戒輪 from Sanjie Monastery 三界寺, specifically a copy of the *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經 [Sūtra on the Heavy Debt towards Parents] dated to the 19th day of the first month of the sixth year of Xiande 顯德 (959). Further details about Jielun's scribal activities are preserved in P. 3919. Unlike the manuscript in Shangtu 上圖 119, this manuscript is crafted in palm-leaf format, inscribed on “the 28th day of the third month of the *yiwei* year (959)” 己未年三月廿八日 of the same year as the above-mentioned manuscript. This palm-leaf manuscript comprises multiple Buddhist scriptures, including “Chapter of Buddha's mother” 佛母品 of the *Daban niepan jing*, *Foshuo fomu enzhong jing* (copied twice), *Foshuo pusa xiuxing sifa jing* 佛說菩薩修行四法經, *Foshuo shixiang jing* 佛說十想經 [Sūtra on Ten Contemplations], *Foshuo fanjie zuibao qingzhong jing* 佛說犯戒罪報輕重經 [Sūtra on the Light and Heavy Retributions for Violating Precepts], *Foshuo wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing* 佛說溫室洗浴眾僧經 [Sūtra on Bathing Monks in the Wet Lodge], *Foshuo jiaju lingyan fodingzun sheng tuoluoni jing* 佛說加句靈驗佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經 [Miraculous Addendum to the Buddha's Crown Supreme Victorious Dhāraṇī Sūtra], *Da weiyi jing qingwen shuo* 大威儀經請問說 [The Great Deportment Sūtra: Questions and Answers]. According to P. 3919, Jielun copied at least 67 palm leaves of scriptures, with only 17 leaves currently extant, indicating a significant volume of work. The writing on the last leaf notes, “Received and upheld by Shanhuai of Sanjie Monastery” 三界寺善惠受持, suggesting that these scriptures might have been copied for Shanhuai, or possibly transferred to him under various circumstances. These documents indicate that Jielun's calligraphy skills had significantly developed, a testament to his extensive training in this art. It is particularly notable that in the manuscript of the *Foshuo*

jiaju lingyan Fodingzun sheng tuoluoni jing, Jielun identifies himself as “Monk Jielun of the Guanyin Hall of Sanjie Monastery” 三界寺觀音院僧戒輪, linking him to the Guanyin Hall where the renowned monk Daozhen 道真, who had led the restoration of the monastery’s scripture collection, was recently in charge.⁸ Xiubo Wang (2014) has compiled multiple instances of scripture copying by monks during Daozhen’s tenure at Sanjie Monastery, supporting the view that Daozhen’s restoration efforts were well-supported by the monastic community. This support likely contributed to a significant enhancement of the educational quality within the monastery, with Jielun exemplifying the novices of the time.

The scripture exemplars used by novice monks for copying scriptures may have been ones that adhered to standardized formats. For example, in manuscript P. 3919, which Jielun transcribed and includes the *Wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing*, there was an initial omission in the text. There, the manuscript writes: 一者、四大無病, 所生常安, 勇武丁不著, 和為人所敬。 However, Jielun missed some content between “勇武丁” and “不著。” Upon realizing the mistake, he corrected it by adding the omitted text alongside the main text, which states: 健, 眾所敬仰; 二者、所生清淨, 面目端正, 塵水。 The omitted content exactly filled seventeen characters. Given that each line containing seventeen characters was the standard format for scriptural copying during the medieval period, this indicates that Jielun was using exemplars that followed the standard copying format at the time.

Many Dunhuang manuscripts were constantly exchanged and circulated. Typically, novice monks could acquire these manuscripts from a variety of sources, including monasteries, their mentors, other monks, or patrons. However, according to the manuscripts specifically identified as having been copied by novice monks (excluding disciplinary texts) that I have collected, the vast majority were personally transcribed by the novices themselves, rather than being acquired from external sources.

Among the scriptures commonly transcribed by novice monks, the *Fumu enzhong jing*, *Jin guangming zuishengwang jing*, *Bayang shenzhou jing*, *Guanshiyin jing*, and *Wuliang shouzong yaojing* were particularly prevalent. This selection aligns with the scriptures that are known to be popular in the Dunhuang area.⁹

Occasionally, novice monks would also undertake commissions to copy scriptures for others. For example, BD 6261 appears to be a copy of the *Guanyin jing* created by novice monk Lingjin 靈進 from Liantai Monastery 蓮臺寺 for individuals, such as Zhang Haisheng 張海晟. These copying tasks are typically not performed for free. Indeed, engaging in paid copying was already a known practice among student (*Xueshilang* 學士郎) copiers. Earning a fee for copying scriptures might have been a common practice among these *Xueshilang*. For instance, BD 1199 includes a poem by a *Xueshilang* that reads, “The book is written today, why then no payment made? What kind of scoundrel leaves, without a backward glance?” 寫書今日了, 因何不送錢? 誰家無賴漢, 和回面不相看。 Similarly, S. 692 features a poem at the end of the “Qin Wife’s Lament” 秦婦吟 stating, “The text is written today, for it five bushels of rice. Credit is unattainable, it remains my own misfortune” (今日寫書了, 合有五斗米。高代(貸)不可得, 還是自身災). If these poems are indicative of local rates in Dunhuang, then a student copier’s fee was approximately five bushels of rice. According to Zheng Binglin’s estimates (Zheng 1997), the market price for a Dunhuang manuscript was approximately equivalent to one bolt of wheat per *juan*, equivalent to ten bushels of wheat. If the price mentioned in the poems is accurate for a single *juan*, then the fees charged by student copiers might have been roughly half of what professional copiers commanded.

4. Learning Buddhist Knowledge

While studying basic scriptures, novice monks are also required to learn fundamental Buddhist concepts and terminologies. Once they have gained a sufficient understanding of Buddhism, they move on to studying more in-depth commentaries to undergo advanced Buddhist training.

Paul Magnin (1984) has carried out preliminary research and organized five types of Buddhist texts that use catechistic format, which include *Sanbao sidi wenda* 三寶四諦問答 [Questions and Answers on the Three Jewels and the Four Noble Truths], *Xiaosheng sanke*

小乘三科 [The Three Categories of Small Vehicle], *Sanke fayi* 三窠法義 [The Meaning of the Teaching of the Three Categories], and *Famen mingyi ji* 法門名義集 [Collection of the Words and Meanings of the Dharma Gate]. Daishun Ueyama (1990), in his study of Dunhuang manuscripts, proposed the notion of “Buddhist Doctrinal Outline” 佛教綱要書 to describe texts that introduce fundamental Buddhist knowledge.¹⁰ Building on Ueyama Daishun’s groundwork, Fapeng Yang (2010) has systematically catalogued similar literature from Dunhuang manuscripts, naming them “Buddhist primer” 佛教入門讀物. He views these as the main educational materials used in monastic schools. Although his perspective that these documents are the principal material in monastic education is debatable, his recognition of their value as introductory readings for Buddhism is insightful. These texts, though not necessarily part of the monastic school curriculum, include the most basic Buddhist concepts and terminologies, indicating that they were likely used by novices and other beginners in Buddhism. According to Yang’s classification, these documents include: *Sabao sidi* 三寶四諦 (P. 2434, P. 3450, P. 2073V, P. 4627, S. 6108, S. 4236, S. 2669V, S. 1674, BD 7572, BD 6230, *Xiaosheng sanke* 小乘三科 (P. 2841, P. 4805, S. 5531, BD 3274, BD 7493, BD 7082, BD 6858, BD 8466, ㄉx. 223, ㄉx. 708), *Dasheng sanke* 大乘三科 (P. 3861, BD 7902), *Sansheng wuxing* 三乘五性 and *Wusheng sanxing* 五乘三性 (BD 791), BD 8024), *Shijian zongjian* 世間宗見 (BD 8024, BD 5889, Ryūkoku University 535) and *Famen mingyi ji* (P. 2119, P. 2128, P. 2317, P. 3008, P. 3009, P. 5958, P. 3001V, S. 6160, P. 4943, S. 1520, BD 7268, BD 4483, and BD 2889).¹¹ Novice monks likely acquired their foundational understanding of Buddhist cosmology and other basic concepts through guidance from their mentors, lectures, and these introductory texts.

The *She Dasheng lun* 攝大乘論 [Skt. *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*; Compendium of the Great Vehicle], a fundamental treatise of the Yogācāra tradition, is also a significant scripture in the Chinese Yogācāra tradition. This text requires a solid foundational understanding before one can engage with its teachings. The manuscript S. 2048, which contains the “first *juan* of the *She Dasheng lun*” 攝論章卷第一, includes a notation that reads: “On the 28th of the eighth month of Renshou 1 (601 AD), novice monk Shanzang from Chongjiao Monastery in Guazhou copied this commentary at Biancai Monastery in the capital. Shanzang completed this with the intention of ensuring its circulation for future generations and noted that the verification and correction of the text are now complete” (仁壽元年 (601年) 八月廿八日, 瓜州崇教寺沙彌善藏, 在京辯才寺寫《攝論疏》, and 流通末代, 比字校竟). In doing so, Shanzang not only facilitated his own study but also expressed the hope that the text would be preserved and transmitted through the ages.

Alongside the *She Dasheng lun*, the *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 [Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*] is another seminal text from the Yogacara tradition. During the periods of the Tibetan Occupation and Guiyi Army, influential figures such as Tankuang 曇曠, Facheng 法成, and Fajing 法鏡 spurred a resurgence of the Yogacara tradition in the Dunhuang area, making the study and preaching of the Yogācāra texts a popular trend. Tankuang, for instance, preached in Dunhuang for many years, each session drawing large crowds of monks from various monasteries to listen and learn. Among the many attendees were numerous novice monks. Novices Hongzhen 弘真 and Yizhen 一真, for example, attended these sessions multiple times and may even have transcribed a complete copy of the *Yujia shidi lun*. Specifically, the manuscripts Hongzhen copied include BD 1087 and BD 1857 of the *Yujia shidi lun*. Yizhen’s lecture notes include *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論分門記 (S. 6788), *Yujia dilun: juan yi* 瑜伽師地論卷一 (Collection of Yamamoto Teijirō 山本悌二郎), *Yujia shidi lun: juan si* 瑜伽師地論卷四 (BD 14026), *Yujia shidilun: juan yi liu* 瑜伽師地論卷一六 (P. 3940), and *Yujia shidi lun juan sayi* 瑜伽師地論卷卅一 (BD 14032) (see Daishun Ueyama (2010)).

Besides the Yogācāra tradition, Chan tradition was also highly prevalent in Dunhuang, with a particular emphasis on practicing both the Northern and Southern Chan schools. This Chan culture influenced even the novice monks. For instance, on the 23rd day of the second month of a *dingmao* 丁卯 year (847), novice monk Minghui 明慧 copied the text *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men* 大乘無生方便門 [Mahāyāna Unborn Expedient Means], a key document of the Northern Chan school. Along with this text, he also transcribed a

poem that praises the Chan approach: “The Buddha, with a stature of ten and a half Chinese *chi*, commands reverence from people of the past, present, and future. The Dharma he preached represents an eternal truth that transcends time. To attain the state of being free from afflictions, it is imperative that one begins with the mind, as this is the foundational point for all endeavors” (丈六誰跡三世欽, 菩提理絕去來今。欲昇彼岸無學道, 一切都緣草計心). This poem expresses the direct approach to realizing Buddha-nature through the mind, as encapsulated in the motto “realizing the mind and seeing one’s nature” 明心見性, which aligns closely with the approach of the Northern Chan school. Although it is unclear if Minghui wrote this poem himself, his transcription of it suggests his deep engagement with Chan studies. Additionally, the high quality of the calligraphy in this poem also indicates Minghui’s advanced skill level.

5. Ritual Training

Besides studying the precepts and scriptures, novice monks also learn various religious rites under the guidance of their mentors, primarily focusing on reciting scriptures and performing penitential rites. Penitential rites are a core Buddhist activity within the monastic community, based on the belief that these rites can absolve sins. For the rulers of the Guiyi Army, which was a governing authority that ruled over the Dunhuang region from 848 to 1036, monks primarily served to bless the nation, so their main duties involved scripture recitation and penitential rites. This training begins during the novice stage. Document P. 6005, titled “*An Edict Issued to Monastic Officials for the Administration of Monastic Communities in Preparation for the Vassa Residence*”, indicates that novices must perform “penitential rites at three specific times each day” 三時禮懺 under their mentor’s supervision.

Another relevant document is S. 1604, titled “*Tianfu ernian siyue ershiba ri dusneg-tong Xianzhao tie zhu sengni gangguan tuzhong deng*” 天復二年四月二十八日都僧統賢照帖諸僧尼綱管徒眾等 [On the 28th day of the fourth month of Tianfu 2, a notice from Xianzhao, the superintendent of monks, to all monks, nuns, and their respective communities]. This notice requires the religious community, including monks, nuns, male and female novices, to “intensify their efforts” 勤加事業 during the summer by “reciting the one-juan Da Foming jing every night” (每夜禮《大佛名經》一卷). Although no complete manuscript of the Da Foming jing 大佛名經 [Buddha Name Sūtra] written by novices from the Guiyi Army period has been identified, many practice writings on the verso of manuscripts feature Buddha names from this sūtra, such as “南無無無東方善德” from P. 2483, along with others like “南無海德光明南南明” from S. 2104 and “南無光佛” from S. 2669. Besides the Da Foming jing, Dunhuang manuscripts also include texts like the Tiantai lichan wen 天台禮懺文 [Penitential Rites Text of Tiantai School]. Novices have copied similar penitential writings, such as in BD 5727, containing the Lichan wen 禮懺文 [Penitential Rites Text], handwritten by a novice from the Pure Land Monastery 淨土寺 on the 25th day of the tenth month of Changxing 長興 5 (934), a jiwu year 甲午年.

Besides penitential rites, monks often use eulogies during various religious activities, such as funerals. Document P. 2483, titled “*Buddhist Eulogies*” 佛家贊文, contains several eulogies, including “Eulogy for Ascending to the Pure Land” 歸極樂去贊, “Hermitage Eulogy” 蘭若贊, “Amitabha Eulogy” 阿彌陀贊, “Prince’s Five Watches of the Night” 太子五更轉, “Eulogy for Rebirth in the Pure Land” 往生極樂贊, “Mount Wutai Eulogy” 五臺山贊, “Precious Bird Eulogy” 寶鳥贊, “Buddha’s Sand Impression Eulogy” 印沙佛文, “Facing the Void Eulogy” 臨曠文, “Mahāyāna Pure Land Eulogy” 大乘淨土贊. In the colophon at the end, an individual named Chouyan 丑延 states he personally wrote this on “the 27th day of the fourth month of a *jimao* year” 己卯歲四月廿七日, while a colophon at the beginning written by the individual Baoji 保集 states that “he wrote one copy of the personal tribute with a devoted heart” 發信心寫《親贊文》一本 on “the third day of the 12th month of the fourth year of Taiping xingguo, a *jimao* year” 太平興國四年己卯歲十二月三日. Chouyan’s note is dated earlier, in the same year as Baoji’s. However, the handwriting on the front closely resembles that of Baoji’s inscription, suggesting that the manuscript was

originally by Baoji and Chouyan might have falsely claimed it later to assert ownership and done so by predating his colophon to that of Baoji. This manuscript includes texts for various rituals such as “daochang fashi” 道場法事 (mandala ceremonies) (e.g., “Hermitage Eulogy”), funeral rites (e.g., “Facing the Void Eulogy”), and “Buddha sand impression” rites (e.g., “Buddha’s Sand Impression Eulogy”), indicating its broad utility. Chouyan’s possession of this manuscript suggests he was also learning these rites.

Document S. 5892 is a compilation copied by the novice monk Fading 法定 from Sanjie Monastery on the 30th day of the *jiayu* year (974?), including “Entering the Mountain Eulogy” 入山讚文, “Buddha Name Sūtra” 佛名經, and “Rite of the Dharma-body without Ideation” 無想法身禮. Copying these ritual texts was part of the learning process for conducting these rites.

6. Conclusions

This article primarily discusses the educational framework in Buddhism, detailing the education and training received by novice monks. However, it is crucial to recognize that not all novices have access to such religious education. According to our analysis of literacy rates among the Dunhuang monastic community, only approximately fifty percent might have this opportunity. Many novices receive their early education within the monastic school settings. For those who could not attend these schools, they may still receive some basic education from their mentors. For novice nuns, all their early education might depend entirely on their mentors. One document attesting to the early education is P. 2995, transcribed by a “Xushi Lang”, includes a primer on surnames characteristic of the Dunhuang region,¹² followed by a poem that emphasizes the importance of this basic education: “Novices naturally know much, what does another’s name matter? From start to finish, no surname is irrelevant. Those who fail to learn, risk their novice heads being broken.” (沙彌天生道理多, 人名不得那(奈)人何? 從頭至尾沒閑姓, 忽若學字不得者, 打你沙彌頭腦破). This illustrates that mentors provide basic education, including lessons on surnames, to novices.

As for the progression of education for novices, it does not necessarily follow a clear sequence between basic education in monastic schools and specialized religious education from mentors. In particular, the study of monastic precepts might start as early as their ordination. However, religious studies requiring literacy typically begin only after novices have received early education in monastic schools and have developed some literacy and culture.

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Notes

¹ Similar expressions can be found in the *Sifenlv Shanfanbuque Xingshi Chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 [Simplified and Amended Handbook of the Four-Part Vinaya] authored by Daoxuan (596–667) of the Tang Dynasty. For further reference, see T no. 1804, vol. 40, p. 25.

² *Nanhai jigui nei fazhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 [A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago] authored by Yijing (635–713), T no. 2125, vol. 54, p. 219.

- ³ The punctuation system utilized in contemporary books is not found in ancient Chinese literature, or rather, standard ancient Chinese books seldom employed complex punctuation marks. However, in the Dunhuang manuscripts, we have discovered a variety of more enriched symbols. For more on this topic, refer to Imre Galambos (2014).
- ⁴ See *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Tang Dynasty] authored by Daoxuan (596–667), T no. 2060, vol. 50, p. 537.
- ⁵ See *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty] authored by Zanning (919–1001), T no. 2061, vol. 50, p. 746.
- ⁶ Regarding the daily curriculum of monks as recorded in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, see Zürcher (1989).
- ⁷ I calculate the number of characters based on the texts in their canonical versions, discounting other versions found among Dunhuang manuscripts.
- ⁸ Daozhen’s role as the abbot of the Guanyin Hall of the Sanjie Monastery is inferred from P. 2614, known as “Chongxiu daxiang bei guku tibi bingxu” 重修南大像北古窟題壁並序 [Renovation of the Southern Great Statue and Northern Ancient Grottoes: Inscription and Preface].
- ⁹ For the statistics regarding the popular scriptures in Dunhuang in different epochs, see Lin (2013).
- ¹⁰ Although Ueyama Daishun primarily discusses the ‘Buddhist Outline’ texts in Chinese manuscripts, his work also touched upon some Tibetan counterparts found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.
- ¹¹ Paul Magnin (1984) has focused on these documents.
- ¹² The content most characteristic of Dunhuang includes the listing of the nine common non-Chinese surnames: 張王李趙, 天下不少。殷薛唐鄧, 令狐正等。安康石平, 羅白米史, 曹何闕院...

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Article

The Strategic Use of “雜” (zá) in Xuanzang’s Translations

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Abstract: The character “雜” (zá), commonly found in Chinese Buddhist literature, typically conveys the meaning of “mixed” or “varied”. However, in the translations of the renowned Tang dynasty translator Xuanzang, its usage stands out both in frequency and distinctiveness, setting his work apart from that of other translators. Terms traditionally conveyed using “不淨” (bù jìng, “impure”) or “穢” (huì, “filth”) were deliberately transformed by Xuanzang into “雜染” (zá rǎn, “mixed defilement”) and “雜穢” (zá huì, “mixed filth”), with “雜” nearly becoming synonymous with impurity. Examining the original meaning of “雜”, we find that it primarily signifies “to gather” or “miscellaneous”, typically carrying a neutral connotation. However, when used as an adjective describing a state, “雜” transcends its neutral sense of “various” or “diverse” to encompass notions of impurity, disorder, and deviation from normative standards—often with negative implications. Building on this understanding, it becomes clear that the abstract opposition between purity and impurity in the doctrinal meanings of Buddhist scriptures was reinterpreted by Xuanzang as a concrete opposition between “清淨” (qīng jìng, “purity”) and “雜穢” (mixed filth). This reinterpretation allowed “雜” to describe anything defiling the mind or carrying negative overtones—even when the original Sanskrit text did not explicitly indicate such a notion—thereby constituting a strategic substitution in translation. Furthermore, Xuanzang and his contemporaries frequently employed “雜” as a functional component within disyllabic compounds that collectively expressed negative meanings. Some terms containing “雜” thus cannot be understood simply as “mixed” or “varied”; instead, “雜” functions as a negative marker, reinforcing unfavorable connotations. This paper provides a focused case study on the lexical strategies of ancient Buddhist translators, illustrating how particular concepts—including 雜—were leveraged to reshape doctrinal content. In doing so, it highlights the deliberate linguistic and interpretative choices made by translators like Xuanzang, offering insights into their motivations and the cultural-linguistic contexts that framed their work.

Keywords: Xuanzang; Chinese Buddhist translations; Kumārajīva; Paramārtha

1. Introduction

Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), one of the most renowned translators in ancient China, profoundly shaped the history of Chinese Buddhism through his meticulous and influential translations. According to the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (開元釋教錄), a Buddhist catalog compiled by Zhisheng 智昇 during the Tang dynasty, Xuanzang translated 75 texts comprising a total of 1335 volumes. His corpus includes seminal works, such as the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* (大般若波羅蜜多經, *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*), the *Yuqie shidi lun* (瑜伽師地論, *Yogācārabhūmi*), and the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* (說無垢稱經, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*), all of which have

had an enduring impact on Chinese Buddhist thought and practice. Xuanzang's translations are celebrated for their fidelity to the Sanskrit originals, a feature often emphasized in modern scholarship.¹ Furthermore, Xuanzang is credited with establishing five key translation principles,² which have had a profound and lasting influence on the history of Buddhist translation in China. These principles not only guided his own translation efforts but also shaped subsequent Buddhist translation methodologies.

Before Xuanzang, Chinese Buddhist history was marked by the contributions of several eminent translators, such as An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 2nd century), Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 3rd century), Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa, 239–316), and Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413). Xuanzang's translations not only built upon the work of these predecessors but also introduced notable innovations that reflected his rigorous approach to Buddhist philology. By comparing parallel versions of the same scriptures, we can trace the deliberate and nuanced choices made by different translators.

One notable linguistic innovation in Xuanzang's translations is his extensive use of the character “雜” (zá). His works exhibit a remarkably high frequency of this character, making it a distinctive hallmark of his translation style.

While the following data may not be entirely precise, it provides valuable insight into this linguistic pattern. A statistical analysis of the CBETA database reveals that Xuanzang's works contain an astonishing 5130 instances of the character “雜”, far surpassing other major Buddhist figures. By comparison, Chengguan 澄觀 used it 2116 times, Daoxuan 道宣 1249 times, and Kuiji 窺基 1228 times. To further contextualize this pattern, we examined some of the most renowned Buddhist translators. Kumārajīva used “雜” only 678 times, Paramārtha 真諦 297 times, and Amoghavajra 不空 a mere 179 times.³ Naturally, these figures are influenced by various factors, such as the thematic focus of the texts and the overall volume of each translator's corpus. However, even when accounting for these variables, the exceptionally high frequency of “雜” in Xuanzang's translations stands out as a defining linguistic feature, highlighting a distinctive aspect of his translation approach.

Moreover, “雜” not only appears frequently in Xuanzang's works but also takes on a unique meaning that does not fully correspond to its Sanskrit equivalent, *saṃkleśa*. This raises an important question: why did Xuanzang favor this character in his translations?

Beyond its standalone usage, “雜” also forms compound terms, such as “雜染”. Modern scholars have extensively explored the opposition between “雜染” and “清淨” (purity) in Yogācāra thought (Takaoka 2003; Azami 2002, 2001; Ikeda 1997; Ujike 1970; Yasui 1954). However, little attention has been given to a fundamental question: why is the opposite of “清淨” not simply “染污” (defilement) or “不淨” (impurity), but specifically “雜染”?

The answer to these questions lies in Xuanzang's deliberate and nuanced lexical choices, reflecting his efforts to convey doctrinal subtleties in his translations. This suggests that his preference for “雜” was not merely a stylistic tendency but a conscious attempt to shape Buddhist discourse in Chinese, distinguishing his translations from those of his predecessors.

This paper first identifies the specialized usages of “雜” in Xuanzang's translations, examining its neutral and negative connotations within Chinese literature. It then investigates underlying linguistic and interpretative considerations that may have influenced Xuanzang's choice of this term.

By analyzing this subtle yet revealing strategy, this study seeks to illuminate the complex factors that shaped the linguistic choices of ancient Buddhist translators. Through Xuanzang's use of “雜”, we gain a deeper understanding of how translators navigated the interplay between fidelity to the original texts and the interpretative demands of Buddhist exegesis.

2. The Unique Usage of “雜” in Xuanzang’s Translations

In Chinese Buddhist translations, the character “雜” often corresponds to Sanskrit terms, such as Skt. *miśra*, *vaicitrya*, *viśva*, and *saṃbhinna*, which commonly convey notions of “mixing” or “variety” (Hirakawa 1997, pp. 1229–30). In some of Xuanzang’s translations, such as the *Shuo wugoucheng jing*, “雜” is also used to render Sanskrit terms, including *saṃbheda*, *sārdhaṃ*, *ākīrṇa*, and *saṃsṛṣṭa*. In these instances, these usages of “雜” appear semantically appropriate within their respective contexts.

However, some of Xuanzang’s translations exhibit a distinctive and strategic application of “雜”. A notable example is the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, which has three Chinese translations: *Weimojie jing* (維摩詰經), translated by Zhi Qian⁴ between 222 and 254 CE; *Weimojie suoshuo jing* (維摩詰所說經), translated by Kumārajīva in 406 CE; and *Shuo wugoucheng jing* (說無垢稱經), translated by Xuanzang in 650 CE. Among these versions, Xuanzang’s translation demonstrates a significantly higher frequency of the term “雜” compared to the other two.⁵

In Xuanzang’s rendition, “雜” is frequently combined with other Chinese characters to form disyllabic compounds, such as “雜染” (*zá rǎn*, “mixed defilement”) and “雜穢” (*zá huì*, “mixed filth”). However, the meanings conveyed by these compounds do not always align with the semantic intent or phrasing of the Sanskrit parallel texts. This marked increase in the usage of “雜”, along with the formation of novel compounds, reflects a distinctive linguistic and conceptual approach in Xuanzang’s translations.

2.1. “雜染” (Mixed Defilement)

The exact origins of the term “雜染” cannot be precisely determined, but it became increasingly prevalent during the Tang dynasty, particularly in the translations of Xuanzang. The Skt. *aśubha* (“impure” or “not pure”), which earlier translators, such as Zhi Qian and Kumārajīva, rendered as “不淨” (*bù jìng*, “impurity”) or “穢” (*huì*, “filth”), was systematically translated by Xuanzang as “雜染”. This shift in terminology reflects a deliberate reconfiguration of semantic nuances. For example, in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (Vkn), the following passages illustrate Xuanzang’s distinctive usage of “雜染”:

Vkn: *na śubho na aśubhaḥ* (neither pure nor impure).

Zhi Qian: “無淨無不淨”⁶ (neither pure nor impure).

Kumārajīva: “非淨非穢”⁷ (neither pure nor filthy).

Xuanzang: “非雜染非清淨”⁸ (neither mixed defilement nor purity).

Vkn: (no corresponding Sanskrit phrase).

Zhi Qian: (no corresponding translation).

Kumārajīva: “是淨是垢”⁹ (this is purity, this is defilement).

XuanZang: “此是雜染, 此是清淨”¹⁰ (this is mixed defilement, this is purity).¹¹

These examples reveal Xuanzang’s systematic introduction of 雜染 as a doctrinal term, distinct from the earlier translations. Unlike 不淨 (impurity) and 穢 (filth), which primarily denote physical or moral uncleanness, 雜染 emphasizes a state of contamination or defilement resulting from intermixture.

Xuanzang’s juxtaposition of “雜染” with “清淨” (*qīng jìng*, “purity”) is particularly evident in his translation of *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (大般若波羅蜜多經):

時, 舍利子復白佛言: “世尊! 如是清淨本無雜染。”佛言: “如是畢竟淨故。”¹²
(At that time, Śāriputra again addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One! Such is the purity, without any mixed defilement”. The Buddha responded, “Indeed, because it is ultimately pure”).

佛告善現：“於汝意云何？諸像頗有真實修道，依彼修道有離雜染得清淨不？”¹³
(*The Buddha said to Śāriputra, “What do you think? Do these images have any true ability to cultivate the path? Can one rely on them to cultivate the path, abandon defilements, and attain purity?”*).

In other words, meanings that could originally be conveyed by terms such as “不淨” or “穢” are reinterpreted and transformed by Xuanzang into the term “雜染”.

2.2. “雜穢” (Mixed Filth)

Another noteworthy example of Xuanzang’s translation strategy is his use of “雜穢”. In secular literature, the term “雜穢” can refer to anything impure,¹⁴ but in Buddhist scriptures, the term tends to be semantically closer to “穢”, often referring to unclean substances, such as excrement. In *Miaofa lianhua jing* (妙法蓮華經, *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*), “雜穢” corresponds to Skt. *uccāra*¹⁵, meaning filth or excretion.

The following examples clearly illustrate how the Skt. *apariśuddha* (impure), which was translated as “不淨” by both Zhi Qian and Kumārajīva, was rendered by Xuanzang as “雜穢”. Similarly, Skt. *pariśuddha* (pure), which Zhi Qian translated as “淨” (pure), was rendered by Xuanzang as “無雜” (wú zá, “without mixture”).

Vkn: yadi yādṛṣī cittapariśuddhis tādṛṣī bodhisatvasya buddhakṣetrapariśuddhiḥ sambhavati, tan mā āhaiva bhagavataḥ śākyamuner bodhisatvacaryāṃ carataś cittam apariśuddhaṃ yenedaṃ buddhakṣetram evam apariśuddhaṃ samdṛśyate. (If it is true that the bodhisattva’s purification of his buddha-domain is commensurate with the purification of his mind, is that not saying that this buddha-domain appears as impure as it does because the Exalted One Sakyamuni’s mind was not purified when he pursued his bodhisattva practice?).¹⁶

Zhi Qian: “以意淨故得佛國淨，我世尊本為菩薩時意豈不淨，而是佛國不淨若此。”¹⁷ (Because the mind is pure, the Buddha-land becomes pure. When our World Honored One was a bodhisattva, was his mind not pure? Yet this Buddha-land was impure in such a way).

Kumārajīva: “若菩薩心淨則佛土淨者，我世尊本為菩薩時意豈不淨，而是佛土不淨若此。”¹⁸ (If a bodhisattva’s mind is pure, then the Buddha-land becomes pure. When our World Honored One was a bodhisattva, was his mind not pure? Yet this Buddha-land was impure in such a way).

Xuanzang: “若諸菩薩心嚴淨故佛土嚴淨，而我世尊行菩薩時，心不嚴淨故，是佛土雜穢若此。”¹⁹ (If bodhisattvas wholly purify their minds, then the Buddha-land becomes wholly purified. However, when our World Honored One was practicing as a bodhisattva, his mind was not purified, and so this Buddha-land was mixed with filth in such a way).

Vkn: prakāśā bodhiḥ svabhāvapariśuddhā (enlightenment is shining, intrinsically pure).

Zhi Qian: “明哉！佛自然已淨。”²⁰ (Illustrious indeed! The Buddha is naturally pure).

Kumārajīva: (none).

Xuanzang: “明顯是菩提，自性無雜故。”²¹ (Illuminated is bodhi, as its nature is free from mixture).

In the first example, “不淨” is distinctly replaced by “雜穢”. In the second example, while the Sanskrit term primarily conveys the idea of purity, Xuanzang opts for a negative construction, rendering it as “無雜”.²² This shift illustrates that in Xuanzang’s translations, the original opposition between purity and impurity (*pariśuddha* vs. *apariśuddha*) is transformed into an opposition between purity (清淨) and mixture (雜穢 or 雜). In this context, “雜” nearly becomes synonymous with impurity.

In summary, while the traditional view holds that Xuanzang's translations are more rigorous in adhering to the Sanskrit originals, these examples demonstrate that this is not always the case. Rather than translating Skt. *aśubhaḥ/apariśuddha* as “不清淨” (impure), Xuanzang systematically introduced terms like “雜染” and “雜穢”, reflecting his particular interpretation of impurity as arising from the mixture.

2.3. Xuanzang's Substitution of Terms with “雜”-Based Expressions

Notably, Xuanzang's use of “雜” was neither incidental nor unintentional. A comparison of different translations of the same scripture reveals that Xuanzang deliberately replaced terms used by earlier translators, with a distinct focus on forming compounds with “雜” to reinterpret and refine negative descriptions. For example, Xuanzang's *She dasheng lun ben* (攝大乘論本, *Mahāyāna-saṃgrahaśāstra*) represents a later translation of the same text previously translated by Paramārtha真諦 (499–569) as *She dasheng lun* (攝大乘論). A detailed comparison reveals that while Xuanzang's translation closely resembles Paramārtha's in structure and content, he made deliberate modifications to certain key terms. These changes provide insight into Xuanzang's unique translation strategy, particularly his tendency to introduce “雜染” as a substitute for earlier terms such as “染污” (*rān wū*, “defilement”), “不淨” (impure), and “煩惱” (*fán nǎo*, “afflictions”).

Paramārtha: “若離此名相所立阿黎耶識，不淨品、淨品等皆不成就。煩惱不淨品、業不淨品、生不淨品、世間淨品、出世淨品等皆不成就。云何煩惱不淨品不成就？”²³ (*If the Ālaya-vijñāna [Storehouse Consciousness] is not established in terms of its name and form, then neither the impure nor the pure aspects can be accomplished. The impure aspects related to afflictions, actions, and existence, as well as the pure aspects of the worldly and transcendental realms, cannot be accomplished. Why is it that the impure aspect of afflictions cannot be accomplished?*).

Xuanzang: “由若遠離如是安立阿賴耶識，雜染清淨皆不得成。謂煩惱雜染，若業雜染，若生雜染皆不成故；世間清淨，出世清淨亦不成故。云何煩惱雜染不成？”²⁴ (*Because if the Ālaya-vijñāna is not established in this way, neither defilement nor purification can be accomplished. Specifically, the defilements related to afflictions, actions, and existence cannot be accomplished; nor can the purity of the worldly or the transcendental realms be accomplished. Why is it that the defilement of afflictions cannot be accomplished?*).²⁵

The examples listed above illustrate that Xuanzang systematically replaces earlier terms with “雜”-based expressions. This deliberate substitution reflects his thoughtful approach and careful consideration in conveying nuanced meanings through his translations. A closer examination of parallel translations reveals a pattern of lexical substitution, emphasizing Xuanzang's deliberate linguistic modifications. The following table presents a structured comparison of his key substitutions.

Table 1 demonstrates that Xuanzang's deliberate lexical substitutions—particularly the systematic use of “雜” in expressions like “雜染” and “雜穢”—constitute a distinctive and intentional translation strategy, rather than incidental linguistic variation. By recasting “不淨” and “煩惱” as states arising from intermixture, Xuanzang reshaped Buddhist doctrinal discourse to emphasize the causal and composite nature of defilement, reflecting a clear alignment with Yogācāra thought.

Table 1. Xuanzang’s replacement of terms used by preceding translators.

| Text | Sanskrit | Terms Used by Preceding Translators | Terms Used by Xuanzang |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra</i> | <i>āmiṣa-kāyāḥ</i> | 思欲身 (Zhi Qian, Kumārajīva) | 雜穢身 |
| | <i>saṃbhinna-pralāpaḥ</i> ²⁶ | 無義語 (Kumārajīva) | 雜穢語 |
| | <i>vivakṣitaṃ tat pārūṣyam</i> | 無義語, 非應語 (Paramārtha) | 雜穢語 |
| | <i>alpāyūṣāṃ jantūnām</i> | 微細眾生 (Paramārtha) | 雜類生 |
| | <i>bahu vaktavyaṃ</i> | 多言 (Paramārtha) | 言論繁雜 |
| <i>Abhidharm akośabhāṣya</i> ²⁷ | <i>anākulaṃ</i> | 濫 (Paramārtha) | 雜亂 |
| | <i>vyākula</i> | 亂 (Paramārtha) | 雜亂 |
| | <i>avyākulas</i> | 過亂 (Paramārtha) | 雜亂 |
| | <i>mala-palvale</i> | 不淨之器 (Paramārtha) | 雜穢 |
| <i>Mahāyānasamgrahaśāstra</i> | | 不淨, 煩惱, 染污 (Paramārtha) | 雜染 |

However, to fully grasp the rationale behind Xuanzang’s nuanced approach, it is crucial to first examine the original, predominantly neutral meanings and various applications of “雜” in Chinese secular and Buddhist literature, as will be discussed in the following section.

3. The Neutral Connotations of “雜”

3.1. The Role of “雜” in Secular Texts

According to the *Shuowen jiezi* (說文解字), the original meaning of “雜” is defined as “the combination of five colors, derived from clothing and from gathering” (五采相合, 從衣從集). Initially signifying the blending of multiple hues used in clothing, the term inherently conveys a sense of mixture or aggregation, generally without explicitly positive or negative connotations. Indeed, throughout classical Chinese literature, “雜” usually retained a neutral meaning, associated primarily with the notions of diversity or variety rather than moral judgment.

In secular literature, “雜” frequently combines with other nouns in the structure “雜 + X” to form compound terms widely used for categorization or classification. Examples are abundant across Chinese literary traditions: the *Zhou yi* (周易) contains a section named 雜卦 (zá guà, “miscellaneous hexagrams”); similarly, the *Hanshu* (漢書) lists categories such as 雜家 (zá jiā, “miscellaneous schools”), 雜賦 (zá fù, “miscellaneous rhapsodies”), and 雜占 (zá zhān, “miscellaneous divinations”). Such naming conventions extend to numerous classical titles, such as *Xijing zaji* (西京雜記), *Youyang zazu* (西陽雜俎), and *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* (建炎以來朝野雜記), among others.

Beyond book titles, “雜” is commonly used in literary anthologies and genre classifications, emphasizing its role as a neutral aggregative marker rather than a term carrying inherent positive or negative connotations. Terms such as 雜文 (zá wén, “miscellaneous writings”), 雜詩 (zá shī, “miscellaneous poems”), and 雜著 (zá zhù, “miscellaneous essays”) frequently appear as section headings in various texts, reflecting a concept of miscellany and collection.

The neutral and classificatory function of 雜 (zá) extends beyond literary usage into various secular domains, where it denotes heterogeneous, composite, or miscellaneous categories without implying any moral valuation. This broad applicability is evident in terms such as 雜病 (zá bìng, “miscellaneous diseases”), 雜劇 (zá jù, “miscellaneous plays”), 雜技 (zá jì, “miscellaneous acrobatics”), 雜貨 (zá huò, “miscellaneous goods”), and 雜業 (zá yè, “miscellaneous trades”)—all of which emphasize the notion of variety and inclusion.

These examples underscore the versatile function of “雜” as a tool for categorization and classification. While its specific connotations vary depending on context, they consis-

tently revolve around the concept of aggregation and multiplicity. In ancient China, “雜” largely retained a neutral connotation, serving as a linguistic marker for diverse, assorted, or multifaceted entities. In essence, “雜” functioned as the ultimate descriptor for anything that embodied variety—an all-encompassing term for the mixed, the diverse, and the multifaceted.

The use of “雜” in Buddhist literature closely mirrors its application in secular texts, particularly in its function as a marker of aggregation. This characteristic is most prominently reflected in the naming of Buddhist scriptures.

3.2. The Role of “雜” in Buddhist Texts

3.2.1. “雜” in Textual Compilation

A significant number of extant Buddhist texts include “雜” in their titles, which denotes the aggregation of specific types of writings. Examples include *Zabaozang jing* (雜寶藏經), *Zapiyu jing* (雜譬喻經), *Za'ahan jing* (雜阿含經), and *Zawuji jing* (雜無極經)—all of which are compilations of shorter texts. The inclusion of “雜” in these titles does not diminish the value of the scriptures; in fact, many of these texts were widely circulated, indicating that within the Buddhist literary tradition, “雜” primarily carried a relatively neutral connotation.

Notably, while these scriptures were widely disseminated, there is little evidence to suggest that their titles had exact Sanskrit equivalents. The term “雜” was likely not a direct translation from Sanskrit but rather a designation introduced by Chinese translators or scholars based on the structural and thematic nature of these texts. For instance, titles such as *Samyuktāgama* (雜阿含經)²⁸, *Samyuktābhīdharmahṛdaya* (雜阿毘曇心論)²⁹, and *Samyuktaratnapitakasūtra* (雜寶藏經)³⁰ are commonly used in academic discourse as reconstructed Sanskrit equivalents. However, these Sanskrit titles do not correspond to any extant originals; rather, they were retroactively inferred from the Chinese texts.

The scriptures mentioned above share a notable feature: the character “雜” appears as the initial word in their titles, underscoring its role in textual aggregation and classification. Additionally, other Buddhist works incorporate “雜” to denote compilations of texts originating from India, such as *Apidamo zaji lun* (阿毗達磨雜集論), *Genben shuoyiqieyoubu zashi* (根本說一切有部雜事), and *Tanwude lobu zajiemo* (曇無德律部雜羯磨). In these cases, “雜” conveys the idea of compiling multiple distinct sources into a single text.

Beyond these Indian-origin texts, Chinese excerpts and anthologies derived from canonical Buddhist scriptures were also labeled as “雜事” (zá shì, “miscellaneous affairs”), such as *Shisonglv jiemo zashi* (十誦律羯磨雜事). Additionally, some collections that do not necessarily represent combinations of multiple texts but still incorporate “雜” in their titles include *Kongquewang zashenzhou* (孔雀王雜神咒) and *Tuoluoni zaji* (陀羅尼雜集). Overall, the fragmentary nature of many shorter Buddhist scriptures made them well-suited for compilation into independent works organized around various themes.

While the Buddhist texts discussed above primarily center around the term “雜”, another term in the Chinese context—集 (jí, “collection”)—also denotes compilation, though with subtle differences in meaning and usage. Notably, “集” seldom appears as the initial word in titles. However, some pre-Tang Buddhist texts did feature “集” in their titles, such as *Liuduji jing* (六度集經), translated by Kang Senghui 康僧會 during the three kingdoms period; *Dengji zhongde sanmei jing* (等集眾德三昧經), translated by Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa) during the Western Jin dynasty; and *Zhufoyaoji jing* (諸佛要集經), also translated by Dharmarakṣa, and *Sengjialuocho ji jing* (僧伽羅刹集經), translated by Sengjiabacheng 僧伽跋澄 and others during the Former Qin period.

As Chinese Buddhist literature expanded, many Chinese compilations also adopted the character “集” in their titles. Notable early examples include *Chusanrang ji ji* (出三藏記

集) and *Hongming ji* (弘明集), both compiled by the Liang dynasty monk Sengyou. From the Sui and Tang dynasties onward, an increasing number of translations adopted “集” in their titles.³¹ By this period, texts incorporating “集” in their titles had surpassed those beginning with “雜”, reflecting a shift in naming conventions.

The widespread use of “雜” and “集” in Buddhist text titles highlights the strong aggregative nature of Buddhist literature. Both Indian and Chinese Buddhist traditions produced numerous compilations aimed at structuring, preserving, and transmitting Buddhist teachings. This prevalence also indicates that, in the early stages of Chinese Buddhism, “雜” retained a largely neutral connotation, primarily serving as a descriptor for editorial methods or the structural characteristics of texts. In certain contexts, “雜” and “集” were even used interchangeably, further demonstrating that “雜”, in its early textual applications, functioned primarily as a neutral classificatory marker rather than a term implying impurity or disorder.

3.2.2. “雜” in Describing Diverse Combinations

It is important to note that “雜” frequently appears in Buddhist scriptures, often functioning as a neutral descriptor without inherent positive or negative connotations. For instance, phrases like 雜華 (zá huá, “mixed flowers”) and 雜香 (zá xiāng, “mixed incense”) are common in these texts.³² In the Chinese linguistic context, “雜”, in such phrases, simply denotes “varied” or “mixed”, conveying the idea of a combination of diverse elements.

Interestingly, in some cases, the Sanskrit originals do not explicitly contain the concept of “雜”. A notable example can be found in the famous text *Miaofa lianhua jing* (妙法蓮華經, *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*):

諸天人民，悉以雜華、末香、燒香、塗香，衣服、瓔珞、幢幡、寶蓋，伎樂、歌頌，禮拜供養七寶妙塔。³³ (*Gods and humans alike offer assorted flowers, powdered incense, burning incense, paste incense, clothing, a festoon of jewels, streamers and banners, an canopy (adorned) with jewels, music, and hymns to venerate the stupa adorned with seven treasures*).

種種末香，諸雜華香。如是等天香和合所出之香，無不聞知。³⁴ (*Innumerable powders and mixed fragrant flowers—such heavenly fragrances, all of which are blended and exuded, were perceived by all*).

In these examples, 雜華 corresponds to Skt. *puṣpa*,³⁵ which simply means “flower”. The translation as 雜華 was likely influenced by the Chinese preference for disyllabic expressions rather than any direct equivalent in Sanskrit. Similarly, the phrase 七寶雜色樹³⁶ (trees of mixed colors adorned with seven treasures) corresponds to the Sanskrit *ratnāmayair vrkṣasatair upetā*³⁷, meaning “a thousand trees adorned with treasures”. Here, the translator’s choice of 雜色 (mixed colors) appears to be an interpretative addition, emphasizing the diverse hues of the trees after being adorned with jewels.

Another example is 雜香 (mixed incense), which refers to incense made by blending various fragrant substances. This term corresponds to different Sanskrit expressions, such as *vilepana*, *vilepana-cūrṇa*, *candana*, and *candana-cūrṇa*,³⁸ none of which directly include the notion of mixing. It is likely that 雜香 was a term coined in China, reflecting a localized linguistic adaptation while maintaining a neutral connotation.

In earlier Buddhist scriptures, “雜” frequently appears without any clear emotional undertone. This is particularly evident in the *Weimojie jing* (維摩詰經, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*), translated by Zhi Qian during the Three Kingdoms period. In this text, “雜” is repeatedly used to signify the blending or combination of elements, as seen in phrases like 雜糅 (zá róu, “blended”) and 雜聲 (zá shēng, “mixed sounds”).³⁹ In many cases, “雜” corresponds to terms derived from the Skt. \sqrt{yuj} (to join), such as 雜言 (zá yán, Skt. *saṃprayuktā kathā*, “connected discourses”) and 雜行 (zá xíng, Skt. *saṃyojana*, “deviant conduct”). In these

instances, “雜” functions neutrally, indicating variety and composition rather than carrying evaluative connotations. One such case is 雜句 (zá jù, Skt. vicitrpadā, “varied phrases”), where “雜” signifies structural complexity and textual heterogeneity.

Certainly, “雜” also carries negative connotations in certain contexts, as seen in expressions like 鄙雜心 (bǐ zá xīn, base mixed mind) in Guṇabhadra’s translation of the Saṃyuktāgama. However, quantitatively and contextually, neutral uses of 雜—denoting mere aggregation or mixture—were more predominant in early Buddhist texts.

As time progressed, the negative connotations of “雜” in Chinese Buddhism gradually shifted, leading to both a decline in its usage in scripture titles and an increasing association with impurity or undesirability within texts. This shift in meaning will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

4. The Negative Connotations of “雜”

4.1. The Role of “雜” in Secular Texts

Since “雜” denotes the aggregation of diverse elements, it naturally gives rise to multiple adjectival interpretations. Its core meaning is “miscellaneous” or “various”. When emphasizing the contrast between components, it can signify “impure”, while focusing on the number of components suggests “numerous”. Additionally, the notion of “impure” presupposes the existence of a pure or normative state, leading “雜” to carry connotations of a “deviation of the norm”. Moreover, the presence of an excessive number of components often results in disorder, which further allows “雜” to take on the meaning of “chaotic”.

As a verb, “雜” frequently appears in disyllabic compounds that convey the idea of mixture or combination, such as 雜糅 (to blend) and 混雜 (to intermingle). However, through repeated use in contexts describing the mixing of opposites, “雜” gradually acquired a slightly negative connotation. For example, in *Yanzi chunqiu* (晏子春秋): “Right and wrong, good and evil are mixed, and influential figures spread heretical ideas; therefore, individual preferences and aversions are insufficient to guide the masses” (是非賢不肖雜, 上妄說邪, 故好惡不足以導眾). Similarly, in the *Hanshu* (漢書): “Now the virtuous and the unworthy are intermingled, making it difficult to distinguish between the good and the bad. The wicked and the upright are mixed together, and both the loyal and the sycophantic are being promoted simultaneously” (今賢不肖混淆, 白黑不分, 邪正雜糅, 忠讒並進). In such contexts, “雜” conveys a negative implication, particularly when referring to the blending of moral or ethical opposites.

As an adjective, “雜” similarly implies disorder or confusion when used in disyllabic words like 雜亂 (chaotic) or 雜遝 (disordered). It combines multiplicity with a sense of disarray or insignificance. For instance, in the *Chu ci* (楚辭): “Riding in a jumble of carts, disorderly and rampant” (騎膠葛以雜亂兮, 斑漫衍而方行). And in *Wenxin diaolong* (文心雕龍): “In the jumble of chapters, the substance and style are intertwined, and knowledge is partial, none can comprehend everything” (篇章雜遝, 質文交加, 知多偏好, 人莫圓該). In these passages, “雜” connotes disorganized multiplicity, reinforcing its association with confusion and disorder.

In Zhuangzi (莊子), the Dao (道) is portrayed as something that should remain pure and unadulterated, making “雜” undesirable: “The Dao should not be mixed; if mixed, there will be multiplicity; with multiplicity comes confusion; with confusion, anxiety arises; and with anxiety, salvation becomes impossible” (夫道不欲雜, 雜則多, 多則擾, 擾則憂, 憂而不救). This passage highlights the necessity of preserving the Dao’s purity, as contamination with heterogeneous elements leads to disorder and distress. Within Zhuangzi’s philosophical framework, the Dao represents the fundamental universal principle, which should remain pure and consistent. This aligns with the concept that “the ultimate Dao is simple” (大道至簡). Zhuangzi employs the notion of “雜” as a contrast to

the ideal, unblemished state of the Dao,⁴⁰ emphasizing that mixture introduces multiplicity, which in turn leads to confusion.

For Zhuangzi, “雜” signifies a negative state, functioning as a foil to the desired purity of the Dao. By juxtaposing “雜” with concepts like “purity” (純粹) and “simplicity” (素), he reinforces the importance of maintaining the Dao’s purity and singularity.

To conclude, “雜” originated as a neutral term denoting “miscellaneous” or “various”, but over time, it acquired additional connotations of impurity, disorder, and confusion, particularly when describing the blending of opposites or deviations from an ideal state. This semantic shift is reflected in philosophical and literary texts, where “雜” serves as a counterpoint to purity, simplicity, and order, emphasizing the cultural and ethical importance of maintaining clarity and integrity.

4.2. The Role of “雜” in Buddhist Texts

As previously discussed, the term “雜” was often used in the titles of Buddhist texts to indicate compendious or aggregated collections. However, over time, its opposition to “純” (pure) led to a semantic shift, transforming “雜” into a marker that distinguished orthodoxy from heterogeneity in Chinese Buddhist discourse. In the following examples, we will observe numerous instances where “雜” is employed with a negative connotation.

When reviewing a newly translated Abhidharma text, Dao’an (312/314–385) remarked, “頗雜義辭”⁴¹, which translates to “interspersed with various interpretations”.

Similarly, Zhi Mindu 支愍度 (fl. 4th century), after examining earlier translations of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, expressed his dissatisfaction, stating, “文義混雜, 在疑似之間”⁴², meaning “the main text and commentary are mixed, creating doubts about authenticity”.

During the Later Qin dynasty, Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414?), while revising scriptures at the translation institute, remarked, “文義舛雜”⁴³, observing that many early translations were “marred by errors and inconsistencies in their content”.

Sengyou, in his analysis, further distinguished authentic scriptures from apocryphal ones, writing, “真經體趣融然深遠, 假託之文辭意淺雜”. This translates to “the essence of authentic scriptures is harmonious, deep, and far-reaching, while the language and ideas of falsely attributed texts are shallow and mixed”.⁴⁴

Furthermore, in the *Chu Sanzang ji ji*, there is a text titled *The Note on the Two Sutras: Pusa shanjie, pusa dichu* (菩薩善戒菩薩地持二經記). Its author, Sengyou, documented the mixed nature of these two sutras as follows:

“諸品亂雜, 前後參差。”⁴⁵ (*Various sections are disorderly and unevenly arranged*).

“當是曝曬誤雜, 後人不悉, 便爾傳寫。”⁴⁶ (*This was mistakenly mixed due to exposure and drying. Later generations, unaware of the error, transmitted it as is*).

In summary, expressions such as 混雜 (mixed), 淺雜 (shallowly mixed), 雜糅 (interwoven), and 亂雜 (chaotically mixed) clearly illustrate the negative connotations of “雜” in Buddhist contexts. These terms were frequently used to describe textual corruption, doctrinal impurity, and errors introduced through translation or transmission.

5. Understanding Xuanzang’s Strategic Use of “雜”

5.1. “雜染” and “雜穢”

Through the preceding analysis, it becomes evident that the character “雜” embodies both neutral and negative connotations. What, then, were the underlying motivations behind Xuanzang’s use of “雜” in his translations? To explore this question, we turn to two terms—“雜染” and “雜穢”—which were discussed at the outset of this paper. These terms serve as a critical lens for understanding Xuanzang’s translation strategy and interpretive choices.

First, let's consider “雜染”. In addition to translating Skt. *aśubha* (impure), “雜染” typically corresponds to Skt. *saṃkleśa*. In the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, when the Sanskrit text employs *saṃkleśa*, Kumārajīva translated it as 煩惱 (afflictions) or 垢 (gòu, “defilements”), whereas Xuanzang rendered it as “雜染”.⁴⁷ Similarly, in the *Apidamo jushe shilun* (阿毘達磨俱舍釋論, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), where Skt. *saṃkleśa* appears, the translator Paramārtha rendered it as 染污 (defilement), while Xuanzang once again opted for “雜染”.⁴⁸ By critically evaluating the translations of his predecessors, Xuanzang selectively replaced certain terms, demonstrating a deliberate approach that reflects his interpretive priorities and linguistic sensibilities.

The original meaning of Skt. *saṃkleśa* is “suffering”, “defilement”, or “impurity”, and it frequently appears in Buddhist scriptures. Early Chinese translators rendered it as 煩惱 (afflictions), a choice that accurately conveys the original meaning while emphasizing the state of mental and physical bondage or contamination. The term 煩惱 has held a significant place in Chinese Buddhist culture, eventually permeating modern Chinese vernacular and becoming a familiar term in daily language. Linguistically, Skt. *saṃkleśa* is derived from $\sqrt{\text{kliś}}$, meaning “to suffer”, “to feel pain”, or “to torment”. Other derivatives of this root, such as Skt. *kliṣṭa* and Skt. *saṃkliṣṭa*, were also translated as 染污 (defilement). In Buddhist philosophy, Skt. *saṃkleśa* refers to the defilement or impurity of the mind.

Xuanzang's translation of “雜染” emphasizes the notion of “染” (defilement), underscoring its essence as impurity, while “雜” serves as a modifier, expanding the meaning to encompass “various forms of defilement”. In this context, “雜染” underwent semantic bleaching, with “雜” losing its distinct meaning, and the phrase, as a whole, came to emphasize defilement and contamination rather than mere mixture.

Next is the case of “雜穢”. The origin of “雜穢” can also be traced to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*. In this text, a contrast is drawn between the pure Buddha-lands and the impure world of this realm. When describing the impure world, Sanskrit uses *bahudoṣaduṣṭaṃ buddhakṣetram*. Zhi Qian translated this as “多怒害……佛國” (a Buddha-land of much anger and harm) or “多怒之處” (a place of much anger), while Kumārajīva rendered it as “不淨土” (impure land) or “多怒害處” (a place of much anger). Xuanzang, however, translated it as “無量過失雜穢土” (a land of countless faults and mixed filth) or “多雜穢土” (a land of much mixed filth), where “雜穢” corresponds to Skt. *duṣṭa* (defiled).

Building on this framework, Xuanzang introduced terms such as “穢土” (defiled land), “雜穢土” (land of mixed filth), “雜穢處” (place of mixed filth), and “雜穢佛土” (Buddha-land of mixed filth) to describe the earthly realm. Even when the original Sanskrit text merely referred to the realm without additional characterization, Xuanzang infused his translation with interpretative elements, associating this world with the notion of mixed filth. For example, he constructed expressions like “此佛土種種雜穢” (this Buddha-land is full of various forms of mixed filth), while the original Sanskrit merely stated *buddhakṣetra* (this Buddha-land). In contrast, earlier translators, such as Zhi Qian and Kumārajīva, adhered more closely to the Sanskrit source, rendering it simply as “此佛土” (this Buddha-land) or “此土” (this land).

Additionally, Xuanzang's deliberate substitutions demonstrate his strategic use of “雜染” as a nuanced functional term. Unlike Paramārtha, who employed simpler translations such as 不淨 and 染污, Xuanzang's choice of “雜染” reflects an effort to emphasize the compounded nature of defilements—mixing afflictions, actions, and existential factors. This suggests that Xuanzang viewed “雜” as a critical functional term to convey deeper layers of meaning, possibly aiming for a more precise doctrinal articulation or a linguistic adaptation that resonated better with his intended audience.

In sum, the analysis above reveals that in the original doctrinal framework of Buddhist scriptures, the abstract opposition between purity (清淨) and impurity (不清淨) was

concretized by Xuanzang into a conceptual dichotomy between purity (清淨) and mixed filth (雜穢). Within this framework, anything that defiled the mind or carried negative connotations—even when the original Sanskrit text did not include the concept of “雜” (mixed)—could be rendered into Chinese using “雜”, thus facilitating a deliberate substitution, strengthening the semantic link between “雜” and impurity in Chinese Buddhist discourse.

Based on this conclusion, it becomes clear that terms like “雜” had already acquired distinct value judgments. As a result, Xuanzang frequently replaced “雜” with other expressions when previous translators had used it to describe neutral concepts, as will be demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Xuanzang’s replacement of terms used by Paramārtha.

| Text | Sanskrit | Terms Used by Paramārtha | Terms Used by Xuanzang |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya</i> | <i>kāmāvacarāṇi</i> | 欲界雜業 | 欲界繫業 |
| | <i>yoni</i> | 雜 | 種, 種姓, 類 |
| <i>Mahāyāna-saṃgraha-śāstra</i> | | 相雜 | 和合 |

5.2. Similar Cases in Other Translations

The use of “雜” to express negative connotations was not exclusive to Xuanzang. Other Buddhist translators also employed 雜 in ways that reinforced negative or undesirable qualities, suggesting that its semantic shift was part of a broader linguistic and doctrinal development. For instance, in the early 6th century, Lenamoti 勒那摩提 (Ratnamati, fl. 6th century) translated the *Baoxing lun* (寶性論, *Ratnagotravibhāgamahāyānottaratantraśāstra*), rendering the Skt. *samalā* (impurities) as 雜垢 (zá gòu, “mixed filth”).⁴⁹ Additionally, in this text, “雜穢” is directly contrasted with 淨妙 (jìng miào, “pure and marvelous”),⁵⁰ further emphasizing the negative associations of “雜”.

Beyond Xuanzang, the substitution of “雜染” for “染” (defilement) can also be observed, highlighting nuanced differences in their interpretative approaches. For instance:

Tan Wuchen 曇無讖 (Dharmakṣema, 385–433) in the *Da fangdeng daji jing* (大方等大集經) used 染: “一切法無染門, 自性寂靜故。”⁵¹ (*All dharmas are untainted; their own nature is quiescence*).

Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705–774) in the *Daji daxukongzangpusa suowen jing* (大集大虛空藏菩薩所問經) introduced “雜染” to modify 染: “云何無雜染? 謂一切法性寂靜故。”⁵² (*How can there be no mixed defilement? It is because the nature of all dharmas is quiescence*).

This shift suggests that later translators increasingly used “雜染” to highlight a more nuanced or composite concept of impurity, distinguishing it from the simpler notion of 染.

Interestingly, although Xuanzang occasionally replaced earlier translators’ term “染污” (defilement) with “雜染”, he also retained numerous instances of “染污” in his own translations. However, in later translations, these retained instances of “染污” were further replaced, reinforcing the trend toward using “雜” in a negative sense. A comparison between Xuanzang’s translation in the *Da baoji jing* (大寶積經, *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra*) and Fahu’s 法護 (Dharmarakṣa, 963–1058) translation in the *Dasheng pusazang zhengfa jing* (大乘菩薩藏正法經) demonstrates this shift:

Xuanzang: “一者慳垢染污, 二者惡戒垢染污, 三者瞋垢染污, 四者懈怠垢染污, 五者散亂垢染污, 六者惡慧垢染污, 七者不遵尊教垢染污, 八者邪疑垢染污, 九者不信解垢染污, 十者不恭敬垢染污。”⁵³ (*First, the defilement of stinginess. Second, the defilement of bad discipline. Third, the defilement of anger. Fourth, the defile-*

ment of laziness. Fifth, the defilement of distraction. Sixth, the defilement of perverted wisdom. Seventh, the defilement of not following the revered teachings. Eighth, the defilement of wrong doubt. Ninth, the defilement of lack of faith and understanding. Tenth, the defilement of disrespect).

Fahu: “一者慳悋垢雜染，二者毀戒垢雜染，三者瞋恚垢雜染，四者懈怠垢雜染，五者散亂垢雜染，六者惡慧垢雜染，七者無聞垢雜染，八者疑惑垢雜染，九者無信解垢雜染，十者不尊重垢雜染。”⁵⁴ (First, the mixed defilement of stinginess. Second, the mixed defilement of broken discipline. Third, the mixed defilement of anger. Fourth, the mixed defilement of laziness. Fifth, the mixed defilement of distraction. Sixth, the mixed defilement of perverted wisdom. Seventh, the mixed defilement of ignorance of teachings. Eighth, the mixed defilement of doubt and confusion. Ninth, the mixed defilement of lack of faith and understanding. Tenth, the mixed defilement of disrespect).

It is evident that Xuanzang and other translators of his time primarily employed “雜” as a functional word. This functional role allowed it to pair with other terms to form disyllabic compounds that collectively conveyed negative meanings. The terms “雜染” and “雜穢” exemplify this usage. In these compounds, “染” (defilement) and “穢” (filth) carry the core semantic weight, while “雜” serves primarily as a structural filler to create disyllabic expressions. This suggests that “雜” in such contexts may have become semantically vacuous,⁵⁵ functioning solely as a negative marker rather than retaining its original sense of “mixed” or “varied”.

A further indication of 雜’s role as a negative marker is found in earlier translations. In Kumārajīva’s *Zhufa wuxing jing* (諸法無行經), monks who fail to adhere to precepts are described as engaging in 雜行 (deviant conduct). This usage was directly adopted by Shenajueduo (闍那崛多) in the Sui dynasty’s *Zhufa benwu jing* (諸法本無經).⁵⁶ Similarly, in Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (維摩詰所說經), the term 雜行 corresponds to the Skt. *aṅgaṇa* (blemish, depravity).⁵⁷ In these cases, “雜” is employed not to denote literal mixing but to emphasize impurity or deviation, reinforcing a negative characterization. This linguistic shift underscores how “雜” evolved from a neutral marker of variety to an integral part of Buddhist terminology, denoting impurity, heterogeneity, and doctrinal deviation.

6. Conclusions

The preceding analysis allows us to draw several key conclusions regarding the evolving semantic role of 雜 in Chinese Buddhist translations. In early Buddhist texts, “雜” frequently corresponds to Sanskrit terms such as *miśra*, *vaicitrya*, *viśva*, and *saṃbhinna*, generally conveying notions of “mixed” or “varied”. However, in Xuanzang’s translations, “雜” appears with significantly greater frequency, often forming disyllabic compounds, such as “雜染” and “雜穢”. The semantic meanings expressed by these compounds, however, do not fully align with the original Sanskrit texts.

Originally, concepts that could be conveyed using terms such as “不淨” or “穢” were deliberately reinterpreted by Xuanzang using “雜染” and “雜穢”. In this context, “雜” took on connotations that closely approximated impurity, marking a clear semantic shift. Xuanzang consciously replaced earlier translators’ terminology, prioritizing 雜-based compounds to reinterpret impurity and defilement within Buddhist discourse.

In early Chinese Buddhist literature, however, “雜” primarily functioned as a neutral descriptor, commonly used to indicate the collection or diversity of texts and phenomena. This neutral usage is evident in the titles of numerous Buddhist compilations, such as the *Za baozang jing*, where “雜” signifies the aggregation of thematically related scriptures. Analyzing the original meaning of “雜” in classical Chinese sources highlights its primary sense as denoting aggregation, along with extended meanings such as inclusion,

collaboration, and embellishment. In these contexts, “雜” carried no inherent positive or negative valuation.

However, when used as an adjective to describe a state, “雜” extends beyond “varied” or “diverse” to include connotations of impurity, disorder, and deviation from normative standards—thus increasingly adopting a negative tone. Within Chinese Buddhist literature, the opposition between “雜” and “純” (purity) gradually led to the emergence of “雜” as a tool for distinguishing orthodoxy from heterogeneity, particularly in the context of textual mixing during Buddhist scriptural transmission. This shift is evident not only in indigenous Chinese Buddhist writings but also in translated scriptures, where “雜” became an essential term to characterize negative phenomena.

Xuanzang’s translations exemplify this semantic transformation, wherein the abstract doctrinal opposition between purity and impurity was restructured into a concrete contrast between “清淨” and “雜穢”. This reinterpretation enabled anything that defiled the mind or carried negative connotations—even when the original Sanskrit did not explicitly contain the notion of “mixed”—to be rendered in Chinese using “雜”, thereby facilitating semantic substitutions that reinforced negative associations.

Furthermore, Xuanzang and his contemporaries often employed “雜” as a functional linguistic element that combined with other terms to form disyllabic compounds, collectively conveying negative meanings. For instance, in terms such as “雜染” and “雜穢”, the core semantic weight is carried by “染” (defilement) and “穢” (filth), while “雜” serves as a structural filler to complete the disyllabic word. In such cases, “雜” might have become semantically vacuous, functioning more as a linguistic device than as a term with independent meaning. This finding suggests that not all instances of “雜” in Buddhist texts should be understood as denoting mere mixture or diversity; instead, in many contexts, it functions primarily as a negative marker, reinforcing unfavorable connotations.

By examining Xuanzang’s strategic use of “雜”, this study provides a focused case study on the deliberate lexical choices of Buddhist translators. It reveals how translators employed subtle linguistic strategies to reinterpret doctrinal concepts and adapt them to specific cultural and linguistic frameworks. Xuanzang’s practice of replacing terminology from earlier translations reflects a broader phenomenon in Buddhist scriptural transmission, where multiple translations of the same content often resulted in notable linguistic and conceptual shifts. These systematic substitutions provide valuable insights into the evolving cultural contexts of Buddhist translators and their interpretations of Buddhist doctrines.

More broadly, this research highlights the transformative role of linguistic choices in shaping doctrinal meaning and cultural transmission. The shift of “雜” from a neutral descriptor to a marker of impurity and heterogeneity underscores the dynamic interplay between language and ideology in Buddhist translations. This case study illustrates how subtle lexical changes influence doctrinal interpretation, sectarian identity, and the broader reception of Buddhist thought in China.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of analyzing translation practices as a means of tracing patterns of cultural adaptation and understanding the enduring legacy of textual transmission. Future research could extend this analysis to other frequently modified Buddhist terms, further illuminating the linguistic and philosophical evolution of Chinese Buddhist discourse.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| Skt. | Sanskrit word |
| Vkn | <i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśa</i> |
| CBETA | Comprehensive Buddhist Electronic Text Archive Foundation |

Notes

¹ See Huang (2011, p. 23). For additional perspectives on Xuanzang’s translation style, see Fan (2022).

² See CBETA (n.d., T54, no. 2131, p. 1057c7-12).

³ Regarding the frequency of “雜”, this study utilized the statistical function of CBETA Online. See: <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/search/?q=%E9%9B%9C&lang=zh> (accessed on 11 March 2025).

⁴ The attribution of this translation remains a subject of scholarly debate. Drawing upon various perspectives, four primary hypotheses have emerged: (1) the text was translated by Zhi Qian (支謙); (2) it was rendered into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa (竺法護); (3) it was initially translated by Yan Fotiao (嚴佛調) and later revised by Zhi Qian; or (4) it was first translated by Zhi Qian and subsequently revised by Dharmarakṣa. Although no definitive consensus has been reached, scholars generally acknowledge that this scripture was translated at an early date and that it bears a close connection to Zhi Qian. For further discussion, see Ono (1983, p. 35), Shi (1998, p. 217), Sakaino (1972, pp. 147–48), Karashima (2015, p. 92), and Radich (2019, p. 33).

⁵ Zhi Qian’s version features 15 instances of “雜”, Kumārajīva’s version includes 5 instances, and Xuanzang’s version contains 29 instances.

⁶ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 474, p. 534b27-28).

⁷ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 475, p. 555a11).

⁸ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 476, p. 584b10).

⁹ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 475, p. 553a10).

¹⁰ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 476, p. 580c4).

¹¹ This study utilized the *Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae* (TLB n.d.) database at the University of Oslo for comparing different versions of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*. For details, see: <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=volume&vid=37> (accessed on 7 December 2024).

¹² CBETA (n.d., T06, no. 220, p. 450b10-11).

¹³ CBETA (n.d., T06, no. 220, p. 1047c15-17).

¹⁴ For example, Liu Yiqing 劉義慶’s *Shishuo xinyu* (世說新語) says: “劉公榮與人飲酒, 雜穢非類, 人或譏之 (Liu Gongrong, when partaking in drinking gatherings, was known to mix with individuals of diverse and sometimes questionable backgrounds. Some critics have taken him to task for this association)”.

¹⁵ See Karashima (2001, p. 409).

¹⁶ The English translation of the Sanskrit is from Gomez and Harrison (2022, pp. 14–15).

¹⁷ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 474, p. 520b24-26).

¹⁸ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 475, p. 538c6-8).

¹⁹ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 476, p. 559c26-28).

²⁰ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 474, p. 524a16-17).

²¹ CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 476, p. 565a25-26).

²² It is noteworthy that Xuanzang had already used “無雜” earlier in the same passage. He translated “無雜” to correspond to Skt. *asaṃsṛṣṭa*, which means “not mixed with” (rendered by Zhi Qian as 不會 and by Kumārajīva as 不合). Given this precedent, Xuanzang’s translation of Skt. *parisuddhā* as “無雜” may have been influenced by his earlier usage, suggesting a deliberate attempt to maintain terminological consistency within the passage.

²³ CBETA (n.d., T31, no. 1593, p. 116a4-6).

²⁴ CBETA (n.d., T31, no. 1594, p. 135b24-26).

²⁵ This study utilized the *DEDU Parallel Reading System* provided by Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts for a comparative analysis of Xuanzang’s and Paramārtha’s translations. Specifically, it consulted Lin Peizhen 林佩貞’s work (Lin 2003), “《攝大乘論》玄奘與真諦譯本 (全文對讀)” (*A Parallel Reading of Xuanzang’s and Paramārtha’s Translations of the She Dacheng Lun*). For details, see: <https://dedu.dila.edu.tw/view/61cf0a123236b> (accessed on 7 December 2024).

- 26 It should be noted that Skt. *sambhinna* convey the meaning of “mixed” and can therefore be translated as “雜”.
- 27 The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* was translated into Chinese by Paramārtha as *Apidamo jushe lun* (阿毘達磨俱舍論) and later retranslated by Xuanzang as *Apidamo jushe shi lun* (阿毘達磨俱舍釋論). This study utilized the *DEDU Parallel Reading System* provided by Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts for a comparative analysis of Xuanzang’s and Paramārtha’s translations. Specifically, it consulted the resource “阿毘達磨俱舍釋論 *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*”, provided by the “數位典藏組” (Digital Archives Team n.d.). For details, see: <https://dedu.dila.edu.tw/view/Abhidharmakosabhasya> (accessed on 7 December 2024).
- 28 The *Za ahan jing* (雜阿含經) does not have a fully corresponding Sanskrit title. The reconstructed Sanskrit title *Samyuktāgama* is based on the Pali equivalent *Samyutta-nikāya*. In the *Za ahan jing*, instances of the term “雜” generally indicate “various” (e.g., “雜類” [miscellaneous categories], “雜色” [various colors], or “雜香” [various fragrances]) or “mixed” (e.g., “雜泥食” [mixed with mud food], “雜酪飯” [mixed rice and milk]).
- 29 The *Za abidamo xin lun* 雜阿毘曇心論 has multiple historical translations, with most versions retaining the same title. The extant version is the translation by the Liu Song monk Sengjiabaluō 僧伽跋摩 (Saṃghavarman). According to the preface, this Buddhist text is a commentary on the *Abhidharmahṛdaya*, compiled by Dharmatrāta from various sources. Given the composite nature of the text, it incorporates multiple commentaries interwoven with the original *Abhidharmahṛdaya*. Therefore, the term “雜” in the title can be understood as “mixed”, indicating that the work draws upon and blends multiple sources. Throughout the text, “雜” frequently conveys this sense of integration and synthesis.
- 30 The *Za baozang jing* (雜寶藏經) currently lacks a fully corresponding Sanskrit title. Scholars commonly refer to it as *Samyuktaratna-piṭakasūtra*, though the text itself does not include the character “雜” (mixed). Additionally, no authoritative preface explains the origin of this title. The term “雜” here signifies “collection”, and “雜寶藏” implies the gathering of various treasures. This interpretation aligns with the compilation format of the scripture, which assembles diverse narratives to illustrate Buddhist teachings and moral principles.
- 31 For instance, the *Fo benxing ji jing* (佛本行集經), translated by Shenajueduo 闍那崛多 during the Sui dynasty, and the *Dasheng daji dizang shilun jing* (大乘大集地藏十輪經), translated by Xuanzang during the Tang dynasty.
- 32 It is important to note that in traditional Chinese culture, “雜” was also used as a descriptive noun for objects, such as “雜木” (mixed wood), which originally referred to variegated wood. In later periods, this term took on a pejorative meaning, coming to denote inferior-quality wood. However, in Buddhist texts, terms like “雜香” (mixed incense) and “雜華” (mixed flowers) do not imply variegation but simply refer to a mixture of different types of incense or flowers, maintaining a neutral and non-pejorative connotation.
- 33 CBETA (n.d., T09, no. 262, p. 35a10-12).
- 34 CBETA (n.d., T09, no. 262, p. 48c2-3).
- 35 This study utilized the Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae (TLB n.d.) database at the University of Oslo for comparing different versions of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*. For details, see: <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=volume&vid=483> (accessed on 7 December 2024). The case of 雜華, See <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=483&mid=814555> and <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=483&mid=815401> (accessed on 7 December 2024).
- 36 CBETA (n.d., T09, no. 262, p. 11c20).
- 37 See <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=483&mid=812860> (accessed on 7 December 2024).
- 38 See Karashima (1998, p. 569) and Karashima (2010, pp. 619–20).
- 39 See CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 474, p. 520c4 and T14, no. 474, p. 534c1-2).
- 40 Examples like “純粹而不雜，靜一而不變，恬而無為，動而以天行，此養神之道也” (*pure and without mixture, calm and unchanging, tranquil and effortless, moving in harmony with the natural order — this is the way to nourish the spirit*) and “故素也者，謂其無所與雜也；純也者，謂其不虧其神也。能體純素，謂之真人” (*the plain signifies it is untainted; the pure signifies it does not diminish its essence. To embody the pure and plain is to be a true person*) illustrate how “雜” is contrasted with purity (純) and simplicity (素), reinforcing its negative connotation in certain philosophical contexts.
- 41 CBETA (n.d., T55, no. 2145, p. 72b1-3).
- 42 CBETA (n.d., T55, no. 2145, p. 58b27-c2).
- 43 CBETA (n.d., T45, no. 1859, p. 162a17-18).
- 44 CBETA (n.d., T55, no. 2145, pp. 38c17-39a5).
- 45 CBETA (n.d., T55, no. 2145, p. 63a3-4).
- 46 CBETA (n.d., T55, no. 2145, p. 63a17-18).
- 47 For example, see <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=37&mid=129602> (accessed on 7 December 2024) and <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=37&mid=129467> (accessed on 7 December 2024).
- 48 For instance, see <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=511&mid=963197> (accessed on 7 December 2024).

