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Shaping the Formless: Debates over Buddhist Images in Medieval China, ca. 300–700

Lee, Kwi Jeong

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SHAPING THE FORMLESS:
DEBATES OVER BUDDHIST IMAGES IN MEDIEVAL CHINA, CA. 300–700

Kwi Jeong Lee

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how and why Buddhist cultic images fueled controversy among literati circles from the fourth through seventh centuries in China. This study draws on a wide range of sources in classical Chinese, including essays, letters, memorials, edicts, and court debates, as well as Buddhist texts translated from Indian languages and authored in Chinese, to uncover the points of debate and the debaters' shifting presuppositions. These sources are used to show that both proponents and critics believed that Buddhist cultic objects were vital, complicated components of what they thought was notable about Buddhism. The dissertation also argues that while the ostensible subject of the debates may have been the role of cultic objects in Buddhist practice, nevertheless the discussion covered other important points of contention, including Buddhahood, the material and institutional foundations of Buddhism, the tenet of emptiness, and the dynamics of Buddhist practice. This dissertation analyzes this multivocality of cultic objects and discusses pre-Buddhist and Buddhist conceptions of images (*xiang* 象 or 像). Within this framework, the dissertation suggests that proponents of Buddhist positions were keenly aware of the distinction between cultic images and the formless referents of those images. This study notes the historical continuities between indigenous, pre-Buddhist discourses and the later Buddhist conceptualization of images, while also underlining understandings based on the newly imported religion. It argues that interreligious debates over Buddhist images prompted Buddhist apologists to formulate a fuller soteriological account about the meaning and function of cultic images, resulting in a more extensive, sophisticated theory than that supplied by earlier Chinese Buddhist canonical traditions.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

b.	birth year
Ch.	Chinese
d.	death year
d.u.	dates unknown
fig.	figure
HD	LUO Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al., eds. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1986–1994.
Jp.	Japanese
Kr.	Korean
MBD	MOCHIZUKI Shinkō 望月信亨. *Mochizuki Bukkyō daijiten* 望月佛教大辞典. Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1954–1958.
NBD	NAKAMURA Hajime 中村元. *Bukkyōgo daijiten* 佛教語大辞典. Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1981.
P	Pelliot manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France
r.	reign years
S	Stein manuscript in the British Library
Sk.	Sanskrit
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*

- For citations of the Taishō canon, I have consulted the SAT online version (http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php), following its conventions in providing the Taishō number followed by the volume, page, register, and line.

- I have converted the Chinese lunisolar calendar to the Gregorian calendar with the aid of *Liangqian nian Zhong-Xi li zhuanhuan* 兩千年中西曆轉換 (http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw).

- For romanization, I use pinyin for Chinese, modified Hepburn for Japanese, and McCune-Reischauer for Korean.

- For romanization of the names of Chinese authors of my primary sources, I follow the order of family name and given name. Ex) Zong Bing, Fu Yi

- For romanization of the names of East Asian modern scholars, I follow their choices of the order. If the family name comes before the given name, the family name is in uppercase. Ex) TANG Yongtong, WU Hung, Koichi Shinohara, Juhyung Rhi

- When I cite Korean-language secondary studies in the footnotes, I translate their titles. I do not offer translated titles for other foreign-language studies.

- All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Chapter One
INTRODUCTION: CONTROVERSIES OVER BUDDHIST IMAGES, PAST AND PRESENT

Some of the most infamous and vicious detractors of the Buddhist religion in medieval China often branded its observances wasteful, deceptive, and idolatrous. One such critic was Fu Yi 傅奕 (555–639), Director of the Astrological Office (*Taishi ling* 太史令) at the court of Emperor Gaozu of Tang 唐高祖 (Li Yuan 李淵, 566–635; r. 618–626). On the twenty-first day of the sixth lunar month in the fourth year of the Wude 武德 era (July 15, 621), he beseeched the emperor to launch a wholesale suppression of the Buddhist religion.[1] To justify this extreme proposal, Fu disparaged Buddhist devotional practices as sumptuous spending on behalf of a lowly foreign god. The ostentation of Buddhist piety was a perennial subject of scathing criticism not only by external skeptics but also within Buddhist communities.[2] In Fu's memorial, however, this timeworn polemic shrouded a somewhat strange presupposition:

> [Buddhists] build immense *saṃghârāma* (monasteries), whose grandeur is not uncommon. [They] employ craftsmen to seat only the muddy barbarian. [By] striking the grand bell of Glorious Splendor (China),[3] [Buddhists] convene a

[1] "Calling for the Abolition of the Buddha's Law (*Qing fei fofa biao* 請廢佛法表)," *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, comp. Dong Gao 董誥 (1740–1818), fasc. 133 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 1345-46. This memorial also survives in Buddhist compilations under a different title: "Eleven Points for the Demolition of Monasteries and Stūpas and Abolition of Monasticism (*Jiansheng sita fei sengni shi shiyouyitiao* 減省寺塔廢僧尼事十有一條)." See Falin 法琳 (572–640), *Poxie lun* 破邪論, T 2109, 52: 475c1-476b5; *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, comp. Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), T 2103, 52: 160a19-c20.

[2] On criticisms of Buddhist pious undertakings from this socio-economic angle, for instance, see Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels in T'ang China* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955), 217-24; Paul Demiéville, "L'iconoclasme anti-bouddhique en Chine," in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974), 18-22; Gregory Schopen, "The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk: Conservative Monastic Values in an Early Mahāyāna Polemical Tract," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1999): 279-324; Gustavo Benavides, "Economy," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 89-92.

[3] This expression has a military connotation, occurring in a phrase from the *Rhapsody of Plume Hunt* (*Yulie fu* 羽獵賦) by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), "Strike a grand bell and build nine

> devious congregation of foreign monks.[4] [By] diverting the ears and eyes of ingenuous people, [they] seek wealth for themselves. Seamstresses tear silk fabric to make banners for excessive rites. Skillful artisans disperse gold and silver to carve tombs for *śarīra* (relics). Non-glutinous rice, millet, wheat, and husked rice nefariously sustain the assembly of monks and nuns. Incense, oil, wax, and candles vainly illuminate the hall of the barbarian god.[5]
>
> 廣置伽藍，壯麗非一。勞役工匠，獨坐泥胡。撞華夏之鴻鍾，集蕃僧之偽眾。動淳民之耳目，索營私之貨賄。女工羅綺，翦作淫祀之幡。巧匠金銀，散雕舍利之塚。秔粱麵米，橫設僧尼之會。香油蠟燭，枉照胡神之堂[6]

On the surface, the conventional anti-Buddhist rhetoric prevails: Buddhist devotees squander resources on large, opulent monuments; Buddhist clerics are charlatans who perform lavish rituals to procure luxurious goods for themselves while claiming to serve the Buddha. Yet the word "barbarian," an ethnic pejorative for the Buddha and his followers, points to an unstated premise underneath this literal reading. The passage defines the hall of the "barbarian god" as a place for the "muddy barbarian" to be housed and for devotees to make offerings. This definition comprises a chain of statements. The occupant of the hall is the recipient of gifts. This object of Buddhist devotion is the "barbarian god" and "muddy barbarian." The "barbarian god" refers to the Buddha; but the modifier "muddy" implies that the "barbarian" is merely a clay object fashioned in

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banners (*zhuang hongzhong, jian jiuliu* 撞鴻鐘，建九旒)." It originated from the ancient custom of ringing a bell to mobilize armies upon foreign invasions. *HD*, vol. 12 (1993), 1105b.

[4] The question of whether the character *fan* 蕃, translated as "foreign" here, carries a categorically pejorative undertone or not is subject to scholarly discussion. Shao-yun Yang, "*Fan* and *Han*: The Origins and Uses of a Conceptual Dichotomy in Mid-Imperial China, ca. 500–1200," in *Political Strategies of Identity-building in Non-Han Empires in China*, ed. Francesca Fiaschetti and Julia Schneider (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2014), 9-35.

[5] A partial translation of this passage is also available in Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 59. "…corvée laborers and skilled craftsmen do nothing but set up mud barbarians [*hu*] [Buddhist statues]. They strike Chinese [*huaxia*] bells and gather together the false crowds of barbarian [*fan*] monks to dazzle the ears and eyes of the innocent folk."

[6] *Quan Tang wen*, 1345; T 2103, 52: 160b19-26; T 2109, 52: 476a3-10.

the form of the Buddha. These statements together reflect the presupposition that the Buddha is nothing but an *image*.

Now remembered as one of the most virulent assailants of Buddhism in Chinese history,[7] Fu was not the first to equate Buddhist cultic images with the Buddha in order to decry the Buddhist religion writ large. Extant anti-Buddhist writings, dated to as early as the fourth century, frequently problematized the material objects used for Buddhist devotional activities. In doubting eyes, Buddhists, laity and clergy alike, seemed to venerate statues, portraits, stūpas, relics, and books. These cultic objects, crafted with precious substances, including gems, metal, scented wood, silk, and pigments, appeared to simulate the Buddha's presence at prominent positions within the Buddhist monastic compound. In front of images of the Buddha, devotees lowered their heads to the ground, displayed various gifts, such as incense, flowers, food, and clothes, and even performed poems and dances. Such Buddhist rituals as repentance, ordination, and meditation took place around or before material substitutes for the Buddha.[8] Drawing on their observation

[7] On Fu Yi, see OGASAWARA Senshū 小笠原宣秀, "Tō no haibutsu ronsha Fu Eki ni tsuite 唐の排仏論者傅奕について," *Shina Bukkyō shigaku* 支那佛教史學 1, no. 3 (1937): 84-93; Arthur F. Wright, "Fu I and the Rejection of Buddhism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 1 (1951): 33-47. As for the significance of his anti-Buddhist memorials in understanding early Tang religious policies and interreligious court debates, see Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 215-16; TANG Yongtong 汤用彤, *Sui Tang fojiao shikao* 隋唐佛教史稿, reprint (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2008b; originally Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 8-12; Eric R. Reinders, "Buddhist Rituals of Obeisance and the Contestation of the Monk's Body in Medieval China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1997), 90-96; KANG Moon-ho 姜文晧, "Pu Hyŏk ŭi paebullon gwa tangch'o ŭi pulgyo chŏngch'aek 傳奕의 排佛論과 唐初의 불교정책 (Fu Yi's anti-Buddhist memorials and the policy about Buddhism in the early Tang)," *Shilla munhwa* 신라문화 30 (2007), 273-300; Abramson (2008), 58-65; Thomas Jülch, "In Defense of the Saṃgha: The Buddhist Apologetic Mission of the Early Tang Monk Falin," in *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel: Aspects of the Relationship between the Buddhist Saṃgha and the State in Chinese History*, ed. Thomas Jülch (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 22-23.

[8] LIU Shufen 劉淑芬, "Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties," *Asia Major*, third series, 8, no. 1 (1995): 19-49, especially 37-45; John

of these quotidian practices, the detractors of Buddhism considered such cultic images to be the underbelly of the Buddhist religion. By claiming that the very object of Buddhist devotion was simply a lifeless image, the anti-Buddhists thought that they were debasing the Buddha, discrediting his followers, and impugning his teachings. The conflation of the Buddha with his images, in other words, was an attempt to undermine the Buddhist religion as a whole by focusing on its most crucial practices.

Naturally, Buddhist proponents engaged with such denigration by severing the Buddha, the object *of* devotion, from his images, the objects *for* devotion. Instead, many Buddhists underscored the commemorative and salvific functions of cultic images. Images of the Buddha, the explanation goes, not only evoke reverence for the long gone Buddha, but also instantiate his profound tenets, thereby helping Buddhists to achieve the professed goal of Buddhist practice. The ultimate end was to awaken to emptiness and to attain liberation from the afflictions of greed, anger, and delusion (the three poisons) and the karmic nexus connecting evil acts in the past and present to repeated suffering and rebirth in the future. For some Buddhist proponents, this Buddhist justification of images was free from the scholastic niceties of some Buddhist doctrines, but elegantly congruous with Buddhist soteriology.

Debates between those who adhered to indigenous traditions and those who embraced the imported teachings flared up sporadically during the formative period of

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Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 55; HOU Xudong, "Buddhist Pantheon," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1095-1168; Sylvie Hureau, "Buddhist Rituals," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. by John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1207-44, especially 1240-42.

Buddhism in China, roughly from the fourth through seventh centuries.[9] Throughout this prolonged confrontation, the border between the two camps grew especially hot when the polemics touched on images. The detractors of Buddhism singled out Buddhist images to make the foreign religion look incompatible with Chinese mores. In response, the advocates of Buddhism also foregrounded Buddhist images but to claim the opposite, that Buddhism was fully consonant with indigenous traditions.

This dissertation explores how and why Buddhist images came to serve as a foil for advancing such conflicting stances. The debates in question suggest that both critics and apologists took for granted the semiotic versatility of Buddhist images.[10] The debaters considered them to signify each and all of the Buddha, his followers (Saṃgha), and his teachings (Dharma). Buddhist images, by extension, could become a visual synecdoche for the Buddhist religion. Therefore, the Buddhist defense of images constituted an integral part of the defense of the Buddhist religion. In their response to anti-Buddhist criticisms, Buddhist apologists used the example of images to formulate the essentials of Buddhist devotion, for both external detractors and Buddhist insiders. The apologists did not simply negate their opponents' positions but rather creatively reformulated the overarching goals and complicated presuppositions involved in the cultic use of images.

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[9] Many studies have examined this multifaceted tension that the introduction of Buddhism brought into the Chinese social, political, intellectual, and cultural spheres. For this body of scholarship, see below, pp. 27-29.

[10] As for a semiological discussion of the Japanese Shingon tradition, see Fabio Rambelli, *A Buddhist Theory of Semiotics: Signs, Ontology, and Salvation in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Interreligious contention offers a vantage point to appreciate this dynamic hermeneutical situation engendered by the equivocal nature of Buddhist images. Above all, Buddhist images fueled controversy because the two sides assigned different, often irreconcilable, meanings and values to them.[11] For instance, some anti-Buddhists maintained that Buddhist images indicated Buddhist monastics were immoral and Buddhist devotees were gullible. To a certain extent, Buddhists agreed with this criticism—or at least, some of them remained ambivalent about the utility of Buddhist images.[12] Against the impression that Buddhist practices unconditionally embraced images as replacements for or embodiments of the Buddha, Buddhist canonical traditions were sensitive to the risk intrinsic to such a straightforward equation of the Buddha with his images. The danger was both epistemic or philosophical, having to do with rendering the absolute within the sensory realm, and soteriological, involving the proper motivation and accoutrements of Buddhist practice. Buddhist canonical sources sometimes note images, in passing, as means to produce karmic rewards or mementos of the Buddha but,

[11] On the equivocal nature of religious images, see Moshe Barasch, "The Idol in the Icon: Some Ambiguities," in *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, ed. Jan Assmann and Albert I. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1-26. The same observation has been made recently: "one person's image is another person's idol." Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm and Iconophilia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 5. For the nature of cultic objects that divide people's attitudes or interpretations into two camps, see Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 32-46.

[12] As for Buddhists' own ambivalence toward images of the Buddha, see Paul Demiéville, "Butzuzô 佛像," in *Hôbôgirin: dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1937), 210-15; Alexander C. Soper, "Early Buddhist Attitudes Toward the Art of Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (1950): 147-51; Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Art in Medieval China: The Ecclesiastical View," in *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art: Proceedings of a Seminar Held at Leiden University, 21-24 October 1991*, ed. K. R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 1-20; Robert D. DeCaroli, *Image Problems: The Origin and Development of the Buddha's Image in Early South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 29-50.

at other times, suppress the topic of the Buddha's images altogether. In the canonical context, Buddhists were neither consistent nor expressive about the meaning and function of their cultic images.

The recurring criticisms from the outside, however, prompted Buddhist apologists to realign and articulate the internally divergent but muted perspectives on images in soteriological terms. The Buddhists argued that cultic images were indispensable in promoting Buddhist teachings and leading Buddhists to achieve Buddhist salvific goals. The multivocality of images, in other words, became "anchored" to a soteriologically univocal discourse.[13] Furthermore, this Buddhist defense of images vis-à-vis the external attack found its way back into the interior of Buddhist discourse. Buddhist devotees reiterated the soteriological rhetoric about images, which was formulated to counter the anti-Buddhist criticisms, in the dedicatory inscriptions of images or during the ritual of image dedication. The ritual language thus extended the apologetic exegesis of Buddhist images beyond the arena of interreligious contention. What Buddhist images signified and how they worked were neither self-evident nor unanimously accepted, but contingent on the audience being addressed, the historical situation, and the purpose of the formulation. Multiple interpretations of Buddhist images were contested and negotiated through the interreligious contention.

This dissertation maps the significant moments in the trajectory in which interreligious contention touching on Buddhist images came to inform the formulation of a Buddhist soteriology of images. My discussion of these moments centers on the rhetoric

[13] The concept of "anchorage" theorizes the signification of an image as an attempt to control the polysemy of an image by texts. Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 38-40.

and logic employed by the debaters. This analysis of eristic language helps to uncover the points of contention. The two sides disagreed on three major issues concerning the vital components of the Buddhist religion. The first issue involved the worthiness of the Buddha being remembered by means of images. The second issue revolved around the morality of Buddhist communities that committed to the exorbitant and extensive practice of making images. The third issue concerned whether and how the Buddha's ultimate teaching could be represented through images.

These seemingly disparate points, showcasing a breadth of image problems, indicate one of the central underlying conceptual issues raised by images: images are supposed to indicate something "real" or "original" that is extrinsic to themselves. Many participants in the debate, however, did not pin down the identity of the real that Buddhist images were supposed to signify, represent, or instantiate. This fuzziness helped to engender the semiotic versatility of Buddhist images. The Buddha, Saṃgha, and Dharma could all—separately or together—serve as good candidates for what Buddhist images should denote or connote. Rarely did debaters consider images and their referents to be essentially the same thing. Buddhist images took on tangible form, whereas the Buddha, Saṃgha, and Dharma did not. This substantial gap, on the one hand, left room for Buddhist apologists to gainsay the opposition's critique of materialism or attachment to objects and to look for alternative explanations. On the other hand, the gap between Buddhist images and their formless referents placed Buddhists in a quandary: the objects of their devotion appeared to be mere material things rather than that which is ultimately real. The interreligious debates in medieval China demonstrate the way Buddhists grappled with these challenges.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first discuss my definition of the term "image" in light of existing scholarship on Buddhist images in medieval China. Then I introduce my source materials and methodologies. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a brief overview of each successive chapter.

The Concept of Image and Its Analytical Utility

I do not follow the conventional usage of the term "image" in the scholarly discussion of Buddhist cultic objects. Historians of Asian religions and art have routinely used it in the sense of anthropomorphic statues and pictures of divinities or transcendental beings. This dissertation, in part, takes issue with such a restricted understanding of the term. Instead, I follow a more complex understanding, based on the work of Mitchell and others who conceive of images at the general theoretical level, within the broader process of apprehending reality. In this cognitive cycle, one perceives a reality, builds a mental representation about what that reality is like, reproduces such a mental construct through linguistic or material/sensory means, and reassesses or reaffirms the received reality via such media, under the presupposition that the media resemble the reality.[14] The word "image" refers to all of these mental, linguistic, and material products that mediate between a reality and the one who conceives of it. By counting both abstract notions and concrete things, this understanding of images allows for the

[14] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7-36; idem, "Image," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 38-42.

interconnectedness of different media in terms of their function as epistemic instruments without limiting the scope of resemblance to visual verisimilitude.[15]

This dissertation applies this multifaceted term to the contexts of medieval Chinese religious discourse. Primarily, I use "image" as an English equivalent to the Chinese character, *xiang* 象 or 像.[16] Simultaneously, the word also serves as an analytical concept for explicating the nature of the problems that Buddhist cultic objects brought to the fore among learned circles in medieval China. Admittedly, the semantic gamut of the English "image" cannot neatly dovetail with that of the Chinese *xiang*.[17] That being said, the two words share the basic meaning and conceptual premise. Exploring that common ground, this dissertation defines "image" as a material representation, that is, a physical object designed to re-enact the presence of something absent by way of the former's presumed likeness to the latter.

Both "image" and "representation" presuppose a referential relationship between one thing and another because an image assumes a similitude between the two, and

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[15] As for differences and similarities between visual and non-visual modes of images, Mitchell (1986), 9-36; idem (2010), 42-43; Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 45-66.

[16] Paul W. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 499-500; Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Göteborg: Elanders boktryckeri aktiebolag, 1964; originally published in 1957), 193. For an etymological account of *xiang*, see Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 147-49. Sharf's choice of translation is "schema," which he alternates with "image." On the concept of *xiang* as *image*, see Hellmut Wilhelm, "The Interplay of Image and Concept," in *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the* Book of Changes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 196-99.

[17] For a conceptual approximation of *xiang* to its Western counterparts, see T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1993): 158-60.

representation involves the act of one being substituted for another.[18] As the concept of representation brings out such semiotic relations inherent in images, it helps to explain why the semiotic nature of Buddhist images caused controversy among learned circles in medieval China. Additionally, my definition qualifies the modality of images as visual or material rather than mental or linguistic. As I will discuss in the next chapter, in religious discourse in medieval China, the concept of images or *xiang* presupposed the distinction between linguistic media and material media and was used to justify the practice of making and using material objects in lieu of the physically unreachable originals.

Throughout Western history, the term "image" has undergone considerable semantic expansion as well as rigorous theoretical discussion.[19] As this dissertation centers on the medieval Chinese case of interreligious contention, I discuss the concept of

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[18] For an etymological survey of the term "representation," see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 241-52. On the methodological difficulties posed by the concept of representation in cultural studies, see Johannes Fabian, "Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (Summer, 1990): 753-72; John R. Bowlin and Peter G. Stromberg, "Representation and Reality in the Study of Culture," *American Anthropologist* 99, no. 1 (1997): 123-34. On representation as a relational concept, see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 3-10; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Representation," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11-22. As for the usefulness of the term "representation" in examining a discourse of cultic objects, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Representation: The Word, the Idea, the Thing," in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001a), 63-78.

[19] For an etymological study of the term "image," see Ray Frazer, "The Origin of the Term 'Image'," *ELH* 27, no. 2 (1960): 149-61. For a brief introduction to the theological and philosophical intricacies of the term within Western historical contexts, see Margaret R. Miles, "Image," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 160-72. As in-depth historical and theoretical contemplations from the perspectives of art history and art theory, for example, Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); idem, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2005): 302-19; idem, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

the image in reference to its cognates that help to clarify the nature of the interreligious debates in question.

First and foremost, "image," in its barest sense, means "likeness."[20] This basic definition associates "image" with "icon" because the latter's Greek origin *eikon* is equivalent to the Latin origin of "image" and, thus, conveys a sense of likeness.[21] The semiological usage of "icon" is predicated on this presumed similitude between the signifier and the signified.[22] In art history, icons narrowly refer to panel portraits of sacred figures in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition.[23] Drawing on this specific context, scholars of religion often define icons as consecrated or ritually animated images that are owed cultic devotion.[24] Throughout this dissertation, I predominantly use "image" instead of "icon" because the medieval Chinese debates over Buddhist cultic objects did not directly concern the issue of consecration.

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[20] Mitchell (1986), 31.

[21] On the interchangeability of "image" and "icon," Robert Maniura, "Icon/Image," *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 7, no. 1 (2011): 52; Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 3.

[22] Charles S. Peirce, "Chapter 3: The Icon, Index, and Symbol," in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 157-59; Yvonne Rogers, "Icons at the Interface: Their Usefulness," *Interacting with Computers* 1, no. 1 (1989): 105-17.

[23] Brubaker (2012), 3.

[24] John E. Cort, "Images: Images, Icons, and Idols," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second edition, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 7 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4389; Bernard Faure, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 237; Robert H. Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," *Representations* 66 (1999): 81; Helmut Brinker, "From Image to Icon: Unseen Caches for Animating the Sacred," in *Secrets of the Sacred: Empowering Buddhist Images in Clear, in Code, and in Cache* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 6.

The cultic function of images evokes the term "idol."[25] This distinctly derogatory word is frequently used to label "wrong" objects of adoration, such as Baal, the golden calf, money, and celebrities.[26] Along with the now obsolete ethnographical terms, such as "fetish" and "totem,"[27] the concept of the idol was often invoked to discriminate "their superstition" from "our religion," based on the use of material objects as the focus for religious practices. As will be fully discussed in the following chapters, Buddhist cultic images divided learned Chinese into proponents and opponents of Buddhism. The latter viewed Buddhist cultic images as a false object of devotion, thereby defining some Buddhists as a deficient cultural Other, just as did European travelers and missionaries in Asia.[28]

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[25] Carlo Ginzburg, "Idols and Likenesses: A Passage in Origen and Its Vicissitudes," in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001b), 95-108.

[26] For analytical discussions about the conceptual complexities and modern implications of the terms "idol" and "idolatry," see Halbertal and Margalit (1992), especially 137-62; Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-13; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Idolatry: Nietzsche, Blake, and Poussin," in *Idol Anxiety*, ed. Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 56-60; Daniel Barbu, "'Idolatry' and Religious Diversity: Thinking about the Other in Early Modern Europe," *ASDIWAL: Revue genevoise d'anthropologie et d'histoire des religions* 9 (2014): 39-50.

[27] On the conceptual and historical background of the term "fetish," see William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17; idem, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring 1987): 23-45; idem, "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105-24; Tomoko Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 242-67; Annabel Wharton, "Icon, Idol, Totem and Fetish," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003), 3-11.

[28] Michelle Bacci, "Cult-Images and Religious Ethnology: The European Exploration of Medieval Asia and the Discovery of New Iconic Religions," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 36 (2005): 337-72; Donald S. Lopez Jr., "The Idol," in *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7-61. For a comparative analysis of the Chinese receptions of foreign religions, Buddhism in the Han and Tang periods and Christianity in the late Ming, see Eric R. Reinders, *Buddhist and Christian*

This juxtaposition of "image" with "icon" and "idol" shows that discourses of images are inextricably linked to the semiotic nature of images. Cultic objects are considered such because they hold referential relationships with their subjects, to which a given religious community assign sacred meanings and values. Therefore, discussions about images cannot set aside questions or premises about the meanings and values that images are supposed to signify. Conceptualizing cultic objects as *xiang*, Chinese intellectuals accepted the semiotic condition that those objects stood in reference to entities deemed worthy of veneration.

Medieval Chinese debates over Buddhist images involved the dimensions noted above concerning the terms "icon" and "idol." In the first place, people venerated, adored, and protected material objects that they believed stood in for a sacred original by virtue of the objects' presumed likeness to the original. In addition, people focused on the cultic associations and implications of images to criticize or defend religious practice. And finally, semiotic questions about how and what Buddhist images signify, represent, and instantiate were constantly being debated. The external critics thrust their own conceptual frameworks upon the relationship between Buddhist images and their referents. These unstated presuppositions complicated the semiotic questions surrounding Buddhist images.

These three aspects of image discourse in medieval China become particularly noticeable when images are conceptualized as material representations. In what follows, I

Responses to the Kowtow Problem in China (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 95-101. For the intraspecific nature of a discourse that marginalizes differences, see Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the 'Other'," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230-50.

explain how this relational definition of images helps to reassess the four interrelated issues and assumptions that have shaped recent scholarly discussions about Buddhist images, particularly in the study of Chinese religions and religious art. These issues and assumptions concern the classification of Buddhist cultic objects, the restriction of Buddhist images to anthropomorphic form, the indiscrimination of images from their originals, and the essentialist claim about the Buddhist origin of cultic images in Chinese religious culture.

Regrouping Cultic Objects

When defined as material representations, the concept of images encompasses a broad variety of material objects that represent absent or unseen beings with whom those objects have semiotic relationships, such as relics, books, monuments, statues, and portraits. Hence, images would include relics as a sub-category, a point deserving further explanation. The standard classification of Buddhist sacred objects often distinguishes relics from images because relics do not bear visual likeness to what they represent, as images are supposed to do. Moreover, scholars often place more significance on relics than images because, according to this explanation, relics forge a direct physical link to their original sacred personages. Simultaneously, scholars have noted that both relics and images can embody divine presence, especially of the Buddha, and be employed as strategies to continue and transmit the Buddha's teachings after his *parinirvāṇa*.[29]

[29] As for discussions about the distinction and relation between relics and images, see Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30-31; John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004a), 18-20; Juhyung Rhi, "Images, Relics, and Jewels: The Assimilation of Images in the Buddhist Relic Cult of Gandhara—or Vice Versa," *Artibus Asiae* 65, no. 2 (2005): 169-211; Robert F. Campany, "Á la recherche de la religion perdue: 'Aśokan Stūpas,' Images, and the Cult of Relics in Early Medieval China," unpublished paper presented to the AAR Seminar on

Notably, some Buddhist canonical sources categorize relics and images together as "reminders" (Sk. *caitya*) of the Buddha.[30] Likewise, medieval Chinese writers employed similarly comprehensive terms to classify sacred objects. For instance, the transliterated word *futu* 浮圖 or 浮屠 often operated as a catch-all term referring to the Buddha, Buddhist monks, monasteries, stūpas, cultic statues, and portraits.[31] Debaters, both for and against Buddhism, often grouped buildings, stūpas, statues, and paintings together as a single topic of discussion. In medieval China, the operative term for these inclusive categories was *xiang*, or "image." Therefore, this dissertation uses the rubric of images to make a point that medieval Chinese intellectuals attended to the representing function of Buddhist cultic objects rather than their different physical forms.[32]

Buddhist Relic Veneration (1995), p. 37; Faure (1996), 248-49; Sharf (1999): 80-85; Jacob N. Kinnard, "The Field of the Buddha's Presence," in *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, ed. David Germano and Kevin Trainor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 117-19. Schopen (1999), 281-82. For a recent study that classifies relics and images together under the rubrics of sacred objects and bodies, see Fabio Rambelli and Eric R. Reinders, *Buddhism and Iconoclasm in East Asia: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 3-43.

[30] The four kinds of *caitya* (*cetiya* in Pali) for the Buddha according to the *Kāliṅgabodhi Jātaka*: *dharma* (teachings), *sārīrika* (bodily remains), *paribhogaka* (contact or association, e.g., the Bodhi tree, the wheel, the footprints), *uddesika* (indicative, e.g., portraits). Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 201-203; Trainer (1997), 89; Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 5; Strong (2004a), 19.

[31] Known as the Chinese transliteration of the word *Buddha*, the term *futu* is routinely rendered as stūpa in modern studies. For example, Tracy Miller, "Of Palaces and Pagodas: Palatial Symbolism in the Buddhist Architecture of Early Medieval China," *Frontiers of History in China* 10, no. 2 (2015): 222. In the mid-sixth century, however, it meant several different things related to the Buddhist religion. According to *Hanyu dacidian*, *futu* means 1) the Buddha, and his images, 2) the Buddhist religion, 3) Buddhist monks, 4) Buddhist stūpas, 5) finials of Buddhist parasols and banner poles. *HD*, vol. 5 (1992), 1246.

[32] As a reflection on the distinction of relics and images, for example, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2011), 25-31. Emphasizing materiality shared by relics and images, Bynum proposes "holy matter" as a category that encompasses relics and images together. Leslie Brubaker also

Defamiliarizing Visual Anthropomorphism

As a single category for cultic objects, the definition of images as material representations expands the modes of likeness to the sacred original from visual anthropomorphism to non-figural physical forms. As noted above, in modern academic discussions of Buddhist cultic objects, the term "image," frequently used interchangeably with "icon" or occasionally with "idol,"[33] almost exclusively refers to the sculptural or pictorial representations of the Buddha and his entourage in anthropomorphic form, distinct from the non-figural material representations of the Buddha, notably stūpas and books.[34] This restricted sense of "image" has prevailed for two reasons, one more straightforward than the other. The term has been taken as a literal translation from the Sinitic noun *foxiang* 佛像 (Jp. *butsuzō*, Kr. *pulsang*).[35] As this Chinese term typically refers to statues representing the Buddha in human form,[36] scholarship on this topic has drawn on this narrow meaning of the term.

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points out the gradual association of portraits of a saint with his or her real presence as in the relics. Brubaker (2012), 11-14.

[33] For example, Alfred Foucher used "image," "icon," and "idol" interchangeably throughout his essay, "The Greek Origin of the Image of Buddha," in *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and Other Essays in Indian and Central-Asian Archaeology*, trans. L. A. Thomas and F. W. Thomas (London: Humphrey Milford, 1917), 111-37.

[34] For example, Sharf, recognizing that "the term *image* can refer to a wide range of material objects," confined his usage to "representations of humans and deities in sculpted or painted form" and further differentiated "icon" from "image" as a "specific sort of religious image that is believed to partake or participate in the substance of that which it represents." Sharf (1999): 81.

[35] The term *foxiang* is often considered to be equivalent to the Sanskrit *buddhapratimā* or *mūrti*. Faure (1996), 235.

[36] *HD*, vol. 1 (1986), 1291b-92a. For two-dimensional depictions of the Buddha in human form, the term "shadow of the Buddha" *foying* 佛影 is often used. This narrow usage of *xiang* as representations of the human form, however, gained currency relatively late around the fifteenth century. Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 93-96, 103-104. One of the Chinese terms for visually anthropomorphic likeness, available by the fourth century to which the first extant interreligious debates were dated, was *xingxiang* 形象, literally translatable as an "image in bodily form." See, for instance, the titles of the translated

This very specific usage also pertains to the growth of Buddhist art history as a modern academic subject. In his 1937 dictionary entry on *butsuzō*, literally "Buddhist image" or "Buddha image," Paul Demiéville translates the Sino-Japanese word as "icon" or "image" of the Buddha that conceptually includes "all sacred images of the Buddhist cult" in sculptural or pictorial media.[37] His references to art historians Alfred Foucher and Ananda Coomaraswamy suggest that Demiéville's construal of *butsuzō* was intimately related to the debate over the origin of the so-called "iconic" representation of the Buddha in the early twentieth century. Systematizing Albert Grünwedel's distinction between non-anthropomorphic, or "aniconic," depictions of the Buddha, such as the Bodhi tree, stūpas, footprints, wheels, or canopies, and anthropomorphic, or "iconic," statues of the Buddha, Foucher and Coomaraswamy marked the inception of the anthropomorphic rendering of the Buddha as the watershed in the history of Buddhist art.[38] The early twentieth-century debate between Foucher and Coomaraswamy over the regional origins of iconic images of the Buddha and the late twentieth-century controversy over the validity of the concept of aniconism have already been reassessed in

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Buddhist texts, *Foshuo zuo fo xingxiang jing* 佛說作佛形像經 (Scripture of the Buddha's Preaching on Making Images in the Bodily Form of the Buddha), T 692, 16: 788a15-788c18; *Foshuo zaoli xingxiang fubao jing* 佛說造立形像福報經 (Scripture of the Buddha's Preaching on Merit of Erecting Images in Bodily Form), T 693, 16: 788c23-790a8.

[37] Demiéville (1937), 210.

[38] Albert Grünwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, trans. A. C. Gibson (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1901; German original published in 1893), 67-68 (re-cited from Juhyung Rhi 이주형, "Pulsang ŭi kiwŏn: Chaengjŏm gwa kwaje 불상의 기원: 쟁점과 과제 (The origin of the Buddha image: points of contention and remaining questions)," *Misulsa nondan* 미술사논단 3 (1996): 371). Alfred Foucher, "The Greek Origin of the Image of Buddha," in *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and Other Essays in Indian and Central-Asian Archaeology*, trans. L. A. Thomas and F. W. Thomas (London: Humphrey Milford, 1917), 111-37; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Indian Origin of the Buddha Image," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 46 (1926): 165-70; idem, "The Origin of the Buddha Image," *The Art Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1927): 287-329.

many other studies.[39] In this short section, suffice it to say that the emphasis on anthropomorphic representation over non-figural representation was in line with the once dominant narrative of European art history as established by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) and others, which championed the classical Hellenistic style of rendering mythical figures in idealized human form.[40] Although Foucher's theory has been modified or rebutted,[41] his dichotomous assumption has dictated the direction of discussions of Buddhist cultic objects, rarely subjected to scrutiny. The field of Buddhist studies, on the one hand, has admitted the functional equivalence of diverse material representations of the Buddha but, on the other, still assumes an essential difference between these forms of representing the Buddha.

In medieval China, however, Buddhist proponents tended not to strictly differentiate the anthropomorphic visual representation of the Buddha from his non-

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[39] For the debate over the historicity of aniconism in Buddhist art, see John Huntington, "The Origin of the Buddha Image: Early Image Traditions and the Concept of *Buddhadarśanapuṇyā*," in *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, ed. A. K. Narain (New Delhi: Kanak Publication, 1985), 23-85; Susan Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 401-408; idem, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look," *Art Orientalis* 22 (1992): 111-56. Vidya Dehejia, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1992): 45-66. For overviews of the debates, see Robert N. Linrothe, "Inquiries into the Origin of the Buddha Image: A Review," *East and West* 43, no. 1/4 (1993): 241-56; Rhi (1996); idem, "Reading Coomaraswamy on the Origin of the Buddha Image," *Artibus Asiae* 70, no. 1 (2010): 151-72; Ashley Thompson, "In the Absence of the Buddha: 'Aniconism' and the Contentions of Buddhist Art History," in *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, ed. Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 398-420.

[40] Rhi (1996): 365. It should be noted that this old model was a historical product out of the eighteen-century European intellectual context and is no longer valid in the discipline of art history.

[41] Foucher's theory met a strong opposition from Coomaraswamy who espoused the Indian origin. Yet the terms of the debate were still delineated by Foucher's binary of human form and non-human form. Since then, scholarship on the origin of images of the Buddha has been demarcated by this focus on anthropomorphic statues. For example, see Benjamin Rowland Jr., "A Note on the Invention of the Buddha Image," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 11, nos. 1-2 (1948): 181-86; TAKATA Osamu 高田修, *Butsuzō no kigen* 佛像の起源 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967).

figural representations. Discourse about Buddhist images during the interreligious debates was not finely attuned to formal differences between the diverse material media for representing the Buddha, whether they be stūpas, books, statues, portraits, or shrines. The concept of images as material representations, therefore, helps keep open the interpretive option that in Chinese conceptualizations, images of the Buddha were not bound by visual likeness to his bodily human form. This broader definition of images can also help us revisit assumptions about the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha deriving from early twentieth-century discourse on Buddhist art.

Revisiting the Language of Presence

By challenging the validity of the unquestioned assumption that images of the Buddha be anthropomorphic, the concept of images as material representations can shed new light on the semiotic nature of cultic objects. The Latin *repraesentare*, from which "representation" derives by way of Old French, means the "literal bringing into presence of something previously absent, or the embodiment of an abstraction in an object."[42] This etymological sense of representation notes both the precondition of images and the effects of images: the original that images serve to make present is physically absent, and thus the mode of presence intended by images is subjunctive.[43] Images reify the want of presence as much as presence, thereby mediating between the absence of the real and the

[42] Pitkin (1967), 3.

[43] "On one hand the 'representation' stands in for the reality that is represented, and so evokes absence; on the other, it makes that reality visible, and thus suggests presence. Moreover, this opposition can easily be reversed: the representation is present in the former case, even if only as a surrogate; in the latter case it ends up recalling, in contrast to itself, the absent reality that it is intended to represent." Ginzburg (2001a), 63. Ginzburg cites Roger Chartier, "Le monde comme représentation," *Annales ESC* 6 (1989): 1514.

necessity for its presence. The notion of representation can elucidate this role of images as intermediaries between the absent real and its wished-for presence.

Buddhist canonical sources explain the physical absence of the Buddha in this world, caused by his travel to a celestial realm or his ingress into *parinirvāṇa*, as the precondition for creating the Buddha's images.[44] While relaying these scriptural accounts,[45] existing scholarship has de-emphasized the *continuous* import of the Buddha's absence that his images evoke.[46] Growing out of the methodological reflection that doctrine-oriented studies have failed to describe adequately what Buddhists actually do,[47] interdisciplinary studies of Buddhist practices have stressed that Buddhists handle images as if they were real. As virtually all Buddhist rituals require material

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[44] For example, *Zengyi ahan jing* 增一阿含經 (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*), trans. Gautama Saṃghadeva (Jutan Sengqietipo 瞿曇僧伽提婆, fl. 383–398), 397, T 125, 2: 705b19-706a18; *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (*Dīrghāgama-sūtra*), trans. Buddhayaśas (Fotuoyeshe 佛陀耶舍, fl. early fifth century) and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (fl. 365–416), 413, T 1, 1: 28b2-30a14.

[45] Many scholars of Buddhism have explained the worldly absence of the Buddha as the motive for fashioning Buddhist material representations. To introduce only a modicum of vast scholarship, Arthur Waley, "Did Buddha Die of Eating Pork?: With a Note on Buddha's Image," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1932): 343-54; Paul Mus, *Barabuḍur: Sketch of a History of Buddhism Based on Archaeological Criticism of the Texts* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1998; French original published in 1935), 49-90; David L. Snellgrove, "Śākyamuni's Final *Nirvāṇa*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 36, no.2 (1973): 399-411; Yael Bentor, "The Content of Stūpas and Images and the Indo-Tibetan Concept of Relics," *Tibet Journal* 28, nos. 1-2 (2003): 21-48.

[46] For studies that emphasize "presence," see Robert H. Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32, no. 1 (1992): 4; idem (1999): 77-78; Faure (1996), 237-74; Kinnard (2004); John S. Strong, "Buddhist Relics in Comparative Perspective: Beyond the Parallels," in *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, ed. David Germano and Kevin Trainor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004b), 27-49. On the interplay between absence and presence by Buddhist images, see Malcolm David Eckel, "The Power of the Buddha's Absence: On the Foundations of Mahāyāna Buddhist Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, no. 2 (1990): 61-95; idem, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 73-113.

[47] For summaries of this transition of research trends, see Trainor (1997), 2-5; Sharf (1992): 2; Sharf (1999): 76-80; Strong (2004a), 2-4.

representations of the Buddha to mark the focal point of ritual space,[48] much scholarship has hypothesized that images of the Buddha embody the Buddha or his virtues and affectively bring forth his presence to his followers.[49] At the same time, scholars have been fully wary that this practical equation of cultic images with the Buddha might make Buddhists look "idolatrous."[50] Therefore, scholars have emphasized that treating lifeless images like the real presence of the Buddha or Buddhist divinities is not indicative of Buddhists' confusion of images with the real. Scholars have explained the ritual of image consecration or the theory of the Buddha's multiple bodies as Buddhists' concerted efforts to avoid such confusion.[51] The concept of "living images" epitomizes this broader

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[48] Hureau (2010), *passim*.