- 49 See <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=1125&mid=1943583> (accessed on 7 December 2024).
- 50 See <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&view=record&vid=1125&mid=1944012> (accessed on 7 December 2024). *Baoxing lun* (寶性論), volume 4: “轉雜穢身得淨妙身。” (Transforming the defiled body to attain the pure and marvelous body). CBETA (n.d., T31, no. 1611, p. 841a3).
- 51 CBETA (n.d., T13, no. 397, p. 93c25-26).
- 52 CBETA (n.d., T13, no. 404, p. 614a3-4).
- 53 CBETA (n.d., T11, no. 310, p. 197c2-7).
- 54 CBETA (n.d., T11, no. 316, p. 783c19-23).
- 55 Similarly, Zhu (1992, pp. 138–48) observed that during the evolution of disyllabic word formation in Chinese vocabulary, certain monosyllabic words exhibited a particularly strong tendency to combine with other terms, facilitating their transition from monosyllabic to disyllabic forms. Examples of such words include 行 (xíng), 毒 (dú), 復 (fù), and 自 (zì), among others.
- 56 *Zhufa wuxing jing* (諸法無行經): “是比丘雜行, 去佛道甚遠。” (These monks engage in deviant conduct, straying far from the Buddha’s path). CBETA (n.d., T15, no. 650, p. 753a28-29). *Zhufa benwu jing* (諸法本無經): “此比丘雜行, 去菩提遠。” (These monks engage in deviant conduct, straying far from enlightenment). CBETA (n.d., T15, no. 651, p. 764c20-21).
- 57 Vkn: *adhyāśayamaitrī niraṅgaṇatayā* (The love which is one’s highest ambition because there is no evil in it. cf. Gomez and Harrison (2022, p. 72). Kumārajīva: “行深心慈, 無雜行故。” (Engaging in profound compassion, free from mixed conduct), CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 475, p. 547b29-c1). Xuanzang: “修深心慈, 離瑕穢故。” (Cultivating profound compassion, because free from filth and blemishes). CBETA (n.d., T14, no. 476, p. 573a23-24).

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Article

Indra's Palace on Mount Meru: A Study on the Design Philosophy of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall

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Abstract: Wu Zetian's 武則天 Bright Hall 明堂 was an unprecedented structure, serving as both a political hub and a ceremonial center of the state, symbolizing the image of Wu Zetian's regime. While it inherited some traditional design concepts, the core structure—such as the central pillar—differed significantly from earlier Bright Halls, aligning more closely with the Sudharmā Hall 善法堂 of the deity Indra in Buddhism. Furthermore, both the Bright Hall and the Sudharmā Hall were used for court gatherings and decision making, bearing the nature of the palace of heavenly gods. The high degree of similarity suggests that the design of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall was likely modeled after the Sudharmā Hall. This design highlighted Wu Zetian's identity as both the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden 淨光天女 and the Cakravartin 轉輪聖王, thereby reinforcing the political legitimacy and sanctity of her rule. The Bright Hall, together with the Celestial Pillar 天樞 which represented Mount Meru 須彌山 and the Heavenly Hall 天堂 symbolizing Tuṣita Heaven 兜率天, form a representation of Mount Meru's cosmic landscape.

Keywords: Bright Hall 明堂; Sudharmā Hall 善法堂; Wu Zetian 武則天; Cakravartin 轉輪聖王; Sui–Tang Luoyang City 隋唐洛陽城

1. Introduction

Bright Hall (*Mingtang* 明堂) was the highest-level ritual building in ancient China, symbolizing imperial authority and the image of the state. During Wu Zetian's 武則天 (624?–705; r. 684¹–705) reign, the empire was strong. As the only female emperor in China, Wu Zetian was ambitious, astute, and also eager to legitimize her power. The Bright Hall, the building of which had long been planned by the Sui 隋 (581–618) and Tang 唐 (618–907) emperors but never came to realization, was finally erected in Luoyang 洛陽, the de facto capital at the time, becoming a prominent cultural symbol of Wu Zetian's regime.

The Bright Hall, which was built during the reign of Wu Zetian, was a grand and unique structure, differing in certain aspects from the “classical model” of a Bright Hall.² It served as a reception hall for handling political affairs and receiving subjects, and also functioned as a ritual hall where rituals dedicated to the heavens and ancestors were performed and Buddhist activities were conducted during 688–694 and 696–705. However, it was finally dismantled during the Kaiyuan period (713–741) of Emperor Xuanzong (685–762; r. 712–756) of the Tang Dynasty. To depict the appearance of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall, we draw mainly upon textual sources.³ In 1986, the foundations of the Bright Hall were excavated, and these excavations confirmed some details described in the textual sources.

The Bright Hall stood on the central area of the Luoyang palace complex (Figure 1), completed in the fourth year of the Chuigong 垂拱 era (688) under the supervision of Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義 (fl. 680s–690s). It was named “Wanxiang Shen'gong” 萬象神宮 (the Divine Palace of Myriad Phenomena). According to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government), the Bright Hall was 294 chi 尺 (≈ 89 m)⁴ tall, with a square base measuring 300 chi (≈ 90.9 m) on each side. It had three levels: the bottom level symbolized the “four seasons” (*sishi* 四時) with each side decorated in its designated seasonal colors; the second level symbolized the “twelve hours” (*shier chen* 十二辰) with a dome supported

by nine dragons at the top; the third level symbolized the “twenty-four solar terms” (*ershisi qi* 二十四氣), also dome-shaped, with a one-zhang 丈-tall iron phoenix adorned with gold inserted at the top. The Bright Hall had a giant wooden pillar with a cross-sectional circumference of 10 wei 圍 that ran through the center of the structure. Surrounding the base of the hall was an iron canal filled with flowing water, forming the *Biyong* 辟雍 (the moat).⁵ After being destroyed by fire on December 8, 694, it was rebuilt in April 696 and renamed “*Tongtian Gong*” 通天宮 (The Palace that Connects to Heaven). The gilded iron phoenix on the roof of the hall was later damaged by wind and replaced with a copper fireball held by a group of dragons.⁶

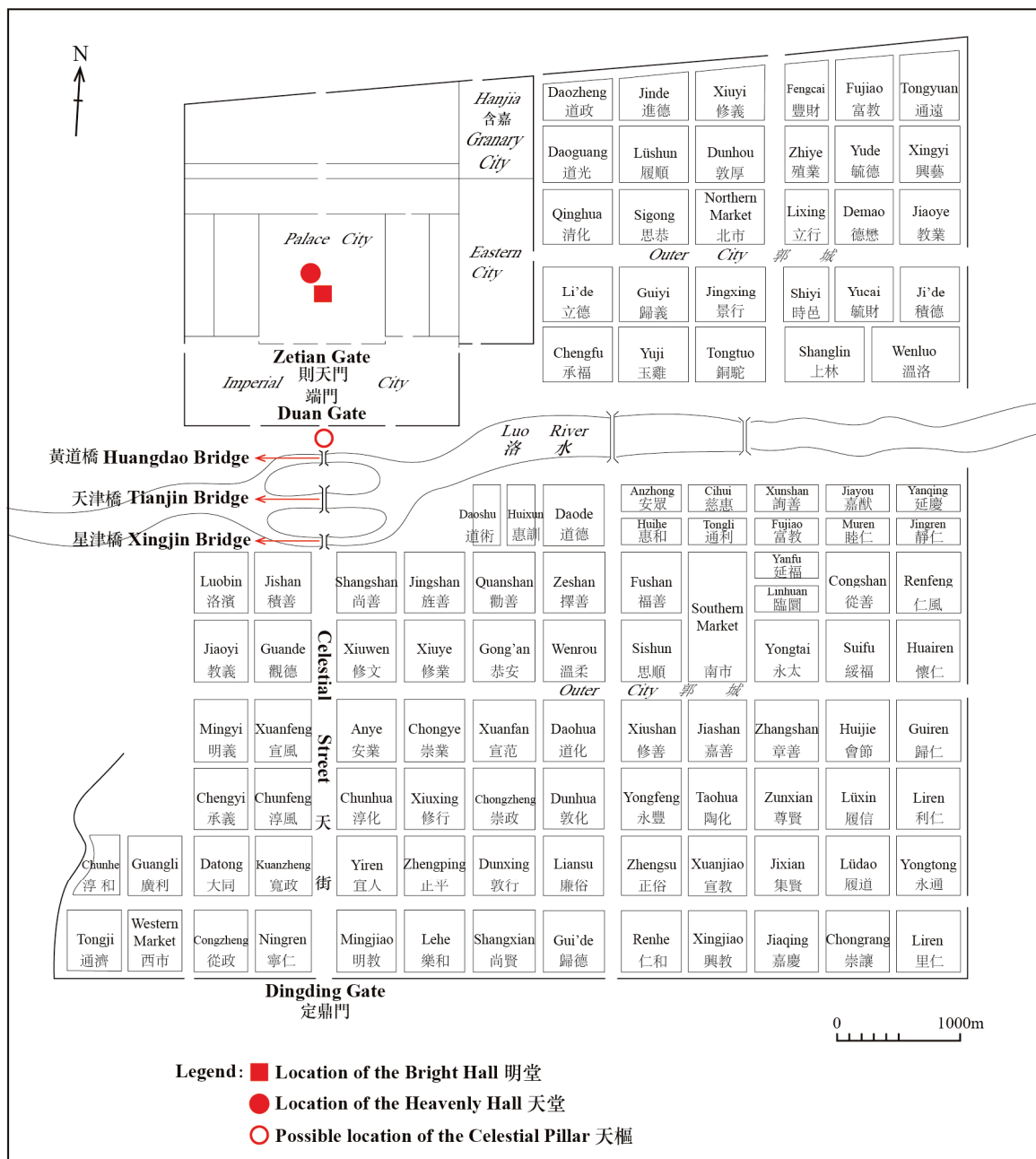


Figure 1. The layout of buildings on the main axis of Sui-Tang Luoyang City. (The diagram of the city plan is revised after *Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo* 2014, p. 71, illustration 2–39. The locations of the Bright Hall, the Heavenly Hall, and the Celestial Pillar, respectively, refer to *Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo Luoyang Tang cheng dui* 1988, pp. 227–30; *Luoyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiu yuan* 2016, p. 5; Guo 2001, pp. 72–73).

Archaeological excavation of the site of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall revealed an octagonal rammed earth foundation with a large circular pillar pit in the center and a giant pillar foundation stone at the bottom of the pit (Figure 2), confirming that the Bright Hall had a thick central column (Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo Luoyang Tang cheng dui 1988, pp. 227–30; Wang 1993, pp. 949–51). The architectural history community has produced reconstructed pictures of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall to help us understand this magnificent building visually (Figure 3).⁷

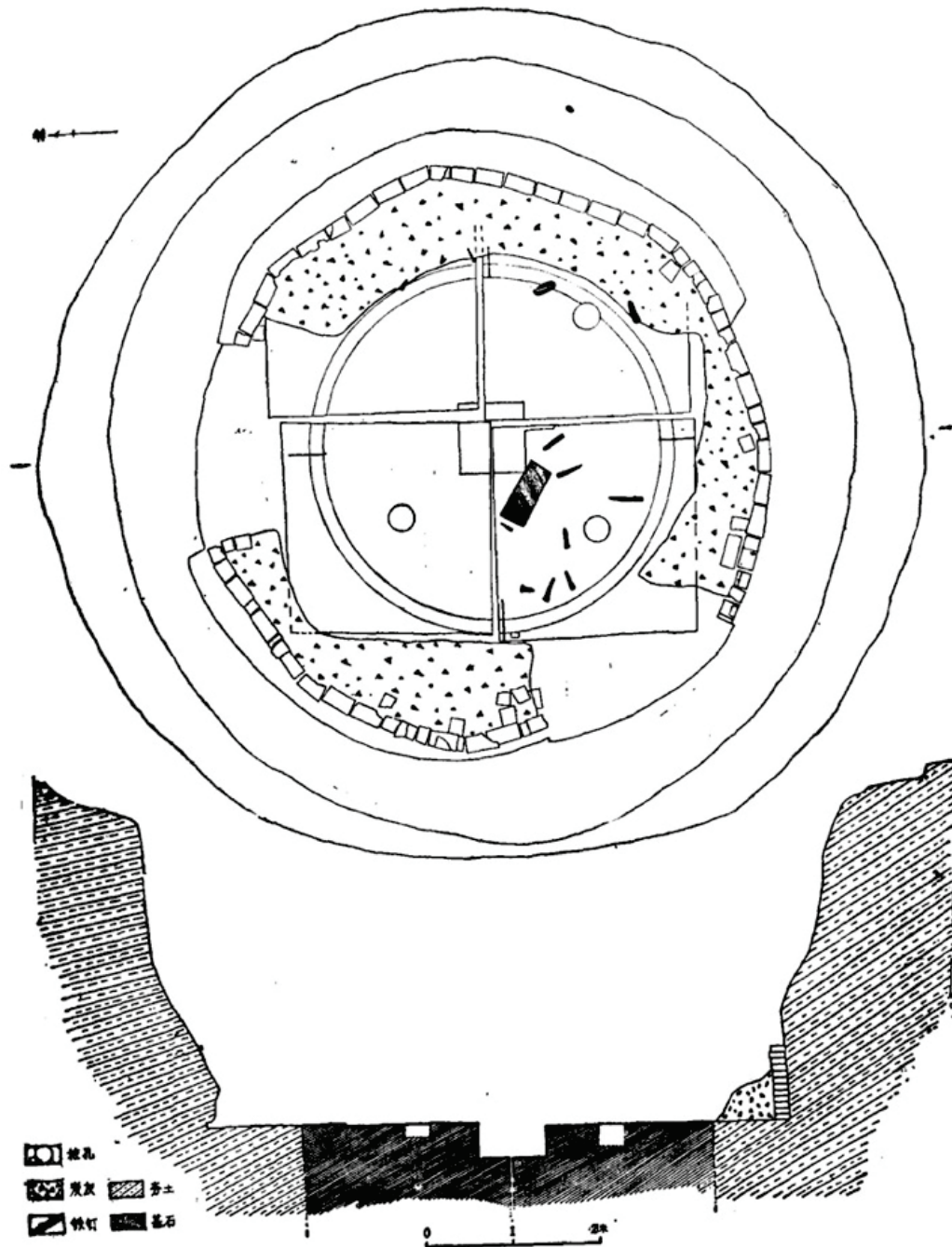


Figure 2. The plan and section of the central pillar pit at the site of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall (from Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo Luoyang Tang cheng dui 1988, p. 229, illustration 2).

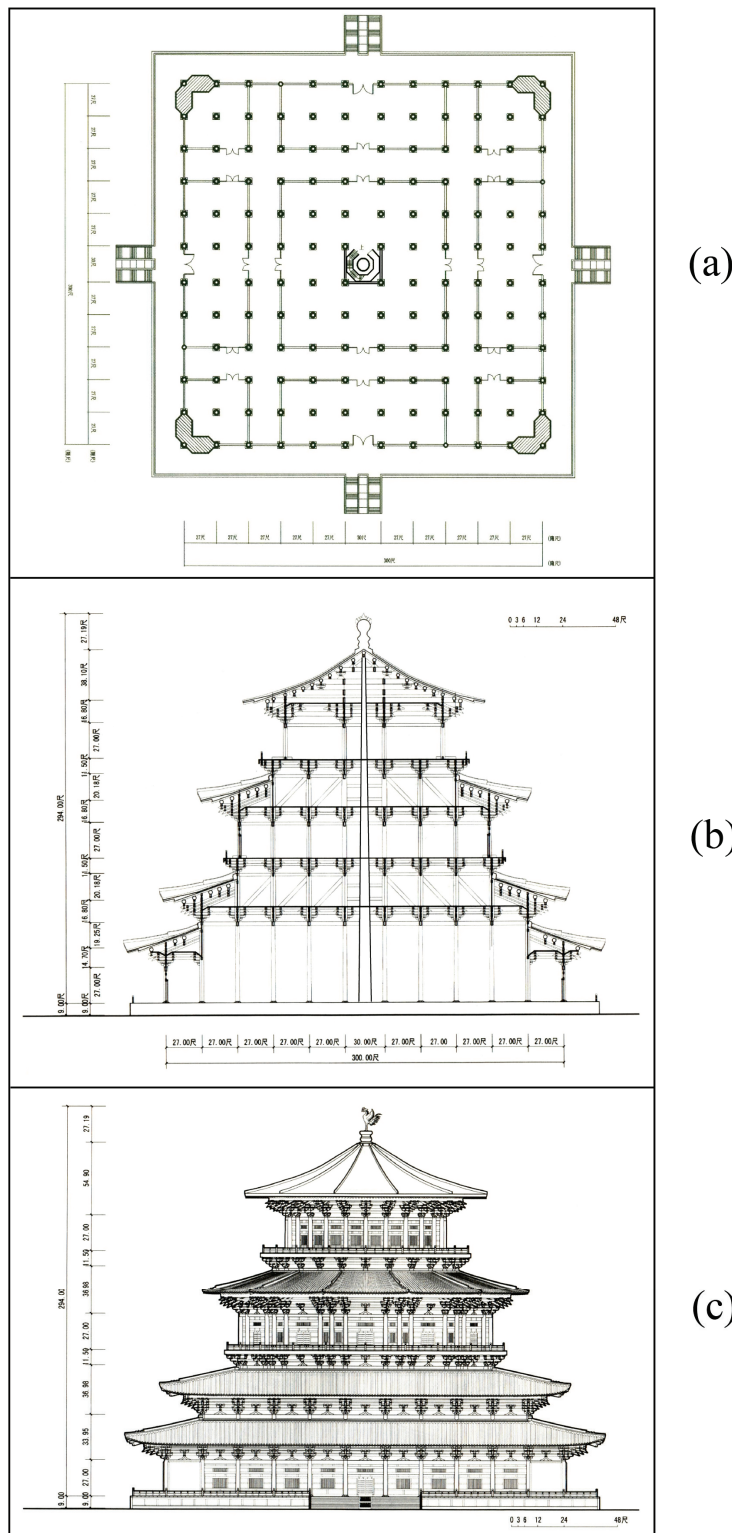


Figure 3. The reconstructed pictures of Wu Zetian’s Bright Hall. (a) The plan of the ground floor; (b) the vertical section with a copper fireball as the top decoration; (c) the elevation with a gilded iron phoenix as the top decoration (from Wang 2011, pp. 417, 431–32, illustration 34, 44–45).

The shape of Wu Zetian’s Bright Hall partly exhibits concepts associated with traditional Chinese design, and at the same time absorbed Buddhist cultural elements and made daring innovations. On the one hand, the Bright Hall has a round structure at the top and a square bottom, symbolizing the round sky and the square earth (*tianyuan difang* 天圓地方).

The three levels from the bottom to top try to imitate the four seasons, the twelve hours, and the twenty-four solar terms, respectively, symbolizing the cycle of a year. It reflects the overall traditional Chinese cosmic view following the design of past Bright Halls. This design aims to match the ideal political model in which the emperor communicates with heaven and man and issues political orders according to heaven's will at an appropriate time. Its design theory is based on the Confucianism that combines the theory of yin 陰-yang 陽 and the five elements (*Wuxing* 五行).

On the other hand, when Wu Zetian designed the regulations for building the Bright Hall, she only consulted with the Scholars of the Northern Gate (*Beimen xueshi* 北門學士) and did not consult Confucian scholars.⁸ Building the Bright Hall at the center of the palace, divided into three floors, with a huge central pillar, are features that are completely different from previous situations where the Bright Halls were located at the southern suburbs of the capital, with only one or two levels and no central pillars. Confucian officials under Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang also criticized Wu Zetian's Bright Hall for violating Confucian etiquette,⁹ showing its unconventional characteristic. Since Wu Zetian had been influenced by Buddhism since childhood, she used the religion as her main source of political legitimacy after taking power (Chen 1935, pp. 137–47; Forte 1976). She appointed the monk Xue Huaiyi as the person in charge of the construction of the Bright Hall, and built the Heavenly Hall (*Tiantang* 天堂) to enshrine a huge statue of the Buddha north of it. She also held many grand Buddhist activities in the Bright Hall.¹⁰ It is conceivable that the innovative design of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall should also be influenced by Buddhism.¹¹

The academic circle recognizes that Wu Zetian's Bright Hall has a strong Buddhist flavor, but it is unclear about the specific Buddhist cultural elements contained in the Bright Hall. In the past, this Bright Hall was often considered to be related to the pavilion-style pagoda, or even considered as the same.¹² Although the towering image and central column structure of the Bright Hall were like the pagoda, the Bright Hall was mainly used to hold state ceremonies such as holding court meetings and conducting rituals to heaven and ancestors, while the pagoda was used to make sacrifices to relics and house statues of the Buddha. The functions and architectural properties of the two are quite different. If the Bright Hall is regarded as a pagoda, holding the above-mentioned state ceremonies in the pagoda would seem rather strange. Moreover, it is worth noting that the pagoda originally reflects the celestial palace symbolically.¹³ Therefore, instead of describing the Bright Hall as imitating the pagoda, it is more appropriate to describe it as imitating the design of the celestial palace.

The Bright Hall constructed under Wu Zetian was part of a complex of ritual edifices (including the Celestial Pillar, the Bright Hall, and the Heavenly Hall, which will be demonstrated in detail at the beginning of the next chapter of this article), which should be understood as a unity. Due to certain problems with information gained from text sources, the actual nature and functions of these buildings have been interpreted differently. In the 1980s and 1990s, Antonino Forte and Ku Cheng-mei 古正美 put forward imaginative views. Forte believed that the Bright Hall of Wu Zetian that was built in the fourth year of the Chuigong era (688) was the collective name for a group of buildings on the north–south axis of the palace, including the narrow Bright Hall in the south and the “Sacred Tower” (*Lingtai* 靈臺) in the middle (Forte believed that the Sacred Tower was composed of two connected buildings, the Heavenly Hall and the Terrace of Dayi 大儀; in Forte's opinion, the former served as a traditional astronomical observatory and was also an out-and-out Buddhist pagoda, the latter was an observatory with a built-in armillary sphere), and a Biyong in the north; the Bright Hall, which was rebuilt after the fire, is a three-level stand-alone building, with the top floor symbolizing the original Heavenly Hall (Forte 1988). Ku Cheng-mei believed that the Bright Hall and the Heavenly Hall form the *Saṅghārāma* (community of the *Saṅghā*) of the Cakravartin, with Wu Zetian imitating the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises (Ku 1993, pp. 320–43).

There is considerable room for debate regarding their interpretation of the basic historical sources. For example, Forte used the Dayi built by Wu Zetian as a key point to deduce

the symbolic meaning of the Bright Hall, and believed that the Dayi was the Armillary Sphere. However, the known historical sources cannot provide evidence for this theory. In addition, Forte believed that the Bright Hall under Wu Zetian that was rebuilt after the fire only had a central column on the top floor, and there were no central columns on the first and second floors. This view was also inconsistent with the actual situation found in historical records and archaeological excavations. From this, he inferred the top floor of the Bright Hall which was rebuilt after the fire symbolizes the original Heavenly Hall. This view is naturally difficult to be accurate. As for Ku's theory, Kang Le 康樂 made an objective analysis and refutation of it, which is available for reference (Kang 1996, pp. 109–43).

In recent years, Lü Bo 呂博 personally divided the symbolic meaning of the Bright Hall into several stages of evolution based on events like the promulgation of the *Commentary on Mahāmegha Sūtra* (*Dayun jing shu* 大雲經疏) and the establishment of Wu Zetian's title as a Cakravartin (Lü 2015a, pp. 42–58), without considering the preparation time for these policies, which seems to be inexhaustive. In short, what needs to be re-evaluated is the guiding ideology of the innovative design of the Bright Hall under Wu Zetian. In what follows, I will aim at clarifying its symbolic meaning and the motives for adopting this particular design.

This paper focuses on the ideas behind the design of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall and explores how Wu Zetian skillfully used Buddhist ideology to consolidate her political rule. First, we look at the main axis building combination of Luoyang City during Wu Zetian's reign, and based on the two buildings aligned on the main axis, that of the Celestial Pillar (*Tianshu* 天樞) and the Heavenly Hall, which have clear symbolic meanings, we can gain a sense of the general direction of the design ideas behind the Bright Hall. We then analyze in detail the architectural layout, functions and architectural properties of the Bright Hall, and demonstrate in detail that the Bright Hall was probably designed to imitate the Sudharmā Hall (*Shanfa tang* 善法堂) of Trāyastriṃśa (*Daoli tian* 忉利天). Then, in the context of the cultural background of the period when Wu Zetian claimed to be the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden (*Jingguang tiannü* 淨光天女) and the Cakravartin, we explore her political motivations for building a Bright Hall which imitated the Sudharmā Hall.

2. The Bright Hall's Imitation of the Sudharmā Hall

2.1. Proposal of the Idea

Wu Zetian constructed three grand structures on the main axis of Luoyang City and its vicinity: the Celestial Pillar, the Bright Hall, and the Heavenly Hall (as shown in Figure 1). Although the Celestial Pillar's construction might begin slightly later than the other two, its planners likely considered the relationship it had with the other two buildings during its construction. In other words, these three buildings are supposed to have a close connection. Among them, the symbolic connotations of the Celestial Pillar and the Heavenly Hall are relatively clear and distinguishable, like two keys that open up the way for us to gain an insight into the profound meaning behind this group of buildings. Therefore, we might as well start from the Celestial Pillar and the Heavenly Hall, following the symbolic connotations they carry, to precisely pinpoint the effective thinking path for exploring the symbolic meaning of the Bright Hall.

The construction of the Celestial Pillar began no later than the second year of the Tianshou 天授 era (691)¹⁴ and was completed in the first year of the Zhengsheng 證聖 era (695).¹⁵ From the bottom up, the Celestial Pillar consisted of metal components such as the iron mountain (*tieshan* 鐵山), an eight-sided copper pillar, a cloud canopy (*yungai* 雲蓋), and dragons holding a pearl (Figure 4).¹⁶ Just as Li Song and Forte have pointed out, the lower part of the Celestial Pillar, the iron mountain with enormous size, should symbolize the Cakravāda-parvata (Iron Encircling Mountain [*Tiewei shan* 鐵圍山]) that encircles Mount Meru (*Xumi shan* 須彌山) in Buddhist cosmology (Li 1985, p. 43; Forte 1988, p. 243). Consequently, the Celestial Pillar, encircled by the iron mountain, naturally holds symbolic meaning related to Mount Meru. Moreover, the Celestial Pillar was in the shape resembling the character “工” as seen in many images of Mount Meru in Chinese cul-

tural regions during the Tang and earlier periods. Furthermore, the name “Celestial Pillar” straightforwardly expresses the concept of the celestial axis, aligning with Mount Meru’s characteristic as the cosmic axis.¹⁷

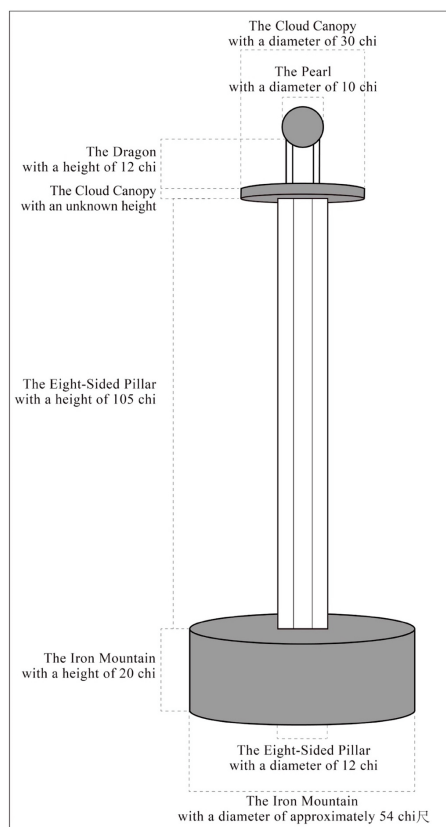


Figure 4. The sketch restoration of the Celestial Pillar. (Drawing by the author).

The Heavenly Hall was built around the same time as the Bright Hall, located slightly to the northwest of the latter (Wang 2023, p. 103). It was planned as a five-level structure, and from the third floor, one could overlook the Bright Hall.¹⁸ The name “Heavenly Hall” indicates that it should symbolize the Heavenly Palace, which housed a giant Buddha statue, most likely representing Maitreya Buddha descending from the Tuṣita Heaven (*Doushuai tian* 兜率天) (Luo 2016, pp. 29–42). Therefore, the Heavenly Hall likely represented the Tuṣita Heaven, a view recognized in academia (Lü 2015a, p. 54).

The Bright Hall was once strategically positioned between the Celestial Pillar and the Heavenly Hall. Notably, the Celestial Pillar bears a distinct resemblance to Mount Meru, a crucial element in Buddhist cosmology, while the Heavenly Hall corresponds closely to Tuṣita Heaven within the same religious framework. Given these clear associations, this paper embarks on an in-depth exploration of the possibility that the Bright Hall might also have embodied the symbolic meaning of the Buddhist cosmology. Following this line of thought, and considering the evidences discussed below, this paper suggests that the innovative design of the Bright Hall may have drawn inspiration from the image of the Sudharmā Hall 善法堂 in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven 忉利天.

Buddhism adopted and transformed the Indian Brahmanic worldview, positing that at the center of the world is Mount Meru, with the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (also known as the Thirty-Three Heavens 三十三天) ruled by Indra atop. At the center of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is Sudarśana City (*Shanjian cheng* 善見城), and the Sudharmā Hall is its most important building.¹⁹ Images of the Buddhist world centered around Mount Meru were common during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (*Nanbei chao* 南北朝; 420–589), Sui and Tang periods, often depicting a heavenly palace atop Mount Meru, such as the relief carving on the front of the stele of Dayun 大雲 Temple in Linyi 臨猗 from the third year of the Tian-

shou era (692) (Figure 5).²⁰ These images suggest that the concept of the Buddhist world centered around Mount Meru was well known to people at that time.



Figure 5. The relief carving on the front of the stele of Dayun Temple in Linyi from 692. (Photograph by Li Qiuhong).

It was rumored during Wu Zetian's reign, a monk named Hongfang 洪昉 (d.u.) was invited by Indra to the Sudharmā Hall to preach to heavenly beings. After returning to the human world, Hongfang described the scenes in the Sudharmā Hall and painted these scenes on twenty-four folding screens (*pingfeng* 屏風), causing a sensation. Later, Wu Zetian summoned Hongfang to the palace and observed the paintings on the screens.²¹ Although the story of Hongfang's ascension to heaven may be fictitious, his paintings of the scenes of the Sudharmā Hall and Wu Zetian's appreciation of them were likely true, and his depictions of the Sudharmā Hall would have aligned with descriptions in Buddhist scriptures; otherwise, people would not have believed it. This indicates that Wu Zetian and her contemporary subjects were familiar with the image of the Sudharmā Hall and held a strong admiration for it. As discussed below, there are similarities between the architectural structure and functions of the Bright Hall and the Sudharmā Hall, providing evidences that the Bright Hall was modeled after the Sudharmā Hall.

2.2. Architectural Structure and Facilities

One of the most striking structural features of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall was the central wooden pillar that ran through the entire structure. This pillar, over 200 chi 尺 (≈ 60.6 m) tall with a circumference of 10 wei 圍, was the key design element that marked the building's distinctive characteristics. The poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote: "There was a camphor tree growing deep in the mountains. People got to know it seven years after it grew into a big tree. This tree stands 200 chi tall, with a circumference of 10 wei at both the top and bottom. The Son of Heaven required such wood to build the Bright Hall, and only this wood met the specifications and is suitable for use".²² The inspiration for Bai Juyi's poem clearly came from the central pillar of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall. This type of tall and rare wooden material must have been extremely valuable. The *Jiu Tang-shu* 舊唐書 (Old Tang History) records that during the construction of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall, it took over a thousand workers to drag a single massive piece of wood, shouting in unison as they worked together.²³ This likely refers to the process of erecting the central pillar, indicating the enormous nature of the task. Prior to Wu Zetian, no records or archaeological findings of Bright Halls from previous eras showed the presence of a central

pillar.²⁴ When Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dismantled Wu Zetian's Bright Hall, the central pillar was specifically removed,²⁵ because it did not conform to traditional rites and was heavily influenced by the ideology of Wu Zetian's Zhou 周 Dynasty. Every detail of the Bright Hall, as an idealized building, was imbued with deep symbolic meaning. Wu Zetian's decision to invest tremendous resources in installing a central pillar that did not conform to traditional rites in the Bright Hall likely conveyed a crucial symbolic message beyond its structural function.

According to the records in Buddhist scriptures (Table 1),²⁶ the Sudharmā Hall in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is also a structure with a central pillar. The central pillar is extremely tall and large, made of various precious materials, and magnificently adorned, becoming the hallmark of the Sudharmā Hall. The central pillar of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall is overall the same as that of the Sudharmā Hall, providing the primary clue for understanding the design concept of the Bright Hall. Of course, both the central pillar of the Bright Hall and the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall should symbolize the cosmic pillar that connects heaven and earth.

Table 1. The records of the Sudharmā Hall's 善法堂 central pillar in Buddhist scriptures.

| The Records of the Central Pillar of the Sudharmā Hall | Scripture Sources |
|---|---|
| The cross-sectional circumference of the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall is 480 li. The height of the gate is 4000 li. They are made of seven precious substances (中柱圍四百八十里, 門高四千里, 以七寶作之). | <i>Da loutan jing</i> 大樓炭經 (Sūtra of the Great Conflagration), T no. 23, 1: 294c4-5. |
| The cross-sectional circumference of the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall is 10 yojana, and the height is 100 yojana (中柱圍十由旬, 高百由旬). | <i>Chang ahan jing</i> 長阿含經 (Long Āgama Sūtra), T no. 1, 1: 131b11. |
| The central pillar which is composed of various precious substances protrudes out of the Sudharmā Hall. A golden canopy is set on the top of the pillar, which is majestic and luxurious. The cross-sectional circumference of this central pillar is 1 yojana, and the cross-sectional diameter is 1/3 of 1 yojana (中央眾寶大柱聳出堂上, 其柱最頂覆金露盤, 種種莊嚴並皆具足. 是中央大柱圍一由旬, 徑三分之一). | <i>Fo shuo lishi apitan lun</i> 佛說立世阿毘曇論 (Abhidharma on the Establishment of the World According to the Buddha), T no. 1644, 32: 183b13-15. |
| There is a precious pillar in the center of the Sudharmā Hall, which is 20 yojana high (善法堂中央有一寶柱, 高二十由旬). | <i>Qishi jing</i> 起世經 (Sūtra on the Arising of Worlds), T no. 24, 1: 341b13-14. |
| There is a precious pillar right in the center of the Sudharmā Hall, which is 20 yojana high (當其中間有一寶柱, 高二十逾闍那). | <i>Qishi yinben jing</i> 起世因本經 (Sūtra on the Causes and Beginning of Worlds), T no. 25, 1: 396b13. |

Secondly, according to the *Henan zhi* 河南志 (Gazetteer of Henan) taken from the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (Yongle Encyclopedia), the central great room of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall was called the "Duanyi Great Room" 端宸殿.²⁷ The term "yi" 宸 originally referred to screens in the palace, and later came to signify the emperor's throne. The meaning of "duanyi" 端宸 is that the emperor sits leaning against the screen, or that the emperor sits on the throne with dignity. In the first year of the Wansui Tongtian 萬歲通天 period (696), Wu Zetian issued edicts from the Duanyi Great Room in the Bright Hall,²⁸ and in the first year of the Shenlong 神龍 period (705), Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (656–710; r. 705–710) ascended the throne in the Duanyi Great Room.²⁹ From the name and activities in the room, it is inferred that the Duanyi Great Room housed the imperial throne, which should be placed in front of the central pillar and facing south, or else it would not express the supreme status of the emperor. The Sudharmā Hall has similar facilities. According to *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (Long Āgama Sūtra), next to the bottom of the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall is the throne of Indra.³⁰ The *Fo shuo lishi apitan lun* 佛說立世阿毘曇論 (Abhidharma on the Establishment of the World According to the Buddha) also describes Indra sitting on a lion throne next to the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall.³¹ Both the imperial throne in the Duanyi Great Room of the Bright Hall and the throne of Indra in the Sudharmā Hall were placed next to the bottom of the central pillar and were imperial thrones, indicating a correlation between the two.

Furthermore, the Bright Hall of Wu Zetian was surrounded by the Biyong (the moat) at the bottom. In traditional Chinese view, the Biyong often symbolized heaven and also symbolized the prevalence of moral education.³² However, in the two “*Mingtang fu*” 明堂賦 (Poetic Essay on the Bright Hall) by Ren Hua 任華 (d.u.) and Li Bai 李白 (701–762), respectively, it was claimed that the flowing water around the Bright Hall of Wu Zetian represented the vast sea,³³ different from traditional Chinese concepts. This evokes the Buddhist cosmic imagery of the Sudharmā Hall on top of Mount Meru, which is surrounded by the sea.

Overall, the design of the Bright Hall of Wu Zetian, with its central pillar, throne next to the bottom of the pillar, and the surrounding sea, is very similar to that of the Sudharmā Hall.

2.3. Functions of the Building

In the fourth year of the Chuigong period (688), Wu Zetian issued an edict declaring that the Bright Hall was a place for the emperor to offer sacrifices to the gods, ancestors, and to meet with officials.³⁴ Therefore, the upper level of the Bright Hall was planned for sacrificial activities, while the lower level was used for hosting officials and issuing edicts.³⁵

First, regarding the activities related to meeting the officials and issuing edicts, records in the *Jiu Tangshu*, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New Tang History) and the *Zizhi tongjian* state that in the first year of the Yongchang 永昌 period (689), the first year of the Zaichu 載初 period (690), the first year of the Wansui Tongtian period (696), the first year of the Shengli 聖曆 period (698), and the second year of the Shengli period (699), Wu Zetian held ceremonies in the Bright Hall to meet the officials and issue edicts. In the first year of the Shengli period (698), the Director of Ceremonies, Pilü Renxiu 辟閭仁譚, reported to Wu Zetian: “On each New Year’s Day, Your Majesty receives the officials and issues edicts in the Bright Hall. Officials above the ninth rank in the capital and envoys from various states line up in the courtyard of the Bright Hall”.³⁶ This describes the details of Wu Zetian receiving those paying homage and issuing orders in the Bright Hall.

Similarly, the Sudharmā Hall was where Indra received homage from other Heavenly Kings and issued edicts. The *Fo shuo lishi apitan lun* describes the scene of the Heavenly Kings meeting Indra in the Sudharmā Hall:

Next to the central pillar of the Sudharmā Hall is a lion throne, where Indra sits, with sixteen Heavenly Kings on each side. Other Heavenly Kings sit in order according to their ranks. Indra’s two sons, Zhantan and Xiupiluo, who are two generals of Trāyastriṃśa, sit on either side of the Thirty-Three Heavenly Kings. Dhṛtarāṣṭra with his subordinates sit next to the eastern gate, Virūdhaka with his subordinates sit next to the southern gate, Virūpākṣa with his subordinates sit next to the western gate, and Vessavaṇa with his subordinates sit next to the northern gate. The Four Heavenly Kings report to Indra on the worldly affairs of the human world. 善法堂內最中柱邊有師 (=獅)子座, 釋提桓因昇座而坐. 左右二邊各十六天王行列而坐, 其餘諸天隨其高下依次而坐. 時天帝釋有二太子, 一名栴檀, 二名脩毘羅, 是忉利天二大將軍, 在三十三天左右而坐. 時題頭賴吒天王依東門坐, 共諸大臣及與軍眾恭敬諸天得入中坐. 時毘留勒叉天王依南門坐, 共諸大臣及與軍眾恭敬諸天得入中坐. 時毘留博叉天王依西門坐, 共諸大臣及與軍眾恭敬諸天得入中坐. 時毘沙門天王依北門住, 共諸大臣及與軍眾恭敬諸天得入中坐. 是四天王於善法堂, 世間善惡奏聞帝釋及忉利天.³⁷

The *Dasazhe Niqianzi suoshuo jing* 大薩遮尼乾子所說經 (Mahāsatya Nirgrantha Sūtra) further writes: “Indra is the lord of the Thirty-Three Heavens, issues edicts in the Sudharmā Hall, and the other Heavenly Kings listen to his commands with joy and reverence”.³⁸ It clearly indicates that the Sudharmā Hall was the place where Indra issued his edicts, almost no different from Wu Zetian’s activities in the Bright Hall.

Second, concerning sacrificial rites to heaven and ancestors, during the period from the completion of the Bright Hall until the second year of the Shengli era (699), Wu Zetian almost annually held sacrifices to the Haotian Shangdi 昊天上帝 (Supreme Emperor of Heaven) and the ancestors of the Wu family in the Bright Hall. As this paper argued, the Bright Hall emulated the Buddhist Sudharmā Hall, so conducting Confucian rituals in

it seems somewhat inappropriate. However, the Sudharmā Hall and the Haotian Shangdi both belong to the heavenly realm, with the lord of the Sudharmā Hall, Indra, and the Haotian Shangdi being, broadly speaking, similar celestial deities with similar status and characteristics.³⁹ Moreover, Wu Zetian consistently integrated Buddhist and Confucian ideas in political propaganda, placing both the Seven Treasures (*Qibao* 七寶) of the Cakravartin and the traditional Nine Tripod Cauldrons (*Jiuding* 九鼎) of China in the Bright Hall (Fracasso 1988, pp. 85–96; Lü 2015b, pp. 188–90). Thus, Wu Zetian’s sacrifices to the Haotian Shangdi in the Bright Hall, which symbolized the Sudharmā Hall reflect a blend of culture to expand political influence.

2.4. Nature of the Building

Since at least the Western Zhou 西周 (1046B.C.-771B.C.) period, China has been influenced by the concept of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming* 天命) with the highest rulers calling themselves “Son of Heaven” (*Tianzi* 天子) and seen as representatives of the Supreme God on earth. Since at least the Qin 秦 (221B.C.-207B.C.) Dynasty, the capitals and palaces of emperors were designed to reflect celestial signs in name, location, layout, and structure, highlighting the sacredness and authority of the ruler.⁴⁰

The Sui-Tang Dynasty’s Luoyang City is a prime example of a design based on celestial signs (Xiong 2017, pp. 118–228). The two official histories of the Tang state that the Luo River 洛水 running through the Luoyang City resembled the Milky Way (i.e., Sky River).⁴¹ The imperial palace, called the Ziwei 紫微 (Palace of the Purple Tenuity), was located in the northwest of the city, symbolizing the North Star surrounded by other stars.⁴² The palace and city gates were named Zetian 則天 (Imitating the heaven) Gate, the Duan Gate 端門 (the door of the Supreme Palace Enclosure in the sky), and the three bridges on the Luo River outside of the Duan Gate were named Huangdao 黃道 (Ecliptic) Bridge, Tianjin 天津 (Celestial Ford) Bridge, and Xingjin 星津 (Star Ford) Bridge. Furthermore, the great road leading from the bridges in the south to the Dingding 定鼎 Gate of the outer city wall was called the Tianjie 天街 (Celestial Street). These names contained a strong celestial implication, resembling the celestial world (as shown in Figure 1).

The Bright Hall, as the emperor’s palace and the highest-ranked building in Luoyang, the celestial city, must be seen as a heavenly palace. In the fourth year of the Chuigong period (688), Liu Yunji 劉允濟 (fl. 680s) praised the Bright Hall, saying: “Great heavens, the palace of the Supreme God stands in the Ziwei City [the Purple Forbidden Enclosure in the sky]; vast earth, the hall of the sage stands in the imperial palace”.⁴³ Zhang Jianzhi 張柬之 (625–706), in the first year of the Yongchang period (689) wrote: “Your Majesty received the mandate of heaven and governs the people, residing in the Ziwei Palace, sitting in the Bright Hall”.⁴⁴ Both compared the Bright Hall to the Ziwei Palace, indicating their similar nature. Since the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Chinese worldview have been deeply influenced by Buddhism, and they often equated the traditional concept of the Ziwei Palace with the Buddhist Celestial Palace.⁴⁵ Wu Zetian’s Bright Hall, regarded by Confucian officials as the Ziwei Palace, is rich in Buddhist elements and should have the connotation of a Buddhist celestial palace in the eyes of ordinary people.

Additionally, in the second year of the Zongzhang 總章 period (669) of Tang Gaozong’s 唐高宗 (628–683; r. 649–683) reign, an edict established the regulations of the Bright Hall, and in the third year of the Xianheng 咸亨 period (672), Luo Binwang 駱賓王 (640?–684?) described it as “promoting virtue and amending customs, the Bright Hall emulates the Supreme God’s palace”.⁴⁶ This reveals the traditional concept of the Bright Hall as a model of the celestial palace of the Supreme God, which is very similar in nature to the Sudharmā Hall, which was also the palace of the Buddhist heavenly god Indra.

In conclusion, the Bright Hall and the Sudharmā Hall are very similar in many aspects, and the former is likely following the design of the latter.

3. Related Cultural Background

From the perspective of the political and cultural background of the time, Wu Zetian's imitation of the Sudharmā Hall in designing the Bright Hall can be attributed to two key reasons that cannot be overlooked.

First, it aligns with the composition of the *Commentary on Mahāmegha Sūtra* 大雲經疏 to establish Wu Zetian's identity as the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden 淨光天女. In the first year of the Zaichu era (690), Xue Huaiyi, Faming 法明 (fl. 690s–700s), and others composed the *Commentary on Mahāmegha Sūtra*, which used the narrative of the *Mahāmegha Sūtra* (*Dayun jing* 大雲經) where the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden reincarnates as a queen to rule Jambudvīpa (the human realm) to legitimize Wu Zetian's female rulership. This became a key political propaganda for the regime change imposed by Wu Zetian (Forte 1976). The planning and composition of the *Commentary on Mahāmegha Sūtra* took time, and related plans may have already been in place during the construction of the Bright Hall. Since Wu Zetian was compared to a heavenly goddess, her palace naturally needed to be modeled after the heavenly palace. Furthermore, the original version of the *Mahāmegha Sūtra*, also named the *Da fangdeng wuxiang jing* 大方等無想經 (Great Corrective Vast Sūtra of No Thought) translated by Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (Dharma-raksa; 385–433) of Northern Liang 北涼 (397–439), recorded that:

In the distant future, this queen (who was reincarnated from the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden) will become a Buddha named the Tathāgata of Purity, Reality, and Growth (*Jingshi zengzhang rulai* 淨實增長如來). At that time, the Sāhā world will be renamed the Pure Cleansing (*Jingjie huanzhuo* 淨潔浣濯) world. There will be a city called Pure Wonder Fragrance (*Qingjing miaoxiang* 清淨妙香), adorned with seven treasures, unparalleled, just like the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. 如是女王未來之世過無量劫當得作佛，號淨實增長如來，應正遍知，明行足，善逝，世間解，無上士，調御丈夫，天人師，佛，世尊。此娑婆世界爾時轉名淨潔浣濯，有城名曰清淨妙香，其城純以七寶莊嚴，最勝無上，猶忉利宮。⁴⁷

The prophecy stated that when the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden attains Buddhahood, human cities will be as pure and majestic as the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Therefore, imitating the design of the Sudharmā Hall in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven for the Bright Hall would help Wu Zetian establish her image as the Pure Light Heavenly Maiden. It is worth noting that one of the authors of the *Commentary on Mahāmegha Sūtra*, Xue Huaiyi, was also in charge of the construction of the Bright Hall, further strengthening the link between these two political and cultural projects.

Second, it reinforced Wu Zetian's image as the Cakravartin. In the second year of the Changshou 長壽 era (693), Wu Zetian adopted the honorific title of *Jinlun shengshen huangdi* 金輪聖神皇帝 (Sage Emperor of the Golden Wheel [Cakravartin]) and displayed the Seven Treasures of the Cakravartin in the Bright Hall, promoting herself as such.⁴⁸ Comparing emperors to the Cakravartin had been common since the Northern and Southern Dynasties (Kuramoto 2011, pp. 16–19; Sun 2013, pp. 78–88). Wu Zetian, as a devout Buddhist, held the ideology of the Cakravartin even before adopting the title “Golden Wheel”, possibly conceived in tandem with the construction of the Bright Hall. In Buddhism, the Cakravartin is considered the ideal human ruler, parallel in status to Indra. As recorded in texts like the *Dingsheng wang gushi jing* 頂生王故事經 (Sūtra on the Story of Cakravartin Mūrdhaga) translated by Faju 法炬 (fl. 290s–310s) during the Western Jin 西晉 (266–317), the Cakravartin King Mūrdhaga once ascended to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and sat side by side with Indra in the Sudharmā Hall.⁴⁹ Some relief panels from the 2nd and 3rd centuries found in southeast India (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and other places) depict King Mūrdhaga and Indra sitting together (Figure 6), indicating their equal status.⁵⁰ Thus, the image of the Cakravartin sitting in the Sudharmā Hall is especially noteworthy.

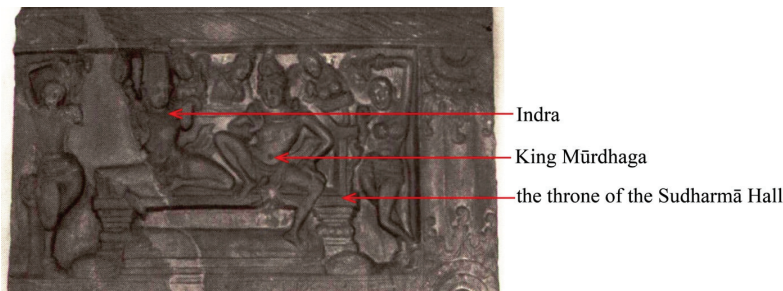


Figure 6. The relief of King Mūrdhaga and Indra sitting together in the Sudharmā Hall, around the 3rd century, housed in the Archaeological Museum of Nagarjunakonda of India. (The base image is taken from Miyaji 2010, p. 285, illustration II-63. The arrows and words are marked by the author).

In the first year of the Zhengsheng era (695), Wu Zetian held a Buddhist ceremony in the Bright Hall, displaying the Seven Treasures of the Cakravartin, and throwing large amounts of metal coins into the air.⁵¹ This recalls the miraculous event from King Mūrdhaga's reign, where the Seven Treasures were all present, and heaven rained gold and silver coins for seven days and nights.⁵² Reliefs of a Cakravartin from before or after the common era found in Jaggayyapeta of southeast India also depict a scene of the Cakravartin surrounded by Seven Treasures, with strings of square coins descending from the sky (Figure 7) (Miyaji 2010, pp. 274–93). It is evident that Wu Zetian was familiar with the story of King Mūrdhaga and intentionally created an atmosphere of a peaceful and prosperous reign associated with a Cakravartin. As mentioned earlier, King Mūrdhaga, equal in status to Indra, once sat side by side with him in the Sudharmā Hall. Therefore, it is reasonable that Wu Zetian's Bright Hall would imitate the design of the Sudharmā Hall.



Figure 7. The relief of a Cakravartin with Seven Treasures and falling coins, from the 1st century B.C. to the 1st century A.D., housed in the Government Museum of Chennai of India (from Koezuka and Miyaji 2000, p. 125, plate 106).

Furthermore, since the Cakravartin is on par with Indra, his capital should naturally rival the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. According to Buddhist scriptures like the *Youxing jing* 遊行經 (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta) from the *Chang ahan jing*, Kuśinagara, where the Buddha attained nirvana, was once the capital of the Cakravartin Mahāsudassana 大善見, known for its wealth and splendor, with the Dharma Hall (*Zhengfa dian* 正法殿) built by heavenly craftsmen from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.⁵³ Scholars have pointed out that Mahāsudassana's capital and its Dharma Hall were replicas of Sudarśana City and the Sudharmā Hall of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. The various scenes of Mahāsudassana's capital symbolized "the worldly manifestation of the heavenly kingdom" (Shi 2009, p. 430). In the last years of Emperor Hui 惠帝 (259–307; r. 290–307) of the Western Jin, the Indian monk Qiyu 耆域 (d.u.) came to Luoyang and remarked that the city resembled the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, even claiming that the craftsmen who built the city had come from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and returned there after completing it.⁵⁴ In the tenth year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 era (433) during the Liu Song 劉宋 (420–479) Dynasty, the kingdom of Heluodan 呵羅單 presented a letter to the Song court, praising the Song capital as resembling the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven,⁵⁵ indicating that such Buddhist ideas already spread to China. Within this cultural context, for Wu Zetian to emphasize her image as the Cakravartin, it was necessary to model her capital after the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, and even more so to construct a building symbolizing the Sudharmā Hall, which only the Bright Hall would qualify.

Additionally, Buddhism emphasizes that both the Cakravartin and the Buddha are born in the center of the world, not in peripheral regions, as Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) noted: "The supreme among humans is the Cakravartin, and the supreme among sages is the Buddha. If these two supreme beings are born, they must be at the center of the world".⁵⁶ The Sudharmā Hall, located at the summit of Mount Meru, is considered the center of the world in Buddhist cosmology. In traditional Chinese belief, the center of the world (*tianxia zhizhong* 天下之中) was thought to be in the Luoyang region.⁵⁷ Imitating the design of the Sudharmā Hall in the construction of the Bright Hall would help re-establish the image of Luoyang as the center of the world, thus creating the necessary environment for Wu Zetian to be seen as the Cakravartin or even the Maitreya Buddha.

4. Conclusions

In summary, Wu Zetian's Bright Hall was the central building of the empire, designed based on traditional principles regarding the Bright Hall in addition to emulating the Buddhist Sudharmā Hall. It aligned with Wu Zetian's multiple identities as emperor, heavenly maiden, Cakravartin, and became a symbol of her political legitimacy, authority, and even divinity.

In the ideal design of Wu Zetian's Luoyang City (the Divine Capital [*shendu* 神都]), the Celestial Pillar, the Bright Hall, and the Heavenly Hall stood from south to north, from low to high along the city's main axis, symbolizing Mount Meru, the Sudharmā Hall of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven on the Mount Meru, and the Tuṣṭita Heaven above it, respectively. This should just be a three-dimensional representation of the commonly seen pictorial image of Mount Meru. Coupled with other buildings aligned on the main axis of the city that were rich in traditional cosmological meanings such as the Zetian Gate, the Duan Gate, the Huangdao Bridge, the Tianjin Bridge, the Xingjin Bridge, and the Celestial Street (as shown in Figure 1), Luoyang City has been built into the sacred "Celestial City".

Unfortunately, in December 694, the unfinished Heavenly Hall was destroyed by fire, damaging the Bright Hall as well. At that time, the Celestial Pillar was still under construction, not completed until May 695. The idea of combining the Celestial Pillar with the Bright Hall and the Heavenly Hall could not be realized as scheduled because of the fire. It was not until the reconstruction of the Bright Hall which was completed in 696 that the Celestial Pillar and the Bright Hall finally stood together in Luoyang, the sacred capital, and jointly expressed the great achievements of Wu Zetian's Zhou Dynasty. Regrettably, it is unknown whether the reconstruction of the Heavenly Hall was completed.⁵⁸ Nowadays, Wu Zetian's Bright Hall, Heavenly Hall, and Celestial Pillar have all been buried in the

dust of history. However, the grand and profound design concepts that integrated them still leave us with an endless aftertaste.

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Abbreviations

T Taishō shinshū daizōkyō; see Takakusu and Watanabe (Takakusu and Watanabe 1924–1934).

Notes

- ¹ Although Wu Zetian officially established the Wu Zhou 武周 Dynasty in October 690, she had been in control of political power since 684. Therefore, this article takes 684 as the starting year of Wu Zetian's reign.
- ² Many ancient Chinese emperors, including Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9–23), Liu Xiu 劉秀 (r. 25–57), and Yuan Hong 元宏 (r. 471–499), once built the Bright Halls. For the forms and design concepts of the Bright Halls in past dynasties of China, refer to Wechsler (1985), pp. 195–211; Wang (1987), pp. 1–43; Jiang (2003), pp. 18–215; Zhang (2007), pp. 11–186; Pankenier (2013), pp. 342–49; Minamizawa (2018), pp. 21–225; Lü (2018), pp. 115–30.
- ³ The main available text sources recording the form and structure of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall are as follows: *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government); *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Old Tang History); *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New Tang History); *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Institutional History of the Tang Dynasty); *Tongdian* 通典 (Comprehensive Statutes); *Cefu yuan'gui* 冊府元龜 (Primary Divination Tortoise of the Records Office).
- ⁴ There were distinctions between large chi and small chi in the Tang Dynasty. Architectural measurements should be calculated using the large chi. 1 large chi in the Tang Dynasty was approximately equal to 30.3 cm (refer to Qiu 2002, pp. 352–67).
- ⁵ *Zizhi tongjian* 204. 6454: (武則天明堂) 高二百九十四尺, 方三百尺。凡三層, 下層法四時, 各隨方色, 中層法十二辰, 上為圓蓋, 九龍捧之, 上層法二十四氣, 亦為圓蓋, 上施鐵鳳, 高一丈, 飾以黃金。中有巨木十圍, 上下通貫, 栴檀檉檉藉以為本。下施鐵渠為辟雍之象。In the edition of *Zizhi tongjian* reprinted by Hu Kejia 胡克家 (1757–1816) in the Qing 清 Dynasty (1644–1911), the above eleven characters “上層法二十四氣, 亦為圓蓋” are missing. Zhang Yu 章鈺 (1865–1937) supplemented these characters based on the editions from the Song 宋 (960–1279) and Ming 明 (1368–1644) Dynasties.
- ⁶ *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6505: 施金塗鐵鳳, 高二丈, 後為大風所損, 更為銅火珠, 群龍捧之。
- ⁷ Scholars successively drew several restoration drawings of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall in different forms previously (see Wang 1987, illustration 5.1–5.4; Fu 2001, pp. 413–14; Yang 2001, pp. 73–75; Zhang 2007, pp. 207–9). The drawings by Wang Guixiang have been improved compared with previous works (see Wang 2011, pp. 369–455).
- ⁸ *Zizhi tongjian* 204. 6447: 獨與北門學士議其制, 不問諸儒。
- ⁹ *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 875: 體式乖宜, 違經紊禮。
- ¹⁰ For examples, in the second year of the Changshou 長壽 era (693), the Seven Treasures (*Qibao* 七寶) of the Cakravartin were displayed in the Bright Hall (see *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6492). In the first year of the Zhengsheng 證聖 era (695), a great Buddhist equal assembly (*wuzhe dahui* 無遮大會) was held in the Bright Hall (see *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6498). In the first year of the Shenlong 神龍 era (705), the Buddha's relics from Famen 法門 Temple in Fufeng 扶風 were grandly worshipped in the Bright Hall (refer to Chen 2002, pp. 97–100).
- ¹¹ For a comprehensive discussion on the Buddhist influences on Wu Zetian's Bright Hall, refer to Xie (2021), pp. 12–19; Skrypnik (2021), pp. 929–48.
- ¹² The scholar who put forward this view earlier is Tanigawa Michio (refer to Tanigawa 1983).

- 13 The Buddhist stupa in ancient India had the symbolic connotation of the celestial palace (refer to Miyaji 1992, pp. 9–82). Many inscriptions on Buddhist statues from the Southern and Northern Dynasties (*Nanbei chao* 南北朝; 420–589) to the Sui–Tang periods of China called the pagoda building “tiangong” 天宮 (heavenly palace), indicating that the pagoda in ancient China also symbolized the celestial palace (refer to Zhang 1999, pp. 205–30).
- 14 According to the epitaph of Quan Xiancheng 泉獻誠 which was written in 701, Quan received an imperial edict from Wu Zetian and was responsible for the construction of the Celestial Pillar in 691. From this, it can be known that the construction time of the Celestial Pillar was no later than 691. Liang Weizhong 梁惟忠, “Dazhou gu Zuowei da jiangjun you Yulinwei shangxia Shangzhuguo Bianguo Gong zeng you Yulinwei da jiangjun Quan jun muzhiming bing xu” 大周故左衛大將軍右羽林衛上下上柱國卞國公贈右羽林衛大將軍泉君墓志銘並序 (Epitaph with a Preface for Lord Quan, the General of the Left Guard, Highest Military Officer, Duke of Bian State, Posthumously Bestowed as the General of the Right Feathered Forest Guard of the Great Zhou): (天授) 二年二月奉勅充檢校天樞子來使 (refer to Zhou and Zhao 1992, p. 985).
- 15 *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6502–6503: (證聖元年) 夏四月, 天樞成. “Dazhou gu zhenjun da jiangjun Gao jun Zuyou muzhiming bing xu” 大周故鎮軍大將軍高君足西墓誌銘並序 (Epitaph with a Preface for Gao Zuyou, the Senior General Who Guards the Army of the Great Zhou): 證聖元年造天樞成 (refer to Wu 1998, p. 230).
- 16 The restoration of the shape and size of the Celestial Pillar is comprehensively referenced from *Jiu Tangshu* 6. 124; *Xin Tangshu* 76. 3483; *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6496–6503; *Da Tang xinyu* 8. 126. For specific demonstrations, refer to Guo 2001, pp. 72–73.
- 17 Some scholars believed that the construction of the Celestial Pillar was influenced by foreign monumental architecture such as the Asoka Pillar in India and the Trajan’s Column in Rome (refer to Zhang 1994, pp. 44–46).
- 18 *Zizhi tongjian* 204. 6455: 又於明堂北起天堂五級以貯大像, 至三級則俯視明堂矣.
- 19 In early Buddhist sutras like *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (Long Āgama Sūtra), *Qishi jing* 起世經 (Sūtra on the Arising of Worlds), and *Qishi yinben jing* 起世因本經 (Sūtra on the Causes and Beginning of Worlds), it is described that the Sudharmā Hall is situated within Sudarśana City. Whereas in some other Nikāya-Buddhism treatises such as *Apidamo dapiposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 (Treatise of the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma), *Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論 (Abhidharma Storehouse Treatise), and *Apidamo shunzhengli lun* 阿毘達磨順正理論 (Treatise on Accordance with the Correct Doctrine), it is stated that the Sudharmā Hall is located at the southwest corner outside Sudarśana City. Additionally, there is also a “Sudharmā Hall” in Tuṣṭita Heaven where Bodhisattva Maitreya dwells. The “Sudharmā Hall” in Tuṣṭita Heaven was constructed by the light of the pearl on the forehead of the great deity *Laodubati* 率度跋提. However, the name of the “Sudharmā Hall” in Tuṣṭita Heaven is only seen in individual scriptures like *Fo shuo guan Mile Pusa shangsheng Doushuai tian jing* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經 (Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya’s Ascent to Rebirth in Tuṣṭita Heaven). These meditation scriptures were composed relatively late and might have adopted the name of the Sudharmā Hall of Indra, which should have already been common knowledge in early Buddhism.
- 20 There are multiple scenes carved on this stele that show the events before and after Sakyamuni’s nirvana. Figure 5 depicts Mahāmāyā, the mother of Sakyamuni, descending from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven on top of Mount Meru to attend the mourning ceremony for Sakyamuni. Moreover, the inscription on this stele indicates that the stele was once in the possession of the Dayun 大雲 Temple, which was built under the order of Wu Zetian, and one of the donors of this stele was a monk from the Taiping 太平 Temple in Luoyang, which indicates that this stele had a close relationship with Wu Zetian and the capital city of Luoyang. For the research on Wu Zetian’s construction of the Dayun Temple, refer to Nie (2020), pp. 60–87. For the inscriptions on this stele, see Chen (2005), pp. 234–35. For the details of the nirvana images, refer to Li (1997), pp. 69–73; Li (2008), pp. 6–46.
- 21 The story is documented in the *Ji wen* 紀聞 (Record of Observations and Experiences) compiled by Niu Su 牛肅 in the Tang Dynasty and later incorporated into *Taiping guang ji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Taiping Xinguo Period) (see *Taiping guang ji* 95. 631–635). Niu Su is believed to have lived from the Wu Zhou period to the Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (711–762; r. 756–762) period in the Tang Dynasty. The *Ji wen* mainly records events that the author personally witnessed or heard about, possessing relatively high historical value.
- 22 Bai Juyi 白居易, “Yuyi shi wu shou” 寓意詩五首 (Five Allegorical Poems), *Quan Tangshi* 425. 4678: 豫樟生深山, 七年而後知, 挺高二百尺, 本末皆十圍, 天子建明堂, 此材獨中規. The image of the “Bright Hall Wood” can also be found in the poems written by Du Mu 杜牧, Pi Rixiu 皮日休, and others from the middle and late Tang Dynasty, and was used as a metaphor for the “pillar of the country”.
- 23 *Jiu Tangshu* 183. 4742: 曳一大木千人, 置號頭, 頭一闕, 千人齊和.
- 24 For instance, in the second year of the Zongzhang 總章 era (669) under the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628–683; r. 649–683) of the Tang Dynasty, a construction plan for the Bright Hall was formulated. It was planned to install “Tang xin ba zhu” 堂心八柱 (eight pillars around the center of the Bright Hall). In other words, the center inside Gaozong’s planned Bright Hall should be a square usable space surrounded by eight pillars. In Wu Zetian’s Bright Hall, the center was occupied by a pillar and was no longer a usable space, which was quite different from the previous situations. For the regulations of Gaozong’s Bright Hall in the plan, see Li Zhi 李治 (Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty), “Ding Mingtang guizhi zhao” 定明堂規制詔 (The Imperial Edict on Determining the Regulations of the Bright Hall), *Quan Tangwen* 13. 155–158.

- 25 *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 876: The upper floor of Wu Zetian's Bright Hall was dismantled, making it 95 chi (\approx 28.8 m) shorter. Moreover, the central pillar of the Bright Hall was removed, and an octagonal tower was set up on the flat platform on the top floor (且拆上層, 卑於舊制九十五尺, 又去柱心木, 平座上置八角樓).
- 26 It should be pointed out that the four scripture excerpts listed in Table 1, except for the quotation from *Fo shuo lishi apitan lun* 佛說立世阿毘曇論 (Abhidharma on the Establishment of the World According to the Buddha), are four different Chinese translations of the same original Indic source text. For the basic information about these scriptures, refer to the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, contents written by Michael Radich (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?7a.xml>) (accessed on 8 December 2024), Charles Muller (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?8d.xml>) (accessed on 8 December 2024) and Roujia Zeng (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?8d.xml>) (accessed on 8 December 2024).
- 27 Henan zhi 1. 120.
- 28 *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 867: (武則天) 御通天宮之端宸殿, 命有司讀時令, 布政於群后.
- 29 *Tang huiyao* 1. 4: 神龍元年正月二十四日, (唐中宗) 即位於通天宮端宸殿.
- 30 *Chang ahan jing*, T no. 1, 1: 131b12: 其堂 (=善法堂) 中柱圍十由旬, 高百由旬, 當其柱下敷天帝御座.
- 31 *Fo shuo lishi apitan lun*, T no. 1644, 32: 184a26-27: 善法堂內最中柱邊有師 (=獅) 子座, 釋提桓因昇座而坐.
- 32 *Baihu tong* 2. 131: 辟者壁也, 象壁圓以法天也; 雍者, 壅之以水, 象教化流行也.
- 33 Ren Hua 任華, "Mingtang fu" 明堂賦 (Poetic Essay on the Bright Hall), *Quan Tangwen* 376. 3816: 行水四周而為海. Li Bai 李白, "Mingtang fu" 明堂賦 (Poetic Essay on the Bright Hall), *Quan Tangwen* 347. 3520: 流辟雍之滔滔, 象環海之湯湯. Based on the contents of the essays, what Ren and Li described should be the Bright Hall constructed by Wu Zetian before it was dismantled by Emperor Xuanzong (refer to Yu and Kang 2020, p. 153).
- 34 *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 863: 夫明堂者, 天子宗祀之堂, 朝諸侯之位也. For the research on the poems composed by Wu Zetian for the ceremonies held in the Bright Hall, refer to Sevillano-López (2018), pp. 312–18.
- 35 *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 864: 今以上堂為嚴配之所, 下堂為布政之居.
- 36 *Jiu Tangshu* 22. 868: 今每歲首元日於通天宮受朝, 讀時令, 布政事. 京官九品以上, 諸州朝集使等咸列於庭.
- 37 *Fo shuo lishi apitan lun*, T no. 1644, 32: 184a26-b9.
- 38 *Dasazhe Niqianzi suoshuo jing*, T no. 272, 9: 319a17-18: 譬如帝釋王, 三十三天主, 布正 (=政) 善法堂, 諸天歡喜受.
- 39 The monk Shenqing 神清 (fl. 800s–810s) of the mid-Tang period compared traditional Chinese deities like the Haotian Shangdi with the Brahma, Indra, and the Four Heavenly Kings in Buddhism and even viewed them as equals (see *Beishan lu* 1. 29).
- 40 For example, in Xianyang 咸陽, the capital of the Qin Dynasty, the Wei River 渭水 flowing through the city symbolized the Milky Way, and the Heng Bridge 橫橋 symbolized the Altair (渭水貫都以象天漢, 橫橋南渡以法牽牛). The palaces in Xianyang were designed to imitate the Palace of the Purple Tenuity, symbolizing the residence of the Heavenly Emperor (因北陵營殿, 端門四達, 以則紫宮, 象帝居) (refer to He 2006, p. 27; Pankenier 2013, pp. 317–22).
- 41 *Jiu Tangshu* 38. 1420–1421: 洛水貫都, 有河漢之象.
- 42 *Xin Tangshu* 38. 982: 以象北辰藩衛, 曰紫微城.
- 43 Liu Yunji 劉允濟, "Mingtang fu" 明堂賦 (Poetic Essay on the Bright Hall), *Quan Tangwen* 164. 1677: 大哉乾象, 紫微疏上帝之宮; 邈矣坤輿, 丹闕披聖人之宇.
- 44 Zhang Jianzhi 張柬之, "Dui xianliang fangzheng ce" 對賢良方正策 (Responses to the Imperial Examination on Worthy and Upright Scholars), *Quan Tangwen* 175. 1785: 伏惟陛下受天明命, 統輯黎元, 載黃屋, 負黼宸, 居紫宮之邃, 坐明堂之上.
- 45 In the inscriptions on Buddhist statues from the Southern and Northern Dynasties, there were mentions of being reborn in Ziwei Palace, showing that the concept of Ziwei Palace tended to merge with that of Buddhist heavens. For example, the inscription on the statue of Maitreya Bodhisattva made by Liu Luozhen 劉洛真 in the first year of the Yanchang 延昌 era (512) of the Northern Wei Dynasty, on the left wall of Guyang Cave of Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, records: "Help our deceased parents be reborn in a place as peaceful and happy as Ziwei Palace (使亡父母託生紫微安樂之處)". The inscription on the statue stele made in the eighth year of the Tianbao 天保 era (557) of the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577) at Liubei Temple 劉碑寺 in Dengfeng 登封 records: "Hope that the spirit ascends to Ziwei Palace and the body rises to a wonderful realm (願使神登紫宮, 形升妙境)". The inscription on the statue of Locanabuddha made by the wife of Wang Feng 王豐 in the fourth year of the Tiantong 天統 era (568) of the Northern Qi Dynasty records: "Hope to be reborn in Ziwei Palace in the future and be reborn in the land of peace and happiness (願得神勝紫微之宮, 託生安洛 [=樂] 之國)". For the complete texts and analysis of these inscriptions, refer to Hou (2015), pp. 197–98; Wang (2008), p. 206.
- 46 Luo Binwang 駱賓王, "Bingbu zou Yaozhou po zei Shemengjian deng lubu" 兵部奏姚州破賊設蒙儉等露布 (Memorial on the Victory over the Bandits Shemengjian and Others in Yaozhou Submitted by the Ministry of War), *Quan Tangwen* 199. 2012: 宣風布政, 明堂法上帝之宮.
- 47 *Da fangdeng wuxiang jing*, T no. 387, 12: 1107a29-b5.
- 48 *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6492: "In the ninth lunar month of the second year of the Changshou era (693), 5000 people including Wu Chengsi 武承嗣 submitted a petition to Wu Zetian, asking her to add the honorific title of 'Sage Emperor of the Golden Wheel'. On

the ninth day of that month, Wu Zetian accepted this honorific title in the Bright Hall and granted an amnesty to the whole country. She made the Seven Treasures of the Cakravartin. Whenever there was a court assembly, the Seven Treasures would be displayed (in the Bright Hall) (魏王承嗣等五千人表請加尊號曰金輪聖神皇帝。乙未，太后御萬象神宮受尊號，赦天下，作金輪等七寶，每朝會，陳之殿庭)”。

- 49 *Dingsheng wang gushi jing*, T no. 39, 1: 823b14-20: “After King Mürdhaga had this thought, he immediately disappeared from the world of Uttarakura and arrived in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Leading the four kinds of soldiers, he rushed towards the Sudharmā Hall. At that time, when Indra saw King Mürdhaga coming, he said to King Mürdhaga, ‘Your Majesty, you can sit on this throne.’ At that time, King Mürdhaga sat side by side with Indra. Except for their eyes, these two kings seemed to have no difference (頂生王作是念已，於鬱單曰沒，便住往三十三天，及四種兵詣彼善法講堂。爾時釋提桓因遙見頂生王來，見已便語頂生王曰，善來大王，可就此座。爾時阿難，頂生王即就座而坐，與釋提桓因同坐。此二王同坐而無有異，顏容姿貌正等無異，唯眼眇異)”。
- 50 Although King Mürdhaga did not have a happy ending because of his greed, the fact that as the lord of the human world, he is highly comparable in status to Indra, the lord of the heavenly realm, is indisputable. Moreover, according to Buddhist scriptures such as the *Zeng yi ahan jing* 增壹阿含經 (Ekottarika Āgama Sūtra), in addition to King Mürdhaga, the Cakravartin named Ren 荏王 (referred to as “King Nimi” 尼彌王 in the *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 [Madhyama Āgama Sūtra], or “King Nan” 南王 in the *Liudu ji jing* 六度集經 [Sūtra on the Collection of the Six Perfections]) also ascended to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and sat side by side with Indra. This shows that being on an equal footing with Indra is not the exclusive privilege of King Mürdhaga, but a common attribute of Cakravartins.
- 51 *Chaoye qianzai* 5.115–116. *Zizhi tongjian* also records the situation of the assembly held by Wu Zetian and Xue Huaiyi: “Every time a great Buddhist equal assembly was held, as much as ten thousand strings of cash were used. There were large number of men and women participating in the assembly. Another ten carts of cash were scattered, allowing the assembled people to scramble and pick it up. People trampled on each other, and some even lost their lives as a result (每作無遮會，用錢萬緡，士女雲集，又散錢十車使之爭拾，相蹈踐有死者)” (see *Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6498).
- 52 *Liudu ji jing*, T no. 152, 3: 21c22-23.
- 53 *Chang ahan jing*, T no. 1, 1: 21b13-23a16.
- 54 *Gaoseng zhuan* 9. 365: (耆域) 見洛陽宮城云，髣髴似忉利天宮，但自然之與人事不同耳。域謂沙門耆闍蜜曰，匠此宮者從忉利天來，成便還天上矣。
- 55 *Song shu* 97. 2381. In 430, the country named Heluotuo 訶羅陁; in 435, the country named Shepopoda 闍婆婆達; in 517, the country named Poli 婆利; and in 518, the country named Gantuoli 干陁利 sent envoys to China to present their national letters and used eulogistic words similar to the above-cited literature (see *Song shu* 97. 2380–2383; *Liang shu* 54. 794–796). These countries were located in the Indonesian islands of Southeast Asia. It can be known that the capital buildings were analogized to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven palaces in ancient Indonesia. This concept should originate from India.
- 56 *Shijia fangzhi* 1. 11: 凡人極位名曰輪王，聖人極位名曰法王，蓋此二王不生則已，生必居中。
- 57 The concept that Luoyang is located at the center of the world has a long history in ancient China. When King Cheng 成王 (r. 1042B.C.-1021B.C.) of the Western Zhou constructed Luoyang City, Duke Zhou 周公 evaluated Luoyang and said, “This is the center of the world. The distances traveled by those coming here to pay tribute from all directions are basically the same (*Shi ji* 4. 133: 此天下之中，四方入貢道里均)”. In the fourth year of the Renshou 仁壽 era (604) of Emperor Yang 煬帝 (569–618, r. 604–618) of the Sui Dynasty, the construction of the Eastern Capital Luoyang City began. The emperor issued an edict saying, “Luoyang has been the king’s capital since ancient times. Heaven and earth, *yin* and *yang* are in harmony here. It controls three rivers and strategic passes in all directions. The land and water transportation is convenient. The distances traveled by those coming here to pay tribute from all directions are equal (*Sui shu* 3. 61: 洛邑自古之都，王畿之內，天地之所合，陰陽之所和，控以三河，固以四塞，水陸通，貢賦等)”. In the fourth year of the Zhen’guan 貞觀 era (630) of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (599–649, r. 626–649) of the Tang Dynasty, when he wanted to renovate the Luoyang Palace, he said, “Luoyang is at the center of the world. The distances traveled by those coming here to pay tribute from all directions are equal. The reason why I want to construct Luoyang is to facilitate the people (*Jiu Tangshu* 75. 2641: 洛陽土中，朝貢道均，朕故脩營，意在便於百姓)”. In the second year of the Xianqing 顯慶 era (657) of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, Luoyang was promoted to the Eastern Capital. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602?–664) presented a congratulatory memorial and said, “The emperor and empress are far-sighted and establish the capital at the location in the center of the world (*Da Ci’en si Sanzang fashi zhuan* 9. 212–213: 伏惟皇帝皇后揆物裁務，懸衡撫俗，即土中之重隩，遞虞巡而駐蹕，因舊制之瓌偉，儀鎬京而建邠)”. The inscription on the statue of Niche 964 of Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, which was carved in the fifth year of the Kaiyuan era (717), said, “The area of the Guiluo (=Luoyang) is at the center of the world (Liu and Li 1998, p. 316: 龜洛之地今天之中)”, expressing the same thought.
- 58 The *Zizhi tongjian* records that after the fire in the Heavenly Hall and the Bright Hall, Wu Zetian ordered the reconstruction of these two buildings, and still appointed Xue Huaiyi as the person in charge (*Zizhi tongjian* 205. 6499: 命更造明堂天堂，仍以懷義充使). The *Henan zhi* records that after the fire, the Heavenly Hall was not rebuilt anymore; instead, the Foguang Temple was built on the site of the former Heavenly Hall (*Henan zhi* 1. 120: 不復造天堂，其所為佛光寺).

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Article

The Jamāl Garḥī Monastery in Gandhāra: An Examination of Buddhist Sectarian Identity Through Textual and Archaeological Evidence

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Abstract: In the 19th century, the British archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham identified the remains of an unidentified Buddhist monastery at Jamāl Garḥī, an ancient site located approximately 13 km from present-day Mardān, Pakistan. Subsequent excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India between 1920 and 1921 unearthed a schist inscription dated to the year “359”. Heinrich Lüders, the renowned German Indologist and epigraphist, attributed this inscription to the Dharmaguptaka sect/school. Despite this early attribution, the Monastery’s precise sectarian characteristics have remained largely unexplored in later scholarship. This article reevaluates the site’s sectarian identity by employing a “ground-to-text” methodology that integrates archaeological evidence with textual analysis, with a particular focus on the Chinese translation of the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*. Through this comparative framework, this study seeks to elucidate the religious ideas reflected in the site’s material culture and their relationship with Dharmaguptaka disciplinary thought. The analysis encompasses the architectural remnants of the *stūpa* excavated by Cunningham and the “Fasting Buddha” statuery, now preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan, the British Museum, and other sites, situating these artifacts within the distinctive visual and contemplative traditions linked to the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*. By integrating architectural, sculptural, textual, and epigraphic materials, this article provides a nuanced understanding of sectarian developments at Jamāl Garḥī and argues that an explicit emphasis on the ‘Middle Way’ ideology constituted a defining feature of the Dharmaguptaka tradition during this period.

Keywords: Jamāl Garḥī Monastery; Gandhāra; Dharmaguptaka; *Vinaya*; Fasting Buddha

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, the British Army in India excavated several important Buddhist sites in the Gandhāra region.¹ Among the most prominent figures involved in these efforts was Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893), a Major General in the British Army, who led extensive archaeological investigations at monastic sites in both Gandhāra and Mathurā.² At the site of Jamāl Garḥī, an ancient location situated in a rural area approximately 13 km from present-day Mardān in Pakistan,³ Cunningham uncovered the remains of a previously undocumented Buddhist monastery (Cunningham 1848, p. 104; 1875, p. 46). His findings were meticulously recorded in an archaeological report published in 1875, which included a detailed catalogue of the recovered artifacts.⁴

The newly established Frontier Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) resumed excavations at Jamāl Garḥī between 1920 and 1921, producing a comprehensive report that documented an extensive inventory of the site’s material remains.⁵

1.1. The Jamāl Garḥī Monastery Site

The ancient ruins of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery are located at the center of a triangular region formed by Swāt, Puruṣapura (present-day Peshawar), and Takṣaśilā (present-day Taxila) in the present-day Mardān District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. The surrounding landscape features hilly terrain to the northeast and plains to the south, reflecting the remote yet culturally rich areas of ancient Gandhāra.⁶

Importantly, Jamāl Garḥī is located near several other key historical sites, including Thareli (Sawal Dher), Sikri, Takht-i-Bāhī, and the hill that bears the Aśokan Shāhbāzgarḥī Inscription, all of which were once flourishing centers of Buddhist activity.⁷ Scholars widely agree that the region now known as the Mardān Division was an integral part of the ancient Gandhāran network. This network served as a critical hub along international trade routes connecting India, Central Asia, and China, via Udḍiyāna and Peshawar, and extending to Chārsadda (historically Puṣkalāvātī).⁸ Moreover, it played a key role in facilitating the exchange of visual culture and artistic traditions across these regions.⁹

1.2. The Gandhāra Region’s Historical Buddhist Context as It Pertains to the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery Site

In 326 BCE, Alexander the Great (c. 331/323 BCE) conquered the region of Gandhāra,¹⁰ leaving behind Greek populations that influenced the local culture. By 321 BCE, the Mauryan dynasty, founded by Chandragupta Maurya (r. 324 to 300 BCE), assumed control of the region (Cribb 2017, pp. 3–27). Under King Aśoka (r. c. 273–232 BCE), Buddhism emerged as a dominant religion (Salomon 2018, pp. 1–24).

Scholars have cited that between the fourth century BCE and the seventh century CE, Gandhāra was governed by various rulers, including the Greeks, Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, Scythians, Kushans (c. 30–375 CE), Sasanians, Huns, and other political entities (Behrendt 2004, p. 23). These rulers introduced diverse religious traditions and artistic conventions (Behrendt 2007, pp. 3–5), fostering a convergence of Greek, Indian, and Persian cultures in which Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Zoroastrianism coexisted. These conditions allowed local Buddhism to absorb various influences (ibid., pp. 3–5), as evident in the stylistic diversity of Buddhist imagery at sites such as the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery.

Reconstructing the microhistory of the subregion surrounding the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery remains a tentative endeavor, as the correlation between ancient Chinese place names and modern geographical terminology remains a subject of debate. Nevertheless, several historical sources provide a valuable framework for such reconstruction. The strategic geographic position of the Mardān Division is highlighted in numerous historical accounts of ancient Gandhāra.

Notably, in his “Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms” (*Foguo ji* 佛國記), the renowned Eastern Jin (東晉, 317–420 CE) Chinese Buddhist monk and translator Faxian (法顯, 337–422 CE; traveled 398–412 CE) identified Gandhāra (捷[捷]陀衛國) as lying southeast of the ancient region of Udyāna/Udḍiyāna/Odḍiyāna (烏菴/長國) in northern India—corresponding to the present-day Swāt Valley. Faxian also recorded that King Aśoka’s second son, Kuṇāla (*alias* Dharmavivardhana), once served as governor of Gandhāra (是阿育王子法益所治處).¹¹

The region was again visited during the Northern Wei period (北魏, 386–534 CE) by the monk Songyun (宋雲, d. u.), whose journey is recorded in the “Travelogue of Songyun” (宋雲行紀[記]).¹² Later, during the Tang dynasty (唐, 618–907 CE), the eminent monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (596?–664 CE/fl. 603–664 CE)—who traveled from 629 to 645 CE—referred to

the area as the “Gandhāra kingdom” (健馱邏國) in his “Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang [Dynasty]” (*Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記).¹³

During Faxian’s visit in the late fourth–early fifth century, the Gupta Empire (3rd to mid–6th century CE) was in power in India, and the Buddhist community in Gandhāra flourished mainly under *nikāya* (i.e., sectarian monastic orders), with numerous *stūpas*¹⁴ and monasteries embellished with gold and silver, indicating robust patronage.¹⁵ By the time Songyun arrived in 520 CE, however, the region had come under the control of the Hephthalites (Greek: *Χίλων “Hun”; Indic: Śveta Huṇa; Chinese: Yàndā 嚙哒),¹⁶ marking the onset of a period of decline in Buddhist institutional life. Monastic orders had weakened, and support for religious establishments had diminished.¹⁷ Gandhāra’s economy appears to have collapsed sometime in the late 5th century, coinciding with a Hun occupation of the region. Japanese historian and archaeologist Kuwayama Shōshin 桑山正進 (Kuwayama 2006, pp. 124–27) posits that this decline in patronage may have been linked to a shift in trade routes that favored Afghanistan, or to other, unidentified causes of economic disruption. Kurt Behrendt (2004, pp. 205–6; 2007, p. 4) similarly observes that the lack of patronage is especially evident in the archaeological materials, as construction activities at major Buddhist centers across Gandhāra came to a sudden halt, leaving many sacred areas unfinished. While the Huns may not have been solely responsible, their rule likely exacerbated Gandhāra’s economic decline.

By the time Xuanzang visited in the 7th century, Buddhism in Gandhāra had further deteriorated. Nevertheless, a vibrant monastic presence persisted, now centered on Mahāyāna teachings. Xuanzang noted the presence of multiple religious traditions and reported that some monasteries practiced both the “great vehicle” (Mahāyāna) and “little vehicle” (Nikāya) doctrines.¹⁸ Monastic scholars from the region continued to make significant contributions to Buddhist literature, producing a wealth of *śāstras* (scholastic treatises).

In summary, the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery endured for centuries amid the evolving sociopolitical and religious landscape of Gandhāra. The historical context outlined here provides a valuable framework for understanding the factors that may have influenced the Monastery’s architectural features and significantly aids in interpreting its material remains.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The historic region of Gandhāra, renowned for its rich textual and visual legacy associated with Buddhism and the Silk Roads, has drawn sustained scholarly interest for over a century. Extensive research has explored Gandhāra’s Buddhist architecture, artistic traditions, structural remains, and its significant corpus of Gāndhārī Prākṛt manuscripts and translated Buddhist texts. One important example is the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery, which, despite being undocumented for many years, is now recognized as one of the earliest Buddhist sites in the region. In her 1987 doctoral dissertation, Elizabeth Errington reevaluated earlier archaeological findings on Jamāl Garḥī’s ancient site by Cunningham and the ASI. Her study offered a detailed examination of the site’s *stūpa* complex, inscriptional evidence, and the narrative themes depicted through Gandhāran stylistic conventions in Buddhist imagery (Errington 1987, 2022).

In more recent scholarship, the chronology and architectural characteristics of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery site have been further investigated by Behrendt (2004)¹⁹ and Wanaporn Rienjang.²⁰ Epigraphic data from the Monastery has also been analyzed and documented by scholars such as Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass.²¹

Nevertheless, despite extensive research in regional archaeology and textual studies as distinct disciplines, comprehensive analyses that integrate material records with textual sources remain largely insufficient.

This article addresses this gap by recontextualizing the material culture of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery in light of the Chinese translation of the *Dharmagupta-Vinaya* and other related Buddhist texts. The article employs a “ground-to-text” methodology, comparing archaeological remains (ground) with textual evidence.

This approach reverses the “text-to-ground” methodology utilized by Cunningham, using material evidence to connect relevant historical *Vinaya* texts detailing Buddhist monastic regulations.

The analysis includes the renowned “Fasting Buddha” statue,²² discovered at the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery site, possibly by the ASI in the early 20th century, and currently housed in the National Museum of Pakistan. This statue is compared with a related “Fasting Buddha” relief panel, likely from the main *stūpa* of Jamāl Garḥī, excavated during Cunningham’s expedition in the late 19th century and now located in the British Museum. Additional examples of this “Fasting Buddha” iconographic type from sites such as Takhti-Bāhī and Sikri are also examined in relation to pertinent textual sources.

The study connects these statues to contemplative practices described in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* tradition, particularly as expressed in the *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 (“*Sūtra* of the Collection of the Past Activities of the Buddha”; Skt. **Buddha-carita-samgrāha*) and the *Sidi lun* 四諦論 (“*Treatise on the Four Noble Truths*”; Skt. **Catuḥṣatya-sāstra*, **Catuḥṣatya-nirdeśa*), preserved in Chinese. By juxtaposing textual and material evidence,²³ this article explores the connections between the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery’s ideological orientation and its sectarian characteristics, thereby illuminating its broader historical and cultural significance in the context of South Asian Buddhism and along the Silk Roads.

2. The ‘Sectarian Affiliation’ and Chronology Reconstruction of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery Based on Epigraphical Data

The Jamāl Garḥī Monastery, identified by Alexander Cunningham and the ASI, ranks among the earliest surviving Buddhist monasteries. During ASI excavations, a Kharoṣṭhī inscription was discovered on a black-greenish mica schist²⁴ stone tile, referred to as the “Jamālgarḥī Inscription of the [Yona] Year 359” (hereafter, the “Jamālgarḥī Inscription”)²⁵ (Figure 1).

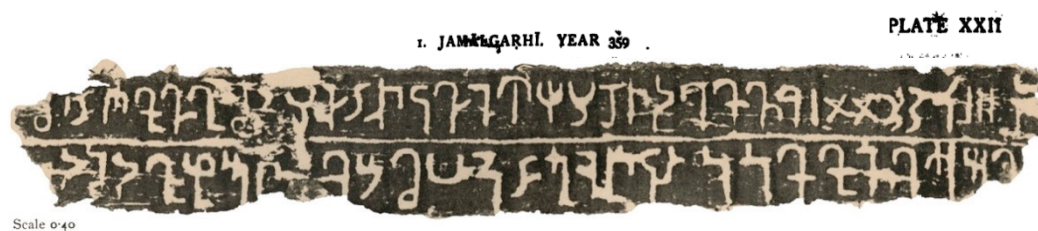


Figure 1. ‘Jamālgarḥī Inscription of the [Yona] Year 359.’^{26,27}

The ASI reported that the inscribed stone was discovered “during the removal of debris in Courtyard 7”²⁸ (Figure 2). Harold Hargreaves (1876–1951), who served as Director General of the ASI from 1928 to 1931, suggested that the Jamālgarḥī Inscription was likely “one of the courses of a wall,” although its original site remained uncertain.²⁹

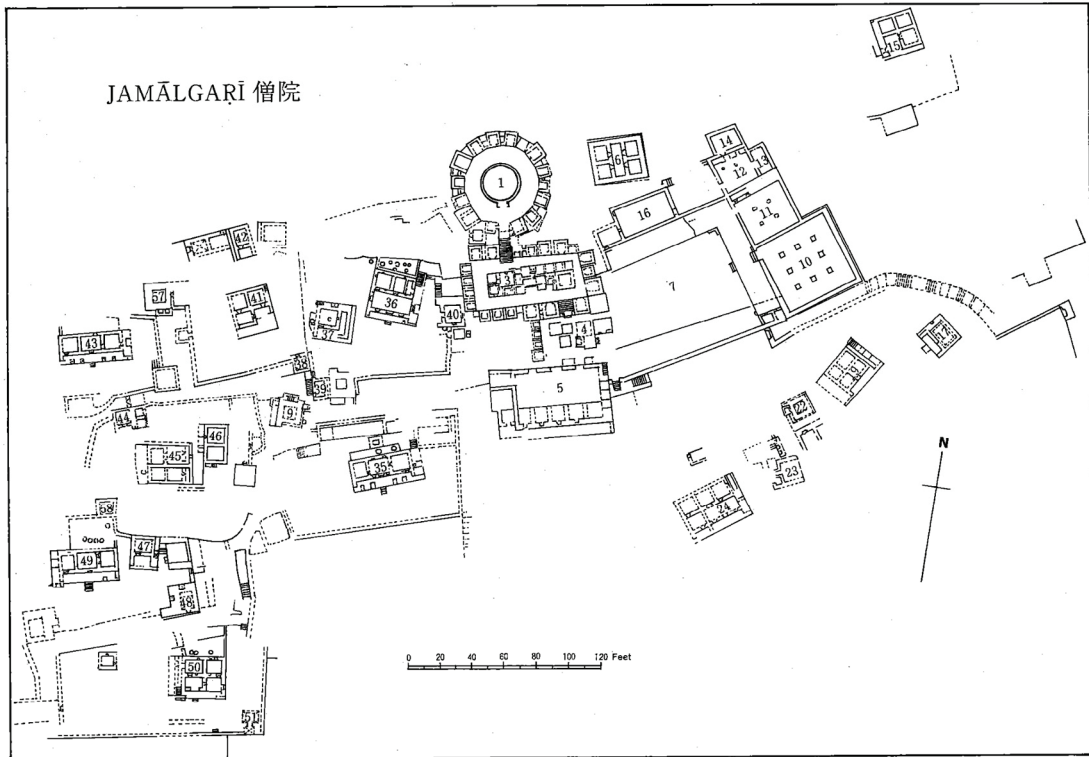


Figure 2. Jamāl Garhī ichnography plan (image source: Tsukamoto 1996–2003, Figure 44).

Building on these early accounts, Errington (2022) produced a comprehensive site plan, combining the 1873 and 1923 plans with her own survey, detailing the Monastery's structures and previously omitted buildings. She identified Room 16 (Figure 2), located adjacent to Courtyard 7, as the probable location where the Jamālgarhī Inscription was recovered. However, she also noted that the inscription may have originated from another part of the Monastery's complex (Errington 2022, p. 9).

Following the excavations, Norwegian Indologist Sten Konow (1867–1948) deciphered the Jamālgarhī Inscription in 1929. The text reads as follows:

Text:

- 1 *saṃ 1 1 1 100 20 20 10 4 4 1 Aśpaī [u] sa padhammammi sa-
vaena Poda [ena sa] haehi pida [pu] [trehi*]*
- 2 *[U] dīliakehi i [ś] e rañe prethavide dhamaīte [oke] parigrahe sar-
vasa [pana*]*

Konow interpreted the inscription as follows:

Anno 359, on the first [day] of [the month]³⁰ Āśvayuj, an asylum connected with religion was established in this grove by the śrāvaka Potaka, with (or, for) the Udīliaka companions, father and sons, in the acceptance of all beings.³¹

In 1940, German Indologist and epigraphist Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943) proposed a different interpretation:

In the year 359, on the first day of Aśvayuj, Poda, together with his companions, fathers, and sons—the Udīliakas—constructed [this] for acceptance by the Dharmaguptakas in honor of all beings.

[Im Jahre 359, am ersten des Aśvayuj, hat Podaa zusammen mit seinen Genossen, Vätern und Söhnen, den Udḍiākas, errichtet zur Entgegennahme durch die Dharmaguptīyas, zu Ehren aller Wesen (Lüders 1940, p. 20).]

Lüders diverged from Konow by interpreting the term “*dhamaūte* [oke]” in the inscription as “*Dhamaūt[i]ana*”, which corresponds to the Sanskrit “*Dharmaguptīyānām*,” denoting “the Dharmaguptaka school/sect” (Ch. *Fazang bu* 法藏部)³² ([Dhammaguta + -ga-] {d^həm:əgut:əjə} *adj.* [of a Buddhist school *Dharmaguptaka*]³³).

Lüders’ interpretation confirmed the attribution of the inscription, demonstrating that the Dharmaguptakas had established monastic sites in northwestern India during the early centuries CE—despite earlier inscriptions attesting only to their presence in Mathurā. By the 7th century, according to the account of Xuanzang, the Dharmaguptakas were still present in Udyāna.³⁴ This view is further supported by Shizutani Masao 静谷正雄 (cf. Shizutani 1974, pp. 87–92) and Meicun Lin 林梅村 (cf. Lin 1988, pp. 149–50).

Although Errington mistakenly credited Lüders’ discovery to Konow, the identification of the term “Dharmaguptakas” is solely attributable to Lüders. Nevertheless, Errington also confirms that the Monastery in question once belonged to the Dharmaguptaka school.

The Dharmagupta school or ‘sect,’ also known as the Dharmaguptaka (Skt: धर्मगुप्तक Dharmaguptaka; Pāli: Dhammaguttika), represents one of the early sects or branches of the Buddhist tradition.³⁵ In this article, the term “sectarian identity” or “sectarian affiliation” refers to a community of Buddhist monks who collectively adhere to a common *Vinaya* tradition (see Wang 1989, pp. 66–71).

While previous studies have examined whether school affiliations (*nikāyas*) influence specific canonical textual traditions, the present research focuses on how sectarian affiliation affects broader institutional frameworks, ranging from monastic complexes and architectural layouts to aspects of Buddhist image iconography. Identifying the sectarian affiliation of a particular monastery or site is essential for understanding its historical and ideological characteristics. This inquiry serves as a key point of entry for analyzing both the physical features and the historical context of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery.³⁶

Scholars generally regard the Chinese translation of the *Dīrghāgama* (Ch. *Chang Ahan jing* 長阿含經, T. 1.1.1a–149c, c. 412–413 CE, commonly known as the Longer *Āgama-sūtra*), along with the **Dharmagupta-Vinaya* (Ch. *Sifen lü* 四分律, T. 1428, c. 410–412 CE), or the ‘Four-Part *Vinaya*,’ as foundational texts attributed to the Dharmaguptakas (Heirman 2002a, pp. 396–99). Among these, the **Dharmagupta-Vinaya* in particular³⁷ was widely disseminated in China from the 5th century CE onward through translated scriptures,³⁸ playing a crucial role in the Sinicization of Buddhism.³⁹

Over the past century, numerous Buddhist sites along the ancient Silk Roads have been unearthed. Among these, artifacts associated with the Dharmaguptaka tradition—such as *sūtra* scrolls, inscriptions, statues, and stone reliefs—have attracted scholarly interest. Researchers have deciphered and translated some of these materials, shedding light on the Dharmaguptaka’s historical presence. According to Tsukamoto Keishō (塚本啓祥, 1929–2010), the main surviving inscriptions of the Dharmaguptaka are found at Haddā and Kunduz in the north, Mathurā in central India, and the Kanheri Caves in the west (Tsukamoto 1996–1998, p. 1061).

In the 2nd–1st centuries BCE, the Dharmaguptaka were involved in constructing the Bharhut *stūpa*, where inscriptions documenting their donations appear on two *stūpa* railings (*vedikā*). Additional analyses and references related to these inscriptions have been cataloged by Baums and Glass (see Items: CKI 116; 117; 118; 119; 122; 123) in the Catalogue of Gāndhārī Inscriptions.⁴⁰ Despite such findings, Shizutani (1974, p. 92) notes that Tsukamoto’s comprehensive 1996 study makes no mention of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery

or its associated *stūpa*-monastery complex. Moreover, no other scholars have systematically examined the Jamāl Garḥī site in relation to the Dharmaguptaka tradition.

The academic discussion concerning the date of the construction or expansion of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery centers on the “Jamālgarḥī Inscription,” which references the year “359.” Konow proposed that this date corresponds to August 24, 275 CE, a view supported by both Lin (1988, p. 150) and Chongfeng Li 李崇峰 (C. Li 2019, p. 330). Shizutani (1974, p. 90), by contrast, speculated that the inscription may be based on the Vikram Samvat calendar, which begins in 58 or 57 BCE, thus placing the event in 302 CE. Errington (2022, p. 7) offered a different interpretation, suggesting that the inscription follows a Greek chronological system and should be dated to around 179 CE. This Greek system is associated with the reign of Eucratides I (Εὐκρατίδης, *fl.* c. 205–145 BCE; *r.* 172/171–145 BCE), with Richard Salomon (2005, pp. 359–401, esp. p. 377) identifying 175 BCE as the baseline. If this Greek era is accepted, the inscription would correspond to approximately 184 CE.

According to Konow, during a visit to Jamāl Garḥī in early 1912, Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) discovered a Kharoṣṭhī inscription consisting of eleven characters—each approximately 2.5 inches (6.35 cm) in height—engraved on one of the slate slabs forming the pavement surrounding the main *stūpa*.⁴¹ This *stūpa* had previously been excavated under the supervision of Cunningham in 1873 (Figure 3; Cunningham 1873).⁴²



Figure 3. ‘Jamālgarḥī Slab/Pavement Stone Inscription.’⁴³

The original report authored by Stein asserts the following:

The inscription [...] shows plainly, characters of the Kushāṇa period [c. 30–c. 375 CE]. Its chronological interest is evident; for placed as it was and scratched into a stone of no great hardness, it could not have retained its legibility if it had lain exposed for a long series of years [...] It seems, therefore, probable that the period when the *Stūpa* court was finally abandoned is not separated by a very great interval from the time when these characters were scratched in, perhaps by some pious visitor.⁴⁴

After its discovery, the inscribed stone—now housed in the Peshawar Museum (inv. No. 01873)—was examined and revealed a votive inscription:

“*[B]u[dharakṣi]da[sa] ta(da)nam[ukhe],” translated as “The gift of Buddharakṣita.”⁴⁵ N. G. Majumdar (1897–1938) noted that the stone contained several holes, which he believed had been used “to hold offerings of coins.”⁴⁶ This hypothesis was supported by the subsequent discovery of a copper coin of Vāsudeva I (Βαζοδηο, *r.* c. 190–230 CE), found in one of the holes of another pavement slab at Jamāl Garḥī.⁴⁷

Further evidence of coin offerings at the site was provided by Hargreaves, who recorded the discovery of a copper coin of Kanīṣka I (*r.* c. 127–150 CE), two copper coins of Huviṣka (Bactrian: OOHḐKI, *r.* c. 150–190 CE), and six silver coins attributed to the Hunnic ruler Kidara (*r.* c. 425–457 CE) during excavations in the 1920s.⁴⁸ Charles Arthur Crompton (1873) also reported the discovery of silver coins likely belonging to Kidara (Errington 1987, Appendix 6, No. 448). According to Cunningham’s (1875, p. 194) account, special stone slabs with grooves were installed in the courtyard of the *stūpa* within the Jamāl Garḥī fortress, designed specifically to receive coins as votive offerings.

The range of coins unearthed at the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery spans the reigns of five Kushan rulers, reflecting the site’s prominence during the Kushan Empire’s most prosperous period. More recently, archaeological excavations carried out between 2012 and 2015, sponsored by the Japanese government and UNESCO, recovered additional coins from Huviṣka’s reign (c. 150–190 CE), with some specimens dating as early as 158 CE, roughly five to eight years after his coronation (Khan 2015).

These findings suggest that the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery was likely established in the 2nd century CE. The so-called “Jamālgarḥī Inscription” (dated to [Yona] Year 359 = c. 179 CE), which documents the founding of an “asylum in possession of the Dharmaguptikas,” appears to coincide with the Monastery’s expansion under Huviṣka.⁴⁹

Taken together, the archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicates that the monastery complex was both constructed and expanded during the 2nd century CE, with its monastic community likely remaining active at least into the 3rd century.⁵⁰

3. The Architectural Remains of the *Stūpa* Courtyard at Jamāl Garḥī in Connection with *Vinaya* Literature

The *Sifen lü* 四分律 (T. 1428; Skt.**Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*, hereafter *Sifen lü*) was translated into Chinese around 410–412 CE by Buddhayaśas (Ch. Fotuoyeshe 佛陀耶舍, fl. c. early 5th century), a prolific translator of Buddhist texts and a Dharmaguptaka monk of Kashmiri (罽賓國) origin. Uniquely among ancient *Vinayas*, the *Sifen lü* includes specific provisions concerning *stūpa* construction. Although it was translated approximately a century after the completion of the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery, the architectural layout and structural features of the Monastery’s main *stūpa* courtyard⁵¹ exhibit striking similarities to the descriptions found in this text.

3.1. *Stūpa* Formation

The *stūpa* at the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery site differs significantly in form from the specifications found in the *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (T. 1425; Skt. *Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya*, dated 416–418 CE, hereafter *Mohesengqi lü*), which explicitly prescribes a square foundation for *stūpas*:

As for the method of constructing a *stūpa*: railings [should] surround all four sides of the square foundation/platform. Two domes (**anḍa*) [should] be constructed, one on top of the other (on the foundation). [Atop of them], a square tusk-like (construction; 方牙) (**harmikā*) [should] protrude in the four directions. Canopies (槃蓋), long banners (長表), and discs (*chattrā*; 輪相) [should] be attached atop.

作塔法者, 下基四方周匝欄楯, 圓起二重, 方牙四出, 上施槃蓋長表輪相。⁵²

In contrast, the *Sifen lü* permits *stūpas* to be constructed in a variety of shapes—square, round, or octagonal—stating the following:

The Buddha says, ‘Construct it as square, round, or octagonal’

佛言: “四方作, 若圓, 若八角作”。⁵³

The *Vinaya* of the Mahīśāsaka school/sect (彌沙塞部/化地部)—the *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (Skt. *Mahīśāsaka-Vinaya*; abbreviated as 彌沙塞部五分律 and 彌沙塞律, T. 1421, c. 423–424 CE⁵⁴, hereafter *Wufen lü*), does not explicitly prescribe the form of the *stūpa*’s foundation or platform. However, it does include a verse—identical to one in the *Sifen lü*⁵⁵—that extols the virtue of building a *stūpa* with a mere “ball of clay” (*yi tuan ni* 一搏/團泥) rather than gold.⁵⁶ This imagery may suggest a *stūpa* of rounded form, due to the association of clay with malleable, circular shapes.⁵⁷

The *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (“Ten Recitations Vinaya,” T. 1435, dated 404–409 CE; Skt. **Sarvāstivāda-Vinaya* or **Daśādhyāya-Vinaya*), translated by Punyatāra (Ch. Furuoduolu 弗若多羅) and Kumārajīva (Ch. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, c. 334–413 CE), includes further architectural references. It describes the construction of “arched niches” (龕塔, **stūpa-grha-pratisamyuktam*) and “pillar *stūpas*” (柱塔). It specifies that the *stūpa*’s body should be elevated with sculpted Buddha images. Such *stūpas* were also likely circular in design.⁵⁸

Archaeological evidence from the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery supports the view that the square foundation of its main *stūpa* was a later addition to an originally circular base (Behrendt 2004, p. 199). Its initial design likely resembled that of early Indian *stūpas* at (a) Sāñchī, (b) Bhārhut, and (c) Dharmarājikā—structures characterized by a high drum and a hemispherical dome in the “inverted bowl” (覆鉢 *fubo*) style (Figure 4, Behrendt 2004, p. 236).

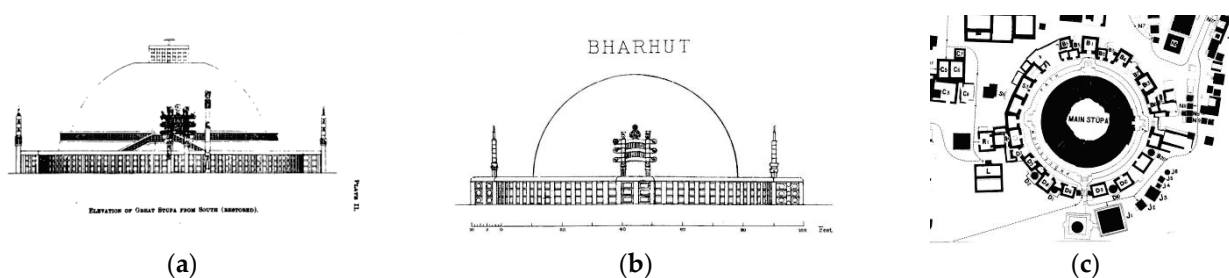


Figure 4. (a) Elevation of the Great *Stūpa* at Sāñchī (from South, restored, from [Marshall 1918a, Pl. II]); (b) the *Stūpa* of Bhārhut: illustration of form, c. third century BCE by Cunningham;⁵⁹ (c) plan of the Dharmarājikā *Stūpa* (Marshall 1918b, Pl. IV).

In subsequent periods, *stūpa* architecture in China evolved into more columnar forms, with foundations taking on square, octagonal, or cruciform shapes. These more evolved architectural forms align more closely with the rules outlined in the *Mohesengqi lü* (*Mahāsāmgghika-Vinaya*).

However, the construction of the main *stūpa* at the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery—especially in its earlier form—follows design principles and circular shapes more aligned with those found in the Chinese translations of the *Vinayas* associated with so-called “Mainstream” or “Nikāya Buddhism.” In particular, the *Sifen lü* (i.e., *Dharmagupta-Vinaya*) and *Wufen lü* (i.e., *Mahīsāsaka-Vinaya*) provide closer textual parallels to the Monastery’s architectural features (Figure 5).

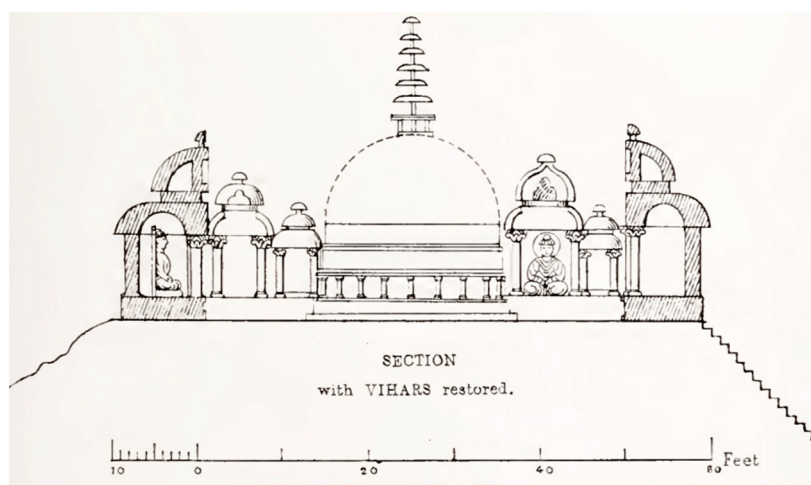


Figure 5. Cunningham’s (1875) elevation reconstruction of the main *stūpa* courtyard (*ASIR V*, Pl. XV).

3.2. Layout and Orientation of the Stūpa Courtyard

The architectural plan of the Jamāl Garhī Monastery site (See above, Figure 2)⁶⁰ suggests that its earliest buildings were organized along a central axis. These structures included the main *stūpa*, the *Caitya-gr̥ha* (Hall), the Monastery Hall, and the Cloister. The *stūpa* courtyard/complex was situated in the northeastern part of the overall layout, with the monastery gate oriented to face east. The main *stūpa* courtyard was connected to a large, enclosed courtyard, likely used for meetings, while the monks' cells were located separately from the courtyard.

During the Tang dynasty, the eminent scholiast and *Vinaya* master Daoxuan 道宣 (fl. 596–667 CE) emphasized that Buddhist monasteries should adhere to principles outlined in the *Vinayas*. In 667 CE, Daoxuan documented these principles in his “*Illustrated Scripture on the Ordination Platforms Established in Guanzhong*” (*Guanzhong chuangli jietan tujing* 關中創立戒壇圖經), where he outlined guidelines for monastery construction as follows:

Vinaya and *sāstra* texts distinguish between ‘flat bounded areas’ “*chang* 場” and ‘raised platforms’ “*tan* 壇”. Unsurprisingly, all the countries of the Western kingdoms (西天諸國, i.e., India) have established separate rituals, whereas here (the Chinese) have never done so. [...] The name “raised platform” (壇; i.e., ‘altar’) was established during the Buddha’s time! 律論所顯, “場”, “壇” 兩別, 西天諸國皆立別儀, 此土中原素未行事, 不足怪也. [...] “壇” 之立名在佛世矣!⁶¹

The layout and orientation of the *stūpa* are explicitly discussed in the *Mohesengqi lü* (*Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya*), which was translated into Chinese during the Eastern Jin dynasty by Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅 (359–429 CE) and Faxian. This text states:

Concerning matters of *stūpas* (塔事; *stūpavastupratīsam-yuktam*): When a *samghārāma* (monastery) is built, one should choose (lit. “plan”) a suitable place, in advance, for the *stūpa*. The *stūpa* should not be located to the south or west (of the monastery). It should be located to the east, (or) located to the north. The area of the (monastic Community) is not allowed to transgress the area of the Buddha (i.e., *stūpa*). The area of the Buddha (i.e., *stūpa*) is not allowed to transgress the area of the Community. If the *stūpa* is located near a cemetery and if dogs, which feed on leftovers, bring them and dirty the area, fences should be made. Cells of monks should be built to the west or south of (the *stūpa*). Used water of the area of the Community should not flow into the area of the Buddha (i.e., *stūpa*). Used water from the area of the Buddha (i.e., *stūpa*) is allowed to flow into the area of the Community. The *stūpa* should be built on a high place and at a vantage point.

塔事者, 起僧伽藍時, 先預度好地, 作塔處。塔不得在南, 不得在西, 應在東, 應在北, 不得僧地侵佛地。佛地不得侵僧地。若塔近死屍林, 若狗食殘持來污地, 應作垣牆。應在西若南作僧坊, 不得使僧地水流入佛地, 佛地水流入僧地。塔應在高顯處作。⁶²

Chinese scholar Zhan Ru (湛如) observes the following:

The *Mohesengqi lü* reflects the Mahāsāṃghika school’s (Ch. *Dazhong bu* 大眾部) strong emphasis on the spatial positioning of *stūpas*. Whenever a monastic community constructs a new monastery, it is required to reserve the most desirable plot of land specifically for the *stūpa* courtyard, which should be situated in the northern and eastern sections of the site. The term ‘*stūpa* courtyard’ indicates not only the prominence of the *stūpa*’s location within the monastery but also its architectural separation as a dedicated space. The *Mohesengqi lü* further stipulates that the grounds of the *stūpa* must not overlap with the monks’ residential quar-

ters, and that the *stūpa* should be enclosed by a wall or fence to protect it from contact with impure objects (Ru 2006, p. 212).

The architectural layout of the Jamāl Garhī Monastery closely follows these prescriptions. Its *stūpa* courtyard is located at the northernmost and highest point of the complex, with the *Caitya-gr̥ha* (Hall No. 2) and the Cloister (No. 3) arranged below it.

In contrast, Cunningham's (1875, pp. 26–30) report draws attention to key differences at the nearby Buddhist monastery of Takht-i-Bāhī, built around the same period. Unlike Jamāl Garhī, Takht-i-Bāhī features a *stūpa* courtyard oriented to the south—an arrangement that directly contradicts the spatial regulations set forth in the *Mohesengqi lü*.⁶³

Furthermore, an inscription found on a black earthenware jar excavated from the Takht-i-Bāhī site confirms that this monastery belonged to the Kāśyapīya school (Ch. *Yin-guang bu* 飲光部). Thus, this difference in the orientation and integration of the *stūpa* courtyard may reflect doctrinal or disciplinary distinctions between the Buddhist schools or sects (Tsukamoto 1996–1998, p. 1061). Monika Zin (2022) has noted that variations in monastery layouts often arise from the differing attitudes of coexisting schools within a given region. Similar phenomena are observable in the southern Indian regions of modern Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, where numerous schools were established concurrently.

In his *Guanzhong chuangli jietan tujing* (關中創立戒壇圖經), Daoxuan notes that the monastic community built monasteries by adhering to principles found in both the *Vinaya-pitakas* and *Sūtra-pitakas*. He also suggests that canonical texts such as the *Āgamas* (or *Nikāyas*), scriptural collections respected across sects,⁶⁴ may have served as common reference points for each school's records on monastery construction.⁶⁵

It is also plausible that a wider corpus of canonical texts or *Tripitaka* materials from various Buddhist traditions was accessible in Gāndhāra during this period. As Gāndhārī emerged as the *lingua franca* for the region's diverse populations, it also became the scriptural language for many flourishing Buddhist institutions and the medium for translating their manuscripts (Salomon 1990; 2018, pp. 57–58).

Japanese Buddhist scholar Karashima Seishi 辛嶋静志 (1957–2019) (Karashima 1992) notes that early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts were transmitted orally, not in an 'ecclesiastical language' like Sanskrit, but in local vernacular *Prākritis*⁶⁶—among them Gāndhārī, a Middle Indo-Aryan language spoken across northern and central India.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the formation and transmission of early Buddhist canonical texts exhibit significant variation, reflecting a gradual and evolutionary process (Karashima 2006; Salomon 2017, p. 242).

Traditional studies of the *Vinaya* have often regarded rules common to all *Vinaya* schools as the most ancient. However, scholars such as Shizuki Sasaki 佐佐木閑 and Wei Li 李薇 (W. Li 2019, pp. 308–309) argue that this perspective is overly reductive and that additional supporting evidence must be examined.

Archaeological findings suggest that the earliest excavated *stūpas*, such as those at (a) Sāñchī, (b) Bhārhut, and (c) Dharmarājīkā, are primarily oriented toward the north and east of their respective sites.⁶⁸ Scholars have noted that early Indian religious texts—including the *Manusmṛti* (*Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*), the *Bṛhat Samhitā*, and the epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*—associate spatial orientation with caste hierarchy. In these traditions, the northern direction is often linked to notions of superiority (Chi 2018, pp. 66–78).

Chinese monks recorded similar traditions during their travels in India. For instance, Daoxuan, in his earliest and most comprehensive work on the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*, titled *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* (四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, "A Commentary on Conduct and Procedure: Abridgments and Emendations to the Four-part *Vinaya*"), provides further insights:

The *Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya* says: Concerning matters of *stūpas* (塔事; *stūpavastupratīsam-yuktam*): When a *samghārāma* (monastery) is built, one should

choose (lit. “plan”) a suitable place for a *stūpa*. A *stūpa* should not be located to the south or west (of the monastery). It should be located to the east, (or) north. (In “the middle country” [中國, *madhyadeśa*, i.e., ‘central north India’],⁶⁹ monastery entrances typically face east, so *stūpas* and monastery buildings are oriented accordingly. Even kitchens and toilets are in the southwest due to the prevalence of northeasterly winds there.⁷⁰ In the ‘divine continent/holy land’ [神州; i.e., China], the west is considered the primary direction [正陽],⁷¹ so [monastery and *stūpa* constructions] do not need to follow Indian customs).

《僧祇》：塔事者。起僧伽藍時，先規度好地，作塔處。其塔不得在南，在西。應在東，在北（中國伽藍門皆東向故。佛塔廟宇皆向東開。乃至厨廁亦在西南。由彼國東北風多故。神州尚西爲正陽。不必依中土法也）。⁷²

Daoxuan believed that the provisions in the *Vinaya-piṭaka* were influenced by local conditions and climate and could thus be adapted according to variations in location.

Although the guidelines for selecting a site to build a *stūpa* are only documented in the Chinese translation of the *Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya*, evidence from ancient *stūpa* remains and related texts suggests that these provisions reflect relatively older traditions preserved by the *Mahāsāṃghika* school. It is also possible that similar provisions existed in the *Vinayas* of other sects at the time, contributing to their widespread use in *stūpa* construction. Alternatively, such provisions may have been omitted or altered during localization to accommodate sectarian differences, local customs, or climatic and geographical conditions.

Zhan Ru highlights that among all extant *Vinaya-piṭaka* texts, only the *Mahīśāsaka-Vinaya* (五分律) and the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* (四分律) emphasize the concept of “offering to the Buddha within the *Saṅgha*.” However, the Dharmaguptaka school (法藏部) teaches that offerings made directly to the Buddha yield greater merit than those made to the *Saṅgha*, and offerings to a Buddha’s *stūpa* generate even greater merit still (Ru 2000, pp. 81–82).

In the first century CE, the arrangement of *stūpa* courtyards in the Dharmaguptaka’s *Vinaya-piṭaka*, written in the Gāndhārī language, may have shared significant similarities with the *Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya*.

In the important historiographical text that records the Sarvāstivāda account of the evolution of the various schools (*nikāya*) that arose in the mainstream Buddhist community in the years after the Buddha’s death in ancient India, the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (Ch. *Yibu zonglun lun* 異部宗輪論 “The Cycle of the Formation of the Schismatic Doctrines” T. 2031), translated by Xuanzang (in c. 622 CE), it states the following:

Doctrines of the Dharmaguptakas:

The propositions originally held in common by the Dharmaguptakas are: (1) Although the Buddha is included in the *Saṅgha*, giving separate gifts to the Buddha procures great fruition (merit), but giving to the *Saṅgha* [does not]. The act of making offerings to a *stūpa* procures great merit; (2) The deliverance obtained by the Buddha [vehicle] and that obtained by the [other] two vehicles is the same, but the noble paths [of each vehicle] are different; (3) Heretics cannot obtain the five supernatural powers; (4) The whole body of the *arhat* is pure (*anāsrava* 無漏). Most of the other teachings [of this school] are the same as those of the *Mahāsāṃghikas* (大眾部).

其法藏部本宗同義。謂佛雖在僧中所攝，然別施佛果大，非僧。於宰堵波興供養業獲廣大果。佛與二乘解脫雖一，而聖道異。無諸外道能得五通。阿羅漢身皆是無漏。余義多同大眾部執。⁷³

This record highlights why the Dharmaguptakas placed great importance on the sanctification of *stūpas* and their historical connection with the *Mahāsāṃghikas*.

As previously mentioned, the exact placement of the *stūpa* courtyard is not explicitly defined in the *Sifen lü* (*Dharmagupta-Vinaya*). However, modern scholars have proposed that various clues point to the possible existence of a Gāndhārī *Tripitaka*. Based on this premise, it is plausible that the Jamāl Garhī Monastery’s main *stūpa* was constructed by the Dharmaguptakas in adherence to a version of the *Vinaya* that included these specific provisions at the time.

4. Ideas Embodied in the Iconography of the “Fasting Buddha” Images

Buddhist art historian Juhyung Rhi (2008b, pp. 125–54) argues that variations in ascetic narratives and their visual representations in Gandhāran art largely reflect the distinct historical contexts in which the associated texts and images were produced. In a separate study, Rhi (2008a) classifies Gandhāran Buddha images into five types, attributing their stylistic differences not only to chronological shifts in production but also to the existence of independent workshop clusters in the northwestern Peshawar Valley. Based on Rhi’s analysis, it is reasonable to conclude that the unique visual representations of the “Fasting Buddha” in Gandhāra were shaped by localized artistic and period-specific aesthetics. However, additional factors may also account for the conceptual and ideological distinctions these images convey.

One particularly striking example is the “Fasting Siddhārtha (Buddha)” from Takht-i-Bāhī (Figure 6). Although partially damaged, the sculpture conveys a haunting image of ascetic devotion with remarkable clarity. The gaunt face resembles a skull, featuring sunken eyes and sharply defined cheekbones, projecting a sense of bodily collapse and spiritual intensity.

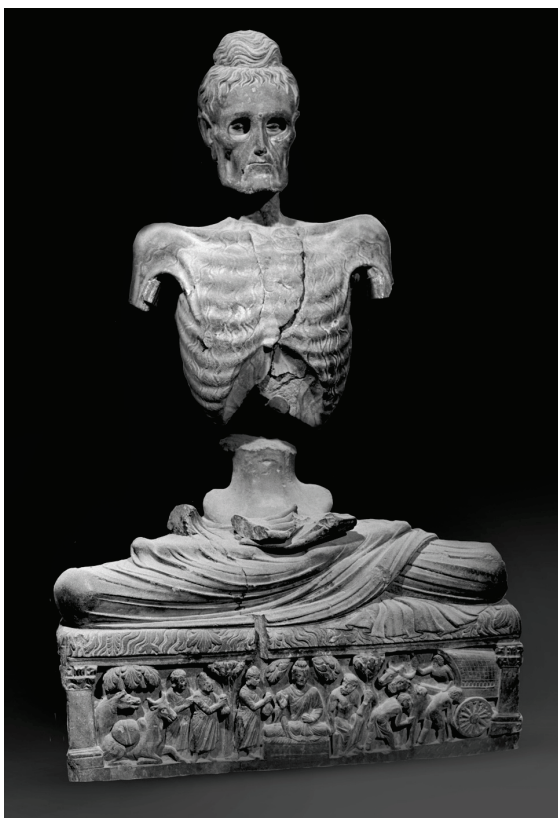


Figure 6. “Fasting Siddhārtha (Buddha)”, Takht-i-Bāhī (Gandhāra Region), c. 30–375, © Peshawar Museum (photo source: following Ingholt and Lyons, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 1957, pl. 53, and (Rhi 2008b, p. 143), Figure 2 with modifications).

Similarly, the “Fasting Buddha” from Sikri (Figure 7) transforms the human form into a near-sacrificial icon: the facial features are stretched thin across the bones, reinforcing a visual language of spiritual detachment and physical suffering. The torso is rendered with extreme anatomical precision—ribs protrude like blades, the spine forms a knotted ridge beneath the skin, and the abdomen caves into hollow recesses. The arms hang like withered branches, and enlarged joints further exaggerate the sense of bodily deterioration.

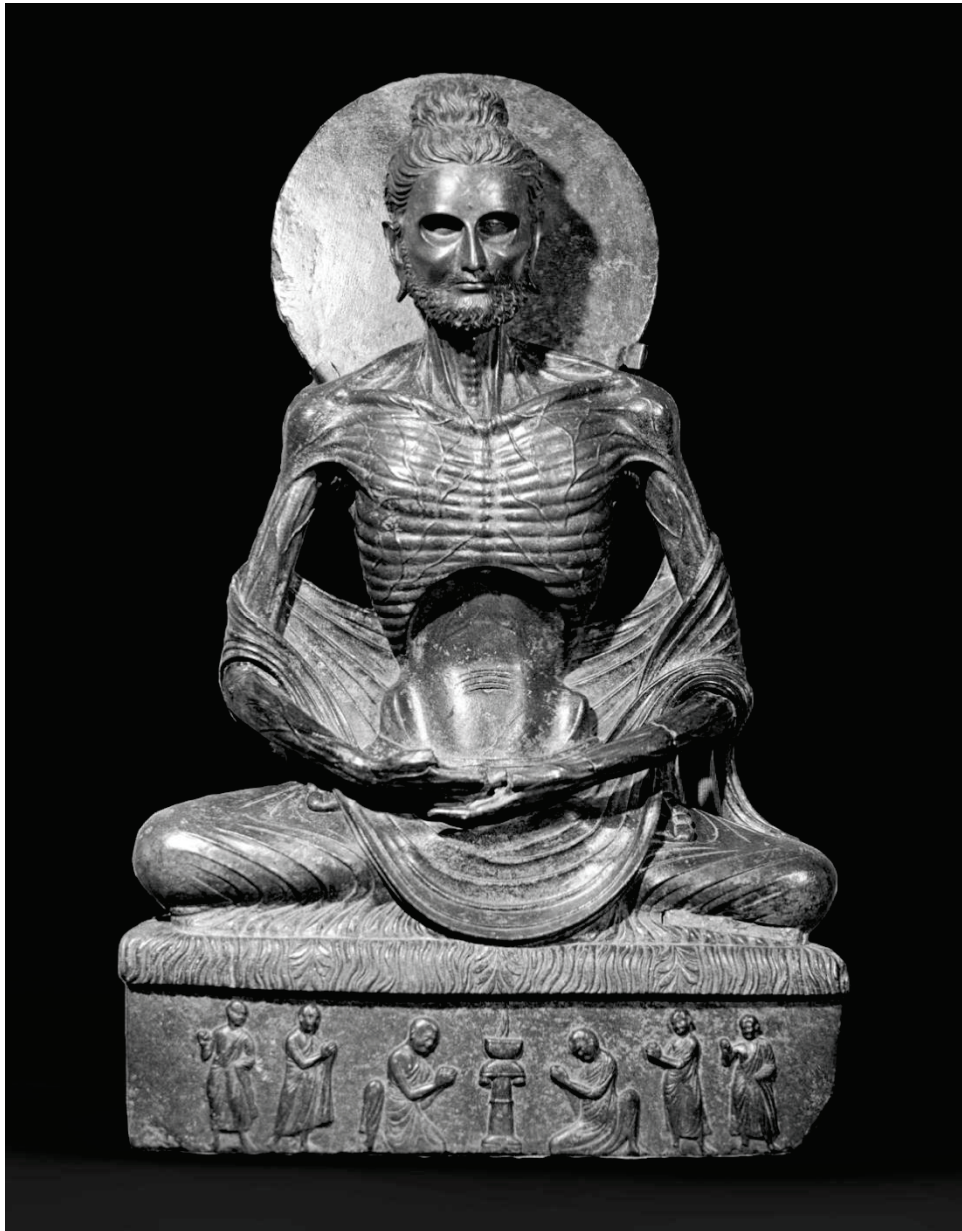


Figure 7. “Fasting Siddhārtha (Buddha)”, Sikri (Gandhāra Region), Khaibar Pakhtun Khuwa, Pakistan, Schist, c. mid-1st–mid-3rd century, © Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan (photo source: following *Gandhāran Art of Pakistan*. Tokyo, 1984, pl. I–1, and (Rhi 2008b) with modifications).

In contrast, the “Fasting Buddha” image excavated from Jamāl Garḥī (Figure 8) showcases a vigorous, muscular figure that stands in stark contrast to the emaciated depictions found at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sikri. If stylistic differences alone had been responsible for this variation, it would have been entirely feasible for the Jamāl Garḥī monastic community to commission sculptures from the same workshops that were active at Takht-i-Bāhī. In fact, statues at Jamāl Garḥī dating to the same period suggest shared workshop affiliations, indi-

cating that the iconographic divergence likely arises from differing ideological orientations rather than access to artisanship.



Figure 8. “Fasting Buddha”, Jamāl Garhī (Gandhāra Region), Mardan Dt., Khaibar Pakhtun Khuwa, Pakistan, c. 2nd–3rd century, Schist, © National Museum of Pakistan collection (佛陀苦修像, 馬爾丹地區加瑪爾·伽利, 巴基斯坦國家博物館藏) (photo source: by authors, documented on site at the “GANDHARA HERITAGE ALONG THE SILK ROAD: A Pakistan-China Joint Exhibition” [香林寶像——犍陀羅藝術展], Shenzhen Museum of History and Folk Culture [深圳博物館歷史民俗館], Shenzhen, China [Dates: 26 December 2023–24 March 2024]).

In his textual analysis, Rhi (2008b) categorizes early Buddhist texts on the Buddha’s asceticism into three main groups:

Group A includes the *Sifenlü* (四分律) and *Fo benxing ji jing* (佛本行集經, T. 0190), among others.

Group B comprises the *Majjhima-nikāya* and *Zengyi ahan jing* (增一阿含經, T. 0125, *Ekottarika-āgama*).

Group C contains texts such as the *Xiuxing benqi jing* (修行本起經, T. 0184), *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* (太子瑞應本起經, T. 0185), and *Puyao jing* (普曜經, T. 0186, *Lalitavistara Sūtra*).

According to Rhi, the majority of Gandhāran visual depictions of the “Fasting Buddha” correspond to **Group C**—texts that represent the earliest extant Chinese translations but lack detailed critique or discussion of ascetic practices.

The “Fasting Buddha” from Jamāl Garhī—now preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan—embodies an alternative vision of asceticism: one that rejects glorified emaciation in favor of vitality and inner strength. This aesthetic seems to reflect a fundamentally different understanding of bodily discipline and spiritual cultivation, aligning more closely with the texts in **Group A** as identified by Rhi. It strengthens the case that the Dharmaguptaka tradition influenced this Monastery’s artistic and ideological framework.

Additional iconographic and textual evidence reinforces this connection. The *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* (四分律), in its first *skandhaka* (犍度) on monastic ordination (受戒), contains a passage describing the Buddha entering the first *dhyāna* (初禪) during his ascetic practices, emphasizing meditative attainment rather than bodily mortification.⁷⁴

Then the Bodhisattva recalled, “Long ago, when I was sitting under a jambu tree by a field belonging to my father the king, I eliminated the desire for sensual pleasure, as well as all other evil and unwholesome states; with applied thought, reflection, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness of mind, I attained mastery of the first *dhyāna*.”

The Bodhisattva then contemplated, “Could this path bring an end to the origins of suffering?” It occurred to him, “Indeed, this path will bring an end to the origins of suffering.” Thereupon, motivated by this realization, the Bodhisattva undertook cultivation with great effort. Through this path, he brought an end to the origins of suffering.

Then the Bodhisattva wondered, “Is it possible to attain happiness through desire or unwholesome states?” It occurred to him, “No, it is not possible to attain happiness through desire or unwholesome states.”

He further considered, “Is it possible to attain happiness by cultivating desirelessness and abandoning unwholesome states?”

It occurred to him, “Whether or not that is possible, I will not obtain happiness through mortification of my body. I shall eat a little rice porridge to regain my strength.”

爾時菩薩自念：“昔在父王田上坐閻浮樹下，除去欲心惡不善法，有覺有觀喜樂一心，遊戲初禪。”

時菩薩復作是念：“頗有如此道可從得盡苦原耶？”復作是念：“如此道能盡苦原。”時菩薩即以精進力修習此智，從此道得盡苦原。

時菩薩復作是念：“頗因欲不善法得樂法不？”復作是念：“不由欲不善法得樂法。”

復作是念：“頗有習無欲捨不善法得樂法耶？然我不由此自苦身得樂法，我今寧可食少飯粍得充氣力耶？”⁷⁵

A further example appears in a relief panel reportedly unearthed at Jamāl Garhī and now preserved in the British Museum (Figure 9).⁷⁶ It depicts an emaciated Bodhisattva (Fasting Buddha) flanked by celestial beings and worshippers, visually echoing the passage from the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*. This scene offers a narrative counterpart to the textual emphasis on meditation, illustrating the Buddha’s path to enlightenment through both physical imagery and symbolic context.



Figure 9. “A rectangular panel in grey schist carved with an emaciated Bodhisattva seated on a throne and with Indra, Brāhmaṇa, Vajrapāṇi and a girl offering rice beer”, Jamāl Garhī (Gandhāra Region), Mardan Dt., Khaibar Pakhtun Khuwa, Pakistan, c. 2nd–3rd century, Schist; © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, Museum number 1880.67 (asset number 297877001) (photo source: following Behrendt 2010 with modifications).

As described in the British Museum’s catalogue:

The Bodhisattva’s damaged forearms originally met in *dhyāna*; he is naked to the waist where a twisted roll of textile forms a girdle...His head, unevenly sliced at right angles to the slab, is bearded on one side along the jaw to the chin and still has one deep-set eye, a prominent cheek-bone and horizontal mouth below a moustache...The flat-shouldered torso is ribbed, the top of the rib cage plunging in a deep ‘V’ below the protruding vertebrae. Nippled breasts project slightly, and the waist is indrawn at the navel. The posture is dramatically straight and still, the arms bony. The face of the grass-covered rectangular seat has triangular panels each containing a large, roughly triangular indentation.⁷⁷

This image of the frail, skeletal Buddha, surrounded by divine figures, illustrates the physical manifestation of the narrative of the Buddha’s path to enlightenment and its spiritual lessons—i.e., the ‘Middle Way’ (中道). This sculpture conveys this concept not through a depiction of the Buddha but through the surrounding narrative scene.

The image also notably aligns with the description found in the Chinese translation of the Buddha’s biography, the *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 (T. 3, No. 190, translated by Jñānagupta 闍那崛多在 591 CE) in the chapter (品) ‘On Diligence and Ascetic Practices’ (精進苦行品):

At that time, Sujātā having heard these words, took a vessel from the Bodhisattva’s hand. She entered her house and filled it with fragrant, delicious, sweet food and drinks, along with various cakes, fruits, and stews. The vessel overflowed, and she then knelt before the Bodhisattva, offering it to him.

.....

At that time, the Bodhisattva saw that the brāhmaṇa Deva had developed a heart inclined toward him and was filled with joy. He then said to Deva the brāhmaṇa:

“Great Brāhmaṇa! Could you provide me with a small amount of food so that I may sustain my life? Even just a little broth made from lentil beans, soybeans, kidney beans, red beans, or the like—if I eat it, I can maintain my life.”

The brāhmaṇa, being narrow-minded, petty in thought, with limited understanding and no expansive vision, nonetheless wished to practice almsgiving. He accepted this request and replied to the Bodhisattva:

“Great noble prince! I can indeed provide such food.” Thus, for six years, the brāhmaṇa provided the Bodhisattva daily with the aforementioned food. The Bodhisattva accepted it each day, consuming it in accordance with the teachings of the Dharma to sustain his life. During that time, the Bodhisattva would receive the food with his bare hands, taking only a small portion daily—be it a soup of mung beans or red beans, just enough to preserve life.

As a result of this meager sustenance, the Bodhisattva’s body grew emaciated, his breathing became faint, and he appeared as frail as an aged man of eighty or ninety, utterly without strength, his limbs failing to respond. Likewise, his joints and bones became rigid and brittle.

By thus reducing his intake of food and drink, and practicing intense asceticism, the Bodhisattva’s skin grew deeply wrinkled. Like a bitter gourd not yet fully ripe, severed from its stem and left in the sun to wither yellow under the heat—its flesh parched, its skin wrinkled, flaking off in patches like dried bone—so too was the Bodhisattva’s skull, appearing no different.

Due to his meager intake, the Bodhisattva’s two eyes had sunken deep into their sockets, like water at the bottom of a well from which stars might be seen reflected. Thus, his eyes barely appeared visible.

Again, due to eating so little, the Bodhisattva’s ribs protruded widely apart, covered only by skin, resembling the exposed rafters of a cowshed or a goat shed.

時善生女聞是語已，從菩薩手而取瓦器，入自家中，滿盛香美甘味飲食，并及種種餅果羹臠，溢瓦器中，即出胡跪，奉授菩薩。

……

爾時，菩薩見彼提婆羅門，心向於菩薩，生歡喜已，即告提婆羅門言：“大婆羅門！汝能為我辦少許食，活我已不？若小豆臠，大豆，菘豆，赤豆等羹，而我食之，持用活命。”彼婆羅門，心狹劣故，少見少知，無廣大意，欲行布施，述可此語，報菩薩言：“大聖太子！如是之食，我能辦之。”彼婆羅門，於六年中，日別如上所須之食，以供菩薩。菩薩日日受取此食，依法而食，以活身命。爾時菩薩，但以手掌日別從受，隨得少許而食活命，或小豆臠及赤豆等。是時菩薩，受食既少，隨掌所容，如上所說，諸豆汁食，菩薩如是食彼食已，身體羸瘦，喘息甚弱，如八九十衰朽老公，全無氣力，手脚不隨。如是如是，菩薩支節連骸亦然。菩薩如斯減少食飲，精勤苦行，身體皮膚，皆悉皺。譬如苦瓠，未好成熟，割斷其蒂，置於日中，被炙萎黃，其色以熟，肌枯皮皺，片片自離，如枯頭骨。如是如是，菩薩髑髏，猶是無異。菩薩既以少進食故，其兩眼睛深遠陷入，猶井底水，望見星宿。如是如是，菩薩兩眼，覩之纔現，亦復如是。又復菩薩以少食故，其兩脅肋，離離相遠，唯有皮裹，譬如牛舍，或復羊舍，上著椽木。⁷⁸

Both the composition of the image (Figure 9) and its narrative structure employ the visual motif of bodily emaciation to convey the Bodhisattva’s (i.e., the Fasting Buddha) renunciation of worldly desires. Surrounded by celestial attendants and donors, the relief panel combines various episodes from the Buddhist *sūtras* into a cohesive, unified scene⁷⁹—a technique of visual narration frequently found in Gandhāran reliefs.

To the right stands a bearded, hirsute, and gaunt-faced Vajrapāṇi, holding a vajra shaped like a long baton resting against his right shoulder. Just above and beside him,

rendered in higher relief, is a full-faced woman, likely Sujātā. She wears a long tunic that reaches her feet and a heavy overgarment draped over her left shoulder. Her sleeves appear thickly woven, and her hands are joined, possibly holding a floral offering or garland. Her right leg is slightly bent, as though she is preparing to kneel. She wears hoop earrings and a necklace, and her hair is coiled into a wreath-like shape at the back of her head. Opposite Sujātā is a standing male figure resembling Vajrapāṇi, shown turning sideways. He wears Indra’s headdress with its cylindrical crown, along with earrings, a necklace, and an *uttariya*. He holds a pair of flowers in both hands. Next to him, another male figure also wears a sleeved tunic and an *uttariya*, along with earrings and a necklace, and joins his hands in a gesture of offering, likely representing the brāhmaṇa.⁸⁰

Together, these figures frame the emaciated Bodhisattva, reinforcing the narrative message: that spiritual realization is achieved through disciplined renunciation, not mere physical suffering.

As Rhi (2008b) observes, the Chinese translation of the *Fo benxing ji jing*—affiliated with the Dharmaguptaka tradition and rendered into Chinese during the Sui dynasty (隋, 581–618 CE)—illustrates the Bodhisattva’s continued consumption of food at various stages: prior to undertaking austerities, during the ascetic practices themselves, after renouncing them, and before advancing toward the bodhi tree. This narrative presentation suggests that the contrasting representations at Jamāl Garḥī, in comparison to other regional sites, may reflect sectarian differences in perspectives regarding asceticism and the ideal of the Middle Way, rather than merely reflecting stages in textual development.

Although the texts categorized in **Group C** were translated earlier, their chronological precedence does not inherently imply that the practices they describe developed before those found in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, *Āgama* texts, or various *Vinaya* traditions. Rather, the classification and doctrinal positions regarding austerity may correspond with the viewpoints of different sectarian lineages. Considering this, it is reasonable to posit that the Dharmaguptaka tradition was more closely aligned with emphasizing the ‘Middle Way’ and opposing extreme asceticism, a trait evident in the imagery from Jamāl Garḥī.

Behrendt (2010) has observed that texts associated with the Dharmaguptaka and Sarvāstivādins, early Nikāya Buddhist schools in Gandhāra, articulate various regulations concerning “forest practices” (i.e., Buddhist adherents who advocated a much more extreme path of austerity than those living in the monasteries attached to sacred areas), particularly in the discourse between the Buddha and the five monks, former ascetics, whom the Buddha converted at Sārnāth. Furthermore, various biographical texts recount Shakyamuni’s six-year fast and its eventual failure. These texts suggest that the ‘Middle Way’ or ‘path,’ rather than extreme renunciation, is the pathway to enlightenment. Consequently, it may be inferred that the monks at the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery requested artisans to render ascetic images in this manner to convey the ideology of the ‘Middle Way.’ Additionally, the concept of ‘escaping suffering and attaining bliss’ embodies the nascent stages of the *tathāgatagarbha* (‘Buddha-nature’ 如來藏) doctrine and is intricately connected with Mahāyāna philosophy.

In the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*, on rules regarding ordination, the text employs the story of the Buddha’s expounding of the Dharma at the Deer Park (Mrgadāva 鹿野苑) to elucidate the Four Noble Truths. However, before discussing the Four Noble Truths, the text places particular emphasis on the concept of the Middle Way (中道), stating the following:

...A bhikṣu who has eliminated the two extremes [of reality] (除此二邊已) can attain the Middle Way (更有中道), wherein the eyes are illuminated (眼明), wisdom is clarified (智明), and there is eternal tranquility and cessation (永寂休息). Such a one achieves supernatural abilities (成神通), perfect enlightenment (得等覺), and the conduct of a *śramaṇa* leading to *nirvāṇa* (成沙門涅槃行).

.....比丘除此二邊已,更有中道,眼明智明永寂休息,成神通得等覺,成沙門涅槃行。⁸¹

It further explains:

What is called ‘the Middle Way’? (云何名中道) ‘The Middle Way’ is characterized by the following: Eyes illuminated (眼明), cognition supranormal (智明), permanent cessation (永寂休息), achieving supernatural abilities (成神通), perfect enlightenment (得等覺), and the *śramaṇa*’s conduct toward *nirvāṇa* (成沙門涅槃行).

This is the Noble Eightfold Path (賢聖八正道 *āryāṣṭāṅga-mārga*):

Right View (正見, *samyag-drṣṭi*, correct understanding),

Right Action (正業, *samyak-karmānta*, the righteous behavior of post-learners),

Right Speech (正語, *samyag-vāc*, correct articulation),

Right Practice/Intention (正行, *samyak-samkalpa*? proper engagement),

Right Livelihood (正命, *samyag-ājīva*, virtuous means of subsistence),

Right Skillful Means (正方便, *samyag-vyāyāma* appropriate techniques),

Right Mindfulness (正念, *samyak-smṛti*, attentive awareness),

Right Concentration (正定, *samyak-samādhi*, accurate focus and determination).

This is called the Middle Way (是謂中道).

云何名中道? 眼明智明永寂休息, 成神通得等覺, 成沙門涅槃行, 此賢聖八正道: 正見, 正業, 正語, 正行, 正命, 正方便, 正念, 正定, 是謂中道。⁸²

These passages correspond closely to the iconography of the Fasting Buddha image discovered at the Jamāl Garhī Monastery site—particularly the example now housed in the National Museum of Pakistan (Figure 8). As stated, this sculpture portrays a robust physique and a spirited expression, visually reinforcing the idea that through the cultivation of sublime conduct (*brahmacaryā*; 梵行), one can exhaust the root of suffering (修梵行盡苦源) and thereby “delight in my teachings” (於我法中快自娛樂).⁸³

Based on Cunningham’s survey records, the foundation of the great *stūpa* at Jamāl Garhī originally featured high-relief stucco statues of the Buddha, surrounded by niches on all sides.

Cunningham (1875, p. 47) states:

The chapels, which formed the enclosure, stood on a continuous basement like that of the stupa [*sic*] itself. This was divided into straight faces of unequal length, according to the size of the chapels above them. Some of these faces were covered with plain stucco; but most of them were ornamented with seated figures of Buddha, alternately Ascetic and Teacher, and smaller standing figures of Buddha between them.

Cunningham’s description reveals that the Buddha statues within the niches of the *stūpa* courtyard were systematically arranged to depict the Buddha in various states and postures. These included *dhyāna* meditation (禪定), ascetic practice (religious austerity, 苦行), preaching (說法), and standing. Additionally, one statue depicted the Buddha walking, with his right leg slightly bent forward, his left hand holding the corner of his robe, and his right hand raised in the “no-fear” gesture (施無畏印, *abhaya mudrā*). These representations evoke the image of a *śramaṇa* engaged in “transforming meritorious deeds into supreme enlightenment,” ultimately culminating in supreme enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*).

This combination of Buddha iconography most likely represents the practice of ‘contemplation of the Four Noble Truths’ (Skt. *Caturāryasatyā/caturāryasatyāni*; Ch. *Si shengdi guan* 四聖諦觀). According to traditional Śrāvakayāna (聲聞) teachings, if one can perceive the Four Noble Truths without uncertainty, they will eliminate all afflictions that hinder a

clear understanding of the conditions of ‘arising and ceasing,’ thereby achieving the “path of liberation” (*vimukti-mārga*).

In the chapter on “Critical Analysis/Reflection” (思擇) of the ‘Treatise on the Four Truths’ (Ch. *Sidi lun* 四諦論; Skt. **Catuṣṣatya-śāstra*, **Catuṣṣatya-nirdeśa*) by Vasuvarman (婆藪跋摩, d. u.), translated by Paramārtha (真諦) during the Chen dynasty (陳, c. 557–569 CE), the text discusses how the Four Noble Truths can be cognized. It specifically notes that the Vibhajyavādas (分別說部) believed this practice could be used to cultivate the ‘meditation on non-wishing’ or ‘the gate of liberation through wishlessness’ (無願解脫門), the second of the ‘three gates of liberation’ (三解脫門).

This state of *samādhi* is characterized by the absence of any desires, even the desire for liberation, which leads to *nirvāṇa*:

The “Four Contemplations” (四相, i.e., ‘the four contemplations of the truth of suffering’) are distinct. How can they be meditated upon and realized simultaneously? The answer is through the process of “meditative imagination” (想). As the *sūtras* explain: “By cultivating (修習) the ‘mental image/conception of impermanence’ (無常想), one eradicates all forms of desire.” This conceived (想) “confirmatory vision” (境界) is, namely, “the truth of ‘suffering’” (苦諦 *duḥkha*). All forms of desire correspond to “the truth of ‘the arising’ of suffering” (集諦 *samudaya*). The act of eradicating (desire) represents “the truth of the ‘cessation’ of suffering” (滅諦 *nirodha*). Lastly, the “conception of impermanence” (無常想) aligns with “the truth of ‘the path to liberation’” (道諦 *mārga*)—the way to liberation. For this reason, although the “Four Truths” (四諦) are distinct, they can be realized simultaneously (一時得見).

Furthermore, through critical analysis/reflection (思擇), the process is clarified. As the *sūtras* state: “Because of the conception/‘mental image’ of impermanence and other contemplations (因無常等想), one carefully reflects on the five aggregates (五陰, *pañca-skandha*), and thus desire (貪愛) that has not yet arisen will not arise (未生不得生), and desire that has already arisen will cease (已生則滅).” Among these, ‘the five aggregates’ (五陰) represent ‘the truth of suffering’ (苦諦); ‘desire’ corresponds to ‘the truth of the arising of suffering’ (集諦); their ‘non-arising and cessation’ (不生及滅) represent ‘the truth of the cessation of suffering’ (滅諦); and the ‘conception of impermanence’ along with ‘critical reflection’ aligns with ‘the truth of the path’—the path to liberation (道諦). For this reason, one can realize the “Four Noble Truths” (四諦) simultaneously.

Moreover, by contemplating transgressions or flaws (由觀失故), the process becomes clearer. As the *sūtras* state: “In contemplating the basis of the tangling (afflictions), which lead to transgressions (觀結處過失), desire ceases.” The basis of these afflictions (結處) corresponds to ‘the truth of suffering’ (即苦諦); desire (貪愛) aligns with ‘the truth of the arising of suffering’ (即集諦); cessation (滅) represents ‘the truth of the cessation of suffering’ (即滅諦); and the contemplation of these faults or flaws (過失觀) aligns with ‘the truth of the path’ (道諦). For this reason, one can clearly perceive and attain “the Four Noble Truths.”

四相不同, 云何一時而得並觀者? 答: 由想故, 經中說: “修習無常想, 拔除一切貪愛。” 是想境界, 即是苦諦; 一切貪愛, 即是集諦; 拔除, 即是滅諦; 無常想, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 雖四不同, 一時得見。復次, 由思擇故, 如經言: “因無常等想, 思擇五陰, 貪愛, 未生不得生, 已生則滅。” 此中五陰, 即是苦諦; 貪愛, 即集諦; 不生及滅, 即是滅諦; 無常等思擇, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 一時得見四諦。復次, 由觀失故, 如經言: “觀結處過失, 貪愛即滅。” 結處, 即苦諦; 貪愛, 即集諦; 滅, 即滅諦; 過失觀, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 一時見諦。復次, 由思擇故, 如經言: “因無常等想, 思擇五陰, 貪愛,

未生不得生, 已生則滅。”此中五陰, 即是苦諦; 貪愛, 即集諦; 不生及滅, 即是滅諦; 無常等思擇, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 一時得見四諦。復次, 由觀失故, 如經言: “觀結處過失, 貪愛即滅。”結處, 即苦諦; 貪愛, 即集諦; 滅, 即滅諦; 過失觀, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 一時見諦。⁸⁴

...The Vibhajyavāda school (分別部) states: If one assembles the contemplation/vision of the ‘marks of suffering’ (聚苦相[*duḥkhākāra*]觀), penetrates the arising and ceasing mind (達生滅心), and becomes disillusioned with the conditioned (厭有為; *samskr̥ta*), one can cultivate the ‘gate of liberation through wishlessness’ (修無願解脫門). If one contemplates the conditioned (觀有為)—that is, all phenomena—and recognizes them as merely arising and ceasing (唯有生滅), without perceiving any other dharmas (不見余法), one can cultivate liberation through emptiness (修空解脫門; meditation on nonsubstantiality). If one contemplates tranquility (觀寂靜) without perceiving the conditioned (不見有為), or the marks of arising and ceasing (及生滅相), one can cultivate liberation through signlessness (修無相解脫門; the meditation on no characteristics). Although ‘the four contemplations of the truth of suffering’ (四相) are distinct (雖別), they can be cognized all at once (得一時觀).

.....分別部說: 若聚苦相觀, 達生滅心, 厭有為, 修無願解脫門。若觀有為, 唯有生滅, 不見余法, 修空解脫門。若觀寂靜, 不見有為, 及生滅相, 修無相解脫門。此中苦相, 即是苦諦; 相生, 是煩惱業, 即是集諦; 相滅, 即是滅諦; 是法, 能令心離相, 見無相, 即是道諦。若見無為法寂, 離生滅, 四義一時成。異此無為寂靜, 是名苦諦; 由除此故, 無為法寂靜, 是名集諦; 無為法, 即是滅諦; 能觀此寂靜, 及見無為, 即是道諦; 以是義故, 四相雖別, 得一時觀。⁸⁵

The Dharmaguptakas shared profound connections with the Vibhajyavāda school. The *Za apitan xin lun* 雜阿毘曇心論 (**Samyukta-abhidharma-hṛdaya-sāstra*, T. 1552) also records that the Dharmaguptakas emphasize the ability to attain a ‘right view’ (現觀) of the Four Noble Truths through simultaneous realization (一時), enabling all four truths to be contemplated simultaneously.

The text elaborates:

Dharmaguptakas (曇無得等) explain the attainment of insight into the Four Noble Truths as a state of ‘seeing them without uncertainty’ (一無間等). [...] Regarding this ‘seeing without uncertainty’ (一無間等), the text further states: ‘In attaining an uninterrupted and unified insight into the truths (於諦一無間等), what is the rationale (何以故)? It is grounded in faith in the noble and wise (信聖賢故), as the World-Honored One (Bhagavat) (世尊) proclaimed: “A bhikṣu (比丘) who has no doubt regarding suffering (苦), no doubt regarding the arising of suffering (集), and similarly, no doubt regarding the cessation of suffering (滅) and the path (道), is said to possess such insight.” This insight is compared to a lamp, which integrates four essential functions:

1. heating the vessel (熱器),
2. burning the wick (燒炷),
3. maintaining an endless supply of oil (油盡),
4. dispelling darkness (破暗).

Similarly, this singular wisdom (一智) enables one to comprehend suffering (知苦) and cultivate the path to liberation (修道). Therefore, it is said that achieving such seamless and unwavering understanding (一無間等) corresponds to attaining ‘right comprehension.’

曇無得等, 說一無間等. 說一無間等者, 彼說: 於諦一無間等, 何以故? 信聖賢故, 如世尊說: “比丘於苦無疑, 集亦無疑, 滅, 道, 亦如是。” 如燈俱作四事, 熱器, 燒炷, 油盡, 破暗; 如是一智, 知苦乃至修道, 是故一無間等.⁸⁶

In summary, a close analysis of the Fasting Buddha images, particularly those from the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery, reveals a distinctive aesthetic that diverges from the harsh, emaciated depictions of asceticism found at other regional sites such as Sikri and Takht-i-Bāhī. When viewed alongside other archaeological features, including *stūpa* construction and the overall layout of the Monastery, and interpreted through relevant textual sources, these images strongly suggest that Jamāl Garḥī maintained a close affiliation with the Dharmaguptaka sect. Furthermore, the stylistic variations observed in these Fasting Buddha statues reflect not only differences in period and craftsmanship but also underlying sectarian beliefs and doctrinal orientations within the monastic communities that commissioned them.