[49] As authoritative works, especially in East Asian contexts, see Bernard Faure, "The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 768-813; Robert H. Sharf, "Introduction: Prolegomenon to the Study of Japanese Buddhist Icons," in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1-18. In this line of inquiry, the best studies have centered on the topics of visions, visuality, and a variety of Buddhist meditative practices. To introduce only a small number of works among vast scholarship, Paul M. Harrison, "*Buddhānusmṛti* in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978), 35-57; idem, "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras," *Eastern Buddhist* 35, nos. 1-2 (2003): 115-51; Jacob N. Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999); Robert H. Sharf, "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism," in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 151-97; David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 143-77; Bruce C. Williams, "Seeing through Images: Reconstructing Buddhist Meditative Visualization Practice in Sixth-Century Northeastern China," *Pacific World, Third Series*, no. 7 (2005), 33-89; Nobuyoshi Yamabe, "Visionary Repentance and Visionary Ordination in the *Brahmā Net Sūtra*," in *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya*, ed. William M. Bodiford (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 17-39; Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For a revisionist approach to meditative visions and the term *visualization*, see Eric M. Greene, "Visions and Visualizations: In Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology," *History of Religions* 55, no. 3 (2016): 289-328.

[50] For example, Tambiah (1984), 197-207; Sharf (2001), 9-12.

[51] On Buddhist practices of animating images, see Richard Gombrich, "The Consecration of a Buddhist Image," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966): 23-36; Tambiah (1984), 243-57; Donald K. Swearer, "Hypostasizing the Buddha: Buddha Image Consecration in Northern

discursive trend in Buddhist studies.[52] It stresses the effects of images on the devout but understates the representational role of images.

My point, however, is that images—by definition—carry semiotic relationships. Resorting to the language of presence to explain the nature of cultic images inevitably loses sight of the other side of images—the fact that their *raison d'être* lies in the absence of the real. To assume presence, then, cannot adequately explain that images also highlight absence. Without counting this complex semiotic nature of cultic images, one comes to consider the object of Buddhist devotion to be a *thing*. As will be fully examined in the following chapters, both detractors and apologists made the case that obfuscating the distinction between images and their originals was erroneous. When

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Thailand," *History of Religions* 34, no. 3 (1995): 263-80; idem, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Yael Bentor, "On the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and *Dhâraṇîs* in Stûpas and Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (1995): 248-61; idem, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 165-211; James Robson, "The Buddhist Image Inside-Out: On the Placing of Objects Inside Statues in East Asia," in *Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Tansen Sen (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 291-307. On the Buddha's multiple bodies, see NAGAO Gadjin, "On the Theory of Buddha-Body (*Buddha-kāya*)," *The Eastern Buddhists, New Series* 6, no. 1 (1973): 25-53; Lewis R. Lancaster, "An Early Mahayana Sermon about the Body of the Buddha and the Making of Images," *Artibus Asiae* 36, no. 4 (1974): 287-91; Frank E. Reynolds, "The Several Bodies of Buddha: Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition," *History of Religions* 6 (1977): 374-89; John J. Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); GUANG Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005); ANESAKI Masaharu 姉崎正治, *Genshinbutsu to hosshinbutsu* 現身佛と法身佛 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1982).

[52] Sharf (1999): 78; idem, (2001), 8. In a similar vein but with different theoretical tones, see Faure (1996), 237-74. Note his application of the concept of *double*. For a general discussion of Buddhist images in the medieval Chinese context from this perspective, see Kieschnick (2003), 52-69. Recent art historical studies have also followed this trend. For example, Sun-ah Choi, "*Zhenrong* to *Ruixiang*: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahabodhi Buddha Statue," *The Art Bulletin* 97, no. 4 (2015): 364-87; Michelle C. Wang, "Early Chinese Buddhist Sculptures as Animate Bodies and Living Presences," *Ars Orientalis* 46 (2016): 13-39. Cf. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

defined as material representations, the concept of images can account for both the absence of the original and the presence of its proxies. This understanding of images helps to reveal the broader spectrum of challenges posed by Buddhist images, both within and outside of Buddhist communities.

Reflecting on Cultural Essentialism in the Study of Chinese Religions

Noting the semiotic nature of images, the definition of images as material representations helps redress the modern misconception that Buddhism, for the first time, brought the practice of using cultic images into Chinese ritual culture. Building on an assumption about fundamental differences between the Buddhist religion and indigenous Chinese traditions, much previous scholarship has characterized the cultic use of images as essentially foreign to Chinese religious practices.[53]

Focusing on the semiotic function rather than visual anthropomorphism helps us better understand the conceptual commonalities between the pre-Buddhist discussions of images and the interreligious debates over Buddhist images. The early Chinese discourse of images not only attests to the cultic use of images before the arrival of Buddhism but

[53] TSUKAMOTO Zenryū 塚本善隆, *Chūgoku Bukkyō tsūshi* 中國佛教通史, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Suzuki gakujutsu zaidan, 1968), 23; idem, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism: From Its Introduction to the Death of Hui-yüan*, trans. Leon Hurvitz, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985), 21; WU Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd Centuries A.D.)," *Artibus Asiae* 47, no. 3/4 (1986): 263-352; idem, "A Deity without Form: The Earliest Representation of Laozi and the Concept of *Wei* in Chinese Ritual Art," *Orientations* 34, no. 4 (2002): 38-45; Kieschnick (2003), 58-59; Minku Kim, "The Genesis of Image Worship: Epigraphic Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), 3-4; Sun-ah Choi, "Quest for the True Visage: Sacred Images in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Art and the Concept of *Zhen*" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2012), 272-73. For the opposite interpretation, of religious images as an indigenous invention, see LIU Yang, "Manifestations of the Dao: A Study in Daoist Art from the Northern Dynasty to the Tang (5th-9th Centuries)" (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1997), 8-70; idem, "Origins of Daoist Iconography," *Ars Orientalis* 31 (2001): 31-64.

also exhibits shared interests in puzzling out the relationship between images and their invisible originals. While informing the conceptual template for discussing the cultic use of images, pre-Buddhist reflections on images shared with the later debates over Buddhist images underlying presuppositions about the semiotic nature of cultic images. These presuppositions concerned a chain of questions regarding what ultimate reality is, how it can be known, what relationship it forges with its images, and how those images are received by their users. These questions were fundamentally epistemological and were not always discussed in cultural terms definable as essentially *Chinese* or *Buddhist*. When conceptualized as material representations, the notion of images can illuminate the common ground of image discourses on different fronts. As I will point out in Chapters Three and Six, the claim about the Buddhist origin of cultic images in China was a literal reading of the polemical texts produced during the debates over Buddhist images.[54]

Buddhist Apologetic Literature and Image Controversies

Records of the interreligious contention in medieval China have survived in Buddhist apologetic literature, produced by religious insiders to defend their tenets and practices against external criticisms. The two major compilations are the *Collection [of Texts] for the Propagation and Illumination [of Buddhism]* (*Hongming ji* 弘明集, ca. 515,

[54] On the polemical nature of the claim that Buddhism introduced cultic images to China, see Berthold Laufer, "The Development of Ancestral Images in China," *Journal of Religious Psychology* 6, no. 2 (1913): 111-23; Eric M. Greene, "The 'Religion of Images'?—Buddhist Image Worship in the Early Medieval Chinese Imagination," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (forthcoming). This literal reading of the polemical claim is not simply a mistake of modern scholars. Confucian scholars reiterated this claim during their debates over the reform of Confucian temples in the Ming period. Modern scholars then literally accepted their literal reading of the earlier polemical claim again. For a study on the Confucian debates over cultic images, see Deborah A. Sommer, "Images into Words: Ming Confucian Iconoclasm," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 29, no. 2 (1994): 1-24.

T 2102, hereafter *Propagation and Illumination*) by Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518)[55] and the *Expanded Collection [of Texts] for the Propagation and Illumination [of Buddhism]* (*Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, ca. 664, T 2103, hereafter *Expanded Propagation and Illumination*) by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667),[56] who drew some of the materials from his own earlier compilation, the *Collection of Debates between Buddhists and Daoists in the Past and Present* (*Ji gujin fodao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡, 661, T 2104, hereafter *Past and Present*).[57] Buddhist apologetic literature also includes compendia on specific debate topics, notably Yancong's 彥悰 (fl. late seventh century) *Collection of Various Matters on Monastics' Not Bowing to the Laity* (*Ji shamen buying baisu dengshi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事, 662, T 2108) and Zhisheng's 智昇 (fl. early eighth century) *Continued Collection of Debates between Buddhists and Daoists in the Past and Present* (*Xu ji gujin fodao lunheng* 續集古今佛道論衡, ca. 730, T 2105, hereafter *Continued Past and Present*) on the introduction of Buddhism to the Later Han 後漢 (25–220). Independent titles, such as *Dispelling Vices* (*Poxie lun* 破邪論, T 2109) and *Defending the Right* (*Bianzheng lun* 辯

[55] Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hung-ming chi und die Aufnahme des Buddhismus in China* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976); LIU Lifu 劉立夫, *Hongdao yu fojiao—Hongming ji yanjiu* 弘道與佛教—弘明集研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004); LI Xiaorong 李小榮, *Hongming ji Guang hongming ji shulun gao* 《弘明集》《廣弘明集》述論稿 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005). As modern translations, MAKITA Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gumyōshū kenkyū* 弘明集研究, 3 vols. (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1973); Harumi Hirano Ziegler, trans. *The Collection for the Propagation and Clarification of Buddhism*, 2 vols. (Moraga, CA: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai America, 2015-17).

[56] TANG Hon Ting 鄧漢庭, "Shi Daoxuan *Guang hongming ji* yanjiu 釋道宣《廣弘明集》研究" (M.A. thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1989); LIU Linkui 劉林魁, *Guang hongming ji yanjiu* 廣弘明集研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011).

[57] Friederike Assandri, "Inter-religious Debate at the Court of the Early Tang: An Introduction to Daoxuan's *Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng*," in *From Early Tang Court Debates to China's Peaceful Rise*, ed. Friederike Assandri and Dora Martins (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 15-32.

正論, T 2110) by Falin 法琳 (572–640), have also survived.[58] This study primarily consults the two main compilations, Sengyou's *Propagation and Illumination* and Daoxuan's later expansion because they exhibit the broadest coverage in terms of issues and volumes.

Individual works garnered in these anthologies take a variety of formats, such as treatises or essays (*lun* 論), simulated catechetical dialogues, letters (*shu* 書), memorials (*biao* 表), edicts (*chi* 勅), and court debates (*lunheng* 論衡). The diversity of these formats suggests that interreligious debates occurred not only in the public and regulated settings, where presiders assigned topics and decided winners,[59] but also in interpersonal correspondences. These collected materials reflect the disagreements within Chinese literati circles over an array of issues posed by the arrival of Buddhism in Chinese society. The issues range from the inception of Buddhism in China's idealized past and Buddhist soteriological notions, such as transmigration of rebirth and karmic retribution,

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[58] Thomas Jülch, *Die apologetischen Schriften des buddhistischen Tang-Mönchs Falin: With an English summary* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2011); idem, "In Defense of the Saṃgha: The Buddhist Apologetic Mission of the Early Tang Monk Falin," in *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel: Aspects of the Relationship between the Buddhist Saṃgha and the State in Chinese History*, ed. Thomas Jülch (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 18-93; WONG Chi-hang, "A Study of the Life and Thought of Falin: A Great Buddhist Defender in China" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Hong Kong, 2016).

[59] Mary M. Garrett, "The 'Three Doctrines Discussions' of Tang China: Religious Debate as a Rhetorical Strategy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 30, no. 3 (1994): 150-61; Sylvie Hureau, "Réseaux de bouddhistes de Six Dynasties: défense et propagation du bouddhisme," in *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale*, ed. Catherine Despeux (Paris: Peeters, 2002), 45-66; Paul W. Kroll, "Huilin on Black and White, Jiang Yan on *Wuwei*: Two Buddhist Dialogues from the Liu-Song Dynasty," *Early Medieval China* 18 (2012): 1-24; SHI Zhiru, "Contextualizing Buddhist Approaches to Religious Diversity: When and How Buddhist Intellectuals Address Confucianism and Daoism (3rd–9th c), in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 83-88; Joachim Gentz, "Religious Diversity in Three Teachings Discourses," in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 123-139.

to monastic etiquette and lay donations, to name a few.[60] Moreover, these Buddhist compilations contain not only pro-Buddhist works but also anti-Buddhist criticisms in the form of full or partial citations. Buddhist compilers and apologists incorporated the opposition's positions only to refute them definitively. Nevertheless, these Buddhist compilations are the earliest extant reserves of anti-Buddhist writings.

For this reason, modern historians have largely approached Buddhist apologetic literature as testimonials about the conflicts between the foreign religion and indigenous teachings. Employing the explicatory model of cultural encounter and assimilation, studies of Buddhist apologetic literature have often highlighted the differences between Buddhism and indigenous Chinese traditions, the former's adaptation to the latter, or vice versa.[61] Historians also have analyzed these interreligious debates by region and period. It has been noted, for example, that the debates largely focused on metaphysical issues in

[60] In his study on the *Mozi lihuo lun* one of the catechistic essays compiled in the *Hongming ji*, Keenan questions its apologetic nature because the primary concern of the text is the cultural compatibility of Buddhism and indigenous Chinese teachings rather than Buddhist doctrinal matters. John P. Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts: A Reader-Response Study and Translation of the Mou-tzu Li-huo lun* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 8-10.

[61] TANG (2008a), 83-104, 280-373, *passim*; Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, third edition (Leiden: Brill, 2007; originally published in 1959), 254-320; TOKIWA Daijō 常盤大定, *Shina ni okeru bukkyō to jukyō dōkyō* 支那に於ける仏教と儒教道教 (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1930), 45-106; Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, "Anti-Buddhist Propaganda during the Nan-Ch'ao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15-1/2 (1952): 166-92; idem, "On Some Factors Responsible for the Antibuddhist Persecution under the Pei-Ch'ao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17-1/2 (1954): 261-73; idem, "The Economic Background of the Hui-ch'ang Supression of Buddhism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19-1/2 (1956): 67-105; Leon N. Hurvitz, "Additional Observations on the 'Defense of Faith'," in *Bukkyō shigaku ronshū: Tsukamoto hakushi shōju kinen* 佛教史學論集: 塚本博士頌壽記念 (Kyoto: Tsukamoto hakushi shōju kinenkai, 1961), 28-41; LI Bincheng 李斌城, "Tangdai Fo-Dao zhi zheng yanjiu 唐代佛道之争研究," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究, no. 2 (1981): 99-108; Jo-shui Chen 陳弱水, "Anti-Buddhism and Intellectual Conditions in Sixth and Seventh Century China," in *Guoshi fuhai kaixin lu: Yu Yingshi jiaoshou rongtui lunwen ji* 國史浮海開新錄: 余英時教授榮退論文集, ed. Chou, Chih-ping 周質平 and Willard J. Peterson (Taipei: Lianjing, 2002), 97-120.

the aristocratic southern dynasties and on statecraft matters in the conquering northern dynasties. Scholars have also charted anti-Buddhist or pro-Buddhist positions by treatise or debater.[62] Many studies have examined recurring topics, most notably the indestructability of the spirit (*shen bu mie lun* 神不滅論)[63] and the monastic refusal to bow to the laity (*shamen bu bai su* 沙門不拜俗).[64] The issues germane to the Chinese literati's sense of cultural superiority have also attracted much scholarly attention.[65]

For those who have not delved into this material firsthand, the fact that these polemical texts were preserved in official Chinese Buddhist canons may give the

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[62] To list only a few studies in recent decades, Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhist and Taoists in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Catherine Despeaux, "La culture lettrée au service d'un plaidoyer pour le bouddhisme: le «Traité des deux doctrines» («Erjiao lun» de Dao'an)," in *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale*, ed. Catherine Despeau (Paris: Peeters, 2002), 145-228.

[63] For overviews of the debates, see Ch'en (1952); Zürcher (2007), 11-12. As recent studies, SUGATA Tomō 菅田智雄, "*Hakkoku ron* saikō: shinmetsu fumetsu ronsō no igi no saikentō 『白黒論』再考: 神滅不滅論争の意義の再検討," Komazawa daigaku bukkyō 駒沢大學佛教學部論集 37 (2006), 365-84; Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012); Michael Radich, "Ideas about 'Consciousness' in Fifth and Sixth Century Chinese Buddhist Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, and the Chinese Background to **Amalavijñāna*," in *A Distant Mirror: Articulating Indic Ideas in Sixth and Seventh Century Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Chen-kuo Lin and Michael Radich (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2014), 471-512; idem, "A 'Prehistory' to Chinese Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, with a Focus on the Term *shishen* 識神/*shenshi* 神識," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44, no. 2 (2016): 105-26. For earlier scholarship, see Zürcher (2007), 322, n. 40.

[64] Recent studies in English are Thomas Jülch, "On Whether or Not Buddhist Monks Should Bow to the Emperor: Yancong's (557-610) 'Futian Lun' (Treatise on the Fields of Blessedness)," *Monumenta Serica* 60 (2012): 1-43; Reinders (2015), 27-94. As classical studies, MICHIBATA Ryōshu 道端良秀, "Tōdai no sōni fuhai kunshin ron 唐代の僧尼不拝君親論," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究 4 (1954), 407-17; Leon N. Hurvitz, "'Render unto Caesar' in Early Chinese Buddhism: Hui-yüan's Treatise on the Exemption of the Buddhist Clergy from the Requirements of Civil Etiquette," *Sino-Indian Studies* 5, nos. 3-4 (1957): 80-114; KOBAYASHI Masayoshi 小林正美, "Eon *Shamon fukei ōsha ron* no ichi kōsatsu 慧遠「沙門不敬王者論」の一考察," *Tōyō bunka* 東洋文化 57 (1977), 101-31; KAMATA Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 中國佛教史, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1983), 349-71.

[65] For instance, the Daoist claim that Buddhism is a downgraded version of Laozi's teachings (*huahu lun* 化胡論) has been a subject of much scholarship. For information on previous studies, see below, Chapter Three, p. 68, fn. 135.

impression that the evidence is prejudiced against the opponents of Buddhism. A close reading of these materials, however, demonstrates the reliability of the Buddhist presentation of anti-Buddhist positions, to a reasonable degree. More often than not, the Buddhist apologists had to concede that there was a grain of truth in the external criticisms. Buddhist authors, for instance, themselves admitted to the faults of corrupt or lapsed monks and occasionally adopted some of their opponents' stances. As will be shown in the following pages, the subject of Buddhist images was not always a clear winner for the Buddhist side, and a full discussion of image problems often exposed some of Buddhism's vulnerability to its detractors.

These sources, however, did not accurately document historical realities surrounding the interreligious debates in medieval China. After all, these criticisms and defenses of Buddhism were collected and edited by Buddhist monastics much later than these texts were first authored. Although the sources in question are indispensable for understanding the reception of the foreign religion and the nature of conflicts between the imported and indigenous traditions in medieval China, the organizing structure of and selected topics for the compilations undeniably reflect the Buddhists' perspectives on the controversies surrounding their own religion. Sengyou and Daoxuan assembled these materials to preserve the Buddhist version of the story.

My interpretive strategy is to highlight the editorial conventions and overriding interests of the compilers. In the first place, Buddhist compilers selected materials addressing the topics that they thought were critical for protecting the Buddhist religion among Chinese learned circles. Secondly, they arranged these materials in a dialogical, parallel, or binary scheme, matching up pro- and con-. Religious identities of the

collected debaters were fluid and often inclusive. Some people whom the Buddhist apologetical compilations put in the anti-Buddhist camp were known, according to other historical sources, to have been supporters or sympathizers of the Buddhist cause. By contrast, in the apologetic literature, although debaters often shared rhetorical strategies and proof-texts, they were cast to be either for or against Buddhism. The sources, in short, thrust a dichotomy of anti-Buddhism and pro-Buddhism upon the nuanced in-between positions.

This apologetic literature thus serves as a window on the learned Buddhists' concerns about their religion. The artificial or provisional dichotomy entrenched in these sources sheds light on the way Buddhist apologists presented their cases. First, the Buddhists spelled out the crux of Buddhist teachings and practices in layman's terms, establishing the conceptual ground that the two sides could share. The interreligious setting also offered opportunities for the Buddhists to voice their views on the issues that did not particularly pose problems within the community. Through the interactions with their opponents, therefore, the Buddhist proponents came to recognize what part of the Buddhist religion was susceptible to external criticism. The interreligious debates, in other words, provided Buddhists with a heuristic mirror to see their own religion from an "outside" point of view and to reorient themselves accordingly.[66]

The cultic use of Buddhist images was one such issue that Buddhist writers frequently touched on with their external critics but not with their peers. Except for a few passages, Buddhist canonical traditions seldom explicate what cultic images are and how

[66] Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007; Originally published in 1991), 77-82.

they work. Within Buddhist apologetic literature, by contrast, remarks on images and image-related practices recur across many different works. Nevertheless, no treatises exist that are entirely devoted to the discussion of Buddhist images. Previous studies, therefore, have often concluded that Buddhist cultic images did not arouse serious controversy in comparison to European cases, such as Byzantine iconomachy or the Reformation.[67] According to the standard scholarly explanation, Buddhists largely remained indifferent to the issues regarding the relationship between images and the sacred original, with the exception of an anecdotal case of the Chan monk Danxia Tianran 丹霞天然 (739–824), who denied the divine presence in Buddhist images by burning a wooden statue of the Buddha as firewood.[68] Furthermore, it has long been accepted that anti-Buddhist image-breakings in China were driven by fiscal reasons rather than conceptual ones.[69] Some of the comments on images in apologetic literature have only recently begun to be subject to close analysis.[70] Recent studies, however, have rarely taken into account the overall dialogical contexts of such remarks. As a result, there has been no discussion as to how and why the interreligious debaters brought up the topic of Buddhist images.

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[67] Demiéville (1937), 210; idem (1974), 17-25.

[68] For remarks on this famous Chan episode, see, for example, Demiéville (1974), 24-25; Faure (1996), 249; Kieschnick (2003), 76; Gregory P. A. Levine, *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art, and Other Predicaments* (Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 54-74.

[69] Reischauer (1955); Ch'en (1956); Demiéville (1974); Eric R. Reinders, "Recycling Icons and Bodies in Chinese Anti-Buddhist Persecutions," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 48 (Autumn 2005): 61-68.

[70] LEE Kwi Jeong 이귀정, "Ch'odang ki ŭijwahyŏng ujŏnwang sang yŏn'gu 初唐期 倚坐形 優填王像 研究" (MA thesis, Seoul National University, 2010), 70-77; Choi (2012), 54-57; Greene (forthcoming). Art-related passages from Buddhist apologetic literature are compiled in Alexander C. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959).

This dissertation focuses on the language about images in Buddhist apologetic literature. Despite the long-standing skepticism toward the truth value of rhetoric in general,[71] literary elements are vital to interreligious debates. Debate, at heart, is an exchange of ideas expressed in language. Whether or not debaters truly believe what they hear and say, they formulate ideas and deliver those ideas to the opponent through rhetorical tactics. Since rhetorical tactics do not work if the opponent does not understand the meanings of and assumptions underneath them, such rhetorical tactics reflect what the debaters think about a given topic. Therefore, the debaters' literary choices—tropes and allusions, ways they are used, messages they convey, and undertones of those messages in a given context—deserve to be closely analyzed to understand the underlying conceptual framework that made Buddhist images controversial among Chinese learned circles.

Medieval Chinese intellectuals were drawn into the debates over Buddhist images not on account of their interest in images themselves but on account of the subjects that Buddhist images were supposed to represent. Nearly all important interreligious debates—many of their central issues do not concern Buddhist images *per se*—at some point invited Buddhist cultic images and image-centered devotional practices into their purview. This frequency attests to the gravity of Buddhist images in the defense of the Buddhist religion.[72] When taking the Buddhist apologetic compilations holistically, not as

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[71] Stanley Fish, "Rhetoric," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 203-22.

[72] As an insight into frequency or repetition as an index to the importance of a subject matter, Jacqueline I. Stone, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 23. Also see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 2010; originally published in 1972), 221.

a convenient reserve of individual cases, we can see that there were consistent patterns across the seemingly sporadic notes on Buddhist cultic images throughout the debates.

This dissertation also seeks to excavate unstated presuppositions about Buddhist images by analyzing the patterns in these comments. Discourse develops upon a web of tacit premises that are loosely shared by a discursive community; the members of this community do not always need to spell out these underlying assumptions. The assumptions were "written in invisible ink on the fabric" of the community, and thus the audience can automatically add such unspoken premises to the discourse themselves.[73] Analysis of a discourse in the past is incomplete without bringing to light these hidden assumptions. As will be fully discussed in the following chapters, in the interreligious debates over Buddhist images, the latent presuppositions concerned the semiotic nature of images. The debaters did *not* expound on the relationship between Buddhist images and their referents. The debaters instead drew on Buddhist images to discuss something else that the debaters supposed Buddhist images would signify. To understand this nature of the debates, I will examine the presuppositions underneath the debates.

To uncover the unspoken presuppositions, the contextualization of the debates is necessary. This dissertation seeks to reveal the conceptual backdrop of the debates by examining diverse supplementary materials, including indigenous Chinese classics, episodic historiographies, and Chinese translations of Buddhist canonical sources, such as scriptures, monastic codes, and didactic stories. Most of these materials predate the Buddhist apologetic compilations, with the exception of some Buddhist translations that

[73] As for the significance of unstated premises in analyzing a discourse in the past, Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof: The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 39-42. My quotation is from page 42.

were contemporary with the earliest surviving debate records. The dissertation also uses non-canonical Buddhist sources relevant to the Buddhist practice of fashioning images, such as miracle tales, liturgies, and dedicatory inscriptions. These sources were coterminous with the later portion of the apologetic compilations. By examining the materials composed outside the debates, this study seeks to situate the debates within a broader context in which the presuppositions about images continuously generated new questions and suspicions among Chinese learned circles.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation does not aim to construct a sequential narrative of how the debates over Buddhist images proceeded or to offer a blow-by-blow account of the debate. Not only were the debates themselves sporadic, but the documentary accounting of them is very uneven. My discussion, instead, focuses on the patterns in debate strategy, discourse of the image, conceptions of proper ritual, and attitudes toward Chinese and foreign culture whenever Buddhist images surfaced as a controversial topic. In Chapter Two, I examine recurring comments on images across different genres within pre-Buddhist indigenous and Buddhist canonical traditions to lay out the conceptual condition of the debates. These comments presupposed the multivalence of images and noted the tension between images and their unseen originals. Chapters Three through Five explore how anti-Buddhist rhetoric problematized Buddhist images and how Buddhist proponents handled these external criticisms. In Chapter Three, I investigate the criticisms that the Buddhist use of cultic images was alien and harmful to Chinese states and the Buddhist responses that attempted to valorize foreignness. Chapter Four examines how the detractors targeted the fashioning of Buddhist images to criticize

Buddhist communities for being morally wrong. It also looks at how the Buddhist apologists reformulated the soteriological account of Buddhist images to claim the utility of Buddhist cultic images. Chapter Five traces how Buddhist apologists presented Buddhist images as the reification of emptiness against the anti-Buddhist denial of the semiotic significance of Buddhist images. Chapter Six examines non-debate materials that encapsulated and formularized Buddhist apologetic rhetoric about images outside the platform of interreligious contention. In conclusion, I argue that Buddhist proponents' receptivity to external criticism allowed them to formulate a sophisticated soteriological account of images without blurring the distinction between images and the real. Buddhist iconology, in short, was an apologetic project.

Chapter Two
CONCEPTIONS OF IMAGES BEFORE ANTI-BUDDHIST POLEMICS

This chapter explores how Chinese intellectuals conceptualized images before Buddhist cultic images piqued anti-Buddhist criticisms. By the fourth century, when the first recorded case of the contention took place, learned Chinese inherited from indigenous traditions a model with which to articulate semiotic relationships and ritual uses of images. Meanwhile, Buddhist scriptures and monastic codes, available to Chinese learned circles during the time of the debates, also indicate that Buddhist traditions came to China with several perspectives to think of the relationship between the Buddha and his images. This chapter argues that these antecedent discussions on different fronts proceeded upon a number of common presuppositions about the relationship between images and their referents without straightforwardly equating the two.

It appears that three interrelated presuppositions informed the conceptions of the meaning and role of the image. To begin with, the image was supposed to forge a referential relationship to something intangible. The referent of the image was deemed inconceivable or unreachable without the image. It therefore follows that images served as a medium which would allow humans to gain access to such incorporeal referents. This functional understanding then led to two opposite stances on how exactly the relationship between the images and their referents should be understood. On the one hand, the images were considered to be capable of effectively replacing their referents—the original. On the other hand, the gap between the images and the real was beyond question, and required underscoring at each turn. In ancient and early medieval China, these three presuppositions guided the perspectives on how images would operate.

These contemplations of images are preserved in indigenous classics and

translated Buddhist texts. Chinese classical sources include philosophical treatises and historiographies, which were available in good numbers by the fourth century and provided a shared point of reference to the learned circles. While there was no definitive and systematic theory, Buddhist texts, *sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *avadāna* genres all took up the conceptual intricacies of the Buddha's images. These questions with which Buddhist writers grappled were certainly familiar to their Chinese readers, as many of these texts were available in translation. These Buddhist sources did not enter the Chinese intellectual scene as a single fixed corpus. Rather, they trickled in slowly but continuously during the time of the interreligious debates. Some of them were available in Chinese before the first recorded anti-Buddhist criticism of images transpired, but new texts also kept being introduced through translation over the period of the debates. In terms of Buddhist texts, my analysis focuses on the ones translated into Chinese by around the end of the fifth century, when principal rhetorical moves for the criticism and defense of Buddhist cultic images had been established.

This chapter is indebted substantially to the studies by Berthold Laufer, Alexander Soper, and Erik Zürcher for garnering primary sources for this chapter.[74] Yet, my approach to these sources differs from theirs. Under the assumption that the cultural origins of ideas can be pinpointed, they often used the source materials to determine what is *Chinese* and what is *Buddhist*. I do not naïvely deny cultural differences between Chinese indigenous traditions and Buddhist teachings and practices. Rather than taking such differences for granted, however, I seek to understand the nature and extent of the

[74] Laufer (1913): 111-23; Soper (1950): 147-51; Zürcher (1995), 1-20. Zürcher drew his materials largely from Demiéville (1937).

differences that emerged in certain discursive contexts. For that purpose, this chapter traces conceptual engagements in which writers and readers inadvertently but repeatedly partook regarding a specific epistemological issue, the relationships between images and the real. In this chapter, I note similar ideas across different texts; in the meantime, I do not claim the intertextuality of these sources in a strict sense. Since conceptualizations of the image were presupposed rather than enunciated, it would be more adequate to consider the commonalities of ideas across the sources as a testament to the wide currency or importance of such ideas among intellectual circles than as the intended result of mutual influences on one another.

Chinese learned circles, regardless of their political and religious persuasions, often turned to a similar scheme of thinking that situated images in relation to something intangible or transcendent and envisioned the use of such images as an attempt to get connected to those incorporeal entities. This chapter aims to uncover this broad discursive framework in order to better understand how Chinese intellectuals conceived of such semiotic relationships and utility of images before divergent stances on images became more pronounced in the more restricted setting of interreligious contention in the subsequent periods.

This chapter comprises three parts in a roughly chronological order and by genre. The first part of the chapter looks at the earliest extant metaphysical reflection of images in Chinese indigenous traditions, in which an image was conceived as an epistemic instrument for grasping an otherwise unfathomable reality. The second part examines how the relationship between images and the original was explored in stories about images of the dead, i.e., immaterial beings. In the final part, this chapter investigates how

Buddhist writers avoided the direct equation of the Buddha with his images. On the whole, this chapter intends to disentangle various strands of the conceptual backdrop against which Buddhist images came to divide Chinese learned circles into two camps during the interreligious debates.

Images of the Unknowable

Any reflections on the meaning and role of images in Chinese intellectual and cultural history should begin with the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經).[75] In its best-known chapter, the "Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations" (*Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳) or the "Great Commentary" (*Dazhuan* 大傳), which lays the cosmological and epistemological basis for the cleromantic practice,[76] images (*xiang* 象) are explained as the means that helps the diviner to grasp the otherwise unfathomable cosmic reality. Divination allows a glimpse into the ever-changing movements of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi* 天地), as these cosmic changes are reflected in divination. By unveiling the workings of the cosmic order, the explanation goes, divination assists one to cognize the direction of the universe at a given moment and to measure his or her own place in the protean world and make

[75] Much scholarship in the fields of Chinese art history, history, literature, and religions has drawn on the *Book of Changes* as a point of departure for discussing Chinese conceptualizations of "image" or *xiang*. To introduce only a small number of authoritative studies in English, Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 33; Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 37-43. Griffith and Sharf (1993): 158-60; Clunas (1997), 103-104.

[76] For studies on the *Xici zhuan*, see Willard J. Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations' of the Book of Change," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 1 (1982): 67-116; Edward L. Shaughnessy, "The Writing of the Xici Zhuan and the Making of the Yijing," paper presented at the Symposium in Honour of Rudolf G. Wagner on His 60th Birthday, "Measuring Historical Heat: Event, Performance, and Impact in China and the West" (Heidelberg, 2001), 197-221.

decisions accordingly.[77] The *Book of Changes* applies the term "image" to such divination results that show the coordination of Heaven, Earth, and humans. Images provide clues to enigmatic cosmic reality, serving as a medium for grasping it. Conversely, the cosmos manifests its own mysterious motions through images.[78]

This explanation of images as the representation of cosmic reality affords a comparative perspective about what *likeness* of images meant in the early Chinese context, and, by extension, raises the question of whether it is adequate to translate *xiang* into "image." Some contemporary theorists have advanced the equation of the image with its represented subject by virtue of the visual verisimilitude of the two.[79] In contrast, the *Book of Changes* construes the likeness in images in terms of epistemology rather than

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[77] "hexagram divination … a method of penetrating moments of the cosmic order to learn how the Way or Dao is configured and what direction it takes at such moments and to determine what one's own place is and should be in the scheme of things" so that one can "avert wrong decisions, avoid failure, and escape misfortune and, on the other hand, make right decisions, achieve success, and garner good fortune." Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1.

[78] The conceptualization of images is especially pronounced in chapter A12. "This is why images are what the sages use to display the vestiges under heaven, and imitating them in their shape and form give images to the properties of things; this is why they are called images. The sages use them to display the movements of all under heaven, and observe their convergence and penetration in order to give motion to their canons and rituals (夫象，聖人有以見天下之賾，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象。聖人有以見天下之動，而觀其會通，以行其典禮)." This translation is based on the Mawangdui manuscript (second century BCE). See Edward L. Shaughnessy, "The Writing of the Xici Zhuan and the Making of the Yijing," unpublished paper at the Symposium in Honour of Rudolf G. Wagner on His 60th Birthday, "Measuring Historical Heat: Event, Performance, and Impact in China and the West" (Heidelberg, 2001), 207. For a translation based on the third-century received version commented by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the* I Ching *as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 68.

[79] For example, Baudrillard and Rancière, despite their opposite stances on political uses of images, have grounded their theories on the premise that images (or simulacra) are capable of reproducing reality and posing as if they were real. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Brooklyn: Verso, 2007).

visuality. Images in the *Book of Changes* are presented as sixty-four hexagrams consisting of six horizontal lines, each of which is either solid (Yang) or broken (Yin). Although some of those hexagram images are named after physical entities, such as the well (*jing* 井 ䷯) or the tripod (*ding* 鼎 ䷱), no combination of solid or broken lines can resemble the physical forms of the actual objects that such names signify.[80] Since those geometrical line figures cannot bear a likeness to cosmic changes visually, the word "image" may appear inaccurate to explain the function of the hexagrams. For that reason, different terms, such as "figure" or "schema," instead of "image," have been proposed to translate *xiang* in the context of the *Book of Changes*.[81] In the case of rendering *xiang* into English, the alternatives to *image* have seldom addressed the etymological meaning of "likeness" inherent in the Chinese term. By definition, *xiang* is supposed to resemble a represented subject.[82] Calling the hexagrams *xiang* thus presupposes the likeness between the hexagrams and cosmic reality. Yet, the fact that the hexagrams do not have figural

[80] See Lynn (1994), 438-43 (well); 451-59 (tripod). On the conceptual nature of naming the hexagrams, see Wilhelm (1977), 200-201.

[81] Many scholars have contemplated how to translate *xiang*. Brashier lists the terms proposed by earlier studies. The list includes: symbol, figure, representation, image, shape, emblem, imitation, depiction, appearance, picture, *typus*, simulacrum, analogue, and counterpart. K. E. Brashier, *Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 454, n. 11. Following Sharf's suggestion, Brashier uses the notion of "schema" to explain the meaning of *xiang*, keeping the Chinese original *xiang*. See also, Peterson (1982): 80-81; Wechsler (1985), 33; Sharf (2002), 147-49.

[82] In its chapter "Jie Lao 解老," *Master Han Fei* (*Han Feizi* 韓非子) offers an anecdotal account about how the *xiang* 象 (elephant) became interchangeable with the *xiang* 像 (likeness or to resemble) with the human radical. It says: "people rarely saw living elephants, but obtained the skeleton of a dead elephant. They consulted its sketch to conceive of living ones. Therefore, *xiang* (elephant) came to refer to what was envisioned in the mind (人希見生象也，而得死象之骨，案其圖以想其生也，故諸人之所以意想者皆謂之象也)." This passage is cited by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) in his commentary to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 by Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58–148). Duan Yucai, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, fasc. 17 (Shanghai: Jiangzuo shulin, 1910), entry no. 369.

qualities suggests that the authors of the "Attached Verbalizations" did not conceive the nature of likeness in *xiang* as only visual.[83] Cosmic reality, after all, is invisible to the naked eye and that is why divination was needed in the first place. Outside this particular ancient Chinese context, the common meaning of image is also not necessarily contingent on visuality.[84] As each of the semantic groups under *xiang* and "image" respectively constellates around the etymological sense of likeness, the word "image" can address the conceptual intricacies of *xiang* more adequately than other English terms.

Other ancient Chinese classics also took the meaning of image that was not bound by a visually perceivable resemblance. Most overtly, the *Book of the Way and Virtue* (*Dao de jing* 道德經) turns to such non-visual aspects of images in discussing the ineffable and unfathomable nature of the Way (*Dao* 道).[85] Explaining the Way apophatically, Chapter 14 of the text succinctly states that the Way does not have a physical form, and thus, its images do not have a material basis ("shape without shape, image without things" 無狀之狀，無物之象).[86] This conception is reiterated in Chapter 41

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[83] Wilhelm emphasizes the contemplative use of the image. Wilhelm (1977), 198-99.

[84] On the literary and mental aspects of images, see Frazer (1960), 149-61; Mitchell (1986), 7-36.

[85] On the definition of Dao and its notorious difficulty, see Russell Kirkland, "Dao," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 304; Livia Kohn, "One Dao—Many Ways: Daoist Approaches to Religious Diversity," in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 54-57; Gil Raz, "What Is Daoism and Who Is Its Founder?," in *Varieties of Religious Invention: Founders and Their Functions in History*, ed. Patrick Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 86-87.

[86] Chapter 14: "Look for but not seen, its name is "minute." Listened for but not heard, its name is "rarefied." Grabbed for but not gotten, its name is "subtle." These three cannot be perfectly explained, and so are confused and regarded as one. Its top is not clear or bright. Its bottom is not obscure or dark. Trailing off without end, it cannot be named. It returns to its home, back before there were things. This is called the formless form, the image of no thing. This is called the confused and indistinct. Greet it and you will not see its head; Follow it and you will not see its tail. Hold fast to the Way of old, in order to control what is here today. The ability to know the ancient beginnings, this is called the thread of the Way. (視之不見，名曰夷；聽之不聞，名曰希；

amid a host of perplexing paradoxes about the Way, most famously: "the great image is beyond form (大象無形)."[87]

These aphoristic propositions intimate the role of images as an epistemic instrument of tracing an otherwise unfathomable referent. Such an agnostic attitude toward the represented subjects of images betrays what may look like Saussurean insight: the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. The idea that images refer to something outside images and it is not immediately obvious seems to defy recent theoretical reflections on the images.[88] By defining the ultimate truth represented by

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搏之不得，名曰微。此三者不可致詰，故混而為一。其上不皦，其下不昧。繩繩不可名，復歸於無物。是謂無狀之狀，無物之象，是謂惚恍。迎之不見其首，隨之不見其後。執古之道，以御今之有。能知古始，是謂道紀)." For translation, Philip J. Ivanhoe, "*Laozi* ('*The Daodejing*')," in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 169. I modified Ivanhoe's translation "the formless form, the image of no thing" based on Sharf's "the shape without shape, the schemata without substance." Sharf (2002), 148.

[87] Chapter 41: "When the best scholars hear about the Way, They assiduously put it into practice. When average scholars hear about the Way, They sometimes uphold it and sometimes forsake it. When the worst scholars hear about the Way, They laugh at it! If they did not laugh at it, it would not really be the Way. And so the common saying has it: The clearest Way seems obscure; The Way ahead seems to lead backward; The most level Way seems uneven; Highest Virtue seems like a valley; Great purity seems sullied, Ample Virtue seems insufficient; Solid Virtue seems unstable; The simple and genuine seems fickle; the great square has no corners; the great vessel takes long to perfect; the great note sounds faint; the great image is without shape; the Way is hidden and without name. Only the Way is good at providing and completing. (上士聞道，勤而行之。中士聞道，若存若亡。 下士聞道，大笑之。不笑不足以為道。故建言有之。明道若昧。進道若退。夷道若類。上德若谷。太白若辱。廣德若不足。建德若偷。質真若渝。大方無隅。大器晚成。大音希聲。大象無形。道隱無名。夫唯道，善貸且成)." Ivanhoe (2005), 183.

[88] My juxtaposition needs qualification. Contemporary theories of images have been formulated based on further stratification of images into several sub-categories, registers, or orders. Certain kinds of images have originals in the physical "real" world which are represented in and by images, e.g., portrait or photography (iconic copies), whereas some have basis on nothing but fictional creations or optical illusions, e.g. Disney World (simulacra or phantasmagoria). Images of images (for example, an image of Mona Lisa on a postcard) also constitute their own sub-category. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 27 (1983): 45-56; Baudrillard (1994). Images of deities, transcendental beings, or ultimate truth—the subjects of the images that this chapter concerns—can fall under any sub-categories of these, in accordance with one's understanding of what/who those represented realities are. My admittedly simplistic comparison intends to emphasize that ancient Chinese discourse did not restrict the

images as formless and abstruse, early Chinese discourse kept open to interpretation the likeness between the representing medium and the represented subject. The likeness between the two is not to be verified only by visual perception, but to be conceptually postulated by social practice, especially when the referent does not assume a physically constant form.

The idea that something formless and invisible is still visually representable and that such representation can be considered to assume the likeness of the original also appears to have been brought to bear on a discourse of pictures.[89] In a pithy dialogue preserved in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子, for example, an unnamed painter in the retinue of the Qi prince 齊王 holds that invisible entities are easier to portray in pictorial form than visible ones because viewers cannot assess a resemblance of the representation to its invisible original.[90] This vignette exhibits the gist of the astute view regarding the

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"likeness" in images to *visual* terms, but broadly conceived of it in terms of its representing function.

[89] On the conceptual continuity from *xiang* in the *Book of Changes* to *xiang* in Chinese theories of painting, see Clunas (1997), 102-104.

[90] "There was a retainer painting for the Prince of Qi, whom the Prince of Qi asked: 'What is most difficult in painting?' He replied: 'Dogs and horses are most difficult.' 'What is easiest?' He replied: 'Demons and goblins are easiest. Since dogs and horses are things known by man, visible before us the day through, they cannot be completely simulated and thus are difficult. Demons and goblins are without form, and not visible before us, hence they are easy' (客有為齊王畫者，齊王問曰，畫孰最難者？曰，犬馬最難。孰最易者？曰，鬼魅最易。夫犬馬、人所知也，旦暮罄於前，不可類之，故難。鬼魅、無形者，不罄於前，故易之也)." For this translation, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 24. The painter's reply is modified and cited in a different context. See *Huainan zi*, Book 13, Chapter 7: "Nowadays artisans like to paint demons and detest representing dogs and horses. Why? Because demons do not appear in the world, while dogs and horses can be seen daily (今夫圖工而好畫鬼魅，而憎圖狗馬者，何也？鬼魅不世出，而狗馬可日見也)." For this translation, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, ed. John S. Major, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 498.

irreducible gap between the real and pictures, as well as the subjectivity or arbitrariness of a likeness between the two.

Once established, the premise that images are to represent the otherwise unfathomable and, therefore, not to be defined by visual similitude allows images a considerable hermeneutic range. One image can convey multiple meanings. Different images can signify one and the same thing. This semiotic versatility of images, which was epitomized by the *Book of Changes*, led to three presuppositions that constructed a conceptual framework for thinking about what images are and how they work. First of all, that which images represent was construed unknowable without images. From this epistemically functional point of view, images seemed to be able to replace their referents—unknowable reality—or render insignificant the difference between images and the real. On the other hand, as images themselves manifest the unavailability of their real referents, one could argue for the irreducible gap between images and the real. These two opposite exegetical stances on the relationship between images and their referents surface prominently in stories that feature images as surrogates for the deceased.

Images in Lieu of the Departed

It is nearly universal that people create material objects for representing the dead and express a vast spectrum of behavioral responses to those objects. At one end, people protect and adore them and, at the other end, despise or even destroy them. The phenomenon that people treat inanimate things as if they were animate beings attracted as much attention in the past as it does today. In early China, historiographers passed down moral stories about those who treated images of the deceased as if they were living. The stories promoted the sincere attitude toward the dead on the one hand, and yet, also

cautioned against excessive lodging of one's sentiments in such lifeless objects. The main focus of such stories was not images *per se*. That being said, the perspective on whether images would be commensurable with the real or not was often woven into the fabric of these narratives.

In his study of collective memory about the deceased in early China, Brashier attends to the workings of *xiang* in two respects, agreeing with the position that images are on par with their referents. His analysis inductively defines *xiang* as a tangible means that gives shape to otherwise intangible qualities of the departed. Following Sharf's translation of *xiang* as "schema," Brashier explains that it serves as the principal knot of a network that connects deceased ancestors with those who have been left behind. By preserving that which constitutes the pattern of him or her in memory, according to Brashier, *xiang* makes the presence of a deceased continue and thus maintains the social relationship between the dead and the living.[91] In light of the exposition of images in the *Book of Changes*, a staggering array of items that Brashier places under the rubric of *xiang* merits attention. By his reckoning, *xiang* as a category encompasses not only material objects, such as portraits, tablets, clothes, tombstones, graveyards, the lineage shrine, and its ritual utensils, but also physical performances, including impersonations, songs, and dances during ancestral sacrifice.[92] As discussed above, this classification does not confine the nature of likeness in *xiang* to visual similitude. Brashier draws this

[91] K. E. Brashier, *Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 263-68. Brashier explains *xiang* as material objects for serving to preserve memory such as souvenirs and catalogues. On the social significance of connecting the dead with the living through memorial services, see Amy L. Olberding, "The Stout Heart: Philosophical Strategies for Death and Grief" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai'i, 2001), 179-83.

[92] Brashier (2014), 268-316.

functional definition of *xiang* from a comparison with the ancient Greek *sema*, inscribed tombstones. Both terms refer to material things that are connected to the deceased. According to Brashier's exposition, however, *sema* underlines the absence of the deceased in this world, whereas *xiang* conjures the continued presence of the departed from this world.[93] Brashier applies this comparative angle to early Chinese commemorative practices because, as he sees it, *xiang* was given agency to play the animate role of the deceased by receiving ritual veneration, such as sacrificial food, prostration, etc.

Studies of Chinese religions have long explained that the *xiang* of dead ancestors assume living qualities, especially in a commemoration context. In his pioneering 1913 article, Laufer argues that the idea of images endowed with animate characteristics was entrenched in the indigenous practice of ancestral veneration. His analysis does not delve into the conceptual complexities of the term *xiang* in the context of Chinese religious practices. Nonetheless, by mentioning diverse forms of cultic images in pre-Buddhist China, ranging from geometric to zoomorphic and anthropomorphic,[94] he insightfully notes that in ancient China, images in diverse forms performed the same cultic function as the ritual stand-ins for invisible originals. Based on this observation, he further points out that the claim that the ritual use of images in China was a Buddhist import is an uncritical acceptance of the anti-Buddhist polemical point at face value.[95]

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[93] Ibid., 264-67.

[94] Laufer (1913): 112-13. He classified ancient Chinese cultic images into four groups: 1) images of geometric forms used in the worship of cosmic deities; 2) images in the shape of animals—both real and imaginary—and monsters; 3) effigies of shamanistic origin or representations of the shaman; 4) statues of heroes and ancestors.

[95] Ibid., 115.

As Brashier and Laufer have observed, early Chinese traditions have no shortage of stories in which images of the dead appear to have been treated as living beings. Most of such stories were collected and preserved for their moral lessons.[96] A typical story would follow this plot: filial children make images of their deceased parents and express affection and respect for those images as if they were the actual parents, and their piety is then duly rewarded. The story of Ding Lan 丁蘭 may be one of the best-known examples. Ding, bereft of his mother, carved a wooden effigy and cared for it as if it were his real mother. He also had his wife serve it in a mourning dress and bow to it for three years. The couple made decisions in accordance with the image's reactions. One day, a neighbor came in to borrow something during Ding's absence, but his wife refused the request since the image did not approve, and the neighbor, in a rage, knocked over the image. Upon his return, Ding noticed the pain of the image, heard what happened, and assaulted the neighbor. As the officers gathered at Ding's home to arrest him for the violence, the image shed tears. His sincere filial piety, thus, allowed him to be exonerated.[97] Since the protagonist of this story is the filial son, Ding, not the image of his deceased mother, the narrator does not say whether the weeping was the response of the effigy on its own or the response of the real deceased mother for her son via the image. These moral stories do not explicitly deal with this issue of whether images carry agency or intermediacy. Together with other stories, however, such anecdotes of images still afford clues as to how ancient Chinese writers construed images endowed with what

[96] Edward H. Schafer, "The T'ang Imperial Icon," *Sinologica* 7 (1963a): 156.

[97] For detailed discussion about various versions of the story in literary and visual traditions, see Kim (2011), 46-76. For my summary of the plot, I consulted Laufer (1913), 120. It cites Herbert Allen Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1898), 736.

modern scholars see as "living qualities."

Another such story, the anecdote of Jin Midi 金日磾 (134–86 BCE), the Xiongnu prince who became an honored Han minister, may appear to be another typical moral story promoting filial piety. At a deeper level, however, it allows a glimpse into the subtle way the agency of images was viewed in early China. Like the story of Ding Lan, the episode at the outer layer centers on Jin's filial piety with which he was recognized as an exemplar among foreigners. When his father King Xiutu 休屠王 was defeated by Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140–117 BCE) during the military campaign of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (Liu Che 劉徹, b. 157 BCE; r. 141–87 BCE), Jin surrendered himself with his mother and brother. He was assigned the task of looking after the imperial horses, and his mother became known for teaching her sons virtues and manners. As the story goes, after his mother passed away, Emperor Wu had a painted portrait of her (*huaxiang* 畫像) put in the Palace of Sweet Spring (*Ganquan gong* 甘泉宮) and Jin paid a visit to it every morning and wept in front of it.[98]

The Palace of Sweet Spring was a ritual hall where images of divinities were installed. The *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記, 91 BCE) and the *History of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書, 82 CE) ascribe its construction to an obscure Li Shaoweng 李少翁 (fl. second century BCE), a wizard or occult technician (*fangshi* 方士), who was active at Emperor Wu's court. Li installed images of celestial deities and ritual paraphernalia inside the hall, claiming that they would be more effective means to reach the divinities.[99]

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[98] Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Hanshu* 漢書, "Huo Guang Jin Midi zhuan 霍光金日磾傳," 68: 2959-60.

[99] The episode of Li Shaoweng installed painted images of various deities inside the Palace of Sweet Spring is preserved as a historical record. The shortened version appears in the *Annals of the Former Han* (*Qian-Hanji* 前漢紀, ordered in 198), comp. Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209), 13: 134-35: "Inside the Palace of Sweet Spring, there were images of Primordial Unity (Taiyi 太乙,

In describing this ritual space, early Chinese writers plainly differentiated the agency of deities from that of their images by explaining the purpose of images as a means to *invite* deities, not to replace them.[100] If images themselves were thought to carry their own agency, there is no need to bring the deities down. The historiographers further mentioned that such invitations nonetheless failed. This passing remark on the failed invitation presupposes that images act as intermediaries rather than on their own.

By specifying the Palace of Sweet Spring as a place to install the portrait of Jin Midi's mother, the episode suggests two things. One is the practice of making images of those physically inaccessible and using them for ritual purposes. The other is the conception that the virtuous dead were deemed equivalent to divinities to the degree that their images can be placed in the same ritual space. This story of Jin Midi indicates that the early Chinese were not unfamiliar with the notion of the images representing incorporeal beings. With such images, people remembered and served those who were beyond the human realm. Jin wept in front of the image of his mother because it

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Polaris) and all ghosts and divinities for sustaining sacrificial ritual with the intention to invoke those deities (於甘泉宮中。畫太乙諸鬼神像所設祭祀。欲以致其神)." The passages in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* are the same: "'Your Majesty want to communicate with deities. [If] your palace and clothes do not resemble the divine manner, deities will not arrive,' Wencheng (Li Shaoweng) said. Therefore, he had clouds painted on [imperial] chariots, and had each of them ride on [different] matching days to ward off evil spirits. He also had the Palace of Sweet Spring constructed, an elevated chamber placed at the center, and all deities such as Heaven, Earth, and Primordial Unity painted. [He] put ritual paraphernalia in order to reach the celestial god. After several years past, this technique waned further, and deities did not come (文成言曰:「上即欲與神通，宮室被服不象神，神物不至。」乃作畫雲氣車，及各以勝日駕車辟惡鬼。又作甘泉宮，中為臺室，畫天、地、泰一諸神，而置祭具以致天神。居歲餘，其方益衰，神不至)." *Shiji* 史記, "Xiaowu benji 孝武本紀," 12: 458; ibid., "Fengshan shu 封禪書," 28: 1388; *Hanshu* 漢書, "Jiaosi zhi 郊祀志," 25: 1219.

[100] Cf) Robert F. Campany, "The Real Presence for Joseph M. Kitagawa," *History of Religions* 32, no. 3 (1993a): 233-72. Although his discussion focuses on the early medieval case of Guanyin's manifestations, his analysis also points out the role of images for devotees to invoke deities.

reminded him that she was not there.

The notion of images as intermediaries that vacillated between incorporeal beings and humans must have been taken for granted since early Chinese writers rarely expounded on it. Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145 or 135–86 BCE) framing of Li's failed attempt to invoke the deities in the Palace of Sweet Spring ("deities did not come 神不至") may induce us to apply the stark divide between the cultured elite, who recorded these stories as tendentious tales to foil any belief in the living agency in images, and the uneducated populace, who appeared as gullible characters in stories, who treated images as if they were real. It is hardly possible, however, to impose such binary terms onto Sima's stance on images. First, in his accounts, members of the ruling class also treat images as if real. Moreover, Sima tells such stories under the tacit assumption that how one treats divine images will have direct consequences for humans. According to his account, King Wuyi of Yin 殷帝武乙 (d. ca. 1113 BCE) had material images of celestial gods made, played a board game with those images, and shot arrows at them (*shetian* 射天) when he won the game.[101] In this story, it was the ruler who acted as if the images were real, as did the commoners, Ding Lan, his wife, their neighbor, and the "barbarian" Jin Midi.[102] Furthermore, Wuyi's story is meant to preach the dire consequences that the ruler's action inflicted on himself and his heirs. By inserting Wuyi's death right after his

[101] "King Wuyi was without Dao. He made dummies and called them 'heavenly gods.' He played the Bo 博 game with them [by] ordering others to make the moves [for dummies]. When heavenly gods did not win, he humiliatingly punished them [by] making leather bags full of blood to haul them upward and shot arrows at them. That was, namely, 'shooting at Heaven.' (帝武乙無道，為偶人，謂之天神。與之博，令人為行。天神不勝，乃僇辱之。為革囊，盛血，卬而射之，命曰射天)." *Shiji*, "Yin benji 殷本紀," 3: 104.

[102] Kieschnick used this story to discuss that there was no practice of using cultic images in pre-Buddhist China. Kieschnick (2003), 59.

"shooting at Heaven," Sima implies that the king's maltreatment of images of divinities spelled his doom.

> When Wuyi went out for hunting between the Yellow and Wei rivers, lightning struck Wuyi dead. His son Taiding came to the throne. King Taiding died, and his son King Yi came to the throne. During his reign the Yin declined still further.
>
> 武乙獵於河渭之閒，暴雷，武乙震死。子帝太丁立。帝太丁崩，子帝乙立。帝乙立，殷益衰[103]

By putting in a series Wuyi's sacrilegious behavior toward heavenly images, his dreadful death by lightning, and the short-lived reigns of his heirs, Sima Qian implies that Wuyi's shooting at Heaven cost himself, his descendants, and his dynasty. This narrative arrangement presupposes that the material images of deities are tied to immaterial deities: images may not have the autonomous agency to act on their own but their originals exert power over humans.

Sima's subtle formulation about the relationships among images, their referents, and human actors sheds light on the conceptual complexities intrinsic to the practice of using images as surrogates for the otherworldly. The very physicality of the images re-enacts the presence of the beings represented by images. Yet, the beholders of the images acutely sense the physical unavailability of such beings. Another story involving the aforementioned Li Shaoweng, who constructed the Palace of Sweet Spring to house images of deities, throws into relief the illusionary resemblance but irreconcilable disparity—a compelling paradox—between images and the real. When Emperor Wu of Han was grieving the death of his favorite concubine, Li crafted a moving image of her and showed it to the distressed emperor with the exhortation not to touch it. The story

[103] *Shiji*, 3: 104.

goes along quite predictably. The emperor, astonished at the sight of the returned concubine walking around the palace, could not help but extend his arm, and the image disappeared instantly.[104]

The moral of this episode is apparent: the image evanesces because it is not real, however closely it resembles the real. It was Wang Chong 王充 (ca. 27–100) who vocally espoused this skeptical position. His sole extant writing, *Balanced Disquisitions* (*Lunheng* 論衡), criticizes the funerary or commemorative uses of images in multiple places.[105] On the story of Emperor Wu and the image of his deceased concubine, in particular, Wang draws a clear line between inanimate images and living agency, rejecting any possibilities for images to be capable of replacing the real.

> There are thousands and tens of thousands of dummies, but they are never called humans. Why so? They have noses, mouths, ears and eyes, and yet their nature is anything but spontaneous (*ziran* 自然). Emperor Wu was fond of Lady Wang. When she had died, he yearned to see her form again. A Dao master used miscellaneous skills (*fangshu* 方術) to make a doll in her shape. When it was complete, it passed through the palace gate. Emperor Wu, astonished, rose to greet it, but, all of a sudden, it spirited away. Since it was not a real, spontaneous being, but a sham, artfully made by a conjuror, it became diffuse at first sight, dispersed, and vanished. Things that have been manufactured cannot last long, like the form of Lady Wang could not remain seen for long.[106]
>
> 偶人千萬，不名為人者，何也？鼻口耳目非性自然也。武帝幸王夫人，王夫人死，思見其形。道士以方術作夫人形，形成，出入宮門。武帝大驚，立而迎之，忽不復見。蓋非自然之真，方士巧妄之偽，故一見恍忽，消散滅亡。有為之化，其不可久

[104] The detail of the story differs by version. Sima Qian recorded the name of the concubine as Lady Wang, but Ban Gu as Lady Li. *Shiji*, 12, 458; *Hanshu*, 5: 1219.

[105] On Wang Chong's skepticism toward the ritual use of images, see Kim (2011), 35-46. Kim, however, considers Wang's opposition to ritual images as indicative of the view widely shared by his contemporaries.

[106] This translation is modified from *Lun-Hêng, Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung*, Part I, translated from the Chinese and annotated by Alfred Forke, second edition (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962), 97.

行，猶王夫人形不可久見也[107]

Wang's treatises did not engender any commentarial annotations until the nineteenth century.[108] Moreover, he stated that he wrote his work in order to refute misconceptions held by his contemporaries. For these reasons, his opinions have often been taken as in the minority of his time. Nonetheless, the fact that his only work has weathered all those times suggests that his "minor" views were deemed worthy of preservation and dissemination. Images, as he saw them, resemble the real only in appearance, but lack the decisive feature of the real—they cannot exercise their own agency.

These stories are episodic and not necessarily factual, but evidentiary enough for us to see a diversity of perspectives on the relationship between images and their originals in early China. The compilers of the stories did not consider it strange that people treated images of immaterial beings—dead or divine—as if they had been real. Conceptions about the relationship between images and the real, which underlay such practice, however, ran a broad spectrum from direct equation to categorical repudiation. Against the backdrop of these decidedly varied perceptions of what images are and what they do, the Buddhist religion brought its own images and image-centered practices to China. It goes without saying that it arrived with equally diverse strategies to manage the complexities of images.

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[107] Wang Chong 王充, "Ziran 自然," *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, annotated by Huang Hui 黃暉, fasc. 54, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 780.

[108] Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 311. For the historical reception of *Lunheng*, see Forke (1962), 9-11.

Anxieties about the Buddha's Image

The Buddhist default stance on the Buddha's images is, to put it bluntly, that the Buddha should not be confused with his anthropomorphic form. Upon this proposition, the Buddhist canonical tradition constructed a nuanced discourse of images that wrestled with the conceptual tension between images as practically equal to the Buddha and images as a metaphor for the Buddha. John Strong explains the reservation about the Buddha's images as the caution against the chance that the Buddha images may give the illusion of the permanent existence of the Buddha.[109] Such apprehension about images reflects the primary condition for the fashioning of the Buddha's images. As Buddhist scriptural sources formulate, Buddhists sought to make images of the Buddha because the Buddha was no longer available to meet in person.[110] This awareness of the distance between the Buddha and his images, as well as the epistemic risk intrinsic to images of the Buddha, did not precipitate the wholesale proscription of images, but required post hoc justifications of the images that were already in use. As a result, Buddhist traditions came to deploy different discursive tactics to endorse the utility of images, and yet circumvent the epistemic pitfalls accompanied by the images.[111]

One such attempt was to subsume the discourse of images under the soteriological scheme. Scores of textbooks have explained that Buddhist images were produced in order to generate and accumulate merit, the reward that brings better stations of rebirth, which,

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[109] John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112-15.

[110] The legend of the first Buddha image commissioned by King Udāyana follows this line of reasoning. See T 125, 2: 705b19-706a18.

[111] For a discussion on the internal diversity of Buddhist discourse of images, see DeCaroli (2015), 30-43.

in theory, eventually lead to ultimate liberation from the *saṃsāra*.[112] This doctrinal rationale appeared from the nascence of the Chinese Buddhist scriptural tradition. One of the earliest extant Sinitic translations, the *Scripture of Cultivating Wisdom* (*Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經, Lokakṣema, 179), within the *prajñāpāramitā* literature, foregrounds the purpose of producing merit by means of the Buddha's images in a catechistic conversation between two bodhisattvas, Sadāprarudita (Satuobolun 薩陀波倫) and Dharmōdgata (Tanwujie 曇無竭), about the Buddha's body.[113] Sadāprarudita asks whether or not the Buddha's spirit is in his image (神在像中耶). To this question, Dharmōdgata, the *prajñāpāramitā* exegete, answers, "It is not there. The image of the Buddha is made only because one desires to have people acquire merit (不在中。所以作佛像者。但欲使人得其福耳)."[114]

Didactic parables also support the logic of merit. One of the most celebrated examples in medieval China was the legend of King Udāyana's first image of the Buddha.[115] While scholars suspect that the original Indic version of the story may have been available around the first century CE, its sole extant version survives in the Chinese translation of the *Ekōttarāgama* by Saṃghadeva around 397 in Jiankang 建康 (present

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[112] For a discussion on the notion of merit leading to ultimate liberation, see Bryan D. Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2017), 34.

[113] Lewis R. Lancaster, "An Early Mahayana Sermon about the Body of the Buddha and the Making of Images," *Artibus Asiae* 36, no. 4 (1974): 289-91.

[114] *Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經 (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), trans. Lokakṣema (Zhi Loujiachen 支婁迦讖, fl. 167–189), 179, T 224, 8: 476b20-22. Here I follow the translation by Lancaster (1974): 289. The third century translation of the *prajñā* texts also keeps the same part in different wording. *Damingdu jing* 大明度經, trans Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 223–253), T 225, 8: 507a24-26.

[115] For vast scholarship on this legend and the image traditions that produced copies of this purported first image, see below, Chapter Six, p. 168, fn. 355.

day Nanjing).[116] To recall this famous legend, when Śākyamuni was staying in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to preach to his mother, Lady Māya, King Udāyana, who missed Śākyamuni so much, commissioned an image of the Buddha for the first time ever. The king asked about karmic rewards that he could expect from the act of fashioning an image of the Buddha after Śākyamuni returned to Jambudvīpa. Inserted as part of the Sāṃkāśya miracle, this *agama* version is believed to be closer to the archetype of the legend.[117] Before it became available in Chinese, however, Chinese audiences had already become familiar with the merit-generating role of the Buddha's images through earlier translations of the Sanskrit original's derivative versions. For example, the *Scripture of the Buddha's Preaching on the Making of Images in the Buddha's Bodily Form* (*Foshuo zuo fo xingxiang jing* 佛說作佛形像經), known to have been translated in the Later Han (25–220), enumerates merits of image production for subsequent lifetimes, ranging from good-looking appearance to birth in a wealthy and powerful family, without regressing to the three evil paths.[118] Taking the *prajñāpāramitā* and merit scriptures

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[116] T 125, 2: 705b19-706a18.

[117] IWASAKI Masumi 岩崎真澄, "Bunken jō yori mitaru butsuzō no kigen 文献上より観たる佛像の起原," *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 31, no. 2 (1920): 56; TAKATA (1967), 11-12.

[118] *Foshuo zuo fo xingxiang jing* 佛說作佛形像經, unknown translator catalogued in the Later Han (25–220), T 692, 16:788a15-788c18. Another translation of the same original text with a slight different ending is *Foshuo zaoli xingxiang fubao jing* 佛說造立形像福報經, unknown translator catalogued in the Eastern Jin (265–420), T 693, 16:788c23-790a8. For an English translation of the Later Han version, see Robert H. Sharf, "The Scripture on the Production of Buddha Images (*Zuo fo xingxiang jing*)," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 261-67. These early Chinese translations, however, do not necessarily mean that their source-texts, based on the *agama* version, also had Indic originals. Storch identifies the *Catalogue of Later Han* as the *Han Catalogues of Zhu Shixing* (*Zhu Shixing Han lu* 朱士行漢錄), a catalogue compiled by Zhu Shixing 朱士行 (ca. 203–282), one of the allegedly first-ordained Chinese monk who traveled to Khotan to obtain Buddhist scriptures but did not return to China. See Tanya G. Storch, "Chinese Buddhist Bibliography" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 17-20; Zürcher (2007), 61-63.

together, this emphasis on merit justifies the practice of making images, but, at the same time, preempts the possibility of considering the reverent behavior toward the images of the Buddha as the belief in the Buddha's living qualities in those images.

In contrast to the scriptural sources, monastic codes curiously suppress the topic of the Buddha's images. None of the monastic codes offer explicit directives about what to do with the Buddha's images. The *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (*Shi song lü* 十誦律),[119] primarily translated by Puṇyatāra (with Kumārajīva's contribution to the first scroll) around 404 in Chang'an 長安 (present day Xi'an), for instance, only implies the ban on the making of the Buddha's image through the mouth of the wealthy patron, Anāthapiṇḍika. He asks the Buddha to allow images of bodhisattvas: "World-honored one, since it is not permitted to make an image of the Buddha's body, I pray that the Buddha will grant that I make images of his attendant bodhisattvas (如佛身像不應作。願佛聽我作菩薩侍像者)."[120] The Buddha agrees to the donor's request for making bodhisattva images without broaching the matter of his own images.[121] This indirect deterrence, at least on the normative level, is known to be the sole injunction against images of the Buddha in the Buddhist canon. Previous studies have taken it as a sectarian exception or later interpolation rather than an authoritative order imposed on all

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[119] *Shi song lü* 十誦律 (*Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*), trans. Puṇyatāra (Furuoduoluo 弗若多羅, fl. mid-fourth to early fifth centuries) and Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, 344–413), T 1435, 23: 352a8-9. This passage was first noted by IWASAKI Masumi 岩崎真澄, "Bukkyō geijutsu no kigen (ge) 佛教藝術の起源 (下)," *Kokka* 國華 360 (May 1920), 434; idem (1920): 68; Arthur Waley, "Did Buddha Die of Eating Pork?: With a Note on Buddha's Image," in *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1932), 352; Soper (1950): 148; Zürcher (1995), 5-6.

[120] T 1435, 23: 352a8-9. Translation by Soper (1950), 148.

[121] Scholarly interpretations on the identity of these flanking bodhisattvas vary. Juhyung Rhi hypothesizes that this stipulation may have been relevant to the practice of rendering Śākyamuni Buddha in the form of bodhisattva. Juhyung Rhi, "From Bodhisattva to Buddha: The Beginning of Iconic Representation in Buddhist Art," *Artibus Asiae* 54, no. 3 (1994): 220-21.

Buddhists.[122] Nevertheless, this passing remark still suggests the general reluctance to endorse the fashioning of the Buddha's images even for the doctrinally sanctioned merit-making purpose. The monastic codes of other schools also avoid the subject of the Buddha's images altogether. In particular, the *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya* (*Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律), co-translated by Buddhabhadra (359–429) and Faxian 法顯 (ca. 340–420) in Jiankang, 416, specifies permissible pictorial subjects in monasteries. This clause prohibits the depiction of sexual intercourse, allows five scenes of aged monks, grapevines, makaras, corpses, and landscape, but does not stipulate anything about images of the Buddha.[123]

This silence warrants further contextualization in light of the reception of the Buddha's images within Buddhist communities. At first glance, for the case of *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya*, it may be understandable in that cultic images and decorative themes are different topics to discuss. Erik Zürcher interpreted the reticence about the Buddha's images in the *vinaya* literature as indicative of the assignment of image matters to the laity's hands. He grounded his hypothesis on the passage from the same *vinaya* that prohibits monastics from directly handling gold and silver, and the lay regulation in the *Scripture on the Discipline of the Upāsaka* (*Youposai jie jing* 優婆塞戒經, early fifth century) that requires an image of the body of the Buddha to be whole.[124] As Gregory

[122] Waley (1932), 353; DeCaroli (2015), 33.

[123] *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (*Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya*), trans. Buddhabhadra (Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅, 358–429) Faxian 法顯 (ca. 340–420), 416, T 1425, 22: 496c-497a.

[124] "It is not allowed to make an image representing [only] one half of the Buddha's body. … Once it has been restored to completeness, it [may] be exhibited (不應造作半身佛像 […] 治已具足然後顯示)." T 1488, 24: 1052a17-19. Translation by Zürcher (1995), 7-8.

Schopen has shown,[125] however, archaeological evidence indicates that both clergy and laity actively partook in Buddhist image practices.

As rule books, the *vinaya* texts are prescriptive by design. They intend to regulate practices, not to describe them faithfully. The *vinaya* literature discusses practices not as actually exercised, but as critically evaluated in terms of their propriety and methods. Therefore, the scarcity of remarks on the Buddha's images or image-centered practices itself is a clue to how monastic members conceived of the image of the Buddha. It appears to have been a delicate matter—it is difficult to explain the image of the Buddha on the basis of doctrines, but equally difficult to interdict it for its practical significance. If there is an explicit prohibition on the fashioning of cultic images, it is a transgression to make one; if there are no rules at all, you will have options. In other words, the relative lack of attention to image matters in the *vinaya* seems to suggest that the making of the Buddha's images was not wholeheartedly embraced, but only conditionally sanctioned, at least around the time when the early *vinaya* texts were composed. Such hesitance was embedded in the Chinese translations of *vinaya* literature.

Given the nature of the *vinaya* genre, it is telling that explicit stipulations on cultic images appear only in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Although the original Sanskrit version is known to have been composed in northwestern India in the first or second century, Yijing 義淨 (635–713) obtained its copies in Śrīvijaya in 671 and translated them into Chinese between 700 and 712.[126] According to a passage from one of his

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[125] Gregory Schopen, "On Monks, Nuns, and 'Vulgar' Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism," *Artibus Asiae* 49, nos. 1-2 (1988-1989): 153-68.

[126] Stephen F. Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 50, fn. 1.

translations, a new monastic member, Nanda, who relinquished his bride Sundara, drew her on a rock and got lazy in meditation. Seeing Nanda falling for the picture of her, Kāśyapa discussed with the Buddha the danger of pictures leading practitioners into a transgression against the Dharma, and the Buddha in turn banned paintings of living creatures and allowed paintings of corpses or skulls only.[127] This is still not a direct prohibition of cultic images *per se*. However, we can be almost certain that the interdict against the visual depiction of the living involves the ban on anthropomorphic images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. As these texts became available in the eighth century long after the major contentious issues about Buddhist images were laid out in the interreligious controversies, it is unlikely that the Buddhist apologists who participated in the debates in this study could have had knowledge of this particular reservation about images. Yet, the Buddhist sources known to the Chinese audience by then already contained such ambivalence—the acknowledgement of the utility with the caution against the risk. The later Chinese translations merely reaffirmed the reservations about images that had long been there, if framed differently.

There is no known *abhidharma* text that openly deals with the Buddha's images. The *sutra* and *vinaya* traditions also remain tenaciously reluctant to spell out the meaning of devotees bowing and making offerings to images of the Buddha. This want of explicit references to the issue in question has given the impression that the Buddhist scholastic tradition in general was indifferent to the conceptual complexities of images.[128] Yet, an *avadāna* story concerning Upagupta, the awakened monk, and Māra, the archenemy of

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[127] *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye zashi* 根本説一切有部毘奈耶雜事 (*Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya kṣudrakavastu*), trans. Yijing 義淨 (635–713), 710, T 1451, 24: 252a15-27. Zürcher (1995), 8.

[128] Demiéville (1937); idem (1974).

Buddhist practitioners, alludes to the gravity of image matters among Buddhists by elucidating the way in which the image of the Buddha works on its beholder.[129] This story first became available to Chinese readers in 306 through the *Aśokāvadāna* (*Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳) translated by An Faqin 安法欽 (fl. 281–306) in Luoyang.[130] The case in point is set after Upagupta subjugated Māra. Regretting having been born after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, Upagupta requested Māra to display the physical body of the Buddha (*rūpakāya*, *seshen* 色身). Māra agreed to do so under the condition that Upagupta should never bow down. Once Māra transformed himself to look like the Buddha, however, Upagupta could not help prostrating himself. To Māra, who was appalled at the monk's violation of their agreement, Upagupta explained:

> "You should listen. I neither broke my words nor paid respect to you. It is like [people] make images of celestial beings and the Buddha out of clay and wood and pay respect to celestial beings and the Buddha out of reverence for them. It is not bowing down to clay and wood. I was also like that. I could not resist being overwhelmed by joy at the sight of the Buddha, and therefore, paid respect to him accordingly. It is not that I thought of you and paid respect to you."
>
> 汝當聽我不違言要。亦不向汝作禮。如似泥木造作於天像及佛像。敬天佛故而爲作禮。不禮泥木。我亦如是。不勝見佛心歡喜故便起作禮。不以汝想爲汝作禮[131]

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[129] For a detailed study of this particular scene, see Strong (1992), 104-16. Strong's study is based on the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna*, ed. E. B. Cowell, and R. A. Neil (Cambridge, 1986).

[130] *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳, trans. An Faqin 安法欽 (fl. 281–306), T 2042, 50: 119c12-120a23; *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經, trans. Saṃghabhara (Sengqiepoluo 僧伽婆羅), T 2043, 50: 160a28-c24. The Saṃghabhara version was translated during the first half of the reign of Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (502–549) in Jiankang.

[131] T 2042, 50: 120a18-22. The later translation is: "I did not pay respect to you and did not break the promise. You should listen now. For instance, if [someone] makes the Buddha out of clay and pays respect, that is thinking of the Buddha, not thinking of clay. I now look at you, but thinking of the Buddha, not of Māra (我不禮汝。亦不乖約。汝今當聽。譬如以土爲佛。若禮敬者。但作佛想不作土想。我今見汝。但作佛想不作魔想)." T 2043, 50: 160c21-23. For the translation of the corresponding part in the *Divyāvadāna*, see Strong (1992), 111: "Just as men bow down to clay images of the gods, knowing that what they worship is the god and not the clay, so I, seeing you here wearing the form of the Lord of the World, bowed down to you, conscious of the Sugata, but not conscious of Māra."

Māra's apprehension about Upagupta's bowing to the conjured image of the Buddha is twofold. One is the notion that spiritually less-advanced beings will be shattered if awakened ones pay respect to them.[132] More pertinent to this study, the other layer is that people bow down to images of the Buddha due to the confusion of illusions with the real Buddha. Māra thought that Upagupta mistook him in the likeness to the Buddha's physical body as the real Buddha. Upagupta responded to Māra by explaining how the semiotic relationship between the real Buddha and his images affects Buddhist devotees: images of the Buddha help Buddhists to fortify their reverence for him in their minds, and therefore, lead them to express their inner reverence outwardly through respectful deportment. It is the Buddha, not his images, to whom they pay obeisance.

This conversation between Upagupta and Māra adumbrates the ambivalence that Buddhists harbored towards the Buddha's images. First, Upagupta notes the evocative potent of the Buddha's images on Buddhist devotees based upon the unequivocal semiotic relationship between the Buddha and his images. This acknowledgement of the power of images indicates that Buddhists sensed the necessity of the Buddha's images for those who practice Buddhism after his *parinirvāṇa*. Second, via the mouth of Māra, the story reveals that Buddhists were fully aware of the epistemic risk inherent in cultic images of the Buddha and thus anxious about using them. In other words, Buddhist writers saw that images of the Buddha were useful for devotional practices and yet likely to cause confusion and controversy even within their own communities. That is the moral of the encounter between Māra and Upagupta.

Such ambivalence informed Buddhist image discourse in several respects. By

[132] Strong (1992), 108.

promoting the production of images as merit projects, the scriptural tradition avoided discussing the possible confusion of the Buddha's images with the Buddha. Monastic codes, adopting a "don't ask, don't tell" tactic, placed the image issues in a gray area. The lucid exposition in the form of dialogue borrowed the voices of the unfortunate monk, who could not meet the Buddha in the flesh, and the quintessential saboteur of Buddhist practices. The prevalent position that cut across these different discursive methods was that images of the Buddha must not be straightforwardly equated with the Buddha. On the surface, this may seem a small difference: devotional acts are directed to images of the Buddha, whether the true object of devotion is the Buddha or not. Nevertheless, Buddhist writers still made a concerted effort to inscribe the caution against the epistemological conflation of the two. These reservations about the outward ritual action shed light on the nature of the image problems that Buddhists faced even within their own communities. Chinese Buddhists, who translated and read these sources, were also aware of such underwritten anxieties about cultic images. And this awareness of the tension resurfaced during the interreligious contention.

Conclusion

The critics of Buddhism, as will be examined in the following chapters, attacked Buddhist cultic images for the same misgivings Māra had. Buddhist apologists, in turn, adopted the same position as Upagupta's. Although neither side specifically referred to the episode of Upagupta and Māra, the disagreement between the two resembles the presuppositions of the early Chinese discussions about images of the dead. The sympathetic Sima Qian and the skeptical Wang Chong alike accepted the premise that the living made images of the dead out of the wish to meet them again, however, that would

not mean images were deemed real. Likewise, in the story of Upagupta and Māra, the creation of a copy of the Buddha's physical body was justified due to inaccessibility to the real Buddha, but the anxieties about the mistake of confusing the Buddha with his images remained. As seen in the *Book of Changes*, the metaphysical conceptualization of images as a means of access to the otherwise inconceivable cosmic reality was also an attempt to approximate images and the real with full awareness of the irreducible gap between the two.

This conceptual affinity between Chinese indigenous discussions and Buddhist internal exposition indicates a shared concern for the propriety of images as replacement for the real—cosmic reality, the departed, gods, and the Buddha. The diverse array of ways to speak of images reflects the gravity of the dilemma and the earnestness with which it was dealt. Even when people knew the images were not real, they still treated the images as the real. This inconsistency between cognition and action called for contemplation on how to make sense of the relationship between images and their physically unavailable referents. On the one hand, it could be said that images resemble the real to the extent that the distinction between the two would be pointless. From the other perspective, however, the disparity between the two is irreconcilable because images made known the physical unavailability of their originals.

Image discourse engendered and envisioned such two camps whether it took place within indigenous Chinese contexts or Buddhist internal contemplations. The conflicting positions coexisted inside each tradition. When Buddhist images came to be the point of interreligious contention, however, these internally bifurcated perspectives became realigned. This time Buddhist images divided Chinese learned circles into two, and each

side came to form a clear external stance vis-à-vis the other side. The following three chapters will explore image discourse in this interreligious setting along the fault line that Buddhist images created.

Chapter Three
THE IMAGE AS A SURROGATE FOR THE BUDDHA

In the fourth and fifth centuries, two features of the Buddhist religion riveted literati circles. The first was the extensive use of images as the focus of devotional actions and ritual activities—prostration, circumambulation, invocation, ordination, and repentance, to name a few; the second was the foreign origin of the religion. The currency of the term "teachings of images" (*xiangjiao* 像教), as it is applied to Buddhism, attests to the former feature. This term, which occasionally carries derogatory undertones, originated in the Buddhist technical term "Semblance Law" (*xiangfa* 像法), which refers to the second phase of the degeneration of Buddhist teachings after the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*.[133] However, by the early fifth century, both Buddhist and anti-Buddhist writers associated this term with the cultic use of Buddhist images.[134] Simultaneously, advocates of indigenous teachings were intimidated because the imported religion had been gaining much traction among the Chinese people. Claiming superiority over Buddhism, for instance, Daoist proponents circulated the story that Laozi went westward to found Buddhism in order to convert or tame barbarians (*Laozi huahu lun* 老子化胡論).[135] Having originated in the legend that Laozi went missing after having allowed a gatekeeper at the western frontier to transcribe the *Book of the Way and Virtue*, this

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[133] Sharf (2001), 203, n. 11; Greene, "Religion of Images?," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (forthcoming).

[134] I discuss one of the earliest recorded cases of this association in Chapter Five, pp. 140-50.

[135] To list only a few of abundant scholarship, see WANG Weicheng 王維誠, "Laozi huahu shuo kaozheng 老子化胡說考證," *Guoxue jikan* 國學季刊 4, no. 2 (1934): 1-99; Zürcher (2007), 290-307; KAMATA, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi*, vol. 1 (1982), 294-304; Anna K. Seidel and Michel Strickmann, "Taoism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 28 (1994), 394-95; Kohn (1995), 11-14; Gil Raz, "'Conversion of the Barbarians' [Huahu 化胡] Discourse as Proto Han Nationalism," *The Medieval History Journal* 17, no. 2 (2014): 255-94.

conversion story developed into the Sinocentric, propagandistic notion that the Buddha was none other than Laozi, who willingly related his teachings in order to meet the inferior capacity of non-Chinese people.[136]

Around the late fifth century, anti-Buddhist polemics began to associate the foreign origin of Buddhism with the use of cultic images. For instance, the *Essay of the Three Things Destroyed [by Buddhism]* (*Sanpo lun* 三破論), attributed to the Daoist Master Zhang Rong 張融 (444–497),[137] notes in passing, "as the barbarians did not believe the void or *xuwu* 虛無, Laozi crossed the Chinese frontier, and thereafter founded the teaching of images in bodily form (*xingxiang zhi jiao* 形像之教) to convert them (胡人…不信虛無，老子入關，故作形像之教化之)."[138] Here, the essay construes the use of images as inferior to the Daoist concept of the void or formless truth: the non-Chinese people require something tangible to believe in because they are otherwise incapable of understanding the profundity of Daoist teachings. The author does not elucidate the

[136] For ethnocentric reading of the criticisms against Buddhism, see Zürcher (2007), 264-80. Modern scholars have often framed the criticisms of Buddhism for its foreign origin as ethnocentric or nationalistic sentiments rooted in Han Chinese "cultural superiority" and fundamental differences of "races." Kohn (1995), 4-5; Abramson (2007), 52-82.

[137] For a brief explanation about the context in which the essay was written, see Ch'en (1952): 172-73. Ch'en believes that it was probably composed in the Nan Qi (479–502). While the whole essay does not survive, its partial citations or summaries are preserved in the *Hongming ji* (see below, fn. 138). For biographical information of Zhang Rong, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, *Part Four* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2171-73.

[138] The phrase I translate here is cited by the pro-Buddhist literati Liu Xie 劉勰 (465–522) in his *Essay of Extinguishing Doubts* (*Miehuo lun* 滅惑論), T 2102, 52: 50c20-22. This phrase also appears in Sengshun's 僧順 (fl. late fifth century) "Responses to the *Essay of the Three Things Destroyed [by Buddhism]* by a Daoist adept named Zhang Rong (*Da daoshi jiacheng Zhang Rong Sanpo lun* 答道士假稱張融三破論)," T 2102, 52: 52b17-18: "胡人不信虛無，老子入關，故作形像之化也." Other translations of this passage can be found: Richard B. Mather, "Chinese and Indian Perceptions of Each Other between the First and Seventh Centuries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 1 (1992): 4; Choi (2012), 80; Greene (forthcoming).

contexts of this provocative assertion. This reticence suggests that the devotional use of images routinely served as a pretext for disparaging Buddhism for its non-Chinese origin, to such a degree that further explanation was unnecessary.

This chapter seeks to reveal the set of presuppositions that conditioned such an anti-Buddhist association of cultic images with foreignness or *non-Chineseness*. The chapter examines how the detractors of Buddhism characterized Buddhist images as alien to Chinese ritual culture and how Buddhist proponents rose to such criticisms. In this chapter, I argue that anti-Buddhists did not find the practice of using cultic images itself "non-Chinese," rather the Buddha—the subject of Buddhist images and object of Buddhist devotion via images. Buddhist apologetic strategies thus centered on neutralizing the negative undertone of foreignness and extolling the Buddha as a founder of universal teachings.