5. Conclusions

According to Cunningham (1875, p. 197), the number of surviving statues from the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery is significantly greater than those from the contemporary monastery at Takht-i-Bāhī. He also notes that in the *Caityagrha* of Jamāl Garḥī, many imperial statues adorned with jewels on their necks and arms were found, which later Indian archaeologists identified as images of Maitreya.⁸⁷ The belief in the Bodhisattva of the Dharmaguptaka is recorded in numerous Chinese Buddhist sources.⁸⁸ These factors suggest that, at this time, Dharmaguptaka had a close connection with Mahāyāna thought.

Cunningham proposes that the Jamāl Garḥī Monastery, with its gilded statues and overall splendid architecture, may have served as a royal monastery. Tsukamoto (1961, pp. 74–82) suggests that, in the history of India after the Mauryan Empire, the relationship between various empires and Buddhist sects is reflected in the Buddhist remains at different sites. For instance, the *stūpas* of Sāñchī and Bhārhut, likely constructed during the Śūṅga dynasty, demonstrate the connection between the Kuṣāṇas and the Buddhist sites of Gandhāra and Mathurā in northern India, as well as the ties between these dynasties and cave monasteries such as Ajanta and Kengheri.

As mentioned above, the rise of the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta dynasties following the decline of the Mauryan Empire led to a regionalization of cultural forms, underscoring the relationship between the monastic order and its local supporters. It is likely that the monastic orders, originally established by Aśoka, evolved with regional distinctions.

The Jamāl Garḥī Monastery thrived during the reign of King Huviṣka (c. 150–c. 190 CE), who, despite not being a Buddhist, supported other religions such as Zoroastrianism in Persia and Greek religions. Buddhist monastic orders, often eager to secure royal patronage, were likely more inclined to adapt to the preferences of rulers less favorable to Buddhism, as demonstrated in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

Scholars Xianlin Ji 季羨林 (Ji 2001) and Karashima (2013b, pp. 177–78; 2018a, pp. 181–96) have suggested that the rise of the Maitreya (Gk. Μετράγα; Ch. Mílè 彌勒) faith may have been influenced by the Persian Mithraic faith (Old Persian: Miça), potentially rooted in proto-Zoroastrianism.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is plausible that the Buddhist monasteries in the Mardān region, particularly during the period of King Kanīṣka, absorbed elements of Greek and Persian culture and art, which were further integrated under King Huviṣka. This cultural synthesis likely contributed to the development of the belief in the Bodhisattva.⁹⁰

The Jamāl Garḥī Monastery emerges as a pivotal site for understanding the institutional and ideological frameworks of early Buddhist monasticism in Gandhāra, particularly its affiliation with the Dharmaguptaka sect. The Monastery's *stūpa* architecture, characterized by its circular foundation and axial alignment adhering to *Vinaya* prescriptions, closely aligns with the Dharmaguptaka's emphasis on ritual precision and spatial sanctity. The iconography at Jamāl Garḥī, in contrast to contemporaneous sites like Takht-i-Bāhī, underscores its doctrinal adherence to Mahāyāna practices. The Fasting Buddha imagery discovered here reflects the Dharmaguptaka interpretation of the Middle Way, while the broader emergence of Maitreya remains a critical avenue for future research.

In summary, the Monastery's material and epigraphic records, along with textual evidence, exemplify how specific *Vinaya* traditions influenced monastic topography, ritual practice, and iconographic programs in Gandhāra.

Future investigations may explore comparative analyses of Dharmaguptaka-affiliated sites along the Silk Roads or examine the transmission of their *Vinaya* practices into East Asia, where their influence profoundly shaped the Sinicization of Buddhist disciplinary thought and monasticism.

By anchoring Jamāl Garḥī within the Dharmaguptaka tradition, this research clarifies the sectarian dynamics of Gandhāran Buddhism and demonstrates the value of integrating archaeological data with textual sources to reconstruct the lived religious practices of early monastic communities.

Further analysis of the Monastery's remains and a comparison of the statues' iconography with the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* allow us to more clearly trace the evolutionary trajectory of the Dharmaguptakas within their historical context and open avenues for further discussion.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AGBG | (Foucher 1905–1918) |
| ASI | Archaeological Survey of India |
| ASIAR | <i>Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report</i> |
| ASIFCAR | <i>Archaeological Survey of India Frontier Circle Annual Report</i> |
| ASIR V | (Cunningham 1875) |
| List | (Majumdar 1924) |
| JASB | <i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</i> |
| BD | <i>The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)</i> , 6 vols, translated by Isaline B. Horner, London: Pali Text Society, 1938–66 |
| Vin | <i>The Vinaya Piṭakam</i> , edited by H. Oldenberg, London: Pali Text Society, 1879–83 |
| Skt | Sanskrit |
| P | Prakrit [Prākṛit] |
| Kh | Kharoṣṭhī |
| Gk | Greek |
| Ch | Chinese |
| Jp | Japanese |
| c. | Circa |
| r. | Reigned/ruled |
| j. | juan 卷 |
| d. u. | Date unknown |
| * | Reconstructed |
| T | <i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled during the Taishō Era (1912–26)]. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/ , accessed on 26 March 2025) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php , accessed on 26 March 2025). <i>Xinbian xu zangjing</i> 新編卍字續藏經 [Man Extended Buddhist Canon]. 150 vols. Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, Taipei 臺北, 1968–1970. Reprint of Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧, et al., comps. Dai Nihon zoku zōkyō 大日本續藏經 [Extended Buddhist Canon of Great Japan], 120 cases. Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin 藏經書院, 1905–1912. Digitized in CBETA (https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/ , accessed on 26 March 2025). |
| X | <i>Da zangjing bubian</i> 大藏經補編 [Supplement to the Dazangjing]. Huayu chuban she 華宇出版社, Taipei 臺北, 1985. Ed. Lan Jifu 藍吉富. |
| B | Catalogue of Gandhari Inscriptions published by Baums and Glass (Item: CKI 116): https://gandhari.org/catalog/?itemID=90 [accessed on 26 March 2025]. The entry lists other analyses and mentions of the “Jamālgarhī Inscription”. <i>Gandhāran Art Bibliography</i> |
| Baums and Glass | (https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections/bibliography) [accessed on 26 March 2025] |
| GAB | |

Notes

- Official British attempts to organize a system for gaining information on the antiquities of the region began in 1851. Cf. (Punjab Proceedings 1851; Cunningham 1875, pp. 46–48; Errington 2022, pp. 1–2).
- In early January 1848, Alexander Cunningham discovered the Buddhist site of Jamāl Garhī using what he considered the first accurate map of the Peshawar basin, produced by Claude-Auguste Court, a French officer under the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh who created the map while searching for sites associated with Alexander the Great (Court 1836, p. 394; Cunningham 1848, p. 130). Cunningham collected sculptures, including one he misidentified as Queen Māyā, a mistake that later aided in cataloging efforts. His early documentation laid the groundwork for subsequent archaeological research. For further details, see Cunningham (1848, 1873, 1875, 1885); see also Errington (1987, pp. 80, 131, 325) for a chronology of these events.

- 3 See (Cunningham 1875, p. 46; Majumdar 1924, p. 7).
- 4 See (Cunningham 1875), especially, notes on Jamāl-garhi, pp. 46–53, 197–202, Pl XIII and XIV.
- 5 Archaeological Survey of India. 1921. *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle for the Year 1920–1921*. Peshawar: Government Press; (Hargreaves 1921a, 1921b, 1922, 1923, 1924a, 1924b, 1926). For a chronological overview of this report and the photographs produced, see (Errington 1987; Behrendt 2004, pp. 17–18).
- 6 (Bhandarkar 1919, p. 54). See also, (Salomon 1999, p. 3; Willemen 2001, pp. 163–69; C. Li 2008, pp. 17–18; Lèvi and Chavannes 1895, pp. 371–84; Chavannes 1903, pp. 130–32; Behrendt 2007, pp. 3–5).
- 7 (Cunningham 1875, pp. 8–23, 46; Foucher 1915, pp. 21–32).
- 8 See (Swati 2008, pp. 132–34; Cunningham 1875, pp. 46, 8–23, 89–90; Foucher 1915, pp. 10–16, 21–32; Olivieri 2021, pp. 390–391).
- 9 The scholarship on Gandhāra includes multiple disciplines that extend beyond the immediate scope of this paper and is too extensive to be fully reviewed here. Nevertheless, several recent studies in Gandhāran art and archaeology have directly informed this research. Many of these are listed in the Gandhāran Art Bibliography (GAB), accessed on 26 March 2025, at <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections/bibliography>. Notable examples include the following: Behrendt’s (2004) *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, which offers a comprehensive overview and description of the development of 2nd century BCE to 8th century CE Buddhist sacred centers in ancient Gandhāra and present-day northwest Pakistan; Kuwayama’s (2006) comprehensive synthesis of the term “Gandhāra,” drawing on diverse source materials in his essay “Pilgrimage Route Changes and the Decline of Gandhāra,” in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, Texts*, ed. P. Brancaccio and K. Behrendt, pp. 107–34; Jessie Pons’ (2018) critical examination of the geography and terminology of Gandhāran art in “Gandhāran Art(s): Methodologies and Preliminary Results of a Stylistic Analysis,” in *The Geography of Gandhāran Art*, ed. Rienjang, W. and P. Stewart, pp. 3–42; Luca Maria Olivieri’s (2022b) up-to-date overview of the field in “The Archaeology of Gandhāra,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology* 21; and Stefan Baums’ (2018) “A framework for Gandhāran chronology based on relic inscriptions,” in *Problems of Chronology in Gandhāran Art*, ed. Rienjang, W. and P. Stewart, pp. 53–70. For further discussion, see also Rienjang and Stewart (2018, 2022), Behrendt (2004, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2017), Dietz (2007), and Rhi (2005, 2008a, 2008b).
- 10 *Epitoma Pompei Trogi*, XV, 4, Rühl’s (1886) edition, Leipzig, p. 119; trans. by McCrindle (1893), *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great*, pp. 327–28, 114–15.
- 11 (Zhang 2008, pp. 27–28, 30–31; Swati 2008, pp. 132–34; Beal 1869).
- 12 Now preserved in the “Records of the Monasteries of Luoyang” (*Luoyang jialan ji* 洛陽伽藍記) of Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之 from around 547 CE. See the more recent translations by Wang Yi-t’ung, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang by Yang Hsüan-chih* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Jean Marie Lourme, *Yang Xuanzhi: Mémoire sur les monastères bouddhiques de Luoyang* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014). Also see notes by Chavannes (1903, 1915), Liu (2024), and commentary and annotations by Zhou (2010) and Yang (2006).
- 13 (Ji [1985] 2000, pp. 232, 257). For dates and other aspects of Chinese Buddhist Travelogues, see Deeg (2005, 2007, 2014, 2020, 2023).
- 14 Here, defined as solid, round masonry structures in which relics of the Buddha were embedded.
- 15 Behrendt (2007, p. 4) notes that a dramatic increase in the construction of Buddhist monasteries and in donations to sacred areas within Gandhāra occurred from about the fourth to the early fifth century CE. Most of the extant *stūpas*, image shrines, and monasteries date to this late period, and consequently this is when the largest portion of sculpture must have been produced.
- 16 Sometimes referred to as the Ephthalites (‘White Huns’ mid-4th century CE; cf.: *Luoyang Qielanji Jiaoshi* 洛陽伽藍記校釋, j. 5: B 12, No. 77, p. 229a9–10).
- 17 (Yang 2006, pp. 213–214). For further historical accounts of Gandhāra and the decline of Buddhist institutional life during this period, as well as its effects on visual and textual culture, see (Neelis 2011; Salomon 2018; Olivieri 2022a, 2022b; Pons 2018; Errington 1999–2000).
- 18 *Da tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記, J. 2: “僧徒五十餘人, 並大乘學也.” (Ji [1985] 2000, p. 256). English translation, see (Beal 1884, p. 112): “Outside the eastern gate of the town of Po-lu-sha is a *sangharama* with about fifty priests, who all study the Great Vehicle. Here is a stupa built by [sic] Asōka-rāja. In old times, Sudana the prince, having been banished from his home, dwelt in Mount Dantalōka. Here, a Brahman begged his son and daughter, and he sold them to him.”
- 19 (Behrendt 2004, see esp. pp. 113–14, 122, 131, 177, 197–99, 227, 277).
- 20 Cf. Rienjang (n.d.). “Jamālgarhī”, Gandhāra Connections website, <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/XDB/DMS/Jamalgarhi%20v.%20.pdf> accessed on 30 March 2025.
- 21 See, for example, Majumdar (1924, pp. 7–8, No. 14); Konow (1929, pp. 110–13); Lüders (1940, pp. 17–20); Bailey (1946, p. 790); Brough (1962, p. 44, n. 3); Shizutani (1965, p. 132; pp. 135–36, No. 1736); Vertogradova (1995, p. 63); Tsukamoto (Tsukamoto 1996–1998, p. 967); Lin (1998, pp. 349–50); Salomon (2005, p. 377); Neelis (2011, p. 241); and Jantrasrisalai et al. (2016, p. 81), all of whom have, to varying degrees, examined or discussed the epigraphical material addressed in this study and have been recorded in Baums and Glass’s *Catalogue of Gāndhārī Inscriptions* (see Items: CKI 116; 117; 118; 119; 122; 123); <https://gandhari.org/catalog>. accessed on 16 June 2025.
- 22 Concerning the conventional use of the nomenclature “Fasting Buddha,” see (Rhi 2008b, p. 127, note 9).

- 23 Here, “material evidence” refers to both archaeological and epigraphic material.
- 24 Schist represents a metamorphic stone that ranges in color from green to black and was commonly used in Gandhāra for masonry and sculpture. See discussion by (Konow 1929, pp. 110–13).
- 25 The ASI’s original report notes: “Many antiquities were recovered in removing the debris in this area, the most valuable being the Kharoshthi inscription of the year 369.” See Archaeological Survey of India. 1921. *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle for the Year 1920–1921*, Peshawar: Government Press, p. 4.
- 26 Image Source: from (Konow 1929, pp. 110–13, No. XLV, pl. XXII.1). For a detailed discussion of the inscriptions’s text, including its romanization and translation, see (Konow 1929; Lüders 1940, pp. 15, 20).
- 27 “Year 359” = possibly referring to “Day 1 of Āśvayuj, year 359 of Yona”? For a detailed discussion of the inscriptions’ text, including its romanization and translation, see (Konow 1929, pp. 110–13, pl. XXII.1; Lüders 1940, pp. 15, 20). Concerning further notes on this dating format, see (Salomon 2000, pp. 55–56).
- 28 Archaeological Survey of India 1921, p. 4; p. 5, No. 4 “Epigraphy”.
- 29 Archaeological Survey of India 1921, p. 5, No. 4. Concerning the ‘Jamālgarhī Inscription’s’ excavation process, see (Konow 1929, pp. 110–13; Lüders 1940, pp. 15–49; Shizutani 1974, pp. 87–92; Lin 1988, pp. 150–57; 1998, pp. 349–50; Salomon 2005, p. 377; C. Li 2019, p. 330; Errington 2022, p. 7).
- 30 “[]” indicates amendments added by the authors for readability of text, and based on (Salomon 2000, p. 55).
- 31 (Konow 1929, p. 110–13). See also (Konow and van Wijk 1924, p. 70, note 1; Majumdar 1924, p. 8, note 1).
- 32 On the name Dharmaguptaka, see (Salomon 1999, pp. 169, 176; Silk 1999, p. 373, note 34).
- 33 “Dhamaūte[ana],” cf. glossing recorded in Baums and Glass (CKI 116); <https://gandhari.org/catalog?itemID=90>. accessed on 24 February 2025.
- 34 (Lüders 1940, p. 20). “Für die Geschichte der buddhistischen Kirche ist die Inschrift nicht ohne Interesse, weil sie zeigt, daß die Dharmaguptakas in den ersten Jahrhunderten n. Chr. auch im Nordwesten Indiens eine Stätte hatten, während sie bisher inschriftlich nur für Mathurā bezeugt waren. Im 7. Jahrhundert waren sie nach den Angaben Hüen-tsang’s noch in Udyāna vertreten.”
- 35 See (Bureau 1955, pp. 15–30, 34; Lamotte 1958, pp. 571–606; Heirman 2002b, pp. 11–12; 2002a, pp. 396–99).
- 36 For discussions on the problems of determining ‘sectarian’ and ‘school’ affiliations, see Salomon (2008, p. 14), Boucher (2008, p. 190), Anālayo (2017, pp. 58–77), Fussman (2012, p. 198), Willemen (2023, p. 10), and Fukita (2017).
- 37 (Willemen 2023, pp. 1–10; Salomon 2017, pp. 239–68; Allon and Silverlock 2017, pp. 1–5).
- 38 These two large scriptures were translated by Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (d. u.) between 412 CE and 413 CE. See (Legittimo 2014, pp. 65–84).
- 39 Daoxuan 道宣 was a strong advocate for making the *Vinaya* for the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* the most standard version in China. See the *Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳, Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (T. 2060: 620c2-3), and the *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* (T. 1804: 51c7-9); Daoxuan (T. 1804: 2b19-20); See also, (Heirman 2002a; 2014, pp. 193–206).
- 40 Baums and Glass [<https://gandhari.org/catalog?section=inscriptions>. accessed on 26 March 2025].
- 41 Behrendt (2004, p. 27) notes that typical Buddhist religious centers in Gandhāra comprised a sacred area for public worship and a more private monastic section with *vihāras* (monasteries) and small devotional structures. The public sacred area and private monastic space were designed to serve the religious needs of at least three distinct communities—lay followers, resident monks, and local and long-distance pilgrims—which included a main *stūpa* surrounded by smaller *stūpas* and shrines for either relics or images. Main *stūpas* refer to the large, central *stūpa* characteristic of Greater Gandhāran sacred areas; together with a monastery, the main *stūpa* was among the first structures constructed when a new Buddhist site was established.
- 42 See description by Konow (1929, pp. 116–17).
- 43 Image source: (Konow 1929, No. LII, pl. XXII. 8, p. 116. Peshawar Museum, inv. No. 01873).
- 44 (Stein 1912, p. v; 1915, pp. 12, 23, pl. I; Konow 1929, pp. 116–17).
- 45 In the Catalogue of Gāndhārī Inscriptions, Baums and Glass (see Item: CKI 123) list this inscription as Item: CKI 123, “Jamalgarhi Pavement Stone Inscription,” based on Konow 1929. They reconstruct the text as: “[B]u[dharakṣi]da[sa] tanam(*ukhe)” See: <https://gandhari.org/catalog?itemID=97> [accessed on 10 June 2025].
- 46 (Hargreaves 1924b, p. 57; Göbl 1984, type 1001, No. 10; Majumdar 1924, p. 9, List No. 19).
- 47 (Konow 1929, pp. 115–16). Errington notes that Cunningham reported that seven of the eight Kushāṇa coins found in 1873 were again those of Vāsudeva (Cunningham 1875, p. 194). However, no other details are given, so it is impossible to determine if they were, in fact, issues of “Vāsudeva I” (c. 190–230 CE) or were later imitations (c. 230–380 CE).
- 48 (Hargreaves 1921b, Appendix V, 23–27, Nos. 140, 192–193, 241–242; Hargreaves 1923, p. 19, Appendix V, 23, No. 140, 28; Nos. 263–264).
- 49 (Hargreaves 1923, pp. 5–6; Appendix 5: 21, No. 42). See also, (Errington 1999–2000, p. 197).

- 50 Errington (2022, p. 19) notes that although scholars have provided similar numismatic evidence found in the region dating to the early 2nd century (c. 113–127 CE), the surviving ruins of Jamāl Garhī’s main *stūpa* complex are primarily later renovations, despite these no doubt including the extensive re-use of earlier sculptures. Therefore, their combination of elements might be random and may not indicate their original location.
- 51 *Stūpa* courtyards are usually parts of the public sacred area consisting of the main *stūpa*, surrounding small *stūpas*, relic shrines, *stūpa* shrines, and (in later construction) image shrines. For a detailed account of the main *stūpa* courtyard at Jamāl Garhī, see (Errington 2022, pp. 9–10).
- 52 *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, j. 33: T. 22, No. 1425, p. 498. See also (Karashima 2018c, pp. 439–69, esp. p. 441).
- 53 *Sifen lü* 四分律, j. 52: T. 22, No. 1428, p. 956.
- 54 Translated by Buddhajīva (Ch. Fotuoshi 佛陀什), Zhisheng 智勝, Daosheng 道生 and Huiyan 慧嚴 between 423 and 424 CE. See Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*. See also the catalog *Chu sanzang ji ji*, j. 3: T. 55, No. 2145, pp. 21a25–b1 (Buddhajīva, Zhisheng, Daosheng and Huiyan), j. 15: T. 55, No. 2145, pp. 111a28–b2 (Buddhajīva and Zhisheng).
- 55 *Sifen lü* 四分律, j. 52: “不如以一搏泥，爲佛起塔勝...” T. 22, No. 1428, pp. 958b7–24.
- 56 *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律, j. 26: “搏泥，而說偈言：‘不如一[搏]團泥，爲佛起塔廟。’” T. 22, No. 1421, pp. 172c27–173a1.
- 57 T. 22, No. 1421, pp. 172c27–173a1.
- 58 *Shisong lü* 十誦律, j. 56: T. 23, No. 1435, p. 415.
- 59 (Cunningham 1879), Pl. III “Plan [and Elevation] of *Stūpa*”.
- 60 (Tsukamoto 1996–2003, p. 452, Figure 44).
- 61 *Guanzhong chuangli jietan tujing* 關中創立戒壇圖經: T. 45, No. 1892, pp. 807–808. Author’s translation.
- 62 *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 j. 33: T. 22, No. 1425, p. 498; Translation following (Karashima 2018c, p. 443) with modifications.
- 63 T. 22, No. 1425, p. 498.
- 64 (Salomon 2008, p. 14; Anālayo 2017, pp. 66–67; Karashima 2017; Strauch 2017).
- 65 Recent discoveries of the so-called Gāndhārī *Āgamas* show that the manuscripts of the “The Robert Senior Collection of Gandhari/Kharoṣṭhī Buddhist manuscripts” were probably produced by monastics of the Dharmaguptaka lineage. See (Allon and Silverlock 2017, pp. 1–55; Chung 2013, pp. 14, 9–41).
- 66 For Prākṛit features of the original Indic texts eventually translated into Chinese, including early Mahāyāna texts, see, (Karashima 1992, pp. 262–75; 2006, 2013a, 2018b; Boucher 1998; Nattier 2008, pp. 21–22).
- 67 See (Salomon 2018, p. 62, note 82).
- 68 According to Chinese Buddhist art historian Ling Li 李翎, in her lecture titled “Analysis of the History of the Main *Stūpa* at Sānchī” (桑奇大塔的歷史辨析), delivered on November 19, 2021, at the Research Center for Buddhist Texts and Art, Peking University (北京大學佛教典籍與藝術研究中心), Sānchī *Stūpa* No. 2 was likely the earliest structure built at the site and occupies the northernmost position within the monastery complex. Furthermore, the remains of the early courtyard walls of the Dharmarājika *Stūpa*, constructed around the 1st century BCE, are located to the south and west. Based on this analysis, it can be inferred that the current location of *Stūpa* No. 2 would originally have been in the northeastern part of the site.
- 69 For discussions on the semantic scope of the term *Zhongguo* 中國 in Sinitic Buddhist texts, particularly in its use to refer to the ‘central region of northern India,’ see Karashima (2010, p. 647) and Wu (2020, p. 395, note 32).
- 70 The explicit reference to the veneration of the East in the Chinese context seems to convey another concept. According to Max Deeg (2023), through the travelogue of Xuanzang, the *Datang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記, the idea spread that the eastern region of the Buddhist continent, Jambudvīpa (Ch. *Zhanbu zhou* 瞻部洲)—identified as China—would morally rank first among all the empires of the four cardinal directions, including Persia as the Western empire. According to Xuanzang, the Indians thus venerated the East and its ruler. *Datang Xiyu ji*, j. 1, T. 51, No. 2087, p. 869b29–869c, 2: “In the customs of the three rulers [of the South, the North, and the West], the East is highly revered. The doors of their residences are open to the east, and when the sun rises, [they] turn east to venerate [it]. The land of the ruler of men [(i.e., China)] honors the southern direction” 三主之俗，東方爲上。其居室則東闢其戶，旦日則東向以拜。人主之地，南面爲尊。 For a discussion of this passage, see Deeg (1999, pp. 241–54; 2023, p. 141).
- 71 This “正陽” could allude to ‘facing the emperor.’
- 72 T. 40, No. 1804, p. 134a16–19. Author’s translation.
- 73 *Yibu zonglun lun* 異部宗輪論: T. 49, No. 2031, p. 17. Translation based on (Tsukamoto 2004) with modifications.
- 74 There is some debate about which narrative or aspect of enlightenment these fasting images of the Buddha represent. While Rhi (2008a, 2008b), Behrendt (2010), and Wladimir Zwalf (1996) argue that these representations depict the Buddha prior to enlightenment, particularly during or at the point of his six-year fast, Robert Brown (1997) contends that these images might illustrate the 49-day fast under the bodhi tree on the vajrāsana throne, which followed immediately after the Buddha’s enlightenment. Nonetheless, Behrendt (2010) notes that, regardless of whether these images represent his pre- or post-enlightenment fast, they emphasize his role as the ultimate yogin in the wilderness, serving as powerful ascetic expressions of the Buddha’s path.

- 75 *Sifen lü*四分律, j. 32: T. 22, No. 1428, p. 781a3–14. Author’s translation.
- 76 The provenance of this rectangular panel piece remains controversial; its reverse side features an inscription of “J,” indicating its origins at Jamāl Garhī. Cunningham proposed that sculptures from the site be incised with a ‘J’ (Cunningham 1885, p. 93), which has become the primary method for identifying artifacts from the 1873 excavation. Following the excavation, the discoveries were distributed among institutions in Calcutta, Lahore, and the British Museum, while some artifacts are in Chandigarh, with others located as far away as Stockholm (Väldskultur Museerna OS-120/S-113B). Errington (2022, p. 7) notes that numbered, photographed sculptures and the incised “J” allow tracking and reconstruction of much of the 1873 archaeological records (see Table of records for Appendix B sculptures, Errington 2022, pp. 7, 36–42), aiding in confirming this sculpture’s origins at the Jamāl Garhī Monastery site.
- 77 Museum number 1880.67 “Description” (refer to: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1880-67, accessed on 13 May 2025).
- 78 *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經, j. 24: T. 03, No. 190, p. 765b12–15, p. 767c1–17. Translated by author(s). For another English translation, see (Beal 1875, pp. 189–95).
- 79 (Foucher 1905–1918, pp. 381–82, fig. 193).
- 80 Foucher (1905–1918) offers a similar view, while Zwalf (1985) suggests that the woman should be recognized as Māyā, alongside the deities Indra and Brahmā, and her protector Vajrapāṇi.
- 81 *Sifen lü*四分律, j. 32: T. 22, No. 1428, p. 788a8–13. Author’s translation.
- 82 *Sifen lü*四分律, j. 32: T. 22, No. 1428, p. 788a8–10. Author’s translation.
- 83 *Sifen lü*四分律, j. 32: T. 22, No. 1428, p. 789a2–4.
- 84 *Sidi lun* 四諦論: T. 32, No. 1647, p. 377c11–22. Author’s translation.
- 85 *Sidi lun* 四諦論: T. 32, No. 1647, p. 378a1–11. Author’s translation.
- 86 *Za apitan xin lun* 雜阿毘曇心論, j. 11: T. 28, No. 1552, p. 962a20–b3–7. Author’s translation.
- 87 (Cunningham 1875, p. 202) (Appendix B: s.6).
- 88 *Yibu zonglun lun shu shu ji* 異部宗輪論疏述記: T. 53, No. 844, p. 577a18–b4.
- 89 See also the discussion by Behrendt (2014).
- 90 Behrendt (2014) also notes that during the turn of the Common Era, Maitreya served as an independent devotional icon. The relative popularity of Maitreya in Gandhāra, compared to northern and western India, suggests that Gandhāran Buddhists were following a different ideological trajectory during the time of the Great Kushans. The emerging Maitreya iconography appears to align with the Gandhāran typology, and the significantly larger production of Maitreya images may indicate that this tradition originated in the northwest and was likely influenced by outside sources.

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Article

A Study on the Literacy Rate of Buddhist Sangha in the Tang Dynasty

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Abstract: The Buddhist sangha played a crucial role in ancient China, exerting significant influence on its society through religious identity and cultural knowledge. However, not all members of the monastic community were literate. The Tang Dynasty introduced an examination system that assessed monks' proficiency in reciting Buddhist scriptures, determining their eligibility for ordination. Simultaneously, efforts to remove unqualified monks and nuns provided an opportunity to estimate the literacy rate within the monastic community. A statistical analysis of the literacy rate offers a novel perspective for understanding the evolution of Buddhism, the intricate relationship between religion and politics, and the role of the monastic community in local society during the Tang Dynasty.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty; Buddhist sangha; literacy rate; scripture recitation examination

The Buddhist sangha constituted a significant cultural entity in ancient Chinese society, exerting profound influence. The elite segment within the monastic community, particularly those high-ranking monks in closer proximity to imperial authority, played a pivotal role in shaping national Buddhist policies and influencing the dynamics of the state-religion relationship. Previous studies predominantly focused on these monks. Nevertheless, it is imperative to underscore that the comparatively overlooked lower and middle-ranking monks within the monastic community constitute a more sizable contingent, engage more extensively with the general populace, and wield a more pervasive and quotidian influence. It was precisely due to their endeavors that, during the medieval period, Buddhist monasteries evolved into pivotal cultural centers within regional societies. The manifestation of such an influence by the sangha stems not only from their religious authority but also from their cultural knowledge (Xie 2009). Erik Zürcher once described the ancient Buddhist sangha as “the Secondary Elite” (Zürcher 1989). Consequently, the investigation of their cultural attributes, particularly the literacy rate within the monastic community, becomes of paramount importance¹.

1. Not All Monastics Possess Literacy

Regarding the issue of literacy rates within the Buddhist sangha, there has been a lack of rigorous scholarly investigation in previous studies. When discussing literacy rates in modern times, some scholars even hastily classify all religious groups, including Buddhism and Taoism, directly into the literate category (Mote 1972). Perhaps this impression arises because many activities undertaken by the sangha are inherently connected to written texts. Internally within Buddhism, a significant task for ordained individuals is the recitation of scriptures, which undoubtedly imposes literacy requirements on members of the sangha. According to Vinaya, such requirements are articulated from the moment of ordination. Novices (*śrāmaṇeras*) are mandated to recite scriptures daily², with literacy being a presumed prerequisite. The internal mechanisms of Buddhism ensure a cultural demand within the sangha, compelling its members to be more motivated to be literate compared to lay practitioners. During the medieval period in China, the state repeatedly issued decrees mandating that ordained monks within the sangha must possess a certain

level of proficiency in reading scriptures. However, whether articulated in Vinaya regulations or state decrees, they undeniably present an idealized state, and the practical situation may significantly deviate from these standards. Furthermore, from another perspective, the recurrent issuance of state decrees implies the existence of individuals within the sangha who were unable to read scriptures.

The Sūtra of the Dharma's Complete End (Fa miejin jing 法滅盡經), an apocryphal sutra dated to the end of the 5th century, revealed that many monks at that time “did not chant scriptures” 經不誦習 and “did not know characters and sentences” 不識字句³. In the first year of the Yuanxing 元興 era (402), during the reign of Emperor An of the Jin Dynasty 晉安帝 (382–419, reg. 397–419), the Grand Commandant Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404) perceived a decline in Buddhism. He believed that there were too many inadequately qualified monks and nuns, necessitating a purge. Consequently, he promulgated an ordinance for the expulsion of monks and nuns (料簡沙門書), outlining specific criteria for elimination. According to the decree:

Those monks who possess the ability to articulate the doctrinal principles of Buddhist scriptures, those who rigorously adhere to the precepts of Buddhism without any transgressions, and those who dwell in mountainous and forested areas refraining from lay engagements are considered conducive to the dissemination of Buddhism. They contribute to the governance of the lay society and serve as exemplary models for individuals. Apart from this subset of monks, all other monastics are mandated to return to lay life and assimilate into the ordinary populace. 諸沙門有能申述經誥，暢說義理者；或禁行修整，奉戒無虧，恒為阿練若者；或山居養志，不營流俗者，皆足以宣寄大化，亦所以示物以道，弘訓作範，幸兼內外。其有違於此者，皆悉罷遣。⁴

These criteria, particularly the qualification of having “the ability to articulate the doctrinal principles of Buddhist scriptures”, evidently target those monks who are unable to recite and understand the Buddhist scriptures. This indicates that Huan Xuan was acutely aware of the presence of illiterate monks within the monastic community during that period. Nevertheless, they took into consideration other virtues of the monastic community, recognizing that monks’ ethical conduct is a crucial factor enabling their ordination and entry into monastic life. Hence, they established multiple criteria to account for these various virtues.

At the time that the Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou 北周武帝 (543–578, reg. 560–578) tried to exterminate Buddhism, he once required those who were illiterate to return to laity. He posited that “inadequately qualified monks might refrain from voluntary lay reversion due to feelings of shame” 寡德沙門恥還於素俗. Consequently, he established explicit screening methods and criteria for monks. Specifically, he mandated local officials to conduct examinations, and based on the assessment outcomes, only those monks capable of reciting Buddhist scriptures and having undergone multiple checks were permitted to remain within the community. Namely, the defrocking of monks and nuns was accomplished through the recognition and recitation of classical scriptures, compelling those unable to read to return to lay life. This shares similarities with Huan Xuan’s approach; however, the difference lies in that the Emperor Wu established only this criterion, disregarding the other virtues of monks. After the promulgation of the decree, it faced vehement opposition from monks such as Tanji 曇積. Tanji emphasized the diverse virtues possessed by different monks and enumerated five reasons to oppose the Emperor Wu’s policy. However, concurrently, he admitted that there were many monks who were “obtuse, and lacking a gift for reading. They study hard but have not learned a single character” 受性愚鈍，於讀誦無緣；習學至苦，而不得一字. “They are not smart and they cannot read more than one phrase” 無聽力，日誦不過一言. Some monks practicing asceticism were also incapable of “reciting.”⁵ In accordance with Tanji’s petition, his opposition was not directed at the defrocking per se but rather at the criteria for defrocking. He contended that it is imperative to differentiate the diverse virtues of individual monks. This proposition aligns relatively closely with the views of Huan Xuan.

In the later period of the Southern Chen dynasty during the reign of the Last Emperor 陳後主 (553–604, reg. 582–589), there arose a situation discovered during the reorganization of the sangha, wherein “there were as many as tens of thousands of monks and nuns without proper monastic credentials” 無貫者萬計. In response to this, many court officials proposed the defrocking of the monastic population and advocated for a method of “examining the recitation of scriptures”, stipulating that “monks and nuns who fail the scripture recitation test should return to lay life” 策經落第者，並合休道. Although this proposal was not implemented due to opposition from the wise master Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597)⁶, it nevertheless indicates that contemporary authorities were aware of a significant number of illiterate monks in the Southern Chen dynasty.

During the early Tang Dynasty, there persisted individuals who were illiterate. Notably, Huineng 惠能 (638–713), the renowned founder of the Southern School of Chan Buddhism, even said that he had “not recognized characters since birth” 一生以來，不識文字. While the factual accuracy of this claim may be subject to debate, it underscores that, in his perspective, illiteracy was not perceived as a hindrance to monastic life in a monastery. Illiteracy was not an isolated phenomenon but endured for an extended period. By the Song Dynasty, there still existed a considerable illiterate demographic. Pro. Minsheng Cheng (2019) even suggested that it might have been as high as one-third, although he did not provide a specific basis for this estimation. Nevertheless, the existence of a significant number of illiterate monks and Daoists during the Song Dynasty is an historical reality.

In general, the Buddhist sangha in ancient China was not entirely literate. However, before the Tang Dynasty, to be more precise, prior to the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang 唐高宗 (628–683, reg. 649–683), it is challenging to precisely gauge the literacy rate of the monastic community. This is primarily due to the diverse avenues through which individuals could qualify for monastic ordination during this period, and the state’s attitude toward illiterate monks was not uniformly negative. Although Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou once attempted to employ literacy as a criterion for scrutinizing and reorganizing monks and nuns, whether this measure was fully implemented lacks explicit documentation in historical records. Since the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang, the potential for calculating the literacy rate of the sangha emerged due to a dual phenomenon during this period. Firstly, there was a gradual normalization of state-led population censuses for the sangha⁷, resulting in the preservation of substantial data on the number of monks and nuns during the Tang Dynasty in historical records. Secondly, from the reign of Gaozong onward, literacy among monks became an official means of controlling the sangha. The institutional framework mandated that all individuals seeking ordination must pass a scripture recitation examination. In theory, the implementation of this policy could ensure literacy for all those receiving monastic ordination. However, historical evidence indicates that clarifying measures targeting monks and nuns were undertaken in nearly every dynasty, suggesting the persistence of illiterate monks. However, for our current research, what is crucially significant is that certain activities related to the defrocking of monks and nuns have preserved defrocking data. This facilitates the potential for statistical analysis and an estimation of the number of illiterate monks within the sangha.

2. The Scripture Recitation Examination System Implemented within the Buddhist Sangha during the Tang Dynasty

Since the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the government has consistently sought to strengthen control over the size of the Buddhist sangha, and one of the measures employed is the establishment of the ordination system⁸. However, during the period of the Eastern Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the criteria for monastic ordination were relatively broad, and individuals could qualify for monastic ordination through various means. At that time, the government placed particular emphasis on the moral character of applicants. By the Tang Dynasty, the criteria for ordination became increasingly specific, and the methods became more diverse, including scripture recitation examination (*shijing* 試經), special policies decreed by the emperor, and purchasing monastic ordination with

money. Among these, *shijing* emerged as the most important and prevalent method of ordination in the early Tang period. *Shijing* involves the recital of Buddhist scriptures, and only those who recite a certain quantity of scriptures qualify for monastic ordination⁹. This shift from emphasizing the moral character of applicants to emphasizing their cultural proficiency represents a significant transformation in the ordination system during the Tang Dynasty.

The formalization of the scripture recitation examination gradually occurred no later than the Xianqing era 顯慶 (656–661) under Emperor Gaozong¹⁰. The earliest recorded *shijing* took place in the third year of Xianqing (658). In that year, “the emperor decreed, selecting 150 boys for monastic ordination through an examination that tested their memorization of Buddhist scriptures” 令詮試業行童子一百五十人擬度¹¹. Subsequently, after Gaozong, almost every dynasty issued explicit decrees regarding the examination of scripture recitation for monastic ordination. For instance, in the second year of the Shenlong 神龍 era (705), Emperor Zhongzong 唐中宗 (656–710, reg. 684, 705–710) issued a decree stating, “Nationwide examinations on Buddhist doctrinal knowledge will be conducted for those boys and practitioners preparing to apply for monastic life. Individuals demonstrating a profound understanding of Buddhist doctrines will be selected and granted monastic ordination” 天下試童行經義，挑通無滯者，度之為僧¹². Despite the weakening of state control over monks and nuns after the An Lushan Rebellion 安祿山叛亂, decrees continued to be issued regarding the scripture recitation. In the second year of the Zhide 至德 era (757), Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (711–762, reg. 756–762) ordered, “lay individuals who can read five hundred sheets of Buddhist scriptures will be eligible for monastic ordination under the pretext of understanding Buddhist scriptures” 白衣誦經五百紙，賜明經出身為僧¹³. In the eighth year of the Dali 大曆 era (773), Emperor Daizong 唐代宗 (726–779, reg. 762–779) stipulated, “Nationwide examinations in the three categories of scriptures, monastic rules, and treatises will be conducted for boys and practitioners intending to apply for monastic life. [Only those who pass the examinations] will be eligible for monastic ordination” 敕天下童行策試經律論三科，給牒放度¹⁴.

The standards for the scripture recitation examination varied across different periods. For example, during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762, reg. 712–756), the requirement was set at “two hundred sheets” 二百紙¹⁵, which was later increased to seven hundred sheets during the reign of Emperor Suzong¹⁶. In the Wenzong era, the requirement specified that “for monks and nuns during the examination, the ability to read five hundred sheets of scriptures is considered qualified” 試經僧尼，必須讀得五百紙¹⁷. The Tang Dynasty had its lowest requirement during the reign of Emperor Jingzong 敬宗 (809–827, reg. 824–827), who specified that “monks who can recite one hundred and fifty sheets of Buddhist scriptures and nuns who can recite one hundred sheets are eligible for monastic ordination” 僧能暗誦一百五十紙、尼一百紙，即令與度¹⁸. If we consider the official standard of 28 lines per sheets and 17 characters per line during the Sui and Tang periods, monks and nuns needed to memorize approximately 71,400 characters and 47,600 characters, respectively. In terms of the monk’s standard, this roughly equates to a portion of the *Lotus Sutra* 法華經.

Those who passed the examination were eligible for monastic ordination and were recorded in the register of monks and nuns 僧尼籍. In the register, it was necessary to specify the scriptures they had studied. For instance, a memorial submitted to Emperor Wenzong 唐文宗 (809–840, reg. 826–840) by the Ministry of Rites in the fourth year of the Dahe era (830) described the format of the monk and nun register at that time.

Henceforth, for those monks and nuns who passed the examination, the local officials should separately record their monastic names, lay surnames, places of origin, the masters listed in their lay household registers, the academic achievements of these monks and nuns, and the number of sangha assigned to each temple. The compiled register of monks and nuns should be submitted to the Ministry of Rites for subsequent verification. 起今已後，諸州府僧、尼已得度者，勒本州府具法名、俗姓、鄉貫、戶頭、所習經業及配住寺人數，開項分析，籍帳送本司，以明真偽。¹⁹

In the second year of the Xiande 顯德 era (955) of the Later Zhou Dynasty, the court stipulated:

One month before the emperor's birthday, [local officials] must record the names, places of origin, assigned temples, ages, and academic achievements of those eligible for monastic ordination in the register of monks and nuns. The register is then to be submitted to the Ministry of Rites. The Ministry of Rites will issue monastic ordination certificates based on the register, after which these individuals are allowed to undergo monastic ordination. 一應合剃頭受戒人等，仰逐處於天清節一月前，具'姓名、鄉貫、寺院、年幾，及所習經業'申奏，候勅下，委祠部給付憑由，方得剃頭受戒。²⁰

In addition to the *shijing* during monastic ordination, in the early Tang Dynasty, the state implemented a relatively rigorous daily scripture recitation examination system. Specifically, when compiling the register of monks and nuns, a scripture recitation examination was conducted. In the twelfth year of the Kaiyuan era (724), during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, regulations were established for the *shijing*, requiring monks to "read two hundred sheets of Buddhist scriptures, with a minimum of seventy-three sheets read annually, and an examination conducted every three years" 誦二百紙經，每年限誦七十三紙，三年一試²¹. It is noteworthy that the mention of "an examination conducted every three years" aligns with the contemporaneous regulation of compiling the register of monks and nuns every three years. This indicates a close relationship between the *shijing* and the compilation of the register.

Scholars have reconstructed the edict issued in the twenty-fifth year of Kaiyuan, found in the *Tiansheng ling* 天聖令, which pertains to the "compilation of the register of monks and nuns". According to this regulation:

Every three years, a comprehensive census of all Taoists, female Taoists, monks, and nuns was to be conducted at the state and county levels, resulting in the compilation of a register. The register was required to include information such as the time of their monastic qualification, duration of monastic life, and academic achievements. The seals of the state and county were to be affixed to the designated positions on the register. 諸道士、女冠、僧、尼，州縣三年一造籍，具言出家年月、夏臘、學業，隨處印署。²²

The term "academic achievements" mentioned in this regulation likely corresponds to the *shijing* referred to in the law of the twelfth year of Kaiyuan. The practice of conducting scripture recitation examinations during the compilation of the register of monks and nuns did not originate with Emperor Xuanzong but had already become an established system by the time of Emperor Gaozong. An example from the unearthed *Monk Register of the Sien Temple in Gaochang County, Xizhou, in the Second Year of Longshuo (662) of the Tang Dynasty* 唐龍朔二年（662）西州高昌縣思恩寺僧人戶口簿 in Turpan, Xinjiang, dated 2004, indicates that each monk's academic achievements were recorded. For instance, Monk Zhang had read five volumes of the *Lotus Sutra*, one volume of the *Yaoshi jing* 藥師經, and one volume of the *Foming jing* 佛名經, while Monk Chongdao 崇道 had read five volumes of the *Lotus Sutra*²³. These academic achievements evidently did not encompass the entire content studied during the three-year period but likely reflected the recitation undertaken during the examination before the compilation of the register of monks and nuns.

In the Tang Dynasty, the requirements for monks to obtain monastic ordination were stringent, coupled with regular examinations. These institutional mechanisms ensured a relatively high cultural standard within the Buddhist sangha. However, there were instances of inadequately qualified monks from time to time. In the early Tang period, concerted efforts were made to rectify this situation. Although historical records do not explicitly document specific elimination criteria, it is likely that the *shijing* played a crucial role in this endeavor. For instance, during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, an edict was issued:

Nationwide, all monks and nuns under the age of 60 were mandated to undergo a scripture recitation examination. Each individual must recite 200 sheets of Bud-

dhist scriptures. Those monks and nuns who failed to meet the specified requirements were obligated to return to lay life. Additionally, alternative forms such as meditation (坐禪) or expounding Buddhist scriptures were explicitly prohibited as substitutes for the scripture recitation examination. 有司試天下僧尼年六十以下者，限誦二百紙經，……落者還俗，不得以坐禪、對策義試。²⁴

Emperor Xuanzong stipulated that disqualified monks and nuns must return to lay life and emphasized the exclusive use of the scripture recitation examination as the assessment method, precluding alternatives like meditation or scripture exposition. The primary aim was evidently to evaluate the literacy and recitation abilities of monks and nuns. Emperor Xuanzong further mandated the establishment of roles such as *Qingdi shangzuo* 清滌上座 (sthavira) in temples nationwide, tasked with improving the academic standards of monks and nuns within their respective temples²⁵. In another instance, in the ninth year of Dahe 大和 (835), Li Xun 李訓 presented a memorial to Emperor Wenzong, expressing concern over the large number of inadequately qualified monks and nuns consuming significant state and social resources. Subsequently, with Emperor Wenzong's support, a nationwide scripture recitation examination for monks and nuns was instituted, and those who failed were forcefully returned to lay life²⁶.

The monks and nuns eliminated through the scripture recitation examination were predominantly illiterate individuals. In other words, the number of disqualified monks and nuns likely closely mirrored the size of the illiterate population. This provides a potential basis for estimating the literacy rate within the monastic community²⁷.

3. Estimation of Literacy Rates within the Buddhist Sangha in Different Periods of the Tang Dynasty

The statistical estimation of the literacy rate within the Buddhist sangha involves, on one hand, the relatively accurate total figures of the sangha population and, on the other hand, the relatively accurate numbers of literate or illiterate monks. Historical materials provide several records of the size of the Buddhist sangha in different periods of the Tang Dynasty, offering data for the total number of monks. Additionally, information from various purges of monks and nuns during the Tang Dynasty provides insights into the elimination of certain individuals, contributing to the potential estimation of illiterate monks. Therefore, by combining these two sets of data, we can make a rough estimate of the literacy rate within the Buddhist sangha during different periods of the Tang Dynasty.

3.1. Literacy Rate of the Buddhist Sangha from the Reign of Emperor Gaozong to Emperor Xuanzong

During the reigns from Emperor Gaozong to Emperor Xuanzong, the state adopted the method of scripture recitation examinations to determine which monks could obtain monastic ordination. Additionally, regular scripture recitation examinations were conducted during the compilation of monk registers, significantly reinforcing governmental control over the Buddhist sangha and ensuring its cultural standards. During this period, policies were rigorously enforced, ensuring the quality of the sangha. The "Record of Monks of Chongfu Temple Chanting Scriptures in May of the First Year of Zhengsheng 證聖 (695)" 武周證聖元年(695)五月西州高昌縣崇福寺轉經歷 (73TAM193: 37a, 27a, 30a, 29a, 1a, 27b, 37b, 30b) revealed that monks such as Xuanpan 玄判, Xuanshi 玄式, and Xuanfan 玄範 had recently obtained monastic ordination but were already participating in scripture recitation activities²⁸. This indicates that they possessed a certain level of literacy and scripture recitation abilities at the time of their ordination. Therefore, although there were monks like Huineng who were illiterate, they were likely in the minority, and the literacy rate within the sangha during this period appears to have been quite high.

However, the system of strictly using scripture recitation examinations for monastic ordination was temporarily disrupted during the reigns of Empress Wu Zetian to Emperor Ruizong, giving rise to a phenomenon:

Individuals attempting to evade taxes, conscription, and punishment sought refuge in Buddhist temples, effectively becoming unauthorized monks unregistered in the official monk registry. The population of such unauthorized monks reached tens of thousands.²⁹ 逃丁避罪，並集法門，無名之僧，凡有幾萬。

The total population of the sangha during that time is not explicitly recorded in historical records. The closest available data are from the year 736, where the number of monks and nuns was 126,000³⁰. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, control over the Sangha's numbers was stringent. In the 19th year of the Kaiyuan era (731), an edict from Emperor Xuanzong mentioned that the emperor had prohibited the ordination of monks and nuns, a prohibition that lasted nearly 20 years³¹. 不度人來，向二十載。 This implies that no one was permitted to undergo monastic ordination from Emperor Xuanzong's accession in 712 until 731. Therefore, the data from the year 736 should be close to the data from the early Kaiyuan era. In addition, in the second year of the Kaiyuan era (714), in response to the large number of unqualified monks in the sangha, Yao Chong 姚崇 (650–721) submitted a memorial to Emperor Xuanzong calling for the rectification of the sangha. Different historical sources provide varying accounts of the number of unqualified monks expelled during this rectification, such as over 12,000 according to *The Biography of Yao Chong in Jiu Tangshu*³², over 20,000 according to *The Annals of Emperor Xuanzong in Jiu Tangshu*³³, and over 30,000 according to *Tang Huiyao*³⁴. According to the epitaph of Helan Wuwen's tomb 賀蘭務溫墓誌, during the reign of Emperor Ruizong, Helan Wuwen (656–721) also conducted a census of the number of unqualified monks. According to his investigation, there were over 20,000 unqualified monks at that time, requiring compulsory return to lay life³⁵. These data align more closely with the account in the *The Annals of Emperor Xuanzong in Jiu Tangshu* and may be closer to the actual situation. Thus, at the end of the reign of Emperor Ruizong, the number of monks in the Sangha was likely around 146,000.

During the reigns from Emperor Taizong 太宗 to Emperor Gaozong, a span of over 60 years, the combined number of monks and nuns barely exceeded 60,000³⁶. Surprisingly, within the subsequent thirty years from Empress Wu to Emperor Ruizong, the size of the sangha more than doubled. This period witnessed a notable influx of individuals, many of whom, despite not having undergone scripture recitation examinations, obtained the qualification for ordination and joined the monastic community. The cultural proficiency of these inadequately qualified monks and nuns was decidedly inferior to that of their predecessors in the monastic community.

In the period of Empress Wu, Su Gui 蘇瓌 (639–710) once submitted a memorial mentioning that “the number of inadequately qualified monks and nuns might have accounted for approximately half of the total population” 天下僧尼濫偽相半³⁷. This implies that the literacy rate within the sangha during that time could have been around 50%. Although Su Gui's assessment is subjective and cannot provide precise literacy rate data, it does illustrate a significant presence of inadequately qualified monks and nuns. Di Renjie 狄仁傑 (630–704) also reported that there were tens of thousands of monks who had not obtained monastic ordination through legal channels. Based on investigations conducted in the capital, the number of such monks had reached several thousand³⁸. Regarding the number of inadequately qualified monks, the more precise statistical data mentioned earlier pertain to the expulsion in 714, totaling over 20,000 individuals. It can be deduced that the proportion of expelled monks and nuns to the total sangha population was roughly 13.7% (12,000/146,000). Therefore, the literacy rate within the sangha was approximately 86.3%. This figure, higher than Su Gui's subjective impression, suggests that despite a considerable number of inadequately qualified monks during the period from Empress Wu to Emperor Ruizong, overall, the imperial control over the sangha remained relatively effective.

With the renewed strengthening of Emperor Xuanzong's control over the Buddhist ecclesiastical community, the literacy rate within the sangha likely experienced a further improvement. The rectification movement initiated in 714 did not conclude within a short period. Based on the *Inscriptions on the Memorial Stone Engraved on the Three Sacred Statues*

三尊真容像支提龕記, dated to the nineteenth year of Kaiyuan (731), the *Qingdi shangzuo* was kept in many temples nationwide, suggesting that Xuanzong's measures for the regulation of monks and nuns persisted for an extended period. From this stone inscription, it is observed that monks frequently emphasized their scripture recitation practices. For example, the inscription highlights the diligent scripture recitation of Monk Yihong 義紉, stating that he diligently studied, reciting the *Vimalakirti Sutra* 維摩詰經 and the *Lotus Sutra* daily. 精勤攝念, 策勵持經, 《維摩》《法華》, 日誦一遍. It also mentions Monk Qian-shou 乾壽's profound understanding of Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra*, *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Śāstra* 唯實論, *Abhidharmakosa-sastra* 俱舍論, and *Nyāyamukha* 因明論. 學《法華經》《唯識》《俱舍》《因明》等論, 皆理極精微, 妙窮法相. While these contents are inherently part of the daily learning routine for monks, their prominent emphasis in inscriptions suggests a close association with the Buddhist policies of the Xuanzong era, particularly the scripture recitation examinations³⁹.

Emperor Xuanzong's rigorous control over monastic ordination and the frequent scrutiny of individuals entering the sangha systematically closed the loopholes for illiterate individuals seeking refuge in the monastic community. Phenomena similar to Huineng's assertive proclamation during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, where he declared, "not recognized characters since birth", likely became less prevalent during this period. Therefore, the literacy rate within the sangha during the Xuanzong period should have shown a noticeable increase compared to the preceding period, possibly approaching a level where almost all monks and nuns were literate.

3.2. Literacy Rate of the Buddhist Sangha from the Aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion

After the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion, the state's control over the Buddhist sangha became less effective. In order to raise funds for the military, Emperor Suzong initiated a large-scale encouragement for the populace to obtain monastic ordination qualifications by donating money to the government. Individuals who had "never read any Buddhist scriptures and were completely illiterate" could enter the monastic community by paying additional fees. 未曾讀學、不識文字者⁴⁰. Consequently, the cultural proficiency of the sangha gradually declined. There are few records in historical texts that mention the number of monks who obtained monastic ordination qualifications through monetary donations. For example, in the year 757, the *Jiu Tangshu* recorded, "After the recovery of the two capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, Emperor Suzong ordered the implementation of the policy of selling monastic ordination certificates in several surrounding provinces of Chang'an. More than ten thousand people obtained monastic qualifications through monetary donations" 及兩京平, 又於關輔諸州, 納錢度僧道萬餘人⁴¹. However, these records are quite vague and offer limited assistance in estimating the literacy rate within the sangha.

Fortunately, the Dunhuang documents have preserved information about the sale of monastic ordination certificates during the reign of Emperor Suzong, providing us with a relatively accurate understanding of the situation in the six provinces of Hexi (Liangzhou 涼州, Ganzhou 甘州, Suzhou 肅州, Guazhou 瓜州, Shazhou 沙州 and Yizhou 伊州). Dunhuang Document P. 4072(3), titled "Report on the Sale of Tonsure Certificates in Hexi by Zhang Jiali in the Second Year of Qianyuan (759)" 唐乾元二年(759)張嘉禮河西六州納錢度僧告牒, records a total of 327 monks and 169 nuns receiving monastic ordination in the six provinces of Hexi. By the end of the Kaiyuan era, there were 3245 monasteries nationwide with 75,524 monks and 2113 nunneries with 50,576 nuns⁴². With 328 provinces in the country, this averages 10 monasteries per province with an average of 23 monks and 6 nunneries per province with an average of 24 nuns. Therefore, in the six provinces of Hexi, there were approximately 60 monasteries, 36 nunneries, 1380 monks, and 864 nuns. Thus, the number of monks and nuns who obtained monastic ordination through monetary donations in 759 accounted for around 19.2% (327/1707) and 16.4% (169/1033) of the total population in monasteries and nunneries, respectively. This suggests that even if all these individuals were illiterate, the literacy rates at that time might have been approximately 80.8%

for monks and 83.6% for nuns. These data also corroborate the literacy rate of the local Buddhist sangha in Dunhuang during the early period of Tubo rule. Tubo was an empire established by Tibetans from the early 7th century to the mid-9th century, and it ruled Dunhuang from 786 to 848.

The Dunhuang manuscript S.10967, housed in the British Library and titled “*Record of Scripture Chanting among Monks in the Lingtu Monastery and Other Monasteries Around the Year 789*” 789年前後靈圖寺等寺僧眾轉經歷, is a document that lists participants in a chanting event for blessings. The document records the names and assigned tasks of 34 monks from 10 different monasteries. Among these, Lingtu Monastery had the highest number of monks, with 13 participants, while other monasteries had a maximum of 3 participants each. Therefore, this event was primarily led by monks from Lingtu Monastery. The chanting monks were undoubtedly literate, and based on document S.2729(1), “*Report on Population Statistics Book of the Sangha Tribe of Shazhou under the Mi Jingbian in the Third Month of the Year of Dragon (788)*” 辰年(788)三月沙州僧尼部落米淨辯牒上算使勘牌子曆, Lingtu Monastery had 17 monks in March 788. Hence, the literacy rate at Lingtu Monastery during this time was at least 76.5% (13/17). While these data are specific to one monastery, studies suggest that they are similar to other monasteries in the region⁴³. The Tubo occupation of Dunhuang began in 786, so by 788, the main members of the Dunhuang sangha were evidently a continuation of the Tang Dynasty sangha. The literacy rate during the An Lushan Rebellion in the Hexi region seems comparable to the early Tubo occupation, indicating a literacy rate of approximately 75% to 80% during the Suzong era. Although relatively high, this rate is significantly lower than that of the Xuanzong era.

After Emperor Suzong, especially following the suppression of the An Lushan Rebellion, subsequent emperors, such as Emperor Daizong 代宗, Emperor Dezong 德宗 (742–805, reg. 779–805), Emperor Shunzong 順宗 (761–806, reg. 805–806), Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (778–820, reg. 806–820), Emperor Jingzong 敬宗 (809–827, reg. 824–827), and Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (809–840, reg. 826–840), attempted to reinforce control over the monastic community. They continued to implement policies, including scripture recitation examinations for ordination qualifications and measures like the purification of monks and nuns. While these policies and measures aimed at improving the quality of the Buddhist sangha and increasing literacy, most of them were abandoned shortly after implementation. Occasionally, policies involving the sale of ordination certificates were even introduced. For instance, during the reign of Emperor Muzong 穆宗 (795–824, reg. 820–824), the military commissioner of Xuzhou 徐州, Wang Zhixing 王智興 (758–836), established an Ordination Platform 戒壇 in Sizhou 泗州, conducting ordination ceremonies for those seeking monastic life. This led to a phenomenon where families with three sons would inevitably have one of them ordained 戶有三丁,必令一丁落發⁴⁴. Consequently, during this period, the size of the monastic community continued to expand. By the time Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (814–846, reg. 840–846) initiated the Buddhist suppression, the total number of the sangha reached an astonishing 260,000, constituting a significant portion of the national population, rising from 1 in 400 during the Xuanzong period to 1 in 100⁴⁵. Among them, a substantial number were likely illiterate monks. Due to the lack of precise data, an estimation of the literacy rate during this period remains challenging. However, it is evident that the literacy rate within the monastic community at this time was likely lower than during the Suzong era.

In the Huichang Buddhist Persecution 會昌法難, Emperor Wuzong allowed only a very limited number of temples and monks to remain in Chang’an and certain regions. These monks were mostly elderly and experienced, likely to be literate. After Emperor Wuzong’s death, his immediate successor, Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (810–859, reg. 846–859), despite adopting an administrative style opposing Wuzong⁴⁶, initially implemented relatively strict measures to restrict Buddhism. Decrees issued during Emperor Xuanzong’s reign indicate that, until the sixth year of Dazhong 大中 (852), fewer than a thousand old temples were permitted to be reestablished nationwide, with approximately 30,000 monks and nuns ordained. The majority of these monks had been forcibly returned to lay life dur-

ing the Huichang Persecution, and they played a dominant role in the revival of Buddhism from the Dazhong period to the Xiantong 咸通 period. Stringent restrictions on Buddhism persisted until the twelfth month of 852, marking eight years since the Huichang suppression. During this period of strict state control, the overall quality of the Buddhist sangha improved significantly, notably reflected in a substantial increase in literacy rates.

During the reigns of subsequent emperors such as Emperor Yizong 懿宗 (833–873, reg. 859–873) and others following Emperor Xuanzong, the Buddhist monastic community experienced a rapid expansion, accompanied by a gradual rise in the number of inadequately qualified monks, leading to an apparent decline in the literacy rate of the monastic community. In the Central Plains region, the lack of direct materials prevents a direct estimation of the literacy rate. However, considering that, since the year 848, when Dunhuang returned to Tang control under the authority of the Zhang family's Guiyi Army 張氏歸義軍 (848–914), and Buddhist development in Dunhuang began to synchronize with that in the Central Plains, the literacy rate of the monastic community in Dunhuang might offer some insight into the literacy rate of the Central Plains monastic community.

During the rule of the Guiyi Army, the monastic community in Dunhuang also experienced rapid expansion, growing from 427 individuals in the early ninth century (S. 5676) to 1600 individuals in the early tenth century (P. 2704). Among them, there were undoubtedly numerous inadequately qualified monks. This development in the Dunhuang Buddhist monastic community appears to be connected to the Buddhist policies in the Central Plains. According to research, despite the monastic community's malignant expansion, the existence of internal educational mechanisms within the monastic community ensured that a certain proportion of monks and nuns progressed from illiteracy to literacy, estimating this ratio to be approximately between 50% and 65%⁴⁷.

The above estimation of the literacy rate of the Tang Dynasty Buddhist monastic community is based on extant historical records, supplemented by certain Dunhuang and Turfan documents. Relevant fluctuations can be graphically illustrated in a chart (see Figure 1):

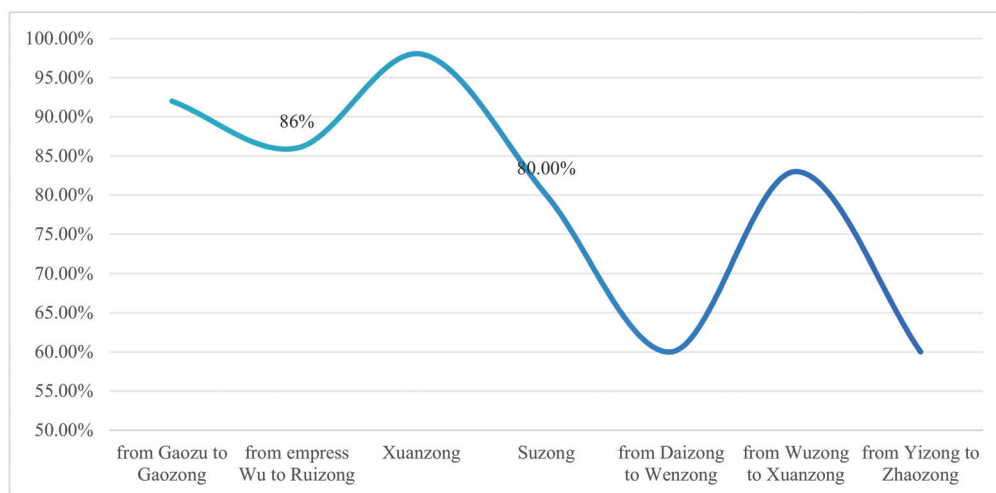


Figure 1. Fluctuations in the Literacy Rate of Buddhist Sangha in the Tang Dyansty.

4. Conclusions

The Buddhist sangha constituted a significant cultural community in ancient China, exerting substantial influence on the society of the time. The extent of their impact was largely derived from their cultural knowledge. The high or low cultural quality of the sangha not only directly influenced the development of Buddhism itself but also had a profound impact on the broader society in which they existed.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism, particularly in the development of doctrinal studies, during the early Tang Dynasty, eight major Buddhist sects experienced simultaneous prosperity, marking an undeniable peak in the development of Chinese Buddhism. Throughout this developmental phase, eminent monks like Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) and

Yijing 義淨 (635–713) played crucial guiding roles. The acceptance and assimilation of Buddhist doctrines, especially those of the Yogācāra school 唯識宗, were evidently closely linked to the overall cultural quality of the monastic community at that time. The high literacy rates within the sangha and the state-sponsored systems such as scripture recitation examinations undoubtedly served as significant safeguards, continually producing eminent monks and providing favorable conditions for the advancement of Buddhist doctrinal studies.

In the middle to later period of the Tang Dynasty, the vibrant scenes of monks traveling nationwide for study and hundreds or thousands of monks attending lectures given by a single master became increasingly rare. During this time, there was limited enthusiasm and involvement in profound Buddhist doctrines, including those associated with the Yogācāra school. The development of Buddhist doctrinal studies entered a relatively subdued phase, not solely due to factors such as the decline of Indian Buddhism or the turmoil in China, but likely influenced by the reduction in the literacy rate within the monastic community. In the later Tang Dynasty, the declining literacy rate objectively hindered monks from delving into profound philosophical doctrines like Yogācāra. Instead, they focused on learning knowledge and ritual skills associated with sects that had lower cultural literacy requirements, known as “expedient means” (方便法門). This phenomenon contributed to the growth of sects such as Pure Land Buddhism 淨土宗. In the context of Central Plains Buddhism, after the later Tang Dynasty, both Pure Land and Chan Buddhism 禪宗 thrived, with practitioners emphasizing the chanting of Buddha names and engaging in skillful question-and-answer sessions. This period did not witness the simultaneous prosperity of the eight major sects, as seen in the early Tang Dynasty.

The fluctuation in the monastic community’s literacy rate, particularly its decline, while not significantly impacting the Tang Dynasty’s political governance due to the presence of elite monks in the court, still exerted influence on the interplay between politics and religion. Illiteracy often provided lay rulers with a pretext to oppose or regulate Buddhism. Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou, for instance, sought to purge the monastic community, citing monks’ insufficient reading abilities. During Emperor Dezong’s reign in the Tang Dynasty, Pang Yan 彭偃 (?–784) also appealed for imperial intervention to rectify the monastic community, citing the prevalence of uncultured monks⁴⁸. The cultural quality of the Buddhist monastic community had a more pronounced impact on local governments. Taking Dunhuang as an example, Prof. Rong Xinjiang’s research indicates that since the Tubo rule, the growing influence of the Buddhist sangha empowered top-ranking monks to co-govern Dunhuang alongside local authorities. It was not until Zhang Chengfeng’s 張承奉 (?–914) rule that the Guiyi Army’s political power surpassed religious authority. Prof. Rong contends that this phenomenon is significantly linked to the cessation of Buddhist doctrinal studies in Dunhuang, the decline in the cultural quality of monks and nuns, and the proliferation of inadequately qualified monastics within the sangha⁴⁹.

The decline in the literacy rate within the monastic community evidently carries significant adverse implications. However, when observed against the backdrop of monks increasingly residing in lay households rather than monasteries during the later stages of the Tang Dynasty and the growing trend of layization in Buddhism⁵⁰, the significance of literate monks within regional societies can, to some extent, also be construed as having positive implications.

The Dunhuang document P. 3608V contains a memorial that mentions Xianyu Shuming 鮮于叔明 (693–787), Linghu Huan 令狐峒 (?–805) and others requesting the emperor to conduct scripture recitation examinations for monks and nuns and to prohibit them from engaging in commercial activities. According to this memorial, during the reign of Emperor Dezong, many temples were occupied by the military, and all temples lacked dining facilities, providing no food for the monks 所在伽藍，例無飯僧. In temples without dining facilities, monks, naturally, could not reside there for an extended period. This is consistent with the characteristics of Dunhuang monasteries where they only “provide food when they have an event” 有事供糧⁵¹. Before the Huichang Persecution, the Japanese

monk Ennin 圓仁 (793–864) also observed the phenomenon of “monks all living in lay homes” 僧盡在俗家 in the Beihai County of Shandong and other places⁵². This indicates that the phenomenon of monks residing in lay households rather than temples was already quite prevalent before the Huichang Persecution.

From the reign of Emperor Wuzong to the early period of Emperor Xuanzong’s rule, approximately 200,000 monks and nuns were forcibly returned to lay life and resided in households⁵³. Even if these monks and nuns later regained qualification through ordination, they likely maintained closer connections with lay families. Some of these individuals might have received cultural education in the monasteries before returning to lay life. Based on the estimation in this article, even with a conservative literacy rate of 50% during this period, it implies that there were around 100,000 literate monks and nuns among them. If we adopt the scholarly estimate of an approximately 10% literacy rate in ancient times⁵⁴, then during the Huichang and Dazhong eras, an estimated two million literate individuals existed nationwide⁵⁵. The literate monks and nuns residing in lay households constituted one-twentieth of the total literate population, signifying a substantial proportion. While documentation on the interactions between monks and nuns in lay households and the surrounding laypeople is scarce, these monastics significantly assimilated into lay society, a scenario that is not challenging to envision. Therefore, if the Huichang suppression by Wuzong and the restrictions by Xuanzong on Buddhism had a profound impact on the development of Buddhist doctrinal studies, the suppression and restrictions, in turn, impelled literate monks and nuns into lay society. This process facilitated the dissemination of knowledge from within monasteries to the broader society, evidently contributing positively to local social development⁵⁶.

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Notes

¹ In the several centuries following the establishment of Buddhism by Siddhartha Gautama in the 6th century BCE, the literacy of monks was not a pressing concern. During this period, Buddhist scriptures primarily relied on oral transmission through memorization. It was not until around the turn of the Common Era that the practice of recording Buddhist scriptures in written form gradually emerged. However, even with this development, whether in India or in regions such as Central Asia and Southeast Asia, there was not a strong imperative for monks to be literate. This stands in marked contrast to the development of Buddhism in China.

² In *The Ten Precepts and Conduct Rules Observed by Novices* (沙彌十戒法并威儀), it is stipulated that novices are required to recite scriptures three times daily 晝夜三時,誦經行道. see T 1471: 932a,b.

³ T 396: 1119a.

⁴ T 2012: 85a.

⁵ T 2103: 279a,b.

⁶ T 2060: 565c.

⁷ Before the 8th year of the Tianbao era (749), the Tang government stipulated the “registration of the sangha every three years” 三年一造. Subsequently, after this period, it was revised to “register the sangha every ten years” 諸州僧尼籍帳等, 每十年一造. Following the An Lushan Rebellion, although the compilation of sangha registrations became somewhat disordered, the state continued to implement periodic reorganization measures. For instance, in the 4th year of the Taihe era during the reign of Emperor Wenzong (830), it was mandated that “the sangha registrations of local prefectures and jurisdictions...be compiled every five years” 諸州府僧尼籍帳, 今五年一造. See: *Tang liudian* 4: 126. *Cefu yuangui* 474: 5369.

⁸ Regarding the research on the ordination system, see (Michihata 1967, pp. 29–177; Zhan 1998, pp. 5–13; Ming 2003, pp. 179–92; Lai 2010, pp. 120–206).

⁹ Regarding the research on the *shijing* in Tang dynasty, see (Bai 2005, pp. 31–36).

¹⁰ The Tang emperors’ choice to adopt the scripture recitation examination as the primary method for ordaining monks and nuns might be a continuation of the policies established during the periods of Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou and the Last Emperor of the Chen Dynasty. It is also plausible that the influence of the imperial examination system played a role.

¹¹ T 2053: 275c.

- 12 T 2037: 822c.
 13 T 2035: 452c.
 14 T 2035: 379a.
 15 *Tang huiyao*: 861.
 16 *Song gaoseng zhuan*: 374.
 17 *Tang da zhaoling ji*: 591.
 18 *Song gaoseng zhuan*: 736.
 19 *Cefu yuangui* 474: 5369.
 20 *Wudai huiyao*: 153–154.
 21 *Tang huiyao*: 860.
 22 See (Dai 2006, pp. 105–32).
 23 About the register, see (Meng 2007, pp. 50–55; Meng 2009, pp. 136–43).
 24 *Tang huiyao*: 861.
 25 About the *Qingdi shangzuo*, see (Wu 2022a, pp. 25–47).
 26 *Zizhi tongjian* 245: 7906.
 27 Here, I would like to express my gratitude to an anonymous reviewer for providing insightful suggestions. The reviewer expressed concerns about the use of the scripture recitation examination as a criterion for judging literacy, stating that “a monk may conceivably have been ‘literate’ enough to follow the text of a scripture while chanting it, but not be able to write a simple legal contract”. Indeed, the extant materials from the 7th to 8th centuries preserved in classical literature are not rich enough to fully address this issue. However, the Dunhuang materials preserved from the 8th to 10th centuries can demonstrate that literate monks during that time were capable of reading scriptures to fulfill religious duties while also using their cultural knowledge to engage in activities requiring written skills to assist the lay community. Additionally, the question raised by the reviewer touches upon a topic that scholars often debate when studying literacy rates, namely the issue of full literacy and functional literacy. In my view, the requirement of the scripture recitation examination entails monks and nuns reading tens of thousands of characters from Buddhist scriptures, which suggests that monks and nuns who have passed the examination are likely acquainted with a considerable number of written characters, classifying them as possessing full literacy rather than functional literacy. For discussions on this topic, see (Solomon 1971; Mote 1972; Idema 1974; Rawski 1979; Idema 1980).
 28 *Tulufan chutu wenshu* 8: 485–491.
 29 *Jiu Tangshu* 89: 2893.
 30 See (Zhou 2008, p. 15).
 31 *Cefu yuangui* 159: 1775.
 32 *Jiu Tangshu* 96: 3022.
 33 *Jiu Tangshu* 8: 172.
 34 *Tang huiyao*: 837.
 35 *Quan Tangwen buyi*: 104–105.
 36 *Fayuan zhulin*: 2898.
 37 *XinTangshu* 125: 4398.
 38 *Jiu Tangshu* 89: 2893.
 39 Regarding the content of this stele inscription, refer to *Quan Tangwen* 987: 10209. for further study on this stele inscription, consult (Wu 2022a, pp. 25–47).
 40 *Tongdian* 11: 244.
 41 *Xin Tangshu* 51: 1347.
 42 *Tang liudian*: 125.
 43 See (Wu 2022b, pp. 1–25).
 44 *Jiu Tangshu* 174: 4514.
 45 See (Xie 2009, p. 437).
 46 *Zizhi tongjian* 248: 8029–8030.
 47 See note 43 above.
 48 *Jiu Tangshu* 127: 3580.
 49 See (Rong 2015, p. 275).
 50 For the reasons behind monks residing in lay households, refer to (Wu 2018, pp. 14–21).
 51 See (Hao 1998, pp. 123–63).

- 52 *Nittō-guhō-junrei-kōki no kenkyū*: 228–349.
- 53 According to research, from the comprehensive Buddhist suppression initiated by Emperor Wuzong in April of 845 until the complete lifting of restrictions on Buddhism by Emperor Xuanzong in the twelfth month of 852, a period of eight years, less than a thousand old temples were permitted to be reconstructed nationwide, and approximately 30,000 monks and nuns were ordained. Refer to (Wu, forthcoming).
- 54 See (Goody 1963, pp. 304–45; Baines 1983, pp. 572–99; Harris 1989; Beard et al. 1991).
- 55 During the reign of Emperor Wuzong, the total number of households in the realm was 4,955,151, with an estimated population of around 20 million. Regarding the household data, see *Cefu Yuanguai* 486: 5515.
- 56 In Buddhist monasteries during the medieval period, monks not only imparted Buddhist knowledge but also provided education in secular subjects. Numerous documents, written by monks and including items such as divorce letters, property division documents, testaments, dividing family inheritance documents, are preserved in the Dunhuang caves. These documents cover virtually every aspect of daily life for ordinary people that requires written records. They convincingly demonstrate that during the medieval period, monks were actively involved in various aspects of lay society. For further insights into the education of secular knowledge within monasteries, see (Mair 1981; Galambos 2015).

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Article

Balancing Indic Fidelity and Chinese Expression: Xuanzang's Approach to Translating the *Yogācārabhūmi*

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Abstract: This study examines Xuanzang's methodology for translating the *Yogācārabhūmi* into Chinese, with particular focus on his translation of passages explaining the central concept of volition (*cetanā*). Through comparative analysis of Chinese and Tibetan translations—particularly passages for which Sanskrit parallels are not available—this paper investigates textual divergences and interpretative challenges in the two translations. Comprehensive examination of textual evidence across the *Yogācārabhūmi* corpus confirms that a problematic term in Xuanzang's Chinese translation—*suiyu*—authentically reflects the Sanskrit source text, specifically corresponding to the Sanskrit term *anupradāna*. This allows us greater insight into Xuanzang's translational strategy and its reception among his disciples. While previous scholarship has traditionally emphasized Xuanzang's strict fidelity to Sanskrit grammatical structures, this study reveals a more sophisticated approach: he employed *suiyu* as a translation of *anupradāna* specifically for technical discussions of consciousness and mental factors, but adopted more idiomatic renderings of *anupradāna* in general contexts. However, the interpretations of *suiyu* among his disciples suggest that even this careful methodology sometimes failed to achieve its intended clarity, highlighting the inherent tension between preserving original textual features and ensuring accurate semantic transmission—a fundamental challenge in cross-cultural Buddhist transmission that continues to shape our understanding of Buddhist traditions.