Precipitated by Buddhist images, this strand of interreligious contention was predicated on the understanding that Buddhist images were the means of honoring the Buddha. Despite their conflicting stances, both sides shared the tacit premise that Buddhist images, as the focus of devotional practices, were substituting for the Buddha. On the surface, the debates concerned the worthiness of the Buddha, that is, whether the Buddha deserved the devotion, which was mediated by his material representations, of Chinese devotees. The conceptual framework that underlies this point of contention was the ideal of ancestral veneration. For Chinese intellectuals who participated in the interreligious debates, ancestral veneration as a conceptual model established the norms of cultic devotion, determining the legitimate relationship between devotees and their object of devotion on the basis of kinship between deceased ancestors and their living

descendants.[139] The model of ancestral veneration further delimited the scope of ritual efficacy. While devotees expected deities to bestow boons or rewards, the kinship model restricted the roster of rightful beneficiaries to the lineal descendants from an ancestral god. As will be discussed in the following pages, this logic of ancestral veneration dictated perspectives on Buddhist images for both Buddhist proponents and anti-Buddhist critics.

The first part of this chapter investigates how the norms of ancestral veneration led the detractors of Buddhism to deny the worthiness of the Buddha to be venerated through his images. The second part focuses on the way Buddhist apologists used the same conceptual framework to explain the reason Buddhist Chinese venerated the Buddha by material means. Finally, the last part examines rhetorical moves Buddhist apologists made to deal with the issue that the Buddha was not Chinese.

Serving the Barbarian Ghost

The debates in question proceeded upon a preconception about the exclusionary effects of ancestral veneration. That is, if a devotee worshipped a deity whose efficacy was supposed to benefit others, such misdirected devotion would have unfavorable consequences for the devotee. Accordingly, venerating the "correct" deity so that the rewards of devotional acts would fall squarely on the rightful devotees was deemed imperative. This suggests the critics of Buddhism censured the devotional use of images

[139] Keith N. Knapp, "Borrowing Legitimacy from the Dead: The Confucianization of Ancestral Worship," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 143-92; K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Asia Center, 2011). Brashier explores how ancestral veneration as an idea system or a discursive model worked in early China.

as barbarian not simply because the imported religion promoted it but rather because they feared that the effects of making offerings to a foreign deity might assist non-Chinese clans who could menace the Chinese state.[140] In other words, the anti-Buddhist critics did not oppose the use of images itself but rather the devotion to the foreign god for xenophobic reasons.[141] At first glance, this criticism may not seem concerned with Buddhist images. The criticism, however, was preconditioned on the assumption that Buddhist images are substituted for the Buddha as the recipient of devotion. Instigated by the devotional use of Buddhist images, the criticism thus came to problematize the legitimacy of the Buddha.

One of the earliest recorded debates testifies that Buddhist images triggered apprehension about the Buddha's foreign origin.[142] The debate occurred at the court of the Jin emperor Cheng 晉成帝 (Sima Yan 司馬衍, b. 321; r. 325–342), when Sima Hong 司馬紘, Prince of Pengcheng 彭城王 (d. 342), proposed to host a poetry contest to celebrate the hall that housed the image of the Buddha, which was painted by the previous emperor, Ming 晉明帝 (Sima Shao 司馬紹, b. 299; r. 323–325). His reason was straightforward: both the painting and the hall had survived intact throughout the turmoil of Wang Dun's 王敦 (266–324) attempted usurpation in 324, and their preservation was

[140] For the historical background of the anxiety about foreign invasions, see Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 127-58.

[141] For early Chinese resistance to Buddhism based on ethnocentric superiority, see Zürcher (2007), 264-80. On the rhetoric of cultural superiority over foreign ethnicities in early Chinese history, see Erica F. Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE-50 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 115-40.

[142] Ch'en (1952): 169; Zürcher (2007), 105.

an auspicious sign of the dynasty's very survival.[143] Responding to this proposal, Cai Mo 蔡謨 (281–356), the court advisor, at first attributed the preservation of the image to divine favor, as did the prince. Yet Cai soon refused to associate its survival with the dynasty's good fortune because the Buddha portrayed in the painting was a "barbarian" (*yi* 夷).[144] Eventually, he denounced the prince's intention as a dubious attempt to overturn the regime because the celebration of the Buddha's portrait would pose a threat to the state.

From this dispute between Cai Mo and Sima Hong,[145] one can see the rationale behind the xenophobic disparagement of Buddhist images: while the very survival of the dynasty exhibits propitious signs from the Buddha, his auspices would not be of service to the Chinese dynasty because he is not its tutelary ancestral deity. Although this reasoning draws precisely on the premise that benevolent effects are granted exclusively

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[143] "Suzu 肅祖 (temple name of Emperor Ming), favoring the Buddha's way, painted an image [of the Buddha] in person in the Hall of Pleasure in Wisdom (*Lexian tang* 樂賢堂). While passing through the turmoil of invasions, the hall still survives (以肅祖好佛道。手畫形像於樂賢堂。經歷寇難而堂猶存)." T 2103, 52: 126c8-9.

[144] "What is called [the teaching of] the Buddha is the custom of barbarians, not the system of classics and canons. The previous emperor fathomed both heaven and earth, and had many talents and skills. To idle his time away at that moment, he just happened to paint that image. As to his liking for the Buddha's way, I have not heard about it. While the raiders rushed in and the imperial capital fell, this hall alone remained intact. This is truly a sign of numinous spirits protecting the throne, but not the manifestation of the flourishing virtue of the Great Jin nor the first priority [worthy] of songs and praises. [As] the people and retinues witness things and associate them with meanings, it is acceptable to compose rhapsodies and encomia in private. Now [Sima Hong] wants to have the emperor issue a decree to have official historians claim that the previous emperor had fondness of the Buddha, and then compose praises of the image for the barbarians. Therefore, I have doubts about the righteousness [of his intention] (佛者，夷狄之俗，非經典之制。先帝量同天地，多才多藝，聊因臨時而畫此象，至於雅好佛道，所未承聞也。盜賊奔突，王都隳敗，而此堂塊然獨存，斯誠神靈保祚之徵，然未是大晉盛德之形容，歌頌之所先也。人臣覩物興義，私作賦頌可也。今欲發王命，敕史官，上稱先帝好佛之志，下為夷狄作一象之頌，於義有疑焉)." *Jinshu* 晉書, 77: 2035. For the shorter summary, see T 2103, 52: 126c10-14.

[145] This episode is also mentioned in following works: Ch'en (1952): 169; Soper (1959), 35; Zürcher (2007), 105-6. On Wang Dun's patronage of Buddhism, see Zürcher (2007): 97-100.

by the ancestral deity of the dynasty, the conclusion of this premise remains puzzling: how would tributes to the Buddha image work in opposition to the interests of the Chinese state when the devotees were, in fact, Chinese?

A clue can be found in an anti-Buddhist criticism penned by Xun Ji 荀濟 (d. 547), an outspoken critic of the most famous and ardent Buddhist patron, Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, b. 464; r. 502–549).[146] In his memorial "Discussing the Buddha's Teachings (*Lun fojiao biao* 論佛教表)," submitted to the court around 522 and summarized and partially quoted in Daoxuan's 644 *Expanded Propagation and Illumination*, Xun argues that devotion to Buddhist images would lead to negligence in the observance of ancestral sacrifices, thus resulting in misgovernment.[147]

> The books by the three sovereigns and the five emperors are the best for the imperial ruler. The four [moral] standards and the six [social] relationships are the all-time norms. After Emperor Wu of Han offered sacrifices to the golden man (*jinren* 金人), the Yellow Xin was founded. After Emperors Huan and Ling of Han offered sacrifices to [images of] the Buddha (*futu* 浮圖), the eunuchs stood up to wield power. Since then, the Three Kingdoms confronted one another. Due to this, the Five Barbarians have incessantly swallowed up [the Middle Kingdom]. […] [Your Majesty] has not officiated at seasonal imperial sacrifices in person, [but] deceived and insulted the state ancestor shrine [by using] dried meat made of bamboo and sacrificial animals made of flour (i.e., vegetarian offerings). This [manner of sacrificial performance] defies the dignity of the yellow (imperial) chariot, but plays the act of a bluish (tonsured) head. Every morning and evening, [Your Majesty] venerates the barbarian ghost of wicked magic, bends down to make offerings to the bald thieves of greed and lewdness (Buddhist monastics),

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[146] As a few representative works on Liang Wudi, see MORI Mikisaburō 森三樹三郎, *Ryō no Butei: Bukkyō ōchō no higeki* 梁の武帝: 仏教王朝の悲劇 (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1956); ZHOU Yiliang 周一良, "Lun Liang Wudi ji qi shidai 論梁武帝及其時代," in *Zhonghua xueshu lunwen ji: Zhonghua shuju chengli qishi zhounian jinian* 中華學術論文集: 中華書局成立七十周年紀念 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 123-54; Andreas E. Janousch, "The Reform of Imperial Ritual during the Reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–549)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1998); Tom De Rauw, "Beyond Buddhist Apology: The Political Use of Buddhism by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (r. 502-549)" (Ph.D. diss., Ghent University, 2008); Mark Strange, "Representations of Liang Emperor Wu as a Buddhist Ruler in Sixth- and Seventh-century Texts," *Asia Major* 24, no. 2 (2011): 53-112.

[147] T 2103, 52: 128c18-20.

> indulges in belief in the obnoxious barbarian, and curries favor with him by sacrificing with excessive rites. I fear that it is not intelligence and integrity that can assist Your Majesty with bliss.
>
> 以三墳五典帝皇之稱首。四維六紀終古之規模。及漢武祀金人。黃新以建國。桓靈祀浮圖。閹豎以控權。三國由茲鼎峙。五湖仍其荐食。[148] […] 歲時禘祫未嘗親享。竹脯麪牲凌誣宗廟。違黃屋之尊。就蒼頭之役。朝夕敬妖怪之胡鬼。曲躬供貪婬之賊禿。耽信邪胡諂祭淫祀。恐非聰明正直而可以福祐陛下者也[149]

Beginning by associating devotion to Buddha images (*jinren* 金人 and *futu* 浮圖) with the demise of the Han dynasty, Xun's memorial accuses the emperor of dereliction of duty as an officiant of sacrifices for imperial ancestors. This exemplifies the anti-Buddhist view that ancestral veneration and Buddhist devotion—at least those centered around images—would conflict. The latter would automatically displace the former, Xun argued, leading the government into a helpless state.

Together with the case of Cai Mo, Xun's memorial showcases the reason the anti-Buddhist critics considered devotion to Buddhist images to be deleterious to Chinese states. From their perspective, Buddhist devotional practices seemed to prevent Chinese devotees from fulfilling their obligation of performing ancestral sacrifices. The result of such neglect would be even graver when the devotee was a ruler. Cai questioned Sima Hong's political intention based on this dichotomy dividing "our" ancestors from "their" ancestors. Xun used the same framework to blame the emperor's devotion to Buddhism. Both Cai and Xun surmised that the efficacy of ancestral veneration would be successful for one side alone.

This claim that Buddhist images would be beneficial for barbarians and detrimental to the Chinese is based on two assumptions. One is the functional

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[148] T 2103, 52: 128c20-23.

[149] T 2103, 52: 129a8-12.

equivalence between the Buddha and his images. In his memorial, Xun, characterizing the Buddha as a wicked foreign god, explicitly associated devotion to Buddha images with the fall of Chinese dynasties. That being said, when targeting the emperor's commitment to Buddhism, he singled out the Buddha, rather than his images, as the emperor's center of devotion. As depicted in the memorial, however, the emperor's devotional actions, such as prostrating himself, presenting gifts, and performing sacrifices, presume that certain physical objects receive material or immaterial offerings.[150] In addition, Buddhist ritual procedures usually required the installation of Buddha images as surrogates for the Buddha.[151] Given all these circumstances, one could reasonably conjecture that the emperor worshipped the Buddha by means of material representations.

This practical equation of Buddhist images with the Buddha also led to the anti-Buddhist conception that Buddhist devotional practices would be incompatible with Chinese ritual culture. Considering the emperor's devotional actions towards material representations of the Buddha as his negligence of ritual duty, Xun implied the impossibility of venerating both the Buddha and the Chinese ancestors on equal terms. The model of ancestral veneration, by definition, sanctions devotional activities only

[150] Reinders (2015), 42-47.

[151] For discussions on a variety of practices using an image as a ritual surrogate for the Buddha, see, for instance, Hureau (2010), *passim*; Yamabe (2005), 18-19; Wendi L. Adamek, "Merit-Cultivation Practices and Image Making in the Northern Dynasties," in *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University*, ed. Leopold Swergold and Eileen Hsiang-ling Hsu (New York: Miriam and ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2008), 29-30. For more information on this scholarship, see above, pp. 3-4, fn. 8.

within the familial lineage. The Buddhist use of cultic images, therefore, automatically meant a violation of Chinese ritual standards.

Anti-Buddhist rhetoric placed the Buddha at the antipode of deceased ancestors. This is evidenced by Xun's choice of the word to address the Buddha, "barbarian ghost" (*hugui* 胡鬼). Commonly translated as "ghost," *gui* 鬼 refers to malicious spirits of the dead who cannot receive sacrifices.[152] Here, the notion of the ghost works in opposition to that of *shen* 神. Rendered as "divinity" or "god," among other things, the word routinely refers to spirits of deceased ancestors or tutelary deities.[153] In a discussion on Chinese supernatural beings, the notions of ghost and god make relative categories, often constituting the two faces of a Janus in that "one man's ancestor is another man's ghost."[154] This relative conceptualization of ghost and ancestor, combined with the belief in ritual efficacy, explains how one transcendental being can be both benevolent and malevolent. For devotees to reap the benefits of their cultic devotion, the relationship between devotees and their objects of worship should remain exclusively within the

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[152] For in-depth discussion of the usage of the term, see Mu-chou Poo, "The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion," in *Religion and Chinese Society*, vol. 1, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 173-91.

[153] The word *shen* 神 carries a wider range of senses than simply meaning an "ancestral god." See Harold D. Roth, "The Concept of *Shen* in Early Taoism: A Ghost in the Machinery?" in *Sagehood and Systematization of Thought in the Late Warring State and Early Han*, ed. Kidder Smith, Jr. (Brunswick: Bowdoin College, 1990), 11-32; Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), 157-65; Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Asia Center, 2002); Hong Yue Guo, "Rebirth and Karmic Retribution in Fifth-century China: A Study of the Teachings of the Buddhist Monk Lu Shan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2007), 77-94.

[154] Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 146. For a discussion on the diverse Chinese concepts of spirits and divinities, see Fu-shih Lin, "Chinese Shamans and Shamanism in the Chiang-nan Area during the Six Dynasties Period (3rd-6th Century A.D.)" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1994), 122-51.

family. As one's familial lineage, by definition, cannot be shared by other individuals, the veneration of an ancestral god belonging to a different family group automatically leads to the abandonment of one's own.[155] This basic logic of Chinese ancestral veneration underlies the anti-Buddhist claim that Emperor Wu's devotion to the Buddha led him to neglect his own ancestors, eliciting dire consequences for the dynasty. The detractors construed the Buddha as the ancestral deity of non-Chinese people, which, seen from the Chinese perspective of ancestral veneration, could only be a ghost malignly effecting the Chinese.

Another anti-Buddhist pejorative of the Buddha, the "barbarian god" (*hushen* 胡神), also implies the same relativity of ghost and ancestor. As seen in Fu Yi's 621 memorial presented at the outset of the dissertation, this appellation epitomizes the idea that the Buddha is the ancestral or tutelary god of non-Chinese ethnic groups. Fu applied this framework of ancestral veneration to the cultic use of Buddhist images in the extreme. Pushing the functional equivalence between the Buddha and his images further, Fu asserted that Buddha images and Buddhist devotees shared a substantial root.

> In the Western Regions, barbarian people are born from mud, thereby making it easy for them to serve stūpas and images made of clay tiles. Now they have hairy bodies, human faces, but bestial minds. All the four colors of monks, owls, donkeys, and mules are evil breeds of avaricious traitors.[156]
> onkeys, and mules are evil breeds of avaricious traitors.[156]
> 在西域胡人因泥而生，是以便事泥瓦塔像，今猶毛臊，人面而獸心，道人土梟驢騾

[155] The idea that deceased ancestors would aid descendants upon proper performance of sacrifices or otherwise could be harmful is also found in the Brahmanical tradition. See John C. Holt, "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living: Merit Transfer in the Early Buddhist Tradition," *Numen* 28, fasc. 1 (1981): 3-7.

[156] Abramson translated the same passage: "In the Western Regions barbarians [*hu*] are born out of mud. Therefore they naturally worship pagodas and statues made from mud and tile. Today they still have the stench of fur and the faces of men but the hearts of beasts. The four categories of monks, owls, donkeys, and mules are the evil spawn of greed and contrariness." Abramson (2007), 59.

四色，皆是貪逆之惡種[157]

In this passage, the Sinocentric cliché of calling non-Chinese people "barbarians" escalates into an invective, equating foreigners with animals and rebels.[158] Framing the relationship between Buddhist devotees and Buddha images into a kinship, Fu claims that both originated from an identical substance, a lowly one—mud or clay (*ni* 泥). In other words, he seeks the *raison d'être* of Buddhist images in the common origin of devotees and their object of devotion. In this way, Fu's anti-Buddhist polemic draws on the notion that the subject and object of worship constitute a patrilineal kinship. This rhetorical move exemplifies that the presuppositions of ancestral veneration informed the criticism of Buddhist images: *you are what you worship*.

The anti-Buddhist critics, Cai Mo, Xun Ji, and Fu Yi, extrapolated the model of ancestral veneration to Buddhist devotional practices. On the one hand, the Buddha, the recipient of Buddhist devotion, was deemed equivalent to the ancestral or tutelary deity of non-Chinese, or "barbarian," people. On the other hand, Buddhist images were automatically understood to be a substitute for the Buddha because they served as the physical focus of Buddhist devotional practices. This presupposed, semiotic relationship between the Buddha and his images led anti-Buddhists to call Buddhist devotees derelict

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[157] *Quan Tang wen*, 1346.

[158] On the Chinese discourse of the non-Chinese bestiality, see Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-imperial Origins of the 'Sino-barbarian' Dichotomy," in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59-102. For studies on Chinese identity formation and cultural stereotyping, see, for example, Terry Kleeman, "Ethnic Identity and Daoist Identity in Traditional China," in *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual*, ed. Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 23-38; Abramson (2007), 38-51; Brindley (2015), 141-71. For a discussion on the attribution of non-human features to followers of different religions, see Elaine H. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, and Heretics* (New York: Random House, 1995).

in their duty of offering sacrifices to their own ancestors.

Buddhist proponents saw through these multilayered presuppositions underneath the criticism of Buddhist images. After all, Buddhist apologists were also Chinese intellectuals and tapped into the same repository of linguistic and cultural resources as their opponents. Falin (572–640), in the vanguard against Fu Yi, captured the essence of the criticism as follows:

> The barbarians develop fully the sublimity of the decorative carving of the spirit of the corpse. As to gods, sacrifice should not be offered if they are not kin. As to all beings, the memorial ceremony should not be performed if they are not for ancestors. [The Buddhists] do not venerate their parents, but venerate others.
>
> 戎狄屍靈翻盡雕莊之妙。且神不享非其族。物不祀非其先。不敬其親而敬他人[159]

The fact that a Buddhist apologist wrote this passage suggests the significance of the image issues in defending the Buddhist religion. Anti-Buddhist critics specifically attacked the devotional use of Buddhist images to defame the Buddha and his followers together. To counter this criticism, Buddhist proponents also drew on the framework of ancestral veneration. The next section focuses on how the Buddhists assigned ancestral status to the Buddha.

To Honor the Patriarch

To put it briefly, anti-Buddhist critics considered Buddhist images to indicate that Chinese Buddhists cherished the "barbarian ghost," which was antithetical to their own ancestors. Buddhist apologists, unsurprisingly, confronted this derogatory conception of the Buddha with vehement rejoinder. The Buddhists responded in two directions. One

[159] Falin 法琳, *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論, T 2110, 52: 532c29-a1. This passage is also cited in T 2103, 52: 183b25-27.

was to apply the kinship model to the relationship between the Buddha and his Chinese followers; the other was to neutralize the pejorative undertone of the "barbarian" label.

Responses to Fu Yi's memorial exemplify the first tactic. Li Shizheng 李師政 (fl. seventh century), a self-identified lay disciple of Falin, was particularly keen on repudiating the claim that Buddhist images and devotees shared the bloodline. A passage from his *Essay on Inner Virtue* (*Neide lun* 内德論)[160] reveals that Li not only attempted to refute Fu's assertion but also presented a Buddhist formulation about the role of images.

Li's counterargument proceeded in four steps. First, he enumerated various materials used to produce Buddhist images, such as metal, wood, pigment, and silk, in addition to the clay tiles that Fu mentioned.[161] His reasoning was that because Buddhist images are made of various substances, one cannot say the devotees and their cultic images originated only from mud. This first point prepared for the next one, with which Li tried to falsify Fu's claim in its entirety.

In the second step, Li applied Fu's anti-Buddhist reasoning to the indigenous practice of ancestral sacrifice. He writes, "Ancestral tablets inside the temples of the Middle Kingdom are made of wood. [If one follows Fu's logic] that would mean

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[160] Jin Tao 金濤, "The Confucian Reading of Buddhist Teaching: Two Truths, Li Shizheng and the Intellectual Milieu of Buddhism in the Early Tang," *Xuanzang foxue yanjiu* 玄奘佛學研究 19 (2013): 113-46. His pro-Buddhist essay comprises a series of simulated conversations between an anti-Buddhist questioner named as the "Judicious Scholar (*Bianchong shusheng* 辯聰書生)" and a pro-Buddhist respondent called the "Gentleman of Loyal Righteousness (*Zhongzheng junzi* 忠正君子)." Although his biographical information is not much known, his only surviving work *Neide lun* 内德論 is widely cited in Buddhist encyclopedias such as *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 (T 2036) and *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T 2122).

[161] "As regards making the numinous image to replicate the venerable form, [there are] many ways to use materials, not simply clay tiles. [The images are] either carved or cast. That is, iron, wood, gold, and copper are used. [They are] painted or embroidered in multiple colors on silk (夫崇立靈像摸寫尊形。所用多塗。非獨泥瓦。或彫或鑄。則以鐵木金銅。圖之繡之。亦在丹青縑素)." T 2103, 52: 190b22-24.

gentlemen who observe the ritual codes all grew out of trees (中國之廟以木爲主，則謂制禮君子皆從木而育耶).”[162] By exercising *reductio ad absurdum*, Li exposes the absurdity of his claim that Buddhist devotees and images share a material origin.

However, if the counterargument solely focused on discrediting the opponent, that would evade the point of the debate, leaving unexplained the reason for using images as the devotional focus. To bolster the Buddhist position, the Buddhists' own case ought to be presented. Therefore, in the third step, Li offered an alternative explanation:

> Parents should not be forgotten; therefore the imperial lineage shrine is constructed. The Buddha should not be forgotten; therefore his images in bodily form are erected.
>
> 親不可忘。故爲之宗廟。佛不可忘。故立其形像[163]

By likening parents to the Buddha, Li explains that Buddhist images operate in the same way as the imperial lineage shrine: they allow Buddhists to remember the Buddha just as the imperial shrine enables rulers, as children, to memorialize their forefathers. This comparison employs the same conceptual framework used by Fu Yi and other anti-Buddhist critics, which held that devotees and their objects of devotion constitute a relationship equivalent to patrilineal kinship between ancestors and descendants. However, unlike his opponent, Li does not conflate the intended objects of devotion (ancestors and the Buddha) and the material means used for devotion to them (shrines and images). Instead, by distinguishing the medium from the entity represented by the medium, he asserts that the devotional use of Buddhist images amounts to ancestral veneration in terms of ritual function rather than kinship between devotees and their

[162] T 2103, 52: 190b25-26.

[163] T 2103, 52: 190b26-27.

objects of worship. Fu, at least in his polemical formulation, related the recipient of devotion to devotees by flesh and blood, whereas Li presented the founder of teachings as tantamount to the ancestor. In either case, the model of ancestral veneration shaped both anti-Buddhist and pro-Buddhist positions.

In the final step, Li Shizheng reaffirmed the point made in the previous step. Buddhist images, from the Buddhist perspective, acted as a medium for honoring the Buddha's wisdom and virtue in his absence.

> [Erecting the Buddha's images] expresses the heart of immeasurable gratefulness. [It] extends to venerate [the Buddha] as if he were present. This is to appreciate the sagacious and to admire the virtuous.
>
> 以表罔極之心。用申如在之敬。欽聖仰德[164]

Here the expression "as if [the Buddha] were present (*ruzai* 如在)" is noteworthy. It recalls the phrase "sacrifice [to ancestors] as living; sacrifice to spirits as living (祭如在, 祭神如神在)" from the *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu* 論語).[165] In order to counter the anti-Buddhist criticism, Li turned to language outside of the Buddhist tradition. His allusion to the *Analects* may give the impression that he sought recourse to Confucian discourse on ritual. It may also suggest that he endeavored to locate Buddhist cultic images in a ritual system that was comprehensible to a broader audience. It would include those who were reluctant to openly endorse Buddhism but were familiar with the practice

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[164] T 2103, 52: 190b27-28.

[165] This phrase is from the chapter of "Ba Yi 八佾." The translation is from Thomas Wilson, "A Confucian Theory of Gods and the Rites to Venerate Them," paper presented at the Annual Conference of Association for Asian Studies in Atlanta, April 4, 2008. For the significance of this particular expression in Chinese theories of ritual, see Thomas A. Wilson, "Spirits and the Soul in Confucian Ritual Discourse," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 42, no. 2 (2014): 185-212. Reading of this phrase is subject to scholarly discussion. Some scholars interpret it as reference to the presence of ancestral spirits during the performance of sacrifices.

of performing memorial services for deceased ancestors or teachers. Anyone with a level of literacy that allowed them to read Li's writings would have instantly grasped his reference to the *Analects*. These possibilities indicate that the language of ancestral veneration supplied the vocabulary and conceptual instruments for a comparative understanding of devotional practices across different traditions.

Against the criticism that Buddhist images were to serve a foreign ancestor, the Buddhist apologists used the same language to explain the use of Buddhist images as a sincere act of honoring a great master who was no longer with his followers. In the defensive account of Buddhist images, in other words, venerating a teacher amounts to making offerings to one's ancestor. Li's homology extends the scope of patrilineal kinship to the relationship between a teacher and the teacher's students. By the early seventh century, Chinese political theories commonly explained social hierarchy and norms in familial terms, which likened social superiors to fathers. In this light, Li's defense of Buddhist images conformed to the paradigm of ancestral veneration, defining the Buddha as a patriarch.

Prior to Fu Yi's criticism, Buddhist proponents had already explained Buddhist images in the context of commemoration. A pithy phrase, "the concealed traces [of the Buddha] by the twin trees (a metonym for *nirvāṇa*) in turn shall be resuscitated by images in bodily form (雙樹晦跡，形像代興),"[166] from the pro-Buddhist *Extinguishing Doubts* (*Miehuo lun* 滅惑論) by Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–522),[167] refers to the Buddhist

[166] T 2102, 52: 50c24.

[167] On Liu Xie, Victor H. Mair, "*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 and Buddhism," in *A Life Journey to the East: Sinological Studies in Memory of Giuliano Bertuccioli (1923–2001)*, ed. Antonino Forte and Federico Masini (Kyoto: Scuola Italiana di Studi sull' Asia Orientale, 2002), 45-76; Antje Richter, "Empty Dreams and Other Omissions: Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* Preface," *Asia Major*

canonical account that ascribes the initial use of Buddhist images to the physical demise or *nirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni. This funerary association mirrors the underpinnings of ancestral veneration, according to which the recipients of sacrifice are deceased humans. Ancestor veneration, at its core, is the memorial service.[168]

However, in order to validate the Buddhist use of cultic images as being part of a legitimate memorial service for the Buddha, Buddhist proponents were still required to explain the reason the Buddha deserved to be remembered. At this moment, the defense of Buddhist images shifted to a defense of the Buddha, just as the criticism of Buddhist images became criticism of the Buddha. The strand of criticism that held that Buddhist images would entail the negligence of the Chinese people's own ancestral veneration was still sustained by the fact that the Buddha was not Chinese. That fact itself was undeniable, so the Buddhists rerouted the contention to an interpretable issue—the Buddha's virtues. The Buddhist defense of images, therefore, came to involve a redefinition of the Buddha as a being worthy of veneration by Chinese devotees, despite his foreign origin.

In justifying the use of cultic images, the Buddhists strove to assign ancestral status to the Buddha, not within a barbarian clan, but in a lineage of great teachings. A

25, no. 1 (2012): 84-86. As for more studies on Liu Xie, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, *Part One* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 572-79.

[168] For discussions on the role of remembrance in the formation of a community, see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 84-119; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-33. Campany also discusses, in passing, Buddhist devotional practices in terms of funerary practices. Campany (1995), 5, 32-33. On the significance of ancestral memorial services in Chinese religious practices, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 20-30.

lesser-known Buddhist apologist named Wang Mingguang 王明廣 (fl. late sixth century) made effective use of this strategy. Introducing himself as a student of the famous Fotucheng's 佛圖澄 (ca. 232–348) anonymous disciple, he stood up to Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (fl. 566–567), who allegedly masterminded the anti-Buddhist campaign at the court of Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou 北周武帝 (Yuwen Yong 宇文邕, b. 543; r. 560–578).[169] Wang's memorial touched on issues of Buddhist images in various places. In one of them, he explicitly called the Buddha "father" and extolled his greatness. Emphasizing the commonalities between Buddhist devotion and Chinese indigenous classical teachings, Wang explains that images and stūpas—material representations of the Buddha—are the best means for Buddhist followers to continue to remember the Buddha after his *parinirvāṇa*.

> The Buddha was the compassionate father (*cifu* 慈父) who tamed heaven and humans. From the beginning throughout the middle till the end, [he] cherished, benefited, and comforted all sentient beings. [When he] concealed his inner core (*shen* 神) in the twin trees, the earth trembled in the ten directions. His hair was given to the Four Heavenly Beings and his body was divided among the eight kingdoms. The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* says, "Making images and stūpas of the Buddha is superlative. [If one] constantly gives rise to a joyous state of mind [in order to make images and stūpas], [he will] be immediately born in the Imperturbable Land." [We] know well that matters of supporting fathers and serving teachers originated in the classics.
>
> 佛爲慈父調御天人。初中後善利安一切。自潛神雙樹地動十方。髮授四天驅分八國。涅槃經云。造像若佛塔。猶如大拇指。常生歡喜心。則生不動國。明知資父事師自關古典[170]

[169] On Wei Yuansong's anti-Buddhist campaigns, YU Jiaxi 余嘉錫, "Beizhou huifo zhumouzhe Wei Yuansong 北周毀佛主謀者衛元嵩," *Furen xuezhi* 輔仁學誌 2, no. 2 (1931): 527-51; TSUKAMOTO Zenryū 塚本善隆, "Hokushū no haibutsu ni tsuite 北周の廢佛に就いて," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 16 (1948): 29-101; Ch'en (1964), 187-94; April D. Hughes, "Waiting for Darkness: Judgment, Salvation, and Apocalyptic Eschatology in Medieval China" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2014), 190-92; SHI Longdu, "Buddhism and the State in Medieval China: Case Studies of Three Persecutions of Buddhism, 444-846" (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2016), 117-19.

[170] T 2103, 52: 157c16-20.

In the above passage, the term "compassionate father" (*cifu* 慈父) merits attention. Followed by the expression of "taming" (*tiaoyu* 調御) from the "Supreme Tamer" (Ch. *tiaoyu zhangfu* 調御丈夫; Sk. *puruṣa-damya-sārathi*), one of the ten canonical epithets of the Buddha,[171] it unequivocally refers to Śākyamuni Buddha. Although the term itself has wide currency in Buddhist scriptures, its etymology is not Buddhist. It broadly appears in classical texts of pre- or non-Buddhist origins, such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Mozi* 墨子, *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shuo Yuan* 說苑), *Balanced Disquisitions* (*Lunheng* 論衡), and so forth. These sources frequently pair the word with other compounds in the same form, i.e., the combination of an adjective denoting moral quality and a noun for a social, particularly familial, role as wise ruler (*xianjun* 賢君 or *huijun* 慧君), loyal statesman (*zhongchen* 忠臣), filial child (*xiaozi* 孝子), strict mother (*yanmu* 嚴母), friendly older brother (*youxiong* 友兄), or respectful younger brother (*tidi* 悌弟). All the adjectives in the compounds describe virtues that people are expected to adhere to in playing their respective social roles. In this context, the "compassionate father" is a customary expression or metaphor for the ideal father figure. In his defense of Buddhist images, Wang Mingguang uses the idiom to argue for the Buddha's worthiness of veneration. By addressing the Buddha as "compassionate father," he reframes the Buddha from "a

[171] The ten epithets (*shihao* 十號) of the Buddha are: 1) Thus-Come One, *Rulai* 如來, *Tathāgata*; 2) Worthy of Offerings, *Yinggong* 應供, *Arhat*; 3) Correctly Enlightened, *Zhengbianzhi* 正遍知, *Samyak-saṃbuddha*; 4) Perfected in Wisdom and Action, *Mingxingzhu* 明行足, *Vidyā-carana-saṃpanna*; 5) Well-Gone, *Shanshi* 善逝, *Sugata*; 6) Knower the Secular World, *Shijianjie* 世間解, *Lokavid*; 7) Unsurpassed, *Wushangshi* 無上士, Anuttarā; 8) Supreme Tamer, *Tiaoyu zhangfu* 調御大夫, *Puruṣa-damya-sārathi*; 9) Teacher of Gods and Men, *Tianren shi* 天人師, *Śāstādevamanusyānām*; 10) World Honored One, *Shizun* 世尊, *Bhagavān*. *NBD*, 653a-b. Jan Nattier, "The Ten Epithets of the Buddha in the Translations of Zhi Qian 支謙," *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University (for the Academic Year 2002)* 6 (March 2003): 207-250.

barbarian ghost" into the ideal father figure espoused by broader Chinese classical traditions that were not exclusively aligned with certain schools or sects. This reading is also confirmed by Wang's concluding remark stating that the practice of serving fathers and teachers is what classics teach. Hence, the term "compassionate father" redefines the Buddha as the ideal and venerable father, appealing to the conceptual scheme of ancestral veneration grounded in the universal value of filial reverence for parental figures.[172]

The statement that the Buddha is the ancestor of Buddhists did not remain simply rhetorical. It was put into practice for ordained clerics by the renowned Dao'an 道安 (312–385). By instituting a unified surname *Shi* 釋, after the first character of *Shijiamuni* 釋迦牟尼—the Chinese transliteration of *Śākyamuni*, for all ordained monastic members, he implemented the concept that Chinese Buddhist disciples all belong to one family founded by Śākyamuni.[173]

Forming the Buddhist quasi-kinship lineage, the definition of the Buddha as a patriarch was not innovative. By the early seventh century when Fu Yi's memorial inflamed a series of debates with Falin and his fellows, it was already an established convention for Buddhist proponents.[174] As the anti-Buddhist critics applied the kinship

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[172] By referring Buddhist monks as *buddhaputra* (*fozi* 佛子), Indian Buddhists also assigned the parental status to the Buddha. This suggests that Chinese Buddhists consciously selected family metaphors to explain the monastic institution. The appeal to patrilineal kinship was a common way of claiming the identity and authority of a religious institution across denominations. See, for example, *Zengyi ahan jing*, T 125, 2: 658b26-c17.

[173] *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, comp. Huijiao 慧皎 (495–554), T 50: 352c29–353a3; Zürcher (2007), 281; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the* Chanyuan qinggui (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2002), 14-15; John Kieschnick, "Buddhist monasticism," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 557-58.

[174] On the expansion of the concept of filial piety to broader social relations in Han China and afterwards, see John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 175-78.

model to the relationship between the Buddha and his devotees, so did the Buddhist defenders. The anti-Buddhist interpretation built on the dichotomy of the Chinese "us" and the non-Chinese "them," whereas the pro-Buddhist defense drew on the notion of a lineage of all-embracing teachings. This interpretative difference between the two sides was not reconcilable because the detractors pointed to the fact that the Buddha was not Chinese, but the apologists resorted to the value that he deserved to receive devotion from Chinese followers. As long as a pejorative undertone accompanied the label of "foreign origin," the defense of Buddhist images remained susceptible to criticism. The Buddhist apologists, therefore, went a step further and gave a new tenor to what it meant to be foreign in Chinese society.

Extolling the Foreign Origin

The unquestionably foreign origin of Buddhism provided anti-Buddhists with a pretext for disparaging the religion. As examined above, they censured Buddhist cultic images as evidence of Chinese Buddhists' commitment to the "barbarian" god because the Buddha was a foreigner. In their rejoinder to this criticism, the Buddhists promoted the value of being aliens in China, thereby presenting the Buddha as a paragon, whose teaching could benefit Chinese states. This rhetorical tactic was executed in two directions. One was to eulogize the precedents of foreigners who were known to create benefits for Chinese states; the other was to equate the Buddha of Indian extraction with great Chinese teachers.

One of the earliest extant Buddhist apologetic essays, dating to the early fourth century, exemplifies the way Buddhist proponents praised foreigners in China. In one of the simulated catechist conversations in *Master Mou's Elucidating Doubts* (*Mouzi lihuo*

lun 牟子理惑論, hereafter *Master Mou*),[175] when the questioner asks a leading question about the reason the Buddhist teachings should be espoused despite the inferiority of non-Chinese ethnicities,[176] Master Mou, the pro-Buddhist respondent, refutes the ethnocentric assumption underneath the question. Pointing out the shortsightedness of the perspective that places China—the Middle Kingdom—at the center of the world,[177] he enumerates historical examples demonstrating that statesmen of foreign descent assisted with the governance of Chinese states, while some Chinese politicians, conversely, thwarted it.[178] By alluding to illustrious foreigners of the past, Master Mou argues that the Buddha's

[175] Keenan, *Master Mou* (1994).

[176] "The questioner said: Confucius said, 'The barbarians with a ruler are inferior to the Chinese without one." Mencius criticized Chen Xiang 陳相 for rejecting his own learning to adopt the arts of [the foreign teacher] Xu Xing 許行, saying, "I have heard of using what is Chinese to transform what is barbarian, but I have never heard of using what is barbarian to transform what is Chinese.' You, sir, at the age of twenty learned the Ways of Yao, Shun, Confucius, and the Duke of Zhou. But now you have rejected them and instead have taken up the arts of the barbarians. Is not this delusion? (問曰。孔子曰。夷狄之有君。不如諸夏之亡也。孟子譏陳相。更學許行之術曰。吾聞用夏變夷。未聞用夷變夏者也。吾子弱冠學堯舜周孔之道。而今捨之。更學夷狄之術。不已惑乎)" T 2102, 52: 3c10-14. The translation is modified from Keenan (1994), 102 and Leon Hurvitz and Tsai Heng-Ting, "The Introduction of Buddhism," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comp. Wm Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 425.

[177] "The commentary says, 'The north polar star is in the center of Heaven and to the north of man.' From this perspective one can see that the land of Han is not necessarily situated in the center of Heaven (傳曰。北辰之星。在天之中。在人之北。以此觀之。漢地未必爲天中也)." T 2102, 52: 3c21-22. T 2102, 52: 3c14-26. This is a modified translation of Keenan (1994), 103 and Hurvitz and Tsai (1999), 425.

[178] "King Yu came from the Qiang 羌 tribe in the west but was a divine sage. Gusou 瞽叟 gave birth to King Shun but was stubborn and silly. Youyu 由余 was born in the land of the northern barbarians but had the Qin 秦 rule. Uncle Xian of the Guan (Guan Shu Xian 管叔鮮) and Uncle Du of the Cai (Cai Shu Du 蔡叔度) came from the Yellow River and the Luo River (the Central Plain) but they were slanderous (禹出西羌而聖哲。瞽叟生舜而頑嚚。由余産狄國而覇秦。管蔡自河洛而流言)." T 2102, 52: 3c19-21.

teachings benefit all beings, including the Chinese, whose learning was confined to their own classical traditions alone.[179]

Although the precise historical context of the composition of the *Master Mou* is unclear,[180] the logic employed by its author showcases the Buddhist response to the discourse that disparaged Buddhism for its foreign origin.[181] Rather than avoiding the fact that the Buddha was foreign, Buddhist apologists engaged with it to promote the utility of Buddhism in China. The question raised in the dialogue with Master Mou did not directly concern Buddhist images. As examined in this chapter, however, one of the key issues that anti-Buddhists raised with regard to Buddhist images was whether or not a non-Chinese master was worthy of veneration. This anti-Buddhist suspicion shares with Master Mou's inquisitor the assumption that foreign teachings are inferior to indigenous ones. Given this commonality, Master Mou's rhetorical move to champion virtuous aliens can be viewed as an effort to elevate the Buddha's stature in China, and, by extension, adumbrates the Buddhist stance in later debates.

When the critics of Buddhist images targeted the non-Chinese origin of the Buddha, Buddhist proponents made a more compelling point than simply glorifying aliens. This time the Buddhists contended that esteemed Chinese teachers and the Buddha

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[179] "As Buddhist scriptures say, weather above or below, or at any point around, all beings containing blood belong to the Buddha. Therefore I constantly revere and study these [scriptures]. Why should I reject the Way of Yao, Shun, Confucius, and the Duke of Zhou? Gold and jade do not harm each other; and crystal and amber do not cheapen each other (佛經所説。上下周極含血之類物皆屬佛焉。是以吾復尊而學之。何爲當捨堯舜周孔之道。金玉不相傷。隨碧不相妨)." T 2102, 52: 3c23-25. This is a modified translation of Keenan (1994), 103 and Hurvitz and Tsai (1999), 425.

[180] It is the first work compiled by Sengyou in his *Hongming ji*.

[181] On the criticism of Buddhism for its foreign origin and the diverse Buddhist defensive tactics, see Zürcher (2007), 264-80.

alike were foreign. The dialogue between Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou and Jingying Huiyuan 淨影慧遠 (523–592) exhibits this strategy.[182] In the spring of 578, when announcing his plan to expand anti-Buddhist iconoclastic measures to the newly annexed territory from Northern Qi, the emperor began with the point that Buddhist teachings state that the Buddha's images do not embody the Buddha but, contradictorily and deceptively, promoted the use of images.[183] Huiyuan audaciously objected to the imperial edict to destroy Buddhist scriptures and images. Their heated exchange brought up the issue of the foreign origin of Buddhist teachings. Against the anti-Buddhist proposition that Buddhist scriptures, which promote the wasteful and deceptive Buddhist practice of using images, came from outside China and should thus be banned,[184] Huiyuan creatively relativized criteria for determining foreign origin:

> If scriptures from a foreign country cannot be accepted, then, as what Zhongni said came from the State of Lu, it should be discarded and cannot be practiced in the territories of Qin and Jin.
>
> 若以外國之經，非此用者。仲尼所説，出自魯國。秦晋之地，亦應廢而不行[185]

Facing the anti-Buddhist ruler, Huiyuan did not explicitly exalt the foreign Buddha. Instead, he drew on the multiplicity of Chinese polities. By referring to China's own historical experience of internal diversities, his riposte challenged the emperor's unspoken assumption that Confucius was Chinese and only the Buddha was foreign.

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[182] Jingying Huiyuan's biography is collected in the section for renowned exegetes in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳), T 2060, 50: 489c26-492a27. On his scholastic position on doctrinal issues, see Wendi L. Adamek, "The Impossibility of the Given: Representations of Merit and Emptiness in Medieval Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 45, no. 2 (2005): 143-50.

[183] Chapter Five discusses this edict in fuller detail. See below, pp. 150-52.

[184] T 2103, 52: 153b25-26; T 2104, 52: 374b12-13.

[185] T 2103, 52: 153b27-29; T 2104, 52: 374b14-16.

Exercising the perspective that the distinction between "indigenous" and "foreign" is not categorical, Huiyuan maintained that the Confucian teaching from the Lu state was not endogenous to the states of Jin or Qin. Given the fact that Northern Zhou was a dynasty founded by immigrants of the Xianbei 鮮卑 nomadic group from the north, Huiyuan's statement might imply that the Confucian teaching was also foreign to the Northern Zhou court. He might even be hinting at the irony that a foreign ruler was denouncing a foreign religion for its foreign origin. In any case, Huiyuan's apologetic point was clear: the foreign origin was not a sufficient reason for destroying Buddhist images and scriptures.

As seen in the case of *Master Mou*, the foreign origin of Buddhism already stirred suspicion about the utility of the religion in Chinese society, and Buddhist apologists formulated an eristic device to lessen the negative value of *non-Chineseness* in China. When Buddhist cultic images brought up this strand of anti-Buddhist criticism, however, the move became bolder, relativizing the dichotomy of the Chinese and non-Chinese. In this way, Buddhist apologists presented the Buddha, commensurate with Confucius, as an honorable patriarch of universally great teachings.

Conclusion

Despite their conflicting stances on Buddhism, the debaters in question viewed Buddhist cultic images from the common perspective based on the model of ancestral veneration. Both anti-Buddhists and pro-Buddhists interpreted the use of Buddhist images in the context of commemorating the deceased via ritual and defined the relationship between the Buddha and his followers in the kinship model. The two sides disagreed on the issue of whether the Buddha, as a foreigner, deserved to be remembered and venerated by Chinese devotees via ritual. The anti-Buddhists conceived of the

Buddha as an ancestral tutelary deity for non-Chinese people, who were often regarded as posing existential threats to Chinese regimes and were thus despised and feared as "barbarians." Therefore, they argued that devotion to the Buddha would harm Chinese states. In response, the Buddhist side applied the expanded category of ancestors to the Buddha as a founding father of great teachings on par with Chinese counterparts. The Buddhists, however, could not deny the fact that the Buddha came from outside of China. To reduce the negative connotation of being foreign in China, they turned to past examples of virtuous foreigners in China or the diversities of Chinese polities. With such rhetorical moves, the Buddhists sought to valorize the Buddha, despite his foreign origin, in accordance with Chinese socio-religious norms.

At first glance, this strand of contention may seem to have centered not so much on images as the Buddha himself.[186] In the cases under discussion, the debaters considered the semiotic relationship of Buddhist images with the Buddha as a given. Both sides readily accepted the presupposition that Buddhist images were substituted for the Buddha in a ritual setting. As explained in Chapter Two, Chinese intellectuals were familiar with the concept of commemorative images of the dead and the use of such images as ritual surrogates.[187] Likewise, as Buddhist debaters often noted, the Buddhist religion brought its cultic images with the commemorative context of honoring the Buddha after his *parinirvāṇa*. Setting the norms of legitimate ritual, ancestral veneration was also memorial service at its core. Shaped by both indigenous and Buddhist

[186] As for the inevitability to talk about images in terms of their referents, see Andrew Harrison, "What is 'Presence'?," in *The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects*, ed. Robert Maniura and Rupert Shepherd (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 161-72.

[187] Laufer (1913); Brashier (2014).

discourses, these preconceptions about the role of images as ritual surrogates prepared the debaters to instantly note the semiotic relationship between Buddhist cultic images and the Buddha. Rather than disputing the validity of that relationship, therefore, the debaters argued over the meaning of the Buddha for Chinese states. That which was foreign in Buddhist cultic images, as anti-Buddhists claimed, was not cultic images, rather the Buddha, for whom Buddhist images filled in during his physical absence.

As the commemorative role of images presupposed the object of commemoration outside images, the acceptance of the role of Buddhist images as ritual surrogates meant that the debaters, whether Buddhist or anti-Buddhist, carefully differentiated cultic images from the true recipient of veneration. The conflation of the two was a polemical move that the anti-Buddhists made to discredit Buddhists in the extreme. Suggesting that Buddhist images themselves were the object of Buddhist devotion, Fu asserted that Buddhist images and Buddhist devotees originated from the same substance. In response to this scornful rhetoric, Li Shizheng also attended to the material respect of devotional practices. Using the ancestral shrine as an example, Li underscored the necessity of material surrogates for the true object of devotion. The next chapter explores the debates that this material dimension of Buddhist devotional practices provoked.

Chapter Four
THE IMAGE AS A MORAL PROBLEM FOR THE SAṂGHA

In early sixth-century Luoyang 洛陽, the new capital of the Northern Wei 北魏 (368–534), Buddhist monasteries made a glamorous cityscape. Multistoried stūpas towered over the otherwise low, flat skyline, their gilt finials sparkling under sun and moon. The monastic precinct, marked with fluttering silk banners, was as grandiose as the imperial palace. Inside the sanctum, located at the heart of the monastic compound, a host of polychrome statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas stood on the elevated platforms; their jeweled *ūrṇā* (the wisps between the eyebrows as one of the Buddha's bodily marks) and golden haloes shone through the windows and doors. Such luminous Buddhist edifices, which created the splendor of the short-lived capital, mesmerized residents and visitors alike.

Soon after the collapse of the Northern Wei, such material representations of Buddhism were faulted for the failed governance. In his memoir on the capital during the final years of the dynasty, *Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記, ca. 547), Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之 (d. 555), a former court official, laments that the Buddhist zeal for building monasteries and fashioning images spelled doom:[188]

[188] The received records are not consistent as regards Yang Xuanzhi's official capacity at the Northern Wei court. The *Guang hongming ji* introduces him as Director of the Palace Library (*bishujian* 秘書監), whereas other sources such as *Lidai sanbao ji*; *Da tang neidian lu*; *Xu gaoseng zhuan* as Vice Commander of the Pacification Army (*fujunfu sima* 撫軍府司馬). In his other work, *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, Daoxuan, who compiled the *Guang hongming ji*, says Yang was Commandery Governor (*junshou* 郡守) of Qicheng. For the English translations of these titles, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 217 (2053 *fu-chün chiang-chün*), 452 (5713 *ssū-ma*). Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之, "Luoyang qielan ji xu 洛陽伽藍記序," *Luoyang qielan ji jiaoshi* 洛陽伽藍記校釋, ed. ZHOU Zumo 周祖謨 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987, second ed.). For Yang's critical attitude toward the Buddhist institution, see William John Francis Jenner, *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital (493–534)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 8-11.

After [Emperor Ming of Han 漢明帝 (Liu Zhuang 劉莊, b. 28 CE; r. 58–76 CE)] dreamed of [a man crowned with] the sun and shining like the full moon, images (*xiang* 像) having long eyebrows adorned the Gate of Sun (*yangmen* 陽門),[189] and figures (*xing* 形) having jet-black hair were painted in the Terrace of Night (*yetai* 夜臺).[190] More recently there has been a rush to spread the influence of Buddhism. In the Yongjia 永嘉 years (307–313) of the Jin dynasty (265–420) there were only forty-two temples, but after the August Wei (386–534) rose to power and established its capital by Mount Song and the River Luo, pious belief exuberated and the law and teachings flourished more [than ever]. Aristocrats and high officials parted with their horses and elephants as if kicking off their sandals; commoners and great families gave their wealth as easily as leaving footprints. As a result, monasteries and pagodas were packed closely together. Men competed in drawing the heavenly beauty of the Buddha,[191] and in copying the shadow he left in the mountain.[192] Golden spires (stūpas) were as high as the Numinous Altar (*lingtai* 靈臺),[193] and preaching halls were as grand as the Epang Palace. How could it be merely wood clothed in silk and embroidery, clay covered with red and purple pigments?[194]

自頂日感夢，滿月流光，陽門飾豪眉之像，夜臺圖紺髮之形。爾來奔競，其風遂廣。至於晉室永嘉，唯有寺四十二所。逮皇魏受圖，光宅嵩洛，篤信彌繁，法教愈盛。王侯貴臣，棄象馬如脫屣，庶士豪家，捨資財若遺跡。於是招提櫛比，寶塔駢羅，

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[189] *Yangmen* 陽門 is an abbreviation of Kaiyang men 開陽門 (Morning Sun Gate), the gate of the Southern Palace of Luoyang. Yi-t'ung Wang 王伊同, trans., *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-Yang* by Yang Xuanzhi (杨衒之) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 5.

[190] *Yetai* 夜臺 is an abbreviation of Changye tai 長夜臺 (Eternal Night Terrace). It is known to be the name of Emperor Ming's tomb, which was built while he was still alive. Wang (1983), 6.

[191] It may refer to copies of the legendary first image of the Buddha commissioned by King Udāyana. According to some versions circulated in medieval China, the king sent his artisans to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven with the help of Maudgalyāyana so that they could copy the physical likeness to the Buddha who was preaching his deceased birth mother, Lady Māya. On the legends about the Udāyana image in Luoyang, see below, Chapter Six, pp. 168-76.

[192] This may refer to copies of another legendary image of the Buddha, which Faxian reported was located in a cave in Nagarahāra in present-day Afghanistan. For the legend of this type, see Eugene Y. Wang, "The Shadow Image in the Cave: Discourse on Icons," in *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, ed. Wendy Swartz, Robert Ford Campany, Yang Lu, and Jessey J. C. Choo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 405-27; idem, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 245-47.

[193] The character *tai* 臺, translatable as "altar" or "platform," refers to a type of architectural structure whose top is wide and flat. The term *lingtai* 靈臺, translated "Numinous Altar" here, refers to a building for observing astrological movements and making prognostications. *HD*, vol. 11 (1993), 768.

[194] This phrase (木衣綈錦，土被朱紫) itself is a quote from Chang Heng's 張衡 (78–139 CE) "Rhapsody of the Western Capital (*Xijing fu* 西京賦)." Cf. Jenner (1981), 141-142; Yi-t'ung Wang (1983), 4-6.

> 爭寫天上之姿，競摸山中之影。金刹與靈臺比高，廣殿共阿房等壯。豈直木衣綈繡，土被朱紫而已哉[195]

On the surface, this excerpt repeats the standard narrative that Buddhism spread on Chinese soil in tandem with the quantitative increase in cultic statues and monasteries.[196] On a deeper level, however, is the criticism that Buddhist cultic objects exhausted the state coffers. Here, the passage turns to figurative language, the meaning of which is overt to any readers of classical Chinese. The well-known trope of the Epang 阿房 Palace of the First Emperor of the Qin 秦始皇 (Ying Zheng 嬴政, b. 259 BCE; r. 247–210 BCE) signifies both a fallen regime, whose ruler extorted resources from his subjects to luxuriate in a lavish lifestyle, and the misery of the people under such an autocrat.[197] Furthermore, the rhetorical question at the end of the passage (How could it be truly that wood was clothed in silk and embroidery, clay covered with red and purple pigments?) criticizes the fiscal profligacy prompted by the overconsumption of extravagant materials, such as silk and pigments, for Buddhist images. Taken together, this passage associates material commitment to the Buddhist religion with the moral degeneration of ruling elites, and thus, the demise of the state.

Buddhist cultic objects were also subjected to physical destruction. During the three major anti-Buddhist suppressions, statues, stūpas, and monasteries were mutilated

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[195] Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之, "Luoyang qielan ji xu 洛陽伽藍記序," *Luoyang qielan ji jiaoshi* 洛陽伽藍記校釋, ed. ZHOU Zumo 周祖謨, second edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), pp. 3-6 (T 2092, 51: 999a).

[196] Other records about the history of Buddhism in China also repeat the same explanation. For a notable example, see "Treatises on [Teachings by] Śākyamuni and Laozi (*Shi Lao zhi* 釋老志)," *History of Wei* (*Wei shu* 魏書), *juan* 114 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), p. 3025. It has been widely accepted that the transmission of Buddhism in East Asia took place through the transmission of Buddhist cultic objects. To introduce only a few, Sharf (2001), 2; Kieschnick (2003), 53-55; Rambelli and Reinders (2012), 6-7.

[197] *HD*, vol. 11 (1993), 930b.

or utterly destroyed.[198] Ever since the seminal work of Paul Demiéville, modern scholars have explained that the primary reason for such iconoclastic measures was money.[199] Certainly, the production of Buddhist cultic objects was an exorbitant operation.[200] For one, statues, paintings, and scriptures were made from precious substances, such as metals, minerals, gems, silk, and pigments. As some of these materials often served as actual currency, their use in creating cultic images meant that the overall monetary reserve in a state economy would decrease because devotional objects did not return to the market unless their original materials were restored.[201] Monastic architecture, constructed from relatively humble materials, such as timber, stone, and clay, was not less expensive.[202] Often described as enormous and as magnificent as the imperial palace, a monastery occupied vast tracts of land and mobilized a grand scale of labor for construction and maintenance.[203] Moreover, the monastic space required the installation

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[198] For classical studies of the three major anti-Buddhist suppressions, see TANG (2008a), 332-373; TSUKAMOTO Zenryū 塚本善隆, "Hokugi Taibutei no haibutsu kishaku 北魏太武帝の廢佛毀釋," *Shina bukkyō shigaku* 支那佛教史學 1, no. 4 (1937): 104-122; idem, "Hokushū no haibutsu ni tsuite 北周の廢佛に就いて," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 16 (1948): 29-101; idem, "Chūgoku no haibutsu to kōbutsu 中國の廢佛と興佛," *Zen kenkyūjo kiyō* 禪研究所紀要 8 (1979): 129-145; Ch'en (1952): 166-192; idem (1954): 261-273; idem (1956): 67-105.

[199] For a few works in English language, Reischauer (1955), 217-71; Ch'en (1956): 67-105; Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995; original French in 1956), 14-25; Demiéville (1974).

[200] For discussions on Buddhist undertakings as expensive operations, see Gernet (1995); Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 51; 59-60; Michael J. Walsh, "The Buddhist Monastic Economy," in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, vol. 2, ed. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1273-75.

[201] Reinders (2005): 61-68.

[202] Puay-Peng Ho, "Building on Hope: Monastic Sponsors and Merit in Sixth- to Tenth-Century China," *Asia Major*, third series, 17, no. 1 (2004): 35; Kieschnick (2003), 185-98.

[203] The economic significance of land and human labor at the disposal of Buddhist monasteries, see Denis C. Twitchett, "Monastic Estates in T'ang China," *Asia Major*, new series, 5, no. 2 (1956): 123-146; Michael J. Walsh, *Sacred Economies: Buddhist Monasticism and Territoriality*

of ritual paraphernalia, notably stūpas, statues, and bells, which were, again, built from lavish materials using advanced craftsmanship. While monastic regulations banned monks and nuns from engaging in economic production and handling money directly, they still participated in such activities.[204] In addition, wealthy and powerful lay donors gave their land to monasteries to evade taxes;[205] sponsored vegetarian banquets for monastics; funded various rituals, such as ordination, consecration, and seasonal retreats; and paid clerics for private services, such as funerals and memorials. In short, monastic construction generated an entire cycle of consumption and production confined to the interior of Buddhist monasteries.[206] Noting this vicious cycle of conspicuous consumption, modern scholars have explained the Chinese anti-Buddhist campaigns and criticisms of images in economic terms.

Literally translated from *foshi* 佛事 (Sk. *buddha-kārya*) in Chinese, the term "Buddhist undertakings" means "the Buddha's soteriological tasks." In common usage, it

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in Medieval China (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); JIANG Boqin 姜伯勤, *Tang Wudai Dunhuang sihu zhidu* 唐五代敦煌寺戶制度 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[204] Lien-sheng Yang, "Buddhist Monasteries and Four Money-raising Institutions in Chinese History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 13, no. 1/2 (1950): 174-91; Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, "The Role of Buddhist Monasteries in T'ang Society," *History of Religions* 15, no. 3 (1976): 219-23; HAO Chunwen 郝春文, *Tang houqi Wudai Song chu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* 唐后期五代宋初敦煌僧尼的社会生活 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998); idem, "The Social Life of Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Dunhuang during the Late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Early Song," *Asia Major*, third series, 23, no. 2 (2010): 77-95. For similar cases in Indian Buddhism, see Schopen, "Bones of a Buddha" (1999).

[205] Denis C. Twitchett, "The Monasteries and China's Economy in Medieval Times," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 19, no. 3 (1957): 539; Walsh (2009); John Kieschnick, "Buddhist Monasticism," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 568-69.

[206] For an overview of the economic activities and impacts of Buddhist monasteries, see Richard von Glahn, *The Economic History of China: From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 200-204.

refers to a wide array of activities to financially support Buddhist monasticism.[207] Any kind of Buddhist undertaking could elicit complaints from the opponents of Buddhism.[208] However, due to their scale, construction projects drew particular ire. Critics frequently singled out projects for building monastic halls, stūpas, and statues as representative of fiscal profligacy that Buddhist devotional practices encouraged. All these circumstances suggest that monastic construction was censured due to monetary issues.

The economic reason alone, however, cannot fully explain the nature of recurring censure against Buddhist monuments because Buddhist construction projects were inextricably linked with Buddhist teachings and monastic institutions.[209] This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the detractors of Buddhist images harnessed Buddhist ethical and soteriological notions germane to monastic construction in order to bring Buddhist monasticism into disrepute. In what follows, I discuss that criticism of the fashioning of Buddhist images and monuments raised issues about Buddhists who participated in image production and its promotion. Throughout the debates, the anti-Buddhists noted that Buddhist cultic objects were not only ritual surrogates for the physically unavailable Buddha but were also part of the design to sustain Buddhist monasticism. For the critics, Buddhist images epitomized the Buddhist monastic institution as an entire enterprise. Consequently, the contention about the making of Buddhist images came to touch on the social morality of Buddhist monasticism.

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[207] *MBD*, 4547a; *NBD*, 1192d.

[208] Benavides (2005), 89-90. Peter Skilling explains the Buddhist built environment was not sustainable due to its expenses. Peter Skilling, "Rhetoric of Reward, Ideologies of Inducement: Why Produce Buddhist 'Art'?," in *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Conservation*, ed. David Park, Kuenga Wangmo, and Sharon Cather (London: Archetype Publications, 2013), 35.

[209] Benavides (2005), 86-95; Reinders (2005): 62-63.

This chapter examines three critical points of contention with regard to the production of Buddhist cultic objects. The first section of the chapter revisits the criticism of Buddhist images as conspicuous consumption. The second section looks at anti-Buddhist criticisms of images that drew on the Buddhist precept of non-killing (*bu shasheng* 不殺生). The third section analyzes the debates over the notion of merit, the Buddhist doctrinal ground for image production. This chapter argues that these seemingly heterogenous discussions, taken together, addressed moral issues embedded in the fashioning of Buddhist images.[210]

Conspicuous Waste

The characterization of Buddhist undertakings as overconsumption and as a means for monastics to amass wealth already appeared in one of the earliest surviving Buddhist apologetic essays. The *Correcting Errors* (*Zhengwu lun* 正誣論), a defense of Buddhism by an unknown writer sometime between 316 and 324, introduces the essence of the criticism: "Buddhist monks squeeze resources out of the people to construct stūpas and monasteries on a grand scale and amass wealth. Lavish decorations of such monuments are exceedingly wasteful without yielding any benefit (道人聚斂百姓。大搆塔寺。華飾奢靡。費而無益云云)."[211] At first glance, this strand of criticism seems to target ostentation in opposition to the ideal of frugality.[212] While the same sort of

[210] For discussion that interrelates the patronage of Buddhism, the violation of Buddhist precepts, and Buddhist soteriology of gifts, see Benavides (2005), 77-102.

[211] T 2102, 52: 8a18-19. The verb *julian* 聚斂 means that officials amass wealth by heavy taxation.

[212] Kieschnick (2003), 9.

criticism recurred throughout anti-Buddhist discourse,[213] the memorial written by Xiao Mozhi 蕭摹之 (fl. fifth century), Governor of Danyang (*Danyang yin* 丹陽尹), in 435 and compiled in Daoxuan's *Expanded Propagation and Illumination*, encapsulates the problem of Buddhist undertakings as conspicuous waste in the way that Veblen would recognize.[214] Maintaining that Buddhism flourished through the construction of lavish cultic objects, as described in the *Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang*, Xiao emphasizes that Buddhist patrons vied to embellish monastic structures and images to captivate spectators.

> Since the Buddha's teaching reached the Middle Kingdom, four dynasties have passed. [The numbers of] stūpas, monasteries, and images in bodily form have reached thousands. When [you] approach [them], [they] can enrapture [your] mind; when [you] step back, [they] can attract [you]. These days [Buddhists'] respectfulness has become superficial. It is not sincerity that counts most, but the competition for extravagance that matters. This transgresses moderation and violates the regulations. It is imperative to reinforce inspections and norms. Without such precautionary measures, overindulgence and intemperance will not cease.
>
> 佛化被於中國，已歷四代。塔寺形像，所在千計。進可以繫心，退足以招勸。自頃已來，敬情浮末。不以精誠爲至，更以奢競爲重。違中越制。宜加檢裁。不爲之防，流遁未已[215]

While lumping monastic buildings, stūpas, and statues together, Xiao uses such cultic objects as evidence of the material indulgence by Buddhist devotion and the cycle of overconsumption. Buddhist cultic objects, manifesting splendor themselves, entice more people to spend resources fashioning more of them.

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[213] T 2012, 52: 35b16-24. Shi Daoheng 道恒 (346–417) also summarizes this line of criticism in his *Shi bo lun* 釋駁論. For his response, see T 2012, 52: 36c21-26.

[214] Veblen singles out devout observance as a wasteful way to flaunt the social status and wealth. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, originally published in 1899), 191-215.

[215] T 2103, 52: 127b23-26.

The important point in this line of criticism is that Buddhist proponents agreed with their opponents. As Gregory Schopen has demonstrated, Buddhists themselves had a history of censuring *some* monastics for their simoniacal misuse of monastic undertakings.[216] This indicates that Buddhists were already wary of the lucrative prospects of construction projects, which might lead to monastic corruption. When Buddhist structures loomed large on the medieval Chinese religious landscape, Buddhist proponents and their opponents agreed that such material representations of the religion caused a problem. However, during this time in China, the context of interreligious contention put the Buddhist apologists, despite their own conscientiousness, in a defensive position because criticism of their practice came from outside their community. While acknowledging the problem, Buddhist apologists were still required to justify the practice of Buddhist donation and monastic construction.

In his *Elucidating [Teachings of] the Buddha* (*Mingfo lun* 明佛論, ca. 433),[217] for example, Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), a literatus associate of the renowned Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334–416),[218] remarks quite abruptly: "[this is] not speaking of the practice of revering stūpas, overspending on images, or supporting monks who pretend to play a pipe (*lanchui* 濫吹)[219] because [those acts] ruin property and harm people. Material

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[216] Schopen (1999).

[217] Zürcher (2007), 269-71. Partial translation of this essay is available by Walter Liebenthal, "The Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Thought," *Monumenta Nipponica* 8 (1952): 378-94.

[218] *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, vol. 3-4, ed. David Knechtges and Taiping Chang (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2348-51.

[219] The expression "one who pretends to play a pipe (*lanchui* 濫吹 or *lanyu* 濫竽)" refers to a person who obtains a job without proper qualification or who does not properly perform his or her occupational duty. This idiom originated in the fourth parable collected in the first volume of the chapter of "Inner Store of Sayings (Nei chu shuo 內儲說)" of the *Master Han Fei* (*Han Feizi* 韓非子). *HD*, vol. 6 (1991), 181-82.

things (*wu* 物) hinder a glimpse into the far-reaching truth, but have us to look into the petty fault at near distance (*jinbi* 近弊), leading to preposterous slander of the [Buddha's] Law (非崇塔侈像容養濫吹之僧，以傷財害民之謂也。物之不窺遠實而觀近弊，將橫以詬法矣)."[220] Zong Bing composed this essay in the context of debating over the issue of the agent that transmigrates after death (*shen bu mie* 神不滅).[221] Seemingly off topic, his sudden mention of the issue of overconsumption suggests widespread criticism of "wasteful" Buddhist undertakings among his contemporaries to the extent that no further explanation was deemed necessary.

Here, Zong distinguishes three types of Buddhist devotional practices: venerating stūpas, spending on images, and supporting monks. This taxonomy exhibits the understanding that all these activities would fall under the same category of Buddhist practices. By labeling them as "fault (*bi* 弊)," he shares with anti-Buddhists the critical viewpoint that Buddhists indulge in excessive consumption.[222] Hinting at his sympathy with the detractors, however, Zong's attitude exemplifies how Buddhists handled such an attack. By adding the adjective meaning "near (*jin* 近)" to "faults (*bi* 弊)," he downplays the spending issue of Buddhist undertakings.

More often than this trivializing rhetoric, Buddhist apologists blamed a few unspecified minorities for such excess and exploitation of lay donation. To prevent this criticism from growing to become a condemnation of the entire monastic community, the Buddhists contended that the vast majority of monastic members were conscientious. In

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[220] T 2102, 52: 16a7-9.

[221] For studies on these debates, see above, p. 29, fn. 63.

[222] "Buddhists were painfully aware of the problems generated by their own wealth and success," Rambelli and Reinders (2012), 4.

their response to the allegation about lapsed monks, for example, Dao'an 道安 (fl. 557–581) and Falin 法琳 (572–640) used nature metaphors to stress that nothing is devoid of flaws. Even in the perfect and ideal condition, such as a mountain full of jade or sweet dew and river or ocean brimming with gold or pearls, the Buddhists claimed that some defects are inevitable. "Mount Kunlun still has pebbles and the Fu River has dirt and stones (崑山多玉。尚有礫沙。浮水豐金。寧無土石)";[223] "the snowy mountain has poisonous plants, and the big ocean also has *rākṣasa*."[224] Against the criticism that lavish Buddhist cultic objects revealed that Buddhist clerics were so corrupt that they possessed immense wealth accumulated through donations, the Buddhist proponents argued that only a small number were involved in such a petty offense. Such slight flaws, as claimed, should not be used to defile monasticism in its entirety.

Killing Insects and Trees

By marginalizing the issue of overspending inflicted by monastic construction, Buddhist proponents evaded the problem rather than proposing a solution to it. Naturally, the criticism did not subside but targeted other dimensions of monastic construction. The detractors were particularly keen on the contradiction between monastic construction and Buddhist ethics.[225] Drawing on the Buddhist precept that banned any type of killing (*bu*

[223] Dao'an 道安, "Erjiao lun 二教論," T 2103, 52: 143b21-22.

[224] Original sentences: "The Snowy Mountain (Himalaya) originally has lots of sweet dew, but also poisonous plants in it. The Great Ocean is teeming with pearls, but also full of *rākṣasa*. Let say the Forest Deng lacks one branch. How can one regard [the forest] as strange and destroy it (夫雪山之內。本多甘露亦有毒草。大海之中。既足明珠亦饒羅刹。喻崑山缺於片石。比鄧林損於一枝耳。何可爲怪而使廢之)?" Falin, *Poxie lun* 破邪論, T 2109, 52: 487c4-7. He left this comments at the end of his *Poxie lun* to explain fifteen kinds of misdeeds done by monastics.

[225] For discussion on contrast between the austerity of mendicant practice and meditation and the affluence of settled monasteries, see Kieschnick (2003), 12.

shasheng 不殺生), the anti-Buddhists claimed that Buddhists were violating their own moral code by erecting religious edifices. The problem was that any building project would involve destroying life—whether it be trees for wood or worms for foundation work. Noting these effects, which any construction work entailed, the anti-Buddhists used the Buddhist language to condemn Buddhists. This point of criticism may appear hypercritical and less effective than calling monastic construction wasteful. Such language, however, was repeatedly employed by statesmen who opposed the imperial sponsorship of monastic construction.

For instance, when Emperor Ming of Song 宋明帝 (Liu Yu 劉彧, b. 439; r. 465–472) decided to convert his own residence into a grandiose monastery Xianggong si 湘宮寺,[226] his Secretariat (*Zhongshu* 中書), Yu Yuan 虞愿 (426–479),[227] turned to Buddhist ethics to ask the emperor to rescind his decision.

> This monastery harms ants by digging the land and burns worms by making bricks and tiles. Corvée labor [for the construction] torments the muscle of the people. [As it has them] sell their wives and children, [the sound of] their wailing brims the streets. If the Buddha knows, he will think this is transgression. [Even] if the Buddha does not know, what benefit will this building [of a monastery] bring?
>
> 此寺穿掘傷螻蟻，塼瓦焚虫豸。勞役之苦百姓筋力。販妻貨子呼嗟滿路。佛若有知，念其有罪。佛若無知，作之何益[228]

In this passage, Yu claims that monastic construction causes pain for many subjects, ranging from killing insects to oppressing people. He makes this point from the Buddhist

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[226] T 2103, 52: 127c12-13.

[227] On this passage, Li Yuqun, "Classification, Layout, and Iconography of Buddhist Cave Temples and Monasteries," trans. John Kieschnick, in *Early Chinese Religion: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, pt, 2, ed. John Lagerway and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 648.

[228] T 2103, 52: 127c13-16.

point of view, asserting that the emperor's pious undertaking, in effect, breaches Buddhist teachings. In doing so, Yu also entertained the long-held ideal of government that the ruler should care about the welfare of his subjects. In his opposition to the imperial patronage of monastic construction, the minister contended that monastic construction levies unbearable burden of corvée labor on the people. This demonstrates that criticisms of Buddhist undertakings involved not only the socio-economical issue of consumption but also the politico-ethical issue of ideal rulership. Xun Ji 荀濟 (d. 547), the vocal critic of Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549), also exercised similar rhetoric in his anti-Buddhist memorial, stating "[They] kill ants to erect [images of] the Buddha. … They exploit the people and truncate trees. They burn ants and harm the harmonious energy (*heqi* 和氣). [害螻蟻而起浮圖。[…] 勞民伐木。燒掘螻蟻，損傷和氣]."[229] The point of these critiques was obvious: monastic construction helps neither Buddhism nor the state.

In response to this polemic that Buddhists violated their own ethical code by taking up building projects, Buddhist apologists first attempted to recharacterize the criticism. Accordingly, their argument was that the criticism rather conforms to Buddhist teachings, for it expresses care for life and thus fits the notion of compassion (Sk. *karuṇā*, Ch. *cibei* 慈悲). For instance, Yu Yuan, who submitted a poignant petition against the conversion of a palace into a monastery, was praised for criticizing Buddhism by the virulent anti-Buddhist Fu Yi[230] but was also praised as a champion of the Buddha's

[229] T 2103, 52: 129c1 3-17; 131a11-12.

[230] Fu Yi's compilation of biographies of twenty-five opponents of Buddhism, entitled *Gao shi zhuan* 高識傳, does not survive on its own, but Daoxuan summarized it in his *Guang hongming ji*. T 2103, 52: 123b6-135b8.

legacy of compassion (此寔大慈之本懷，得佛之遺寄) by Daoxuan, who endeavored to discredit Fu Yi.[231] Daoxuan also eliminated Xun Ji from Fu's roster of anti-Buddhists. Daoxuan explains that Xun did not truly intend to suppress the Buddhist religion but simply disparaged it out of his personal resentment toward the Buddhist emperor, who refused to select him as a minister.[232]

Reassessing the criticism that Buddhist undertakings kill insects and plants as the Buddhist statement of compassion, Daoxuan ironically intimated Buddhists' own qualms about this dilemma: *we are violating our own precept by committing to our religion*. The Buddhist proponents knew that reinterpretation of the criticism could not resolve the problem. They required a more rigorous defense than such evasive rhetoric because lay donation for monastic construction was a principal means to sustain Buddhist monastic institution. However, as the anti-Buddhist critics defined the problem in terms of the Buddhists' own moral code, it was challenging for Buddhist apologists to find an effective counterargument. In this sense, it may have been inevitable that they deployed the same defensive tactic as they did against the criticism of monastic construction as overconsumption: admitting the offence but minimizing culpability.

Daoxuan's comments on Wei Yuansong's anti-Buddhist proposal offer a case in point. Wei, the putative mastermind of the anti-Buddhist suppression in the Northern Zhou, proposed to circumscribe monastic construction because it harmed people and

[231] T 2103, 52: 127c16-17.

[232] T 2103, 52: 129a3-6.

animals.[233] In response, Daoxuan—the vinaya expert—first acknowledges the Buddhist ideal that monastic construction should be free from destroying life. However, he concludes his defense with a compromise:

> Once upon a time King Aśoka had stūpas made. It was accomplished by ten thousand gods in one day. Now [when we] make [images of] the Buddha, it takes several accumulated years and cost fortune and lives. Moreover, [when] mud is mixed, clay prepared, and bricks and tiles fired under the sun, [those procedures] take out insects by creating the peril of fire, and wipe out ants by bringing the disaster of water. Since benevolence (*ren* 仁) and compassion (*ci* 慈) are respectfully practiced, there is no miraculous response (*ying* 應) that grants permission [for such construction projects] yet. This is the true precept. Therefore, when monks build their residence, they should first prevent such problems. If there is any loss of life, then it should not be undertaken. Valuing beings and generating compassion is [the way of] constructing a stūpa of benevolence. It is proper to follow principle to the utmost. [But] things rarely go this way.
>
> 昔育王造塔。一日而役萬神。今造浮圖。累年而損財命。況復和土作泥塼瓦成日。爲草蟲而作火劫。助螻蟻而起水災。仰度仁慈未應垂許。斯誠誡也。故比丘造房先除妨難。有損命者必不得爲。重物起慈即爲仁塔。理極正矣。事罕行之[234]

In describing how plants and insects die during monastic construction, Daoxuan acknowledges that the Buddhist religion stipulates the prevention of such killing. Reflecting on the reason Buddhists are accused of transgression of their own precept, he acquiesces to the criticism. Subsequently, however, he explains that the non-killing prescription does not always conform to reality in the end, thereby intending to excuse the violation of the non-killing precept.[235]

Furthermore, Daoxuan contends that Buddhists are not alone in killing insects for

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[233] "[Wei Yuan] song says, not encouraging to build and distort the view about the monastery is because [it] hurts people and livestock. Committing it goes against the great compassion of all the Buddhas (嵩云不勸立曲見伽藍者。以損傷人畜故也。若作則乖諸佛大慈)." T 2103, 52: 132b4-5.

[234] T 2103, 52: 132b5-10.

[235] On the violation of the non-killing precept, Jonathan A. Silk, "Good and Evil in Indian Buddhism: The Five Sins of Immediate Retribution," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (2007): 253-86.

construction projects. Seeking recourse both outside and inside the Buddhist tradition, he first claims that the Chinese imperial tradition includes the launch of largescale construction projects that kill insects and harm people. Then, he continues, among such imperial operations, monastic construction is morally superior because it is not for the sake of emperors alone.

> It is the old norm of heaven's constant path to cut down trees and dig up the land. It is deep respect for humanity (*renlun* 人倫) to build monasteries and encourage donations. As to exploiting the people and harming ants, which emperor has not done any of those? As merit does not accrue for one's own sake, the four groups of commoners did not refuse to do labor. The offense [of violating the non-killing precept] does not reach [the degree of crimes perpetrated by] others. Hundreds of insects die, but that is not an offense.
>
> 伐木掘地，天常之舊規。造寺興供，人倫之厚敬。勞民損蟻何帝無之。是以福不自資。四俗不辭勞役。罪不及他。百蟲死而非罪[236]

In this passage, Daoxuan justifies monastic construction in two respects. First, he relates it to imperial projects that mobilized an immense amount of human and material resources. The emphasis on imperial involvement in monastic construction obfuscates the focus of the criticism on Buddhist monasticism and lessens its intensity. This diversion tactic, then, leads to the subsequent move that appeals to the notion of merit, Buddhism's explicatory device to support Buddhist undertakings. Although the intended readership of his apologetic compilation would include more than those versed in Buddhist teachings, Daoxuan does not expound on the theory of merit. Nevertheless, the passage still takes recourse to the Buddhist notion of merit, that is, one can accrue merit on behalf of others and multiply it without cost. In the end, Daoxuan concludes that killing insects during monastic construction is not a violation of the non-killing precept because the benefit of

[236] T 2103, 52: 131a20-23.

the project exceeds the lives of insects. This statement showcases the Buddhist defense of monastic construction that pivoted on the soteriology of merit.

The notion of merit, the central foundation of almost all Buddhist ritual practices, could not remain intact from anti-Buddhist attack. The opponents of Buddhism were well aware of this Buddhist logic that underlay the fashioning of cultic objects. In the next section, I examine the criticism that called the notion of merit a deception and the Buddhist counterarguments that explained and promoted the core of Buddhist soteriology.

The Controversy over Merit

The proliferation of Buddhist images was, by and large, indebted to the soteriology of merit. That is, those who performed good deeds would gain merit to be reborn in a better condition than the present life, and the acquired merit can be transferred to other designated recipients, especially family members of the sponsors.[237] Buddhist theorists publicized the creation of images as one of the most effective methods for generating merit.[238] On the grounds of merit, Buddhist scriptures encourage Buddhists to participate in any stage of the fashioning of images, e.g., commissioning, providing

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[237] On the notion and workings of merit, see, for example, Richard Gombrich, "'Merit Transference' in Sinhalese Buddhism: A Case Study of the Interaction between Doctrine and Practice," *History of Religions* 11, no. 2 (1971): 203-19; John C. Holt, "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living: Merit Transfer in the Early Buddhist Tradition," *Numen* 28, fasc. 1 (1981): 1-28. On the concept of merit as the doctrinal ground for image production, see, for example, Kieschnick (2003), 157-64, 191-94; Wendi L. Adamek, "Merit-Cultivation Practices and Image Making in the Northern Dynasties," in *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University*, ed. Leopold Swergold and Eileen Hsiang-ling Hsu (New York: Miriam and ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2008), 27-33; Peter Skilling, "Rhetoric of Reward, Ideologies of Inducement: Why Produce Buddhist 'Art'?" in *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Conservation*, ed. David Park, Kuenga Wangmo, and Sharon Cather (London: Archetype Publications, 2013), 27-37.

[238] Sharf (1996), 261-67.

materials or labor for crafting, consecrating, and maintaining them.[239] Dedicatory inscriptions also reveal that donors commissioned images out of their wishes to obtain merit.[240]

Given its soteriological significance in Buddhist construction projects, challenging the notion of merit was a natural step of argumentation for anti-Buddhists. However, as with other strands of anti-image criticism examined above, the critics did not always precisely delineate their reasons. For instance, Fu Yi simply dismissed the notion of merit, stating "Since the beguiling barbarian (the Buddha) deceptively spoke about the merit of monastic construction, ordinary people believe that and compete for commissioning monasteries and stūpas (妖胡虛說造寺之福，庸人信之，爭營寺塔)."[241] In his 577 iconoclastic edict, Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou also said that Buddhist scriptures vainly spoke about the merit of producing images.[242]

These seemingly passing remarks alone may give an impression that the notion of merit was not a major issue in the interreligious debates.[243] For being such brief references, however, Buddhist apologists composed lengthy and comprehensive discussions on merit in response. Moreover, as will be examined below, the Buddhist

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[239] T 694.

[240] These wishes are not necessarily linked to canonical affiliations of images' subject matters. HOU Xudong 侯旭東, *Wu, liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang: yi zaoxiangji wei zhongxin de kaocha* 五, 六世紀北方民眾佛教信仰：以造像記為中心的考察 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 96-102, 150-248.

[241] T 2103, 52: 134c4-5.

[242] "Buddhist scriptures extensively praise the making of pictures and stūpas. They adorn them magnificently, hoping for excessive merit. But [pictures and stūpas] are inanimate—how could they bestow such kindness (佛經廣歎，崇建圖塔。壯麗修造，致福極多，此實無情，何能恩惠)?" T 2104, 52: 374a21-22. For detailed analysis of this edict, see below, Chapter Five, pp. 150-52.

[243] Kieschnick (2003), 198.

defense of merit in the context of criticizing Buddhist undertakings allows for a glimpse into the ways medieval intellectuals construed the workings of merit. In this sense, however abrupt it was, the criticism of merit contributed, to a certain degree, to the medieval Chinese formulation of a discourse of Buddhist images in terms of merit.

The question of what exactly anti-Buddhists criticized about the notion of merit is difficult to answer conclusively. The notion of merit conjoins not only Buddhist practices and tenets but also laity and clergy. This integrating role of the notion of merit seems to have led critics to suspect an ulterior motive behind the promotion of the merit soteriology via the fashioning of images. The notion of merit grounds the practice of giving (Sk. *dāna*; Ch. *bushi* 布施), which virtually helped perpetuate monasticism.[244] Whether Buddhist supporters sponsored Buddhist undertakings out of sincere piety to produce merit or vanity to flaunt their wealth, the de facto beneficiaries of such donations were Buddhist clergy.[245] The anti-Buddhist critics did not fail to notice the role of the merit soteriology as the motor of the preservation of Buddhist monasticism. Having witnessed the monastic institution amassing wealth as well as recruiting new members as

[244] For the relationship between merit soteriology and the preservation of monastic communities, Holt (1981): 11. From early on, Buddhist monasticism developed a norm that the activation and transfer of merit should be presided by monks. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 203-4; Reiko Ohnuma, "Gift," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 103-23.

[245] In principle, the ultimate recipient of lay donations is the Buddha. While functioning as a "receptacle" of offerings, Buddhist clerics also need to accumulate merit for their own salvific achievement. See Holt (1981): 19-22; Adamek (2005): 141-42; Michael J. Walsh, "The Economics of Salvation: Toward a Theory of Exchange in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 2 (June 2007): 374-75; Jeffrey C. Shirkey, "The Moral Economy of the *Petavatthu*: Hungry Ghosts and Theravāda Buddhist Cosmology," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago (2008).

a result of lay donations that the merit soteriology encouraged,[246] anti-Buddhist statesmen dismissed the notion of merit as mere trickery for monastics to live off affluent and powerful laity.