Keywords: Xuanzang; translation methodology; *Yogācārabhūmi*; *cetanā*; *suiyu*; *anupradāna*

1. Introduction

The *Yogācārabhūmi* (hereafter YBh) is the earliest and most fundamental treatise of the Yogācāra school of Mahayana Buddhism, composed approximately in the 4th century CE. Its core doctrines provided the theoretical basis for subsequent Yogācāra texts such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the *Triṃśikā vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, establishing the YBh as an essential resource for understanding Yogācāra philosophy. The text, however, has a long history of transmission, and the current state of extant sources is intricate and, in some cases, fragmentary. The original Sanskrit version has not survived in its entirety and was not preserved through an unbroken tradition. Nevertheless, complete translations exist in both Chinese and Tibetan. The last century has witnessed the gradual rediscovery and critical editing of Sanskrit manuscripts comprising approximately half of the text; contemporary scholars now primarily rely on these Sanskrit witnesses for doctrinal analysis. For the remaining sections, where Sanskrit texts remain undiscovered or unedited, scholars must depend on comparative readings of the Chinese and Tibetan translations.

The fragmentary state of the sources presents several complexities. For instance, while the Sanskrit text of the initial portion (the first six *bhūmis*) of the YBh serves as a primary source, it survives in only a single manuscript.¹ This manuscript is estimated to have

been composed between the 10th and 12th centuries, thus postdating both the 7th-century Chinese translation and the 9th-century Tibetan translation. This chronological gap has resulted in textual discrepancies through scribal errors and other factors. A representative example can be found in the *Manobhūmi* (*The Stage of the Mental Consciousness*, 意地) section of the Basic Section 本地分, where the extant Sanskrit text enumerates 51 “mental factors” (*caitta/caitasika*, 心所有法 or 心所)² while subsequently referencing a total of 53.³ The Tibetan translation consistently lists 51 items⁴, whereas a comparison with the Chinese translation indicates that early Sanskrit manuscripts consistently enumerated 53 mental factors, with the factors “incorrect craving” 邪欲 and “incorrect ascertainment” 邪勝解 being subsequently omitted.⁵ In such cases, the Chinese translation preserves crucial evidence of the early Sanskrit tradition, rendering it indispensable for understanding both the doctrinal structure of early Yogācāra and the historical development of Yogācāra thought.

The complete Chinese translation of the YBh was produced in the mid-seventh century CE by the great Chinese pilgrim translator Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 602–664 CE). Xuanzang is famous for his journey from Tang China to India and then back again, in search of Buddhist learning and, specifically, for Indic Buddhist texts to collect and translate. Notably, studying and acquiring the YBh constituted Xuanzang’s primary objective during his westward journey. After studying under Śīlabhadra 戒賢 (6–7th century CE) at Nālandā Monastery, he completed the comprehensive translation in one hundred fascicles upon returning to China. Though other partial translations exist, references to the Chinese translation of the YBh generally denote Xuanzang’s complete rendition. His translation endeavored to preserve the original meaning with exceptional fidelity; in a departure from typical Chinese rendering of Sanskrit texts, Xuanzang even incorporated Sanskrit grammatical features into Chinese word/sentence structures. As Fu (2006, p. 73) observes, Xuanzang’s translation “established an innovative linguistic system within the Chinese framework by incorporating Sanskrit elements [...], and has maximized Chinese philosophical expressiveness.”

Nevertheless, this newly constructed linguistic framework, though embedded within Chinese language structures, often remained foreign to native Chinese speakers. The YBh contains numerous definitional passages that are remarkably concise yet engage with complex doctrinal contexts, many of which are critical for comparative studies of Buddhist sects and schools. Some, for instance, illuminate points of convergence with and divergence from the doctrinal understandings of other traditions such as the Sarvāstivāda. These passages thus offer valuable insight into how Buddhist philosophical concepts were transformed during cross-cultural transmission. In cases where these definitional passages appear in portions for which no Sanskrit manuscripts have been discovered or critically edited, interpretation must depend on the Chinese and Tibetan translations. However, interpreting the Chinese translation poses challenges not only for modern scholars but also for historical Buddhist exegetes, even those well-versed in doctrines and languages. They often found themselves caught between the norms of classical Chinese grammar and the specialized lexicon of Buddhist texts. In contemporary research, scholars often draw on the Tibetan translation for a more comprehensive understanding. However, when the Chinese and Tibetan translations diverge, they face the delicate task of assessing the reliability of each translation’s version and, when possible, adjudicating between them. Thus, interpreting certain passages in both Xuanzang’s Chinese translation and the Tibetan translation remains a significant and ongoing challenge for Buddhological research.

This article undertakes an illustrative case study from the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* 攝抉擇分 (hereafter VinS) section of the YBh corpus, examining the term “*suiyu*” 隨與 that appears in the definition of “volition” (*cetanā*, 思). Volition occupies a significant position within various Buddhist doctrinal systems, including Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra traditions, where it

is categorized as a “mental factor” (*caitasika dharma*). Specifically within the Yogācāra system, volition is classified as one of the five “omnipresent mental factors” (*sarvatraga*, 遍行), alongside “contact” (*sparsa*, 觸), “attention” (*manaskāra*, 作意), “feeling” (*vedanā*, 受), and “ideation” (*samjñā*, 想). A nuanced understanding of how the YBh conceptualizes volition is therefore crucial for understanding the Yogācāra doctrinal framework as a whole.

However, the YBh’s treatment of these terms presents several interpretative challenges. Through an examination of *suiyu*, this case study demonstrates more pronounced divergences between the Chinese and Tibetan translations. This reflects Xuanzang’s distinctive translational strategy, which sought to balance fidelity to the Indic source with adaptation to the Chinese linguistic and conceptual environment. It also illustrates the difficulty his exegetical successors faced in fully assimilating his innovative approach. This example brings into focus broader issues of localization, reception, and doctrinal interpretations in cross-cultural transmission of Buddhist texts. Through close analysis of this specific lexical item within the definition of the key mental factor, this article argues that a comparison of the Chinese and Tibetan translations not only clarifies doctrinal content but also sheds light on how Xuanzang’s innovative translational method shaped the interpretation and reception of Yogācāra thought across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

2. Defining Suiyu: A Philological Approach to Chinese–Tibetan Translational Divergence

According to Xuanzang’s translation, the YBh consists of 100 fascicles organized into five sections, including the Basic Section and the VinS section which serve as the first two sections. The initial 50 fascicles contain the Basic Section, while fascicles 51–80 encompass the VinS section, which provides exegetical material corresponding to the structure of the Basic Section. While Sanskrit versions of much of the Basic Section are extant, Sanskrit witnesses are largely unavailable for the remaining portions of the YBh. The YBh presents explanations of volition in both the Basic Section and the VinS section. The Basic Section offers a concise definition⁶:

Skt: *cetanā katamā | cittābhisamskārah |* (YBh p. 60, ll. 2–3)

Tib. trans.: *sems pa gang zhe na/sems mngon par ‘du byed pa’o*/(D tshi 30b1; P dzi 34a3)

Chi. trans.: 思云何? 謂心造作。

(T30, p. 291b29)

English Trans. of Skt: What is volition? It is the activation of the mind.

The VinS provides a more elaborate definition, adding a statement—which is unseen in other Yogācāra texts—to illustrate the expression “the activation of the mind” (*cittābhisamskāra*, 心造作, *sems mngon par ‘du byed pa*)⁷:

Skt: (unavailable)

Tib. trans.: *sems pa gang zhe na/gsum ‘dus pa las dmigs pa de la tshor ba dang/phradpa dang/’bral ba’i phyir sems mngon par ‘du byed pa gang yin pa’o*/(D zhi 59a2; P zi 62a3–4)

Chi. trans.: 思云何? 謂三和合故, 令心造作, 於所緣境隨與領納和合乖離。

(T30, p. 601c19-21)

While superficially straightforward, detailed analysis of this passage reveals several ambiguities that complicate its precise meaning.

2.1. Interpretative Challenge 1: Ambiguity in the Tibetan Translation

Analysis of the Tibetan translation reads as follows:

sems pa gang zhe na/gsum 'dus pa las dmigs pa de la tshor ba dang/phrad pa dang/'bral ba'i phyir sems mngon par 'du byed pa gang yin pa'o//(D zhi 59a2; P zi 62a3–4)

The underlined segment contains two instances of *dang*, which can function as a conjunction (“and”), an associative marker (“with”), or a directional marker (“from”). The interpretation depends significantly on the surrounding syntactic context. The term *tshor ba* (feeling) presents particular complexity, as it can function either nominally or verbally. If interpreted nominally, *tshor ba* could serve as the object of the subsequent actions *phrad pa* (combining) and *'bral ba* (separating). This interpretation is reflected in Muroji et al. (2017, p. 21):

What is volition? It is the construction of the mind based on the combination of three factors [—sensory faculty through thinking faculty, object, and consciousness—] in order to combine with or separate from the feeling towards the object. 意思とは如何なるものか。(感覺能力ないし思考能力と、対象と、認識という) 三者の和合に基づき、その認識対象に対する感受と結び付いたり離れたりする ために、心を造り上げることである。

Alternatively, interpreting *tshor ba* verbally suggests a parallel structure with *phrad pa* and *'bral ba*, resulting in three coordinate actions:

What is volition? It is the activation of the mind that, based on the combination of three factors, [occurs] through feeling [the object], combining [with the object], and separating [from] the object.

This syntactic ambiguity in the Tibetan translation presents a significant challenge for definitive interpretation; as it turns out, the resolution of this difficulty is entangled with a second set of problems in this passage, which we consider below.

2.2. Interpretative Challenge 2: Chinese–Tibetan Textual Divergence

Comparative analysis of the Chinese and Tibetan translations reveals significant variations in vocabulary and syntax:

Chi. Trans.: 思云何? 謂三和合故, 令心造作, 於所緣境隨與領納和合乖離。

Tib. Trans.: sems pa gang zhe na/gsum 'dus pa las dmigs pa de la tshor ba dang/phrad pa dang/'bral ba'i phyir sems mngon par 'du byed pa gang yin pa'o//

While direct correspondences exist between certain terms—“combining with” 和合 parallels *phrad pa*, “separating from” 乖離 corresponds to *'bral ba*, and “experiencing” 領納 aligns with *tshor ba*⁸—the Chinese term 隨與 (*suiyǔ*, hereafter *suiyu*) lacks a clear Tibetan equivalent.

Moreover, the Chinese phraseological sequence presents its own interpretative challenges, particularly regarding the structural relationship between components in the “*suiyu lingna*” 隨與領納 segment. The term *suiyu* proves especially problematic, suggesting two potential explanations for the textual divergence:

- (1) *Suiyu* represents an interpolation during the translation process, potentially serving metrical requirements rather than reflecting the Sanskrit text.
- (2) *Suiyu* accurately renders the Sanskrit source, but this element was not preserved in the Tibetan translation tradition.

2.3. Contextual Analysis: *Suiyu* in the Discussion of *Samṣkāra-Skandha*

These interpretative challenges necessitate examination of broader textual context. A discussion of *saṃskāra-skandha* (the aggregate of volitional formations, 行蘊) in the same portion of the VinS section proves particularly illuminating. This statement defines *saṃskāra-skandha* as phenomena arising from six types of contact (e.g., the contact of the eye, etc.), characterized by “activation” 造作.⁹ Given the YBh’s definition of volition as “the activation of the mind” 心造作 and the historical association between the *saṃskāra-skandha* and the “six groups of volitional activity” 六思身 in early Buddhism¹⁰, this parallel discussion provides valuable interpretative context. The text specifically addresses the relationship between “the activation of the mind” and objects:

Chi. trans.: Furthermore, this characteristic of volitional formations brings the mind into activation through five modalities: first, making [the mind] *suiyu* to objects; second, making [the mind] combine with them; third, making [the mind] separate from them; fourth, producing defiled karma; fifth, causing [the mind] to function autonomously. 又此行相，由五種類令心造作。一為境隨與，二為彼合會三為彼別離，四能發雜染業，五令心自在轉。(T30, p. 593c8-10)

Tib. trans.: de yang ‘di lta ste (*ste* D; *sta* P) yul dang **mthun par byed pa** dang/de dang phrad par bya ba dang/de dang ‘bral (*‘bral* P; *bral* D) bar bya ba dang/kun nas nyon mongs pa dang/las (*las* D; *lus* P) kun tu (*tu* P; *du* D) blang bar bya ba dang/sems kyis dbang bsgyur bar (*bar* D; *ba* P) bya ba’i phyir sems mngon par ‘du byed pa rnam pa lngar (*lngar* D; *sngar* P) blta bar bya’o/(D zhi 38b3–38b4; P zi 40b7–41a1)

The underlined Tibetan segment can be rendered as “causing [the mind] to **adapt** to objects, to combine with them, to separate from them.” This set of three parallel actions—adaptation to objects, combination with objects, and separation from objects—corresponds to the three actions in the Chinese translation: “adapting to objects” corresponds to “*suiyu* to objects 境隨與;” “combining with them” is parallel to “combining with them 彼合會;” and “separating from them” aligns with “separating from them 彼別離.” These direct correspondences establish two crucial points:

- (1) The Tibetan *mthun par byed pa* (causing to adapt) corresponds to Chinese *suiyu*, occurring in the same sequential position before “combining” and “separating.”
- (2) These three functions—*suiyu*/adaptation, combination, and separation—consistently act in relation to objects.

This contextual evidence resolves both previously identified challenges. Regarding the Chinese–Tibetan divergence, it confirms *suiyu* as an authentic translation of the Sanskrit source, representing a specific cognitive function. Concerning the Tibetan definition’s ambiguity, while the volition definition lacks the term corresponding to *suiyu*, the *saṃskāra-skandha* discussion provides crucial comparative context for interpretation. Given the insufficient information in the Tibetan definition of volition alone, analysis must proceed primarily from the Chinese translation.

3. Xuanzang’s Translational Strategy: Balancing Fidelity to the Indic Source with Adaptation to Chinese Expression

3.1. Semantic Analysis of *Suiyu*

The term *suiyu* 隨與 presents interpretative difficulties due to its limited occurrence in Chinese translations. The character 隨 (*suí*) primarily denotes the action of following or complying with, while the character 與 (*yǔ*) has two primary semantic fields:

- (1) A verb denoting bestowal or assistance, exemplified in Prajñā's 般若 (8th century CE) translation of *Da Fangguang Fo Huayan Jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經: "The bodhisattva, having achieved contentment in this way, accepts **according to what is given**, without discriminating between refined and coarse."¹¹
- (2) A verb or adverb indicating accordance or accompaniment, similar to the meaning of 隨 (suí), or as a preposition meaning "with, together with," as in Dharmarakṣa's 竺法護 (3–4th century CE) translation of *Foshuo Xuzhen Tianzi Jing* 佛說須真天子經: "Wisdom and the knowledge of *upāya* always go together **along with** each other, like paired oxen sharing a yoke."¹²

3.2. The Original Sanskrit Term Behind Suiyu

Analysis of the Basic Section reveals two instances where *suiyu* renders terms indicating specific actions, occurring in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* (*The Stage of the Śrāvakas*, 聲聞地) and *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (*The Stage of the Bodhisattvas*, 菩薩地) sections, respectively. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*'s exposition of the precepts and merits of bodhisattvas, the text states¹³:

Skt: tat punar etac caturbhir guṇair yuktaṃ svabhāvaśīlam bodhisattvānām... mahāphalānuśaṃsaṃ veditavyaṃ anuttarasamyaksambodhiphalaparigrahānupradānatayā. (BBh p. 138, ll. 9–17)

English Trans. of Skt: Moreover, this is the bodhisattvas' self-nature precept endowed with four merits. [...] It should be known that this [self-nature precept, endowed with the merit of] comprehending and **bestowing** the fruit of supreme perfect enlightenment, brings great fruits and benefits.

Chi. trans.: This is the bodhisattva's self-nature precept endowed with four merits. [...] It should be known that [this precept] is a pure precept that brings great fruits and benefits, resulting from receiving and **bestowing** the fruit of supreme perfect enlightenment. 如是菩薩具四功德自性尸羅。... 應知即是能獲大果勝利淨戒，攝受隨與無上正等菩提果故。(T30, p. 511a3-10)¹⁴

Here, *suiyu* 隨與 translates *anupradāna*,¹⁵ where the basic semantic value of *dāna* ("giving, bestowing") remains evident, though the precise semantic contribution of the prefixes *anu-* and *pra-* requires further investigation.

The *Śrāvakabhūmi* provides another notable example in its explanation of equanimity (*upeksā*, 捨), where *suiyu* again renders *anupradāna*:

Skt: tatlopeksā katamā/yālabane 'saṃkṣiptacetasaś cittasamatā, śamathavipaśyanāpaksye praśaṭhasvarasavāhitā, karmanyacittasya ca karmanyatā, cittasyānupradānam *anābhogakriyā/(ŚrBh-T3 p. 80, ll. 2–4. *I emended *anābhogakriyāyāh* to *anābhogakriyā* based on the manuscript.)¹⁶

English Trans. of Skt: What is equanimity? It is, for those who have an undefiled mind, the mind's equilibrium towards objects, and it is operating straightforwardly and naturally towards the objects in both aspects of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. And [equanimity is] the suitability of those whose mind is suitable [for meditation]. [The suitability that] functions effortlessly is *anupradāna* of the mind.

This passage addresses meditation rather than volition specifically. However, two significant parallels emerge: both equanimity and volition function as mental factors, and both concern the mind–object relationship. Furthermore, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* in the VinS section enumerates five practice types, including "combination activation" 合會加行, "separation activation" 別離加行, and "equanimity-*suiyu* activation" 捨隨與加行¹⁷, demonstrating remarkable structural similarity to the previously discussed definition of volition; the expression "equanimity-*suiyu* practice" also demonstrates the correlation be-

tween equanimity and *suiyu*. These correlations support our judgment that *suiyu* renders *anupradāna* in the volition definition.

Moreover, given that the Basic Section employs *anubhavanā* for feeling 受, the phrase “*suiyu lingna*” 隨與領納 likely represents a compound incorporating both *anupradāna* and *anubhavanā*.

These attestations indicate that *anupradāna* in this context transcends its basic meaning of “giving, bestowing.” Previous research on the *Savitarkasavicārabhūmi* (*The Stage of Investigation and Analysis*, 有尋有伺地) suggests that *anu-pra-√dā* in the YBh can denote “maintaining [a particular state] or facilitating its continuation.”¹⁸ According to this interpretation, *suiyu* in the context of equanimity signifies “maintaining [the state of equanimity].” This technical usage intersects with broader Yogācāra theoretical frameworks regarding mental factors, though detailed analysis of the significance of this fact lies beyond the scope of this paper.

3.3. Divergent Treatments of *anupradāna* in Chinese and Tibetan Translations

The discussion above is summarized in Table 1, which presents the discrepancies in translations of *suiyu* in the definition of volition (c) across the Chinese and Tibetan versions of the VinS Section. Through comparison of the explanation of *Samṣkāra-Skandha* (b), we identified the Tibetan equivalent *mtshun par byed pa*, confirming the Sanskrit origin of *suiyu*. Further investigation of the term in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* of the Basic Section (a) and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of the VinS Section (d) revealed that *suiyu* corresponds to the Sanskrit term *anupradāna*, thereby resolving the terminological discrepancy in the definition of volition.

Table 1. [*Suiyu* in the contexts related to volition and equanimity].

| | Location in the YBh | The Subject | Chi. Trans. | Tib. Trans. | Sanskrit Text |
|-----|---|--|-------------|--|--|
| (a) | The Basic Section: <i>Śrāvakabhūmi</i> | Equanimity (<i>upekṣā</i>) | 令心隨與, 任運作用 | sems las su rung ba'i rjes su rtsol ba med pa'i bya bas gtod pa | cittasyānupradānam anābhogakriyā |
| (b) | The VinS Section: <i>Manobhūmi</i> | <i>Samṣkāra-skandha</i> | 為境隨與 | yul dang mtshun par byed pa | |
| (c) | The VinS Section: <i>Manobhūmi</i> | Volition (<i>cetanā</i>) | 隨與 | - | |
| (d) | The VinS Section: <i>Bodhisattvabhūmi</i> | The attachment generated from activation | 捨隨與加行 | btang snyoms su 'jog pa'i mngon par 'du byed pa | |

Xuanzang’s translation methodology deliberately incorporated Sanskrit grammatical features into his Chinese renderings. This approach is exemplified in his translation of *anupradāna* as *suiyu* 隨與 in these passages: the prefix *anu(pra)-* was rendered as *sui* 隨 (accordance), while the stem *dāna* became *yu* 與 (bestowal). However, examination of the Sanskrit YBh reveals that Xuanzang’s translation of *anupradāna* exhibits contextual variation. Within the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of the Basic Section, the term *suiyu* appears exclusively in the previously discussed instance, while other occurrences of *anupradāna* as shown in Table 2 were translated differently by Xuanzang¹⁹:

Table 2. [Other renderings of *anupradāna* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*].

| Sanskrit Text | Chi. Trans. | Tib. Trans. |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| (1) BBh p. 82, l. 4: <i>dharmāṇām anupradānam</i> (bestowing dharmas) | 正法施 (T30, p. 497b21) | chos rnams sbyin par byed pa (D wi 44b5; P zhi 52b8) |
| (2) BBh p. 112, l. 4: <i>smṛṭikarāṇānupradānam</i> (bestowing causing to mindfulness) | 與作憶念 (T30, p. 504c13) | dran par byed du gzhug pa (D wi 60b4; P zhi 70b2) |
| (3) BBh pp. 127, l. 24–128, l. 1: <i>dharmadānaṃ ... ananupradānāt</i> (bestowing the dharma ... out of non- bestowing) | 法施...非施 (T30, p. 508b22) | ma byin na (D wi 69a4; P zhi 79b2) |
| (4) BBh p. 140, l. 23: <i>daṇḍakarmānupradānam</i> (giving punishment) | 治罰 (T30, p. 511c4) | chad pa'i las byed du gzhug pa (D wi 76a2; P zhi 87a5) |
| (5) BBh p. 146, ll. 6–7: <i>āsanasthānānupradānena</i> (arranging a seat) | 設座 (T30, p. 513a6) | stan dang gnas sbyin pas (D wi 79a2; P zhi 90a4–5) |
| (6) BBh p. 380, l. 20: <i>dharmarasānupradānād</i> (bestowing the flavour of the dharma) | 施法味故 (T30, p. 568a4) | chos kyi bcud byin pa (D wi 195b1; P zhi 225b2) |

As we can see, in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, *anupradāna* primarily denotes “giving” or “bestowing” without specialized connotations. Thus, Xuanzang’s translation strategy appears to have been deliberately bifurcated: for specialized philosophical contexts, he consistently translated *anupradāna* with *suiyu*—a more technically precise but semantically opaque rendering—while adopting more idiomatic translations in general contexts to enhance comprehensibility. The term *suiyu* in the context of the mental factor of volition also appears in the *Xianyang Shengjiao lun* 顯揚聖教論, a compendium of the YBh.²⁰ Since this text was translated before the YBh, it appears that Xuanzang’s approach to translating *anupradāna* in the definition of volition was already established during his work on the *Xianyang Shengjiao lun* and maintained consistently in his subsequent translation of the YBh. The Tibetan translation of YBh, possibly due to multiple translators working on different sections, demonstrates no consistent rendering of *anupradāna*. The fact that we can trace *suiyu* to its underlying Sanskrit analog at all is due entirely to Xuanzang’s systematic method of translation.

4. Acceptance of Suiyu: The Struggles of Xuanzang’s Successors to Assimilate His Translational Innovations

4.1. Interpretation of Suiyu Among Xuanzang’s Disciples

Xuanzang’s scrupulous system of translation allows modern scholars, with the benefit of comparison to Sanskrit and Tibetan parallels, to precisely interpret some of his more unusual constructions. This is not to say, however, that his method was effective at conveying semantic distinctions to his contemporaries and successors. We can get a sense for whether Xuanzang’s methodical approach was effective by looking to his disciples’ interpretations of *suiyu* in relation to volition. Three distinct interpretations emerge: two addressing the phrase “making [the mind] *suiyu* to the object” 為境隨與 in the description of *saṃskāra-skandha*, and one examining “regarding the object, *suiyu* and experiencing [it], combining with [it] and separating from [it]” 於所緣境隨與領納和合乖離 in the definition of volition²¹:

(1) Master Jing interprets: “That is to say, regarding the object of combination and separation and so forth, volition **follows along with this object** and functions together **with consciousness**.” (2) Master Bei interprets: “That is to say, volition activates the mind, causing objects to **accord with the mind**. The term ‘making’ (為) denotes action, indicating objects’ **accordance with the mind**.” 景師云：“謂於和合乖違等境，思隨此境，與識俱轉。” 備師云：“謂思能發心，令境隨心轉。為之言作，作境隨與心也。”²²

(3) As for the phrase “*sui lingna*” 隨領納, it means that **following the encounter with any object**, [the mind] experiences [that object] immediately. 而隨領納者，**隨與何境相遇**，即便領納。²³

The first two interpretations were documented by Kuiji 窺基, a direct disciple of Xuanzang, in his commentary on the YBh titled *Abbreviated Commentary on Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論略纂. Kuiji himself merely mentioned “*suiyu* and *lingna*” 隨與與領納 (T43, p. 188c11) without offering his own analysis of *suiyu*. The three disciples listed above were the only ones who explicitly articulated interpretations of this term. In the first interpretation, Master Jing 景師 (possibly Huijing 惠景) parsed *sui* and *yu* separately, adding “this object” as the object of *sui*, and treats *yu* as a preposition indicating temporal accompaniment through the phrase “functions together **with consciousness**” 與識俱轉. In the second interpretation, Master Bei 備師 (possibly Wenbei 文備) treats *suiyu* primarily through the verbal function of *sui*, interpreting *yu* as a preposition relating to “mind.” The third interpretation by Dunlun 遁倫 is more complex; “**following(=sui) the encounter with(=yu) any object**” 隨與何境相遇 suggests that he adds “encounter... any object” 何境相遇 regarding *yu*, and interprets *yu* as a preposition indicating the object of “encounter.” Thus, the entire phrase “the encounter **with any object**” functions as the object of *sui*.

As established previously, *suiyu* renders the Sanskrit term *anupradāna*, with *yu* 與 translating the stem *dāna* and *sui* 隨 representing the prefix *anu(pra)-*. The semantic weight of *suiyu* should therefore rest on *yu* (*dāna*), which denotes an action—primarily signifying “giving” or “bestowing”—rather than expressing accordance or accompaniment. Although Xuanzang’s disciples correctly understand *suiyu* as expressing an action, all three interpretations take *sui* as the main verb and misinterpret *yu* as “with,” denoting accordance or accompaniment. This approach derives the primary verbal meaning from the prefix *anu(pra)-* while misconstruing the stem *dāna* as a preposition—a significant departure from the original structure and meaning of *anupradāna*, which Xuanzang was so careful to preserve.

4.2. Analysis of Xuanzang’s Disciples’ Interpretations of *Suiyu*

The interpretations offered by Xuanzang’s disciples have comprehensible origins. A fundamental issue, as Delhey (2024, pp. 205–6) summarizes, is that the character *sui* 隨 in Xuanzang’s translations typically renders the prefix *anu-*, but unlike this Sanskrit prefix, *sui* can function as an independent verb in Chinese. Consequently, even though Xuanzang employed *sui* to translate the prefix *anu-*, Chinese lacks grammatical structures corresponding to Sanskrit prefixes. In the resulting translations, readers cannot readily determine whether *sui* functions as a verb or a prefix. Additionally, the character *yu* 與 carries connotations of accompaniment, further complicating accurate interpretation.

These interpretations cannot be dismissed as merely superficial readings. Section 3 demonstrated that Xuanzang consistently translated *anupradāna* as *suiyu* in contexts related to mental factors such as volition and equanimity, while occasionally using this term for *anupradāna* in bodhisattva-giving contexts. Notably, *suiyu* was not Xuanzang’s exclusive translation for *anupradāna*, as he employed it for other terms and grammatical constructions.

For instance, in the *Manobhūmi* of the YBh’s Basic Section, when explaining defiled imagination (*kliṣṭa-vikalpa*) and undefiled imagination (*akliṣṭa-vikalpa*), the following expressions appear:

Chi. trans.: 或隨與一煩惱、隨煩惱相應所起分別 (T30, p. 280c13-14)

Skt.: ‘nyatamenānyatamena vā kleśopakleśena yaḥ samprayuktah saṅkalpah... (YBh p. 12, ll. 20–21)

Chi. trans.: 或隨與一信等善法相應...所有分別 (T30, p. 280c16-17)

Skt.: ‘nyatamānyatamena vā punaḥ śraddhādikena kuśalena dharmena yaḥ samprayukto vikalpa... (YBh p. 13, ll. 2–3)

Comparison with the Sanskrit reveals that *suiyu* in these sentences does not translate an action verb but forms part of the phrase *suiyu yi* 隨與一 (with any one). Here, *sui yi* 隨一 (any one) translates *anyatama- anyatama-* from *anyatamenānyatamena* (meaning “any one of many”)²⁴, while *yu* 與 (with) represents the instrumental case of *anyatamenānyatamena* and subsequent terms, indicating association with *samprayuktah*.

Similarly, in Xuanzang’s translation of the fifth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, we find the combination *suiyu...xiangying* 隨與...相應:

Chi. trans.: 隨與見此諦所斷相應，即說名為見此諦所斷。 (T29, p. 109c23-24)

Skt.: yaś ca yaddarśanaheyaṣamprayuktah sa taddarśanaprahātavyaḥ | (AKBh: p. 314, ll. 5–6)

Here, *yu* 與 functions as a preposition indicating an associative relationship, while *sui* 隨 appears to work with *ji* 即 to express the relative clause structure of “*yaś...sa...*”. Interestingly, in the previous example, the association between *anyatamenānyatamena... samprayuktah* would be more naturally rendered in Chinese grammar as “與隨一...相應” with 與 placed first. The unusual ordering as “隨與一” may relate to the relative pronoun *yaḥ* in the sentence. Additionally, the *Apidamo Dapiposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 contains two instances of *suiyu* that, while lacking Sanskrit parallels, appear from the Chinese to indicate relationships of accompaniment or mixture²⁵.

These examples demonstrate that in Xuanzang’s work, *yu* 與 in *suiyu* also expresses association or accompaniment relationships—a natural reading in Chinese, particularly since such examples exist within the YBh itself. In these cases, *suiyu* represents the incidental combination of *sui* and *yu* rather than translating a specific Sanskrit term. The difficulty in distinguishing between these two scenarios in Chinese explains why Xuanzang’s disciples might reasonably interpret the *yu* in *suiyu* as indicating accompaniment when analyzing the definition of volition.

5. Conclusions

This study, by examining the interpretation of *suiyu* in the YBh as a case study, has highlighted the methodological challenges inherent in comparative analyses of Chinese and Tibetan translations. It has also proposed systematic approaches for addressing these difficulties. The findings demonstrate that, in the absence of extant Sanskrit sources, a thorough examination of related textual evidence—across multiple languages and traditions—is essential to avoid overlooking crucial semantic and structural relationships.

Through an analysis of the term *suiyu*, this paper has demonstrated that Xuanzang’s translation methodology was sophisticated and context-sensitive: he consistently employed *suiyu*—a term closely adhering to the Sanskrit *anupradāna*—in technical discussions involving consciousness and its associated mental factors, such as volition (*cetanā*) and equanimity (*upeksā*). In contrast, he adopted more idiomatic renderings in contexts where *anupradāna* carries its basic sense of “giving” or “bestowing” in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. It is

generally accepted that Xuanzang sought to preserve Sanskrit grammatical features, yet Delhey (2024, p. 7) observes the following: “his translations of the *Yogācārabhūmi* are faithful to the meaning of each paragraph and, in many cases, each sentence. Regarding the wording of these brief textual passages, he displays considerable freedom, except for the basic technical vocabulary, which remains almost completely unaltered.” The examples discussed in this paper exhibit similar characteristics, revealing Xuanzang’s nuanced approach and his sophisticated understanding of Buddhist doctrinal subtleties.

However, due to constraints imposed by Chinese grammar and the influence of prior translations, Xuanzang’s meticulous strategies sometimes failed to convey his intended meaning with full clarity. The term *suiyu*, for instance, proved difficult to comprehend accurately, even for his immediate disciples.

This case exemplifies the complex dynamics of localization in medieval China, illustrating how translators navigated the tension between fidelity to the source text and adaptation to local linguistic and conceptual frameworks. This dialectic between preservation and adaptation constitutes a defining feature of the transmission of Buddhist texts across Asia. The interpretive difficulties surrounding terms like *suiyu* remind us that the spread of Buddhist thought was never merely a matter of linguistic transfer, but rather a deeply layered process of cultural negotiation and philosophical reinterpretation that continues to shape our understanding of Buddhist traditions today.

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Notes

- ¹ This manuscript, comprising portions of the YBh’s Basic Section (excluding the *Śrāvākabhūmi* and *Bodhisattvabhūmi*), was discovered by Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana (1893–1963) in 1936 at the Sakya monastery Chhag-pe-lha-khang in Tibet. See Tsukamoto et al. (1990, pp. 322–23) and Delhey (2013, pp. 508, 515–16).
- ² YBh p. 11, ll. 14–19.
- ³ YBh p. 57, ll. 8–9.
- ⁴ The Tibetan translation (D tshi 5b7–6a3; P dzi 6b5–7a2) aligns with the Sanskrit text in enumerating 51 mental factors, with this total reaffirmed subsequently (D tshi 28b6–7; P dzi 32a3–4).
- ⁵ T30, 280b13–18, 291a1. Mizuno (1964, pp. 319–22) hypothesizes that the Basic Section originally cataloged 53 mental factors, with the VinS subsequently reducing this to 51 through the elimination of “incorrect craving” 邪欲 and “incorrect ascertain-

ment” 邪勝解—a modification later adopted by subsequent Yogācāra scholars. This suggests the possibility that this doctrinal development influenced the extant manuscript tradition of the Basic Section.

6 The basic philological analysis of the definition of volition (*cetanā*) presented in this section draws on textual observations initially discussed in Yang Jie 楊潔 (2018), “「隨與」 (*anupradāna) について: 五遍行における思 (*cetanā*) の一側面,” インド哲学仏教学研究, vol. 26, pp. 23–28 (Yang 2018). Specifically, the presentation of the Tibetan and Chinese translations of the definition of volition and the interpretative difficulties identified in Section 2.1, Section 2.2 and contextual analysis in Section 2.3 contain material that overlaps with the previous publication. However, while the previous work examined these passages to compare doctrinal positions between the YBh and Sarvāstivāda traditions, the current paper recontextualizes this analysis to investigate Xuanzang’s translation methodology and the cross-cultural transmission of Buddhist concepts. The interpretative difficulties identified in the Tibetan and Chinese translations serve here as the foundation for the subsequent analysis of Xuanzang’s translation strategies rather than for doctrinal comparison as in the previous work.

7 Kramer (2013a, p. 1002) lists the definitions of volition found in Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, Vasubandhu’s *Pañcaskandhaka*, the Basic Section of YBh, and Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. However, the statement in the VinS is found in neither of these sources, nor in Sthiramati’s commentaries (Buescher 2007, p. 58; Kramer 2013b, pp. 35–36) on Vasubandhu’s *Trimśikā Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* or *Pañcaskandhaka*.

8 In the Basic Section, 領納 (*lǐng nà*) is a rendering of the expression *anubhavanā* (experiencing) in the definition of feeling (*vedanā*, 受, *tshor ba*): Skt: *vedanā katamā | anubhavanā ||* (YBh p. 60, l. 2) Chi. trans.: 受云何? 謂領納。(T30, p. 291b28) Tib. trans.: *tshor ba gang zhe na/(P; om. D) myong ba’o/(D tshi 30b1; P dzi 34a3)*

9 何等是行自性? 答: 此亦六種, 如前應知。(中略) 又一切行皆造作相。(T30, p. 593c7-12)

10 *Samṣkāra-skandha*, or *saṃkhārakkhandha* in Pāli, as Hamilton (1996, p. 71) observes, “is defined as the six groups of volitional activity” in the early Buddhist scriptures. See also Kritzer (1999, p. 144), Vetter (2000, p. 29), and Kramer (2013a, p. 988).

11 菩薩如是成就知足, 隨與而取, 不擇精麤。(T10, p. 815a22-23)

12 智慧及善權慧, 常相隨與併行, 如兩牛共一車*鬲。(T15, p. 110a27-28)

13 The identification of Sanskrit terms corresponding to *suiyu* in this section builds upon research originally published in Yang (2018, pp. 29–31). Upon further examination, I found that my previous interpretations of the Sanskrit passages from the *Śrāvaka-abhūmi* and *Bodhisattvabhūmi* sections needed improvement, particularly regarding the semantic range of *anupradāna*. The present interpretations represent my updated analysis. Furthermore, these textual identifications serve as foundational evidence for the analysis of Xuanzang’s translation methodology that follows in subsequent sections, while they are used primarily for doctrinal analysis in my earlier work.

14 The corresponding Tibetan translation is as follows: Tib. trans.: *byang chub sems dpa’ rnam kyī tshul khriṃs kyī ngo bo nyid yon tan bzhi dang ldan pa... bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa’i byang chub kyī ‘bras bu yongs (yongs D; yong P) su ‘dzin cing sbyin par byed pas ‘bras bu dang phan yon che bar rig par bya’o/(D wi 74b2–5; P zhi 85b2-6)*

15 Yokoyama and Hirose (1997, p. 19) lists *suiyu* 隨與 as a rendering for *anupradāna*.

16 The corresponding Chinese translation and Tibetan translation are as follows. Chi. trans.: 云何為捨? 謂於所緣心無染污心平等性, 於止觀品調柔正直任運轉性, 及調柔心有堪能性。令心隨與, 任運作用。(T30, p. 456b8-11). Tib. trans.: *de la btang snyoms gang zhe na/zhi gnas dang/lhang mthong gi phyogs kyī dmigs pa la sems kun nas nyon mongs pa med pa’i sems mnyam pa nyid dang/rnal du bab pa (pa P; ba D) dang/rang gi ngang gis ‘jug (‘jug D; ‘dzin P) pa dang/sems nyams bde ba dang/sems las su rung ba’i rjes su rtsol ba med pa’i bya bas gtod pa gang yin pa’o/(D dzi 144b1–2; P wi 174a4–6)*

17 Chi. trans.: 加行執當知復有五種。一貪愛加行故, 二瞋恚加行故, 三合會加行故, 四別離加行故, 五捨隨與加行故。(T30, p. 704a8-10). Tib. trans.: *de la mngon par ‘du byed pas ‘dzin pa ni mnam pa lṅgar rig par bya ste/rjes su chags pa’i mngon par ‘du byed pa dang/khong khro ba’i mngon par ‘du byed pa dang/phrad pa’i mngon par ‘du byed pa dang/’bral ba’i mngon par ‘du byed pa dang/btang snyoms su ‘jog pa’i mngon par ‘du byed pa’o/(D zi 20b4–5; P ‘i 22a6–7)* The Chinese term “jiaxing” 加行 and the Tibetan word *mngon par ‘du byed pa* can be reasonably equated with the Sanskrit expression of *abhisamṣkāra* (activation). See Yokoyama and Hirose (1997, p. 35).

18 See Yang (2019, pp. 106–9).

19 Additionally, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* in the VinS Section also contains one instance of *suiyu*, though its Sanskrit source is unknown. From the context, it appears to denote “giving” or “bestowing”: “If [a bodhisattva] has no objects to give, they should politely decline with appropriate words and promise to give immediately after they acquire [such objects]. 若無施物, 正言詞謝, 許得隨與。” (T30, p. 709c8) The corresponding Tibetan translation reads: *sbyin par bya ba’i chos mi ‘dogs (‘dogs D; bdog P) na yang legs par shad kyis sbyangs te gtong bar byed pa dang/(D zi 34a5; P ‘i 37a3)*

20 *Xianyang Shengjiao lun* 顯揚聖教論: “思者...或為和合, 或為別離, 或為隨與...” (T31, p. 481a29-b1). This text was translated before the YBh (see *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, T55, p. 556b7-14).

21 The three interpretations by Xuanzang’s disciples were mentioned in my previous work, Yang (2018, p. 25). However, my understanding of these interpretations in that publication was incomplete and requires improvement. The present explanation represents my updated analysis.

- 22 *Abbreviated Commentary on Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論略纂 (by Kuiji 窺基), T43, p. 188c7-9. Other interpretations following the quoted text have been omitted as they do not address the semantic analysis of *suiyu*.
- 23 *Records of the Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽論記 (by Dunlun 遁倫), T42, p. 640a5-6.
- 24 See Delhey (2024, p. 206).
- 25 *Apidamo Dapiposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論: “Throughout the body composed of the four elements, feelings arise **whenever** [the body] contacts **with** tangibles. 遍四大種造色身中, 隨與觸合皆能生受。” (T27, p. 37b15-16) “If in solid objects, earth atoms predominate while water, fire, and wind are few, some earth atoms combine **along with** equal amounts of water, etc., while the remainder remain separate. 若堅物中, 地極微多, 水火風少, 地微隨與水等量雜, 餘則相離。” (T27, p. 682c25-26)

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Article

Yinyuan Longqi's "Huangbo" Writing and the Construction of "Authenticity"

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Abstract: Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 was a pivotal figure in Sino–Japanese cultural exchange. His journey to Japan to propagate Buddhism, founding of the Ōbaku sect (*Huangbo zong* 黃檗宗), emphasis on the orthodoxy of his Zen teachings, and crafting of an “authentic” identity profoundly influenced Japanese Buddhism and culture. While existing studies have predominantly explored the socio–historical dimensions of Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity” (*benzhen* 本真), his extensive corpus of Zen verses remains understudied. By tracing the “Huangbo” (Ōbaku) 黃檗 imagery in his writings, this study addresses how Yinyuan constructed “authenticity” through his poetic works. Before his journey to Japan, Yinyuan employed “Huangbo” imagery to articulate his personal situation and sentiment, elevating it into a symbolic representation of inner “authenticity”. In the early days after Yinyuan went to Japan, driven by the dual imperatives of promoting orthodox Zen and responding to Japanese expectations of Zen origins, he intricately intertwined “Huangbo” with Zen doctrines, transforming the imagery into a marker of “authenticity” that embodied both orthodox Zen philosophy and sectarian identity. Following the establishment of Kyoto’s Mount Huangbo, Yinyuan further reshaped the “Huangbo” imagery into a trans-geographical and cultural symbol of sectarian dharma lineage, thereby ensuring the spiritual continuity of “authenticity” across Chinese and Japanese Huangbo traditions. This process not only reflects the cross-cultural transmission of Buddhism from China to Japan but also serves as a critical lens for examining the interplay between globalization and localization in religious development.

Keywords: Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦; authenticity; Huangbo 黃檗

1. Introduction

During the late Ming Dynasty, the eminent monk Yinyuan Longqi (1592–1673) journeyed eastward to Japan to propagate Buddhism, establishing the Japanese Ōbaku sect and being revered as its founding patriarch. As a crucial envoy of Sino–Japanese cultural exchange, the culture transmitted by Yinyuan and his disciples took deep root in Japanese society, exerting profound influence on various aspects of modern Japan. As noted by Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 in his article *Yinyuan’s Journey to the East and Japanese Huangbo Zen (Ingen no Tōto to Nihon Ōbaku Zen 隱元の東渡と日本黃檗禪)*: “Without the influence of Huangbo culture, no aspect of modern Japanese social movements can be properly understood, regardless of the perspective one adopts” (Yanagida 1996, pp. 276–95). Precisely due to this significant impact and status, academic research on Yinyuan Longqi has garnered substantial attention,¹ revealing two distinctive characteristics: first, previous studies primarily focused on historical and cultural dimensions when discussing

Yinyuan and the Ōbaku sect; second, the “authenticity” issue proposed by Wu Jiang’s monograph *Daohai dongying* 蹈海東瀛 [Leaving for the Rising Sun] merits serious consideration.² This work situates Yinyuan’s eastward journey within the broader context of pre-modern East Asian history, using “authenticity” as a central thread to thoroughly investigate Yinyuan’s role and function in Sino-Japanese exchanges. Essentially, the book introduces the issue of Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity”, explaining through social and historical lenses how Yinyuan established this “authenticity”.

What, then, constitutes “authenticity”? Michel Mohr believed that the religious “authenticity” advocated by Yinyuan contained a strong sense of sectarianism, which paved the way for him to extend his influence to a broader Edo society (Mohr 1994, pp. 331–44). Wu Jiang defines “authenticity” as “the foundation of a tradition and the source for forming a coherent and consistent value system”, aligning it with classical Chinese discourses on concepts such as original (ben), genuine (zhen), and true (zheng).³ In Yinyuan’s missionary activities, the “symbol of authenticity” manifests in two corresponding aspects. First, it specifically refers to Yinyuan’s self-construction as an “authenticity symbol”. Before and after his journey to Japan, Yinyuan deliberately proclaimed himself as representing the “authentic transmission of the Linji sect (*Linji zong* 臨濟宗)”, emphasizing the legitimacy of his Dharma transmission, Zen practices, and cultivation methods, thereby establishing an imagery of “spiritual and religious authenticity”. Second, the authentic Chinese Zen monastic transmission system introduced by Yinyuan led Kyoto’s Manpukuji Temple 萬福禪寺 to be recognized as an “authenticity symbol”. Wu Jiang’s discussion of authenticity provides valuable insights, essentially exploring how Yinyuan Longqi constructed both his own image as an orthodox Zen master within the Linji tradition and the legitimacy of the Ōbaku sect.

This paper follows Wu Jiang’s definition of “authenticity”, with a particular focus on the intrinsic connection between the “authenticity” constructed by Yinyuan at the level of Zen and sect and the legitimacy of the Linji Ōbaku sect. However, when we discuss this issue, besides the social and historical aspects, we should not overlook Yinyuan Longqi’s substantial literary output. Precisely through his poetic verses, he consciously articulated and constructed “authenticity”, proclaiming his inheritance of the orthodox Linji Lineage and emphasizing the orthodoxy of his Zen teachings and cultivation methods. As a Zen master, Yinyuan left an extensive corpus of literary works, with over forty published collections of recorded sayings surviving to this day. His poetic compositions, remarkable both in quantity and diversity of forms, occupy a prominent position in Zen history and Buddhist literary studies, holding significant research value in the history of monastic poetry. His literary reputation also resonated among scholar–official circles during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. While Wu Jiang’s *Leaving for the Rising Sun* examines multiple dimensions of Yinyuan’s “authenticity” construction, it does not delve deeply into how this “authenticity” operates within Yinyuan’s poetic verses. In reality, Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity” relied not merely on his religious missionary activities but found its primary medium in his voluminous writings. The textual articulation of “authenticity” progressed systematically alongside religious practices, while concrete implementations of “authenticity” conversely enriched the typology and content of its textual expressions. This mutual reinforcement between praxis and textuality constitutes the dual dimensions of Yinyuan’s “authenticity” construction.

Interestingly, the prolific “Huangbo” writing in Yinyuan’s poetic verses provides crucial literary evidence for analyzing this constructive process. The polysemous “Huangbo” imagery in Yinyuan’s writings, with its rich connotations, not only reflects the tangible impacts of his “authenticity” construction but also reveals the multivalent spiritual dimensions of his inner world. Therefore, this paper utilizes Yinyuan’s portrayal of the

“Huangbo” imagery as a starting point to explore the intentional or unintentional construction of “authenticity” before and after his journey. It demonstrates how Yinyuan, through strategic depictions of “Huangbo”, repeatedly forged connections between his personal identity and Zen orthodoxy (particularly the Linji lineage), thereby positioning himself and the Ōbaku sect as embodiments of “authenticity”. Following the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Japan, Yinyuan further accomplished the transplantation of “authenticity” by expanding the semantic dimensions of “Huangbo” to bridge the Chinese and Japanese Huangbo traditions.

2. Situation, Practice, and Sentiment: Yinyuan’s Early “Huangbo” Writing

The term “Huangbo” originally refers to a plant. Due to its bitter taste, Chinese literati refined it into a literary imagery to express inner anguish or harsh environments. When integrated into Zen Buddhist discourse, the imagery of “Huangbo” further resonated with the spirit of endurance and asceticism emphasized in Zen practice. The “Huangbo” imagery emerged early in Yinyuan’s poetic compositions. In his early works, Yinyuan absorbed the traditional connotations of “Huangbo” and juxtaposed them with the phrase “poverty-stricken 徹骨貧” to convey his own hardships in both circumstance and spiritual practice. Later, he combined these into the expression “Huangbo always thoroughly poor” 黃檗徹骨貧, articulating his personal resolve: lamenting the decline of the Huangbo Dharma lineage, he hoped his sect would uphold its principles amidst the chaotic state of the Zen community. At this point, the traditional botanical imagery of “Huangbo” became infused with sectarian significance.

This connects to the concept of “authenticity”. To Yinyuan, “Huangbo” was not merely a plant or a literary imagery derived from its bitter taste; it also symbolized the “authenticity” in his mind, reflecting his personal situations, sentiments, and the identity of his sect and Zen methods. Below, we will trace this evolution.

2.1. The Emergence and Application of the “Huangbo” Imagery

“Huangbo” originally refers to the *Phellodendron amurense* tree, also known as *Tanhuan* 檀栿. It is described as bitter in taste, cold in nature, capable of enduring harsh winters without withering, and used medicinally. It treated ailments such as internal heat, jaundice, hemorrhoids, diarrhea, and ulcers. Huangbo primarily grew in the valleys of Hanzhong 漢中 and Yongchang 永昌, with Sichuan 四川 being considered the best source.

The inherent characteristics of this plant were borrowed by ancients as a metaphor for harsh environments, gradually entering literary and Buddhist texts.

The imagery of “Huangbo” appeared early in literati writings. For example, a *Nanchao yuefu minge* 南朝樂府民歌 [Southern Dynasties folk poem] states: “Huangbo becomes a dense forest, how can one endure so much hardship 黃檗鬱成林，當奈苦心多” (Forty-two Songs of the Midnight 子夜歌四十二首).⁴ Here, the bitter taste of Huangbo metaphorizes a wife’s anguish after separation from her husband.

By the Tang and Song Dynasties, this imagery became more frequent, often paired with “eating ice” (*shibing* 食冰) or “chewing ice” (*yinbing* 飲冰). Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote in his poem *Two Songs for Three Years in Prefectural Governor* (*Sannian wei cishi er shou* 三年為刺史二首) “Three years as a prefectural governor, chewing ice and eating Huangbo 三年為刺史，飲冰復食檗”.⁵ Similarly, Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (840–868) wrote in her *Love Letter to Li Zi’an* (*Qingshu ji Li Zi’an* 情書寄李子安) “Chewing ice and eating Huangbo, wishes unfulfilled, Jin River and Hu Pass in my dreams 飲冰食檗志無功，晉水壺關在夢中”.⁶ These lines use “chewing ice and eating Huangbo” (*yinbing shibo* 飲冰食檗) to symbolize austere living conditions, later extending to signify

moral integrity in adversity. For instance, in the Song Dynasty, Zheng Xingyi 鄭興裔 (1126–1199) wrote in his *Zhongsu Ji* 忠肅集 [Collection of Loyal and Serious] “My ancestors and my father valued cleanliness and honesty throughout their lives. After they became officials in their youth, they were motivated to lead a clean life like chewing ice water and eating Huangbo, refusing bribes and not daring to violate them slightly so as not to breed evil 臣祖、父以來，世守清白。束髮入官，勵志冰檠，謝絕苞苴，無敢少有隕越，以滋罪戾”。⁷ Zheng Xingyi declared that his family had upheld a tradition of integrity since his grandfather’s generation. As an official, he persevered in harsh conditions of “chewing icy water and eating bitter Huangbo”, striving to advance his moral cause while steadfastly rejecting bribes. The phrase “chewing icy water and eating bitter Huangbo” has even evolved into a Chinese idiom, encapsulating the dual essence of enduring extreme hardship and maintaining unblemished moral character.

In Buddhism, Huangbo’s bitterness aligned with ascetic practice, forming a distinct imagery. Legend states that in 789, Master Zhenggan 正幹 established the Huangbo temple.⁸ The phrase “Huangbo tastes bitter” subsequently spread through Zen records, alongside the legend of Master Zhenggan founding the temple.

From the Song Dynasty onward, Zen records frequently employed “Huangbo”. Zen masters often use “Huangbo’s bitter nature” as a metaphor for the hardship of cultivation to encourage monks to practice. Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (?–867) once recounted that his Zen teachings descended from masters such as Magu 麻谷 (?–?) and Danxia 丹霞 (739–824), yet as he journeyed across the land, few trusted his dharma—most met it with slander. He invoked ancient masters whose teachings also faced initial rejection. When speaking of Magu’s teachings, he declared “The Zen style of Monk Magu is as bitter as Huangbo, and no one can get close to it 如麻谷用處，苦如黃檗，近皆不得” (Record of Sayings by Chan Master Linji of Zhenzhou 鎮州臨濟慧照禪師語錄).⁹ Here, “as bitter as” metaphorically encapsulates the austere rigor of Magu’s Zen. Master Zhenjing Kewen 真淨克文 (1025–1102) also used the phrase in his verse “Jiu Peak is deep, Huangbo is bitter 鷲峰深，黃檗苦” (A Short Song to the Monks of Duan 短歌寄端上人).¹⁰ “Jiu Peak” (*Jiu feng* 鷲峰) refers to the sacred Grdhrakuta (Lingjiu shan 靈鷲山), where the Buddha Sakyamuni (*Shijia mouni fo* 釋迦牟尼佛) is said to have expounded profound Dharma teachings. The phrase “Jiu Peak is deep, Huangbo is bitter” here metaphorically describes both the inscrutable depth of Buddhist doctrine and the arduous rigor of Zen practice. Numerous similar examples exist across the Zen literature. In these examples, Huangbo is vaguely associated with Zen, indicating both the “bitter” nature of Zen itself and implying the hardships of practicing Zen.

But how did Yinyuan employ the “Huangbo” imagery? What similarities and differences exist between his usage and that of his predecessors, and how does the usage relate to his construction of “authenticity”? The following sections will address these questions.

2.2. “Bitterness of Huangbo from Root to Leaf” 黃檗連根苦: Self-Explanation of Situation and Practice

Yinyuan Longqi’s use of the “Huangbo” imagery was prolific. In his early works, “Huangbo” served both to describe harsh environmental conditions and to intertwine with Zen practice. The former aligns with traditional literati usage, while the latter resonates with Song Dynasty Zen masters. However, when contextualized within Yinyuan’s unique experiences, this imagery reveals profound personal emotions and introspective depth.

In August 1629, Huangbo Temple in Fuqing invited Master Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642) to come and teach. The following year, Yinyuan accompanied Miyun to the mountain. Later, Yinyuan was sent on a fundraising mission, but upon his return, Miyun had already departed for the Ayuwang Temple (*Ayuwang si* 阿育王寺). Disciples such as Muche Daomin 木陳道忞 (1596–1674) and Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661) ei-

ther accompanied Miyun or dispersed elsewhere. In 1630, Yinyuan returned to Mount Huangbo alone, composing the poem Feeling of Returning to the Mountains (*Hui shan you gan* 回山有感) under the intermingling of all kinds of feelings. This is also his first poetic invocation of “Huangbo tastes bitter”:

Where dense clouds¹¹ disperse, each returns to their own paths,
Alone revealing my true nature.
The stream stretches like a white ribbon,
twelve verdant ridges show their naturalness.
Savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf,
[And] gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken [beauty] of plum blossoms.
Helpless, the spring breeze lightly reveals [the secrets],
As crowds trample and shatter the spring of the old garden.¹²
密雲散處各歸津，獨露尋常本色人。
鑿水一條拖白練，青巒十二迴天真。
細嘗黃檗連根苦，冷看梅花徹骨貧。
無奈東君輕漏泄，紛紛踏碎故園春。

To fully grasp this poem, one must understand its context. During his training at Mount Jinsu (*Jinsu shan* 金粟山), Yinyuan aspired to become Miyun’s Dharma heir. However, Miyun and fellow disciples left Huangbo while Yinyuan was fundraising. Therefore, the lines “where dense clouds disperse, each returns to their own paths” superficially depict scenery with clouds dispersing and revealing his true nature, but in reality, it is about Miyun Yuanwu and his disciples leaving one after another, leaving only Yinyuan.

Although there is no detailed record in the literature as to why Miyun did not wait for Yinyuan’s return, Yinyuan was disappointed to be left alone at Mount Huangbo and was at a loss as to the path of his cultivation. Not only did this mean that he had drifted away from his previous ideals, but how to continue his cultivation became a difficult problem in front of him. In such a depressed state of mind, in this poem, Yinyuan contrasts Huangbo’s “bitter taste” with the plum blossom’s being “poverty-stricken”, which undoubtedly has a self-referential meaning. This is the first layer of connotation of “Huangbo” here: “Huangbo” symbolizes Yinyuan’s personal circumstances and inner turmoil.

Is not the bitter taste of Huangbo a euphemism for the bitter voice of Yinyuan’s heart? Is not the poverty-stricken character of the plum blossom a true reflection of his predicament at that time? However, despite the loss of his heart, the choice of these two special plants for the poem reveals the spiritual resilience of Yinyuan, who is not to succumb to adversity. Even though the roots of Huangbo are bitter, he still wants to “savor”, and the plum blossom endures the bone-chilling cold, but he is able to “gaze coldly”.

The second layer of meaning behind “Huangbo” here may suggest Yinyuan’s spiritual resonance with Huangbo Zen practice and the Huangbo patriarchs. The lines “savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf, gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms” likely allude to koans (*Gong’an* 公案) or verses from earlier patriarchs. Perhaps recalling Master Zhenggan’s legend of “ceasing when bitterness arises 遇苦即止”, the Huangbo patriarchs’ koans on “Huangbo tastes bitter”, and Huangbo Xiyun’s 黃檗希運 verse “How can one obtain the fragrance of plum blossoms without going through the poverty-stricken 不是一翻寒徹骨，爭得梅花撲鼻香”¹³; as expressed in the Chant of Reveal in Hall (*Shang-tang kaishi song* 上堂開示頌), Yinyuan synthesized these elements to craft “savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf, gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms” — a self-exhortation to diligently practice Huangbo Zen and deepen his spiritual cultivation. Soon afterward, Yinyuan lived and practiced at Lion Rock (*Shizi yan* 獅子岩), a remote place in Huangbo Temple. For the next six years, Yinyuan lived here with several novices, including Liangzai Xingchang 良哉性常, Liangye Xingle 良冶性樂, and Liangzhe Xingshan

良者性善, and worked to cultivate the land and build stone steps. Despite the difficult living conditions, they managed to live a simple and fulfilling life.

At the same time, it is not difficult to realize that Yinyuan's writing about the coldness of plum blossoms appeared during this period, and his lifelong love of plum blossoms may also be related to this life encounter.¹⁴

Thus, Yinyuan's early use of "Huangbo" synthesizes literati and Zen traditions, repurposing classical allusions to articulate his struggles while affirming his determination to cultivate Zen amid adversity. In particular, the use of the imagery of "Huangbo" by the patriarchs of Huangbo left a deep impression on Yinyuan. For Yinyuan, invoking "Huangbo" and "plum blossoms" consciously perpetuated the Linji and Huangbo Dharma lineages, reflecting his deliberate construction of a "spiritual and religious authenticity".

2.3. The Expression of the Sentiment "Huangbo Always Thoroughly Poor" 黃檗徹骨貧

At times, Yinyuan fused the phrases "savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf" and "gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms" into the compound expression "Huangbo always thoroughly poor". This was not mere wordplay but a deliberate expansion of the "Huangbo" imagery to embody sectarian identity and spiritual resilience.

Huangbo has always been thoroughly poor,
With no Dharma to burden others.
No matter how chaotic the Zen lineage is like hemp seeds,
It will not add dust to the eyes. (Expression of Something 即事有懷)¹⁵
黃檗由來徹骨貧, 了無一法累諸人。
任從亂統如麻粟, 更不重添眼裏塵。

Here, Yinyuan reflects on the Huangbo lineage's steadfastness amid the chaos of late Ming Zen. During the late Ming Dynasty, Zen was extremely prosperous, even triggering a struggle between the Linji and Caodong sects 曹洞宗 over the mainstream status of Zen. However, in the face of the proliferation of Zen sects, there was no better management control within Zen. The rapid proliferation of lineages at that time led to a proliferation of confusion about orthodoxy, and the Zen world was thrown into chaos. It is from this that Yinyuan's sentiments in this verse are derived.¹⁶

In this poem, Yinyuan links "Huangbo" with "poverty-stricken", crafting the expression "Huangbo always thoroughly poor". The combination of imagery also implies the fusion of the qualities of "Huangbo" and "plum blossom". In this verse, Yinyuan transplants the poverty experienced by the "plum blossom" onto the "Huangbo" as a metaphor for the Ōbaku sect's steadfastness in standing proudly in the midst of the chaos of the Zen world.

During that period, the need to codify Zen lineages had long been urgent. Among the Huangbo Zen masters, the first to devote himself to this task was Miyun Yuanwu, who compiled a genealogy of the lineage of all of the ancestors, advocating clear Dharma lineage and organizing Dharma relationships, but the draft was not yet completed. Subsequently, Feiyin Tongrong, the abbot of Huangbo, inherited the legacy of Miyun Yuanwu and compiled the *Wudeng yantong* 五燈嚴統 [Corrected Five Lamps] and *Chan zong yuqiao ji* 禪宗漁樵集 [The Zen Collection of Fishing and Woodcutting], both of which attempted to define the transmission of the Dharma strictly and to rectify any deviations. Yinyuan once wrote a poem to praise him: "Since my master solemnly rectified the orthodox Zen lineage, allowing neither improper claims nor chaotic doctrines to disrupt the sect's discipline, the Dharma lineage has remained as steadfast as the tripod of a thousand year. The luminous teaching of Zen now radiates throughout the world, perpetuating its glory for all ages 直至我師嚴正統, 無容僭竊混宗綱。自茲永定千秋鼎, 萬古聯輝四海揚" (Reading

the Corrected Five Lamps 閱五燈嚴統).¹⁷ This poem indicates Yinyuan's endorsement of the concept of "strict orthodoxy" (*yantong* 嚴統).

As a matter of fact, Yinyuan's ideal has always been to promote the idea of "strict orthodoxy" and to correct the evils of Zen. Although Yinyuan stated in his verse that as long as he did not associate himself with the statements "Zen lineage is like hemp seeds" and "it will not add dust to the eyes", it is more like a momentary angry remark when compared with his actual actions later on. In 1653, the *Corrected Five Lamps* was printed. Regrettably, the publication led to a legal dispute, resulting in Feiyin's defeat and the destruction of the book. This incident deeply unsettled Yinyuan, who was residing in Japan at the time. He pondered the following: "If those who are in power are not able to remove the bad customs and commend the good, but instead support the evil and destroy the righteous, then where will the Chinese culture and civilization go? 當道不能激濁揚清, 反扶邪摧正, 則中華文物, 眼目何在" (Reply to Chief Monk Qilin Wude 復棲林無得首座).¹⁸ Soon afterward, Yinyuan presided over the reprinting of the *Corrected Five Lamps* at the Fumonji 普門寺. After the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect, he was even more unswervingly implementing and practicing the thought, resolutely opposing the residence of foreign disciples in Huangbo Temple, and always strictly guaranteeing the orthodoxy of the Dharma transmission. Through Yinyuan's adherence to the "strict orthodoxy" of thought in his early verse and his implementation of the thought in his later actions, it is not difficult to see the reasons for the various "authenticity" expressions in his verses.

We can discern that Yinyuan broadly supported "strict orthodoxy" and championed institutional legitimacy. Though, at times, he spoke of allowing "chaotic lineages" (*luan-tong* 亂統), his true intent was to urge the Ōbaku sect to steadfastly uphold orthodoxy amid such disorder-ridden adversity. At this juncture, the "Huangbo" imagery represented for Yinyuan both his original aspiration to adhere to the Dharma in harsh circumstances and an emblem of sectarian orthodoxy—carrying profound connotations of "authenticity". This is evident from Yinyuan's early poetic insistence on "strict orthodoxy" and his resolute implementation of these principles after relocating to Japan.

In summary, "Huangbo" evolved from a bitter-tasting plant into a fixed imagery of literary and Zen poetic discourse. This imagery emerged early in Yinyuan's poetic compositions. For Yinyuan, "Huangbo" not only hinted at his personal tribulations but became an image embodying "authenticity". In Yinyuan's writings, "Huangbo" and "poverty-stricken" transitioned from juxtaposition to fusion. "Huangbo" served as his deliberate vehicle for perpetuating the Linji and Huangbo Dharma lineages—a crucial symbol asserting his sect's ability to maintain its path through the chaotic Zen landscape. Therefore, "Huangbo" transcended botany and the literary metaphor to become, in Yinyuan's mind, a representation of "authenticity"; it implies both his own situations and sentiments, as well as his sect and its teachings.

3. The Meaning of Huangbo's "Authenticity" and Zen

If, prior to Yinyuan's journey eastward, the literary representation of the "Huangbo" imagery primarily engaged with personal situations, spiritual cultivation, and sentiments, then in the initial period following his arrival in Japan, this imagery became profoundly integrated with the distinctive characteristics of Zen. This shift directly correlates with "authenticity" construction, manifesting in two aspects.

The first aspect is the establishment of orthodoxy to meet Japan's expectations for Zen origins. During the Edo period, the Japanese religious community was under the control of the Shogunate 幕府.¹⁹ With the development of "Honmatsu Seido 本末制度" and the "Jidan Seido 寺檀制度", Japanese Buddhism gradually fell into a state of paralysis, and the

monastic community also became inert, which gave rise to corruption. Japanese Buddhism urgently needed the revitalization of Zen’s practical spirit of “directly pointing to people’s minds” and desired Chinese Dharma to reform local traditions. The abbot of Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nagasaki 長崎, Yiran Xingrong 逸然性融 (1601–1668), urged Yinyuan to come to Japan several times, and this was one of the attempts of the Japanese Buddhist community to find a way out.²⁰

The second aspect is the propagation of orthodoxy through the conscious dissemination of authentic Zen spirit in Japan. From Yinyuan’s perspective, accepting invitations to propagate Dharma also involved personal initiative. He consciously sought to spread the orthodox Zen spirit. In order to facilitate dissemination, he also needed to actively construct himself as a representative of orthodox Zen.

Whether actively spreading orthodox Dharma or responding to Japan’s expectations for the origin of Zen, Yinyuan had to consciously construct “authenticity”, establishing himself as its representative. Huangbo Zen was precisely an important way for Yinyuan to achieve this goal. Hence, in the early days after arriving in Japan, “Huangbo” imagery was intrinsically connected with Dharma. For Yinyuan, “Huangbo” represented Huangbo Zen, style, and orthodox Zen spirit.

Therefore, Yinyuan crossed over to Japan to spread the Dharma, and through the binding of the imagery of “Huangbo” and the characteristics of Huangbo Zen, he achieved a concrete depiction of Huangbo Zen. He consciously combined “Huangbo” with “staff is hot at the tip” (*bangtou la* 棒頭辣) and “earnest words” (*laopo xinqie* 老婆心切) in verses, imbuing Huangbo Zen with the significance of “authenticity”. The intense urgency of Huangbo’s “beating with the staff” (*banghe* 棒喝) and “earnest advice” (*kukou poxin* 苦口婆心) of Huangbo’s Laopo Zen (*laopo chan* 老婆禪) created balanced tension between doctrinal transmission and local adaptation. This directly responded to Japan’s longing for Chinese Zen origins while paving the way for Huangbo Zen’s foreign implantation.

3.1. *The Sharp Wit and Sudden Shout, Pointing Directly to the Path* 機鋒棒喝，直指門徑

When journeying east, Yinyuan deeply understood that Dharma transmission’s success depended on using the power of “authenticity” to break the decayed traditions of Japanese Zen. Japanese Buddhists then retained sectarian forms but lost their spiritual essence. Therefore, Yinyuan first chose the Ōbaku sect’s “sharp wit and sudden shout” to break stagnation. Under sticks that severed delusions, the fierce Zen style in his verses thunderously reshaped Japanese monastics’ understanding of orthodox Zen.

In 1653, Yinyuan was invited by Zen Master Yiran Xingrong, the abbot of Kōfukuji in Japan, to travel east to propagate the Dharma. He started his journey on the 21st day of the 6th month of the following year. Upon his arrival in Japan, Yinyuan initially resided at Kōfukuji in Nagasaki, later assuming the role of abbot at Mount Seijuzan 聖壽山 Sōfukuji 崇福寺 in Nagasaki and Fumonji in Settsu 攝津. He diligently disseminated Buddhist teachings by visiting renowned temples and ancient monasteries in Japan. With the establishment of the Huangbo Temple on Mount Yamato 太白山, Yinyuan had a dedicated platform for preaching and teaching. He composed numerous poems to elucidate and educate, consistently portraying the essence of Zen teachings. These literary works exhibit a fervent and unrestrained poetic style, embodying a broader and more expansive poetic realm and reflecting his profound aspiration to showcase the Linji Zen tradition and the Ōbaku sect’s distinctive style.

The Linji Zen and Huangbo styles described by Yinyuan are not simply depictions but strategic constructions of “authenticity”. He frequently incorporated ancestral cases such as “Linji’s Great Enlightenment” (*Linji dawu* 臨濟大悟), particularly using Linji Yixuan’s “three questions and three beatings” episode. *Jingde chuandenglu* 景德傳燈錄 [Transmis-

sion of the Lamp Published in the Jingde Era] records the following: when Linji Yixuan first visited Zen Master Huangbo Xiyun, he inquired, “What is the purpose of Bodhidharma (*Puti Damo* 菩提達摩) to come here from the West? 如何是祖師西來的的意”. Huangbo then administered three strikes to Linji in response to his three inquiries. Yixuan did not understand the intention of Huangbo Xiyun’s action and left. When he met Zen Master Dayu 大愚 (?-?), Yixuan suddenly realized why he had been beaten and said, “The Buddhist teachings are not numerous 佛法無多子”.²¹ Huangbo Xiyun repeatedly interrupted Linji Yixuan’s persistence in the main idea of Buddhism through the severe method of hitting. This not only implies the strict educational method of beating but also indicates that the purpose of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West (the great righteousness of Buddhism 佛法大義) was originally “emptiness” and should not be attached to “existence”. This renowned Zen koan not only serves as a paradigm for Zen practitioners within the Zen tradition but has also been a favored motif for literati to incorporate into their poetry since the Song Dynasty (Hou 2021, pp. 50–56). By recreating the Zen patriarchs’ style, Yinyuan reinforced Ōbaku sect–Linji blood ties while embodying Zen essence through concrete actions.

Before crossing over to Japan, Yinyuan had also described the Ōbaku sect’s use of the stick, such as “Where the staff’s tip points directly, who is unaware of the grace 棒頭直指處，若個不知恩” (Back to the Liaotian Residence at Lion Rock 回獅岩遼天居).²² These merely used “stick” as a reference to Zen tradition without explicit Ōbaku sectarian identity. After arriving in Nagasaki, however, Yinyuan’s verses show a marked shift in the style of such depictions and begin to intentionally connect the word “Huangbo” with Zen. This is shown in the following two examples:

Huangbo[’s staff] is hot at the tip,
Held aloft on the crown of Fusang.
Feeling the pain of the faith of three blows,
Singing a long song to complete the nine stages. (First time in Fumonji 初入普門)²³
黃檗棒頭辣，扶桑頂上擎。
痛領三拳信，長歌奏九成。
The difference between the lost and the enlightened is like the difference
between the sky and the earth,
The difference between the wise and the foolish has existed since ancient times.
After being beaten three times by Mount Bo²⁴[’s staff],
Achieved enlightenment and attained the state of open-mindedness and
joyfulness. (Imitating Hanshan’s Poetry 擬寒山詩)²⁵
迷悟隔天壤，賢愚自古今。
檗山三頓棒，痛快廓胸襟。

The first poem adapts Linji’s three-beatings koan; superficially describing Huangbo’s stick reaching Japanese heads, it actually conveys the following: first, Huangbo Zen is distinguished by its stern rigor, which is fundamentally rooted in the practice of “the sharp wit and sudden shout”; secondly, the orthodox Huangbo Zen was introduced to Japan, and if people can deeply understand its principles, they can attain enlightenment. This reveals Yinyuan’s ardent hopes for the Ōbaku sect’s success overseas and the continuation of orthodox transmission.

“Mount Bo” in the second poem is “Mount Huangbo”, which is similar in imagery to “HuangBo”. Yinyuan believed that since ancient times, there had been a vast difference between confusion and enlightenment. If a person can deeply understand the meditation techniques of the Ōbaku sect, then they can feel the pleasure of enlightenment.

Yinyuan’s early verses about Zen were more based on the koan itself. In the later depiction, he delves deeper, emphasizing the particular scenarios in which the Zen master

refrains from using words when interacting with disciples, instead using the approach of “beating with the staff” to directly indicate the path. In his poems, Yinyuan uses words such as “hot” and “pain” to evoke the reader’s direct experience of receiving the Huangbo’s staff. It is as if the reader is present and feels the sharpness of the stick cutting the path of reason like a thunderbolt. This makes people realize that Buddhism transcends the “emptiness” of language.

This type of work intentionally associates Zen with Huangbo in the sectarian sense, which actually implies affiliation with the sect. Through fixed “Huangbo–beating with the staff” pairings, Yinyuan transformed Linji’s common Zen style into the Ōbaku sect’s unique identifier. Yinyuan forsakes rational thinking and intentionally emphasizes the employment of strong language to establish a swift pace in the verses. This serves to offer visual and sensory excitement and effectively conveys a rigorous and intense style. Simultaneously, the Huangbo Zen lineage, which champions the abandonment of fixation on words and encourages intuitive understanding, is also prominently showcased. Through this strategic literary construction, Yinyuan elevated Huangbo Zen from a regional branch of Chinese Zen Buddhism into the paramount symbol of “authentic” Zen, thereby definitively establishing its status as the embodiment of Zen orthodoxy within Japanese Buddhist circles.

3.2. Patient Advice, Earnest Words 苦口叮嚀，老婆心切

In Yinyuan’s poems and verses, in addition to the direct presentation of Huangbo’s Zen style in order to portray “authenticity”, “Laopo Zen” becomes another expression. At the end of “Linji’s Great Enlightenment”, Linji Yixuan returned to Mount Huangbo for further teachings. Huangbo asked, “Why did you come back so quickly?” Yixuan replied, “Only because of your earnest words”.

Here, “earnest words” refer to the Zen master’s painstaking exhortations and guidance to disciples, essentially equating to “earnest advice”. This aligns with the “bitterness” in the imagery associated with “Huangbo”, thereby reflecting a facet of Huangbo’s Zen that emphasizes heartfelt admonitions. Consequently, expressions such as “Insight into the Zen master’s painstaking heart 覷破老婆心” and “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen 黃檗老婆禪” frequently appear in Yinyuan’s poetic verses. This demonstrates Yinyuan’s inheritance of the profound dedication of ancestral masters in guiding disciples. This aspect represents another dimension of the “authenticity” of Huangbo’s Zen, beyond the sharp wit and sudden shout, embodying the ancestral masters’ diligent and nurturing teaching, akin to the gentle spring breeze and nourishing rain.

As a Chinese Zen monk propagating Dharma in Japan, Yinyuan inevitably faced numerous criticisms during his early years. However, he ultimately resolved these through “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen”. The Chronicle records that upon the master’s arrival at Fumonji, a multitude of individuals from diverse backgrounds expressed skepticism and uncertainty, leading to the emergence of contentious debates. Nevertheless, Yinyuan remained serene and collected, as documented in *Hearing Slander (Wenbang 聞謗)*: “I hear sarcasm and see praise as the wind blows in my ears 聞譏風過耳，見譽耳過風”.²⁶ “Without being bound by external sights and sounds, one can attain true freedom and ease. Without pursuing external material things and fame, one can show one’s unique style and light 不見不聞兩自在，無求無謔各風光” (*Hearing Slander 聞謗*).²⁷ However, even though Yinyuan was able to maintain a calm state of mind, the idea of promoting Huangbo Zen in this foreign land did not allow Yinyuan to ignore the slander. Since Yinyuan wished to establish himself as the representative of “authenticity”, he had to respond to all kinds of skepticism.

In this situation, Yinyuan's response was extremely skillful. On the one hand, as a senior monk, Yinyuan had his own temperament and did not engage in a head-on battle with the voices of skepticism, while on the other hand, he needed to stabilize his own reputation and status within Buddhism. Therefore, Yinyuan chose to combine his two needs and conveyed many of his responses to the Zen people through the vehicle of verse. In the year that Yinyuan wrote the poem *Hearing Slander*, he also wrote *Four Songs for the Zen Practitioners* (*Shi zhongchanren sishou* 示眾禪人四首):

Ancestor Dharma faced the wall for nine years,
 Without any distraction in his mind.
 Seeking one's own mind one finds it unobtainable,
 Who in the great world can understand me?
 Daily meditation accompanied by a burner of incense
 Without comparing myself with others.
 Stay away from the world and keep your heart pure,
 Today the world is still full of troubles and impurities.
 Those who learn to imitate the insane behavior of the Zen masters
 Need to be tempered with a few iron lashes.
 If one can have an epiphany at the moment of the lashes,
 One can understand the earnest advice of Huangbo's Zen teachings.
 Practitioners should seize the moment to comprehend Zen,
 Don't pursue wild fox Zen that has no foundation.
 One should have a pure and righteous vision like a mirror,
 With a wink of the brow separate three thousand worlds.²⁸

九年面壁嘴盧都，到底胸中一物無。
 不遇覓心不可得，大千誰識老臊胡？
 日常靜坐一爐香，莫與諸人較短長。
 洗耳清流賣潔漢，至今濁氣滿滄浪。
 方來諸子學瘋癲，吃得當機幾鐵鞭。
 設若棒頭開只眼，始知黃檗老婆禪。
 衲僧徹底薦機先，莫趁無根野干禪。
 正眼分明淨似鏡，眉毛一眨隔三千。

The poem begins with self-deprecating irony, with the author superficially belittling himself as "without any distraction in mind" and "unknown", yet implying his ascetic cultivation and genuine learning through allusions to Bodhidharma's misunderstood practice. Next, the habit of daily meditation and the attitude of not being concerned with rumors and gossip show that the self has a calm and transcendent mind with a clear conscience. After responding to the naysayers, Yinyuan followed up with a defense of his Huangbo Zen teachings. Huangbo's Zen practice is so harsh that it is inevitable that one will have to endure "a few iron lashes" at the beginning of the practice. However, if one is able to achieve enlightenment under the whips, then one will be able to realize the "earnest advice" of Huangbo's Zen practice. Yinyuan stresses that both aspects constitute Huangbo's complete "authentic" Dharma dimensions. Yinyuan emphasized that it was because of this "Laopo Zen" that he shared with his master that he took the same pains in teaching his students, touching them with his wit and helping them to understand the truth that transcends words or thoughts and not to be trapped in heresies such as "Wild Fox Zen" (*yehu chan* 野狐禪).