Importantly, critics did not take issue with the karmic logic of merit itself. In essence, they considered the principle of merit to draw on the commonsensical moral causality that "good begets good."[247] This logic that devotional acts as good deeds would generate and accumulate merit as a reward was not challenged. Instead, critics questioned the efficacy of merit, doubting whether it would be realized at all. In general, Buddhist soteriology does not place the realization of merit in an immediately conceivable timeframe, but rather in a somewhat vague and unforeseeable future, usually in next lifetimes, which no one could witness or experience in this lifetime. Therefore, the criticism of merit was, partly, a refusal to accept the Buddhist cosmological presuppositions about an infinite cycle of rebirth that underpinned the merit soteriology. As discussed in Chapter Two, the scriptures that promote the production of images enumerate a diversity of good rebirth as examples of the realization of merit.[248] The merit soteriology explains that good actions in this life would be rewarded in *another* life. Barring the belief in the transmigration of rebirth,[249] therefore, envisioning the time and

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[246] However, not all the monasteries could enjoy privileges of abundant donation. HAO (1998, 2010).

[247] Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 31.

[248] Sharf (1996).

[249] On the Chinese indigenous ideas about afterlife and their changes after the arrival of Buddhism, Ying-Shih Yü, "'O Soul, Come Back!': A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47, no. 2 (1987): 363-95; Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). The pre-Buddhist conception of afterlife

space for merit to come to fruition must have been difficult.

This skepticism toward the workings of merit appears to have been, in part, deepened by the translation of the Indic notion of *merit* (Sk. *puṇya*) into the loaded Chinese term *fu* 福. In its barest sense, *fu* refers to the "blessing," "good fortune," or "happiness" that ancestral or tutelary deities would bestow upon their rightful devotees.[250] Construed in worldly terms, it usually indicates the fulfillment of earthly desires, such as health, longevity, wealth, occupational success, and procreation of offspring, to name a few.[251] Based on devotion to deities, especially ancestral veneration, this concept of *fu* involved ritual reciprocity between devotees and deities. That is, deceased ancestors, who entered the immortal and godly realm through death, would grant their living descendants what they wish to obtain in this world if they properly perform ancestral sacrifice. Centering on the immediate benefits enjoyable while alive, this idea of blessing or good fortune as ritual efficacy was already entrenched in indigenous ritual practices.

After the Sanskrit *puṇya* was rendered into *fu*,[252] the renowned Kumārajīva introduced another Chinese term for merit, *gongde* 功德, which literally means "virtuous quality attained through studious endeavors."[253] Its original Indic word, *guṇa*, carries a

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reserved room for people to accommodate the Buddhist notion of countless times of rebirth, and yet also offered a locus for different views of afterlife to be contested.

[250] The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the ancient etymology dictionary, explains that *fu* means *you* 祐 and has the same sound of wealth, *fu* 富 (福祐也。从示畐聲). The character *you* means divine assistance.

[251] *HD* vol. 7 (1992), 942.

[252] Tilmann Vetter, *A Lexicographical Study of An Shigao's and His Circle's Chinese Translations of Buddhist Texts* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2012), 219-220.

[253] For discussion about *gongde*, see Lowe (2017), 33-34.

wider gamut than *puṇya*, including the spiritual pursuit to escape the cycle of reincarnation as the ultimate salvific goal.[254] In the Buddhist context of speaking about beneficial effects from devout actions, such as monastic construction and ritual performance, the two Chinese terms quickly became interchangeable.[255] Given the fact that the notion of the transmigration of rebirth did not inhere within the Chinese tradition, it must have been challenging for translators to find Chinese equivalents that could convey the precise meaning and context of the Buddhist *puṇya*. In this sense, the Chinese *fu*, albeit lacking the cosmological premises of the original Indic, may have been an effective alternative, especially when translators worked with a given and limited vocabulary rather than coining neologisms as did Kumārajīva. After all, *puṇya*, like *fu*, is a word that expresses mundane wishes for better life than the present moment.[256]

That being said, both the cosmological premise of *puṇya* and the liturgical association of *fu* might hinder the Chinese audience from distinguishing the two. The Chinese *fu* entailed this-worldly connotations that did not necessarily circumscribe the scope of what the Indic *puṇya* mean. From the anti-Buddhist perspectives, Buddhist proponents used the *fu*, which meant this-worldly benefits, to discuss the *puṇya* that involved benefits in the inconceivable future. This confusion of merit with ritual efficacy, in conjunction with the moral predicament caused by Buddhist undertakings, seems to have underlain the criticism of image production.

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[254] George J. Tanabe, Jr. "Merit and Merit-Making," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell. Jr., vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 532-34.

[255] For instance, a healing liturgy, found amid the Dunhuang corpus, alternates *gongde* and *fu*. The liturgy is quoted in Stephen F. Teiser, "Ornamenting the Departed: Notes on the Language of Chinese Buddhist Ritual Texts," *Asia Major*, third series, 21, no. 1 (2009): 231.

[256] For discussion of merit as both material and spiritual rewards, see Teiser (1988), 210.

Buddhist apologists defended the merit soteriology in line with this skepticism about the efficacy of merit. In order to dispel cynicism about merit, the Buddhist apologists first attempted to establish some commonalities between Buddhist devotional practices that would generate merit and indigenous ritual practices that would grant good fortune. Then, the apologists offered a fuller explanation about how the Buddhist merit operates based on the theory of karmic retribution (*yebao* 業報).

Arguing for the shared features between the Buddhist soteriological notion of merit and the indigenous conceptualization of ritual efficacy, the Buddhist proponents made two complementary moves. The first was to present equally ineffective examples of rituals in indigenous Chinese contexts. For instance, in a pro-Buddhist memorial submitted in 579 to request a new Northern Zhou emperor Xuan 北周宣帝 (Yuwen Yun 宇文贇, 559–581; r. 578–579) to lift the anti-Buddhist iconoclasm promulgated by the previous emperor Wu, the lay Buddhist Wang Mingguang 王明廣 compared imperial rituals such as celestial and ancestral sacrifices with Buddhist devotional practices in order to emphasize that non-Buddhist rituals also failed to bring about desired outcomes, as did the Buddhist ones.[257] Rather than escalating into an extreme of proposing to abolish devotional practices altogether, however, this comparison leads to the persuasion that the immediate unpredictability of ritual efficacy does not deter pious actions.

> Long ago Emperor Yao measured the rule of heaven. Heaven brought a disaster of inundation. The Zhou instated the rites of the ancestral shrine. The shrine did not have ability to bring rain down. Let say, stūpas do not grant merit (*fu* 福) in return, but adversities will result from there. Likewise, we can say heaven and the shrine are the pursuit of nothing (*xuqu* 虛求), [for] a series of [sympathetic] responses

[257] For discussion on the importance of ritual performance as statecraft, see Joseph McDermott, "Introduction," in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-19.

> have ceased. If the movement in darkness (*mingyun* 冥運) is inferred,[258] [we will] realize that the grace (*yin* 恩) of the heavenly temple (*tianmiao* 天廟) is also destined to be impoverished. Why should [monastic] halls and stūpas [alone] be able to save? […] The earthen dragon cannot bring down rain. [People] still venerate it to seek for blessing (*fu* 福). Even though the Buddha of clay (the Buddha image) does not speak a word, how cannot the devotees receive any portent (*zheng* 徵)?
>
> 昔唐堯則天之治。天有逸水之災。周置宗廟之禮。廟無降雨之力。如謂塔無交福。以過則歸。亦可天廟虛求。例應停棄。若以理推冥運。寤天廟之恩亦可數窮命也。豈堂塔而能救[259] […] 土龍不能致雨。尚遵之以求福。泥佛縱使不語。敬者豈得無徵[260]

At first glance, Wang attempts to counter the opponents' argument by pointing out they are guilty of doing what they criticize. Yet he does not stop there. He proposes possible answers as to why: the divine power may wax and wane, or the ritual benefit may appear in a way that only the devotee can detect. This explanation mystifies but universalizes the effect of devotional practices, claiming that it lies beyond the purview of human comprehension.

While the above passage handles the alleged inefficacy of merit in a manner of negation, the second move sheds positive light on the efficacy of merit by generalizing it into universal moral causality. After pointing out the inscrutability of ritual efficacy, Wang cautions against the nearsighted and dichotomous conclusion that the seeming lack of immediate rewards would be a sign of imminent misfortune. To ground this caution, Wang quotes both Confucian and Daoist classics that exhort moral deeds regardless of rewards.

> Stūpas and monasteries in the Qi and Liang dynasties initiated the cause of meritorious virtue (*fude* 福德). How can the providence of exchanging

[258] *Mingyun* 冥運: afterlife destiny. *HD* 2 (1998).

[259] T 2103, 52: 157c21-25.

[260] T 2103, 52: 158a24-25.

> consequences (*jiaobao zhi you* 交報之祐) be blamed? Therefore, *Zengzi* 曾子 said, "[If] a person cherishes goodness, even though blessing (*fu* 福) has not arrived yet, disaster goes away. [If] a person takes on vice, even though disaster has not arrived yet, blessing goes away." *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 said, "The wise do not necessarily live long, and the silly do not necessarily die young. Goodness does not have blessing nearby, and vice does not exchange with disaster." How does he blame this sign at hand and abandon the great token in the distance?
>
> 齊梁塔寺。自開福德之因。豈責交報之祐。故曾子曰。人之好善。福雖未至。去禍遠矣。人之爲惡。禍雖未至。去福遠矣。抱朴子曰。賢不必壽愚不必殘。善無近福惡無交禍。焉責斯近驗而遠棄大徵者乎[261]

In this passage, Wang first encapsulates the point in dispute: Buddhist undertakings do not bring promised merit. Then, he attempts to invalidate the claim by emphasizing the importance of doing good. Unlike his earlier negative claim that underlined equally ineffectual non-Buddhist devotional acts, this time he points to a positive aspect of the indigenous teachings. Despite the lack of immediate rewards, Wang argues, indigenous traditions, such as *Zengzi* and *Baopuzi*, encourage moral actions because at least goodness nevertheless dispels misfortune, even if it does not bring good fortune. By turning to the indigenous views about moral causality, Wang relates monastic construction to a broader ethical basis than Buddhist doctrinal technicalities. This move not only bolsters his first point about the unfathomable nature of ritual efficacy but also expands that point to explain the efficacy of merit at a general level of inscrutable moral causality. In short, he defends Buddhist undertakings by turning to the moral principle that good actions should be exercised no matter what. This way, his justification appeals to the common moral grounds across religious denominations.

The appeal to moral commonalities, however, was digressive. While presenting the Buddhist practice of cultivating merit as no different from the indigenous practice of

[261] T 2103, 52: 157b17-21.

ritual and goodness, this defensive angle did not respond to the initial issue of whether or not Buddhist devotional activities would yield rewards. To convince their opponents, the Buddhists needed to prove that the anti-Buddhist critics had a superficial understanding of merit. The soteriology of merit had to be fortified in clearly Buddhist terms.

In his *Essay on the Two Teachings* (*Erjiao lun* 二教論), Dao'an 道安 (fl. 557–581CE) spelled out the karmic theory that laid the groundwork for the Buddhist soteriology of merit.[262] Like Wang Mingguang, Dao'an also resorted to the inscrutability of moral causality. Unlike Wang, however, Dao'an situated it within a Buddhist explicatory framework. Following Lushan Huiyuan's tripartite theorization of karmic results,[263] his exposition states that good or evil actions done in past lifetimes resonate in the present and in countless future lifetimes. Misfortune, according to him, may follow good deeds due to evil deeds in unknowable previous lifetimes, and good fortune may follow evil deeds thanks to the good deeds in previous lifetimes.[264] He summarizes this matrix of moral causality in Buddhist karmic terms, stating "All of these are that the present karma has not ripened yet but results from the previous have already responded (此皆現業未熟而前報已應)."[265] In this defense, Dao'an eventually argues that ordinary people cannot comprehend the causal relationship between actions and consequences because retribution accrues in accordance with the accumulation of karmic acts from innumerable previous lives. "These rewards and punishments of cause and effect have

[262] Despeux (2002), 145-228. On the intimate relationship between the notion of merit and the theories of karma, see Adamek (2005): 141-43.

[263] For studies on *Sanbao lun* 三報論 (On Karmic Retribution in Three Time Periods), and *Baoying lun* 報應論 (On Retribution and Responses), see Liebenthal (1952); Guo (2007).

[264] Dao'an 道安, "Erjiao lun 二教論," T 2103, 52: 142b19-c13. Despeux (2002).

[265] T 2103, 52: 142b26-27.

broad ramifications of consequences from the three lifetimes (*sanbao* 三報). If one does not have penetrating insights and masterful knowledge, s/he seldom grasps the secrets [of the karmic causality] (此因果之賞罰，三報之弘趣。自非通才達識，罕得其門)."[266] By arguing for the enigmatic nature of karmic causality on which the workings of merit operate, Dao'an suggests that the critics disparaged the concept of merit due to their incomprehension of its workings.

Whether the Buddhist defense of merit succeeded is questionable. Although the Buddhist apologists advanced the soteriology of merit in Buddhist terms, it was still rooted in the karmic theory premised on the worldview of incessant cycles of rebirth. As discussed above, this cosmological underpinning was the source of confusion and skepticism among Chinese learned circles. In the last resort, the efficacy of merit was not a matter of reasoning, but a matter of believing.[267] The recourse to universal morality or its impenetrable nature undermined the Buddhist footing in the soteriology of merit. Although moral causality indeed explained how merit works, the recourse to such universality rendered the Buddhist soteriology of merit dispensable.

The Buddhist proponents searched for a different angle. Rather than maintaining the inscrutability of moral causality, they reformulated the point of contention with economic metaphors. In response to the claim that image production was conspicuous waste, the Buddhists defenders espoused the notion of merit in terms of the Buddhist practice of giving. In his *Dispelling Vices* (*Poxie lun* 破邪論), Falin 法琳 (572–640)

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[266] T 2103, 52: 142b24-25.

[267] For example, see Jingyuan Huiyuan's exegesis, "the belief in the rewards of generous giving is part of being on the correct path of cultivation." For this quotation and translation, see Adamek (2005): 145.

exercises this reframed approach, contending that one need not squander resources on Buddhist cultic objects to produce merit.

> The "Chapter of Measuring Merit" in the *Scripture of Great Precepts of the Upper Status* says: Dedicating stūpas and shrines to the Buddha reaps one-thousand-fold rewards. Giving to *śramaṇas* yields one-hundred-fold rewards. […] The *Scripture of the Upper Status in Wisdom, Original Vow, and Original Precept* says: When you give away [your property] to the Buddha and monks for their meals, stūpas, and monastic buildings, even one coin (*qian* 錢) accrues twenty-four-thousand-fold. However small deeds are, the reward will be immense.
>
> 上品大戒經校量功德品云。施佛塔廟得千倍報。布施沙門得百倍報[268] […] 智慧本願大戒上品經曰。施散佛僧中食塔寺。一錢已上皆二萬四千倍。功少報多[269]

Considering that the cosmological premise led critics to dismiss the workings of merit, this passage, remaining silent as to the posthumous effects of merit, may appear to be another diversion. This seemingly deflecting tactic, however, directly addresses two grave challenges that the Buddhist monastic institution faced. The first is that monastic construction required excessive spending that drained the state treasury only to serve the wealthy and powerful for flaunting their status; the second is that monastics used the notion of merit to deceive lay people into exhausting resources for monasteries. The Buddhist defenders prior to Falin employed digressive rhetoric to minimize monastic responsibility for overconsumption or to generalize the workings of merit. In contrast, Falin responded to the two criticisms with the single answer that monastic construction was a simple, pious deed to generate merit. By doing so, not only did Falin reinstate devoutness as the focus of discussion about Buddhist undertakings, but also reinforced the Buddhist stance in the discourse of merit. The cosmological differences between Buddhist and indigenous Chinese premises regarding the efficacy of devotional practices

[268] T 2109, 52: 478a9-10.

[269] T 2109, 52: 478a12-14.; T 2103, 52: 162c9-12.

were not definitively resolved. Nevertheless, at least in this passage, Falin validated the production of Buddhist cultic objects by presenting merit as an attractive investment: *you do not need fortune to obtain merit, but its yield rate is exponential*.[270]

Conclusion

The anti-Buddhist critics attacked the fashioning of images in three respects. First, Buddhist adherents splurged on building icons, stūpas, and monastic halls in order to display ostentation against the virtue of frugality. Second, Buddhist followers violated their own moral code of conduct by killing insects and tress during the physical process of producing images. Third, monastics deceptively propagated the idea of postmortem rewards of Buddhist undertakings in order to accumulate their own wealth. These criticisms indicate that anti-Buddhist rhetoric brought Buddhist images into focus in order to criticize what the external critics believed Buddhists were doing.

In response, Buddhist proponents also deployed cultic objects to the fore. While admitting their faults of vastly spending resources and accidentally taking lives by monastic construction, the Buddhist apologists endeavored to minimize their accountability. They imputed such misdeeds to only a minority of the monastic communities or diluted the gravity of the transgression. The doctrine of merit motivated Buddhist followers to commit to donation for Buddhist undertakings, so the criticism that merit was ineffective and deceptive posed a pressing problem that the Buddhist apologists could not sidestep through a diversion as they had done for other issues. In order to justify the soteriology of merit, they turned to the idea of universal moral

[270] On the notion of merit as investment, see Walsh (2007): 356-69.

causality by framing Buddhist undertakings as good actions the outcomes of which were not predictable. This move, however, compromised the Buddhist stake on the merit soteriology. The Buddhist proponents recalibrated the defensive angle to focus on the way to generate merit and present the practice of donating to fashion images as a soteriologically easy and profitable investment.

These criticisms and defenses of Buddhist construction projects revolved around moral issues that characterized what Buddhists did as good or bad. However, such debates were often couched in socio-economic terms.[271] In explaining how the merit soteriology works, Falin argued that the smallest amount of donation to monasteries and monastic construction would generate 24,000-fold merit in return. By specifying the workings of merit in such straightforward transactional terms, Falin defended the fashioning of images as a fast track to the achievement of salvific goals.

A discourse of underscoring the salvific effectiveness of Buddhist images appeared in other Buddhist apologetic contexts. Countering the criticism that material commitments to Buddhism drained the treasury,[272] Daoxuan champions the practice of giving as a skillful means (Sk. *upāya*; Ch. *fangbian* 方便) to gain insight into the fleeting nature of things. After opening with the statement that fortune is transient,[273] he explains how material possession provokes what the Buddhist theorists would conceive as the

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[271] On Buddhist soteriology in economic terms, see Benavides (2005); Adamek (2005); Walsh (2007); Shirkey (2008).

[272] Daoxuan's comments on Lu Sidao's 盧思道 (535–586) criticism. For his biographical information, see "Lu Sidao 盧思道 (535–586), Zixing 子行," in *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide,* Part One, ed. David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, 634-36.

[273] "Those who consume fortune to seek out merit know that the body, life, and fortune will eventually scatter and dissipate (彼費財崇福者。知身命財終歸散滅)." T 2103, 52: 133b10-11.

three poisons (Sk. *tridoṣa*; Ch. *sandu* 三毒): A deluded one who does not yet realize the impermanence of fortune (ignorance, Sk. *moha*; Ch. *chi* 癡) would covet wealth (greed, Sk. *rāga*; Ch. *tan* 貪) and thus grow resentment (anger, Sk. *dveṣa*; Ch. *chen* 瞋).[274] The best way to break free from this unwholesome condition, as Daoxuan puts it, is to "relinquish it [i.e., fortune, *cai* 財] like floating dust (棄之若遊塵)."[275] Then, he further suggests the way to use such relinquished fortune and explains its purpose in Buddhist doctrinal terms.

> One embellishes his/her sensory perception to prepare the Dharma body. One provides skillful means to ferry all sentient beings to the bank of salvation. This is the ultimate teaching. The rest is all illusory. What [else] should we know to discuss?
>
> 莊嚴性識，使早備法身。成就善權，務津梁諸有。斯至教也。餘諸幻有，知何所論[276]

The main point of this passage is that the purpose of relinquishing material possession is to lead all sentient beings to understand the Dharma body.[277] To achieve this effect, Daoxuan claims, turning to sensory means is crucial. As one perceives through the

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[274] "Some [people] keep and cherish [body, life, and fortune]. They are slaves who enrich life and keep property. […] The fortune already used is like shadow chasing each other. [If] things yet to be used cannot be given away, they rather incur grudges against kith and kin (徒爲保愛。此厚生守財之奴也 […] 已用之財，如影之相逐。未用之物，不可賜及怨親)." T 2103, 52: 133b11-c26. See Adamek (2005): 141.

[275] "Therefore, from the state, from households, [donors] leave it behind as if taking off shoes. Whether it is fortune or life, relinquish it like floating dust (所以於國於家遺之如脫屣。若財若命棄之若遊塵)." T 2103, 52: 133c26-27.

[276] T 2103, 52: 133c27-29.

[277] The notion of *dharma-kāya*, routinely conceptualized as the absolute and transcendent body of the Buddha, has been subject to rigorous scrutiny. For example, Paul Harrison explains that early traditions construed it as a whole collection of the Buddha's teachings, rather than a theistic notion of ultimate reality or truth as in the statement "Buddha embodies dharma." Paul Harrison, "Is the *Dharma-kāya* the Real 'Phantom Body' of the Buddha?" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15, no, 1 (1992): 44-94; Eckel (1992), 97-109. For more studies on the doctrine of the Buddha's multiple bodies, see above, p. 23, fn. 51.

senses, grasping the Dharma body would be easier if it were reified into a sensory form rather than being kept abstract. The sensory form itself is transitory and hence suitable for guiding sentient beings to realize the illusory nature of things—impermanence.

To put forth this view, Daoxuan uses visually evocative expressions. The sentence "one embellishes his/her sensory perception to prepare the Dharma body (莊嚴性識，使早備法身)" is the key here. The term of *zhuangyan* 莊嚴, commonly translated as "to ornament" in medieval Buddhist texts, is closely related to the visual faculty. While this term conveys several different meanings,[278] one is the act of building and decorating Buddhist monuments.[279] The following penta-syllabic phrase maintains that by ornamenting senses one would have the Dharma body—the ultimate truth of the Buddha—ready to appreciate. Daoxuan's overall point is that laity donate their possessions to monasteries as they understand the impermanence of things, and through such donation for fashioning material objects to decorate monasteries, Buddhists can appreciate that the Buddha's ultimate truth will be realized. Based on this statement, Daoxuan further argues that such material objects for monastic ornamentation—images—serve as a skillful device that helps sentient beings to achieve liberation. By connecting the practice of giving to the making of images, this apologetic comment proposes a soteriological logic of images that extends beyond the purpose of generating and accumulating merit but sets the aim to the level of awakening to emptiness.

Daoxuan's interpretation held that the physicality of Buddhist cultic objects would

[278] On the broad semantic scope of the term and its meaning in Buddhist ritual performance, see Stephen F. Teiser, "Ornamenting the Departed: Notes on the Language of Chinese Buddhist Ritual Texts," *Asia Major*, third series, 21, no. 1 (2009): 201-37.

[279] Ibid., 223-24.

be intimately associated with the metaphysics of emptiness. While the sensory form of images was construed as a skillful means, what remained unresolved was the tension between Buddhist cultic objects, as an illusionistic presence of the Buddha who receives devotion, and the transcendent Buddha, as the one who attained his liberation and went well beyond the dichotomous sensory realm. The next chapter explores the debates that questioned this metaphysical paradox deemed intrinsic to the devotional use of Buddhist images.

Chapter Five
THE IMAGE AS THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DHARMA

This chapter explores the way the debates over Buddhist images turned metaphysical. In Chapter Three we saw that both anti-Buddhists and pro-Buddhists readily accepted the premise that an image of the Buddha served as a ritual surrogate. This chapter investigates the debates about what these surrogate images represented. Buddhist images were supposed to mask, but inadvertently accentuated the Buddha's worldly absence.[280] The anti-Buddhist critics, keenly aware of this absence, disputed the very existence of the Buddha. Pro-Buddhist defenders countered this skepticism by explaining that Buddhist images were a manifestation of the Buddha. However, this stance posed a conundrum even to themselves: an image cannot adequately represent the Buddha, so what does it represent? The solution of the Buddhist apologists was to define the image as a manifestation of the ineffable Dharma, that is, ultimate truth that the Buddha had attained and that his followers aimed to realize. This chapter charts the moments at which the detractors of Buddhism problematized the Buddha's absence while the proponents of Buddhism struggled to escape the metaphysical puzzle.

As this perceived absence of the image's referent came to the fore in these debates, neither side posited the image of the Buddha straightforwardly as a replacement for the Buddha. Even when they accepted Buddhist images as a stand-in for the Buddha, a subtle but unambiguous distinction persisted between the Buddha as the object of representation and his image as a representing medium. Underlying these debates was a

[280] For a discussion on the tension between the absence of the original and the presence of its image, see above, Chapter One, pp. 20-24.

tacit consensus that Buddhist images should be explained in terms of the professed goal of Buddhist practices—the realization of ultimate reality. While skeptics doubted the utility of Buddhist images for that purpose, defenders justified images as an aid to that goal. It is worth noting that the apologists of Buddhist images were not always pro-Buddhist. It was initially anti-Buddhist critics who stressed the role of images in the attainment of the Dharma. In their response to this position, Buddhists maintained that the Buddha's profound teachings should not be reduced to images. When the detractors challenged the validity of Buddhism based on the absence of the Buddha, however, Buddhist proponents sought recourse to images as evidence of his presence. This interchangeability of stances suggests that the absence of the Buddha generated the semiotic fuzziness of Buddhist images, and both sides attempted to harness it to bolster their respective conflicting agendas to undermine or fortify the Buddhist religion.

This chapter comprises three parts. The first part looks at how the invisible referent of Buddhist images began to draw attention during the interreligious debates whose main concern was at first only tangential to the metaphysics of Buddhist images. The second part examines how anti-Buddhist critics picked up on the Buddha's absence to call the Buddhist religion into question and how Buddhist defenders drew on Buddhist images to prove the Buddha's presence. The third part investigates how the metaphysical dilemma of Buddhist images fueled anti-Buddhist campaigns and thus prompted Buddhist apologists to defend the image of the Buddha as the manifestation of the Dharma.

Bowing to the Image of the Absent Buddha

Interest in the metaphysical referent of Buddhist images grew out of a seemingly irrelevant context. From the fourth to early fifth centuries during the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420) and Liu Song 劉宋 (420–479) dynasties, the Buddhist use of cultic images drew attention from some of the leading opponents of Buddhism in a sporadic series of controversies over a matter that I call "proper conduct" (*lifa* 禮法) or, in Leon Hurvitz's words, "civil etiquette."[281] The point of this criticism was that Buddhist monastics did not abide by the indigenous norms in social manners: monks do not bow to rulers;[282] monks do not sit properly but crouch when eating (*jushi* 踞食).[283] This discrepancy between the conduct of Buddhist monastics and indigenous etiquette piqued the ire of courtiers and officials. The debates thus centered on whether the behavioral peculiarities of monastics should be eliminated or tolerated.[284] The supporters of eliminating these peculiarities, i.e., anti-Buddhists or anti-monastics, argued that since important Buddhist practices were already similar to Chinese mores, the Buddhist religion as a whole would remain intact even if minor differences were removed. Along this line of reasoning, the Buddhists' use of images came to exemplify major Buddhist practices that were compatible with

[281] Hurvitz, "Render unto Caesar" (1957).

[282] For information on existing studies on this topic, see above, Chapter One, p. 29, fn. 64.

[283] Compared to the bowing controversy, the debate over the monastic sitting posture for meals has been extremely understudied. JI Zhichang [Chi Chih-chang] 紀志昌, "Nanchao 'jushi lunyi' suo fanying ru, fo jiaoshe de lilun siwei yu wenhua yihan 南朝「踞食論議」所反映儒，佛交涉的理論思維與文化意涵," *Taida wenshizhe xuebao* 臺大文史哲學報 76 (2012): 67-105. For the social significance of proper sitting posture, see LI Ji 李濟, "Guizuo dunju yu jiju 跪坐蹲踞與箕踞," *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 24 (1953): 283-301; ZHU Dawei 朱大渭, "Zhonggu hanren yu guizuo dao chuijiao gaozuo 中古漢人由跪坐到垂腳高坐," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 no. 4 (1994): 102-14.

[284] Zürcher (2007), 106-108.

indigenous norms. Buddhist devotees paid respect to the absent Buddha through Buddhist images in a bodily manner, and the critics of monastic conduct found that similar to the way Chinese people expressing reverence toward social superiors, including rulers, parents, and deceased ancestors. This controversy over monastic manners subsided but was not fully resolved,[285] and critics' observation about Buddhist images in connection with the absence of the Buddha continued to feed the debates between anti-Buddhist and pro-Buddhist proponents.

The controversy over the way monastics seated themselves directly illustrates how the critics of Buddhist monastics conceived the commonality between the Buddhist use of cultic images and Chinese norms.[286] In the debates that occurred on the proposal to alter the monastic sitting manner sometime between 426 and 427, critics likened the Buddhist use of devotional images to the time-honored ideal of venerating ancestors. The point of comparison was that Buddhists paid respect to images as if the images *were* the living Buddha while sacrifice to deceased ancestors was performed as if their spirits were

[285] The Buddhist position in these debates was that monastic communities should remain independent from the secular realm. The most notable advocate of this stance is Lushan Huiyuan's 廬山慧遠 (334-416). "*Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 (Treatise on the matter that *śramaṇas* should not honor the monarch)," T 2102, 52: 29c19-32b11. For the political implication of the bowing debates, see Thomas Jülch, "Introduction," in *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel: Aspects of the Relationship between the Buddhist Saṃgha and the State in Chinese History*, ed. Thomas Jülch (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1-3. The debate in the fourth and early fifth centuries, for the time being, ended in favor of monastics, who were allowed to maintain their exemption from the secular norms. The same issue resurfaced in 662. For the later example of this bowing controversy, see Reinders (2015), 51-75.

[286] As for the points of this debate, see Zheng Daozi 鄭道子 (364-427), "Yu chanshi shu lun jushi 與禪師書論踞食 (Letter sent to the meditation master for discussing [the matter of] crouching and eating)" in T 2102, 52: 77b9-21. For a translation of this letter, *The Collection for the Propagation and Clarification of Buddhism* vol. 2, trans. Harumi Hirano Ziegler (Moraga, CA: BDK America, 2017), 180-81.

present in the shrine.[287] Fan Tai 范泰 (355–428), a leading opponent of the monastic way of sitting,[288] wrote:

> Proper conduct cherishes harmony, and the monastic law respects the same. Now when ascending to the hall of feast, [Buddhist monastics] face the image of the sage as if the spirit were present inside the image.
>
> 禮以和貴，僧法尚同。今升齋堂對聖像，如神在像中[289]

The subjunctive phrase "as if the spirit were present (*rushenzai* 如神在)" is the key here. This well-known phrase from the *Analects* is an unequivocal reference to ancestral veneration, explaining how to perform sacrifice to ancestral gods.[290] As discussed in Chapter Three, it requires only basic literacy to catch the meaning and context. Even without surgical analysis of how the devotional use of Buddhist images resembles ancestral veneration, the audience of this memorial—the emperor and ministers—would have easily caught the import of the comparison: by means of images, Buddhist devotees venerate the absent Buddha as if he were present, just as Chinese descendants perform sacrifices to deceased ancestors as if they were living. Hence, Fan Tai contends, Buddhist monks should follow Chinese etiquette in terms of sitting as well.

The critics reasoned that the Buddhists used images the way the Chinese venerated their ancestors: Buddhist images substituted for the absent Buddha so that

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[287] In the later debates in the early seventh century, the Buddhist side advanced the position that the Buddhist use of images was in conformity with the Confucian ideal of ancestral veneration. See above, Chapter Three, p. 83.

[288] On Fan Tai, see *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide, Part One*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 217-18. He was the father of Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445 or 446) who compiled the *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書). Although he proposed a bill that opposed to the Buddhist monastic custom, he was known to sympathize with Buddhism at the Liu Song court.

[289] T 2102, 52: 77c17-18.

[290] *Analects* 3.12. For a complex history of commentaries on this phrase, see Wilson (2014).

devotees could venerate him even if he were not there. As the critics drew attention to the function of Buddhist images as objects for expressing respect, the analogy between the Buddhist use of images and Chinese manners seemed to work more effectively for the bowing controversy than for the one about sitting posture: Buddhists bow to the Buddha by way of his image although he is gone from this world. But the emperor, unlike the Buddha, is still present in this world, and thus, monastics should bow to the emperor.

On those occasions when this bowing controversy was recorded, however, reference to Buddhist images was covert and often circumstantial: critics did not specify what object stood in for the absent Buddha. This vagueness has already attracted scholarly attention. In his recent work on the bowing controversy in 662, Eric Reinders proposes a hypothesis that images might be the object of Buddhist obeisance.[291] Requiring the presence of the Buddha as witness to a ritual, Buddhist convention places material representations of the Buddha at the center of its ritual space.[292] Statues, portraits, stūpas, and scriptures occupy the place of the Buddha for nearly all Buddhist performances of ritual. Moreover, in response to their opponents, the defenders of the monastics mentioned the image in recapitulating the points of their opponents. On the whole, it is a reasonable conjecture that the object of Buddhist bowing that critics saw was an image filling in for the absent Buddha.

The earliest surviving document of the bowing debates is the edict announced by the court advisor Yu Bing 庾冰 (ca. 296–344) on behalf of Emperor Cheng of Jin 晉成帝

[291] Reinders (2015), 42-47.

[292] LIU, "Art, Ritual, and Society" (1995): 37-40; Campany, "Aśokan Stūpas" (1995), pp. 24-26; Yamabe, "Visionary Repentance" (2005), 17-39; Hureau "Buddhist Rituals" (2010), 1207-44.

(Xianzong 顯宗; Sima Yan 司馬衍, b. 321; r. 325–342) in 340.[293] Although it augurs how the anti-monastic critics would compare Buddhist obeisance with bowing to the emperor, the analogy itself is latent. By asking two rhetorical questions, the edict implies that Buddhist monks pay respect to images that stand in for the absent Buddha, arguing for the universal importance of deferential acts.

> Myriad places have different customs. The divine way is hard to tell, but originates in itself. Profound insight and meticulous understanding sincerely and absolutely are not strange. Why does the etiquette of kneeling and bowing rather have to be as such? […] Does the Buddha surely exist now? Will not the Buddha exist in the future? If the Buddha exists, his way is solid and wide. If the Buddha does not exist, how can his righteousness be attained?
>
> 夫萬方殊俗，神道難辯，有自來矣。達觀傍通，誠當無怪。況阿跪拜之禮何必尚然 […] 且今果有佛耶。將無佛耶。有佛耶其道固弘。無佛耶義將何取[294]

The analogy to Buddhist images is hidden in four cumulative steps. First, by mentioning cultural diversity (myriad places have different customs), the edict suggests that Buddhist monastics are exempt from bowing to the ruler due to the foreign origin of their practices. This acknowledgement of cultural differences, however, only serves to emphasize underlying commonalities between Buddhism and Chinese norms. Second, the remark on the universality of ultimate truth (profound insight and meticulous understanding sincerely and absolutely are not strange) implies that Buddhist advocates claim the general applicability of Buddhist teachings. Third, the edict goes, the Chinese manner of kneeling and bowing is a bodily display of respect and is also universal. This statement hints that monastics already practice the physical expression of reverence. Finally, the Buddha's absence means that deferential acts toward him will be necessary. Taken

[293] For a full translation of this edict and its ensuing memorials by Yu Bing's opponents, see Zürcher (2007), 160-63.

[294] T 2102, 52: 79b26-c4. For another translation, see ibid., 160-61.

together, these four steps intimate that Buddhists bow to perpetuate the profound teachings of the Buddha in his absence. Despite the edict's silence about the identity of the Buddhists' object of veneration, in all likelihood, Buddhists were bowing in front of images. By implying this point, the edict pronounces that monastics should not be exempt from bowing.

If Buddhists can bow to images then monastics can bow to the ruler, according to this position. In 403, roughly sixty years after Yu Bing's edict, Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), who usurped the throne in 402, drew the same comparison as Yu Bing. Buddhist bowing is still suggested, and the analogy is more explicit. Huan Xuan says: "As to the *śramaṇa*'s way of respect, how can all [of it] summarily expressed in the body and preserved only in the mind? [Buddhist] ritual obeisance during confession also involves diligence in performance (沙門之敬。豈皆略形存心。懺悔禮拜亦篤於事).[295] […] But there is only a small difference in such strictness. Since they (i.e., monastics) cannot forget the external form there (in the Buddhist bowing), how can they disregard propriety here (in the obeisance to the emperor) (但爲小異其制耳。既不能忘形於彼。何爲忽儀於此)?"[296] This statement, which begins and ends with rhetorical questions, minimizes the difference between the two occasions of bowing. By emphasizing the bodily dimension of obeisance that Buddhist monastics perform during repentance ritual, Huan Xuan argues for the universality and necessity of deferential acts to cultivate devoutness. His reference to the Buddhist confession ritual implies that the object of Buddhist bowing is an image since the Buddhist manual for confession ritual requires images of the Buddha

[295] T 2102, 52: 81a18-19.

[296] T 2102, 52: 81a20-21.

to be set up.[297] As in Yu Bing's edict, Huan Xuan drew on Buddhist bowing to claim that monastics cannot make a case for being exempt from bowing.

While Buddhist images were implied in connection with the absent Buddha in the previous two examples, Bian Sizhi 卞嗣之 (fl. 402–404), one of Huan Xuan's allies, associates Buddhist bowing with the pursuit of ultimate truth.

> The Buddha's teaching takes the marvelous wisdom as its root, and the guided achievement [of that wisdom] as the goal. […] The mysterious principle is dim and remote, being sought above form. [The act of] piously lying flat and rising up has no damage in keeping the precepts.
>
> 佛教以神慧爲本，導達爲功 […] 神理緬邈，求之於自形而上者。虔肅拜起，無虧於持戒[298]

Barring the last point that highlights obeisance, this excerpt reads like a defense of Buddhism. It holds that the principal purpose of Buddhism is to gain insight into ultimate reality as the Buddha did, and that such mysterious truth is hard to reach. In order to attain it beyond form, Bian Sizhi proposes, one should prostrate oneself. This passing comment, opposing the monastic refusal to bow to the ruler, is innovative: it connects the physical act of bowing with the mental act of awakening to ultimate truth. Like his predecessors, Bian does not refer directly to Buddhist images. Nor does he even imply the absence of the Buddha. By mentioning the deferential act of monastics, however, he hints at a material focus for the action, like other anti-monastic critics did. In his construal, monastics prostrate themselves to accomplish their professed goal—to come closer to ultimate truth—rather than or in addition to venerating the long-gone Buddha.

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[297] Yamabe (2005), 18-19.

[298] T 2102, 52: 84c22-24.

Unlike other critics who assumed that the object of Buddhist bowing was a reference to the absent Buddha, Bian spots its relation to the Buddha's formless truth.

Bian's interpretation of Buddhist bowing is important. It signals that the detractors of Buddhism sensed the ambiguity of Buddhist images. In general, the critics of monastic peculiarities saw the Buddhist image as a universal medium for expressing reverence to the entity that transcends the physical form. The critics, however, did not have to name what exactly that entity should be because they drew on this observation to argue for the commonalities between Buddhist practice and Chinese mores and, by extension, to require monastics to comply with Chinese civil etiquette such as bowing to the ruler and sitting in a proper posture. The intention of bringing Buddhist images into the debate was to dispute the monastics who claimed the universality of Buddhist teachings and yet refused to abide by Chinese norms on the pretext of different monastic rules. For the same reason, the critics did not disparage Buddhist images or their devotional use: They could explore different semiotic possibilities of Buddhist images as long as monastics treated images in the manner that the critics found similar to Chinese ritual etiquette.

This acceptance of Buddhist images by the anti-monastics put the pro-monastics in a delicate situation. Buddhists bowed to images so overtly and earnestly that the defenders of monastics could not deny the importance of bowing. They could neither concur with their opponents—whose intent was to subjugate monastic communities to non-monastic governance—nor rebut that reverence for the paragon should be expressed bodily. Running out of positive moves, the defenders went for understatement. They downplayed the significance of the bodily dimension in Buddhist bowing and the

adequacy of images for representing the unfathomable. In order to disagree with their opponents who attended to the absence of the entity represented by Buddhist images, the Buddhist defenders kept it unknown.

The pro-monastic courtier Wang Mi 王謐 (360–407) deployed this understatement tactic in response to Huan Xuan and his clique. At first Wang admits the significance of monastics' displaying of reverence. Immediately afterwards, he devalues the bodily expression of obeisance as one of the many ways in which monastics practice to achieve their soteriological goal, and he broadens the range of objects worthy of reverence.[299] In particular he casts doubt on the ability of images by themselves to *reveal* ultimate reality.

> Truly, the profound essence is hidden and cut off, [and thus] not to be unveiled by things or images.[300] Its movement is unobstructed and its principle is marvelous. How could merely mortal traces correspond to it?
>
> 良以冥本幽絶。非物象之所擧。運通理妙。豈麁迹之能酬[301]

The gist of this passage is that ultimate truth cannot be adequately represented by images or concrete things. Calling Buddhist images "mortal traces," Wang insists that ultimate truth should be appreciated without recourse to such media. His rhetorical question at the end—how could merely mortal traces correspond to [the profound essence]—stresses the impossibility that images can represent mysterious truth.

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[299] "The way for the *śramaṇas* itself takes respect as its core. However, as the routes for ferrying are already different, their form of righteousness does not involve lowering and bending [their bodies]. […] The *śramaṇas* respect the lineage and take the elders as masters, honoring and respecting each other on their own (夫沙門之道。自以敬爲主。但津塗既殊。義無降屈 […] 沙門所以推宗師長，自相崇敬者)." T 2102, 52: 81b25-27.

[300] This phrase (非物象之所擧) is known to have originated in Xun Can's 荀粲 (c. 209–237) comment on a phrase from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) "Make an image to express its meaning exhaustively (立象以盡意)." *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志), 10: 319.

[301] T 2102, 52: 81c6-7.

Wang's passage seems to approximate an attack on Buddhist images if we do not consider the fact that it was a response to the anti-monastic position. As illustrated by Bian Sizhi's essay, anti-monastics, by contrast, mounted what was essentially a metaphysical defense of Buddhist images. The fault line between critics and defenders formed along the question of whether Buddhist images could sufficiently represent their referent. Both sides shared the view that Buddhist images came into being due to the physical absence of what they were supposed to represent. This sense of absence haunted the pro-Buddhists. Shortly after the etiquette controversy subsided, the question about the intangible subject of Buddhist images arose. This time the debate centered on Buddhist images more explicitly and intensely than before. As the terms of the debate changed, so did the stances: the anti-Buddhists doubted the utility of images and the pro-Buddhists championed it.

How to Bring Back the Long-Gone Buddha

The metaphysical puzzle about what Buddhist images represented was a marginal issue in the etiquette controversy. The issue grew significantly, however. The pro-Buddhists at first emphasized the inadequacy or even impossibility of representing the profundity of the Buddha's being and his teachings. This reservation backfired. Having already perceived the Buddha's absence in the Buddhist use of images, the anti-Buddhists began to question the Buddha's very existence and insisted on seeing the Buddha's manifestation in this world. Facing this altered angle of attack, the pro-Buddhists attempted to rise to the challenge by reversing their earlier position—justifying images as the manifestation of the Buddha and his teaching.