In this way, Yinyuan not only answered the questioning through the verse but also explained the characteristics of Huangbo Zen in depth, finally making a distinction between "Laopo Zen" and "Wild Fox Zen". He not only demonstrated to all people that

he had directly inherited his ancestors' painstaking efforts to teach them but also further emphasized the "authenticity" of Huangbo's Zen teachings.

Thereafter, Yinyuan also utilized this expression from time to time in his verses: "Moment after moment, only Huangbo is bitter. Insight into the Zen master's painstaking heart and compassion makes even the emptiness seem narrow 一刻復一刻，苦口惟黃檗。覷破老婆心，虛空嫌太窄" (Five Chants of the Passing of the Years 年運推遷頌五首).²⁹ He emphasizes "Laopo Zen" as tirelessly permeating students through persistent teaching. In his other poem To Zen Practitioner Liangji Who is Returning to Visit His Mother (*Liangji chanren gaogui xingmu yi ji shi zhi* 良寂禪人告歸省母以偈示之), it is written that "One can use the Zen gatha to comfort and enlighten the mother of Mencius. Laopo Zen allows one to completely transcend the bondage of the world. There is nothing more than to transcend Huangbo Zen, to live up to one's inner nature, and to reach the state of being in harmony with the Buddha nature 可述偈言慰孟母，管教透脫老婆禪。掀翻黃檗無多子，不負摩耶方寸田".³⁰ This incorporates Confucian ethics through "Mencius' Mother Moving Three Times 孟母三遷", using maternal imagery to resonate with the Ōbaku sect's compassionate guidance and fully manifesting its earnest benevolence in instructing disciples.

After Yinyuan arrived in Japan, his construction of "authenticity" essentially purified and reinterpreted Huangbo Zen's core spirit, transforming abstract Zen into perceptible and practical paradigms through poetry. Expanding "Huangbo" imagery from "bitter taste" cultivation metaphors to symbols of a Huangbo Zen, he successfully integrated Dharma practice with cultural identity. The "sharp wit and sudden shout" and "earnest words" in Yinyuan's writings both uphold orthodox Dharma and demonstrate flexible adaptation to foreign environments; the former thunderously destroys stale conventions, and the latter earnestly guides disciples across cultural barriers. This construction not only responded to Japanese Buddhism's thirst for "authenticity" but also transformed Huangbo's Zen style into spiritual resources acceptable to Japanese society through "authenticity" as a medium.

4. "Authenticity" and the Ōbaku Sect

In 1661, Yinyuan was 70 years of age. At that time, as a result of the assiduous endeavors of Zen monks such as Ryōkei Shōsen 龍溪宗潛 (1602–1670) and Tokūō Myōkō 禿翁妙周 (1611–1681), both of the Linji sect Myōshinji 妙心寺 in Japan, Yinyuan was able to garner the support of a considerable number of official political forces.³¹ In that year, the Tokugawa 德川 Shogunate granted permission for the selection of a new temple site for Yinyuan. The new temple was built on Mount Yamato, situated in the Uji District of Kyoto Prefecture, and it functioned as a Linji Zen training center. After the opening of the new temple, Yinyuan learned from the master of Huangbo and named it "Wanfu 萬福 Zen Temple of Mount Huangbo" to show that he would not forget the ancestral home of Huangbo in Fuqing. The founding of the New Huangbo temple officially marked the establishment of the Ōbaku sect in Japan, and from then on, there were two Huangbos in the East and the West.³²

Yinyuan recognized that the transmission of sectarian orthodoxy relied not merely on ancestral monasteries' physical existence but also on constructing a spiritual discourse system bridging China and Japan through "Huangbo" nomenclature. Kyoto's Wanfu Zen Temple should not be Fuqing's replica but should rather witness "authenticity" flourishing abroad, inheriting Chinese Zen's "authentic" spirit and religious significance. To further establish the Japanese Ōbaku sect's orthodoxy and spiritual core while connecting Sino-Japanese Huangbo traditions, Yinyuan began transplanting and expanding sectarian "Huangbo" references in his poetry. Deliberately expanding "Huangbo" from Fuqing's ancestral temple to Kyoto's monastery in verses, he blurred spatial boundaries between "East-

ern” and “Western” Huangbo. Thus “Huangbo” transformed from an exclusive Chinese referent into a shared Sino–Japanese designation, while “authenticity” shed geographical constraints to become a transcultural spiritual resource.

4.1. From “Ancient Ōbaku Sect” to “New Ōbaku Sect”: Yinyuan’s Expectation of “Authenticity”

In the years following the establishing of the New Huangbo Temple, Yinyuan led the development of the Ōbaku sect in Japan with great ambition.³³ As he wrote in his *Written by Chance in First time to Mount Bo* (*Chu dao Boshan ou cheng* 初到檗山偶成), “The foundations of Zen were strengthened by the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Japan. It became a remarkable event that the orthodox lineage of Zen spread across the ocean to this place. Through the Zen Dharma practice at Mount Yamato, the doctrines of the millennia-old Ōbaku Sect has been revitalized once again 新開黃檗壯禪基，正脈流傳海外奇。一片太和溫道義，千秋黃檗振宗綱”。³⁴ Here, “Ōbaku sect” gradually enriched its connotations to encompass both Eastern and Western Huangbo. The phrase “orthodox lineage” binds Japanese missionary work to Chinese ancestral legitimacy, while the statement “the millennia-old Ōbaku Sect has been revitalized once again” metaphorically declares Yinyuan’s ambition to rebuild sectarian frameworks. The expression “remarkable event” holds dual meaning: marveling at Huangbo’s cultural transplantation while dispelling “peripheral” identity anxieties, proclaiming that overseas propagation could achieve eternal merit. This revealed Yinyuan’s ardent hopes for the “New Ōbaku sect” to bear “authenticity”.

At first, Yinyuan still clearly distinguished the references to the Eastern and Western Huangbo in his poetry, referring to the two Huangbos as “Ancient” and “New”, respectively. For example, “Presenting the Ancient Ōbaku sect, transcendental and concise in discourse 托出古黃檗，冷然語無多” (To Celebrate the 60th Birthday of the Temple Master Ryōkei 贈寺主龍溪六旬初度).³⁵ “In the newly opened dojo at Mount Huangbo, a group of practitioners have gathered. This is the place where the core teachings and tenets are straightened out and the righteous Dharma is passed on 新開檗岫通玄侶，直指綱宗正法壇” (To Revered Mr. Ceng also known as Lay Buddhist Huang again 復示層公黃居士).³⁶ However, Yinyuan’s references and descriptions in his poems underwent a transformation. Whether he was writing for personal expression or for public display, he began to focus on and frequently use the term “Mount Bo” to refer to the New Ōbaku sect. In the poems, there are phrases such as “When the turmoil is removed, the Zen hall at Mount Bo appears pure and dignified. The truth of the universal illumination of Zen wisdom and the manifestation of its teachings can be experienced wherever you are 白雲斂盡檗山堂，處處流輝大道彰” (Mid-Autumn in Guimao 癸卯中秋)³⁷. Abandoning “Ancient/New” distinctions, “universal illumination of Zen wisdom” emphasizes Huangbo Zen’s universality. It was no longer confined to China or Japan but penetrated all lands like light. Previously, “Mount Bo” was used to denote Mount Huangbo in Yifeng and Huangbo Temple in Fuqing.

In addition to the conceptual expansion brought about by the change in the designation of Mount Bo, Yinyuan continued to write about Mount Bo in Uji and Huangbo Zen together in his poems and verses:

When a Zen practitioner comes to the Hall of Mount Bo,
His mind is naturally at peace with the Zen teachings of Mount Yamato. (To a
Zen Practitioner 示某禪人)³⁸
禪人逗到檗山堂，觸著太和心自涼。
Mount Bo is lush, green and vibrant,
Its merits and blessings are increasing. (To Kogawa Matazaemon 示小川又左衛門)³⁹
檗山添翠茂，福德轉增高。

This way of writing is not much different from the previous depiction of Mount Huangbo in Fuqing, which also combines “Mount Bo” with the characteristics of Huangbo Zen, but it can subconsciously strengthen people’s awareness of the existence of the Ōbaku sect in Japan as the “main lineage” of Zen. By overlapping Huangbo Hall with realms of cultivation, Yinyuan constructed the Japanese Ōbaku sect as an “authentic” field of Dharma realization. This proved that equal enlightenment could occur at Kyoto’s “Huangbo Hall” without Chinese dependence. The latter poem uses tangible natural imagery to concretize Huangbo’s Japanese prosperity, suggesting that “authenticity” intensified through cultural adaptation rather than being diluted through transplantation. It is through this substitution of terms that Yinyuan gradually made the inner spiritual meaning of “New Ōbaku sect” and “Ancient Ōbaku sect” equal, while the “authenticity” of the “Ancient Ōbaku sect” was originally molded into the same meaning as a “New Ōbaku sect”. In this process, the connotation of “authenticity” was naturally grafted onto the objective existence of Huangbo Temple in Uji.

Furthermore, Yinyuan’s verses on Mount Yamato Huangbo’s architecture reveal intentions of spiritual transplantation. When establishing the New Ōbaku sect, Yinyuan aimed to replicate the architectural layout of Mount Huangbo in Fuqing in the Ming Dynasty and create Mount Yamato Huangbo Temple. Nevertheless, he deliberately avoided physical descriptions, instead shaping spiritual connotations to make temple spaces vessels of “authenticity”:

Tiny things can show profound meaning,
Anywhere can be a place of meditation.
Through Zen practice one achieves great enlightenment,
Becomes a pillar of strength.
Buddhism is capable of embracing all beings in all their diversity,
The teachings of Zen are simple but cannot be measured in words.
Culture and spirituality have been revitalized at Mount Yamato,
the orthodox lineage of Mount Bo will be passed down from generation to
generation. (The Beam is Raised in the Abbot’s Hall on the Fifteenth Day of
Mid-Spring 仲春念五日方丈上梁)⁴⁰
拈來莖草卻鋒芒，到處為標水月場。
徹底大機堪大用，果然成棟又成梁。
門開不二千差攝，法演無多莫可量。
此日太和風雅振，檠山正脈永流長。

Ancient wood born in the Spirit Mountain,
Not far from thousands of miles across the ocean is bound to be extraordinary.
As a pillar of Zen today,
How can one be afraid to take on the responsibility of supporting the great cause.
Zen opens the door to liberation and invites all beings to enter,
The teachings are unparalleled in their ability to explain the truth.
The teachings are like a huge umbrella covering heaven and earth,
Practitioners from all directions come spontaneously. (The Beam is Raised in
Zen Hall on the Twenty-Second Day of the Eighth Month 八月廿二日禪堂上梁)⁴¹
天生古木萃靈山，萬里飄來非等閒。
此日為梁成大器，千秋頂柱豈辭艱。
門開解脫堪同入，法闡真空孰與班。
蓋覆乾坤綿密密，從教八面自來攀。

Although the architecture of the New Huangbo Temple imitates the style of the Ancient Ōbaku sect to some extent, when writing verses about the architecture of the New Huangbo temples, Yinyuan did not emphasize depicting their external performance or

even mentioning their basic architectural patterns but often concentrated on praising their symbolic meaning and spiritual value. In his verses, Yinyuan never skimmed on rendering it with grand and atmospheric vocabulary.

Yinyuan employs the metaphor of “tiny things” being able to “become a pillar of strength” to signify that although the Ōbaku sect was established through simple means, it became capable of supporting both the orthodox Dharma lineage and Japanese Zen Buddhism. This illustrates how its “authenticity” lies in its spiritual essence rather than material appearances. Furthermore, through explicit descriptions of the arduous maritime transportation of timber to Japan, the text implicitly analogizes the tribulations of transmitting the Dharma across the sea, emphasizing the extraordinary significance of how the “authenticity” could only manifest their extraordinary value in foreign lands after enduring hardships. Yinyuan declared Huangbo as Japan’s independent Buddhist pillar whose “authenticity” required millennial guardianship.

In Yinyuan’s writings, “Mount Huangbo” was not an architectural replication but a spiritual dojo bearing an “orthodox lineage of Zen” entrusted with missions of “authenticity”. Thus “Huangbo” completed its transformation from geographical dependence to spiritual autonomy. Both the overseas extension of the Chinese Zen lineage and the new tradition grew in Japanese religious soil.

4.2. *The “New Ōbaku Sect” as the “Old Hometown”: The Spiritual Dwelling of Yinyuan*

In truth, whether it was the naming of the new “Huangbo” temple for the new temple at Mount Yamato in Uji or the construction of a new temple modeled on the layout of the Huangbo Temple in Fuqing, another layer of demand behind the construction of “authenticity” was reflected: the construction of “authenticity” is not only a religious strategy but also hides Yinyuan’s personal need for spiritual refuge.

Despite all of the sights and sounds of the foreign land, the shadow of his homeland always lingered in Yinyuan’s mind and always surged in the dead of night. “In my dream, I wanted to go back to my homeland but I couldn’t, and I rolled over and woke up still in Fusang 夢裏欲歸歸未得，翻身仍舊在扶桑” (Morning writing thoughts in Late Autumn Warmth 小陽春早書懷).⁴² However, after waking up from the dream, he was still thousands of miles away from his hometown; how could he not be disappointed? After leaving Huangbo Temple in Fuqing, Yinyuan made a commitment to the residents of Huangbo to go back to his homeland after three years. During his initial years in Japan, Yinyuan consistently expressed his intention to fulfill this commitment and return to his native land. Between 1656 and 1657, he received multiple messages from the Huangbo monks urging him to come back.⁴³ Yinyuan hesitated on the decision several times before ultimately choosing to stay in Japan. Yinyuan had a strong desire to return to his homeland, and he felt guilty that “promise has not been fulfilled after three years 依約三年信未還” (Thoughts at Dusk on a Pavilion 登亭晚懷).⁴⁴ However, he had not yet completed his mission of propagating the Dharma, so he could not return home so easily. After giving up and returning to China, Yinyuan became more and more firm in his beliefs and finally succeeded in establishing Huangbo for several years, realizing his long-cherished wish. In 1666, at the age of seventy-five, Yinyuan wrote this verse:

I have come to the age of seventy-five living in another country,
I have traveled a long and confusing road.
By chance, the New Huangbo Temple was built,
As if it had temporarily become my old hometown.
The aged naturally enjoy comfort and happiness,
While the wise rely entirely on the power of the Buddha’s teachings.
The true Zen wind blows in the forest,

No matter how the world changes. (Twenty-five Chants for the Twilight of the Year 歲暮吟廿五首)⁴⁵

寄居七十五星霜，曆遍東西路渺茫。
偶爾乍開新槩苑，儼然暫作舊家鄉。
老人自得安閒樂，智者全憑法力強。
一片真風動林野，不妨地久與天長。

Composed as the Japanese Ōbaku sect stabilized and Yinyuan retired to Laosong Hall (*Laosong tang* 老松堂), this poem interweaves mission summaries, complex sentiments about his homeland, and a transcendent twilight mentality. Through this poem, it is not difficult for us to see the psychological motive behind all of the actions of this old man in a foreign country, which is to regard this “New Ōbaku sect” as his “Old hometown”. In this way, he seeks the old image of his hometown of Huangbo through the New Ōbaku sect in front of his eyes to comfort his endless homesickness. By capturing a sense of familiarity in a similar environment, he is able to enjoy “comfort and happiness”. At the same time, Yinyuan fully integrated into the Japanese religious environment by expressing the “authenticity” that he had constructed throughout his life through the statement “The true Zen wind blows in the forest”.

During his years as the abbot of the New Ōbaku sect, Yinyuan consoled himself by saying, “Crossed the ocean to establish a New Ōbaku sect, showing the true face of Zen for just a moment. No matter where I am, the teachings of the Ōbaku sect are the same, so how can I forget that old green mountain? 杖挑海外新黃槩，獨露面門頃刻間。南北東西渾一致，何曾味卻舊青山” (Nostalgia 懷舊).⁴⁶ He believed that “authenticity” transcends geographical differences. Whether in China or Japan, as long as one practices the Dharma, there is no difference. He also emphasized that he had never forgotten his homeland and always buried homesickness in his heart. Nevertheless, upon attaining success and stepping down from his role, Yinyuan was freed from the heavy burden of sustaining the sect, leading to the resurgence of his yearning for his homeland.

In 1664, Muan Xingtao 木庵性瑫 took over as the abbot of Wanfu Temple, and Yinyuan retired to Laosong Hall, devoting himself to writing. Throughout this period, Yinyuan generated a significant body of work portraying the landscapes of his tranquil existence. Nevertheless, in his verses describing the New Ōbaku sect, the old shadow of the Huangbo in his hometown always loomed:

I am far removed from the world’s distractions,
[And] am able to travel with ease wherever I go.
Whether I am sitting or lying down, I never forget the serenity of the Songyin Hall,
Whether I leave or return, I always miss the embrace of Mount Bo.
As the years pass, I still cling to my old path,
Which has undergone countless changes with the ebb and flow of time.
The road I disembarked on to return home was peaceful and smooth,
[And] what a joy it was to enjoy a carefree life. (The Boat Returns to Mount Bo on the Twenty-Fifth Day 二十五日舟回槩山)⁴⁷
塵勞迴脫老風騷，隨處遨遊步轉高。
坐臥不忘松隱裏，去來常戀槩山阿。
兩輪環繞舊時路，一氣升沉長劫波。
登岸到家平坦坦，安閒無事樂如何。

After laying down his heavy burden and retreating to Laosong Hall, Yinyuan could at last honestly express his innermost thoughts amidst the boundless relaxation and joy of “I never forget the serenity of the Songyin Hall” and “I always miss the embrace of Mount Bo”. Even though he had already reached a state of being free from worldly concerns and could roam freely without being bound by sectarian matters, what Yinyuan still thought about

day and night while traveling was “Songyin Hall” and “Mount Bo” on Mount Yamato. These two sentences already convey the author’s strong sense of belonging to the New Ōbaku sect.

Yinyuan, then in the twilight of his life, was keenly aware that he would never have the opportunity to revisit his homeland. Moreover, he acknowledged that his homeland had likely experienced substantial transformations: “Unfortunately, the former homes have been deserted, the once prosperous and beautiful land is now a battlefield 可惜舊家成兔窟，一團錦繡作沙場” (Feelings on Receiving a Letter from Homeland 聞故國信有感).⁴⁸ The war and turmoil after the Qing army entered the country had turned the once prosperous area into a wilderness.

Nevertheless, Yinyuan found solace in his spiritual realm while residing on Mount Bo; thus, he did not excessively mourn. His poems often reveal a sense of tranquility, mirroring the simplicity and naturalness of his later years and his fully enlightened spiritual realm. In 1673, Master Yinyuan peacefully passed away at the age of 82 on Mount Huangbo in Kyoto. In his final farewell, we can perceive an enlightened outlook on life and a state of spiritual practice that can be deemed as perfect. “The staff that came from the west revitalized the Zen forests and created Mount Bo, which naturally led to inner freedom and liberation. Today, by letting go of all attachments and worries, one suddenly transcends all that is worldly and reaches the realm of true emptiness 西來柳栗振雄風，幻出檠山不宰功。今日身心俱放下，頓超法界一真空” (Verse of passing away on April 3rd from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. 初三日未時辭世偈).⁴⁹

Using “staff” (in Chinese, this is *jili* 柳栗, a symbol of Dharma transmission) to link personal mission with ancestral orthodoxy, the poem declares that the Ōbaku sect is an overseas continuation of the “authenticity” of Zen. The Huangbo Temple at Mount Yamato and the meticulously constructed Songyin Hall resemble the dedication of a lifetime. They not only inherited the essence of “authenticity” from the Huangbo lineage in Fuqing but also served as a spiritual sanctuary for Yinyuan’s body and mind in his later years, becoming a surrogate for his homeland.

Through poetry, Yinyuan condensed Fuqing’s ancestral temple into “Huangbo” symbolism, bridging Sino–Japanese Zen lineages. Sectarian orthodoxy shed geographical constraints, transforming architectural spaces into spiritual dojos. Through Yinyuan’s construction, the Japanese Ōbaku sect became both Chinese Dharma’s overseas extension and the inheritor of a spirit of “authenticity”. Ultimately independent from ancestral roots, it stands as a spiritual bridge transcending the Chinese and Japanese Zen worlds.

5. Conclusions

Unlike previous socio–historical studies, this study seeks to address the question from a literary perspective: How did Yinyuan construct “authenticity” in his Zen verses? This study argues that the extensive references to “Huangbo” in Yinyuan’s poetry provide crucial literary clues for examining this construction process. The “Huangbo” imagery in Yinyuan’s works carries profound and multifaceted connotations, exhibiting distinct developmental phases. Through this imagery, we can trace Yinyuan’s conscious and unconscious efforts to construct “authenticity” before and after his journey to Japan.

During his time in China prior to traveling eastward, Yinyuan’s use of “Huangbo” imagery reflected his personal circumstances and aspirations. Leveraging Huangbo’s bitter taste as a metaphor for life’s hardships, he associated “Huangbo” with being “poverty-stricken” to signify his commitment to preserving orthodox Linji and Huangbo lineages amid chaotic Zen practices. Here, “Huangbo” transcended its botanical and conventional literary meanings, becoming an emblem of “authenticity” in Yinyuan’s spiritual worldview.

After arriving in Japan, Yinyuan increasingly linked “Huangbo” imagery with Zen doctrines, transforming it into a symbol embodying both Zen philosophy and sectarian identity. While this tendency existed earlier, it intensified due to socio-historical imperatives: internally, Yinyuan sought to revitalize orthodox Zen practices; externally, he needed to meet Japanese expectations of authentic Zen origins. These dual pressures necessitated the deliberate construction of Huangbo Zen’s “authenticity”. During this phase, “Huangbo” became inseparable from Zen teachings—encompassing both the rigorous “sharp wit and sudden shout” methods and the compassionate guidance of “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen”. Together, these complementary approaches constituted Yinyuan’s vision of the “authenticity” in Huangbo Zen, representing orthodox Zen spirituality.

Following the founding of Kyoto’s Mount Huangbo, the imagery underwent another transformation. Through symbolic transplantation in his verses, Yinyuan recast “Huangbo” as a trans-geographical and cultural emblem of the Dharma lineage. His poetic efforts to “transplant” China’s sacred Ōbaku sect to Japan signified not mere topographical replication but the continuation of the Chinese Ōbaku sect’s authenticity on foreign soil. Simultaneously, Yinyuan deliberately redefined “Ōbaku sect” from exclusively denoting the Chinese patriarchate to a shared designation for both Chinese and Japanese Ōbaku sects, blurring the spatial boundaries between the “New Ōbaku sect” and the “Ancient Ōbaku sect”. Under his conceptual reframing, the Japanese Ōbaku sect became both an overseas extension of Chinese Zen and an independent inheritor of “authenticity”, ultimately emerging as a spiritual bridge transcending Sino-Japanese Zen traditions.

Yinyuan’s “Huangbo” imagery reveals the transnational dissemination of orthodox Zen from China to Japan. The evolution of this imagery not only mirrors the construction of “authenticity” but also exemplifies Buddhism’s cross-cultural transmission, offering critical insights into globalization and localization in religious development. From the perspective of globalization, Yinyuan’s establishment of the Japanese Ōbaku sect—repeatedly emphasizing his ties to Linji orthodoxy—achieved the transplantation of “authentic” Huangbo Zen. By expanding Huangbo’s conceptual scope, he bridged the Chinese and Japanese Huangbo lineages. From the standpoint of localization, his early linkage of “Huangbo” to Zen doctrines addressed Japan’s demand for Zen origins, while later establishing that the “New Ōbaku sect” represented not mere replication but the reconstruction of a sacred space imbued with “authenticity”.

Globalization and localization are important connotations of the “neo-globalism” of Buddhism, and they together promote the cross-cultural dissemination of Buddhism.⁵⁰ In the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Yinyuan’s visit to Japan to promote Buddhism was a model of the cross-cultural dissemination of Buddhism. The “Huangbo culture” that he introduced influenced Japanese society profoundly—impacting literature, architecture, printing, medicine, and culinary traditions. Since the Edo period, Huangbo culture, including the Zen teachings and practices of the Ōbaku sect, has undergone significant adaptation and integration with various strata of Japanese society, exerting a profound influence on Japanese Buddhism and leaving a lasting impact on all facets of Japanese social life.⁵¹ The Mount Huangbo Wanfu Zen Temple in Kyoto, Japan, has preserved its lineage to the present day. In recent years, a substantial number of rare Ōbaku sect documents and cultural artifacts have been returned from Japan to their ancestral homeland in China, creating a new context for the transmission and study of Huangbo culture. Just as Yinyuan adhered to the principle of promoting righteousness and fostering mutual understanding between the East and the West, the shared cultural legacy of Chinese and Japanese Huangbo highlights their enduring exchange and mutual learning in the context of neo-globalism.

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Abbreviations

T *Taishō Tripitaka* 大正藏
X *Manji Zokuzōkyō* 卍續藏

Notes

¹ For further insight into the relevant reviews, see (Tan 2021, pp. 1–9).

² In regard to Wu Jiang’s discourse on Yinyuan as a symbol of “authenticity”, see (Wu 2021, pp. 5–13; Yang and Wu 2023, pp. 118–22).

³ Wu Jiang proposed a highly enlightening concept of “Authenticity” in *Leaving for the Rising Sun: Chinese Zen Master Yinyuan and the Authenticity Crisis in Early Modern East Asia* using it to view the research on Yinyuan Longqi from the perspective of East Asian Buddhism. In his view, “Authenticity” is “the foundation of a tradition and the source of establishing a cohesive and consistent value system”, which corresponds to the discussions of “origin”, “truth”, and “orthodoxy” in ancient Chinese. At the religious level, Yinyuan Longqi went to Japan to spread the Dharma, claiming himself as the “Authentic Transmission of the Linji School” (Linji zhengzong 臨濟正宗) emphasizing the authenticity of the Zen style and practice methods he received, thus establishing himself as an image of “spiritual and religious authenticity”. This “Authenticity symbol” not only brought a great stimulus to the declining Japanese Buddhism during the Edo period but also helped Yinyuan and the Huangbo tradition he established to achieve great success in Japan.

⁴ *Yuefu shiji* 44. 642.

⁵ *Quan tangshi* 63. 692.

⁶ *Tangnolang Yu Xuanji shi* 1. 3.

⁷ *Quan song wen* 4990. 68.

⁸ *Sanshan zhi* 36. 577. It is noteworthy that according to Liang Kejia’s 梁克家 *Sanshan zhi* 三山志 [Records of the Three Mountains] from the Southern Song Dynasty, in 789, Zhenggan had studied under the Sixth Patriarch (Hui Neng 慧能) and left after mastering his teachings. The Patriarch saw him off and said, “Seize the Bodhi and stay here” (ba pu ji ci 把善即此). (The phrase “把善即此” is suspected to be a mistake for “遇苦即止”, It means, ceasing when bitterness arises.) Therefore, when he arrived at Mount Huangbo, he decided to settle here and built a temple called “Prajna Platform” (Bore tai 般若臺).

⁹ *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T no 1985, 47: 1. 501b26.

¹⁰ *Gu zunsu yulu*, X no 1315, 68: 45. 300b15.

¹¹ This word contains a pun. Dense clouds not only depict scenery, but also refer to Miyun Yuanwu.

¹² *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1039.

¹³ *Huangbo Duanji chanshi wanling lu*, T no 2012B, 48: 1. 387b13–14.

¹⁴ According to Wu Zhangyan and Li Liang’s statistics, there are about eighty poems in the hidden Yuan poetry that are titled with flowers, among which nearly fifty are titled with plum blossoms, see (Wu and Li 2018, pp. 1–9).

¹⁵ *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1171.

¹⁶ According to the compilation of *The New Compilation and Revised Complete Works of Yin Yuan* by Hira-kubo Akira, the chronology of this poem is not provided. However, based on the chronology of the poems collected in Volume 14 of the Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Yinyuan, it is speculated that this poem was composed between 1640–1643. This was the period when Master Feiyin was the abbot of Guanghui Temple on Mount Jinsu, actively seeking opinions and preparing for the compilation of the Zen Lamp Record.

¹⁷ *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4043.

- 18 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 5: 2235.
- 19 At that time, both Linji sect and Caodong sect in Japan were in a state of decline, see (Lin 2010, p. 98).
- 20 In fact, Yiran Xingrong has written multiple letters inviting Yinyuan, see (Fan 1981, p. 28).
- 21 *Jingde chuan deng lu*, T no. 2076, 51: 12. 290a21–22.
- 22 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1081–1082.
- 23 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2604.
- 24 “Mount Bo” refers to the fact that after the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Mount Yamato by Yinyuan, this place was regarded as a New “Mount Huangbo” instead of Chinese “Mount Huangbo”. We intentionally distinguished it from the “Mount Huangbo” in Fuqing, so we used “Mount Bo” to refer to this mountain in Japan.
- 25 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3955.
- 26 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2606.
- 27 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4058. These two poems with the same title were written at different times. The former was written in 1655 when the poet was sixty-four years old, while the latter was written around 1666.
- 28 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2827.
- 29 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2975.
- 30 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3863.
- 31 In regard to the support and efforts of Ryōkei Shōsen and Tokūō Myōkō, see (Liu 1993, pp. 17–19). As Albert Welter said, “The ascendancy of Chan resulted from the same strategy employed by other religious groups throughout history: winning the support of well-placed people”, see (Welter 2006, p. 4). Yinyuan also need the support of official political forces.
- 32 In regard to the process of Yinyuan establishing the New Huangbo Temple in Japan, see (Lin 2013, pp. 185–89).
- 33 In regard to the series of religious activities carried out by Yinyuan Longqi during this period, see (Zhu 1985, p. 59).
- 34 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3499.
- 35 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2666.
- 36 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2775.
- 37 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3504.
- 38 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3506.
- 39 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3524.
- 40 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3585.
- 41 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3623.
- 42 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2954.
- 43 This includes letters from Huimen Rupei 慧門如沛 (1615–1664), Feiyin Tongrong, as well as Huangbo monks and lay Buddhists, see (Wei 2017, p. 176).
- 44 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2908.
- 45 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4074–4075.
- 46 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3509.
- 47 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3850.
- 48 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2834.
- 49 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 10: 5055.
- 50 In regard to Neoglobalism and the relationship between Neoglobalism and Buddhism, see (Zhan 2023, pp. 51–149).
- 51 In regard to the influence of Ōbaku sect on Japanese society, see (He 1988, pp. 92–92; Yang and Kamata 1983, pp. 77–80).

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Article

Re-Study of the Gilt Bronze Buddha Statuettes Unearthed from the Eastern Han Dynasty Tomb in Chengren Village, Xianyang City, China

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Abstract: In 2021, two small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes were unearthed from a tomb from the Eastern Han Dynasty in Chengren Village, Xianyang City, Shanxi Province. The excavation team believe that these statuettes are from the late Eastern Han Dynasty and represent the earliest independent gilt bronze Buddha statuettes ever discovered in China through archaeological excavations, a belief that has attracted widespread interest and debate among scholars worldwide. However, because the tomb had been looted in the past, the publication of these findings immediately sparked considerable debate, particularly over the dating of the statuettes. The main controversy revolves around two dating proposals: the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” and the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”. This paper proposes a third viewpoint by examining previously overlooked aspects and materials regarding the statuettes and by placing them within the context of the Guanlong region’s tradition of small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes. We contend that the two statuettes were not created at the same time: we believe that the standing Buddha statuette dates from the end of the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”, whereas the flat five-Buddha statuette was likely crafted between the Yanxing 延興 era and the early Taihe 太和 era of Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The styles, combinations of forms, and themes in these statuettes are not distinctive and are, in fact, typical of small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes from the late “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” to the mid-Northern Wei Dynasty in the Guanlong region.

Keywords: gilt bronze Buddha statuette; Guanlong region; Sixteen Kingdoms; Northern Wei Dynasty; Gandhara

1. Introduction

In May 2021, archaeologists from the Shaanxi Academy Archaeology excavated two small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes from a family tomb from the Eastern Han Dynasty in Chengren Village, Hongdu Yuan, Xianyang City. The statuettes were excavated from M3015 and consist of a standing Buddha with the Abhaya Mudrā (Figure 1) and a flat five-seated Buddha statuette (Figure 2). Furthermore, a pottery jar inscribed with a date marking the first year of the Yanxi era of the Eastern Han Dynasty 延熹元年 (158 AD) was also discovered in the adjacent tomb, M3019, providing a solid foundation for dating the family tomb. The excavation team, through comprehensive research, concluded that these statuettes were the earliest gilt bronze Buddha statuettes ever discovered in China through archaeological means. They are believed to have been locally crafted in a style influenced by Gandhara. These statuettes are of great significance in studying the introduction of Buddhist culture to China and the Sinicization of Buddhism.¹

The academic significance of these two Buddha statuettes is undeniable, and their unveiling promptly drew widespread attention and sparked intense debate within the international academic community.² An overview of the excavation of the family tomb from the Eastern Han Dynasty, along with the preliminary research and scientific analysis³ of the statuettes, was swiftly published (Shaanxi Academy Archaeology 陕西省考古研究院

2022, pp. 3–27; Ran et al. 2022, pp. 82–94; Li et al. 2022, pp. 123–28). However, following this publication, the fact that M3015 had been looted in the past led to a considerable rift in the interpretation of these Buddha statuettes. The main controversy revolves around two dating proposals: the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” and the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”. Despite the ongoing sharing of new research, these disagreements seem to have not only persisted, but intensified. The core issues pertaining to these gilt bronze Buddha statuettes are yet to be resolved and represent an open academic question, the discourse around which continues to be a topic of great interest. This paper proposes a third viewpoint by examining previously overlooked aspects and materials regarding the statuettes and by placing them within the context of the Guanlong region’s tradition of small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes.



Figure 1. The standing Buddha statuette excavated from M3015 in Chengren Village, Xianyang (taken from Shaanxi Academy Archaeology 陕西省考古研究院 2022).



Figure 2. The flat five-seated Buddha statuette excavated from M3015 in Chengren Village, Xianyang (taken from Shaanxi Academy Archaeology 陕西省考古研究院 2022).

2. Current Research Status and Existing Issues

The research on these two Buddha statuettes is quite extensive, covering a wide range of topics, such as their dating, origin, manufacturing techniques, features, artistic style, cultural provenance, function, community of believers, and relation to different forms of belief. Scholars such as Ran Wanli 冉萬里 and Li Ming 李明, who were among the first to conduct specialized research on these statuettes, have offered in-depth analyses from nine distinct perspectives (Ran et al. 2022, pp. 82–94). Among all the issues discussed, the most fundamental is the dating of the Buddha statuettes, which lies at the heart of the debate surrounding them. Currently, two main viewpoints dominate the discourse: the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” and the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”.

The dating of the Buddha statuettes is highly significant, as it represents a cornerstone for addressing most other pertinent issues. In essence, if the chronological framework on which the research is based is fundamentally flawed or disproven, then the discussion of other related topics loses its significance. For instance, it is only relevant to investigate whether these Buddha statuettes were “independently consecrated” or “manufactured locally in China” if they can be confidently dated to the late Eastern Han Period. Similarly, re-examinations of “the route of Buddhism’s introduction to China”, “the developmental sequence of early gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in China”, and “the community of believers during the Eastern Han Dynasty” all hinge on the accurate dating of these statuettes. Therefore, establishing the date of the Buddha statuettes represents a critical issue and the primary question that must be resolved in the related research on this topic.

Regarding the debate over the dating of the Buddha statuettes, Ran Wanli and the excavation team were the first to propose the theory of the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” (Shaanxi Academy Archaeology 陝西省考古研究院 2022, p. 27; Ran et al. 2022, pp. 82–94). This view has been supported by subsequent publications from scholars like Lothar von Falkenhausen, Li Min 李旻, Robert L. Brown, Huang Chunhe 黃春和, and Cui Mengze 崔夢澤, each offering varying levels of detail and nuanced perspectives in their discussions. For example, Lothar von Falkenhausen believes that “the previous art historical sequence may have been founded on a misinterpretation of styles.” (Lei 2022a). Huang Chunhe suggests that “the religious significance and value of these two Buddha statuettes are similar to the numerous statuettes found in tombs in southwestern China at that time, serving merely as general deities for sacrifices rather than independent representations of religious belief.” (Huang 2022, pp. 47–56). Cui Mengze’s latest research article does not discuss the dating controversy, but instead directly builds its argument on the assumption of the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” theory (Cui 2024, pp. 73–76). Given the significant disagreements surrounding the dating of these statuettes, Cui’s research is fraught with risk and could potentially be entirely invalidated.

Immediately after the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” theory was proposed, scholars introduced the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” theory. Yang Xin 陽新 was the first to publish an article elaborating on this new perspective (Yang 2021). Other representative scholars, including Yao Chongxin 姚崇新, Zhu Hu 朱澗, Li Wenwen 李雯雯, and He Zhiguo 何志國, have also published articles in agreement with this view. Both Yang Xin and Yao Chongxin both believe that the two Buddha statuettes were likely mixed into the tomb during later tomb-raiding activities. Yao Chongxin also performed a specific analysis of the nature of these two statuettes and the reasons for their entry into the tomb, suggesting that they might be portable miniature Buddha statuettes that were accidentally left behind by tomb raiders, serving as amulets. He also contends that even if the statuettes date to the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty”, they are not the earliest independent Buddha statuettes nor the earliest gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in China, a conclusion based on his analysis of the “Futu Jian” “浮屠簡” of the Eastern Han Period found at Xuanquanzhi 懸泉置 and other existing works from the Chinese literature (Yao 2022, pp. 17–29). Li Wenwen and Zhu Hu focused on the stylistic aspects of the statuettes and have identified the standing statuette as exhibiting a fusion of three distinct styles: the Gandhara style of the Kushan Period, the Mathura style of the Kushan Period, and the Mathura style of the Gupta Period. They

challenge the idea that the statuettes were forgotten by looters and propose instead that they entered the tomb through secondary or multiple burials (Li and Zhu 2022, pp. 184–91). He Zhiguo conducted a more detailed analysis and comparative study of the statuettes' characteristics. He remained circumspect about the exact reasons for the statuettes being mixed into the tomb, without providing a definitive conclusion (He 2023, pp. 122–31).

Researchers who support the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” theory have presented two key pieces of evidence. Firstly, they all reference a 1950s precedent involving the discovery of two small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes amidst scattered bricks in a looted Eastern Han tomb in BeiSong Village, Shijiazhuang City 石家莊北宋村 (Sun et al. 1959, p. 55). Secondly, in their comparative studies of the characteristics and artistic styles of the Buddha statuettes, they all highlight a bronze standing Buddha statuette in a private collection in Japan (Rhie 2002, pp. 424–25, fig. 2.67) that is similar to the standing Buddha statuette excavated from M3015. Previous research has dated all three statuettes to the Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms. However, proponents of the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” theory find these pieces of evidence to be flawed. As Lothar von Falkenhausen notes, there has been a bias in the dating and classification of these small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes and that they should be re-examined (Lei 2022a). The discovery of the gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in Chengren village actually serves to correct the previous conclusions. Objectively, these two arguments are inadequate, particularly that regarding the bronze standing Buddha statuette in the Japanese private collection. It is an isolated case outside of Chengren, its current whereabouts are unknown, and the specifics of its excavation and provenance are unclear. The research on this statuette is still pending, and its use as evidence has significant limitations.

In terms of the methodology, researchers advocating for both the “Late Eastern Han Dynasty” and “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” theories have largely employed the same three primary research methods, without much distinction. The first method focuses on establishing the relative chronological relationship between the Buddha statuettes and the tombs, i.e., whether the Buddha statuettes were original funerary objects or were introduced into the tombs at a later date. Given that M3015 was once looted, determining the chronological relationship between the statuettes and the tombs largely relies on logical reasoning. However, researchers on both sides of the debate have struggled to present a logic that can fully convince those with the opposing viewpoint. Even among scholars who support the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” theory, there are numerous different ideas about the specific ways in which the Buddha statuettes may have entered the tombs. History is often filled with contingencies and uncertainties, and it is difficult to reach the historical truth based solely on logical reasoning without substantial evidence. We believe that it is unnecessary to dwell excessively on this problem, as it leads to the risk of falling into fruitless debates in which each side simply repeats their own arguments. The resolution of this issue is not essential in fundamentally determining the creation dates of the Buddha statuettes.

The second method involves comparative studies of the form, artistic style, and subject composition of the Buddha statuettes to determine their creation date. Researchers generally agree on the selection of comparative objects, primarily focusing on stone Buddhist sculptures from the Kushan Empire with Gandhara and Mathura styles, Buddha statuettes unearthed from tombs in the Southwest and Jiangnan regions of China from the Eastern Han to Western Jin Periods, and small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes from Northern China up until the “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”. However, due to the subjectivity of the researchers and variations in their starting premises, there are considerable variations in the analysis of the statuettes' features and the selection of comparative focuses. This leads to an interesting phenomenon whereby different conclusions are drawn from the same materials, using the same research methodologies. This is largely attributable to the scope and effectiveness of these research methods. Within certain limits, comparative research of cultural factors undoubtedly represents an effective research method. However, when the comparative objects span a broad temporal and spatial range, with significant

differences in their material, size, function, and user group, comparative research often allows for considerable subjective interpretation and can lack persuasiveness. For example, there is currently a comparative study of the two Buddha statuettes with Gandhara and Mathura statuettes. Such a wide-ranging cross-temporal and -spatial comparison can, at most, demonstrate the possible presence of individual Buddhist sculptures in China during the late Eastern Han Dynasty, but it fails to explain the specific creation dates of these two gilt bronze Buddha statuettes. Therefore, in comparative research, the selection of comparative objects is crucial. Generally speaking, the closer the temporal and spatial scope of the comparative objects, and the more similar their material, size, and function, the more reliable the conclusions are likely to be.

The third method involves utilizing natural sciences for the examination and analysis of the two Buddha statuettes. Due to the differences between metal and organic materials, scientific testing may provide insights into the manufacturing techniques used for these statuettes, and their origins. However, it is less effective in directly determining the exact dates of the Buddha statuettes.

It should be noted that previous researchers have overlooked two critical chronological issues. First, the creation date of a Buddha statuette must precede the date that it was placed in the tomb. Scholars have already demonstrated through the statuettes' wear and tear that they were used for a long time (Yao 2022, p. 18). Therefore, if the statuettes were not placed into the tomb at a later time, then the tomb's date can only be considered as the lower limit for the statuettes' dates; the duration of their use before entering the tomb remains unknown. If the statuettes were indeed placed into the tomb at a later date, then even if their creation date, as speculated by scholars, falls within the "Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms", that date can only be considered as the upper limit for the statuette's entry into the tomb. It may not necessarily correspond to the period during which scholars previously assumed that the statuettes were left in the tomb (Yao 2022, p. 29).

Secondly, it is necessary to consider whether the two Buddha statuettes share the same creation date. After all, although they were unearthed from the same site, they are distinct entities. The current research, whether intentionally or inadvertently, tends to assume that they are contemporaneous relics. However, there are significant differences between them in terms of their subject matter, sculptural features, artistic style, and alloy composition. Could these differences signify that they are from different periods? After all, it is very common in archaeological discoveries to find objects of different ages in the same tomb or Buddha statuette hoard. According to the fundamental principles of archaeological chronology, the later-dated statuette should be considered as the upper limit for when both statuettes entered the tomb. In summary, the two gilt bronze Buddha statuettes from the Eastern Han Dynasty tomb at Chengren Village should not be treated as a single entity, but must instead be considered individually.

3. The Dating of the Standing Buddha Statuette and Related Issues

Of the two Buddha statuettes unearthed in M3015 in Chengren Village, the standing Buddha statuette is notably better preserved, with its sculptural features being relatively clear and thus leading to more attention and discussion among researchers. As previously noted, extensive comparative studies have been conducted on this statuette by scholars. However, due to varying perspectives and the inherent limitations of the comparative objects, the conclusions have been quite divergent. Given the current state of research, it seems unlikely that further substantial breakthroughs in dating the statuette based on its facial features, robes, and posture will be made. Fortunately, we have discovered that the lotus petals on the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette are quite distinctive and can provide an important breakthrough for determining the date of the statuette.

The characteristics of the lotus petals on the pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette unearthed in Chengren Village are as follows: the petals are thick, with a raised longitudinal vein in the center; the widest part can be found slightly towards the back of the middle, narrowing in an arc shape towards the tip, with a concave indentation in the middle at the

tip and a protrusion in the front center, and the length of the petals slightly exceeds their width (Figure 3b). Previous researchers, after comparative studies, have consistently concluded that these petals share similarities with the lotus petal patterns on the halo and umbrella cover of the gilt bronze Buddha statuette unearthed in Yudu Township, Jingchuan 涇川玉都鄉 (Yang 2021). In fact, these are two completely different lotus petal patterns. The widest part of the lotus petals on the Buddha statuette from the Yudu Township Buddha statuette is not at the back but at the front, and from there, they taper straight back; the length of the petals is much greater than the width, leading to an elongated appearance overall (Figure 3a). Apart from the central raised longitudinal vein, all other aspects of these petals differ significantly from those of the petals on the standing Buddha statuette's pedestal in Chengren Village.



Figure 3. Comparative illustration of the lotus petal patterns on the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village and the Buddha statuette from Yudu Township, Jingchuan ((a). the Buddha statuette from Yudu Township, provided by Jingchuan County Museum; (b). the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village. Graphic created by the author).

The shape of the lotus petals on the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village is very consistent with the Bodhi leaves prevalent in Gandharan Buddhist art (Figure 4). In Gandharan Buddhist art, this shape of Bodhi leaf is not only frequently carved as an edge decoration on the stone slabs of stupas and temple steps, but is also extensively used as decoration within specific scenes of the Buddha's life stories. For example, it is widely depicted in images such as the Buddha's asceticism, the subjugation of demons to achieve enlightenment, the offering of the bowl by the Four Heavenly Kings, Brahma's invitation, and the approach to the Bodhi throne⁴ (Figure 4a). The related iconography is extremely rich and is too extensive to list in full.

In China, it is not unusual to find lotus petals styled as Bodhi leaves on small gilt bronze Buddha figures. The Palace Museum houses a small gilt bronze standing statuette of Maitreya Bodhisattva with a lotus throne, with a total height of 9.9 cm. This statuette was purchased in Xi'an in the early 1960s and is cataloged as image No. 21 in *Chinese Gilt Bronze Buddha Statues* 《中國金銅佛》 (Li 1995, pp. 40, 229) (Figure 5a). The lotus petals on the throne of this statuette also take the form of Bodhi leaves, almost identical to those on the lotus throne of the standing Buddha from Chengren Village (Figure 5).

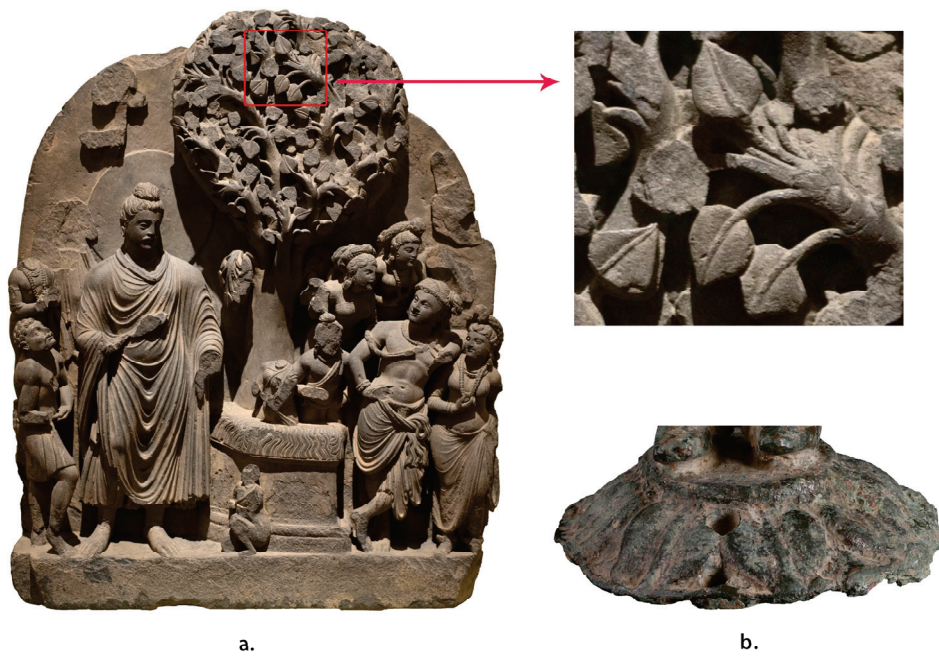


Figure 4. Comparative illustration of the lotus petals on the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha from Chengren Village and Bodhi leaves in Gandhara style ((a). a sculpture showing “the Approach to the Bodhi throne”, collected in the Cleveland Museum of Art, USA, with the image sourced from the official website exhibition; (b). the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village. Graphic created by the author).



Figure 5. Comparative illustration of the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha from Chengren Village and Statuette No. 21 in the Palace Museum ((a). Statuette No. 21 in the Palace Museum, taken from Li 1995, p. 40; (b). the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village. Graphic created by the author).

In addition, the same Bodhi leaf-shaped petals are cast in the center of the double-lion pedestal of the famous gilt bronze Buddha statuette from the second year of the Shengguang era of Daxia 大夏勝光二年 (429 AD) (Figure 6). The second year of the Shengguang era saw the reign of Helian Ding 赫連定, the king of Daxia 大夏. At that time, Tongwan City 統萬城 had fallen, and Helian Ding fled to Pingliang 平涼 (Huang 2015, p. 6). Shi Wen 施文, the devotee of the statuette, held the position of “Zhongshu Sheren” 中書舍人, a close minister who accompanied the monarch. The creation site of the statuette is expected to be in Pingliang (Huang 2015, p. 6), part of the Longdong region 隴東地區, which is close to the location of the two statuettes mentioned above, all of which belong to the Guanlong cultural sphere.

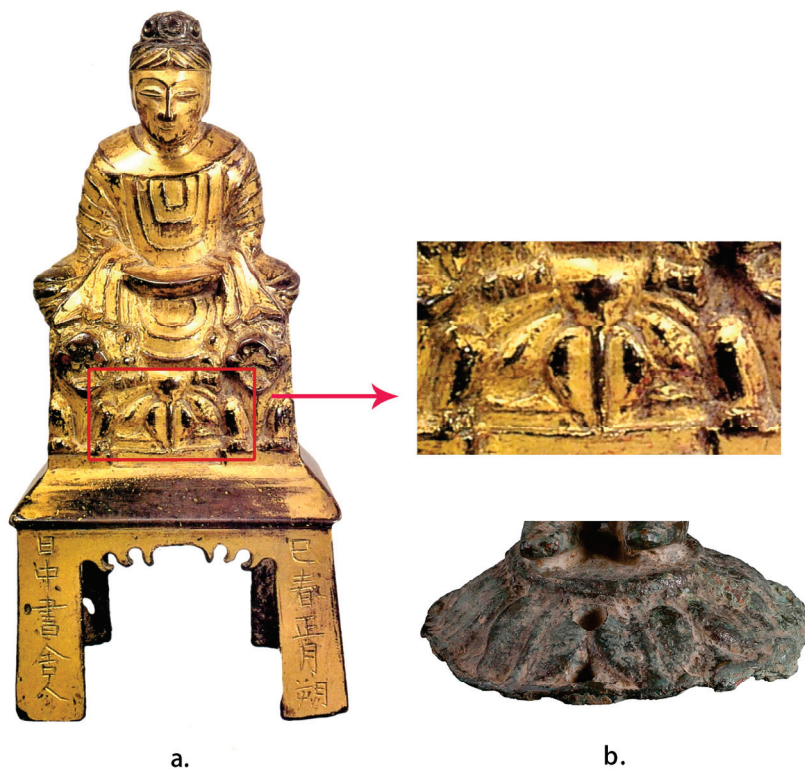


Figure 6. Comparative illustration of the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha from Chengren Village and the Buddha statuette from the second year of the Shengguang era ((a). the Buddha statuette from the second year of the Shengguang era, taken from Luo 2010, p. 40; (b). the lotus pedestal of the standing Buddha statuette from Chengren Village. Graphic created by the author).

The same Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petals also appear in numerous early small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes found outside the Guanlong region in China, such as those excavated in Xiguancheng, Yi County, and Hebei 河北易縣西貫城 (Figure 7a), as well as those collected in the Zhengzhou Museum 鄭州博物館 (Figure 7b), the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 7c), the Nelson Atkins Museum in the United States (Figure 7d), and the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Japan. Each of these statuettes also cast the same Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal at the center of the double-lion pedestal. Moreover, these Buddha statuettes are highly consistent in terms of posture, robe style, clothing patterns, sleeve flares, tenons, and the form of the two lions, indicating that they belong to the same phase of the evolutionary sequence of early small meditative gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in China (Zhang 2024, pp. 49–58). Taking the second year of the Shengguang era of Daxia as a chronological reference, it becomes evident that this Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal pattern was a common and popular design on small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in the late Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms across the Guanlong region and even the entirety of northern China.



Figure 7. Small meditative gilt bronze Buddha statuettes with Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petals cast at the center of the double-lion seat ((a). excavated in Xiguancheng, Yi County, with image taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018; (b). in the Zhengzhou Museum, with image taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018; (c). in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, with image taken from Chen 1996; (d). in the Nelson Atkins Museum, with image taken from Jin 1994).

To the best of our knowledge, the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal pattern has not appeared systematically on other Chinese Buddhist statuettes beyond the early small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes. Within the evolutionary sequence of early small meditative gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in China, the lotus petal pattern, as an important component, also exhibits strong characteristics of distinct stages. A Buddha statuette dated to the fifth year of the Taichang era 泰常五年 (420 AD), excavated in Sidaoying, Longhua County 隆化四道營, is another benchmark piece with an inscribed date in the evolutionary timeline of these statuettes (Figure 8). Buddha statuettes belonging to the same stage as this one include statuette No. 2 unearthed in Beisong Village, Shijiazhuang, a selected statuette from the Baoding Native Products Management Department 保定土產經理部, Statuette No. 4 in the collection of the Palace Museum, and a statuette unearthed in Yudu, Jingchuan County (Liu 2002, pp. 377–82, 385–87). The prevalent lotus petal patterns from this stage are highly uniform in shape and represent an earlier phase than the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal pattern. Taking the well-preserved statuettes from Yudu and from Beisong Village, Shijiazhuang (Statuette No. 2) (Figure 9) as examples, it can be seen that lotus petal patterns are extensively cast on the halo, umbrella cover, and pedestal, as well as the pedestals of miniature meditative seated Buddha or Bodhisattva statuettes attached to the halo. The lotus pedestal of the small Buddha statuette on top of the Buddha statuette selected from the Baoding Native Products Management Department also features petals of the same shape (Figure 10).

The small meditative gilt bronze Buddha statuette in the collection of the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Japan is a remarkable artifact that captures the evolutionary transition of lotus petal patterns. This statuette displays lotus petals in two distinct styles: Those at the center of the Buddha's double-lion pedestal and on the inverted lotus seats within the halo are shaped like Bodhi leaves, indicative of a later stage (Figure 11). Conversely, the lotus petals on the inverted lotus seats of the standing Bodhisattva figures flanking the pedestal reflect an earlier form. Similarly, the lotus petal pattern at the center of the double-lion seat of the Yudu statuette also shows a clear transitional state, blending casting and carving techniques. It maintains the elongated petal pattern style seen in Statuette No. 2 from Beisong Village, Shijiazhuang, from the earlier stage (Figure 9e), while also beginning to adopt the basic form of the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petals of the next stage, though the outline remains relatively slender (Figure 12). In the absence of inscribed dates on these statuettes, we can use the slightly earlier Buddha statuette date to identify the

fifth year of the Taichang era (420 AD) (Liu 2002, p. 386) as the upper limit for determining the appearance of the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal pattern in the small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes.



Figure 8. The Buddha Statuette with an inscribed date of the 5th year of the Taichang era (taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018).

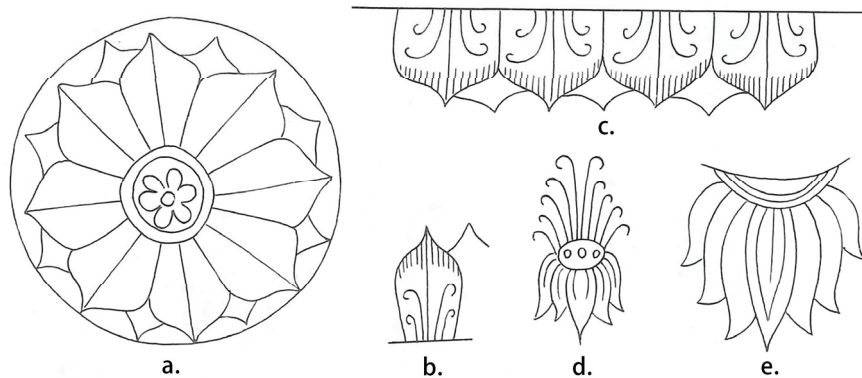


Figure 9. Illustration of the petal pattern on Buddha statuette No. 2 unearthed in Beisong Village, Shijiazhuang ((a). Lotus petal on the canopy; (b). Lotus petals on the backdrop; (c). Lotus petals above the disciple statuette; (d). Lotus petals located at the center of the Double Lion Throne. (e). Lotus petals on the front of the Buddha’s pedestal. All taken from Liu 2002).

Finally, we will discuss the lower limit for the time of the popularization of the use of Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal patterns on small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in northern China. In 439 AD, the Northern Wei Dynasty unified northern China, bringing about a significant transformation regarding the development of Buddhism in northern China. According to the record of *Wei Shu Shi Lao Zhi* 《魏書·釋老志》, during the Taiyan era of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Liangzhou region was conquered and its inhabitants were relocated to the capital. The Samanas followed them eastward, bringing Buddhist beliefs, which led to the further development of Buddhism in the capital. “太延中，涼州平，徙其國人於京邑，沙門佛事皆俱東，象教彌增矣” (Wei 1974, p. 3032). Correspondingly, significant changes also occurred in Buddhist art.



Figure 10. The Buddha Statuette Selected from Baoding Native Products Management Department (taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018).



Figure 11. The Buddha Statuette in the collection of the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Japan (taken from Jin 2002).

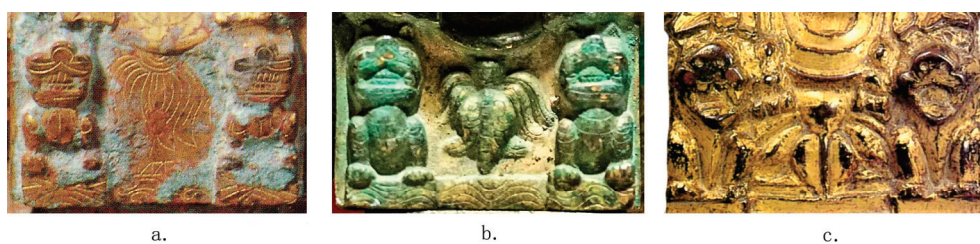


Figure 12. Schematic illustration of the evolution of the lotus petal pattern at the center of the double-lion pedestal ((a). Buddha Statuette No. 2 from Beisong Village; (b). the Buddha statuette from Yudu Township; (c). a Buddha Statuette from the second year of the Shengguang era. Schematic created by the author).

The popularity of early small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes, once centered in the Hebei Province, has waned over time. The existing Buddha statuettes from the early Northern Wei Dynasty, specifically during the Taiping Zhenjun era 太平真君年間, show numerous innovative developments (Liu 2002, pp. 383–84). Among the most notable changes are the lotus petal patterns on Buddhist statuettes, which are distinct from the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal design that was extremely popular around 429 AD. The most distinctive feature of the new lotus petal patterns is the division of each petal into two sections, with a kidney-shaped protrusion at the middle of each part. For example, the lotus petals on the pedestals of the Buddha statuettes devoted by Zhu Xiong 朱雄 in the first year of the Taiping Zhenjun era (440 AD), the Buddha statuette devoted by Wanshen 苑申 in the fourth year of the Taiping Zhenjun era (443 AD) (Figure 13), and the Buddha statuette devoted by Zhuyewei 朱業微 in the fifth year of the Taiping Zhenjun era (444 AD) all exhibit this new style. Moreover, this style persisted in popularity until the fall of the Northern Wei Dynasty and became the primary lotus petal motif on Buddhist statuettes in northern China. In contrast, the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petals that enjoyed a brief time in vogue during the late “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” did not reappear. Therefore, the year 439 AD marks an important milestone in Chinese Buddhist history and art and could be considered as the lower limit for the time of the popularization of the Bodhi leaf-shaped lotus petal patterns on small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes in northern China. In summary, I believe that the standing Buddha statuette unearthed in Chengren Village would have been created in the late period of the Sixteen Kingdoms, around the early 5th century.



Figure 13. The Buddha statuette devoted by Wanshen in the fourth year of the Taiping Zhenjun era (taken from Jin 2002).

4. The Dating of the Flat Five-Seated Buddha Statuette and Related Issues

Each Buddha on the flat five-Buddha statuette has suffered varying degrees of damage, but it is possible to approximate the complete appearance of the Buddha images by piecing together the clear remaining parts of the figure. The Buddha statuette features a long, round face and is seated with a dhyana mudra in front of a peach-tip-shaped halo. The folds on the right arm of the lower-right Buddha statuette are obvious, indicating that it is adorned with a full-shoulder-style kasaya (Figure 14a). The sleeve cuff of the Buddha statuette in the second row on the right remains intact, and the pleats are largely visible,

symmetrically covering both knees (Figure 14b). The left side of the halo still retains a clear belt-shaped joint bead pattern (Figure 14c). The same band-like beaded pattern is also visible on the right side of the halo of the uppermost Buddha statuette, the outer edge of the halo is adorned with clear parallel radiating flame patterns (Figure 14d), and beneath the left knee of this figure, a relatively clear piece of a petal pattern on the pedestal is visible and is of a style that became common in northern China after unification under the Northern Wei Dynasty (Figure 14e). Therefore, the petal pattern alone refutes the assertion that the flat five-Buddha statuette dates from the late Eastern Han Dynasty, and it also indicates that the flat five-Buddha statuette from the Chengren tomb is from a later date than the standing Buddha statuette.

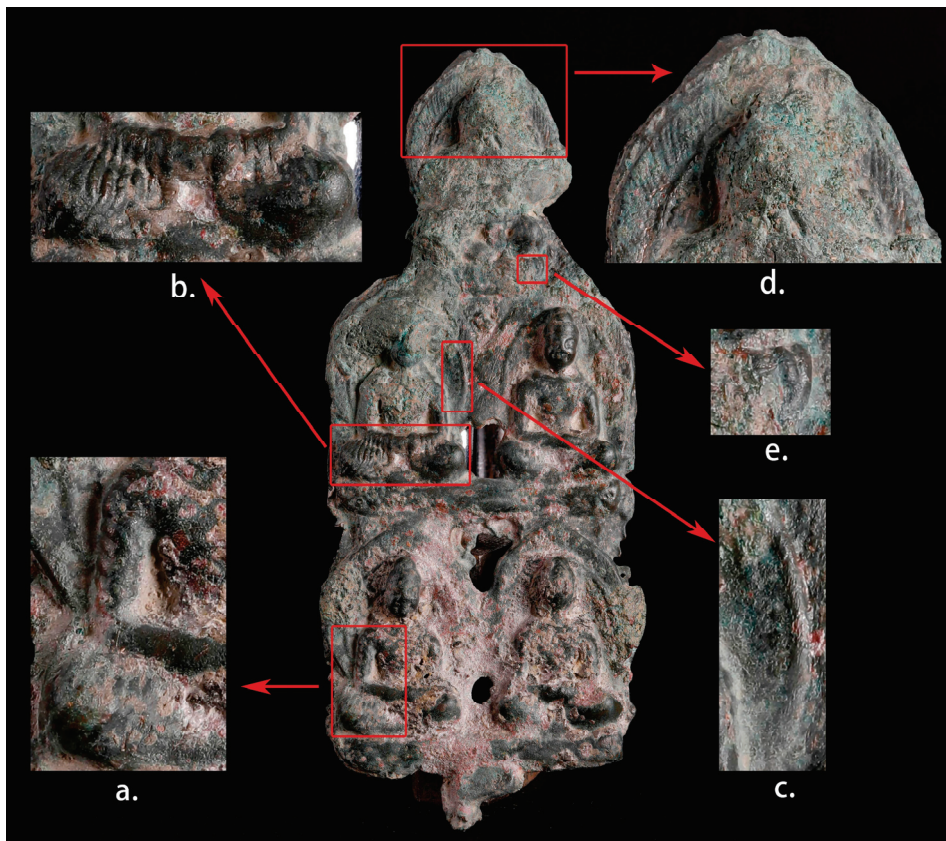


Figure 14. Details of the flat five-Buddha statuette ((a). the right arm of the lower-right Buddha statuette, (b). the sleeve cuff of the Buddha statuette in the second row on the right, (c). the left side of the halo of the Buddha statuette in the second row on the right, (d). the right side of the halo of the uppermost Buddha statuette, (e). a petal pattern on the pedestal of the uppermost Buddha statuette, graphic created by the author).

In fact, there are also some Buddha statuettes within the Guanlong region that share the same style as the Buddha figures on the flat five-Buddha statuette. Among them, the Lingtai County Museum 靈臺縣博物館 houses a well-preserved flat nine-Buddha statuette (Wei 2018, p. 1436), where each figure is strikingly similar in appearance (Figure 15) and highly consistent with the images of the Buddha figures on the flat five-Buddha statuette excavated from M3015 in Chengren Village. It is important to note that this consistency is not limited to individual elements, but extends across all aspects of the statuettes. A number of elements display a high degree of similarity, from the facial features and postures of the Buddha figures to the clothing patterns on their arms, the shape and texture of the sleeve cuffs, the detailed representation of the hand mudras, the shape of the halo, the position and form of the band-like joint bead patterns and parallel radiating flame patterns on the halo, and even the shape of the lotus petals on the pedestals.



Figure 15. The flat nine-Buddha statuette, currently in the Lingtai Museum, and its details (provided by Lingtai Museum. Graphic created by the author).

The flat nine-Buddha statuette in the collection of the Lingtai Museum has a total height of 18.5 cm, and each individual Buddha statuette is the same height as those in the five-Buddha statuette, i.e., approximately 4.9 cm. This statuette was acquired from Xitun Township, Lingtai County 靈臺縣西屯鄉, which is adjacent to the Guanzhong region and has been deeply influenced by the Guanzhong culture, thus belonging to the same cultural sphere. The similarity between these two statuettes is also evident in their special forms; both the five-Buddha and nine-Buddha statuettes are essentially multi-Buddha statuettes composed of many small meditating Buddha figures.

The Palace Museum also has a similar flat multi-Buddha statuette in its collection, consisting of two identical meditating Buddha statuettes and one flying apsara statuette. It is catalogued as Statuette No. 6 in *Chinese Gilt Bronze Buddha Statues* (Li 1995, p. 24) (Figure 16). The entire statuette is 6.7 cm tall, with each meditating Buddha statuette about 4.9 cm tall, matching the size of the previously mentioned multi-Buddha statuettes. Moreover, the features of each part of the Buddha figures, the shape of the halo, and the decorative patterns closely resemble those on the two previously discussed statuettes. The band-like beaded patterns decorating the halo of these Buddha figures are a prevalent decorative motif in the gilt bronze Buddhist statuettes of the Guanlong region and are rarely found on small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes from elsewhere (Zhang and Wei Forthcoming). This statuette was purchased in Xi'an, and it is highly probable that it also originates from the Guanzhong region, where Xi'an is located. The three flat multi-Buddha statuettes referenced above can be classified as the same type of Buddha statuette; they were manufactured and popularized in close proximity and are likely of a similar age.



Figure 16. Buddha Statuette No.6 at the Palace Museum (taken from Li 1995).

In terms of the subject matter of the flat five-Buddha statuette, the ancient Qinzhou region, adjacent to Guanzhong, has also yielded small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes with a composition of five Buddhas. The Tianshui Museum 天水市博物館 houses a meditating gilt bronze Buddha statuette with a short-footed couch-style pedestal, on the halo of which, five seated Buddhas are cast (Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018, p. 75) (Figure 17). Similar Buddha statuettes are also owned by private collectors. The consistency of the five-Buddha composition in the Tianshui Museum statuette with that unearthed at Chengren village is no mere coincidence. This can be confirmed through comparison with the nine-Buddha combinations discovered in the Guanzhong and Qinlong regions.



Figure 17. The Buddha statuette with five seated Buddhas on its halo in the collection of Tianshui Museum (taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018).

In addition to the Buddha statuette with a halo cast with five Buddhas, Tianshui Museum also has a similar meditating gilt bronze Buddha statuette in its collection, with a halo cast with nine Buddhas. There are a considerable number of similar meditating gilt bronze Buddha statuettes with a nine-Buddha combination, with examples unearthed from Xi'an 西安, Zhenyuan 鎮原, and Guyuan 固原, among other places (Zhai 2003, pp. 46–47; Wei and Wu 2003, pp. 16–21; Guyuan Wenwuzhan 固原縣文物站 1984, p. 35) (Figure 18). Moreover, there are many such Buddha statuettes spread among public and private collections both in China and abroad (Saburo 1995). As previously mentioned, the nine-Buddha statuette from Lingtai County and the five-Buddha statuette from Chengren village are also the same type of statuette. It can be seen that both the flat multi-Buddha statuettes and the meditating Buddha statuettes with short-footed couch-style pedestals, which are unique to the Guanzhong and Qinlong regions, feature combinations of five and nine Buddhas. These two types of statuette show a clear corresponding relationship in terms of their Buddha composition.

Through a comprehensive analysis and comparison of the style, size, origin, form, and subject matter of the five-Buddha statuette from Chengren Village, it can be concluded that this type of multi-Buddha statuette, comprising meditating gilt bronze Buddha statuettes approximately 4.9 cm tall, was a commonly popular type of Buddhist statuette in the Guanzhong and Qinlong regions during a certain historical period.



Figure 18. Buddha statuettes with nine seated Buddhas on the halo in the Guanlong region ((a–c), taken from Zhejiang Museum 浙江省博物館 2018, (d), photographed by the author).

Next, we will discuss the dating of this type of flat multi-Buddha statuette. *Chinese Gilt Bronze Buddha Statues* suggests that the flat two-Buddha statuette dates to the first half of the fifth century, but does not give a detailed explanation (Li 1995, p. 24). There is also a very special type of plate-shaped Buddha statuette prevalent in the Guanlong region that can offer relatively reliable evidence for use in dating flat multi-Buddha statuettes. There are a total of five extant plate-shaped Buddha statuettes, four of which are dated. In 1980, a gilt bronze plate-shaped Buddha statuette made by the monks of the Zhuiyuan Temple 追遠寺 in the seventh year of the Taihe era 太和七年 (483 AD) was excavated in the Lianhu District in Xi'an City 西安市蓮湖區. It is generally believed that these statuettes were popular in the Shaanxi and Gansu regions (Li 2016, p. 27; Zhang 2016, p. 261). An undated plate-shaped Buddha statuette collected in Japan has two seated Buddha figures cast on its upper edge that closely resemble those on the flat multi-Buddha statuettes (Jin 2002, p. 399) (Figure 19a). The bottom of this statuette and the pedestal are connected by two complete “C”-shaped twin-dragon head knobs; a similar medallion connection joint can also be found on another plate-shaped Buddha statuette dated to the fourth year of the Yanxing era in the Northern Wei Dynasty 北魏延興四年 (474). Similarly, the Buddha figures on both sides of the flat nine-Buddha statuette from Lingtai County are also connected by a comparable “C”-shaped twin-dragon head knob (Figure 19b). Furthermore, a similar “C”-shaped twin-dragon head image also appears on a copper knocker ring unearthed from a painted coffin tomb from the early Taihe era of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Leizumiao Village, Guyuan 固原雷祖廟村⁵. The detailed features of the dragons, such as the mouth, the eyes, the ears, the mane under the ears, and even the incised lines and bead patterns on the body, are almost identical. This can serve as additional evidence for use in dating the nine-Buddha statuette from Lingtai.

According to the evolution of the plate-shaped Buddha statuettes, Li Jingjie argued that the undated plate-shaped Buddha statuette mentioned above predates the fourth year of the Yanxing era 延興四年 (474 AD); it is probably close to that of the first year of the Heping era 和平元年 (460 AD) (Li 2016, p. 24). If we adopt a cautious approach, then we could estimate that the creation date of the undated plate-shaped Buddha statuette is between the first year of Heping (460) and the seventh year of Yanxing (474), and it is certainly no later than the creation of the latest-dated plate-shaped Buddha statuette, which is from the seventh year of Taihe (483). This range of dates can also be used as the chronological range for the nine-Buddha statuette from Lingtai.



Figure 19. Comparative illustration of the undated plate-shaped Buddha statuette and the flat nine-Buddha statuette ((a). taken from Jin 2002, (b). provided by Lingtai Museum. Graphic created by the author).

On the other hand, based on the corresponding subject matter combinations and relationships, the Buddha statuettes with nine-Buddha combinations on their halos unearthed in places such as Xi'an, Zhenyuan, and Guyuan, as mentioned above, can also provide evidence for use in dating flat multi-Buddha statuettes. According to research by Wei Wenbin 魏文斌 and others, this type of seated Buddha statuette was prevalent during the Taihe Period before Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty 北魏孝文帝 relocated the capital to Luoyang 洛陽, corresponding to the second phase of the Yungang Grottoes (Wei and Wu 2003, pp. 16–21). Saburo Matsubara 松原三郎 also suggests that these statuettes date back to around 475 AD (Saburo 1995).

To summarize, the production era of the flat multi-Buddha statuettes in the Guanzhong and Qinlong regions can be dated to the period between the Yanxing era and the early Taihe Period (around 471–484 AD), during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The five-Buddha statuette from Chengren Village, like many similar statuettes, is also likely to have been created during this time.

5. Conclusions

The two small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes unearthed in M3015 in Chengren Village, Xianyang, are not unique. Between the late “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms” and the mid-Northern Wei Dynasty, numerous examples of small gilt bronze Buddha statuettes that are similar, whether in specific features, combinations of forms, or subject matter, have been discovered in the Guanzhong and Qinlong regions.

These statuettes were not original funerary objects for the tomb, but were mixed into at a later period. The specific time and process of their burial, and the motivation behind it, are beyond the scope of this paper. This issue can currently only be addressed through logical reasoning and lacks concrete evidence; it may remain contentious for a long time. The two Buddha statuettes were created at different times. The standing Buddha statuette was likely created in the late “Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms”, around the early 5th century. And the flat five-Buddha statuette was likely created between the Yanxing era and the early Taihe era of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty (around 471–484

AD). Between the two, the five-Buddha statuette is from a later date and can be regarded as the later limit for when these statuettes entered the tomb, meaning that the two statuettes could not have been placed in the tomb earlier than the reign of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ On 9 December 2021, the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration hosted a press conference to announce archaeological discoveries during the year. Following this, numerous media outlets, such as *Guangming Daily* 光明日報, *China Cultural Relics Newspaper* 中國文物報, and *Shaanxi Daily* 陝西日報 all carried special reports on the two gilt bronze Buddhist statuettes, with the content being largely consistent. For more details, see “Shanxi xianyang chutu guonei zuizao jintong foxiang” 陝西咸陽出土國內最早金銅佛像 [The Earliest Gilt Bronze Buddhist Statues Unearthed in China Discovered in Xianyang, Shaanxi]. *Guangming Daily* 光明日報 2021-12-10, page 09.
- ² For example, on 26 December 2021, the Artistic Research Academy of Sichuan Normal University hosted an academic dialogue titled “Newly Discovered Gilt Bronze Buddha Statues in Xianyang”, in which some scholars raised questions about the dating of the two Buddha statues. Moreover, this new discovery also garnered extensive attention beyond the academic community. On 30 December 2022, Yang Xin 陽新 published an article on the WeChat public account “Taiyang Henda Gumeishu” 太陽很大古美術, conducting a detailed comparative study of these two statuettes with existing early Buddhist statuettes in China, concluding that these two statuettes were likely mixed into the tomb at a later period and date back to the era of the Sixteen Kingdoms. See <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/0LAq9l1218BhC4Olrvyng> (accessed on 4 July 2024). Additionally, from 25–26 February 2022, the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration, in collaboration with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), hosted a workshop titled “Discovering the Earliest Gilt Bronze Buddhist Statues in China”. More than ten scholars from the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration, Hanyangling Museum, UCLA, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The University of Chicago, Yale University, University of Southern California, and Thammasat University participated in a public online academic discussion, bringing this topic to the attention of the international academic community. The scholars present at the workshop also failed to reach a consensus on the dating and other issues related to these two gilt bronze Buddhist statues. For more details, see Lei, Jie 雷潔 (Lei 2022a) “Discovering the Earliest Gilt Bronze Buddhist Statues in China: Archaeological Inferences” 發現中國最早的金銅佛像——考古的推斷, *The Paper: Private History* 澎湃新聞·私家歷史. 2022-03-06, https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_16973851 (accessed on 4 July 2024) and Lei, Jie 雷潔 (Lei 2022b) “Discovering the Earliest Gilt Bronze Buddhist Statues in China: Issues in Buddhist History” 發現中國最早的金銅佛像——佛教史的諸問題, *The Paper: Private History* 澎湃新聞·私家歷史. 2022-03-26, https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_17295519 (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- ³ The scientific analysis includes ultra depth of field microscopy, X-ray photograph, SEM-EDS, and metallographic analysis. The results show that the two bronze statuettes were made of lead–tin bronze through mold-casting. See (Li et al. 2022, pp. 123–28).
- ⁴ Isao Kurita’s catalogue alone contains a large number of related statuettes; for further details, see (Isao 1988, pp. 31, 51–52, 59, 74, 76, 78, 97, 110–13, 116–17, 119, 122, 125–28, 213, 254–55).
- ⁵ The tomb dates to around the same period as Cave 9 and Cave 10 of the Yungang Grottoes, i.e., approximately the 10th year of the Taihe era (486 AD); see (Han and Han 1984, p. 47). For detailed arguments, see (Ningxia Guyuan Bowuguan 寧夏固原博物館 1988, pp. 14–15).

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Article

A Sanctuary of Avatamsaka: The Theoretical and Practical Studies on Huayan Buddhism Embodied in the Sculptures of the Huayan Grotto in Anyue

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Abstract: The Huayan Grotto in Anyue County is one of the most typical caves of the grottoes of Sichuan 四川 and Chongqing 重慶. Being well known for its grand scale and the beautiful style of its sculptures, the cave was designed and carved by the Liu-Zhao sect 柳趙教派 in eastern Sichuan during the Southern Song Dynasty. The Liu-Zhao sect is a local religious group that relies on grottoes and statues to state concepts, propagate ideas, and spread doctrines. The sect is good at integrating a variety of Buddhist thoughts to form its own unique theoretical and practical system. The large-scale statue-making activities under the auspices of the Liu-Zhao sect 柳趙教派 are a classic example of the localization of Buddhism in Southwest China. The ideological system of the Liu-Zhao sect is centered on Huayan, and Huayan Grotto is the very concentration of its special philosophy. This paper considers that the cave constitutes a holy place, with a theme of thoughts of Huayan, which was built based on important doctrines of two masters. Through the combination and arrangement of diversified images, the cave is so far the most complex, complete, and systematic visualized representation of the Huayan's theory and practice. Inside the cave are carved full-length portraits of Li Tongxuan 李通玄, the Elder of Huayan, and Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密, the fifth patriarch of the Huayan sect. There are also statues and inscriptions that illustrate Li's thoughts, such as the Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations 十處十會 and the Sudhana's Pilgrimage 善財遍參 based on Li's exegetical writings on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; the Three Saints of the Huayan School (*Huayan sansheng* 華嚴三聖) carved on the basis of Li's pioneering idea about the trinity of three saints; and the mind-only verse 惟心偈, emphasizing mind as the foundation of Avatamsaka practice. Zongmi's Avatamsaka thoughts were mainly expounded through a series of commentaries on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經, to which the impressive Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment are directly related. In addition to the theoretical system, the cave offers two means for Avatamsaka practice. Highly qualified Avatamsaka practitioners practice by viewing the Trinity of Three Saints and the Buddha's Light, and then they go through five phases of fruition to attain Buddhahood, which is the Avatamsaka practice dominated by Li Tongxuan's thoughts. Less qualified practitioners practice through repentance liturgies and sitting in meditation at the Ritual Site of Perfect Enlightenment, which is the practice of Perfect Enlightenment advocated by Zongmi 宗密.

Keywords: Huayan Grotto 華嚴洞; Liu-Zhao sect 柳趙教派; Li Tongxuan 李通玄; Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密

1. Introduction

The Huayan Grotto 華嚴洞, perched on Mount Xianggai in Shiyang Town, Anyue 安岳 County, Sichuan 四川 Province, in southwest China, distinguishes itself as the largest Buddhist grotto carved in the Sichuan–Chongqing 川渝 region during the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties (960–1279), with a rectangular configuration, a flattened ceiling, and dimensions of 10.9 m in width, 5.9 m in height, and 9.4 m in depth (Figure 1). The sculptures housed in the grotto are characterized by their imposing stature, exquisite form, and intricate detailing, representing the pinnacle of artistic craftsmanship among the stone grottoes in the region. The grotto also boasts distinctive thematic elements, a logical layout, and rigorous overall planning and construction.



Figure 1. Panorama of Huayan Grotto. Photographed by the author.

Particularly noteworthy is a layman statuette positioned afront the crown of Vairocana Buddha 毗盧遮那佛, the primary statue on the main wall of the grotto. Adorned with a Su-Dongpo-style hat¹ and a cross-collared robe, and with his left arm missing, the layman figure typifies the sculptures constructed under the patronage of a locally influential Buddhist sect that flourished in the late Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) in eastern Sichuan. Moreover, Huayan Grotto reflects the sect's unique design ideas in other aspects such as location, scale, and inscriptions. The sect tends to create exclusive statue-making areas away from other folk niches, so Huayan Grotto was carved separately on Mount Xianggai. The impressive size of Huayan Grotto is a result of the sect's passion for creating large caves

and sculptures. The sect is keen on inscribing verses in prominent places and arranging them symmetrically in the form of couplet, like the “mind-only” verse in Huayan Grotto.

This sect reveres Liu Juzhi 柳居直 (reverentially, Liu Benzun 柳本尊, 843–907) as their spiritual leader, a lay Buddhist practitioner 居士 (*gr̥hapati*) from the late Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties period, who engaged in esoteric 密宗 (*guhya*) practices involving acts of self-immolation and self-mutilation. The statues of Liu Juzhi, depicted with blinded eyes, missing ears, and amputated arms, are ubiquitous in the sect’s grottoes. Its actual leader was Zhao Zhifeng 趙智鳳 (1159–1249), a local monk from Changzhou 昌州 during the Southern Song Dynasty. Within contemporary academic discourse, the sect is commonly referred to as the “Liu-Zhao sect”² 柳趙教派, a term derived from the surnames of its two pivotal leaders. The sect is particularly distinguished by its fervent dedication to the large-scale construction of grottoes, sculptures, and inscriptions to elaborate on its doctrines and ideas. The sculptures and inscriptions constructed by the sect are characterized by their rich content, unique form, and distinctive features, collectively constituting a coherent and self-contained landscape. Dozens of sculpture sites attributable to the sect have been discovered in Anyue County of Sichuan Province, and Dazu 大足 District of Chongqing Municipality 重慶, including the Baoding 寶頂 Mountain in Dazu, the Huayan Grotto, the Pilu 毘盧 Grotto, and the Mingshan 茗山 Temple in Anyue, with the Huayan Grotto being the most representative among these sites.

Compared to other well-known sects in the history of Buddhism, the remains of the Liu-Zhao sect are dominated by sculptures and inscriptions. The lack of relevant historical documents and other archaeological material results in the study of the Liu-Zhao sect relying almost entirely on grotto remains. There is only one geographic document, Yudi Jisheng 輿地紀勝, which describes the Liu-Zhao sect from the viewpoint of a contemporaneous bystander (X. Wang 2003, p. 4367). However, the relevant record is quite brief, with only one sentence mentioning that there are grottoes on Baofeng Mountain, where the monk Zhao Zhifeng practiced. Historical documents about this sect in the Ming and Qing dynasties contain many omissions and errors, and they are mainly concerned with the life stories of Liu Benzun and Zhao Zhifeng. In the 1940s, the Dazu stone carving expedition organized by Yang Jialuo first recognized Baoding Mountain as a mandala of Liu-Zhao sect (Yang 1985, pp. 25–27). In the 1980s, several sculpture sites with similar connotations were discovered in Shiyang Town, Anyue County, and scholars came to realize that Baoding Mountain was not the only stronghold of the sect (Chen and Deng 1986, p. 82). Since the beginning of 21st century, more grottoes by the Liu-Zhao sect have been discovered in Dazu and Anyue. The number of sculpture sites has exceeded 30 according to the statistics of Mi Defang (Mi 2019, pp. 518–19). Recently, the author participated in significant archaeological field work and identified some other Liu-Zhao caves, raising the number to 45. Such a large number of grottoes indicate that the Liu-Zhao sect dominated statue-making activities in eastern Sichuan during the late Southern Song Dynasty.

In recent years, scholars from both the East and the West have taken an interest in the grottoes of the Liu-Zhao sect, and their findings have been published. The Baoding Mountain Grotto, the sect’s largest and longest-operating sculpture site, has received the most attention. It was studied holistically by Chen Mingguang, Li Sisheng, Angela F. Howard, Karil J. Kucera, Li Jingjie, and Lei Yuhua. Li Yuqun, Phillip E. Bloom, Hu Wenhe, and Stephen F. Teiser each specialized in a particular cave or a specific subject in Baoding Mountain. The Mingshan Temple Grotto is rigorous in its overall planning and construction, and its theme, layout, and function were carefully analyzed by Henrik Sorensen and Sun Hua. Some of the subjects from the Pilu Grotto, Huayan Grotto, and Kongque Grotto have also attracted discussions. However, most of the smaller-scale sculpture sites are still unknown.

This local sect extensively assimilated the ideas of prominent Buddhist schools in the history of Chinese Buddhism, including the Huayan 華嚴, Chan 禪 (*Dhyāna*), esotericism, and Pure Land 淨土 (*Kṣetra-vara*) traditions, and integrated them in accordance with their interpretations and needs into a sophisticated and distinctive ideological framework, which is fully manifested in its sculptural landscape. Within its ideological construct, Liu Benzun, the spiritual leader of the sect, and Vairocana, the chief Buddha of the Huayan School, are recognized as reciprocal avatars of one another, highlighting the pivotal role of Huayan doctrines in the sect's ideology. The Huayan Grotto, a solemn sanctuary constructed by the sect as an embodiment of its core doctrines, is just themed around the Huayan doctrines.

As the earliest grotto in Anyue to attract scholarly attention, the documentation and research on the Huayan Grotto have lingered at a foundational level for an extended period. In the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, many scholars contributed articles introducing the grotto (Yuan 1986, pp. 45–52; W. Hu 1994, pp. 76, 317–18; Liu 1998, pp. 22, 24), with “The Huayan Grotto in Anyue” standing out as the most detailed survey (G. Li 1994, pp. 40–43), encompassing the grotto's configuration, statue themes, and significant inscriptions. Recently, “An Archaeological Report on the Huayan Grotto in Anyue County, Sichuan Province” has emerged as the most comprehensive documentation on the grotto (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, pp. 43–94), providing a solid foundation for future research through detailed texts and illustrations. Existing research primarily focuses on the chronological dating and thematic identification of the grotto. While a few scholars, relying on the inscriptions from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in the grotto, postulate a Five Dynasties excavation, the majority now concurs with a Song Dynasty excavation based on statue themes and styles (W. Hu 1997, p. 94; Zeng 2001, pp. 57–58; Lei 2014, p. 198). Additionally, these articles delve into the themes of the sculptures, with the statues of the Three Saints of the Huayan School 華嚴三聖 on the main wall's center and the Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment 圓覺菩薩 on the middle-lower sections of the left and right walls gaining widespread academic recognition. However, significant controversies still persist around certain statues, particularly the layman and the monk positioned at the main wall's left and right ends and the fourteen tableaux on the upper sections of the left and right walls. The misidentification of these statues has significantly hindered the overall interpretation of the grotto. Therefore, this article endeavors to correctly identify all the statues, with particular emphasis on the controversial ones; interpret the sect's religious doctrines and design concepts embodied in the statues and inscriptions; and explore the relationship between the statues and the sect's spiritual practices to uncover the primary function of the Huayan Grotto.

There are four main views on the identity of the monk and the layman. Chen Mingguang believes that the monk represents Zhao Zhifeng, that the layman is Zhao Zhifeng's disciple, and that the Huayan Grotto displays three generations of the sect (Chen and Deng 1986, p. 83). Li Guanzhi surmised that the two figures show the monkish appearance of Manjushri and Maitreya (G. Li 1994, p. 41). Wen Yucheng judged that the layman is Huayan Zujue 華嚴祖覺 (1087–1150) and the monk is a worshipper of Liu Benzun (Wen 2007, p. 118). Hu Wenhe identified the two statues to be Yang Zhijing and Yuan Chenggui, disciples of Liu Benzun, based on the “The Tablet of Biography of Liu Juzhi in Tang Dynasty” 唐柳居士傳碑 (W. Hu 2005, p. 231). The evidence provided is not sufficient to support those views, though. Moreover, some problems cannot be solved, such as the images not matching with the assumed identity and the identities not being closely related to other carvings in the Huayan Grotto. Therefore, they are not widely accepted by academics.

The fourteen tableaux are generally regarded as all belonging to Sudhana's Pilgrimages, a view that has been put forward by Li Guanzhi (G. Li 1994, pp. 41, 42), Hu Wenhe (W. Hu 1997, p. 92), and Li Jingjie (J. Li 2011, p. 295). However, some phenomena cannot be comprehended. The number of tableaux is only 10, far less than the 53 episodes of Sudhana's Pilgrimages. Moreover, each figure lacks the typical episode of Sudhana saluting his spiritual guides. In addition, there is a spiritual guide looks like a Buddha, contrary to Avatamsaka Sutra.

2. The Statue of Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635–730) and the Sculptures Embodying His Huayan Thought

2.1. The Statue of Li Tongxuan

On each end of the main wall, one retinue statue is carved. The layman statue positioned on the left end stands at a height of 2.78 m, featuring a bun atop its head with visible strands of hair. The face is characterized by its round and elongated shape, a radiant beam of light emanating from the mouth to both sides. The statue is dressed in a cross-necked undergarment (Figure 2), with a belt tied around the waist. Over the undergarment, it wears a double-breasted robe with wide sleeves, the front panels of which hang naturally. In its left hand, the statue holds a rectangular scroll, with the Chinese characters “合論” (*He Lun*) inscribed vertically on one corner of the cover (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, p. 53) (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Close-up of Li Tongxuan's head. Photographed by the author.



Figure 3. The Statue of patriarch Li Tongxuan. Photographed by the author.

The Chinese characters “合論” on the cover are the abbreviations for “華嚴經合論” (*Huayan Jing He Lun*), a combined version of Li Tongxuan’s commentary on the newly translated eighty-scroll *Avatamsaka Sutra* 華嚴經 (*Huayan Jing*), titled *New Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sutra* 新華嚴經論, and the *Da Fangguang Fo Huayan Jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (the *Avatamsaka Sutra*). As recorded in the *Biography of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasties* 宋高僧傳, “During the Dazhong era (847–860), monk Zhining 志寧 (active during 840s–850s) from Fujian-Zhejiang [閩越] area annotated the *Avatamsaka Sutra* with the *New Commentary* into a 120-scroll version... In the year 967 of the Qiande 乾德 era of the Song Dynasties, monk Huiyan 惠研 (active during 960s) from Fujian rearranged the version and named it *Huayan Jing He Lun* [*Combined Commentary and the Avatamsaka Sutra*], which was widely circulated and highly valued” (Zan 1987, p. 575). *He Lun* is Li Tongxuan’s magnum opus and a collection of his main Huayan thought. It reached the peak of its influence during the Song Dynasties and was regarded as a classic scripture of Huayan Buddhism by its practitioners. As Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1121), the prime minister and dharma protector during the reign of Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135), acclaimed in the preface to the *Chan Master Foguo’s Illustrated Verses of Praise on the Teaching of Manjusri* 佛國禪師文殊指南圖贊, “Patriarch Li’s 40-scroll *He Lun*, State Monk Chengguan’s 100-scroll *Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sutra*, Venerable Nāgārjuna’s 200,000 verses [*gāthā*], and Chan Master Weibai’s 54 eulogies—the theories of the four are highly esteemed by scholars” (Weibai 1983, p. 793a). The fact that Li’s *He Lun* was placed on a par with Chengguan’s *Commentary* in the preface reveals a glimpse of the high esteem in which it was held.

Although Li Tongxuan deeply studied Huayan Buddhism, he did not become an ordained monk but spent his entire life as a lay Buddhist and was later respectfully called Patriarch Li 李長者. The documents from the Tang and Song Dynasties record detailed descriptions of his appearance, particularly highlighting his habit of wearing wide-sleeved

robes without a belt. Tang Dynasty scholar Ma Zhi 馬支 (active during 860s–870s) described him as “wearing a birch-bark hat, a hemp robe and a long undergarment with wide sleeves, walking with his waist loose and without a leather belt” (Ma 1993, p. 654b). Zan Ning 贊寧 (919–1001), in his *Biography of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasties*, also stated that “He [Patriarch Li] wore a coarse cloth robe, with his waist unbelted” (Zan 1987, p. 574). The layman statue in the left corner in the Huayan Grotto, which wears a double-breasted robe with wide sleeves and the front panels hanging naturally, was carved with the intention of highlighting Patriarch Li’s unbelted waist. The two light beams emanating from the corners of the layman statue’s mouth are also important evidence for identifying him. Legend has it that, during the Tang and Song Dynasties, Patriarch Li made many miracles when composing his *He Lun*, among which the light beams emanating from his mouth is highlighted in the Huayan Grotto. The inscription on a stele from the Tang Dynasty describes him as “emanating divine light from his mouth, without lighting a lamp or candle” (J. Wang 1982, p. 15131a). As also stated in *Biography of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasties*, “When he [Patriarch Li] was composing *He Lun*, there were no lamps or candles in the room; every night he would write with a brush, with white light emanating from the corners of his mouth, more than a foot long and shining brightly, which became a constant” (Zan 1987, p. 574). The layman statue in the Huayan Grotto truthfully depicts Patriarch Li’s emanating light from the corners of his mouth. The image of Patriarch Li holding *He Lun* in one hand appeared in his shrine during the Tang Dynasty, which was described in an inscription on the stele of “Record of Miracles at Shenfu Mountain Temple” 神福山寺靈跡記 in the fourth year (907) of the Tianyou era as “holding the *He Lun*, with a tiger standing beside on the left” (J. Wang 1982, p. 15132a). The posture of “holding the *He Lun*” in the inscription is remarkably similar to that of the layman statue in the Huayan Grotto.

2.2. The Sculptures of “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” 十處十會 and “Sudhana’s Pilgrimages” 善財徧參

The profound impact of Patriarch Li and his works on the construction of the Huayan Grotto is evident not merely in the depiction of the lay practitioner but also in the sculptural contents that embody his Huayan thought.

The fourteen tableaux positioned above the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment on the left and right walls have traditionally been interpreted as representing episodes from the Sudhana’s fifty-three pilgrimages (W. Hu 1997, p. 92; J. Li 2011, p. 295). However, this article contends that this interpretation remains arguable. Upon closer examination, the sculptures in the upper sections of the left and right walls of the grotto can be categorized into three ensembles based on their thematic contents (Figure 4).

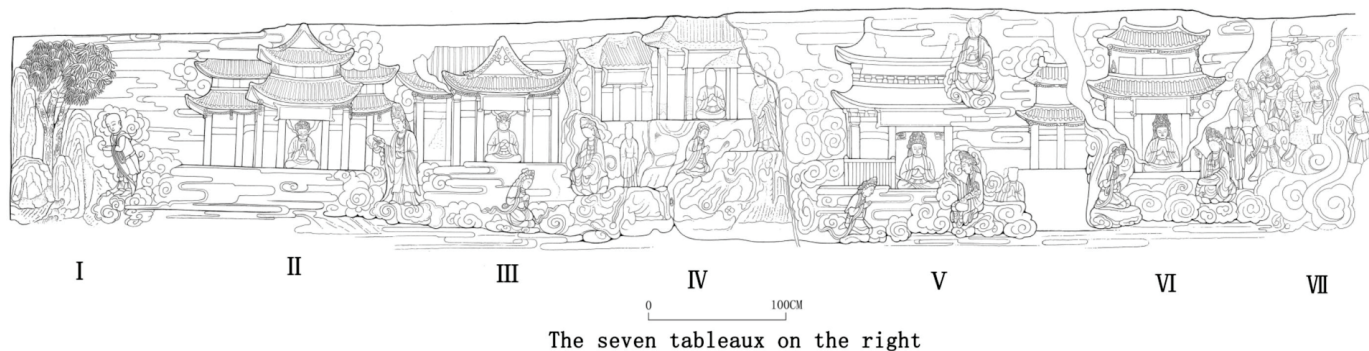


Figure 4. Cont.

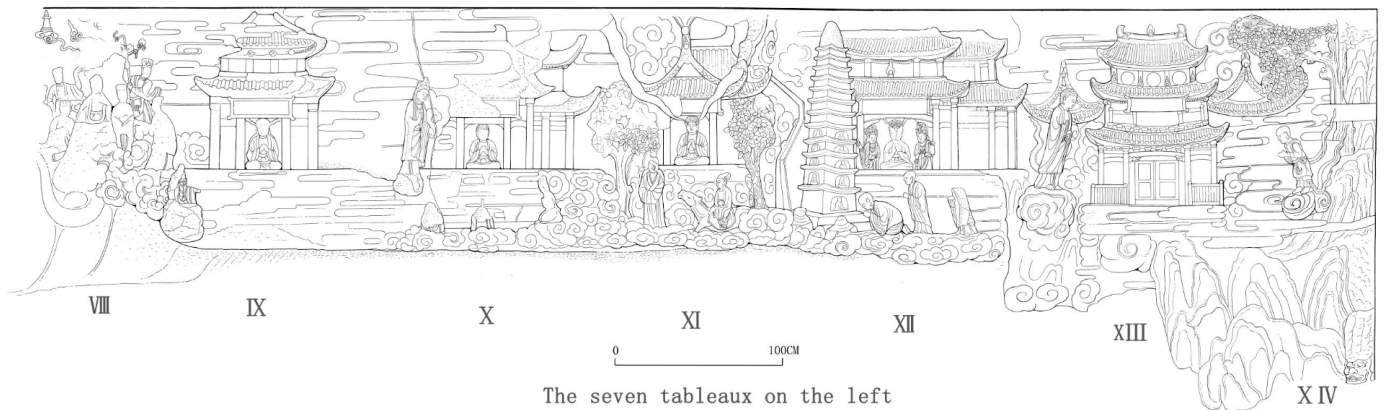


Figure 4. The statue of Ten Assemblies in Ten Location and the Sudhana's Pilgrimage. Provided by the author.

The first ensemble comprises two tableaux (numbers VII and VIII) positioned closest to the rear wall, both of which portray celestial beings 天人 (*divya-mānasyaka*) astride auspicious clouds, progressing towards the grotto's entrance. These celestial beings, as delineated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, exhibit a diversity of attire and mannerisms, vividly representing the Dharma protectors 護法 (*anudharma-pāla*) who convened for the Dharma Assembly 法會 (*dharna-saṃgīti*): "At that time, a multitude of Dharma protectors assembled in the Buddha's mandala [道場]. Countless deities, varying in forms and retinues, arrived from all directions to approach and pay homage to the Buddha" (Siksananda 1993, scroll 14, vol. 5, p. 836a).

The second ensemble of sculptures comprises ten tableaux, each displaying a consistent composition positioned centrally on both the left and right walls. Each tableau depicts an ornate pavilion or hall at its center, where a Buddha is seated in full lotus position. The hall is encircled by auspicious clouds and trees, while other narrative scenes unfold in front of the structure. The invariant arrangement of these elements—buildings, Buddha images, trees, and clouds—in all of these ten tableaux aligns precisely with the compositional motifs of recorded Dharma assemblies: "The treasure trees stand in orderly rows, their branches and leaves shining with brilliance... The halls or pavilions housing the Buddha are vast, magnificent, and imbued with beauty extending in all ten directions. The halls, pavilions, steps, and windows are all adorned with solemnity and splendor. The luminous clouds of Mani illuminate one another" (Siksananda 1993, vol. 5, pp. 785b, 786a).

The illustrations of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* discovered in Dunhuang 敦煌 and Dazu are all of the tableaux of "Nine Assemblies in Seven Locations" 七處九會 (W. Hu 2009, pp. 47–54; Quan 2003, pp. 133–55; Pan 2015, pp. 11–19). However, it is noteworthy that the Huayan Grotto marks the first depiction of ten assemblies, which aligns with the major feature of Li Tongxuan's Huayan thought as revealed in his *He Lun*. According to Li's interpretation, the number ten symbolizes perfection in the context of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. He explicitly states, "The various dharmas in this sutra regard ten as perfection; it cannot merely be said to have nine assemblies in seven locations" (Siksananda 1993, scroll 7, vol. 5, p. 753b). This distinction between "Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations" and "Nine Assemblies in Seven Locations" is a significant point of divergence between Li Tongxuan's and Fazang's 法藏 (643–712) Huayan thought. This distinction is specifically mentioned by Monk Zhipan: "Li's *He Lun* emphasizes ten assemblies in ten locations when discussing Dharma realm [法界 *dharmadhātu*], which contrasts with the Fazang's commentary" (Zhipan 2012, p. 657). Similarly, Zhining also points out in the preface to the *Combined Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sutra* that "there are slight differences from the com-

mentaries of other scholars, as *He Lun* incorporates the meaning of Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” (Zhining 1993, p. 653a).

In contrast to the distribution of nine assemblies in seven locations, Li Tongxuan consolidates the three assemblies in the Samanta-prabha Dharma Hall 普光法堂 into a singular entity, while incorporating the seventh, ninth, and tenth assemblies. By consulting the *He Lun*, one can accurately ascertain the ten assemblies represented within the second ensemble of sculptures.

On the right wall, proceeding inward from the entrance of the grotto, the first tableau (number II) illustrates the first assembly at the Bodhi-maṇḍas 菩提場, where the Vairocana Buddha, seated in the hall, emanates two rays of light from his nose and mouth. This scene corresponds to the textual record where “the Buddha emitted lights as numerous as temples and dust particles from between his teeth” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 18, vol. 5, p. 890b). A bodhisattva 菩薩 stands on the left side of the hall, pointing with an extended hand, symbolizing that Bodhisattva Samanta-bhadra 普賢菩薩 is “announcing to all the bodhisattvas in all bodhi-mandas” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 20, vol. 5, p. 912b).

The second tableau (number III) depicts the second assembly at the Samanta-prabha Dharma Hall 普光法堂. In this scene, the Vairocana Buddha emits two rays of light from between his eyebrows, representing the second assembly held in the Samanta-prabha Dharma Hall where “the Buddha emits great light from the white hair between his eyebrows” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 78, vol. 6, p. 729a). On the left side of the hall, a bodhisattva sits in lotus position, while another bodhisattva kneels on the right side, listening intently. This tableau depicts Bodhisattva Manjushri 文殊師利 expounding doctrines to the assembly of bodhisattvas: “With the power of the Buddha, Manjushri observes all the assemblies of bodhisattvas and utters these words” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 26, vol. 6, p. 34a).

The third tableau (number IV) shows the remnants of a light ray, heavily weathered but still recognizable, on each outer side of the legs of the Vairocana Buddha, who “emits hundreds of billions of brilliant lights of wonderful hues from the toes of both feet” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 31, vol. 6, p. 107b). In front of the hall, a bodhisattva is teaching, while another is listening. The speaker is Bodhisattva Dharmajna 法慧菩薩, the protagonist of the third assembly held at the Trayastrimsha Heaven 忉利天宮: “Dharmajna arises from meditation and addresses the bodhisattvas” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 33, vol. 6, p. 124b).

The fourth tableau (number V), where the Vairocana Buddha’s feet radiate lights, illustrates the fourth assembly held at the Suyāma Heaven 夜摩天宮: “The Buddha emits hundreds of billions of brilliant lights of wonderful hues from his two feet” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 37, vol. 6, p. 184a). The bodhisattva preaching in front of the hall is Guṇavana 功德林, who “arises from meditation and addresses the other bodhisattvas” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 37, vol. 6, p. 190a).

The fifth tableau (number VI) illustrates the fifth assembly held at the Tuṣṭita-bhavana Heaven 兜率天宮, where “the Buddha emits hundreds of billions of brilliant lights from his knees” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 42, vol. 6, p. 251a). The preaching bodhisattva is Vajra-kotu 金剛幢菩薩, who “receives the blessing on his head, arises from meditation and addresses the other bodhisattvas” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 42, vol. 6, p. 262a).

On the left wall, proceeding from the rear outward, the first tableau (number IX) depicts the sixth assembly held at the Paranirmita-vaśavartin Heaven 他化自在天宮, where the Buddha “emits pure lights from between his eyebrows” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 55, vol. 6, p. 432b). Despite the weathering of the statue’s facial features, two beams of light are still discernible emanating from the Buddha’s temples. The partially damaged seated bodhisattva in front of the hall represents Bodhisattva Vajra-garbha 金剛藏菩薩, who is expounding the essentials of spiritual practice to the bodhisattvas, as stated: “Bod-

hisattva Vajra-garbha arises from meditation, and addresses all the other bodhisattvas” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 55, vol. 6, p. 429b).

The second tableau (number X), devoid of any apparent light emission, is the seventh assembly held at the Trītiya-dhyāna Heaven 三禪天, an addition attributed to Li Tongxuan. According to the *Sutra of the Garland of a Bodhisattva’s Primary Karmas* 菩薩瓔珞本業經, the bodhisattva who initiates the preaching at the assembly is described as “asking questions to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas” (Zhu 1983, p. 1010c).

The third tableau (number XI) clearly portrays the Buddha emitting lights from between his eyebrows, which corresponds to the representation of Vairocana Buddha in the eighth assembly held at the Anātha-piṇḍa-dasyarmah 給孤獨園 who “emits great light from the white hair between his eyebrows” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 89, vol. 6, p. 882a). The tableau also includes mounted laymen and their retinues leading the way, which aligns perfectly with the descriptions of the assembly, which mentions “all the kings of the world and their retinues” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 88, vol. 6, p. 861b), “along with numerous kings of the world, all of whom have made offerings to numerous Buddhas and are always capable of benefiting all sentient beings” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 88, vol. 6, p. 861b).

The fourth tableau (number XII), featuring three monks bowing before a Buddhist stupa, illustrates the ninth assembly held at the Great Stupa Temple 大塔廟 in the east of Juecheng 覺城 (City of Enlightenment). In this scene, Bodhisattva Manjushri raises his right hand to guide Sudhana southward, while the Buddha emits great light in this place: “When all the Buddhas from the ten directions are about to preach, they all emit light from the white hair between their eyebrows to illuminate their body” (Siksananda 1993, scroll 90, vol. 6, p. 892a).

The fifth tableau (number XIII) differs slightly in configuration from the other nine, as it depicts Vairocana Buddha not seated in the hall but arriving on a cloud and it stands at the forefront. As the last assembly of the “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations”, “the Assembly of All Lands and All Worldly Realms” refers to all Dharma assemblies. This tableau utilizes the hall to symbolize the venue of the assembly and the standing Buddha to represent the protagonist of the assembly, thereby constituting the two essential elements of the assembly.

The third ensemble of sculptures comprises two tableaux (numbers I and XIV) positioned closest to the grotto’s entrance, both highlighting the portrayal of bald-headed children wearing shawls and trousers, their hands folded in reverence and bowed in a gesture of devotion. The child figure on the left walks towards the tableaux of the “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” in the grotto, while the other child figure on the right, having concluded his practice, turns away from the ten tableaux. This typical depiction signifies that the children embody Sudhana, the central figures in the chapter “*Entering the Dharma Realm*” 入法界品 (gaṇḍa-vyūha) in the latter portion of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Notably, this is the sole depiction discovered in the Sichuan–Chongqing region that features two images of Sudhana—one entering and the other exiting—symbolizing Sudhana’s pilgrimages. Conversely, other depictions of Sudhana’s pilgrimages from the Song Dynasties in the region, such as those at the Wofo Monastery 臥佛院 in Anyue, the Duobao Pagoda 多寶塔 in Dazu, the Baoen Pagoda 報恩塔 in Luzhou 瀘州, and the Shifo Temple 石佛寺 in Guang’an 廣安, all delineate the fifty-three scenes of Sudhana’s pilgrimages to spiritual guides 善知識 (*kalyanamitra*). By contrasting and correlating the content of “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” with that of Sudhana’s fifty-three pilgrimages, Li Tongxuan contended that the assemblies and the pilgrimages constitute the theoretical and practical facets of the singular entity and are essentially indistinguishable. Consequently, the in-

tricate pilgrimage narratives can be replaced by the Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations, and the dual Sudhana images adequately represent the entire process of *Huayan* practices.

These three ensembles of sculptures collectively represent the Huayan Grotto as a comprehensive embodiment of the *He Lun* that is imbued with the essence of Li Tongxuan's thoughts. The *He Lun* can be divided into two sections: chapters one to thirty-eight expound upon Buddhist doctrines, while chapter thirty-nine, "Entering the Dharma Realm", elucidates the spiritual practice process. The tableaux of "Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations", primarily covered in the first half of the eighty-scroll *Avatamsaka Sutra*, visualize the interpretations of the doctrines, whereas Sudhana's pilgrimages embody the practices described in the second half of the sutra. The Huayan Grotto stands as the most comprehensive and exquisite physical embodiment of Li Tongxuan's concept of "exploring the profound causes and effects of the ten assemblies and enumerating the practice methodologies from Sudhana's fifty-three pilgrimages" (Zan 1987, pp. 574–75).

2.3. The Statues of the Three Saints of the Huayan School

On the main wall of the Huayan Grotto, one Buddha and two bodhisattvas are carved. The Buddha in the center, measuring 2.8 m in height, wears a crown adorned with scrolling grass patterns, with a layman statuette afront the crown. The Buddha, round-faced, clad in a cassock, and with hands cupped in front of his chest, is seated in full lotus position on a Sumeru throne 須彌座. The two bodhisattvas both wear crowns adorned with scrolling grass patterns, each with a seated Buddha afront their crowns. They are also round-faced, adorned with pearl pendants on the chest, clad in cassocks, and seated in a half lotus position on the lotus thrones. The bodhisattva on the left, measuring 3.38 m in height, holds a pattra sutra 貝葉經 in his left hand, with the lotus throne resting on the back of a six-tusked white elephant. The bodhisattva on the right, measuring 3.2 m in height, holds a ruyi-scepter 如意 in his right hand, with his lotus throne supported by a lion (Figure 5) (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, pp. 51–54).



Figure 5. The statue of the Three Saints of the Huayan School. Photographed by the author.

This ensemble of statues is common in its combination but distinctive in its specific features. Scholarly consensus is unequivocal regarding the thematic interpretation, unan-

imously identifying the centrally located crowned Buddha as Vairocana, the one astride the elephant on the left as Bodhisattva Samanta-bhadra, and the one mounted on the lion on the right as Bodhisattva Manjushri, collectively referred to as the “Three Saints of the Huayan School”. Notably, within the context of the Huayan Grotto, Manjushri and Samanta-bhadra possess dual identities. While functioning as attendants to the Buddha on the main wall, they also integrate with the ten bodhisattvas on the adjacent left and right walls to constitute the “Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment”. Remarkably, these two bodhisattvas are extracted from the ranks of the twelve bodhisattvas on the side walls and positioned prominently in front of the main wall, with their bodies subtly inclined towards the central Vairocana Buddha. Standing at over 3 m in height, they loom over the other ten bodhisattvas, which measure approximately 1.7 m tall, thereby suggesting that their identity as Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment is of secondary importance and their role in forming the trio with Vairocana Buddha is more crucial.

The significant emphasis on the Three Saints is closely tied to Li Tongxuan’s concept of “Integration of the Three Saints” (三聖圓融), which has exerted a profound influence on Huayan Buddhism. In contrast to the tendency of Zhiyan 智儼 (602–226) and Fazang 法藏 to favor Samanta-bhadra, Li Tongxuan advocates the equality and integration of Vairocana, Manjushri, and Samanta-bhadra as a trinity, which has subsequently transformed the belief system of the Huayan School (Wei 2017, pp. 57–62).

Li Tongxuan posited that the Three Saints encapsulate the core doctrines and ideas of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*: “The overarching principles guiding the interpretation of the inquiries and responses as well as the truths and representations contained in this sutra are rooted in three primary sources: firstly, Vairocana Buddha; secondly, Bodhisattva Manjushri; and thirdly, Bodhisattva Samanta-bhadra” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 739a). He consistently highlighted the indispensable unity among Vairocana, Manjushri, and Samanta-bhadra, asserting that “these three dharmas are essentially one” (T. Li 1983b, Jueyilun, p. 1013b). Furthermore, he emphasized, “Neglecting any one of the three would dismantle their original integrated system” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 747b). This is because the synthesis of Buddhist wisdom, embodied by Manjushri, and Buddhist practice, represented by Samanta-bhadra, is indispensable for attaining Buddhahood, represented by Vairocana. In Li Tongxuan’s theoretical framework, the Three Saints symbolize the entirety of the doctrines contained in the eighty-scroll *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Consequently, the Huayan Grotto utilizes the Three Saints as the primary deities on its main wall, overseeing the sculptures throughout the grotto. Moreover, the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment are formally separated to represent the unity of the religious doctrines of Vairocana, Manjushri, and Samanta-bhadra, thereby further highlighting the Liu-Zhao sect’s emphasis on Li Tongxuan’s Huayan thought.

2.4. “Mind-Only” Verse 惟心偈

On either side of the Vairocana Buddha, inscribed panels are carved, each measuring 100 cm in width and 140 cm in height. Within each of these panels, there is inscribed one verse in large, double-lined, regular Chinese characters. The characters on the left panel read, “If one aspires to comprehend thoroughly all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future” (若人欲了知, 三世一切佛), while the characters on the right panel states, “One should contemplate the true nature of the Dharma-realm, for all phenomena emanate from the mind only” (應觀法界性, 一切惟心造) (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, pp. 80–81) (Figure 6).

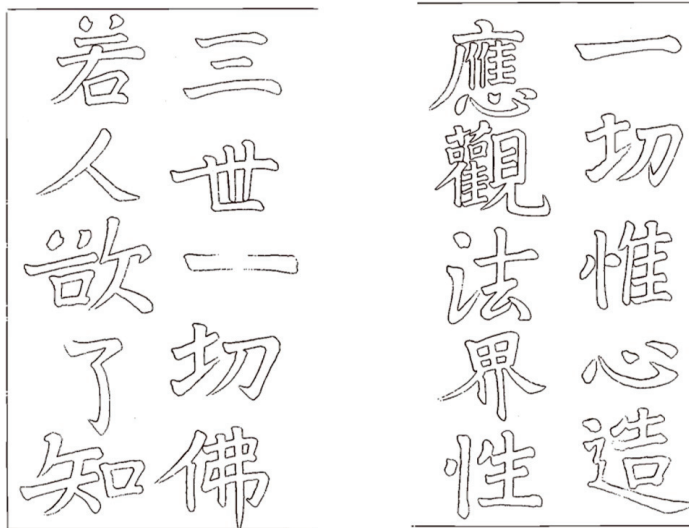


Figure 6. The carved inscription of the “mind-only” verse. Provided by the author.

This verse is excerpted from scroll 19 of the eighty-scroll *Avatamsaka Sutra*, where it is documented that ten bodhisattvas convened at the Dharma Assembly, each chanting a verse. The verse inscribed in the Huayan Grotto was chanted by Bodhisattva Forest of Awakening 覺林菩薩. Among the myriad scrolls of the eighty-scroll *Avatamsaka Sutra*, only a few verses have garnered widespread recognition. The prominent inscription of this particular verse on both sides of the Buddha in the Huayan Grotto is attributable not merely to its widespread recitation but also to its concise encapsulation of another pivotal Huayan concept advanced by Li Tongxuan. His principal works repeatedly underscore the pivotal role of the “mind” in Huayan practice, aligning with this verse’s emphasis on the “mind” as the cornerstone of enlightenment.

Li Tongxuan believed that “all Buddhas are identical with their own mind; all sentient beings are identical with their innate nature” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 768b). He further stated, “If one remains deluded, the obstacles within the mind become boundless, and one remains distant from the Buddha realm. If one is enlightened, myriad Buddha realms are within one’s own pores, layered like shadows” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 817a). According to this doctrine, since the Buddha resides within one’s mind, there is no need to seek externally for enlightenment. The opening of Li Tongxuan’s other significant work, *Ten Manifestations of Resolving Doubts, Manifesting Wisdom, and Attaining Compassion* 解迷顯智成悲十明論, also emphasizes, “If a practitioner seeks to attain the great *Bodhichitta* [菩提心], there is no need to search afar; it suffices to purify one’s own mind” (T. Li 1983a, Shi Ming Lun, p. 768c). He further proclaimed, “The mind of all sentient beings possesses the vast wisdom of the Buddha” (T. Li 1983a, Shi Ming Lun, p. 768b).

This doctrine was not originally conceived solely by Li Tongxuan, nor is it exclusive to the Huayan School. However, it constitutes a significant component of Li Tongxuan’s Buddhist thought. He interpreted the sutras from the perspective of the “mind”, explicitly asserting that the purification and contemplation of the mind are central to Huayan practice. The Liu-Zhao sect placed a verse adjacent to the Buddha that most aptly captures Li’s conception of the mind. This placement not only complements and augments the religious significance of the Huayan Grotto but also serves as a crucial guide for practitioners in their engagement with Huayan practice.

So far, Li Tongxuan and his Huayan thought have been fully materialized by the statues and sculptures in the Huayan Grotto. The statue of Patriarch Li Tongxuan stands prominently at the left corner of the rear wall. The statues of the Three Saints embody Li’s concept of “Integration of the Three Saints”, while the verse inscribed on both sides

of Vairocana Buddha offers a concise articulation of his “mind-only” idea. Furthermore, the sculptures depicting the “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” and “Sudhana’s Pilgrimages” encapsulate the essence of his Huayan thought. More than half of the statues and sculptures in the grotto are directly derived from Li Tongxuan and his theories on Huayan Buddhism, reflecting the Liu-Zhao sect’s profound comprehension of Li’s Huayan thought and their profound reverence for the patriarch himself.

3. The Statue of Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) and the Sculptures Embodying His Huayan Thought

In the middle and lower sections of the left and right walls of the Huayan Grotto, five statues of bodhisattvas are carved on each wall, with heights ranging from 1.65 to 1.73 m. Each of the ten bodhisattvas is adorned with crowns embellished with scrolling grass patterns. Positioned in front of each crown, a Buddha sits in the lotus position, exhibiting a graceful and serene demeanor. The bodhisattvas wear pearl pendants on their chests and are dressed in double-collared robes that flow downward. Their gestures and the objects they hold in their hands are varied; some hold lotus flowers or scriptures, while others support pagodas or cups. They are seated in either half lotus or full lotus positions on pedestal altars that imitate wooden designs (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, pp. 60–65) (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The statue of the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment. Photographed by the author.

Scholarly consensus holds that the ensemble of the ten bodhisattvas along with Manjusri and Samanta-bhadra positioned on the main wall collectively constitute the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment. Li Guanzhi has provided specific identifications for each of these bodhisattvas (G. Li 1994, p. 41). These sculptures illustrate a tableau where the Twelve Bodhisattvas sequentially solicit teachings from the Buddha in their pursuit of perfect enlightenment. In accordance with the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經, Manjusri and Samanta-bhadra, positioned on the left and right sides of the main wall, are the first and second to request teachings. The sequence continues with the third, fifth, seventh, ninth, and eleventh bodhisattvas arrayed before the right wall, while the fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth are positioned in front of the left wall.

The Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment are pertinent to the identification of the monk statue positioned at the right corner of the rear wall in the Huayan Grotto. The layman statue located at the left corner has already been authenticated as Patriarch Li Tongxuan. The monk statue, standing in symmetrical opposition to Patriarch Li, measures 2.85 m in height, depicting a bald figure with curly hair cascading down the side of his head. He is adorned with a cross-collared undergarment and a double-collared cassock that flows externally, with one corner securely fastened to a Jena ring on his left shoulder. The monk figure extends his left hand forward, clutching a sutra upon which the characters “□略”³ (indicating an abbreviated text) are faintly discernible, while his right hand is raised, palm facing sideways, in front of his chest (Figure 8). In comparison to the statue of Patriarch Li, this monk statue is not particularly prominent in its features, and the name of the sutra has been damaged, necessitating the examination of other statues in the grotto for definitive identification. It is established that Li Tongxuan is directly related to the statues of the Three Saints of the Huayan School as well as the sculptures depicting the “Ten Locations and Ten Assemblies” and “Sudhana’s Pilgrimages”. However, he is not linked to the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* or the statues of the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment. It is hypothesized that this particular theme is intimately connected to the monk figure and may even encapsulate the core of his Buddhist thought. Furthermore, the proximity of this statue to Patriarch Li suggests that he was a prominent figure in the history of Huayan Buddhism.

An examination of the history of Chinese Buddhism reveals that only Master Zongmi of Guifeng 圭峰宗密 has such a connection with the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*. Zongmi, a prominent sutra monk-commentator 義解僧 during the mid-to-late Tang Dynasty, was instrumental in advancing both Chan Buddhism and Huayan Buddhism. As a disciple of Monk Daoyuan 道圓 (active during 800s) from Suizhou 遂州, Zongmi belonged to the fifth generation of the Heze lineage (荷澤系) within the Southern School (南宗) of Chan Buddhism. Additionally, he studied Huayan Buddhism under the guidance of Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), known as the State Monk Qingliang 清涼國師. Therefore, Zongmi was highly regarded as the Fifth Patriarch of the Huayan School. Chengguan once commended Zongmi, stating, “Of those capable of following me in exploring the pure land of Vairocana 華藏世界, it must be you” (Daoyuan 1983, pp. 305c–306a). Among the numerous commentaries on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, Zongmi’s commentaries are the most influential. His Huayan thought is predominantly articulated through a series of annotations and commentaries on the sutra.



Figure 8. The statue of Zongmi. Photographed by the author.

In his early years as a novice monk, Zongmi stumbled upon the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and was profoundly moved. As recorded, “Upon encountering the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, he was enlightened to tears before he had even finished reading the scroll. Upon his return, he eagerly shared his enlightenment with his spiritual master” (Pei 1983, p. 523c). Sensing a strong karmic connection with this sutra, Zongmi diligently pursued its study thereafter: “After reading just two pages, I could not contain the immense joy that filled my body and mind. From that moment on, I have been deeply engrossed in its study, a passion that has persisted to this day. I often ponder if I had studied it in a past life, or what karmic ties bind me to it. I simply feel a profound sense of joy that permeates my very being. For many years, I tirelessly sought out eminent monks specializing in commenting on the scripture” (Zongmi 1993, Lueshu Chao, p. 212b). Subsequently, Zongmi’s academic endeavors centered around annotating and commenting on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* throughout his life. As recorded, “Later, in order to delve deeper into the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and Chengguan’s *Detailed Commentary*, and to explore the roots and fruits of Buddhist teachings, I thoroughly read all of my collections of scriptures. Whatever I heard, inquired about, discussed, or read, I meticulously referred to the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, comparing the roots and fruits in search of their essence” (Zongmi 1993, Lueshu Chao, p. 213a). Through Zongmi’s interpretation and promotion, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* emerged as a pivotal scripture of Huayan Buddhism, challenging the supremacy of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and even gradually supplanting it as the core scripture of the tradition (Gong 2018, pp. 87–95).

Zongmi dedicated his entire life to the elucidation of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, producing seminal works such as the *Extensive Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* 大疏 and its condensed version, the *Abbreviated Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* 略疏. He further contributed with the *Annotated Extensive Commentary* (疏鈔) and the *Annotated Abbreviated Commentary* (略疏鈔), which are commentaries on the two aforementioned works, respectively. His *Rituals for Cultivating and Verifying the Sutra of Per-*

fect Enlightenment in Bodhimandalas 圓覺經道場修證儀 provides guidance for the spiritual practice of Huayan Buddhism (J. Hu 2013, pp. 29–33). As noted by Jujian 居簡, a Chan Buddhist monk from the Southern Song Dynasty, regarding the widespread dissemination of Zongmi's commentaries on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* in southwestern China, "Zongmi elucidated this sutra and composed the *Extensive Commentary*, spanning tens of thousands of words. He further condensed this verbose version into the *Abbreviated Commentary*. Both versions have been in wide circulation since the Tang Dynasty, and all the Buddhist practitioners in the southwestern region possess this set of scriptures, indicating their extensive circulation and influence" (Jujian 1993, p. 1b). From this context, the second surviving Chinese character on the scroll held by the monk in the Huayan Grotto, "略" (abbreviated), is derived from the title of the *Abbreviated Commentary*. Although the first character is nearly damaged, the visible vertical strokes in the lower right corner, one long and the other short, suggest that they belong to the right lower part of the character "疏" (commentary). Thus, the original characters on the scroll are likely "疏略" (Abbreviated Commentary). The *Abbreviated Commentary* encapsulates Zongmi's thoughts on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and enjoys considerable popularity and influence in the Sichuan region, making it a representative work of his. Zongmi's holding the *Abbreviated Commentary* aligns well with Patriarch Li's holding the *Combined Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sutra* in terms of both formal presentation and doctrinal content.

In the Huayan Grotto, the statues pertaining to Zongmi occupy approximately half of the space. Notably, a monk statue displaying a scroll stands at the right corner of the rear wall, and the large mural depictions of the Twelve Bodhisattvas of the Perfect Enlightenment cover the middle and lower sections of the left and right walls. The monk statue represents Zongmi, while the mural statues encapsulate the essence of his Huayan thought. Half of the Huayan thought represented in the grotto stems from Patriarch Li, and the other half from Zongmi of Guifeng. In this single grotto, their theoretical pursuits of Huayan Buddhism illuminate with the brilliance of celestial stars.

4. The Practical Studies on Huayan Buddhism

4.1. On the Huayan Spiritual Practice and Cultivation

Li Tongxuan is highly regarded by certain academics as a prominent synthesizer of Wutaishan 五臺山 Huayan thought, which is primarily distinguished by its practice-orientedness and populism. This practice-orientedness is particularly evident in its focus on methodologies and paths for spiritual practice. "Li Tongxuan engaged in practicing the 'Contemplation of Integration of the Three Saints' [三聖圓融觀] at Fangshan [方山] in Shouyang [壽陽] County, a southern hub of the Wutaishan Buddhist cultural landscape, and also practiced the 'Contemplation of Jewel-Colored Radiance [寶色光明觀]'" (Kojima 2000, p. 14). Both the "Contemplation of the Integration of the Three Saints" and the "Contemplation of Jewel-Colored Radiance" (also known as the "Contemplation of the Buddha's Radiance 佛光觀") are prominently represented in the Huayan Grotto in Anyue.

The "Contemplation of Integration of the Three Saints" is vividly represented through the statues of these deities carved on the main wall of the Huayan Grotto. In Li Tongxuan's *A Brief Interpretation on the Casuistry of the Practice Sequence in the New Commentaries on the Avatamsaka Sutra* 略釋新華嚴經修行次第決疑論, the core ideas of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are elucidated from a practical standpoint, with a consistent emphasis on the pivotal role of the Three Saints in meditation. Li asserts, "Moreover, Manjusri, Samanta-bhadra, and Vairocana are all equal in essence and form, and this is called the One Vehicle [*ekayāna* 一乘]. Those who have newly awakened the Bodhi mind should believe, observe, practice, and attain enlightenment in this way" (T. Li 1983b, Jueyilun, p. 1014a). Furthermore, Li emphasizes, "Practitioners should always take three methodologies represented

by Manjusri, Vairocana, and Samanta-bhadra as the fundamental ways throughout their cultivation. Some practitioners, although having the aspiration to attain Buddhahood, are often engrossed in a single way and lose sight of the further cultivation" (T. Li 1983b, Jueyilun, p. 1013b). To illustrate this point, Li compares the Three Saints to signposts along the main path: "The fundamental wisdom of Manjusri and Vairocana, combined with the discriminative wisdom of Samanta-bhadra, constitutes the essence of spiritual practice. By emulating these deities, practitioners can avoid losing their way, falling into doubt, or experiencing disorders in their cultivation. They serve as signposts along the main path, guiding travelers to dispel their doubts" (T. Li 1983b, Jueyilun, p. 1048c). Notably, the roles of Manjusri and Samanta-bhadra vary at different stages of practice. "At the stage of Ten Faiths 十信 up to the Five Levels 五位 of bodhisattva cultivation, Manjusri serves as the primary guide for selection and direction, with Samanta-bhadra as the assistant. However, upon attaining buddhahood, the roles reverse, with Samanta-bhadra becoming the primary guide and Manjusri taking a supporting role" (T. Li 1983b, Jueyilun, pp. 1046a, 1046b). Undoubtedly, the statues of the Three Saints in the Huayan Grotto serve as objects of contemplation for practitioners. Throughout the entire process of Huayan practice, Vairocana, Manjusri, and Samanta-bhadra always play a guiding role. Thus, the magnificent statues of the Three Saints of the Huayan School are prominently placed at the front of the main wall of the Huayan Grotto, ready to inspire and guide practitioners to "observe in this way".

The "Contemplation of the Buddha's Radiance" is embodied by the Vairocana Buddha in the "Ten Assemblies" depicted on the upper sections of the left and right walls. This contemplative practice is a methodology peculiar to the Huayan School, which was widely prevalent in the Wutaishan region. Monks such as Jietuo 解脱 (561–642) and his disciple Mingya 明曜 (558–?), from Foguang 佛光 Mountain in the Wutaishan area, were renowned practitioners of this method. Li Tongxuan, another figure connected with the Wutaishan cultural milieu, was evidently influenced by this tradition and coined it as the "Contemplation of Jewel-Colored Radiance". He held the belief that the radiance emanating from the Buddha's body serves as a guiding beacon for practitioners, and the sequential order of this radiation is linked to that of the practice in the Huayan School, so it cannot be disrupted. As Siksanda noted, "In discussing the ways of radiating, there exist ten distinct ways, each representing Ten Faiths, Ten Abidings 十住, Ten Conducts 十行, Ten Redirections 十回向, and Ten Stages 十地 in a sequential order of cause and effect. This arrangement is immutable, contrasting sharply with the Buddha's radiance in other sects" (Siksanda 1993, scroll 3, vol. 5, p. 700b). The orderly depiction of the radiating parts of the Buddha's body in the Huayan Grotto aligns with Li's conception. Furthermore, Li enumerated specific correspondences between the Buddha's radiance and the sequence of practice, stating, "Initially, ten kinds of light radiate from between the teeth, glorifying all mandalas within the Dharma realm, thereby marking the initial attainment of enlightenment" (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 738a).

The sculptures depicting "Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations" and "Sudhana's Pilgrimages" in the Huayan Grotto illustrate the five-level spiritual practice path of the Huayan School, which refers to Ten Abidings, Ten Conducts, Ten Redirections, Ten Stages, and the Eleventh Stages 十一地. Li Tongxuan equates this five-level practice path with the teachings imparted by the bodhisattvas in the Ten Locations and Sudhana's pilgrimages to seek out spiritual mentors (*kalyanamitra*). For instance, "in the Fourth Assembly at the Suyāma Heaven, the ten bodhisattvas, including Bodhisattva Guṇa-vana, each expound a unique way to enlightenment, collectively forming the ten-conduct ways. This is analogous to Sudhana's southward journey to the Three-Eyed Kingdom, where he encounters monk Shanzhu 善住 and ten subsequent spiritual mentors. Each of these mentors prac-

tices the ten conduct ways as expounded by Bodhisattva Guṇa-vana in the scriptures” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 751a). Together with Manjusri (the bodhisattva who inspires faith), Maitreya (the embodiment of perfection), and Samanta-bhadra (the personification of Buddhist conduct), they constitute a holistic process of Huayan practice. The primary purpose of carving these sculptures in the Huayan Grotto is to demonstrate the intricate steps of Huayan practice for practitioners. As Li Tongxuan notes, “The *Avatamsaka Sutra* contains ways, yet few seek to learn them. Therefore, Sudhana is instructed to inquire about and sequentially carry out each way, as previously stated in the sutra. Merely discussing these ways may lead to confusion in practice. Hence, Sudhana is tasked with personally practicing each of them sequentially, ensuring that future practitioners encounter no obstacles” (T. Li 1983c, Jing Lun, p. 751c).

4.2. On the Spiritual Practice and Cultivation of Perfect Enlightenment

During the mid-to-late Tang Dynasty, when Zongmi lived, the Huayan School was undergoing an ideological shift, transitioning from abstract theory to practical cultivation. Zongmi emerged as a pivotal figure who aligned with this trend and actively promoted this transformation. He “discovered in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* the path of spiritual practice urgently needed in teaching Huayan Buddhism at that time” (Gong 2018, p. 89).

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is intended to illuminate the path to Buddhahood for all sentient beings through the dialectical exchange between the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment, thereby encompassing extensive teachings on spiritual practice. As a scholar-monk oriented towards spiritual practice, Zongmi emphasized repeatedly in his commentary on this sutra the indispensable unity of knowledge and action. He stated, “By acknowledging the deficiencies stemming from a lack of practice, one has awakened to the significance of practice and subsequently inquiries into the methods of practice arise. How, then, can one permanently discern through illusions? It is said: Mere aspiration to comprehend the ultimate truth, without engaging in diverse practices, cannot ultimately lead to a pure mind” (Zongmi 1983b, Lueshu, scroll 1, p. 537a). Zongmi’s thought on spiritual practice is epitomized in his *Rituals for Cultivating and Verifying the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment in Bodhimandalas* 圓覺經道場修證儀, and the Huayan Grotto is meticulously arranged as “a mandala dedicated to cultivate the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*”.

According to the *Ritual*, the first of the seven gateways is “Encouraging Practice” 勸修: “Images of Vairocana, Manjushri, and Samanta-bhadra should be displayed to encourage practitioners to gaze upon these images with reverence, contemplate deeply within their hearts, offer sincere worship, confess their sins with earnestness, and make solemn vows” (Zongmi, *Xiuzheng Yi*, p. 723a). The magnificent and exquisite statues of the Three Saints, carved on the main wall of the Huayan Grotto, serve as objects of admiration, contemplation, prostration, and confession, fostering the development of faith among practitioners. The fifth gateway, “Requirements for Practice 具緣”, stipulates that meditation (*dhyāna* 禪定) requires a tranquil and secluded environment. It lists three suitable locations for meditation: “first, a remote mountainous area where no one ventures; second, a hermitage situated at least three *li* 里 away from human settlements and devoid of disturbing noises such as those from grazing animals; and third, a pure and serene Buddhist temple far removed from layman’s dwellings” (Zongmi, *Xiuzheng Yi*, p. 728b). Considering the location and environment of the Huayan Grotto, it does not fit the description of either a remote mountain or a pure Buddhist temple, but rather aligns well with the second option, a hermitage. The sixth gateway, “Preparations of the Place 嚴處”, reiterates that “one must first choose a simple and quiet place as the mandala for practice, free from noise, filth, and obstacles, as mentioned previously in ‘Requirements for Practice’” (Zongmi, *Xiuzheng Yi*,

p. 729a). This gateway also elaborates on the offerings to the Three Saints: “An image of Vairocana should be placed in the center, with images of Samanta-bhadra and Manjushri on either side, forming the Three Saints. Lotus lamps should be lit, and incense should be burned. All utensils used for offerings must be clean and do not need to be precious” (Zongmi, *Xiuzheng Yi*, p. 729a). A rectangular wooden-imitating table is placed in front of the main wall of the Huayan Grotto (Sichuan daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan et al. 2021, pp. 55–56). Although the table is now empty, one can envision the lotus lamps, incense burners, and other offerings that were placed on it during the rituals. The positioning of the table in front of Vairocana, Manjushri, and Samanta-bhadra aligns perfectly with the descriptions of the offerings to the Three Saints outlined in the *Ritual*.

The specific activities engaged in by practitioners in the past are no longer observable, yet the Huayan Grotto offers insight into the overall configuration of the mandala recorded in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* through material relics, particularly in aspects such as site selection, statue arrangement, and offering settings. The *Ritual* promotes a path of spiritual practice that integrates confession rituals 禮懺 with meditation. Within this unique mandala, practitioners of Perfect Enlightenment are not required to concentrate their minds and imagine; rather, the objects of their prayer, contemplation, and prostration are tangibly present around them. Performing confession rituals or engaging in meditation practices beneath the majestic or compassionate gaze of Vairocana and the Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment must constitute an unparalleled and profound spiritual practice experience.

The spiritual practice detailed in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, such as confession rituals and meditation, serves as a complement to the spiritual practice outlined in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. In his *Annotated Abbreviated Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, Zongmi acknowledges the profound and extensive doctrines of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* while criticizing its complexity, noting that it is less accessible to beginners than the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*. Zongmi remarks, “Given its numerous volumes and intricate doctrines, it is challenging for those who have newly awakened the bodhi mind to delve deeply into it. It is akin to precious treasures in the ocean, hard to obtain” (Zongmi 1993, Lueshu Chao, p. 212b). The mandala of Perfect Enlightenment was initially established for practitioners with lesser or duller wisdom roots 根. Zongmi emphasizes, “A mandala serves as a necessary practice enhancer for those with lesser wisdom roots before they formally embark on their spiritual journey” (Zongmi 1983a, Lueshu, scroll 1b, p. 539a). He further elucidates the significance of the mandala for such practitioners: “The mandala is where one attains enlightenment. It is a place where one vows and resolves to make the necessary preparations within a specified time to seek and attain the truth. Known as ‘jiaxing’ 加行 [practice enhancer], it provides a disciplined and restrictive environment for practitioners with lesser wisdom roots, who may have many distractions and an unsettled mind. By entering the mandala, they can enhance the effectiveness of their spiritual practice” (Zongmi, *Lueshu*, scroll 2b, p. 571a). The realm of Huayan Buddhism demands high standards from its practitioners. Chengguan, in his preface to the *Commentary*, states, “Even Bodhisattvas who cultivate all forms of practice may still perish at the Dragon Gate [龍門], indicating that the realm of Huayan can only be attained by those possessing great wisdom and morality” (Chongxian and Keqin 1983, p. 193a). The mandala not only offers diverse practices such as confession rituals and meditation but also tailors suitable ways to enlightenment for practitioners with different wisdom roots. The practice advocated in Zongmi’s *Ritual*, combined with the Huayan practice dominated by Li Tongxuan’s thought, constitutes the entirety of practices embodied in the Huayan Grotto.

The Three Saints of the Huayan School, depicted on the main wall of the Huayan Grotto, stand together, overseeing the progression of Huayan Buddhist practice on the

one hand, and functioning as the principal deities of veneration in the mandala of Perfect Enlightenment on the other. The verse that “All phenomena emanate from the mind only” serves as a constant reminder to all practitioners that the “mind” is the key to their practice. The splendid radiance of the Buddha in the sculptures of “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” guides the “mind” in cultivating faith and achieving enlightenment. Meanwhile, “Sudhana’s fifty-three pilgrimages” illustrate the whole process of Huayan spiritual practice, encompassing the five sequential levels of spiritual advancement to Buddhahood. The Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment, smiling and gazing down, bear witness to the grand confession rituals in the mandala and the meditation of practitioners, each of whom pursues their own path to perfect enlightenment. Those possessing superior wisdom roots are more suited to Huayan spiritual practice, whereas those with lesser wisdom roots may find greater reliance on the rituals of the mandala of Perfect Enlightenment. In light of this, it is evident that the statues and sculptures in the Huayan Grotto are all arranged with the intent of facilitating spiritual practice. Undeniably, the primary objective in constructing the grotto was to aid in the spiritual practice of Huayan Buddhism.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the Huayan Grotto in Anyue serves as a sacred sanctuary constructed by the Liu-Zhao sect, adhering to the prevalent theories on Huayan Buddhism during the Song Dynasties. The sculptures and inscriptions in the grotto are the condensed manifestations of the Huayan thoughts of Patriarch Li Tongxuan and Zongmi of Guifeng. The towering statues of the two esteemed patriarchs of the Huayan School at the left and right ends of the grotto’s main wall, the statues of the Three Saints of the Huayan School, the inscriptions of the “mind-only” verse, and the tableaux illustrating “Ten Assemblies in Ten Locations” and “Sudhana’s Pilgrimages” on the upper sections of the left and right walls were all meticulously carved in accordance with Li Tongxuan’s interpretations of Huayan Buddhism. The Twelve Bodhisattvas of Perfect Enlightenment, located on the middle lower sections of the left and right walls, are closely linked to Zongmi’s theories on Huayan Buddhism. The Huayan Grotto not only functions as a comprehensive repository of the theories on Huayan Buddhism that were prevalent during the Song Dynasties but also offers two distinct paths of Huayan practice tailored to practitioners of varying wisdom roots. Talented practitioners may engage in the “Contemplation of Integration of the Three Saints” and the “Contemplation of the Buddha’s Radiance”, as advocated by Li Tongxuan, in the sequential five levels of spiritual advancement towards Buddhahood. Conversely, less talented practitioners, enhanced by the mandala, can attain Buddhahood through meditation and confession rituals, as espoused by Zongmi.

The Huayan Grotto, sponsored by the Liu-Zhao sect, stands out as the pivotal element of its sculptural landscape, preeminent among the grottoes of the Sichuan–Chongqing region in terms of scale, artistic merit, thematic uniqueness, doctrinal intricacy, and meticulous design and planning. The constructors of the grotto demonstrated a profound grasp of the Huayan School’s mainstream ideas, suggesting that the Liu-Zhao sect was adept in scriptural studies, engaged in doctrinal exploration, and emphasized spiritual cultivation. This reverses the previous misconception of the sect as lacking in profound theoretical understanding and is of immense significance in unveiling the authentic nature of the Liu-Zhao sect. In the history of Chinese Buddhist art, the Huayan Grotto is unparalleled, featuring distinctive themes and combinations that intentionally integrate monks and laymen, the thoughts of Huayan and Perfect Enlightenment, theory and practice, as well as tradition and innovation. This underscores the Liu-Zhao sect’s inclusiveness and innovation. The Huayan Grotto and its sponsor, the Liu-Zhao sect, represent a classic example of Buddhism’s localization in East Asia.

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Notes

- ¹ Su Dogpo-style is a kind of hat style in Song Dynasty, named after Su Shi (also called Dongpo Jushi) who used to wear. The kind of hat is square in shape with obvious edges. It consists of four walls, and there are walls outside. The heights of the outer walls account for two-thirds of the inner walls. The literati of the Song Dynasty were very fond of wearing this hat.
- ² Liu-Zhao sect is a locally influential Buddhist sect active in the Eastern Sichuan during the late Southern Song Dynasty (1200–1240). The sect was founded by the monk Zhao Zhifeng, who promoted the Buddhist practitioner Liu Juzhi as the spiritual leader. This sect absorbed and integrated the ideas of prominent Buddhist schools, and its main goal is to promote the followers to become Buddha through a series of practices. This sect mainly propagates teachings and attracts believers through statues, thus leaving a large number of grotto remains in Anyue and Dazu.
- ³ The first Chinese character is weathered, with only a few strokes remaining visible. Li Guanzhi recognizes the weathered character as “那” (G. Li 1994, p. 41), but the two characters “那略” make no sense as the title of a sutra. See Li Guanzhi.

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Article

A Study on the Sinification of Buddhism: The Acceptance of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* 成實論 and the Demise of the Chengshi School 成實學派

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Abstract: The **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* played an essential role in the history of Buddhism during the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589). Hitherto, the academic world has not systematically studied this treatise's influence on the Sinification of Buddhism, specifically manifested in the emergence and demise of the Chengshi School. The acceptance of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* went through three stages. In the third stage, the Chengshi masters, who studied the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, affirmed this treatise as part of Mahāyāna. They adopted Mahāyāna doctrines to overcome the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*'s main limitation, lacking in-depth doctrines and an imperfect understanding of emptiness. However, they had mistaken that it was nirvāṇa rather than emptiness that limited the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. Although they omitted the final target of nirvāṇa, their approach to emptiness was still influenced by the progressive mode of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. This paper clarifies that the demise of the Chengshi School was due to the Chengshi masters' overestimation of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and their misunderstanding of Harivarman's intention. No matter how hard the Chengshi masters attempted to improve their understanding, the Chengshi School would have inevitably died out as the Sinification of Buddhism proceeded.

Keywords: **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*; Chengshi school; Chengshi masters; sinification of buddhism; twofold truth

1. Introduction

The Sinification of Buddhism is a crucial issue in the study of the history of Chinese Buddhism. It has been over 2000 years since Buddhism was introduced to China. As an intercultural study, the Sinification of Buddhism continues to attract attention. It is well-recognized by academics that the Sinification of Buddhism has undergone various integration processes. The Sinification of religions does not mean deconstruction, but inheritance and innovation based on their adaptation to Chinese culture (Lou 2020, pp. 63–67). During this process, especially the era of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589), the acceptance of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (collected in the Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka, hereafter T, T32 no. 1646) and the history of the Chengshi School¹ have long been a question of great interest in various fields. It is still puzzling that the popularity of this treatise and the influence of the Chengshi School vanished rapidly.

To date, several studies have investigated the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and the Chengshi School. Most of them are parts of research, and few monographs or papers are devoted to these topics. Research on the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* can be introduced through two main themes. The first is about the original title of this treatise, reconstructed earlier as “**Satyasiddhiśāstra*” (Bunyiiu 1883, p. 280), which has been followed by many scholars (Fukuhara 1969; Arai 1998; Sastri 1975; Dhammajoti 2015). Over the past two decades, more scholars have accepted “**Tattvasiddhiśāstra*” as its original title (Willemen et al. 1988; Potter 1999; Buswell and Lopez 2014; Lin 2015; Kardaś 2016). Fukuhara first proposed a new viewpoint which is still supported by some scholars today. Fukuhara deduced that the original

name should be “*Janaka-Parah-Yathābhāva*”.² The second is the affiliation of Harivarman (ca. 250–350), the author of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. A large volume of studies describing his identification as Bahuśrutīya have been published. First seen in Johnston’s research (Johnston 1972, xxxi–xxxv), this has also been supported by other scholars (Warder 1980, p. 293; Potter 1999, p. 255; Dessin 2009, p. 39). Furthermore, some scholars think Harivarman’s affiliation is complex due to his interaction with Mādhyamika (Priestley 1970; Kardaś 2016). In addition, Fukuhara examined different viewpoints and boldly concluded that Harivarman does not belong to any school; he only insisted on the truth he believed in (Fukuhara 1969, p. 352). In addition to these two aspects, scholars have also studied some of the Buddhist philosophical concepts in this treatise, including emptiness (Priestley 1970; Yao 2005, pp. 97–120), perception (Arai 1998), mind (Skt. *citta*), conjunction (Skt. *samprayoga*) (Dhammajoti 2015, pp. 255–57), etc.

For many years, the demise of the Chengshi School has been an inescapable topic in the narrative of Buddhist history. This issue is primarily the concern of the Chinese academic world. They commonly attribute it to challenges by the Sanlun School (Pan 2009, p. 668; Sheng and Lai 2010, p. 223; Guo 2012, pp. 530–44; Tang 2017, pp. 504–5). Only a few scholars have conducted in-depth studies on this issue. Du’s cross-cultural analysis proves that this demise was not due to external denial or criticism, but the inner contradiction between the traditional Chinese idea of “birth” and the Indian philosophical notion of “cessation (Skt. *nirodha*)” (Du 2008, p. 10). Similarly, Cui concluded that the flaw of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is that its characteristic of Hīnayāna could not adapt to the development of Chinese Buddhism (Cui 2016, p. 137). Overall, these studies are both based on a stereotype that the Sinification of Buddhism led Chinese Buddhism to choose the path of Mahāyāna while abandoning Hīnayāna because Mahāyāna Buddhism is easier to be accepted by merging with Confucianism. However, the Chengshi School chose an alternative path outside of the mainstream. Although their efforts to reconcile the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Mādhyamika failed, this process is still worth researching.

In this research, I use a hermeneutical method to investigate different views of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. The author, Harivarman, the translator, Kumārajīva (344–413), the advocates, Chengshi masters, and the critic, Jizang (549–623), have various understandings and opinions about this treatise. In other words, this paper presents the history of accepting the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, especially how the Chengshi School inherited and developed it. This paper will expose Harivarman’s real intention through describing the twofold truth and, in this way, responding to the discussion of the original title and the author’s affiliation.

From the perspective of doctrinal interpretation, this paper clarifies that the demise of the Chengshi School was due to their overestimation of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and their misunderstanding of Harivarman’s intention. They did not accept the final target as “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” (Skt. *anupādiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*) and instead tried to improve and rationalize this point. At the same time, they accepted Harivarman’s approach to reach the level of emptiness. No matter how they developed their theories, they could not escape this treatise’s progressive mode. Despite the ultimate failure of the Chengshi School, their unique innovations and attempts, which we can all empathize with, showed one of the possible paths of the Sinification of Buddhism.

2. The Acceptance of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*

The acceptance of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* went through three stages. The first stage was the translation of this treatise. There is almost no record of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* before it was introduced into the Chinese Buddhist world. Kumārajīva is the first person to mention this treatise and his translation contributed the earliest extant version of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. It is vital to figure out the motivation behind Kumārajīva’s translation.

Once the translation was completed, some reviews proposed by Kumārajīva were recorded in *Sanlun xuanyi* and *Gaoseng zhuan*:

Someone said: “This treatise explains the cessation (Skt. *nirodha*), just like Mahāyāna.”
Kumārajīva heard and sighed: “Chinese monks are short sighted. How could

they be so shallow?" 或有人言，此論明於滅諦，與大乘均致。羅什聞而歎曰，秦人之無深識，何乃至此乎 (CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 3c17-19).

Kumārajīva addressed Rui: "This treatise challenges the Adhidhamma in seven places, while it only talked about the cessation. He can be called talented if he could understand it without consulting." 什謂叡曰：“此諍論中有七變處文破《毘曇》，而在言小隱，若能不問而解可謂英才。”(CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 364b7-9).

It is a mystery why Kumārajīva, despite his low opinion of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, invested so much of his late years in translating this 16-volume work. The “Biography of Harivarman” (collected in *Chusanzang jiji*) offers a clue, highlighting the treatise’s esteemed reputation in Magādhā (Bihar, India) (CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 79a21-22). During the translation, Kumārajīva worked from a foreign language version of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. A “Record of **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (collected in *Chusanzang jiji*)” stated the following:

Minister Yaoxian asked for a translation of this treatise. It was not finished until the following year. Master Kumarajiva interpreted the original version of the text. 尚書令姚顯請出此論。至來年九月十五日訖，外國法師拘摩羅耆婆，手執胡本口自傳譯。(CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 78a7-10).

Kumārajīva likely had access to the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* in his early years and had kept it for a long time. Moreover, Yaoxian (?–413) requested a translation of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. We can infer that during Kumārajīva’s lectures, he frequently mentioned this treatise, probably positively. That is why Yaoxian had heard of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* in advance and was interested in this treatise. In terms of volume, the work is quite long. The structure of the text is complete enough to show that the translator did not excerpt or revise the text, but reproduced it in its entirety. From the above points, we can ascertain that this treatise was valued then. Even Kumārajīva pointed out that this treatise was not Mahāyāna and only talked about the cessation. However, it still became popular in the world of Chinese Buddhism.

The second stage involved the rapid spread of this treatise. The early Chengshi School emerged gradually, and Kumārajīva’s disciples Sengdao 僧導 (362–457) and Sengsong 僧嵩 were treated as the founders of two lineages of the Chengshi School. In the “Biography of Sengdao”, he studied not only the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, but also the Sanlun treatises and preached one of the most famous Mahāyāna classic, *Vimalakirti Sutra*, at the same time:

At that time, there was a gathering of masters in Guanzhong (Xi’an, China). Sengdao was perceived to be personable and had studied various classics, especially **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, *Commentaries on Sanlun*.... The emperor ordered Sengdao to preach *Vimalakirti Sutra* in the Waguan monastery. 導既素有風神，又值關中盛集，於是謀猷眾典，博採真俗，迺著《成實》、《三論義疏》.....即勅於瓦官寺開講《維摩》。(CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 371a29-b2, b22-b23).

Afterwards, Sengdao moved to the Donglin monastery in Shouchun (Lu’an, China) and adopted many monks fleeing from the north, forming the Shouchun lineage of the Chengshi School, as *Gaoseng zhuan* recorded:

Sengdao had disciples, such as Sengwei, Sengyin, etc. They were both good at **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. 導有弟子僧威、僧音等，並善《成實》。(CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 371c6-7).

The other one was the Pengcheng (Xuzhou, China) lineage of the Chengshi School. Historical records rarely mention Sengsong, but mainly focus on his disciples. “Weishu shilaozhi 魏書釋老志 (collected in *Guanghongmingji* 廣弘明集)” recorded:

In this monastery, there was a famous monk named Sengsong who learned **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* from Kumārajīva. Afterward, he taught Sengyuan, and master Sengyuan taught Master Sengdeng and Master Sengji. 此寺近有名僧嵩法師者，受成實論於羅什，後授淵法師，淵又授登紀二法師。(CBETA 2024.R1, T52, p. 104a22-24).