The call for the (re-)appearance of the absent Buddha posed a grave challenge to Buddhist apologists. In his afterword to the *Propagation and Illumination* (ca. 515), Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) lists the Buddha's worldly absence as the third of six major causes of skepticism toward Buddhism in China.[302] The first three suspicions concern the key concepts of Buddhist teachings and their validity; the other three concern the beginning of Buddhism on Chinese soil. As listed the third, the problem of the Buddha's absence in this world comes after the issue of the agent who transmigrates along the cycle of rebirth, one of the topics that Buddhist theorists most intensely debated with their external critics in the fifth century.[303] The fact that the Buddha's absence made it into this list testifies its urgency to Buddhist apologists.

Demand for the Buddha's worldly manifestation was a corollary to awareness of the Buddha's absence. Within surviving records, this issue first arose in a series of correspondence between the skeptic Li Miao 李淼, Prefectural Governor of Jiaozhou 交州刺史, and his Buddhist respondents Daogao 道高 and Faming 法明. They are remembered now solely on the basis of the letters preserved in the *Collection of Texts for*

[302] "The third suspicion is that [people] do not see the true Buddha and [there is] no benefit for governing the state (三疑莫見眞佛無益國治)." T 2102, 52: 95a18-19. The other five suspicions are: 1) Buddhist scriptures teach false exaggeration without evidential tokens (一疑經說迂誕大而無徵); 2) When people die, spirits perish, and thus there is no three lifetimes (二疑人死神滅無有三世); 4) Antiquity did not have the teaching of the [Buddhist] Law, and it only recently emerged in the Han period (四疑古無法教近出漢世); 5) Buddhist teachings are in the barbarian regions to edify the non-Chinese custom (五疑教在戎方化非華俗); 6) The Buddhist Law was faint in the Han and Wei, and only began to flourish in the Jin (六疑漢魏法微晋代始盛). T 2102, 52: 95a17-21. It should be noted that this list does not include the bowing issue. The controversy over monastics not bowing to rulers and parents recurred over the medieval period and has drawn much of scholarly attention. Sengyou's list suggests that medieval Buddhist apologists approached anti-Buddhist criticisms from the perspectives different from modern scholars.

[303] For scholarship on the debates over indestructability of the spirit, see above, Chapter One, p. 29, fn. 63.

the Propagation and Illumination. The letters themselves are not dated. The correspondence, nonetheless, seems to have taken place in the early fifth century. In the first place, Sengyou, the compiler, related these letters to the debates on the indestructibility of the spirit, which took place in the early fifth century, by leaving his comments on Zong Bing's *Essay of Elucidating [the Teaching of] the Buddha* (*Mingfo lun* 明佛論) penned in ca. 433.[304] Furthermore, a Qing compilation of pre-Tang literature placed the letters in the Liu Song dynasty (420–479) section.[305]

In their first correspondence, Li sparked the metaphysical discussion of Buddhist images by asking a leading question that doubted the existence of the Buddha: why does the Buddha not manifest himself? Following the Chinese epistolary convention,[306] Li opens his first letter to the Buddhist monks politely with a compliment about his interlocutors. Calling ultimate reality *Dao*, he addresses its universality and situates Buddhism as a localized version of ubiquitous truth.[307] His letter uses language that would have been familiar to his interlocutors. In particular, he singles out the Buddhist notion of expedient means (Sk. *upāya*, Ch. *fangbian* 方便) for the soteriological purpose. "As the Way (*Dao*) resides in the pure void, its great four elements are ideal and eternal. And the Gate of the Law (Buddhism) mysteriously arose in various regions. You say that

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[304] T 2102, 52: 72a6.

[305] *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, fasc. 57, in *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, comp. Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 2746.

[306] Antje Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 127-34.

[307] As for the concept of *Dao* as the all-encompassing ultimate reality, see Livia Kohn, "One Dao—Many Ways: Daoist Approaches to Religious Diversity," in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 53-55.

this skillful ability benefits beings, and its teachings liberates [them] immeasurably (夫道處清虛，四大理常。而有法門，妙出群域。若稱其巧能利物，度脫無量爲教)."[308] After stating the universal value of Buddhism in mixed terms, Li gets to the main point of the letter: since Buddhist followers have not witnessed the Buddha in person, his teachings have no grounds.

> How come [Buddhists] have not seen the true form [of the Buddha] in the world? [They] blatantly say empty words without substance.
>
> 何以不見眞形於世。直空説而無實耶[309]

This passage calls Buddhism without the Buddha a lie. Li points out the fact that Chinese Buddhists have never seen the Buddha in person, and he then uses it as evidence for the baselessness of the Buddha's teachings. Li's letter demands the Buddha's existence in this world as a necessary condition for the validity of Buddhism.

Even from this short remark, we can see that the weight imposed on Buddhist apologists was formidable. As the anti-Buddhists related the historical presence of the Buddha to the foundation of Buddhism, the relevance and legitimacy of Buddhism could be undermined by this agnostic argument that there is no definitive evidence for the Buddha's existence.

In response to Li's hostility, the Buddhist interlocutors brought images of the Buddha into the debate. In particular, the ordained Daogao lists the use of images as one of three modes by which the Buddha manifests himself to his followers. In accordance

[308] T 2102, 52: 70a28-29.

[309] T 2102, 52: 70a29-b1.

with the tripartite degeneration of the Dharma,[310] Daogao enumerates the historic moment of the Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi tree as the first manifestation of his Buddhahood; for the second he refers to the Buddha's post-enlightenment career of teaching his disciples and contemporaries while alive;[311] for the last, he presents Buddhist images as a reminder of the Buddha's existence in the world for those who live in times without the Buddha.

> The third way is the teaching of images that closely imitates the track of [the Buddha's] comportment. The imitation of the track of comportment responds to human sentiment of these days. As human sentiment appreciates the image, anyone takes it as manifestation.
>
> 三者像教，髣髴儀軌。髣髴儀軌，應今人情。人情感像，孰爲見哉[312]

Daogao elaborates on this third mode more than the other two. Calling it the "teaching of images (*xiangjiao* 像教)," [313] he defines the third manifestation as replicating the trace of the Buddha's solemn presence (*yi* 儀). He then offers a functional explanation that the likeness to the Buddha's presence leads people to cherish the image (*xiang* 像). This interpretation of the teaching of images leads to the conclusion that a sentimental reaction to a material representation of the Buddha makes people take the image as the manifestation of the real Buddha. Daogao does not say that the image itself *is* the Buddha, but that people take it to be. This third mode of manifestation draws on not the

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[310] Daogao's explanation of the degeneration of the Dharma does not include the final Dharma stage (*mofa* 末法).

[311] "The first way is witnessing the body [of the Buddha] that emits light and shakes the earth. The second way is the True Dharma that accords with the world in which the Buddha lived (一者見身，放光動地。二者正法，如佛在世)." T 2102, 52: 70b7-8.

[312] T 2102, 52: 70b8-9.

[313] On the term *xiangjiao*, see above, Chapter Three, p. 68, fn. 133.

straightforward equation of the Buddha and his images, but devotees' attitudes toward them.

Li Miao, however, was not convinced. The manifestation that he initially demanded was the flesh-and-blood Buddha. As Daogao himself already conceded, the image is not the real Buddha. In their second round of correspondence, therefore, Daogao's distinction between the teachings imparted by the Buddha himself (*zheng* 正) and the Buddha appreciated through his images incited Li Miao to play down the latter.[314] Li argues that images of the Buddha frustrate the awakening to ultimate truth because they are not real and thus engender doubt.

> Suspicion is not the root of awakening. […] If the sounds [of the Dharma] and the traces [of the Buddha's body] accrue in tandem, words and images [may] help each other. [But] the great intent was already distorted. […] As slander and errors also increase strife, without evidence of [the Buddha's] manifestation certified under seal, [slanders and errors] will be solidified themselves. […] Straw dogs make an empty exhibit. Can that be awakening? Images of [the Buddha's] comportment make a vain display. Can that be believed?
>
> 疑非悟本 […] 若乃聲迹並資，言像相濟。大義既乖 […] 將亦謗誤增釁，得不取證於示見印記，以自固乎 […] 芻狗空陳。其能悟乎。儀像虛設。其能信乎[315]

This passage underscores the disparity between the truth and the image. Li holds that practices for realizing truth should eliminate obstacles such as doubt, inaccuracies, and confusion; and yet, as the original teaching ebbs over time, detractors will rise to find fault with it. Images, he argues, facilitate all these degenerative steps because images cannot prove the real. His analogy of Buddhist images to straw dogs amplifies the rhetorical effect: images cannot adequately represent the Buddha's true teaching.

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[314] "As sympathetic edification accords with different periods, the [teaching of] images and the true [Dharma] follow different conventions (感化異時，像正殊俗)." T 2102, 52: 70b25.

[315] T 2102, 52: 70b27-c6.

Li's anti-Buddhist critique resembles the Buddhist defense of images in the controversy over monastic manners. In opposition to the anti-monastic observation that Buddhists bowed to images in lieu of the real Buddha, the Buddhist apologists stressed the unsuitability of images for representing ultimate truth. In this debate over the Buddha's manifestation, Li denies the utility of images to replace the real Buddha. Initially rooted in the Buddhist stance, this emphasis on the discrepancy between the image and the true will resurface on the anti-Buddhist side during the anti-Buddhist campaigns of the late sixth century.

The Buddhist response to Li's critique also resembles the anti-monastic position in the earlier debate. In defending images as the manifestation of the Buddha, both Daogao and Faming draw on the bodily dimension in the devotional use of Buddhist images. Daogao says, for instance, "[People] listen to the sound of the Dharma and praise its excellence. Straw dogs cannot be said to be an empty exhibit. [People] witness images and bend their bodies. How can the numinous comportment (i.e., images of the Buddha) be deemed a vain display (聞法音而稱善。芻狗非謂空陳。覩形像而曲躬。靈儀豈爲虛設)?"[316] While Faming offers a more comprehensive reply than Daogao, both equally stress the significance of images by referring to people bowing to these images.[317]

This Buddhist response is fallacious in its essence. Given Daogao's first reply to the request for the Buddha's manifestation, the response contains contradictions: images

[316] T 2102, 52: 71a4-6.

[317] "The doubtful and blind rely on strangeness; reflective contemplation reveals the manifestation. They bend their bodies and sing praises; appreciate and react to spiritual transformations. All are the ferry and ford for heading to the Path and the rare opportunity for ascending to the purity. Therefore, reliance and contemplation both are recommendable, and suspicion and evidence both work (貳暗寄奇，鑒觀示見。鞠躬歌讚，感動靈變。並趣道之津梁，清升之嘉會。故宜寄觀雙擧，疑驗兩行)." T 2102, 52: 71b9-11.

are not the Buddha; Buddhist devotees bow to images; therefore, images are the Buddha. Buddhist accounts leave unexplained the questions of how the image can simulate the real Buddha and why this is a successful surrogate for the absent Buddha. Regarding images, the Buddhists offered an erroneous syllogism in which the initial proposition was at odds with the conclusion.

In the final analysis, however, whether or not the image of the Buddha is his manifestation is not a matter of reason, but a matter of faith. Therefore, Daogao says, "Forget your body and devote your sincerity, and [the Buddha] will surely respond. If [the Buddha] responds, you will see the whole [Buddha]. If [he] does not respond, you will not see [him]. [Although] those who have seen [the Buddha] report to those who have not, those who have not seen cannot believe those who have seen (夫亡身投誠必感。感則俱見。不感不見。其有見者，以告不見。其不見者，會不信見)."[318] To maintain that the Buddha appears through images, the Buddhist defender retreated to an argument of the heart.

To reinforce the position, Daogao and Faming attempted to resolve the issue by reframing the challenge of their opponent within the Buddhist soteriological scheme that set the awakening to ultimate truth as the goal of Buddhist practices. Repeating the Buddhist theory of the tripartite degeneration of the Dharma, Li claimed that the reappearance of the real Buddha would be the only way to reinstate the true Dharma. In response, Daogao argued for diverse pathways, including the reverential act, to the revival of the Dharma: "Lowering the head and joining the palms are all Buddhist soteriological undertakings. Yet, there are other ways to the profound enlightenment.

[318] T 2102, 52: 71a2-3.

Different paths wind up in the same destination (低首合掌，莫非佛事。但令深悟有方，殊途同歸耳)."[319] Centering on the final goal of Buddhist practice, the Buddhist proponent explained the Dharma as the ultimate truth to be attained rather than the Buddha's original teaching to be restored, as the critic proposed.

This restatement of the Dharma invigorated the defense of images. In his response to Li's second request, Faming redefined the issue of the Buddha's manifestation in relation to the perpetuation of the Dharma and defended the image as the manifestation of the Dharma. For Faming, the Buddha is not only the founder of Buddhism—no longer present in this world, as Li construed—but also the paragon who personifies the abstruse Dharma. Without resorting to doctrinal technicalities, Faming explains that such an abstracted manifestation of the Buddha is beyond human reach. "The Dharma body is tranquil and the marvelous form is as profound. Thus, [as it] can conceal and manifest itself in accordance with the time, its movements and whereabouts are unfathomable (夫法身凝寂，妙色湛然。故能隱顯順時，行藏莫測)."[320] This adjusted position relieves the Buddhists of the burden to prove the presence of the Buddha in the flesh. As the reification of the unfathomable and thus multiform Dharma, the Buddha can put on any face that helps devotees to gain insight into the Dharma. Images, as Faming puts, are one of such exteriors that originated in the true Dharma and have abided in the world since then.

> The dying light cast [by the sun] sufficiently shines in the vulgar world; why would believers increase their doubt because of [the dimness of] the flickering flame of a candle? […] Stūpas, images, scriptures, and books widely fill the world. Why would learners distress themselves over no evidence?

[319] T 2102, 52: 71a8-9.

[320] T 2102, 52: 71b12-13.

餘暉所映足光季俗。信者豈以熒燭增疑 […] 塔像經書彌滿世界。學者豈以無證自悔[321]

The light metaphor in this passage means the Dharma. The further the light travels from its source, the weaker it becomes. Here "dying light" or twilight (*yuhui* 餘暉) refers to the Dharma in the time when it may have waned: too much time has elapsed since the Buddha first illuminated the Dharma in person.[322] Twilight, albeit dimming, still has a light; candles also give off light; both of these indicate that light does exist. One does not need to see the sun to believe its existence. This light analogy illustrates the relationship between images and the Dharma: images retain the undying Dharma at a time without the physical Buddha, just as candles carry the light at twilight. As the light fills the world, therein the Dharma reverberates. Faming argues thus that images represent the Dharma and the Dharma manifests the Buddha.

The correspondence between Li Miao and his Buddhist interlocutors was a reversed mirroring of the disagreement about Buddhist images during the etiquette controversy. In the earlier debates, anti-monastics acknowledged the utility of images as the representation of the absent Buddha or his formless teaching; pro-monastics emphasized the impossibility of images to represent either of them. Noting the nebulous referent of Buddhist images, the anti-Buddhist side even entertained the formlessness or unfathomability of that which Buddhist images represented. The Buddhist apologists did

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[321] T 2102, 52: 71b15-17.

[322] Lushan Huiyuan also adopted the light metaphor in his poem for dedicating an image of the Buddha in 413. "Inscription on the Buddha's Shadow (Foying ming 佛影銘)," T 2103, 52: 197c7-98b13, especially, the second stanza, 198a17. For a translation, see Wang (2014), 415-419, especially, 416. For the significance of the candle and light analogy in Huiyuan's theory of the immortality of the spirit, see Yuet Keung Lo, "From Analogy to Proof: An Inquiry into the Chinese Mode of Knowledge," *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995): 141-58.

not enthusiastically defend the use of images as the focus of deferential acts, at least not to their opponents' faces. In the debate over the manifestation of the Buddha, which centered on the issue of Buddhist images, the pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist sides switched their earlier stances. The anti-Buddhists objected to the adequacy of images to bring back the Buddha's presence; the pro-Buddhists embraced the ability of images to represent the absent Buddha as well as the ineffable Dharma.

After Faming triangulated the absent Buddha, the unfathomable Dharma, and tangible images, Chinese intellectuals continued to engage in controversy over Buddhist images. Once started, the semiotic ambiguity of Buddhist images did not cease to draw suspicion, culminating in the call for iconoclastic measures.[323] The next part of this chapter examines the image controversy as part of such anti-Buddhist campaigns.

Paradox of Images

The edict promulgated by Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou 北周武帝 (Gaozu 高祖; Yuwen Yong 宇文邕, b. 543; r. 560–578) illustrates the way in which the metaphysical dilemma of Buddhist images became instrumental in determining anti-Buddhist campaigns. In the spring of 577, when the edict was issued, the suppression of Buddhism was already under way and it would be expanded to a newly annexed territory from the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577) dynasty.[324] The imperial edict, which constitutes a

[323] Iconoclasm as a concept is polysemous. For a theoretical contemplation on its broadened applicability to East Asian religious contexts, see Fabio Rambelli and Eric R. Reinders, "What Does Iconoclasm Create? What Does Preservation Destroy? Reflections on Iconoclasm in East Asia," in *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, ed. Stacy Boldrick and Richard Clay (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15-33; idem, *Buddhism and Iconoclasm in East Asia: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). This dissertation follows its literal sense of physical breakings of cultic objects.

[324] T 2103, 52: 153a29.

concise critique of Buddhist images, begins with the impossibility of representing the Buddha and interweaves this point with moral criticism of Buddhist image production.

> While Buddhists themselves claim the true Buddha is beyond expression in images, they surreptitiously venerate [images] to express their intentions. Buddhist scriptures extensively praise the making of pictures and stūpas. They adorn them magnificently, hoping for excessive merit. But [pictures and stūpas] are inanimate—how could they bestow such kindness? The gullible are deluded by such beliefs and exhaust their wealth in donations, which the monastic followers are only too ready to extract. Such vices must be eliminated. Therefore all Buddhist scriptures and images shall be destroyed.[325]
>
> 且自眞佛無像，遙敬表心。佛經廣歎，崇建圖塔。壯麗修造，致福極多。此實無情，何能恩惠。愚人嚮信，傾竭珍財，徒爲引費。故須除蕩。故凡是經像，皆毀滅之[326]

The edict uses two key notions of Buddhism to attack the making of images. One is the doctrine of emptiness that negates the fixed nature of beings; the other is the notion of merit that soteriologically justifies the making of images as a moral deed to bring about beneficial results, but according to this edict, is misused on the ground. The opening of the edict pinpoints the incompatibility between the Buddhist negation of the innate qualities of things and the assumed presence of the Buddha in Buddhist images. That is, as Buddhist teachings claim that while the true Buddha does not have permanent qualities that can be captured in material form, the acts of casting his images and bowing to them assume that somehow the Buddha inhabits those images. The criticism goes on to relate this metaphysical criticism to moral criticism. Although Buddhist devotees believe their making and venerating of images of the Buddha would generate merit, images devoid of sensory faculties fail to grant promised rewards, but benefit only the Buddhist monastics

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[325] For other translations of this edict, see Alexander C. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959), 119. Soper's translation is based on T 2104, 52: 374a.

[326] T 2103, 52: 153b4-8.

who gain material supports from devotees who commission to have images made. These contradictions between what inanimate images are and what they purport to be able to do underlie a deceptive extortion exacted by the monastics, the edict concludes, and therefore, the destruction of images is the solution.

Scholars have considered this edict exceptional because Emperor Wu was much better known for his military prowess than his command of Buddhist teachings.[327] By the late sixth century, however, the anti-image rhetoric of this edict was not new to either critics or defenders of Buddhism. As discussed in Chapter Four, moral criticism had been prevalent since the fourth century. Metaphysical criticism of images was also put forwarded in the early fifth century as in the previously examined case of Li Miao. Emperor Wu's edict strung together several threads of anti-image criticism into a rationale to launch an iconoclastic measure, but the denunciation of Buddhist images was by no means new: it lay aligned with the hitherto established criticism of Buddhist images.

Emperor Wu alone did not enforce the destruction of Buddhist images. Buddhist writers often fingered the somewhat obscure figure Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (fl. 566–567) as the one who imbued the emperor with the antipathy toward Buddhist images.[328] Since

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[327] Soper (1959), 118; Choi (2012), 55.

[328] Wei Yuansong's memorial submitted in 567 is summarized by Daoxuan. See T 2103, 52: 131c28-132b28. The *History of Zhou* (*Zhoushu* 周書) and the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (*Beishi* 北史) preserve the nearly identical accounts about Wei Yuansong. The records, however, are minimal: "Coming from Chu (present Sichuan), he was good at prognostication, and versed in the Baozhi 寶誌 (418–514) school on the left of the Yangtze. During the reign of Heavenly Harmony (Tianhe 天和, 566–572), he penned poems to presage the fall and rise of the [Northern] Zhou and Sui, and the imperial household receiving the mandate and evidential portents. His temperament grew not to believe Buddhist teachings, attempting to submit memorials to discuss it (Buddhism) to the extreme. History has lost its matters, and thus cannot be recorded (有蜀郡衛元嵩者，亦好言將來之事，蓋江左寶誌之流。天和中，著詩預論周、隋廢興及皇家受命，並有徵驗。性尤不信釋教，嘗上疏極論之。史失其事，故不為傳)." *Zhoushu* 周書, 42: 851; *Beishi* 北史, 88:

historical data of his activities at court are fragmentary, the extent of his role in the imperial decision about anti-Buddhist campaigns is uncertain.[329] Nevertheless, Buddhist defenders at the time associated him in particular with the breaking of images during the reign of Emperor Wu.[330] According to an ardent lay Buddhist, Wang Mingguang 王明廣 (fl. late 6th century), Wei's contempt for Buddhism was rooted in the use of images for devotion. "[The practice of] revering stone labels dimwitted monks, [and the practice of] revering images converts benighted commoners (敬石名作癡僧。敬像還成愚俗)."[331]

Buddhist apologists seriously engaged with this anti-image rhetoric during the imperial campaigns against Buddhism. When Wang Mingguang requesting Emperor Wu's successor Xuan 宣帝 (Yuwen Yun 宇文贇, b. 559; r. 578–580) to lift the anti-Buddhist ban in 579, he foregrounded the issue of images in his defense of Buddhism. His opponents repeated the existing criticism of Buddhist images. Wang then furthered the position of his pro-Buddhist predecessors. To address the way the dilemma about Buddhist images had been framed, he questioned the anti-Buddhist claim that Buddhists said images could not represent the Buddha on the one hand, but believed the Buddha

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2947. On Baozhi, Alan J. Berkowitz, "Account of the Buddhist Thaumaturge Baozhi," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 577-85.

[329] Scholarly opinions about Wei Yuansong's actual influence on Emperor Wu's religious policies vary. For information on studies on Wei Yuansong, see above, Chapter Three, p. 86, fn. 169.

[330] "The impostor monk Wei Yuansong of Yean Monastery 野安寺 in Yizhou 益州 was skillful at argumentation to the degree that heaven would disperse. He repressed what was right and embellished what was wrong. He requested to destroy images of the Buddha, exterminate monks, and abrogate the Dharma. Then his bigoted rhetoric misled the throne, [but] it was extremely difficult to illuminate [that] during the previous reign. The great state believed that, and admonitions were not accepted. (益州野安寺僞道人衛元嵩。既峯辯天逸，抑是飾非。請廢佛圖，滅壞僧法。 此乃偏辭惑上，先至難明。大國信之，諫言不納)." T 2103, 52: 157a20-22.

[331] T 2103, 52: 158c20-21.

inhered within his image on the other hand. Comparing the image of the Buddha to the tree of the earth god, Wang argued that sacrifice to the earth god, one of the oldest indigenous rituals since the Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–221 BCE) dynasty,[332] carried the same contradiction as the devotional use of Buddhist images. This *reductio ad absurdum* tactic demonstrated that the use of *any* representational medium, such as a statue or a shrine, for example, to be the focus of a cult would always *suggest* the inhabitation of a deity inside that medium, and thus look metaphysically contradictory. The dilemma of Buddhist images, therefore, would be a false conception about the relationship between the Buddha and his image. In other words, the use of images as the focus of devotional activities does not necessarily mean that devotees believe the deity *is* the image.

Wang built his reasoning carefully on multi-layered preconceptions and moderated his otherwise pugnacious tone for the court audience. His defense of Buddhist images begins by quoting Wei Yuansong, "Ghosts are not for veneration, [but for] so to say, cajolement (鬼非如敬，謂之爲諂)."[333] This remark draws on the binary conceptualization of proper deities rooted in the Chinese ritual norm that defines ancestral gods as legitimate objects of worship and non-ancestral ones as "ghosts" to whom devotees make offerings only to benefit themselves.[334] With Wei's short and normative remark on an inappropriate object of devotion, Wang lays the groundwork for further arguments by implying the point: while the critics of Buddhist images belittle the

[332] Jean Levi, "The Rite, the Norm, and the Dao: Philosophy of Sacrifice and Transcendence of Power in Ancient China," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 647.

[333] T 2103, 52: 158a7-8.

[334] I briefly discuss this binary of legitimate gods and illegitimate ghosts in terms of Chinese ritual norms. See above, Chapter Three, pp 77-78.

worship of non-ancestral gods, such as the Buddha, as a pursuit of illicit rewards, people commonly perform what appears to be veneration for illegitimate gods.

Wang's strongest argument is to expose the absurdity of thrusting a dilemma on Buddhist images. For that purpose, he first implicitly compares the devotional use of Buddhist images to sacrifices to the earth god that looks like tree worship. He says, "People bow to and curry favor with the tree of the earth god (拜求社樹)," [335] noting a sacrifice to the non-ancestral earth god. He adds, "How much doubt can that raise (何惑良多)?" [336] His rhetorical question suggests that the imperial court does not criticize devotional acts toward trees but it does criticize the same action to Buddhist images. He continues, "As the tree of the earth god is the place where the ghost is to sustain itself, it is not a mistake to perform sacrifice [to the tree] (若言社樹爲鬼所依資，奉而非咎)." [337] That is, the earth god, as a ghost left without descendants, resides in the tree so that self-interested devotees can have a focal point for sacrifices. If the tree of the earth god is replaced with the image of the Buddha, then the nub of the metaphysical criticism of Buddhist images, as Wang identifies, is this: in seeking worldly benefit from their devotion, Buddhist followers ignorantly serve images of the Buddha because they believe the Buddha actually exists in his images.

This homology between the sacrifice to the tree and the devotional use of Buddhist images sheds light on the fallacy of the anti-Buddhist criticism of images. The two devotional activities are identical behaviorally: devotees pay respect and make

[335] T 2103, 52: 158a8.

[336] T 2103, 52: 158a8.

[337] T 2103, 52: 158a8-9.

offerings to material objects that are thought to have divine identities. Both practices operate on the premises that a material representation can serve as a ritual surrogate for a deity. If one of the two practices is endorsed and the other is shunned, then the reason given for a split decision like this is groundless. Wang continues:

> Likewise, it is possible that [monastic] halls and stūpas are where the Buddha resides and presides, [and that] should necessarily comply with the norms. If [it is] said that the Buddha exists in void emptiness, not in mud and wood, ghosts and gods also must be dark and still, how do they exist inside trees?
>
> 亦可殿塔爲佛住持修營，必應如法。若言佛在虛空，不處泥木。亦應鬼神冥寂。豈在樹中[338]

Wang calls it absurd to assume that deities are in the actual material things to which devotees make offerings. The devotional act to the tree is one thing and the belief that the earth god exists therein is another. Thus Wang argues that the Buddhist use of images for devotional purposes is in accordance with the norms for any other indigenous devotional practices.

In a final move to debunk the specious construal of those opponents of Buddhist images, Wang argues, like his pro-Buddhist predecessor, that the use of Buddhist images aids the achievement of the Buddhist goal. Images, according to the Buddhist design, help followers to get closer to awakening.

> Ultimate truth is not achievable through words. [And thus] scriptures and images themselves can be allowed to work. Perspicacious practitioners and adept masters reveal the use [of scriptures and images] in any respects to aid the true illumination.
>
> 至理不言而得。經像自可令行。通人達士，隨方顯用，翼眞明[339]

[338] T 2103, 52: 158a9-11.

[339] T 2103, 52: 159a25-26.

Precisely because words cannot deliver ultimate truth to a practitioner, the Buddhist permits the use of images. Wang admits the impossibility of expressing ultimate truth by linguistic or material media. So there is no danger in using them, no danger that anyone will mistake words or images for the truth to which they point. Therefore, these media are of great use: they facilitate the awakening to ultimate truth.

Wang does not expound on how exactly Buddhist images serve that purpose of dispelling delusion and awakening truth. Nevertheless, through methodically structured reasoning, he makes his point clear: it is fallacious to see the Buddha in Buddhist images. The representations are a vehicle by which to get to the Buddha. How the vehicle takes one there depends on the driver. There is no reason to destroy the vehicle.

Both strategies—the accusation of Buddhist images as inadequate means to represent the absent Buddha or ineffable Dharma and the defense of Buddhist images as aids to awakening to ultimate truth—predated Emperor Wu's campaigns against Buddhism. What stood out from the anti-Buddhist edict this time was how Buddhist images occupied the center of the contention, when they were considered only a side issue in previous debates. As the edict sanctioned iconoclastic measures on the ground that Buddhist devotees mistook images of the Buddha for the real Buddha, Buddhist apologists were compelled to deploy more assertive tactics than before. Pro-Buddhists compared their own devotional practice to indigenous rituals that used material objects (such as trees) as a cultic focus, arguing that the anti-Buddhist view of associating images with the real Buddha was wrong—and if that interpretation had been true, then all indigenous devotional practices should have ceased.

Jingying Huiyuan 淨影慧遠 (523–592), a renowned Buddhist theorist and audacious critic of Emperor Wu,[340] epitomizes this reinforced defense of Buddhist images. He agrees with the impossibility of representing the true Buddha in material form, as the anti-Buddhists did,[341] and then immediately contends that Buddhist images proclaim that precise impossibility.

> Sentient beings have ears and eyes. They rely on scriptures to hear the Buddha, and images to express his truth. If all is abolished, there will be no way to evoke reverence. […] Before scriptures and images from India arrived during the reign of Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty, how come no one in this land knew that the true Buddha is empty?
>
> 耳目生靈。賴經聞佛，藉像表眞。今若廢之，無以興敬 […] 漢明已前經像未至。此土含生何故不知虛空眞佛[342]

Huiyuan emphasizes the importance of sensory perception in grasping the true Buddha. Through the visual sense, people generate respectfulness to truth expressed in images. His defense up to this point resembles the explanations proposed by the anti-Buddhist Bian Sizhi and the pro-Buddhist Daogao. To augment the conventional argument, Huiyuan cites the legend that Buddhism began in China with Buddhist scriptures and images procured by an envoy whom Emperor Ming of the Han 漢明帝 (Xianzong 顯宗; Liu Yang 劉陽, later Liu Zhuang 劉莊, b. 28, r. 58–75) dispatched to the Western Regions after he saw a golden image of the Buddha in his dream. Huiyuan's hermeneutic flair comes with this story: images testify that the true Buddha is emptiness itself; without images, there is no way to realize that.

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[340] For his biographical information, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 2060, 50: 489c-491b.

[341] "The true Buddha does not have images. This sincerely fits Heaven's decree (眞佛無像。誠如天旨)." T 2103, 52: 153b16; T 2104, 52: 374b3.

[342] T 2103, 52: 153b16-20; T 2104, 52: 374b3-7. For an alternative translation, see Soper (1959), 119.

After stressing the indispensability of images in pursuit of the Buddhist truth of emptiness, Huiyuan affirms that the use of images as the focus of devotional practices does not mean devotees believe the Buddha's presence is inside images. To argue this point, Huiyuan makes an unprecedented move and calls into question the cultic images in the imperial ancestral shrine.

> If [Buddhist] images are inanimate and serving them does not bring merit, they ought to be destroyed. [However,] the images inside the Imperial Ancestral Temple, are they truly sentient? Isn't it equally preposterous to venerate [them].
>
> 若以形像無情，事之無福，故須廢者。國家七廟之像。豈是有情。而妄相尊事[343]

At a glance, this passage resembles Wang Mingguang's comparison of Buddhist images with the tree of the earth god. But unlike Wang, who chose a non-ancestral and thus disputable god, Huiyuan selects ancestral gods of the imperial household—the most legitimate deities in the Chinese pantheon—and suggests that according to this logic ancestral images be destroyed as well. At first, with the subjunctive reiteration of the edict endorsing the destruction of Buddhist images, Huiyuan seems to agree with the validity of such drastic measures. But then he conversely applies the same logic to ancestral images for imperial ritual. Amplifying literary effects, his rhetorical question implies three points. On the surface, it restates that Buddhist images are not the Buddha, just as ancestral images are not ancestors. Simultaneously, it exposes the double standard in the imperial decision to break only Buddhist images while keeping ancestral images intact. At a deeper level, it corrects the mistaken views about Buddhist images. Despite the impression that Buddhist devotees confuse images with the living Buddha, the

[343] T 2103, 52: 153b23-25; T 2104, 52: 374b10-12. For an alternative translation, see Soper (1959), 119-20.

association of Buddhist images with the belief in the Buddha's presence within them is groundless. Buddhists pay respect to the Buddha beyond images.

The 577 announcement of iconoclastic measures against Buddhist images compelled the Buddhist apologists to make stronger arguments than before. In particular, Wang Mingguang and Jingying Huiyuan demonstrate a gradual development of the defense of Buddhist images. Acutely aware of the Buddha's absence, debaters of both sides pondered what Buddhist images represent. The Buddhist apologists in the previous debates vaguely justified images as the expression of profound truth. When the iconoclastic imperial edict drew on the notion of emptiness as a pretext to destroy Buddhist images, the pro-Buddhists employed that very same concept to defend the metaphysics of Buddhist images. Now the Buddhist image became not just an aid for Buddhists to awaken to ultimate reality, but also the manifestation of that reality—of emptiness itself.

Conclusion

From the etiquette controversy in the fourth century to the anti-Buddhist campaigns in the late sixth century, the metaphysical tension between the image and its absent subject prevented Buddhist apologists from explaining away Buddhist images as the representation of the long-gone Buddha. The debates, therefore, proceeded with the underlying question of what the Buddhist images would represent.

During the etiquette controversy, the anti-Buddhist observers at first accepted Buddhist images as the representation of the absent Buddha and his ineffable teachings. In opposition to this interpretation, the pro-Buddhist defenders maintained that images could not adequately represent the Buddha or Dharma. This Buddhist position, however,

overturned when the skeptics of Buddhism who found fault with the absence of the Buddha denied his existence. The Buddhist apologists presented Buddhist images as proof of the existence of the Buddha. The Buddhists advanced this position by explaining that Buddhist images manifested the Dharma and the Dharma was the Buddha. Since anti-Buddhist iconoclasm took place on the pretext of the impossibility of representing what Buddhist images appeared to represent, the Buddhist theorists argued that imposing the metaphysical dilemma onto Buddhist images was erroneous because Buddhists did not confuse the image with the Buddha, endeavoring to consolidate the equation of Buddhist images with the Dharma.

Throughout these debates, the Buddhist apologists disclaimed the semantic equation of Buddhist cultic images with the Buddha and defined the image as an aid to help devotees to realize the Buddha's fundamental teaching of emptiness.[344] This metaphysical role of Buddhist images turned paradoxical: images are not the Buddha as the Buddha is emptiness; by showing that Buddha is not there, images manifest emptiness; and therefore, images are the Buddha. The Buddha in the initial proposition was not same as the Buddha in the final proposition. The former was the absent Buddha whom, as external critics understood it, Buddhist devotees identified with his material representations. The latter was the formless Dharma; this, Buddhist apologists explained, was the Buddha embodied beyond representation.

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[344] For discussion on Buddhist theories of vision and visuality with regard to the tenet of emptiness, Eckel, *To See the Buddha* (1992); Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom* (1999); McMahan, *Empty Vision* (2002); Pamela D. Winfield, *Icons and Iconoclasm in Japanese Buddhism: Kūkai and Dōgen on the Art of Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Also, for discussion on the significance of visual experience in Buddhist devotional practices in early Indian Buddhism, see Andy Rotman, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

When opponents and proponents of Buddhism first debated the legitimacy of Buddhist images as a focus of devotion, this discussion was subsidiary to the main issue of whether Buddhist monastics should observe indigenous norms of social manners. Although this initial debate was tangential to the debate about images, it set the terms for the ensuing debates about what Buddhist images represented. As the issue emerged prominently during anti-Buddhist campaigns, Buddhist apologists rigorously defended Buddhist images as the manifestation of the Dharma. This exegesis did not fade away outside the arena of interreligious debate. The next chapter examines the apologetic rationale of Buddhist images in other discursive formats.

Chapter Six
RITUALIZED APOLOGIES FOR BUDDHIST IMAGES

By the fourth century, when Buddhism fueled interreligious controversy among learned Chinese for the first time, both indigenous and Buddhist traditions already developed a framework for discussing the semiotic relations and ritual function of images without obfuscating the distinction between images and their intangible originals. However, in order to criticize the Buddhist religion, anti-Buddhists drew on Buddhist cultic images to claim that Buddhists worshipped a wrong god or confused inanimate objects with deities. Added to this is the allegation that Buddhist clerics deceived devotees into exhausting their properties on monastic construction and decoration. In the meantime, Buddhist apologists were by no means comfortable with the role of cultic images as substitutes for the Buddha. They maintained that Buddhist images evoke reverence for the virtuous Buddha, motivate Buddhist devotees to do good deeds, and instantiate the lesson of emptiness. In short, Buddhists advocated the indispensability of Buddhist images for practicing the Buddhist religion without claiming their cultic images as divine presence *per se*.

Certain strands from such apologetic rhetoric of Buddhist images surface occasionally in the language used to speak of images outside the interreligious debates. This chapter showcases such discursive continuity by examining legends, dedicatory inscriptions, and liturgies. Generally, these genres employ formulaic language composed of recurring motifs and tropes, stock phrases, and similar plots, all of which make what is written fairly predictable and easily disseminated. This chapter argues that propositions about Buddhist images in these formats centered on the soteriological utility of images. First, they maintain that material representations of Buddhism lay the foundation for

appreciating Buddhist teachings. Second, donors commission images not only for themselves but also for all sentient beings to accumulate merit. Last, Buddhist images are the salvific means for Buddhists to exercise the awareness of impermanence, free themselves from the three poisons, cancel bad karma in the past and present lifetimes, prepare for better stations of rebirth in the future, and thus eventually attain awakening. I argue that these explanations, repeated in different literary forms, suggest that broad Buddhist communities in medieval China were anxious to control a discourse about what Buddhist images are and how they operate.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the legend about the first Buddha image in China as an extension of or interaction with the defense of Buddhism and the impact of this legend on the making of actual statues. In the second part, then, I discuss how the inscriptions of those statues resonated with the essence of the soteriological logic of images as presented in the interreligious debates. In the third part, I examine Dunhuang liturgies recited in image dedication ceremonies that tactfully avoided confusing the distinction between images and the Buddha.

The First Image of the Buddha in the Heartland of China

Stories about the arrival of Buddhism in the heartland of China were particularly instrumental in the defense of Buddhism. One of the recurring threads of anti-Buddhist criticism was that Buddhist teachings had only a short history in China.[345] Against this attack, Buddhists endeavored to promote the Buddhist religion as a time-honored tradition by dating its inception to High Antiquity prior to Confucius and Laozi and

[345] T 2102, 52: 95a17-21.

embellished the introduction of such an ancient teaching to China with epic elements. More often than not, these stories remark on the image of the Buddha brought into China for the first time.

Jingying Huiyuan's defense, examined in Chapter Five, exemplifies how Buddhist apologists used the legends about the arrival of Buddhism in China in the interreligious contention. Against the 577 edict, which sanctioned anti-Buddhist iconoclasm in the Northern Zhou, Huiyuan argued that Buddhist images should not be destroyed because the Chinese people could not have known about Buddhism if not for its images. To support this position, he cited the story that Emperor Ming of Han saw the Buddha in a dream and dispatched envoys to procure a material image of the Buddha.[346]

In the sixth century, the basic plot of an emperor dreaming about the Buddha and an image of the Buddha arriving in China carried considerable weight in Buddhist apologetic literature, which, by this point, had spawned several versions with different details, such as names of characters and locations of the event. Amidst multiple variations of the same scenario, the version in the *Inner Records of the Root of the [Buddhist] Law in Han China* (*Han faben neizhuan* 漢法本内傳, hereafter *Inner Records*) merits special attention because it illustrates how Buddhist apologists made Buddhist cultic images as a necessary component of the legends about the introduction of Buddhism to China.

The *Inner Records* is an apocryphal text produced during the heat of the attack on Buddhism. Its primary purpose was to publicize the ancient origin of Buddhism against

[346] For studies on the legend about Emperor Ming of Han, see Henri Maspero, "Le songe et l'ambassade de l'empereur Ming," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 10 (1910): 95-130; TANG (2008a), 13-22; Zürcher (2007); 19-23. For Huiyuan's rhetorical strategy, see above, Chapter Five, pp. 158-59.

the anti-Buddhist claim that Buddhism was not as old as and thus inferior to indigenous teachings. Although the author(s) and date of the *Inner Records* were unknown, Buddhist writers used it as supporting evidence for situating the inception of Buddhism in China in High Antiquity.[347] Within the received tradition, the *Inner Records* does not survive on its own; it is preserved in Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Expanded Propagation and Illumination* in 664 and Zhisheng's 智昇 (fl. early eighth century) *Continued Debates* in 730.[348] Compiled in 519, Huijiao's 慧皎 (497–554) *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳) does not mention the title of the *Inner Records* but contains passages very similar to those of the *Inner Records*. A portion of a Dunhuang manuscript from the Pelliot collection (P. 2626), dated to 624, corresponds with Zhisheng's citation in the *Continued Debates*. It is, therefore, generally accepted that the *Inner Records* was a patchwork of snippets culled from different sources sometime between 519 and 624 against the backdrop of the interreligious conflicts in the sixth century.[349]

In terms of the overall structure, the relevant section in the *Inner Records* follows the basic plot of the legend of Emperor Ming's dream. It also names court officials who identified the emperor's dream image as the Buddha and gives them conversational parts in the story. In particular, the characters in the story quote the *Records of Anomalies from the History of Zhou* (*Zhoushu yiji* 周書異記, hereafter *Records of Anomalies*), a spurious text that attributes the inception of Buddhist teachings to High Antiquity, a millennium

[347] For an overview of primary sources of this legend, see KAMATA (1982), 106-20.

[348] The versions of the story cited in the two compilations are not exactly the same.