Sengsong's most famous disciple, Sengyuan, was the actual founder of the Pengcheng lineage. Referring to the "Biography of Sengyuan (collected in *Gaoseng zhuan*)", I can also find that Sengyuan studied both the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Abhidharma from Sengsong (CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 375a27-29).

These materials clearly illustrate that the early Chengshi School was much closer to a sect in its form. The **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, Sanlun, and Abhidharma were all considered Buddhist classics and were widely studied by the monks. The **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, in particular, with its well-organized structure and easy-to-understand ideas, stood out among treatises, gaining significant popularity among the monks. This popularity played a crucial role in forming the early Chengshi School. Some outstanding masters among the learners gradually constituted the early Chengshi School, tracing their lineages back to Kumārajīva to inherit orthodoxy.

Along with the popularity of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, different editions gradually appeared. There is more than one edition of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* recorded in *Lidai sanbaoji* 歷代三寶紀: there is a 16-volume work, a 20-volume work, and a 24-volume work (CBETA 2024.R1, T49, pp. 78c22, 119c24). In 489, the emperor of Qi ordered a revision to this treatise. Zhouyu 周顒³ was chosen to record this incident. His preface shows the general skepticism of the Buddhist world towards the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. In the "Record of Abridge of **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* 略成實論記 (collected in *Chusanjang jiji*)", Zhouyu commented:

The **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* abandons the essence and only pursues superficial things. People get lost in complicated discussions. 棄本逐末，喪功繁論。 (CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 78a21).

Likewise, in his "Preface of the Copy of **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* 抄成實論序 (collected in *Chusanjang jiji*)", Zhouyu also pointed out:

**Tattvasiddhiśāstra* reverses the position of cause and effect. This treatise cannot help people answer their questions. 標因位果，解惑相馳。 (CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 78b4).

Meanwhile, Zhouyu also affirmed the positive effects of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. He also explained that the purpose of this revision was not to criticize, but to make it more acceptable to the Buddhist world.

**Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is helpful to practice, and it is indispensable. In order to prevent learners from chasing the target, this treatise should be revised. 成實既有功於正篆，事不可闕，學者又遂流於所赴，此患宜裁。 (CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 78b19-21).

As Kumārajīva previously discovered, the irrationality of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is its ultimate target, retirement (the Satya of cessation). As people's understanding of Buddhism deepened, pursuing personal liberation was seen as a characteristic of Hīnayāna, which was not accepted in mainstream Chinese Buddhism. However, considering that it had spread over half a century, if they fiercely attacked or discredited this treatise, it would inevitably shake the faith of many monks. Therefore, a compromised revision was adopted. It made the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* more reasonable and placed it in Mahāyāna doctrines. The most important thing is that all this effort was not carried out by the Chengshi School alone, but in concert with the masters of that time. Regarding its revised content, Zhouyu described the following:

The purpose of the modification is to simplify it, reducing the length of this treatise to nine volumes by cutting out the redundant and selecting the essential content. In this way, the content of Mahāyāna has not changed, but the troubles of learners will be reduced. 刊文在約降為九卷。刪除採要取効本根。則方等之助無虧。學者之煩半遣。 (CBETA 2024.R1, T55, p. 78b22-24).

This incident marked the transition of the Chengshi School from the second to the third stage. With the legitimacy of the lineage becoming less critical, their strong defenses of this treatise became their main characteristic. To them, it was also the most critical period in the Sinification of Buddhism. During the Liang Dynasty (502–557), Sengmin and

Fayun, together with Zhizang, later known as the “Three Masters in the Liang Dynasty 梁代三大師”, were the representatives of the Chengshi School. They demonstrated a meticulous and thoughtful approach as they selectively inherited and developed the doctrines of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. They both showed their proficiency in interpreting Mahāyāna classics based on the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, as Jizang recorded in *Fahua xuanlun*:

Zhizang (in Kaishan Monastery) was praised for his interpretations on *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. Sengmin (in Zhuangyan Monastery) was famous for his interpretations on *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* and *Śrīmālā-simha-nāda-sūtra*. Fayun (in Guangzhai Monastery) was unique in his interpretations on *Sad-dharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*. 但開善以《涅槃》騰譽，莊嚴以《十地》、《勝鬘》擅名，光宅《法華》當時獨步。(CBETA 2024.R1, T34, p. 363c18-20).

With three masters dominating the Buddhist world in the Liang Dynasty, the Chengshi school reached its most potent point despite the significant skepticism it faced. The Chengshi school was not a lineage anymore. Anyone who was the advocator of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* could be called the “Chengshi master”. Just like their predecessors, they did not find out the fundamental limitations of this treatise. Thereby, they failed to truly understand the author’s intention and their inheritances and developments were in vain.

3. The Limitations of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Chengshi Masters’ Efforts

There are two main limitations of this treatise. One is that the treatise lacks an in-depth explanation of Buddhist doctrine, and the other relates to its understanding of emptiness. We should explain what this treatise talks about. In the 36th chapter of “Rūpa-Trait”, Hari-varman directly pointed out the following:

It is stated that the “**SATYA-SIDDHI-ŚĀSTRA*” will be composed. The term “Satya” stands for the four truths: suffering, origin of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path gates... Now, I intend to ascertain the meaning of these terms in order (Sastri 1975, p. 75). 問曰：汝先言當說成實論，今當說何者為實？答曰：實名四諦，謂苦、苦因、苦滅、苦滅道.....我今欲次第撰集令義明了故說。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, pp. 260c28–261a1).

The **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, a comprehensive work, is structured around the four truths (Skt. caturāryasatya). It consists of 202 chapters, which can be categorized into four parts: suffering (Skt. duḥkha), arising (Skt. samudaya), cessation (Skt. nirodha), and path (Skt. mārga). This scholarly work, despite its 16 volumes, delves into beliefs (three treasures), epistemology (three minds), ontology (emptiness), practice (meditation), and popular arguments (ten disputes)⁴. It can be likened to an encyclopedia. In comparison to the popular treatises of that era, the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is not precisely lengthy. For instance, *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra* contains over 200 volumes and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* comprises 100 volumes; even *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* has 30 volumes. They are all longer than **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and yet are not as rich in their content as this treatise. No matter how knowledgeable the author, **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is always too narrow to include all Buddhist doctrines. Clearly, the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is a rich seam of doctrines, but it also seems so simple in detail.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589), Chinese Buddhism experienced rapid development. In earlier times, this treatise had yet to be fully explored and was only used as a clue to grasp the entirety of Buddhist doctrines. This feature led to the flourishing of the Chengshi School during the second stage. With numerous Buddhist works being introduced and translated, people began to realize the limitations of this treatise; in other words, there were many replacements for the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. From the perspective of beliefs, the Jingtu School replaced three treasures with Amitabha in a more straightforward approach of praying. As for practice, the Tiantai School and Chan School provided effective meditation methods. In epistemology, the Shelun School explained it more deeply.

Even so, the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* still contains a unique twofold truth that significantly contributed to theoretical developments in ontology. We can find this influence in the “Order to explain the meaning of twofold truth 令旨解二諦義 (collected in *Guang hongmingji*)”:

The way of enlightenment is not one. The key points are perception (Skt. *visaya*) and wisdom (Skt. *jñāna*). Sometimes knowledge is presented through perceptual fields, or laws are understood through wisdom. Twofold truth is clarifying knowledge through perceptions. 明道之方，其由非一，舉要論之不出境智。或時以境明義，或時以智顯行，至於二諦即是就境明義。(CBETA 2024.R1, T52, p. 247c2-5).

In Jizang’s *Erdiyi*, the Chengshi masters followed this view, adopting an even more extreme perspective:

Chengshi masters explain “meaning” by saying: “Ultimate truth (Skt. *paramārtha-satya*) and conventional truth (skt. *samvṛti-satya*.) are both perceptions. They all belong to the conventional truth. Truth cannot be described and can only be expressed in conventional words.” 若是成論家解義者，即云：“真俗二諦是境。境有真俗，說真說俗，此兩說並俗諦。真不可說，寄俗諦說也。”(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 87a26-28).

Due to the “unspoken” nature of the twofold truth, the Chengshi masters were driven to develop other doctrines. As members of the Chengshi School, they were not celebrated for their commentaries on the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, but for interpreting Mahāyāna. This is not a mere coincidence, but a result of their strong belief in the profound associations between these Mahāyāna classics and the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. Three masters’ efforts illustrated this vividly.

Fayun focused on the *Sad-dharma Puṇḍārika Sūtra*, whose central theme involves the uniting of three vehicles into one. He believed that the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* should not be treated as Hīnayāna, but as a transition between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Therefore, he explained Mahāyāna classics together with the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 464a26-28).

Sengmin was famous for his commentaries on the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* and the *Śrīmālāsīmaṇīdasūtra*. The *Daśabhūmikasūtra* talks about various levels of practice, while the *Śrīmālāsīmaṇīdasūtra* emphasizes the unity of the four truths into the cessation. Similar ideas can be found in the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*.

Zhizang and his effort to spread the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* should receive greater attention because doctrines of nirvāṇa can be supplementary to the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* in terms of its target. Zhizang established five stages of the Buddha’s body, as Jizang summarized in *Zhongguan lunshu*:

Buddha lives in a formless body in the fifth stage eternally. He has a perfect wisdom that can be widely mastered, and so is Buddha. 第五時明，佛常住佛無有色，但有一圓智有總御用，故名為佛。(CBETA 2024.R1, T42, pp. 140a15-17, a18-20).

Inspired by *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, in the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, “nirvāṇa without remainder” is replaced by perfect wisdom. To the Chengshi masters, this transformation perfectly solves the irrationality of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and finally returns this treatise to the claims of Mahāyāna.

Three Chengshi masters made efforts to uphold the position of this treatise. However, Jizang, as a Sanlun master, did not accept the confusion between the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Mahāyāna. In *Sanlun Xuanyi*, Jizang pointed out it was “emptiness (Skt. *sūnyatā*)” not “nirvāṇa” that limited **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*:

What **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* illustrates is the emptiness as Śrāvakayāna (understands it). 成實所明但是聲聞空。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 4b9-10).

Sad-dharma Puṇḍārika Sūtra examines the way how Śrāvakayāna argues emptiness. Śrāvakayāna cannot perceive existence through emptiness or know emptiness through existence. They are not identical. **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* says so. If

it does not, is there any difference between **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Mahāyāna? 法華之文，辨聲聞證空，不能即空觀有，即有觀空，故無相即。成實所說亦無相即。若明相即，應空有並觀，若空有並觀，與大乘何別？(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 4b15-18).

Jizang uses “Śrāvakayāna” instead of “Hīnayāna” when addressing this treatise. Jizang believed that Harivarman’s understanding of emptiness had been ahead of his time. However, the Chengshi masters’ interpretations of *Tattvasiddhiśāstra* were outdated by Jizang’s time. For this reason, Jizang regarded Harivarman highly and fiercely criticized the Chengshi masters:

Suppose anyone asserts that this treatise belongs to Mahāyāna. It must be his followers’ fault, not Harivarman. 若言斯論亦明大者，過在門人，非跋摩之咎。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 3c24-25).

Jizang’s high regard of Harivarman can also be found in the four types of monks which Jizang divided:

The third type of people, like Harivarman or other Sautrāntika, have already known emptiness of the inner (Skt. *adhyātma-sūnyatā*) and emptiness of existences (Skt. *sarvadharmas-sūnyatā*) with the advanced foundation. According to their understanding, the Abhidharma is inferior in Hīnayāna while **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is superior. 三者譬喻訶梨之流，具得二空，為上根人也。約空義淺深，則毘曇為小乘之劣，成實為小內之勝也。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 5a4-5).

Jizang suggested that the Chengshi masters should accept the limitation of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. He admired Harivarman’s meticulous thought and his foundation regarding Mahāyāna. However, he deeply regretted that Harivarman was discouraged by his teacher’s failure to fully understand Mahāyāna (CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 4c1-4).

In addition to theoretical development, the Chengshi masters attempted to explore a path of faith. During the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577), Chengshi master Daoji was disrespected by his disciple (CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 701a21-25). This unpleasant experience urged him to reflect on his thirty years of teaching the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. Eventually, Daoji gave up the path of Buddhist doctrines and started writing his most famous work, *Jinzang lun* 金藏論, which focuses on the faith of Buddhism. This incident is recorded in the “Biography of Daoji (collected in *Xu gaosengzhuan*)”:

Daoji said: “I have taught **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* for thirty years...Now, I only understand rather than practice. It is better not to understand at all...” Daoji returned to his house and studied Buddhism comprehensively. He enlightened laypeople and finished a work called *Jinzang lun*, consisting of seven volumes. 吾講成實，積三十載...今解而不行，還如根本不解矣...”乃退掩房戶，廣讀經論，為彼士俗而行開化。故其撰集，名為金藏論也，一帙七卷。(CBETA 2024.R1, T50, pp. 701a25-27, a29-b2).

Jinzang lun revolves around a few stories about Saṃskāra and aims to persuade people to be moral. As a result, he achieved considerable success among the laypeople. Although Daoji had given up his achievement on **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, he never regretted his choice (CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 701b18-19). As the Northern Qi Dynasty was replaced by the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581), Daoji’s teachings faded.

Both examples demonstrate that the Chengshi masters were not just proficient in the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*; they were outstanding masters who focused their efforts on overcoming these two limitations. Concerning the first point, they innovated to perfect its doctrines. However, in terms of the second, they rarely realized the irrationality of the “Śrāvakayāna emptiness” rather than the “Hīnayāna nirvāṇa”. The progressive mode of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* influenced the Chengshi masters’ ideas, causing their efforts to reconcile the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Mahāyāna (especially Mādhyamika) to inevitably be in vain.

4. The Theoretical Failure of Chengshi Masters

Before the revision of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, the thoughts of the Chengshi School and the Sanlun School were almost identical as they studied emptiness and developed the notion of twofold truth in Buddhist doctrines. It is important to note that “the twofold truth” can both be found in **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and *Madhyamaka*, but differing greatly in these two contexts. This shared name serves as a connection point, allowing us to delve deeper into the subject. Furthermore, the Chengshi masters misunderstood the author’s actual intention from the start. They exaggerated the importance of emptiness in this treatise and omitted the final target of *nirvāṇa*. In this way, this treatise is still valuable in terms of its ontological doctrines, but has lost its authentic purpose.

4.1. Ignoring the Differences Within the Truth

The core concept of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is the “truth” or “*Satya*”. Harivarman said his purpose was to ascertain the meaning of “truth” (CBETA 2024.R1, T32, pp. 260c28–261a1). This text is structured into four parts, each presenting a unique perspective on the meaning of “truth”. The author’s approach through “double twofold truth” reveals that the descriptions of “*Satya*” change with the constant exploration of the perceptual world. The first twofold truth appears in the 141st chapter of “Setting up of Nominalism (Skt. *prajñapti-sthāpana*)”:

The first ultimate truth is what are (the separate elements) *Rūpa*, etc., and *Nirvāṇa*. The second one, i.e., conventional truth is what is mere *prajñapti*, nominalism, e.g., the conception of a pitcher of *rūpa*, color, etc. and the conception of *puruṣa* on the basis of five aggregates (Sastri 1975, pp. 334–35). 真諦謂色等法及泥洹，俗諦謂但假名無有自體，如色等因緣成瓶、五陰因緣成人。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, p. 327a21–23).

The second twofold truth is presented in the 153rd chapter of “Cessation of Dharma-idea”:

Why is it then stated that things, *rūpa*, etc., are the absolute truths? They are stated so for the good of the ordinary men. There are certain persons harboring the notion of the absolute truth towards the five aggregates (Sastri 1975, p. 356). 問曰：若五陰以世諦故有，何故說色等法是真諦耶？答曰：為眾生故說。有人於五陰中生真實想，為是故說五陰以第一義故空。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, p. 333a13–16).

Sastri uses “ultimate truth” and “absolute truth” to make a distinction. Examining them etymologically, they are both derived from the same Sanskrit word “*Paramārtha-Satya*”. The word “*Paramārtha-Satya*” means the real or entire truth. (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 588c). The scholarly debate on whether Harivarman intentionally differentiates the usages of “ultimate truth” and “absolute truth” or just adopted the meaning of “*Paramārtha-Satya*” is an engaging aspect of my study.

By comparing the Chinese text, “ultimate truth” mainly refers to four noble truths (Skt. *caturāryasatya*), which can be found in the following places:

When the Buddha knows the living beings’ opportune mind, soft mind and disciplined mind, then he preaches the four noble truths (Sastri 1975, p. 126). 佛若知眾生歡喜心、柔軟心、調和心，堪任得解脫，然後為說四真諦法。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, pp. 274c28–275a1).

Just as white garments are placed in the lake, their color one experiences very well; likewise, this person sitting in a place perceives four truths (Sastri 1975, p. 468). 鮮淨白疊投之池中即時受色，此人如是，即於一坐見四真諦。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, p. 362c17–19).

The next step is to figure out the meaning of “absolute truth”. It is commonly known that Kumārajīva preferred using “absolute” to refer to the emptiness in the translations of *Prajñā* treatises (CBETA 2024.R1, T25, p. 210c8–9) (CBETA 2024.R1, T30, p. 21b17–18). As for “absolute truth”, it is the negation of the five aggregates (Skt. *pañca-skandha*) or four

noble truths because their nominations are not actual, which can be found in the following places:

The Sūtra saying that they are void from the absolute truth indicates that they are void from the objective truth (Skt. artha-satyatā) and not empirically. The absolute truth is that the matter is void and akiñcanam, non-thing, consciousness is void and non-thing. Therefore, to view things, matter, rūpa, etc. as void is termed the vision of the absolute voidness. (Sastri 1975, pp. 355–56).
又經中說第一義空，此義以第一義諦故空，非世諦故空。第一義者，所謂色空無所有，乃至識空無所有。是故若人觀色等法空，是名見第一義空。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, no. 1646, p. 333a10-13).

Obviously, Kumārajīva chose these two translations to highlight the difference between them. Furthermore, the word “Paramārtha” means the highest or whole truth and spiritual knowledge (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 588c). Clearly, “Paramārtha-Satya” involves the pursuit of the higher truth. Hence, the point is not whether “ultimate truth” and “absolute truth” are identical or not; they are all established in comparison.

The Chengshi masters were devoted to the twofold truth between perception and wisdom, but ignored the differences within truth. When exploring perceptual fields, the cognition of the world eventually reaches emptiness. This approach may seem right, but it goes against the author’s intention. To Harivarman, his real purpose was not to clarify the emptiness, but to accomplish the emptiness.

4.2. Progressive Mode in the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra

The author’s intent to emphasize the process of “establishing” in the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra, the so-called “treatise on establishing reality” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 180), is a profound philosophical approach. The author adopts a progressive mode, affirming the latter through negating the former. Returning to the discussion of the original title, “Janaka-Parah-Yathābhāva”, the word “Janaka” means both generative and producing (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 410c), aligning with the author’s intention concerning establishing. The word “Para” means farther than, beyond, more than, and better or worse than (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 586b), being in harmony with the author’s progressive thinking. Compared to “Tattva” or “Satya”, they both have the meaning of the “true state” (Monier-Williams 1899, pp. 433a, 1135c), as the word “Yathābhāva” means proper condition or relation (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 842c). It is closer to the reality in which we live. Undoubtedly, this title is more in line with the author’s idea than the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra or *Satyasiddhiśāstra.

Following the author’s reasoning, the substantiality of existences and the five aggregates can be considered destroyed. In addition, emptiness negates existence, which cannot be a concept of being. As a result, there is no reality at all. How does Harivarman answer it?

The cessation exists by way of absolute truth. The Sūtra says: False is what is trifling (Skt. tucchaka). Truth is what exists truly (Skt. yathābhūta). The cessation is definitely yathābhūta and hence it is truly existing (Sastri 1975, p. 480). Additionally, Yogin could obtain a wisdom of yathābhūta. All existences are emptiness; therefore, cessation is the absolute existence. 滅是第一義諦故有。如經中說：“妄謂虛誑，諦名如實。滅即是如實決定，故名第一義有。”又行者生真實智，一切有為皆悉空無，故知滅是第一義有。(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, p. 365b28-c3).

Harivarman’s statement is pivotal in understanding the concept of ultimate reality. He posits that this reality is not tied to any specific existence, but rather to a profound understanding he calls the wisdom of yathābhūta. In a world where everything is nominal and perception is but an illusion, the deconstruction of the five aggregates into emptiness emerges as the only truth. This truth does not necessitate the destruction of anything but rather a guiding of oneself into the realm of emptiness. The absolute state or transcendence that results from this process is beyond the reach of language, leading Harivarman to focus on the methods of cessation rather than attempting to describe the state itself. Two methods are outlined for achieving this state:

It is ceased in two stages: (1) When one enters into the concentration devoid of the mind and (2) When one enters into Nirvāṇa without residue... Śāstra says: “In the person of the Yogin who has abandoned these three minds in the action and defilements do not operate.” (Sastri 1975, p. 359). 問曰：此空心於何處滅？答曰：二處滅，一入無心定中滅、二入無餘泥洹斷相續時滅...論者言：“行者若能滅此三心，則諸業煩惱永不復起。”(CBETA 2024.R1, T32, p. 333c21-23,25-26).

The following diagram shows the vertical axis from the conventional truth to absolute truth, representing this progressive mode. The horizontal axis also shows how the author conceives this treatise in terms of four truths (Skt. caturāryasatya) (Figure 1). To conclude, “nirvāṇa without remainder” is not just a possibility, but the inevitable consequence of this mode, a fact that cannot be ignored.

| | Suffering (Skt. duḥkha) | Arising (Skt. samudaya) | Cessation (Skt. nirodha) | Path (Skt. mārga) |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Conventional truth | Existences | Existences are transient (Skt. anitya) | Cessation of nominal-idea (Skt. prajñapti-citta) | Mediation |
| Ultimate truth | Five aggregates | Five aggregates without nature (Skt. anātman) | Cessation of element-idea (Skt. dharma-citta) | Wisdom of reality (Skt. yathābhūta) |
| Absolute truth | Voidness (Skt. śūnyatā) | | Cessation of void-idea (Skt. śūnya-citta) | Meditation without mind/ nirvāṇa without remainder |

Figure 1. The structure of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*.

4.3. Chengshi Masters' Prejudice and Overinterpretation

Although the Chengshi masters followed Harivarman's approach, they did not accept the third part of cessation and attempted to reconcile the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* with Madhyamaka. In Zhizang's "Interpretation of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (quoted in *Dacheng xuanlun*)", he uses three middle ways to explain Madhayamaka's theory: "the middle way of conventional Satya", "the middle way of true Satya", and "the middle way of conventional and true Satya" (CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 26a19-25). This doctrine is beyond the scope of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and contrary to the idea of Madhayamaka. Apart from the previous analysis in this paper, I adopt hermeneutics to present a further explanation.

Gadamer provided an intricate definition of "prejudice (G. Vorurteil)" as a judgment rendered before all the elements that determines a situation as having been finally examined. Thus, "prejudice" certainly does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but is part of the idea itself; it can have either a positive or a negative value (Weinsheimer and Marshall 1994, p. 283). This complexity, far from being a barrier, is an intellectual challenge that the Chengshi masters grappled with. As advocates, their understanding of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, initially as an introductory treatise to Buddhist doctrines, was influenced subconsciously by a progressive mode, forming a prejudice that continued to affect their understanding and acceptance of the Mahāyāna. Furthermore, the foundation of Mahāyāna also contributed to their prejudice against the final target, "nirvana without remainder". Therefore, the Chengshi masters abandoned cessation and firmly insisted that the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* was a part of Mahāyāna.

The Chengshi masters' knowledge of Buddhism was more excellent than the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, and their perspectives on Buddhist doctrines, including their understanding of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, Madhyamaka, nirvāṇa, etc., can be treated as their "horizon (G. Horizont)". The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point (Weinsheimer and Marshall 1994, p. 313). One intends to understand the text itself. However, this means that the interpreter's thoughts re-awaken

and affect the meaning of the text. Gadamer described this as a “fusion of horizons (G. Horizontverschmelzung)” (Weinsheimer and Marshall 1994, p. 406).

In this study, the Chengshi masters’ understanding and interpretation of this treatise can be considered a fusion of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* and Madhyamaka. Three masters were obsessed with the noumenon of twofold truth and were deeply engaged in attempting to reconcile the contradictions between these two contexts. Jizang reviewed this in his *Sanlun xuanyi*:

Although (Chengshi masters) know twofold truth, some of them agree that the noumenon of the twofold truth is one as well as some of them insist it is two. These arguments are both false and deviate from ultimate and conventional truth. 雖具知二諦，或言一體，或言二體。立二不成，復喪真俗也。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 6a21-22).

Suppose twofold truth have their own noumenon, the connection will be broken. If they connect each other, two noumena cannot be established. Neither of inferences is valid, and vice versa. 若言各體，相即便壞。若有雙即，便二體不成。故進退無通，異義亦屈。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 6a27-29).

As a result, three masters were engaged in overinterpreting Madhyamaka or Mahāyāna. They did not accept cessation as the final target, and in this case, there is no way to solve the noumenon of the twofold truth.

Despite Jizang’s fierce criticism, the Chengshi School did not simply vanish as assumed in general history. A few monks continued to interpret Mahāyāna based on the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, following in the footsteps of the three masters who shaped the school’s interpretation. This lineage is evident in the records of the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907) found in *Xu gaosengzhuan*:

Leading by Zhijue in Zhuangyan temple, new Chengshi School became famous for generations. 莊嚴禪師，新實一家鷹揚萬代。(CBETA 2024.R1, T50, p. 502c23-24).

In addition, Zhijue’s disciples Zhituo 智脫 (541-ca.607), Zhiyan 智琰, and Zhiju 智聚 (538–609) advocated for the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. Although we cannot ascertain their main ideas completely, this path eventually leads to a dead end.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, the function of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* constantly changed. Initially, Harivarman created this work to guide practitioners to absolute cessation. For Kumārajīva, it served as an instruction for beginners. For three masters, this treatise was the basis upon which they developed Mahāyāna doctrines. Their views on this treatise also differ. As the author, Harivarman’s motivation was to synthesize various Buddhist doctrines through this work. As the translator, Kumārajīva considered this treatise an object of comparison with the Abhidhamma. As followers, the Chengshi masters treated this treatise as an essential foundational work and were deeply influenced by its progressive mode.

The failure of the Chengshi School’s doctrinal interpretation is not the only factor that led to its demise. The doctrinal interpretation was not the most important, but it was the most overlooked during the Sinification of Buddhism. From this point of view, the heyday of the Chengshi School emerged because the Chengshi masters aimed to defend the legitimacy of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* more than to develop its doctrines. Although many commentaries are recorded in the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaoseng zhuan*⁵, the Chengshi masters were more likely to choose a path of fusion (as mentioned above) rather than promoting this treatise’s own value.

Nevertheless, the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* is a unique and complete treatise that culminates in the cessation of everything; nothing can be supplementary structural. Any development of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra* essentially involves the development of other schools’ ideas (mainly Mahāyāna). Harivarman perfected this path, leaving only two feasible ways to go forward. The first is spreading the faith of the **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, and the second is seeking a more practicable method to the cessation. Daoji carried out the former while the latter

left no trace. As a path of belief, derivative works, such as moral instructions, were hardly collected in the Tripitaka. Therefore, they remained scattered among the folk writings, waiting to be exposed.

When Harivarman created this work, he had limited the theoretical innovation of the later generation. Despite the Chengshi masters' efforts to improve their doctrines, the Chengshi School still inevitably died out during the Sinification of Buddhism. We can also find that the Chengshi School spread to Japan where it also declined afterward. This process is very different to that in China and awaits future clarification. In any case, Mahāyāna Buddhism represents the mainstream trend in Chinese Buddhism. The Chengshi School, a fleeting historical phenomenon, was one of the endless possibilities of the Sinification of Buddhism. Additionally, the Chengshi masters contributed greatly to the development of the doctrines of Chinese Buddhism, even if their unique creations of Buddhist doctrine have not been accepted and inherited.

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Abbreviations

T = Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled during the Taishō Era (1912–26)]. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (v. 5.2) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (<http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php>, accessed on 1 May 2024).

Notes

- 1 Unlike the clear definition of the Chengshi Sect (jōjitsu) in Japan, it is still difficult to define the Chengshi School precisely. Their members are also called Chengshi masters or Chengshi Mahāyāna masters; these names mostly referred to the monks who studied *Tattvasiddhīśāstra and affirmed it as a part of Mahāyāna. As for their heyday, it was the era of three masters in the Liang Dynasty (502–557), Sengmin 僧旻 (467–527), Fayun 法雲 (467–529), and Zhizang 智藏 (458–522). This description is widely adopted in the Chinese academic world (Tang 2017, p. 503; Lü 1979, pp. 128–29; Sheng and Lai 2010, pp. 167–69).
- 2 Fukuhara noticed a treatise called *Sanlun xuanyi jianyou chao* 三論玄義檢幽鈔 (Originally entitled “Sanlun xuanyi jian you ji” 三論玄義檢幽集, T70 no. 2300), which recorded its Sanskrit pronunciation as “Zhenajia bolouwu youpotishe”. “Zhenajia” is also called “Piliu,” translated as “Cheng.” “Bolouwu” is also called “Yetuoba,” translated as “Shi.” “Youpotishe” translated as “Lun.” 成實論具存天竺之正音，應云闍那迦波樓侮優婆提舍也。闍那迦亦名毘留，此翻為成。波樓侮亦名夜陀跋，翻為實。優婆提舍翻為論。(SAT 2015.T2300, vol. 70, p. 441b27-c01). Fukuhara deduced that its Sanskrit name should be “*Janaka-Parah-Yathābhāva*”, which means “Generating the truest thing” (Fukuhara 1969, pp. 117–21). Similar views have also been approved by Yao (2005, p. 98), Willemen (2006), and Lin (2015, pp. 26–28), and all of them referred to the same document.
- 3 Zhouyu was treated as a member of the Sanlun School. According to Jizang's *Erdiyi* 二諦義: “Sengyuān 僧遠 (414–484) had learned Kumārajīva's teaching. He came to the southland of Wu and lived at the Caotang Monastery in Zhongshan Mountain. Encountering with a hermit, Zhouyu, then Zhouyu was educated.” 遠習什師之義，來入南吳，住鐘山草堂寺。值隱士周顛，周顛因就受學。(CBETA 2024.R1, T45, p. 108b4-5).
- 4 From chapter 19 to chapter 35 (CBETA 2024.R1, T32, pp. 253c20–260c26), Harivarman discussed ten popular arguments at that time: there are trait existent or non-existent, past and future existent or non-existent, everything existent or non-existent, intermediary life existent or non-existent, four truths gradual or one moment's intuition, Arhat may fall or never fall, mind's nature pure of dirt, tendencies and minds association or non-association, unexperienced past actions existent or non-existent, Buddha is included in monks or not, and Pudgala existent or non-existent.
- 5 There are over 20 records of the “Comments on the *Tattvasiddhīśāstra” in *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaosengzhuan*. Tang counted more than 24 pieces of the literature (Tang 2017, pp. 510–11).

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Article

A Historical Survey of Fayun Monastery (法雲寺) in Bianjing (汴京) during the Northern Song Dynasty

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Abstract: Fayun Monastery (法雲寺), a prominent Chan Buddhist monastery in Bianjing (汴京) during the Northern Song Dynasty, thrived for about half a century under the reigns of emperors Shenzong (神宗), Zhezong (哲宗), and Huizong (徽宗). Led by four generations of abbots—Yuantong Faxiu (圓通法秀), Datong Shanben (大通善本), Foguo Weibai (佛國惟白), and Fozhao Gao (佛照杲)—the monastery was esteemed by the royal family and influential in the development of the Yunmen School. This paper examines the monastery's history through the tenures of its abbots, providing insights into the monastery's significance in Northern Song Buddhism and its broader cultural and political context.

Keywords: Fayun Monastery; Faxiu; Shanben; Weibai; Fozhao Gao; Chan Buddhism

1. Introduction

The roots of Chan Buddhism trace back to the early Tang Dynasty, but its pivotal development occurred during the Song Dynasty, when it became the predominant form of elite monastic Buddhism. This era saw the consolidation of the Chan tradition's distinctive characteristics and its rise to prominence, driven by government support, cultural integration, financial patronage from scholar-officials, and the innovative practices of Chan monks. The Song Dynasty government played a crucial role in aligning Buddhist activities with national interests by granting plaques to monasteries, conferring titles on monks, funding monastery properties, and establishing regulations to oversee Buddhist practices. Scholar-officials, as cultural elites, provided financial support and promoted the integration of Chan thought with Confucian philosophy through their literary and academic pursuits. Chan monks, serving as spiritual leaders, disseminated teachings and introduced innovative practices that garnered respect across various social sectors. Together, these factors drove the flourishing of Chan Buddhism during the Song Dynasty, which had a profound influence on both the religious and social-cultural landscape (Schlüter 2008, p. 72).

The development of Chan Buddhism during the Song Dynasty was intrinsically linked to the growth of Chan Buddhist monasteries. The construction and expansion of these monasteries often received support and patronage from nobility, scholar-officials, and even emperors. They invited renowned Chan monks to serve as abbots, bestowed them with honorific titles and Buddhist robes, and frequently held Dharma conferences and lectures. These monasteries became centers of learning and cultural hubs, where monks, celebrities, and scholar-officials often gathered (Huang 1989, pp. 101–23). By studying Chan monasteries in the Song Dynasty, we can understand the interactions between the government, scholar-officials, and Chan monks, and explore the role and function of Chan monasteries and monks in the political and social structure of the Song Dynasty, as well as the development of Buddhism during this period.

Fayun Monastery, the focus of this study, exemplifies the intricate relationships between Chan monasteries, the scholar-official class, and the Song Dynasty government. Located in Bianjing (汴京, also known as Dongjing, 東京, present-day Kaifeng, 開封, Henan,

河南), Fayun Monastery was founded with the patronage of a princess and her husband. It thrived for approximately 43 years under the reigns of three emperors: Shenzong (神宗, 1048–1085, r. 1068–1085), Zhezong (哲宗, 1077–1100, r. 1085–1100), and Huizong (徽宗, 1082–1135, r. 1100–1125). The monastery had four generations of abbots: Yuantong Faxiu (圓通法秀, 1027–1090), Datong Shanben (大通善本, 1035–1109), Foguo Weibai (佛國惟白, mid-11th century–early 12th century), and Fozhao Gao (佛照杲, ?–?). These abbots, all appointed by imperial edicts, significantly contributed to the monastery's development.

This paper aims to reconstruct the history of Fayun Monastery by examining the tenures of its abbots, providing a clearer understanding of its importance in Northern Song Buddhism and the historical trajectory of the Yunmen School from its peak to its decline. Furthermore, this study explores the interactions between the abbots, scholar-officials, and the Northern Song government, shedding light on the broader socio-political and cultural context of the period.

2. The Establishment of Fayun Monastery and the First-Generation Abbot Yuantong Faxiu (圓通法秀)

During the Xiande period (顯德, 954–960) of Emperor Shizong (世宗, 921–959, r. 954–959) of the Later Zhou Dynasty (後周), dynastic changes and wars continued in the northern region. These conflicts led to the Buddhist management system becoming increasingly chaotic, and the number of monks increased, directly affecting the government's taxation and military service systems. Therefore, in the second year of the Xiande period (955), the Later Zhou began a suppression of Buddhism when Shizong ordered various places to eliminate monks and nuns, demolish monasteries that lacked an imperially bestowed name plaque, and destroy pagodas and Buddha statues. The suppression of Buddhism lasted for five years until his death in 959, known as the "Destruction of Buddhism in the Xiande period" (顯德毀佛) (Zhang 2003, pp. 28–33).

Thereafter, Buddhism in northern China declined significantly. It was not until the Song Dynasty that the situation began to improve. In the Northern Song Dynasty, emperors such as Taizu (太祖, 927–976, r. 960–976), Taizong (太宗, 939–997, r. 976–997), Zhenzong (真宗, 968–1022, r. 997–1022), and Renzong (仁宗, 1010–1063, r. 1022–1063) implemented policies to promote the development of Buddhism. They rebuilt or expanded old monasteries, such as Xiangguo Monastery (相國寺), Kaibao Monastery (開寶寺), Tianqing Monastery (天清寺), Jingde Monastery (景德寺), and Longxing Monastery (龍興寺), and built many new Buddhist monasteries and pagodas, including Zifu Yuan (資福院), Pu'an Chan Yuan (普安禪院), Qisheng Chan Yuan (啟聖禪院), Zisheng Yuan (資聖院), Hongfu Yuan (洪福院), and Baoxiang Chan Yuan (寶相禪院). They also appointed Buddhist masters as monastery abbots. Moreover, under the influence of these rulers, the royal family, nobles, and ministers also contributed money and organized the construction of monasteries, rapidly increasing the number of Buddhist monasteries in Bianjing and promoting a flourishing of Buddhism (Wan 1996, pp. 248–250).

The development of Chan Buddhism during the Song Dynasty began with the establishment of Chan monasteries, particularly in Bianjing. According to Volume 45 of the *Fozu tongji* (佛祖統紀 [Annalist Records of Buddhas and Patriarchs]) written by Zhipan (志磐, ?–?), "From the destruction of Buddhism in the Zhou Dynasty to the revival of Buddhism in the Jianlong period (建隆, r. 960–963), the only sects that flourished in the capital were the Nanshan Lü (南山律), Xianshou (賢首), and Cí'en (慈恩), which emphasized Buddhist Doctrine (教理). The outstanding scholars were not fond of talking about name and form (名相), so the Tiantai (天台) school and Chan Buddhism failed to flourish. Since the Chunhua period (淳化, 990–994), the patriarch of the Tiantai school, Siming Zhili (四明知禮, 960–1028) and Zunshi (遵式, 964–1032) became famous and were honored by Yang Yi (楊億, 974–1020) and Chao Jiong (晁迥, 951–1034) and given the titles of Fazhi Dashi (法智大師) and Ciyun Zunzhe (慈雲尊者) by Emperor Zhenzong. However, the Tiantai school was still not prevalent at the capital city. As for Chan Buddhism, Emperor Renzong was enthusiastic about Chan Buddhism and intended to support its development in the capital.

In the 1st year of the Huangyou period (皇祐元年, 1049), the inner minister Li Yunning (李允寧, ?–?) offered his residence in Bianjing as a Chan Monastery, which was bestowed with the title ‘Shifang Jingyin Chan Monastery’ (十方淨因禪寺). Emperor Renzong issued an edict inviting a virtuous monk to be the abbot, and Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修, 1007–1072) recommended Yuantong Ju’ne (圓通居訥, 1010–1071), who declined due to illness and recommended Huai Lian (懷璉, 1007–1090) as abbot”.¹

From this record, we can understand the development of Buddhism in the early Song Dynasty. The founding of Shifang Jingyin Chan Monastery contributed greatly to the popularity and development of Chan Buddhism in Bianjing. By the time of Emperor Shenzong, after decades of development, Chan Buddhism had gained the support and attention of the royal family and scholars and had begun to flourish in the capital and the northern regions (Huang 1989, pp. 110–11; Yang 2006, p. 105). It was under such circumstances that a number of Chan monasteries, such as Fayun Monastery, came into being.

According to the first fascicle of *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* (建中靖國續燈錄 [Continued Jianzhong Jingguo Lamp History]) compiled by Foguo Weibai, “In the third year of the Yuanfeng period (元豐三年, 1080), Emperor Shenzong issued an edict to build the Huilin Chan Yuan (慧林禪院) on the eastern side (Dongxu 東序) and Zhihai Chan Yuan (智海禪院) on the western side (Youwu 右廡) of the Great Xiangguo Monastery (大相國寺). In the fifth year of the Yuanfeng period (1082), at the request of the Princess of Yueguo (越國大長公主, 1051–1123) and her husband Zhang Dunli (張敦禮, ?–1107), the Fayun Chan Monastery (法雲禪寺) was built on the southern side of the Great Xiangguo Monastery. Since then, the monastery flourished, and admirers of Chan Buddhism gathered in Bianjing”.² Moreover, it is recorded in the 30th fascicle of *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* that “after the completion of the Fayun Monastery, Emperor Shenzong bestowed the title of Fayun on it, all requests were complied with, and he personally ordered the selection of famous monks to preach the Dharma. There were often more than a few hundred students coming to the Fayun Monastery”.³ Additionally, Nianchang (念常, 1282–1341?) of the Yuan Dynasty recorded in his *Fozu lidai tongzai* (佛祖歷代通載 [A Comprehensive Registry of the Successive Ages of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs]) that “in the 6th year of the Yuanfeng period (1083), the construction of the Fayun Monastery in the capital was completed (元豐六年, 京城創法雲寺成)”.⁴

It can be seen from the above that Fayun Monastery was built from the fifth to the sixth year of the Yuanfeng period, with the Princess and her husband as its sponsors (檀越, *dānapati*). When Fayun Monastery was founded, Chan Buddhism had already developed to a certain extent in Bianjing and received the support of the ruler and the attention of many monks. Regarding the specific location of Fayun Monastery, it is known from Weibai’s account that it was located to the south of the Great Xiangguo Monastery. According to the historical map of Bianjing in the Northern Song Dynasty, the Great Xiangguo Monastery was located in the vicinity of the imperial city of Bianjing.⁵ Thus, Fayun Monastery should also have been located in the vicinity of the imperial city, close to the political center, making it very convenient to make friends with princes and nobles and perform various religious functions.

After the completion of Fayun Monastery, the first problem faced was the selection of the abbot. In the tenth month of the seventh year of the Yuanfeng period (1084), upon the recommendation of the Princess of Yueguo and her husband Zhang Dunli, Emperor Shenzong appointed Faxiu as the first abbot of Fayun Monastery and bestowed on him the honorific title of “Yuantong” (圓通).⁶ Faxiu⁷, the sixth generation of the Yunmen school, was born into the Xin (辛) family, and was originally from Longcheng of Qinzhou (秦州隴城, present-day Tianshui, 天水, Gansu, 甘肅). He became a Buddhist monk at the age of three under Monk Lu (魯和尚) of Yingqian Monastery on Mountain Maiji (麥積山應乾寺, present-day Maiji District, 麥積區, Tianshui, Gansu, founded in the Tang Dynasty) and changed his surname to Lu (魯). At the age of nineteen, he passed the scripture examination and received the complete precepts (受具足戒). He set his mind on Buddhist teachings and studied various Sutras and Abhidharma texts, such as the *Yinminglun* (因明論), the

Weishilun (唯識論), the *Baifalun* (百法論), the *Jingangjing* (金剛經), the *Yuanjuejing* (圓覺經), and the *Huayanjing* (華嚴經). Whenever he lectured on these texts, he was able to quickly comprehend their deeper meanings and explain them to the people.⁸

In explaining the *Yuanjuejing*, Faxiu often relied on the *Yuanjuejing dashu shiyi chao* (圓覺經大疏釋義抄 [Subcommentary to the Great Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment]) by Guifeng Zongmi (圭峰宗密, 780–841) of the Tang Dynasty, but he had difficulty agreeing with Zongmi's practice of learning Chan. The only person he admired was Yuan Huayan (元華嚴) who lived in Daming Fu (大名府, present-day Daming County, 大名縣, Handan, 邯鄲, Hebei, 河北), but he deeply regretted that Yuan Huayan did not attach importance to sutra over Chan practice. He said, "Sutra is full of Buddha's meaning, so people like Yuan Huayan should not take it lightly. Chan is not the Buddha's meaning, so people like Guifeng should not study Chan. Anyway, I don't believe that the Buddha has ever privately transmitted Chan to Mahākāśyapa (大迦葉) except for his teachings." He stopped preaching and went to the south, determined to eliminate Chan in return for the Buddha's kindness.⁹

From this, we can see that Faxiu's previous prejudice against Chan Buddhism was quite deep. However, the result was unexpected. Around the seventh year of the Qingli period (慶曆七年, 1047), he came to the Tiefo Monastery (鐵佛寺) in Wuwei (present-day Wuwei County, 無為縣, Anhui), where he realized the profundity of Chan Buddhism and recognized his own inadequacy during a conversation with Tianyi Yihuai (天衣義懷, 993–1064). Subsequently, he turned to studying Chan with Yihuai day and night, and, seventeen days later, when he heard the case "Baizhao asked Baoci 'What will happen when love is not yet born?' Baoci said, 'Separate'. (白兆參報慈'情未生時如何?' 慈曰: '隔')", he was fully enlightened (大悟) and officially became a Chan master. After that, Faxiu followed Yihuai to study Chan, moving between Chizhou (池州, today the southwestern part of Anhui, bordering Jiangxi, 江西) and Wudi (吳地, now Zhejiang Province, 浙江 and Jiangsu, 江蘇), for a long period of ten years.¹⁰

After completing his studies around the second year of the Jiayou period (嘉祐二年, 1057), Faxiu first opened an altar to preach the Dharma on Mount Simian (四面).¹¹ In the following years, he served as the abbot of several monasteries in sequence: Qixian Monastery (棲賢寺) on Mount Lu (廬山), Jiangshan Monastery (蔣山寺, also known as Mount Zhong, 鍾山, present-day Nanjing, Jiangsu), Baoning Monastery in Fengtai (鳳台保寧寺, present-day Nanjing, Jiangsu), and Changlu Chongfu Monastery in Zhenzhou (真州長蘆崇福寺, present-day Yizheng, 儀征, Jiangsu). In the tenth month of the seventh year of the Yuanfeng period, Faxiu was appointed as the first abbot of Fayun Monastery and bestowed with the Chan name "Yuantong". On the day of his appointment, Emperor Shenzong sent an envoy with incense and a monk's robe, along with a royal message, to show his high regard for the Dharma. At that time, Zhaojun (荊王趙顥, 1056–1088) also attended the Dharma assembly, demonstrating the imperial court's recognition of Faxiu. On the fifth day of the third month of the eighth year of the Yuanfeng period (1085), Emperor Shenzong passed away, and Emperor Zhezong ascended the throne. On the 10th day of the fourth month (Tongtian Festival, 同天節), which was Emperor Shenzong's birthday, Emperor Zhezong invited monks, including Faxiu, to enter the palace and pray for the late emperor's blessings.¹² Shortly after the completion of Fayun Monastery, the Princess of Yueguo called on the people to contribute funds for casting a bell for the monastery, and many responded enthusiastically. In the fourth month of the first year of the Yuanyou period (元祐元年, 1086), Fayun Monastery cast a bell weighing 10,000 catties, and Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037–1101) personally wrote the *Fayunsi zhongming* (法雲寺鐘銘 [Bell Inscription of the Fayun Monastery]).¹³ Song literati often wrote inscriptions for Buddhist monasteries to celebrate the completion of construction projects, changes in public status, or the granting of name plaques. These inscriptions reveal much about the organization of Buddhism during the Song Dynasty and literati attitudes toward it. These inscriptions were often included in their collected works (Schlütter 2008, p. 7).

On the 29th day of the eighth month of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period (1090), Faxiu became seriously ill. Emperor Zhezong appointed an imperial physician to treat him, but Faxiu politely refused. He said, “If you are sick, you are going to die, and if you try to cure yourself, you are just attached to life. People’s life and death are just a dream, so why do you have to insist on it?” This statement shows that he had already seen through life and death and accepted the natural law of birth, old age, sickness, and death. At the end of his life, Faxiu reflected on his experiences, not lingering on worldly splendor but rather exhorting his disciples to be at ease with their cultivation and not to be obsessed with life, death, and vanity. He then sat down and passed away at the age of 64, with an ordination age of 45.¹⁴

There is no record of Faxiu’s works or discourse records (語錄) in the existing historical biographies, but a few Dharma sayings (法語), poems (詩文), and verses (偈頌) attributed to him are scattered in various Buddhist history books. During his lifetime, Faxiu had 55 Dharma heirs, 27 of whom are recorded in the Lantern Records. Among them, Weibai was the most outstanding and succeeded in becoming the third abbot of Fayun Monastery. Additionally, according to Buddhist historical records, Faxiu also had many interactions with celebrities and scholars of his time, such as Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021–1086), Jiang Yingshu (蔣穎叔, 1031–1105), Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019–1086), Li Gonglin (李公麟, 1049–1106), Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅, 1045–1105), and Wang Shen (王誥, 1048–1104). When interacting with these worldly celebrities, he always adhered to the principle of frankness and straightforwardness, speaking forthrightly without flattery, regardless of their status. Similarly, he was also forthright in his dealings with Buddhists, and his style of propagating the Dharma was stern, not allowing any slackness or prejudice. It is precisely for this reason that Faxiu was honored by many people both inside and outside the Buddhist community, earning the name “Xiu Tiemian” (秀鐵面, Iron-faced Xiu). This reputation is not only related to Faxiu’s profound attainments in Buddhism and his strict self-discipline, but also to his unique charisma and philosophy of dealing with the world.¹⁵

In brief, Faxiu was appointed as the founding abbot of Fayun Monastery in the tenth month of the seventh year of the Yuanfeng period, and served until his death on the 29th day of the eighth month of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period, nearly seven years later. During his tenure, Faxiu not only participated in the daily Buddhist services, but also contributed to the construction of the monastery’s bell and took part in ceremonies organized by the imperial family to pray for the blessings of Emperor Shenzong. Due to his profound Buddhist attainments, exceptional ability to propagate the Dharma, and unique charisma, Faxiu earned the high respect of the imperial court, the nobility, and scholars. Consequently, the fame of Fayun Monastery increased significantly. As the sixth-generation master of the Yunmen School, Faxiu’s leadership at Fayun Monastery also helped develop and strengthen the influence of the Yunmen School during that time.

3. The Development of Fayun Monastery and the Second-Generation Abbot Datong Shanben (大通善本)

At the end of the same year, after the passing of Faxiu, Emperor Zhezong appointed Shanben as the second-generation abbot of Fayun Monastery by an imperial edict. Shanben,¹⁶ whose surname was Dong (董), was a descendant of the Western Han Confucian master Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179 B.C.–104 B.C.) and hailed from Zhongshu Village in Taikang (太康). His grandfather’s name was Qi (琪), and his father’s name was Wen (溫), both of whom served as officials in the state of Yingzhou (潁州, present-day Fuyang, 阜陽, Anhui). Shanben was likely born in Yingzhou. He lost his father when he was just one year old and was raised by his mother in his Uncle Zu Jie’s (祖玠) home. He studied Confucian Classics from childhood and became a learned man in adulthood. However, Shanben had no intention of pursuing an official career. He was keen on avoiding grains (辟穀) and practiced seated meditation (坐禪), preferring to remain inconspicuous. In the eighth year of the Jiayou period (嘉祐八年, 1063), the 28-year-old Shanben entered the Dizang Yuan (地藏院) of the Xiansheng Monastery (顯聖寺) in Bianjing, passed the scripture examina-

tion, and formally became a fully ordained monk. He then studied the Vinaya (毗奈耶) and the Zahuajing (雜華經) under the preceptor Yuan Cheng Huiyi (圓成惠揖, ?–?). Later, Shanben was enlightened by a night dream of Shan Cai (善財), who guided him to the south, so he left Bianjing and traveled south to seek a teacher. At that time, the fifth Chan master of the Yunmen School, Yuanzhao Zongben (圓照宗本, 1021–1100), was teaching Chan in the Wuzhong area (吳中).¹⁷ Shanben went to the Ruiguang Monastery (瑞光寺) in Suzhou (蘇州) and studied under Zongben. Due to his outstanding talent and diligence, he achieved success within five years and soon became unrivaled among his peers. Consequently, Zongben placed great reliance on Shanben and entrusted him with the hopes for the expansion of the Yunmen School.¹⁸

In the spring of the seventh year of the Yuanfeng period (1084), Shanben crossed the Jiujiang (九江)¹⁹ and traveled through Huaishan (淮山, present-day Xuyi, 盱眙縣, Huai'an, 淮安, Jiangsu), visiting ancestral pagodas and enjoying the scenic beauty of the mountains, rivers, and jungles, hoping to spend his life there. He resided in Taishouyan (太守巖, located in Fushan, 浮山, present-day Zhenyang County, 樅陽縣, Anqing, 安慶, Anhui). A few years later, Shanben reappeared and served as the abbot of three monasteries in turn. First, he served as the abbot of Shuanglin Monastery (雙林寺) in Wuzhou (婺州, present-day Jinhua, 金華, Zhejiang) for six years, earning the respect of people in the eastern Zhejiang region (浙東, present-day the eastern part of Zhejiang Province, mainly in the areas of Ningbo, 寧波, Shaoxing, 紹興, and Zhoushan, 舟山). He was even regarded as the reincarnation of Fu Dashi (傅大士, 497–569).²⁰ After retiring from Shuanglin Monastery, Shanben succeeded his teacher Zongben as the abbot of Jingci Monastery (淨慈寺) in Qiantang (錢塘, present-day Hangzhou, 杭州, Zhejiang). At that time, there were more than a thousand Buddhist disciples in Jingci Monastery, donations were abundant, the Dharma seat was flourishing, and the number of worshippers was endless, making visitors feel as if they had come to the Western Heaven. Due to this prosperity, two generations of Chan Masters, Zongben and Shanben, who were called “Daxiao ben” (大小本, Big and Little Ben), became well known. In the fifth year of the Yuanyou period (1090), Faxiu passed away, and shortly thereafter, Shanben took over the abbotship of Fayun Monastery by royal decree of Emperor Zhezong. He was given the Chan name “Datong Chan Master” (大通禪師) at the request of the Princess of Yueguo.²¹

Interestingly, Faxiu and Zongben were fellow disciples, meaning Faxiu was Shanben's Shishu (師叔, paternal uncle; master's fellow disciple). When Shanben studied Chan with Zongben, Faxiu was already a well-known Chan master whom Shanben particularly admired. When Faxiu served as the abbot of Qixian Monastery, Shanben often went to ask him questions. Their relationship was as close as that between Yangshan Huiji (仰山慧寂, 807–883) and his paternal uncle Dongsi Ruhui (東寺如會, 744–823). Moreover, it seems that it was not a coincidence that after Shanben resigned from the post of abbot of Fayun Monastery, Faxiu's disciple Weibai took over as the next-generation abbot. Shanben was an honest and proud man who never said anything against his will to agree with others. However, during his tenure as the abbot of Fayun Monastery, princes and nobles donated money and goods to build and renovate the monastery, making it magnificent and resplendent like a treasure house. After serving as the abbot of Fayun Monastery for eight years, Shanben petitioned to leave his position and retire. After his request was granted, Shanben went to the Chongde An (崇德庵) in Longshan (龍山) of the West Lake (西湖), where he remained for ten years, isolated from the world, living with his disciple Sirui (思睿). In December of the third year of the Daguan period (大觀三年, 1109), Shanben passed away at the age of 75, the Buddhist year being 45.²²

Regarding the time when Shanben took over as the abbot of Fayun Monastery, it likely occurred shortly after 29 August of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period (1090), when the first-generation abbot Faxiu passed away. As for the date when Shanben retired from the position of abbot of Fayun Monastery, there are two records. First, as mentioned earlier, after Shanben served as the abbot of Fayun Monastery for eight years, he lived in seclusion at Chongde Monastery in Longshan for ten years until his death in December of the 3rd

year of the Daguan period. Combined with the above information, the date of Shanben's departure from the capital and his retreat to Longshan is estimated to be at least around the third year of the Yuanfu period (元符三年, 1100). Thus, the period during which Shanben served as abbot of Fayun Monastery was probably between the end of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period (元祐五年, 1090) and the second year of the Yuanfu period (1099), a period of about eight years.

In addition, fascicle 4 of the Yuan dynasty's *Shishi jigu lue* (釋氏稽古略 [An Outline of Historical Researches into the Śākya Family Lineage]) by Juean (覺岸, 1286–?) records that “in the fall of the 7th year of the Yuanyou period (1092), Shanben was granted permission to return to the West Lake in Hangzhou due to old age (元祐七年秋, 師丐老歸杭州西湖, 制可)”.²³ According to this statement, the length of the period during which Shanben served as abbot of Fayun Monastery was two years, from the eighth month of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period to the fall of the seventh year of the Yuanyou period. After careful consideration, we accept the record of the *Chanlin sengbao zhuan* (禪林僧寶傳 [Biography of the Chan Monks]). The reason for this is that, among the two records, the information about Shanben in the *Chanlin sengbao zhuan*—which was completed in the Song Dynasty—is more detailed, and the author Huihong's (惠洪, 1071–1128) information comes directly from Shanben's disciple Sirui, making the information relatively credible. In addition, it is unreasonable for Shanben to resign unilaterally after less than two years in office. In short, Shanben assumed the abbotship of Fayun Monastery around the end of the fifth year of the Yuanyou period and arrived at the latest at the beginning of the sixth year of the Yuanyou period (1091). His departure from the abbotship of Fayun Monastery was probably around the end of the second year of the Yuanfu period, no later than the first month of the third year of the Yuanfu period, the day of Emperor Zhezong's death (1100), totaling about eight years. During Shanben's tenure at Fayun Monastery, he made additions to the monastery, allowing it to develop even more than in the early days of its establishment.

4. The Prosperity of Fayun Monastery and the Third-Generation Abbot Foguo Weibai (佛國惟白)

After Shanben retired from his position as abbot of Fayun Monastery, Weibai was appointed as the third-generation abbot. Weibai,²⁴ born into the Ran (冉) family in Jingjiang (靜江, present-day Guilin, 桂林, Guangxi, 廣西) (Zong 2021), was a disciple of Faxiu. According to the 20th fascicle of the *Chanrong songgu lianzhu tongji* (禪宗頌古聯珠通集 [Comprehensive Anthology of the String of Pearls Verse Commentary of the Chan Lineage]), Weibai had studied with Huanglong Huinan (黃龍惠南, 1002–1069) from the first year of the Xining period (熙寧元年, 1068).²⁵ Perhaps it was shortly after Huinan's death (1069) that Weibai became a disciple of Faxiu to study Chan and achieve enlightenment. After completing his studies, Weibai successively held the position of abbot at Guishan Monastery (龜山寺) in Sizhou (泗州, present-day Sixian County, 泗縣, Anhui) and Tangquan Monastery (湯泉寺) in Fangxian (房縣, present-day Fangxian County, 房縣, Shiyan, 十堰, Hubei, 湖北).²⁶

In the first lunar month of the third year of the Yuanfu period, Emperor Zhezong passed away and was succeeded by Emperor Huizong (徽宗, 1082–1135, r. 1100–1125). Soon afterward, Weibai was appointed abbot of Fayun Monastery in Dongjing and was honored with the title of “Chan Master Foguo”. On the 16th day of the second month of the third year of the Yuanfu period, Weibai entered the palace for the first time, ascended to the high seat (陞座), and taught the Dharma (說法) for the sacrificial ceremony thirty-five days after the death (五七祭典) of Emperor Zhezong, by Emperor Huizong's imperial decree. On the 22nd day of the fourth month of the same year, Weibai once again entered the palace, this time in the Hall of Funing (福寧殿), ascended to the high seat, and taught the Dharma for the sacrificial ceremony one hundred days after the death (百日祭典) of Emperor Zhezong, by Emperor Huizong's imperial decree. On the 17th day of the second month of the first year of the Jianzhong Jingguo period (建中靖國元年, 1101), Weibai entered the palace for the third time by imperial decree, ascended to the high seat, and taught

the Dharma at the Cide Hall (慈德殿) for the sacrificial ceremony thirty-five days after the death of the empress dowager.²⁷

On the 15th day of the 7th month of the first year of the Jianzhong Jingguo period, Weibai handed over the 30 fascicles of the *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* and the 3 fascicles of the Contents that he had compiled to Zhang Dunli, who was a *dānapati* of Fayun Monastery, hoping that he would be allowed to submit them to Emperor Huizong for inclusion in the Buddhist Canon. On the 15th day of the 8th month of the same year, Emperor Huizong wrote the *Yuzhi jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu xu* (御制建中靖國續燈錄序 [The Imperial Preface to the *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*]) in his own handwriting, authorizing the *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* to be included in the Buddhist Canon.²⁸

In the spring of the second year of the Chongning period (崇寧二年, 1103), Weibai received Emperor Huizong's permission to travel to Mount Tiantai (天台山, present-day Tiantai County, 天台縣, Zhejiang). On the 18th day of the 8th month of the same year, Weibai arrived at Zhizhe Chan Monastery (智者禪寺) at Mount Jinhua (金華) in Wuzhou to study the Buddhist Canon. On the first day of the 11th month of that year, Weibai took the essence of the Buddhist Canon and compiled the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* (大藏經綱目指要錄 [Essential Guide and Checklist of the Great Canon]), in 8 fascicles. On the third day of the 2nd month of the next year (1104), the compilation was completed, totaling more than 200,000 characters (Weibai 1993, p. 248).

On the 15th day of the first month of the fourth year of the Chongning period (1105), Weibai wrote the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu shu* (大藏經綱目指要錄述 [Preface to the Essential Guide and Checklist of the Great Canon]). At the beginning of the same year, he submitted the woodblock print of the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* to the court. On the 28th day of the 10th month of the same year, Emperor Huizong issued an imperial decree allowing the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* to be included in the Buddhist Canon and bestowed two empty-name certificates of ordination to Weibai. The next day, the Secretariat (中書省) issued an edict, which was sent to the Ministry of Rites (禮部) of the Department of State Affairs (尚書省) on the first day of the 11th month. Subsequently, the Ministry of Rites issued an edict to Weibai. By the end of the fourth year of the Chongning period, the series of events leading to the incorporation of the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* into the Buddhist Canon was completed one after another (Weibai 1993, pp. 249–50).

Several years later, Weibai left his position as abbot and moved to Tiantong Monastery (天童寺) in Mingzhou (明州, present-day Yinzhou District, 鄞州區, Ningbo, Zhejiang), where he lived until his death.²⁹

Regarding Weibai's disciples, there are eight of them recorded in fascicle 25 of the *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*.³⁰ As for his works, in addition to the aforementioned *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* (30 fascicles) and the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* (8 fascicles), there is also the *Foguo Chanshi Wenshu zhinan tuzan* (佛國禪師文殊指南圖讚 [Chan Master Foguo's Illustrated Verses of Praise on the Teachings of Mañjuśrī], 1 fascicle). It is quite rare that the *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* and the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu*, as the writings of a Chan master, have been successively included in the Buddhist Canon.

As for the specific date when Weibai took over as abbot of Fayun Monastery, there is no clear explanation in the historical materials of the Song and Yuan dynasties. Only Juding's (居頂, ?–1404) *Xu chuandeng lu* (續傳燈錄 [The Sequel to the Lamp History]) fascicle 19 mentions the "Spring of the 3rd year of the Yuanfu period (元符三年春)".³¹ The earliest record of Weibai as the abbot of Fayun Monastery is the aforementioned February 16th in the third year of the Yuanfu period, when Weibai entered the palace to attend the anniversary of the death of Emperor Zhezong. Undoubtedly, those qualified to attend such ceremonies at the palace were either abbots of famous monasteries or senior monks of the time, and Weibai's teacher Faxiu, as the first abbot of Fayun Monastery, had also attended such ceremonies. Thus, even if it was later when he first entered the palace, by the middle of the second month of the third year of the Yuanfu period he was already the abbot of Fayun Monastery. It is also possible that Weibai's appointment as abbot of Fayun Monastery dates back even further, to the end of the second year of the Yuanfu period,

when the previous abbot Shanben stepped down from his post. Because of the serious illness of Emperor Zhezong, the official appointment should have been made after Emperor Huizong's accession to the throne.

In addition, there is no clear record of the date when Weibai retired from his post as abbot of Fayun Monastery. In the existing historical materials, the last record of Weibai being addressed as "Abbot of Fayun Monastery" was in November of the fourth year of the Chongning period. The period from the third year of the Yuanfu period to the end of the fourth year of the Chongning period (崇寧四年, 1105) totals less than six years. Moreover, it is unlikely that Weibai resigned from his post immediately after the affairs related to the collection of the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* into the Tripitaka had been completed. Therefore, it is more likely that Weibai stepped down as abbot of Fayun Monastery in the period between the fourth year of the Daguan period and the first year of the Zhenghe period.

In summary, Weibai took over as abbot of Fayun Monastery at the end of the second year of the Yuanfu period (1099) or at the beginning of the next year (1100). The exact time of his retirement from the post is not currently known. During his tenure, he attended sacrificial ceremonies for deceased emperors and empress dowagers on three occasions by imperial edict. He also wrote and submitted two works, *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu* and *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu*, which were included in the Buddhist Canon after receiving imperial edicts. The inclusion of these two works in the canon is related to the advantage of his identity as the abbot of Fayun Monastery and the assistance of the princess and her husband, who were the sponsors of the monastery. This reflects both the personal success of Chan Master Foguo Weibai and the attitude of the rulers of the time toward Chan Buddhism. The three generations of abbots of Fayun Monastery belonged to the Yunmen school, indicating that the Yunmen school was well developed in Dongjing at that time. Consequently, Fayun Monastery became prominent among the monasteries in Bianjing and reached its most prosperous period during Weibai's abbacy.

5. The Fourth-Generation Abbot Fozhao Gao (佛照杲) and the Decline of Fayun Monastery

After Weibai retired from his position as abbot of Fayun Monastery, Fozhao Gao was appointed as the fourth-generation abbot. He is also considered the last-generation abbot of Fayun Monastery, as there is no record of a fifth-generation abbot. Fozhao Gao, also known as Fayun Gao (法雲杲), was the third-generation Chan master of the Huanglong School (黃龍派) of the Linji School (臨濟宗) in the late Northern Song Dynasty. His date of birth and death, place of birth, and common family name are unclear. According to the *Dahui Pujue Chanshi Zongmen Wuku* (大慧普覺禪師宗門武庫 [Chan Master Dahui Pujue's Arsenal for the Chan Lineage]), Fozhao Gao became a monk as a teenager and later traveled extensively to study under various famous masters. Initially, he studied under Yuantong Ji (圓通璣, 1036–1118) of the Huanglong School. Later, he became a disciple of Zhenjing Kewen (真淨克文, 1025–1102), the second-generation master of the Linji School's Huanglong sect, and attained enlightenment on November 21st of the third year of the Shaosheng period (紹聖三年, 1096). Fozhao Gao initially served as abbot of Guizong Monastery (歸宗寺) in Lushan (present-day Xingzi County, 星子縣, Jiujiang, Jiangxi), where he dedicated himself to the propagation of the Buddha's teachings without slackening.³² Later, he was appointed as the fourth abbot of Fayun Monastery by imperial edict of Emperor Huizong. On the day of his inauguration (開堂日) as abbot of Fayun Monastery, the emperor sent an envoy to congratulate him with imperial incense and ordered Fozhao Gao to submit a 'recorded sayings' (語錄). Huihong was present at the Dharma assembly and assisted in the compilation of these recorded sayings.³³ Before the fourth year of the Xuanhe period (宣和四年, 1122), Fozhao Gao retired as abbot of Fayun Monastery and moved to Tieluohan Monastery (鐵羅漢寺) in Jingde (景德).³⁴ Unfortunately, apart from these records, there are no further details about Fozhao Gao, and only some of his Dharma talks and Gong'an (公案) are included in fascicle 23 of the *Jianzhong Jingguo Xudeng Lu*.

There is no clear record of when Fozhao Gao was appointed as the abbot of Fayun Monastery. On the day of his inauguration, Huihong was present at the Dharma assembly and assisted in the compilation of the recorded sayings. According to Huang Qijiang's *Huihong nianpu jianbian* (惠洪年譜簡編 [Compendium of the Annals of Huihong]), the main periods of Huihong's activities in Bianjing were from the fourth to the seventh year of the Yuanyou period (1089–1092) as well as the year from the eighth month of the fourth year of the Daguan period (1110) to the tenth month of the first year of the Zhenghe period (政和元年, 1111) (Huang 1997, p. 350). Therefore, his attendance at the inauguration ceremony of Fozhao Gao could only have taken place between the eighth month of the fourth year of the Daguan period and the tenth month of the first year of the Zhenghe period. As mentioned in the previous section, the last record of Weibai being addressed as "Abbot of Fayun Monastery" was in the eleventh month of the fourth year of the Chongning period. The period from the third year of the Yuanfu period to the end of the fourth year of the Chongning period (崇寧四年, 1105) totals less than six years. Moreover, it is unlikely that Weibai resigned from his post just after the affairs related to the collection of the *Dazangjing gangmu zhiyao lu* into the Tripitaka had been completed. Therefore, it is more likely that Weibai stepped down as abbot of Fayun Monastery sometime between the fourth year of the Daguan period and the first year of the Zhenghe period.

Regarding the time when Fozhao Gao retired from Fayun Monastery, the *Dahui Pujue Chanshi Nianpu* (大慧普覺禪師年譜 [Chronological Biography of Zen Master Dahui Pujue]) recorded that in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period, at the age of 34, Dahui Zonggao (大慧宗杲, 1089–1163) traveled to Bianjing for the first time, intending to visit Fozhao Gao. Unfortunately, by that time, Fozhao Gao had already retired to Tieluohan Monastery in Jingde.³⁵ According to this record, Fozhao Gao had already retired to Tieluohan Monastery before the fourth year of the Xuanhe period. Additionally, both the abolition of Buddhism by Emperor Huizong in January of the first year of the Xuanhe period (1119) and the death of Fayun Monastery's sponsor, the Princess of Yueguo, in the fifth year of the Xuanhe period (1123) (Tuotuo and Yang 1984, p. 8780) had a significant impact on Fayun Monastery. Considering these factors, it is possible that Fozhao Gao, as the last abbot of Fayun Monastery, retired before the fourth year of the Xuanhe period.

At this point, the history of Fayun Monastery was nearing its end. In the first year of the Jingkan period (靖康元年, 1126), the Jin army attacked Bianjing, the Northern Song Dynasty ended, and, with it, Fayun Monastery was also destroyed, never to reappear on the stage of history.

6. Concluding Remarks

By examining the biographies of the four generations of abbots at Fayun Monastery and researching their tenures using the succession of abbots as a timeline, this paper provides an overview and reconstruction of the approximately forty-three years of history at Fayun Monastery in Dongjing. Despite the limitations in available information, this study aims to piece together the monastery's historical narrative as accurately as possible, recognizing that future discoveries may refine these conclusions. Several key points emerge from this examination:

First, the appointment of the abbots of Fayun Monastery by imperial edict and the bestowal of honorific titles underscore the Song Dynasty government's emphasis on Chan Buddhism. These appointments, coupled with the abbots' involvement in significant state ceremonies, illustrate the integral role of Buddhist monks and monasteries within the broader political and social framework of the Song Dynasty. The monks' prayers for national prosperity, imperial longevity, and social harmony highlight the intersection of religious practices with state interests.

Second, the first three generations of abbots were all from the Yunmen lineage, suggesting that Fayun Monastery operated under a "hereditary monastery" system. This system allowed for the succession of abbots within the same tonsure family, emphasizing the teacher-inheritance relationship. However, the shift to a Chan master from the Linji

school as the fourth-generation abbot signifies a broader trend during the late Northern Song Dynasty, in which the Linji school's influence began to overshadow that of the Yunmen school.

Third, the prosperity and decline of Fayun Monastery were closely tied to the support of its sponsors. The patronage from the Princess of Yueguo and her husband was instrumental in the monastery's development. Their contributions facilitated the construction of key structures and the monastery's overall growth. Conversely, the decline of Fayun Monastery can be attributed to the loss of this strong external support, illustrating the dependency of religious institutions on their secular benefactors. After Weibai retired from his position as abbot of Fayun Monastery, Fozhao Gao was appointed as the fourth-generation abbot. The lack of records about a fifth-generation abbot and the subsequent destruction of the monastery during the Jin invasion of Bianjing mark the end of Fayun Monastery's historical presence.

In summary, the history of Fayun Monastery during the Northern Song Dynasty offers valuable insights into the Yunmen School's rise and fall, reflecting broader trends in the development of Chan Buddhism. The interactions between the abbots, scholar-officials, and the Song Dynasty government reveal the complex dynamics that shaped religious and political landscapes. This study not only sheds light on the significance of Fayun Monastery but also contributes to our understanding of the intricate relationship between religion and state in medieval China. Future research could further explore the relationships between different Chan schools and their respective influences, as well as uncover additional historical materials that might provide deeper insights into the lives and contributions of lesser-known abbots and monks associated with Fayun Monastery.

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Abbreviations

B = *Dazangjing bubian* 大藏經補編 [Supplement to the Dazangjing]. Edited by Lan Jifu 藍吉富. Taipei: Huayu Publishing House 華宇出版社, 1985.

GA = *Zhongguo Fosi Shizhi Huikan* 中國佛寺史志彙刊. Edited by Du Jiexiang 杜潔祥. Taipei: Zongqing Book Publishing Company 宗青圖書出版公司, 1980–1994.

J = *Jiaying Canon (Shinwenfeng Edition)* 嘉興藏 (新文豐版). Taipei: Shinwenfeng Book Publishing Company 新文豐出版社, 1987.

T = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled during the Taishō Era (1912–26)]. Edited by Takakusu Jun-jirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al. 100 vols. Tōkyō: Taishō shinshū daizōkyō kankōkai 大正新修大藏經刊行會, 1988.

X = *Manji Shinsan Dainippon Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經. Edited by Kōshō Kawamura 河村孝照, Giyū Nishi 西義雄 and Kōshirō Tamaki 玉城康四郎, et al. 90vols. Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai 國書刊行會, 1975–1989.

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Notes

- 1 Fozu tongji, T no. 2035, 49:45. 412b410–421.
- 2 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 1. 640c-641a.
- 3 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 30. 827b19–21.
- 4 Fozu lidai tongzai, T no. 2033, 49: 19. 669c.
- 5 For evidence regarding Xiangguo Monastery being located in present-day Kaifeng, Henan, see Huang (1989, pp. 101–7) and Duan (2004), Chen (2005, pp. 353–78), Xiong (1985).
- 6 Dongpo chanxi ji, B no. 148, 26: 4.713a2; Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 10. 699c20–23
- 7 For the study of Yuantong Faxiu (圓通法秀), see Du and Wei (1993, p. 405), and Yang (2006, pp. 123–26).
- 8 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 26. 543b10–18; Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 10. 699c6–11).
- 9 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 26. 543b16–23
- 10 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 26. 543c2–7; Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 10. 699c11–18.
- 11 Zongtong biannian, X no. 1600, 86: 20. 213a4–5.
- 12 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 10. 699c18–700a2.
- 13 Dongpo chanxi ji, B no. 148, 26: 4. 713a1–9.
- 14 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 26. 544a1–5; Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 10.701a22-b3
- 15 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 26. 543b10–544a13.
- 16 For the study of Datong Shanben (大通善本), see Du and Wei (1993, p. 405) and Yang (2006, pp. 126–27), Zhang and Fan (2023, pp. 30–35).
- 17 Wuzhong (吳中) area, It covers most of present-day Zhejiang and the southern part of the Yangtze River in Anhui and Jiangsu.
- 18 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 29. 549a6–21.
- 19 Jiujiang (九江) is located on the southern shores of the Yangtze River in northwest Jiangxi Province. According to *Jin Taikang diji* (晉太康地記), the name of Jiujiang originated from “Liu Xin thought that the nine waters of Hu Han i.e., Ganshui, Poshui, Yushui, Xiushui, Jinshui, Xushui, Shu shui, Nanshui, Pengshui) entered Peng Li Ze. (劉歆以為湖漢九水(即贛水、鄱水、余水、修水、淦水、盱水、蜀水、南水、彭水)入彭蠡澤也)”. Poyang Lake (鄱陽湖) has also been called Pengli Lake historically, but they are not the same.
- 20 Fu Dashi (傅大士) also known as Shanhui (善慧), Fuxi (伏羲), Shuanglin Dashi (雙林大士), and Dongyang Dashi (東陽大士) was a Chinese Buddhist monk who was later deified as the Japanese patron deity of libraries. Dashi (大士), lit. ‘Great scholar’, was used in China as a rendering of the Sanskrit mahāsattva. In addition to the invention of the library system, Fu Dashi was credited with overseeing the construction of the Shuanglin Monastery and compiling an early version of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. He is credited as the author of the *Jingang borejing laisong* (金剛般若經來頌, Taisho大正藏 no. 2732), a commentary on the Diamond Sutra. See Zhang (2003, pp. 28–33)
- 21 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 29. 549a22-b4; Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 15.732c4–6.
- 22 Chanlin sengbao zhuan, X no. 1560, 79: 29. 549a21-b17.
- 23 Shishi jigu lue, T no. 2037, 49: 4. 877c13–14.
- 24 For the study of Weibai, see Zong (2021, pp. 77–96; 2023a, pp. 717–14714-17; 2023c, pp. 267–70; 2023b, pp. 61–77).
- 25 Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji, X no. 1295, 65: 38. 718a15–16.
- 26 Jiatai pudeng lu, X no. 1559, 79: 5. 319a14–15.
- 27 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 17. 749c2–4; 750b2–3; 751b1–2.
- 28 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 1. 640c05–641b2; 30. 826c04–829b7.
- 29 Xuchuan denglu, T no. 2077, 51: 12.536b15.
- 30 Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu, X no. 1556, 78: 25. 795a08–797a13.
- 31 Xuchuan denglu, T no. 2077, 51: 12.536b15. 595b19–23.
- 32 Dahui pujue chanshi zongmen wuku, T no. 1998B, 47: 1. 947a1–12; 948b20.
- 33 Dahui pujue chanshi zongmen wuku, T no. 1998B, 47: 1. 947a14–20.
- 34 Dahui pujue chanshi zongmen wuku, T no. 1998B, 47: 1. 945a10.
- 35 Dahui pujue chanshi nianpu, J no. A042, 1: 796b8–10.

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