[349] YOSHIOKA Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豐, "Kan hōhon naiten seiritsu kō 漢法本内傳成立考," *Chisan gakuhō* 智山學報 3 (1955), 53-57; Zürcher (2007), 22; 325, n. 23; LIU Linkui 劉林魁, "Fojiao weishi *Han faben neizhuan* yu fodao lunzheng 佛教偽史《漢法本内傳》與佛道論爭," *Yunnan shehui kexue* 雲南社會科學, no. 2 (2009): 122-126.

before the reign of Emperor Ming.[350] By pairing Emperor Ming's premonitory dream with High Antiquity, the *Inner Records* asserts two tacit yet interrelated arguments. One is that the Buddhist religion did not arrive in China for the first time during the reign of Emperor Ming. The texts would have us believe that ancient Chinese rulers already knew about the Buddha a thousand years ago when he was born. This first claim leads to the second claim, which is germane to the topic of images: as the emperor reinstated the forgotten tradition, the Buddhist religion in China finally became furnished with all three vital components—not only teachings but also clerics and cultic objects.[351] Emperor Ming's envoys, according to the *Inner Records*, persuaded two Indian monks, Jiashe Moteng 迦葉摩騰 (or Kāśyapa Mātaṅga) and Zhu Falan 竺法蘭, to come to China, and the two embarked on an arduous journey to Luoyang.[352] The story concludes with an

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[350] Zürcher (2007), 273-74; 286-87.

[351] "The *Inner Records of the Root of the [Buddhist] Law in Han China* says: during the Yingping years (58–75), Emperor Ming [of Han], saw a golden man in six *zhang* in his dream at night. The radiance was extraordinary and the color was unparalleled. Emperor Ming got awake and restless. In the morning, a grand congregation of court officials gathered in order to divine the dream. Fu Yi 傅毅, Pundit, respectfully answered, 'I humbly heard, there is a god called the Buddha in the Western Regions. He must be the one Your Majesty dreamt.' Wang Zun 王遵, Erudite of the State Academy, cautiously spoke, 'According to the *Records of Anomalies from the History of Zhou*, a sage was born in the west during the reign of King Zhao of the Zhou 周昭王 (r. eleventh century 1091–977 BCE).' Su You 蘇由, Grand Historian, answered, 'what has been written there is the voice of the teachings for a thousand years that reached this land. That must be what Your Majesty dreamt' (案漢法本内傳云。明帝永平年中。夜夢見丈六金人。光明特異色相無比。明帝寤不自安。至旦大集群臣。以占所夢。通人傅毅奉答曰。臣聞西域有神。號之爲佛。陛下所夢將必是之。國子博士王遵謹對曰。臣案周書異記云。周昭王時有聖人出在西方。太史蘇由對曰。所記一千年時聲教被及此土。陛下所夢必當是之)." T 2105, 52: 397b25-c5.

[352] "Emperor Ming believed so and thus sent envoys. […] [They] arrived in India (Tianzhu 天竺) and met two *śramaṇa* Jiashe Moteng and Zhu Falan. […] Moteng and the other pledged the will to propagate [the Buddha's teachings]. […] [As they] arrived in Luoyang, Emperor Ming, elated, deeply respected them. […] The two including Moteng then translated many scriptures (明帝信以爲然即遣 […] 至天竺國見沙門迦葉摩騰竺法蘭二人 […] 摩騰二人誓志弘通 […] 至於洛陽。明帝大悦。甚尊重之 […] 摩騰二人既至翻譯衆經)." T 2105, 52: 397c3-c10. Cf. Note this passage follows wordings very similar to some portions from the hagiographies of Jiashe Moteng and Zhu Falan preserved in T 2059, 50: 322c20-28, 323a15-18.

announcement that the two monks, the scriptures that they translated, and an image of the Buddha that they brought successfully instituted the Buddhist religion in China.

> The two were first monks in the Han territories. The scriptures [that they brought and translated] were the beginning of the Dharma in the Han territories. Moreover, the image of Śākyamuni [that they brought] was the fourth work modeled on the image [commissioned by] King Udāyana.[353] Emperor Ming then ordered [the image] to be painted and copied and made offerings in accordance with the norms. That was the beginning of the Buddha in the Han territories.
>
> 二人爲漢地僧之始。經是漢地法之初。又釋迦像是優填王像師第四作之。明帝即令圖畫模寫如法供養。即是漢地佛之初[354]

By linking Buddhism known in High Antiquity with Buddhism "re-imported" by Emperor Ming, the *Inner Records* claims that the material form of the latter substantiated the hearsay of the former. As a byproduct of Buddhist apologetic discourse, the *Inner Records* narrates a rare version of the story that draws on the legend of the very first image of the Buddha commissioned by King Udāyana of Vatsa during Śākyamuni Buddha's lifetime.[355] The intent of this literary choice is obvious. By associating the first Buddha image in the seat of the Chinese dynasty with the first Buddha image ever fashioned, the *Inner Records* reinforces the ancient connection between Buddhism in High Antiquity and Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ming to lend credence to the latter as the fulfillment of the ancient prediction as well as the cornerstone of the

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[353] The manuscript version (P. 2626) corresponding to this part is damaged.

[354] T 2105, 52: 397c10-c13.

[355] For multiple variations of the legend of the Udāyana image of the Buddha and its introduction to China, see HIDA Romi 肥田路美, "Shotō jidai ni okeru Uden'ō zō: Genzō no shaka zō shōrai to sono juyō no issō 初唐時代における優填王像—玄奘の釈迦像請来とその受容の一相," *Bijutsu shi* 美術史 120 (1986): 81-95; Martha L. Carter, "The Mystery of the Udayana Buddha," *Annali* 50, fasc. 3, supplement no. 64 (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 1990): 1-43; INAMOTO Yasuo 稲本泰生, "Uden'ō zō 優填王像東伝考—中国初唐期を中心に," *Tōhō hakubō* 東方學報 69 (1997): 357-509; HAMADA Tamami 濱田瑞美, "Chūgoku shotō jidai no rakuyō shūhen ni okeru Uden'ō zō ni tsuite 中国初唐時代の洛陽周辺における優填王像について," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 佛教藝術 287, no. 7 (2006): 45-72; LEE (2010), 51-77; Choi (2012), 61-72.

Buddhist religion on Chinese soil.

The motif that the first image of the Buddha in China was the Udāyana image seems to have gained currency in the sixth century, when the intensity of anti-Buddhist attack on Buddhist material representations was mounting.[356] The earliest extant source that connects the Buddha image venerated by Emperor Ming with the Udāyana image is a compendium of Buddhist miracle tales, the *Records of Signs from the Unseen Realm* (*Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, hereafter *Unseen Realm*), assembled around 490 by Wang Yan 王琰 (b. ca. 454), a devout Buddhist literatus from Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502).[357] This anthology survives not on its own but in the fragmentary form of citations scattered over Buddhist compilations, particularly in Daoshi's 道世 (d. 683) *Pearl Grove of the Dharma Forest* (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, 668, T 2122, hereafter *Pearl Grove*). The story of Emperor Ming's dream from the *Unseen Realm* is preserved in the *Pearl Grove* and Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Collection of Responses and Penetrations of the Three Jewels in the Divine Land* (*Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通録, 664, T 2106, hereafter *Three Jewels*).[358] The two versions are almost identical, and Daoshi was Daoxuan's disciple. As Daoshi worked at the Ximing Monatery (Ximing si 西明寺),

[356] For example, Yang Xuanzhi's *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 in the mid-sixth century (ca. 547) and the 577 edict promulgated by Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou, discussed in Chapters Four and Five, exhibit the anti-Buddhist sentiments that condemned Buddhist cultic objects as the epitome of fiscal and moral dissipation.

[357] As authoritative studies on the *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, WANG Guoliang 王國良, *Mingxiang ji yanjiu* 冥祥記研究 (Taibei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1999); Robert F. Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012a).

[358] The *Mingxiang ji* version is also cited in slightly different wordings by an eleventh-century compilation. *Sanban ganying yaolüe lu* 三寶感應要略録, comp. Shi Feizhuo 釋非濁 (d. 1063), T 2084, 51: 828c12-22.

where Daoxuan was an abbot, in Chang'an, likely the two had access to the same copy of the *Unseen Realm*. Considering these circumstances, one may safely assume that the story cited in the *Pearl Grove* and the *Three Jewels* is quite close to Wang Yan's original version.

Following the same plot of the legend of Emperor Ming's dream, the version in the *Unseen Realm* is different from that of the *Inner Records* in terms of narrative details. Unlike the *Inner Records* version, the *Unseen Realm* version does not name the ministers who responded to the emperor's inquiry. Their dialogue with the emperor is put summarily, "In the West there is a deity called the Buddha. His form is similar to what Your Majesty dreamed. Might it have been him? (西方有神。其號曰佛。形如陛下所夢。得無是乎)" No mention of ancient texts that link Buddhism with High Antiquity and no emphasis on the reinstitution of the Buddhist religion by Emperor Ming appear. The *Unseen Realm* version does not foreground the significance of the arrival of the three essential components of the Buddhist religion in the capital of China as the *Inner Records* does. Although it is mentioned that the foreign monks brought scriptures, no further information, such as titles or translation, is offered.[359]

Instead, the *Unseen Realm* tactfully relates Buddhism in Han China to the Buddha's life time in India. At the center of that connection lie images of the Buddha, which is the narrative focus of this version. Unlike other versions, the *Unseen Realm* specifies the iconographical features of the images, such as height, color, halo, and posture, and the places where the reproduced images were distributed.

[359] Other versions of the legend specify it as the *Scripture in Forty-Two Sections* (*Sishi'er zhang jing* 四十二章經, T 784), which modern scholars have identified as apocryphal. TANG (2008a), 23-32.

> Emperor Ming of Han saw a divine personage in his dream. The body of [the divine personage] stood two *zhang* (approximately sixteen feet) tall; the skin was colored in yellow gold; the head was surrounded by a radiance like sunlight. […] When the envoy Cai Yin 蔡愔 accompanied Central Asian *śramaṇa* Jiashe Moteng and others for the first time,[360] [they] brought the seated image of Śākyamuni with pendant legs painted [on the request of] King Udāyana. The emperor treasured it, [and it was] like the one he had seen in his dream. [He] then commissioned painters to make several copies modeled on it (the Udāyana image), making offerings [to the copied images installed] in the Qingliang Terrace of the South Palace, at the Gaoyang Gate, and at the Xianjie mausoleum.[361]
>
> 漢明帝夢見神人。形垂二丈。身黃金色。項佩日光 […] 初使者蔡愔將西域沙門迦葉摩騰等。齎優填王畫釋迦倚像。帝重之。如夢所見也。乃遣畫工圖之數本。於南宮清涼臺及高陽門顯節壽陵上供養[362]

In this version, the narrative unfolds around three types of Buddha images: the image that the emperor saw in his dream, a copy of the Udāyana image that the foreign monks brought in to Luoyang, and copies of the imported image to be distributed. All these images, according to the passage, resemble one another and, by extension, the original Buddha. By stating that the emperor confirmed that his dream-image resembled the copy of the Udāyana image, the story first implies that the Buddha who appeared in the emperor's dream was the Buddha as portrayed in the Udāyana image crafted during his lifetime. As the story recounts that the Udāyana image was replicated for distribution, the Buddha depicted in those copies is also assumed to have looked like the living Buddha. This chain of duplication, from the Buddha in his lifetime via the emperor's dream-image and the Udāyana image to the distributed copies, bridges the distance between India in

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[360] Compare with the *Inner Records* that describes the monks were of Indian extraction.

[361] Here I follow Campany's translation with modifications. For a full translation of the story with his comments, see Campany (2012a), 68-71.

[362] T 2106, 52: 413c2-10; T 2122, 53: 383b4-12. The two versions in the Taishō canon are identical, but footnote no. 17 in the *Fayuan zhulin* notes an orthographic variant for *yi* 倚 as *fo* 佛. Campany (2012a), 68, fn. 36.

the past and China during the reign of Emperor Ming and afterwards and thus underlines the continuity between original Buddhism taught by the Buddha and Buddhism received by the Chinese emperor and converts.

The combination of the plot of an emperor's dream and the motif that the Udāyana image immigrated to China was by no means unique. One variation, for instance, cites Emperor Wu of Liang as its protagonist, who dreamed and greeted a copy of the Udāyana image to his capital.[363] Many legends stuck to the nearly identical template in which the Udāyana image or other famous Indian Buddhist monuments, notably Aśokan stūpas, arrived or miraculously appeared on Chinese soil.[364] As has often been argued, these stories were one of the ways for Buddhist Chinese, who often lamented that their time and place were too remote from the Buddha's lifetime in India, to express their aspiration to directly connect to the land of the Buddha.

However, as seen in Jingying Huiyuan's defense case and the concoction of the *Inner Records*, the legend of Emperor Ming's dream carried distinctly apologetic overtones. As Campany astutely observes, Buddhist miracle tales demonstrate that in medieval China, Buddhism and indigenous teachings competed against each other not only overtly in the sphere of court politics but also tacitly on many fronts of cultural

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[363] "The founder of the Liang dynasty, Emperor Wu, on the eighth day of the first month in 502, dreamed that the sandalwood image had come to his kingdom, and so ordered a party formed to go and bring it back (梁祖武帝。以天鑒元年正月八日。夢檀像入國。因發詔募人往迎)." T 2106, 52: 419b7-8. I revised Alexander Soper's partial translation and supplemented his omissions. Soper (1959), 70-71. Also see T 2060, 50: 695a13-19.

[364] The narrative of this story follows the pattern of the legend of the Aśoka stūpa in China. For the significance of the Aśoka stūpas in Buddhist pious imagination in medieval Chin, Campany (1995). On the aspiration to procure cultic objects from India, for example, see Choi (2015): 364-87.

production.[365] While numerous stories were contestational implicitly, Buddhist proponents often chose the story of the Emperor Ming of Han from a reserve of many in order to counter anti-Buddhist attacks. According to Sengyou's epilogue of *Propagation and Illumination* (ca. 515), one of the six most damaging criticisms of Buddhism in the early sixth century was that Buddhism did not exist in High Antiquity—its humble beginning could be traced back to the Han (202 BCE–220)—and conversion only started to take place as recently as the Jin (265–420).[366] In his brief rebuttal, Sengyou also drew on the legend of Emperor Ming's dream. He emphasized that Buddhist soteriological undertakings of manufacturing images and building monasteries continued uninterrupted since the reign of Emperor Ming, and they, in turn, laid the groundwork for Chinese devotees to appreciate the profound meaning of Buddhist scriptures. Buddhist writers, in other words, harnessed the legend to defend the Buddhist religion as a whole, maintaining that the material foundation of the Buddhist religion came first, and the understanding of its teachings only ensued afterwards.[367]

When the element of the Udāyana image became incorporated into this origin myth, its power of persuasion took a new turn. The more specific detail that it is embellished with, the more plausible a story may sound. In keeping with the apologetic undertone of the legend, this mix of the Emperor Ming's dream and Udāyana image legends, exemplified by the *Unseen Realm*, disseminated beyond the platform of interreligious debates and the genre of miracle tales. The hagiography of Zhu Falan 竺法

[365] Campany (2012a), 11.

[366] T 2102, 52: 95a19-21, 95b24-c6, 95c20-96a16.

[367] T 2102, 52: 95c29-96a12.

蘭, one of the two foreign monks who the *Inner Records* claimed formed the first monastic community in China, follows the skeleton of the story that contains the key iconographical feature of the first Buddha image in Luoyang, just as the *Unseen Realm* noted.

> [Cai] Yin acquired a chair-seated image of Śākyamuni in the Central Asia (Western Regions). It was the fourth work modeled on the sandalwood image [fashioned for] King Udāyana. [As it] arrived in Luoyang, Emperor Ming immediately ordered painters to copy [it] and had [it] installed in the Qingliang Terrace and on the Xianjie Mausoleum. The old images are no longer existent.
>
> 愔又於西域得畫釋迦倚像。是優田王栴檀像師第四作也。既至雒陽。明帝即令畫工圖寫。置清涼臺中及顯節陵上。舊像今不復存焉[368]

This version differs from the others in minor detail. The person who obtained the image was Cai Yin, a Chinese envoy, no longer foreign monks, and the character for transliterating the king's name is *Youtian* 優田, not *Youtian* 優填. However, the iconographical gist (chair-seated or legs-pendant posture) and genealogy (fourth copy) of the image remained unaltered. The brief mention of the posture of the image is noteworthy because a group of statues bearing the name of the Udāyana image and sitting on chairs, rendered in remarkably consistent form, currently survive at Longmen 龍門 and Gongxian 鞏縣—cave temple complexes in the Luoyang area (fig. 1).[369] While the

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[368] T 2059, 50: 323a16-19.

[369] LI Wensheng 李文生, "Woguo shiku zhong de Youtianwang zaoxiang: Longmen shiku Youtianwang zaoxiang zhi zao zhi duo wei quanguo shiku zhi zui 我國石窟中的優填王造像—龍門石窟優填王造像之早之多為全國石窟之最," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, no. 4 (1985): 102-106; HIDA (1986); MATSUBARA Saburō 松原三郎, "Shotō chōkoku to Indo: tokuni Uden'ō zō zōzō wo chūshin toshite 初唐彫刻と印度—特に優填王像を中心として," *Bukkyō bijutsu kenkyū Ueno kinen zaidan jyosei kenkyū kai hōkokusho* 佛教美術研究上野記念財團助成研究會報告書 14 (1986): 11-13; OKADA Ken 岡田健, "Guanyu Youtianwang zaoxiang de ruogan baogao 關於優填王造像的若干報告," in *Longmen shiku yiqian wubai zhounian guoji xueshu taolun hui lunwen ji* 龍門石窟一千五百週年國際學術討論會論文集 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe,1996), 144-50; XIE Shiying 謝世英, "Longmen shiku de Youtianwang zaoxiang: bieyu Riben Qingliangsi zhi Youtianwang zaoxiang 龍門石窟的優填王造像—別於日本清涼寺之優填王造像," *Lishi wenwu* 歷



Figure 1. The Udāyana Image, Longmen Cave 305, the second half of the seventh century (*Sekai bijutsu dai zenshū, Tōyō hen: Zui Tō* 世界美術大全集, 東洋編: 隋唐, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Shōgaku kan, 1997), fig. 86).

above passage notes that the original fourth copy or its old copies were gone, the dedicatory inscriptions of these statues do not indicate anything about the connection to those extinct old images. It is thus challenging to determine that the passing remarks in the sixth-century hagiography and the late-fifth century miracle tale directly motivated the creation of the prototype of statues that resonated with the iconographical attribute noted in this hagiographic story. One possible scenario would be that the circulation of such narratives introduced the need to corroborate the story, just as the necessity to defend the antiquity of Buddhist teachings in China inspired the production of spurious texts, such as the *Inner Records* or the *Records of Anomalies*, which supported Buddhist polemical claims. Equally plausible is the possibility that the story may have inspired devotees to craft actual statues as the Udāyana images in Luoyang as related by the legend. In any case, the production of these statues named the Udāyana image indicates that the apologetic discourse of associating Emperor Ming's dream with the Udāyana image in the Chinese capital city went beyond the confines of literary

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史文物 6, no. 2 (1996): 26-39; INAMOTO (1997); HAMADA (2006); LEE (2010). The debating point about the origin of this iconography has been whether Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) brought the prototype to the capital regions of Tang China from his pilgrim to India. For a brief introduction to the standing type of the Udāyana image, see Brinker (2011), 16-23.

production. The story, in a brief form, circulated across different platforms and genres and further prompted Buddhist devotees to fashion the Udāyana image in the heartland of Chinese states.

In this light, two more points are noteworthy. First, all the dated examples of those extant statues identified as the Udāyana image were produced during the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang 唐高宗 (Li Zhi 李治, b. 628; r. 649–683). Second, most of the textual sources that connect Emperor Ming of Han and the arrival of Udāyana image in Luoyang are preserved in Buddhist compilations produced during the reign of the same emperor. In terms of his attitude toward the Buddhist religion, Gaozong may be described as inconsistent at best. On the one hand, the Tang state during the second half of the seventh century sponsored a variety of Buddhist undertakings, such as translation projects and monastic construction, following Xuanzang's return in 645. On the other hand, the court hosted a series of interreligious debates over such recurring topics as the seniority of the founders of the three teachings and the matter of Buddhist monks refusing to bow to rulers and parents. On many of these debates, the crown announced rulings unfavorable to Buddhism—though these were revoked soon afterwards.[370] Against this background, the next part entertains a possible connection between the apologetic rationale of images and those statues of the Udāyana image by examining their dedicatory inscriptions.

[370] Reinders (2015).

The Image for Salvific Purposes

While Buddhist canonical traditions promoted image production as a salvific means of generating and accumulating merit, anti-Buddhists often considered this soteriology to be deceptive and wasteful, claiming Buddhist monks coaxed the laity into excessive spending and wealthy donors into flaunting their possessions. Buddhist apologists engaged this censure by explaining how image production contributes to the soteriological workings of merit. As examined in Chapter Four, some strands of Buddhist apologetics for images maintained that donation for fashioning Buddhist images would be the easiest way to produce merit because one penny transforms and multiplies into 24,000-fold merit, and the relinquishment of material possession relieves donors from their attachment to material things, which they will realize are only transient. For the devotees, the manufacture of images, therefore, constitutes an essential step toward their awakening to emptiness. Dedicatory inscriptions of the statues of the Udāyana image in Luoyang would appear to resonate with such soteriological accounts of Buddhist images, as Buddhist apologetics explained.

As a genre, statue inscriptions share literary features to a significant extent, even though individual examples exhibit many variations in diction.[371] Most followed a limited number of formats and required the writer to fill in the blanks of a given format with only essential information. In fully formulated cases, inscriptions usually state when and who

[371] My discussion of these general features of statue inscriptions is indebted to SATŌ Chisui 佐藤智水, "Hokuchō zōzōmei kō 北朝造像銘考," *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 86, no. 10 (1977): 1421-67; HOU (1998); KURAMOTO Shōtoku 倉本尚徳, *Hokuchō bukkyō zōzōmei kenkyū* 北朝佛教造像銘研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2016). These studies are based on fifth- and sixth-century cases.

commissioned what image(s), for whom, and in the hope of attaining what wishes.[372] Donors were from all walks of life—laity and clergy, males and females—and they undertook image-making projects individually or as groups.[373] Primary beneficiaries of the projects were typically deceased family members, and yet a generic roster, including ministers, rulers, and states, often followed, in addition to all sentient beings as in the Buddhist rhetorical convention. The paramount goal of crafting images is to generate and transfer merit to primary beneficiaries. In addition to this basic information, some inscriptions briefly explored the Buddha's virtuous career or the philosophical meaning of images or added verses of encomium at the conclusion.[374] As inscriptions on statues were often fitted into limited surfaces of pedestals, halos or mandorlas, or niches, they are generally brief and concise.

In terms of these general features, the inscriptions of the Udāyana statues are not substantially different from earlier cases. However, the number of surviving statues is estimated rather than accurate, ranging from around fifty to over a hundred, largely because the statues' deteriorated conditions led scholars to come up with different

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[372] Satō categorized statue inscriptions into two types and Hou slightly modified Satō's typology by separating the donors' names and their social positions. Overall, the two types share the basic components. Yet, one type (type B), more elaborate than the other, has a part in which the meaning of Buddhist images from Buddhist doctrinal perspectives is proposed, and occasionally ends with paeans. This typology does not consider abbreviated forms, which, for example, mention only the names of donors, or together with the subjects of images and the names of primary beneficiaries. It is also important to note that despite all structural and conventional similarities, identical wordings across inscriptions are rare. SATŌ (1977): 1424-27; HOU (1998), 87-91.

[373] For studies on donors of image projects, see Amy McNair, "On the Patronage by Tang-dynasty Nuns at Wanfo Grotto, Longmen," *Artibus Asiae* 59, nos. 3-4 (2000): 161-88; idem, *Donors of Longmen* (2007); KURAMOTO (2016).

[374] SATŌ (1977).

counting methods.[375] Of those statues, only eight examples (caves 192, 231, 306, 356, 429, 543, and 1038 at Longmen and an independent statue from Gongxian) contain the part that states wishes or purposes. Three cases indicate donors' names and dedicated dates, and four cases identify donors' names only. As the statement of wishes explains why donors had those statues fashioned, my analysis of the inscriptions of the Udāyana statues is primarily based on those eight cases with fuller inscriptions.

The independent statue excavated from Gongxian Cave is particularly significant. Unlike the other seven in Longmen Caves, this independent statue has a longer (156 characters) and more detailed inscription. Among the statue inscriptions in question, it is the only case that falls under the more elaborate type (type B) by the classification of Satō Chisui and Hou Xudong. The inscription, dated September 11, 660, begins with a contemplation on the relation of the profound truth and images and the soteriological and commemorative purposes of images. While the inscription ends with a stanza of praise, its first line strongly suggests the connection of this particular iconography of the legs-pendant Udāyana image to the legend of Emperor Ming.

> [I have humbly] heard, elevated brightness is unfathomable, and hidden darkness is inscrutable. The sagely virtue reflected in the mirror, [and yet] it is not what the slow-witted [can] measure by compressing [it]. Therefore, [we] hope for the traces of the lotus in order to strengthen our resolve, and look at the hall of the moon in order to empty our minds. [I] respectfully venerate the cause of the silent extinction (*nirvāṇa*), [and thus] have the sign of the supreme comportment carved. […][376] Since the golden man responded in the dream, the primal sculpture

[375] My counting of the Longmen 龍門 cases in situ is forty-six. I excluded severely damaged ones and examples that are only mentioned in inscriptions of empty niches or other statues. The early reports proposed approximate figures, more than a hundred (LI, 1985: 104) or around seventy (WEN Yucheng 溫玉成, "Ryūmon Tōdai kutsugan no hennen 龍門唐代窟龕の編年," in *Chūgoku sekkutsu: Ryūmon sekkutsu* 中國石窟: 龍門石窟, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988), 184). There are four known cases from the nearby Gongxian 鞏縣 caves.

[376] "Finally, on the crescentic second day (*gengwu* 庚午: seventh) of the eighth lunar month (*jisi* 己巳: sixth) in the fifth year (*gengshen* 庚申: fifty-seventh) of the Great Tang Xianqing era (September 11, 660), *bhikṣus* Facheng, Sicha, and Xianling, Liu Shangke, Commandant Murong

> has been thriving. The palace of beads is stunning and the jeweled decorations are dazzling. Flying immortals gather to guard and transformed ladies soar to the sky. Scattered petals on the silky pavilion, lush substances further flourish.
>
> [竊]聞高明不測，幽昧 [難]知。蓋聖德懸鑒，非愚抑度。 是以企蓮蹤而沖志，望月殿而虛心。尊崇寂滅之因，刻尊儀之相。[…] 金人感夢，雕素是興。瓊宮崇麗，寶飾含融。飛仙集衛，化女騰空。紛華綺閣，茂質彌隆[377]

While both Buddhist and non-Buddhist terms and tropes are used, references to the Dharma are implied by metaphors such as "elevated brightness," "hidden darkness," "sagely virtue," and "traces of the lotus." The beginning of the inscription is concerned with how enigmatic the ultimate truth is, stating that the unwise are incapable of understanding such profundity as it is reduced to the visual reflection in the mirror. The inscrutable Dharma and the image are linked by the notion of impermanence, compared to the "hall of the moon" and the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*. In keeping with the canonical account, as well as the apologetic stance, the writer of this inscription recounts that the Buddha's physical absence resulted in the fashioning of the image of the Buddha, and his image manifests his appearance (*zunyi zhi xiang* 尊儀之相). The introduction explores the relationships among the Dharma, the Buddha, and his image, while maintaining the distinction between the image and the real. Conversely speaking, the image reminds devotees of the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*, the want of access to his physical presence, which

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Ji, Vice Commandant of the Western Frontier Jia Cai, Shangguan Shao, and the town elders reverently made an Udāyana image. We wish excellence for the emperor. We cherish prosperity for all beings. As the correct truth is completed and acquired, this beautiful paean by Zhang Xingren is carved (遂於大唐顯慶五季歲次庚申八月己巳朔二日庚午。比丘僧法秤，思察，縣令，劉尚客，校尉慕容基，陪戎尉賈才，尚官紹，鄉城老宿等，敬造優填王像。上願皇帝固業，下異羣生克隆。俱獲正真，勒茲徽頌。張行仁)."

[377] The transcription is available in the catalogue: *Zhongguo shiku: Gongxian shiku si* 中國石窟: 鞏縣石窟寺 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), 282. For the digital version, http://coe21.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/djvuchar?660E,4E0D,6E2C.

leads to the lesson of impermanence and emptiness.[378]

This proposition, tendered by Buddhist apologists during the interreligious contention, is supplemented by another apologetic point made in the verse at the end. The first line extracts the gist of Emperor Ming's story, focusing on the dream of the golden figure and the proselytizing role of the first image in China. Sengyou, Jingying Huiyuan, and the anonymous author(s) of the *Inner Records* explained that copies of the first image in China laid the material foundation for the Buddhist religion to attract converts and to motivate them to learn the Buddha's teachings. The *Inner Records* specifically identified the first image as a copy of the Udāyana image, and this literary motif was employed multiple times by Buddhist writers and compilers from the late fifth century onward. The allusion to Emperor Ming's dream in this inscribed stanza intimates the link between the apologetic discourse of images at court and the adoption of the iconography mentioned in the story.

To understand the significance of Udāyana statues in the Luoyang area, it is important to note that the production of Udāyana statues in the late seventh-century Luoyang area did not follow some of the conventions of the Buddhist practice of making images. Generally speaking, dedicatory inscriptions designate primary and specific beneficiaries, usually deceased parents, to whom patrons of the image wanted to pass on the merit generated by image production. The inscription cited above lists only customary or rhetorical beneficiaries, the emperor and all sentient beings.[379] Of the seven other

[378] Satō explains that this introduction part of type B usually uses indigenous expressions to discuss the profundity of the true meaning of the Buddha and the Dharma. SATŌ (1977): 1425.

[379] "We wish excellence for the emperor. We cherish prosperity for all beings (上願皇帝固業，下異羣生克隆)."

inscriptions, six cases invoke "all sentient beings in the Dharma realm" as the beneficiaries, and four do not designate any specific recipients of merit at all.[380] Taken together, this small sample suggests that, at least nominally, copies of the Udāyana image were dedicated for the welfare of all sentient beings.

The benefits that donors aimed to gain from the replication of the Udāyana image do not diverge much from the usual wish list. Like many other dedication projects, the donors of Udāyana statues also sought the generation of merit, rebirth in the pure realm, and enlightenment.[381] These wishes are commonly couched in Buddhist terms. The contents of wishes do not always have the scriptural or sectarian ground in relation to the subject of commissioned images.[382] That being said, the combination of the Udāyana image and the wish for rebirth in the Pure Land is hardly surprising because the *Scripture of the Buddha's Preaching on the Making of the Buddha's Image*, the earliest known Chinese text on the Udāyana image, recounts that King Udāyana was reborn in Amitabha's Pure Land as the reward of his commissioning an image of the Buddha.[383]

Among these somewhat general statements of wishes, one particular example arranges this standard set of wishes in a systematic manner. Written for a statue installed

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[380] Precise wordings are slightly different: *yiqie hanshi* 一切含識 (cave 192), *fajie hanling* 法界含靈 (cave 231), *yiqie fajie zhongsheng* 一切法界衆生 (caves 356, 429), *fajie cangsheng* 法界蒼生 (cave 1038), *fajie* 法界 (cave 306).

[381] "to share this merit" *gong ci fude* 共此福德 (cave 306), *gongtong si fu* 共同斯福 (caves 356, 429); "to transform in the Pure Sphere" *linghua jingjing* 靈化淨境 (cave 192); "wishing to be reborn in the West" *tuosheng xifang* 託生西方 (cave 356), a mention of the Pure Land *jingtu* 淨土 □□ (cave 231); "complete ascension to correct awakening" *judeng zhengjue* 俱登正覺 (caves192, 231).

[382] HOU (1998), 96.

[383] For the English translation of the Later Han version, see Sharf (1996), 261-67. On the rebirth in the Western Pure Land as a general goal of Buddhist practices, see Gregory Schopen, "Sukhāvatī as a Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 19 (1977): 177-210.

at Longmen Cave 192, this inscription (88 characters), dated 656, employs a more specific soteriological concept, "three obstructions" (*sanzhang* 三障) than the generic notion of merit. Additionally, without an exegetical account at the beginning and a paean at the end, this case falls under type A. Unlike the other seven, most of the inscription centers on the story of how the donor came to take a vow to have an Udāyana image made and how the project was completed.

> The wife of Xin Shizu, née Sun, knew the body would be impermanent. As her husband predeceased [her], she made a vow on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth lunar month in the inaugural year of the Xianqing 顯慶 era (May 24, 656) to reverently make an Udāyana image niche. [Her vow] had not been accomplished yet as it was announced that Née. Sun had passed away on the fourth day of the fifth month in that year (June 1). Later, [the project] was continued and completed by her family dependents Cuan Xie, Xin Xin, Sun Xin, and others. May the spirits of the deceased be reborn in the pure realm and sever and remove the three obstructions. May all sentient beings ascend to correct awakening.[384]
>
> 莘師祖妻孫，知身無常。夫主先亡。以顯慶元年四月廿五日發心，敬造優填王像一龕。未及成就。聞孫婆其年五月四日身故。續[後]有眷屬[爨]協莘信孫信等，檢校今得成就。願亡者靈化淨境，斷除三障。又願及一切含識，俱登正覺[385]

Overall, this inscription explains how the initial donor became the primary beneficiary. It states that her understanding of impermanence led her to take a vow to have an Udāyana image crafted, but after she passed away, her family took over, finished the project, and dedicated the statue for the benefit of the deceased—Née Sun and her husband Mr. Xin. The inscription listed the wishes for the dead and all sentient beings in sequence. As the beneficiaries were dead, the donors prayed for them to be reborn in the pure realm and cut off the three obstructions. The term "three obstructions" refers to the three hindrances

[384] I corrected and modified the translation in McNair (2007), 175.

[385] MIZUNO Seiichi 水野清一, NAGAHIRO Toshio 長広敏雄, *Rakuyō Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* 洛陽龍門石窟の研究 (Tokyo: Zayūhō kankōkai, 1941), 362, no. 1042.

that disrupt the correct path to awakening (*zhengdao* 正道) and wholesome thoughts (*shanxin* 善心), comprised of the obstruction of afflictions (*fannao zhang* 煩惱障), the obstruction of *karma* (*ye zhang* 業障), and the obstruction of retribution (*bao zhang* 報障).[386] First, the obstruction of afflictions commonly means the three poisons—greed (*tan* 貪), anger (*chen* 瞋), and ignorance (*chi* 癡). Second, the karmic obstruction refers to unwholesome acts that prevent the opportunity to learn the Dharma or result in rebirth in the realm of hell.[387] Last, the obstruction of retribution refers to the combined effects of the former two obstructions—the three poisons and unwholesome karma—a relegated rebirth devoid of opportunities to hear the Buddha's teachings.[388] The removal of these three obstructions, the second wish, then, naturally leads to the last wish for all sentient beings, including the deceased, to fully achieve correct awakening.

The notion that donation for the fashioning of images is a means of exercising the awareness of impermanence and preventing the three poisons is the point that Daoxuan asserted in his *Expanded Propagation and Illumination*. Compiled in 667, it was contemporaneous with the Udāyana statues at Longmen and Gongxian. In his response to the criticism that the notion of merit from image production is a deceptive ploy for Buddhist clerics to extract wealth from donors and to wallow in material abundance, Daoxuan argues that material possession generates greed and anger; it expresses the ignorance of the impermanence of material things. Dispensing wealth through donation for monastic construction, he reasons, helps donors not to descend into this unwholesome

[386] *NBD*, 475d.

[387] *NBD*, 407d.

[388] *NBD*, 1241d.

condition. This way, Daoxuan concludes with a familiar trope: images work as the skillful means to "ford and bridge all sentient beings to the bank of salvation (*jinliang zhuyou* 津梁諸有)."[389]

These two dedicatory inscriptions carved on the statues of the Udāyana image present an understanding of Buddhist images as a means of realizing the Buddha's teachings rather than as a replacement for the Buddha. By alluding to the legend of Emperor Ming's dream, the author of the 660 inscription at Gongxian attempted to capitalize on the link between the image and the Buddhist apologetic stance that had been advanced since the early sixth century at least. The author carefully delineated the futile attempt to reduce ultimate truth by visual means and explained the role of the image in reminding Buddhists of the Buddha's *nirvāṇa* and thus the lesson of impermanence. The 656 inscription, in memory of Née Sun and her husband, also explored the connection between the notion of impermanence and the making of Buddhist images. This time, impermanence became the motivation to make a Buddha image, not a lesson to learn from it. By fashioning images, as Buddhists construed it, Buddhists worked toward the achievements of salvific goals—removing the three poisons, not committing evil acts, and thus avoiding regression into the three lower realms.

The logic of Buddhist images was tightly interlocked with the core of Buddhist soteriological tenets. The commonalities between the image inscriptions and Buddhist polemical claims suggest that Buddhist communities broadly shared the urge to articulate the necessity of Buddhist images without making them the objects of devotion *per se*. The next section explores the liturgy that was recited during image dedication, where

[389] T 2103, 52: 133b10-29. On this passage, see above, Chapter Four, pp. 125-28.

Buddhist ritual specialists carefully calibrated language to avoid the direct equation of images with the Buddha.

From an Image to a Bodhisattva

The ritual of image dedication was performed to celebrate the completion of an image. It was presided by local monks for non-elite lay donors, providing us a window into how Buddhist devotees conceived of the significance of images in their religious practices. Titled "Celebrating the Buddha (*tanfo* 嘆佛)" or "Celebrating the Image (*tanxiang* 歎像 or *qingxiang* 慶像)," the liturgy or prayer (*zhaiwen* 齋文)— 523 characters long and thus performable approximately for a half an hour at a minimum—contains a sequence in which to transform a lifeless image into a divine presence worthy of devotion. Despite the "Buddha" in the title, the liturgy maintains a subtle but unambiguous distinction between the image and the Buddha: it presents the image as a bodhisattva, one rebirth shy of buddhahood. The primary concern of this liturgy, however, is not to transform an image but to generate and transfer merit. Roughly forty percent of the entire ritual is dedicated to this purpose. Throughout the ritual, the liturgy repeatedly stresses that the completed image and the ritual for dedicating it were supposed to produce merit, reiterating the same point found in canonical sources.[390] Existing scholarship on Buddhist image rituals has not yet fully attended to the way in which such a doctrinal concept was incorporated into ritual after the completion of images.[391] This Dunhuang liturgy for image dedication, by contrast, demonstrates how

[390] For example, see Kieschnick (2003), 157-64.

[391] In her magisterial study, Yael Bentor explains that consecration renders merit effective. However, she notes that such an emphasis on merit does not appear in the ritual manual itself, but in treatises by the upper echelons of scholastic monks. Bentor (1996), 21. In his pioneering

the generation and transfer of merit was interwoven into the language that endows an image with qualities worthy of veneration. This measured move to steer away from any hint of equating images with the Buddha resonates with the Buddhist apologetic response to the anti-Buddhist criticism that Buddhists confused their objects of devotion with images.

At least nine manuscripts from the Dunhuang corpus (S. 1441 verso, S. 5638, S. 6048, S. 6923, P. 2058, P. 2072, P. 2588, P. 3494, and P. 3819), approximately datable to between the eighth and the tenth century, are confirmed to have whole or partial texts that can be called such.[392] Some of them appear in company with other liturgical texts whose titles include the names of objects, such as Buddha hall (*fotang* 佛堂), banner (*fan* 幡), or scriptures (*qingjing* 慶經).[393] The collected texts are not sequentially arranged to constitute a larger ritual program, so the ritual of image dedication seems to have been

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article, Richard Gombrich explains that the ritual for consecrating an image in Sri Lanka is named "merit action." His observation, however, does not describe how the components of merit-making integrate into the ritual performance. Gombrich (1966), 24.

[392] HUANG Zheng 黃徵 and WU Wei 吳偉 eds, *Dunhuang yuanwen ji* 敦煌願文集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1995), 45-48, 411-14, 434-40. Huang and Wu explain these texts as the pieces for praising Buddhist images. Lionel Giles notes on S. 6048 defines *qingxiang wen* as "composition on the presentation of an image to a temple." See Lionel Giles, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1957), 214. One of the manuscripts in the Pelliot Collection, P. 2072 is catalogued as a text for the purpose of celebrating the completion of Buddhist images. On the ritual of dedication, see Lowe (2017), 45-55.

[393] For example, the manuscripts S. 5638 and S. 6923, titled as "Various Miscellaneous Texts" (*zhuza wen* 諸雜文), group liturgical texts titled as *fotang wen* 佛堂文, *qingxiang wen* 慶像文, *randeng wen* 燃燈文. P. 2588 includes texts titled *fotang* 佛堂 and *qingjing* 慶經, and P. 3819 has *qingfan* 慶幡 and *qingjing* 慶經. The existence of the image dedication liturgy as part of miscellaneous prayers has been mentioned by the scholars who examined these two manuscripts in their studies of other liturgies. Stephen F. Teiser, "A Codicological Study of Liturgical Manuscripts from Dunhuang," unpublished version presented at Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2009), p. 6; CHEN Huaiyu, "Multiple Traditions in One Ritual: A Reading of the Lantern-Lighting Prayers in Dunhuang Manuscripts," in *Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, ed. by Tansen Sen (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 239.

carried out on its own. Besides slight orthographical differences, including errors and omissions, the contents and structure of this liturgy remain consistent across these different manuscripts. This stable textual condition suggests that the liturgy survives in the standardized form.

In what follows, I rely on the version critically reconstructed by Huang Zheng and Wu Wei. My analysis centers on the structure and contents of the liturgy. In terms of organizing principles and linguistic choices, the liturgy for image dedication is like other Dunhuang liturgical texts, notably healing liturgies extensively studied by Stephen Teiser, and lantern-lighting prayers by Chen Huaiyu. These liturgies follow the nearly identical scheme of ritual sequence, employ the parallel prose style for descriptive sections and vernacular for performative sections,[394] and draw on both Buddhist and non-Buddhist terms and tropes.[395] Both the seven-fold structure of healing liturgies[396] and the four components model of lantern-lighting prayers[397] are applicable to the structure of the image dedication liturgy. At the same time, as constituting a ritual for its own purpose, the liturgy contains its own specific contents in the main ritual section. Parsing the image

[394] Shao Wenshi 邵文實, "Dunhuang suwenxue zuopin zhong de pianli wenfeng 敦煌俗文學作品中的駢儷文風," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 2 (1994): 46-48; Stephen F. Teiser, "Literary Style of Dunhuang Healing Liturgies (患文)," *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* no. 14 (2014a), 355-77.

[395] Stephen F. Teiser, "Diction and Metaphor in Dunhuang Healing Liturgies," unpublished paper presented at Princeton University (2014c).

[396] The seven-fold structure goes: 1. Preface to the ritual by describing the Buddha's virtues, 2. Purpose of the ritual, 3. Description of the patient, the beneficiary of the ritual, 4. Generation of merit, 5. Ornamentation, 6. Prayers, 7. Benediction. Teiser (2014a): 362-69.

[397] The four components that construct the lantern-lighting prayer are: 1. Expounding the background and meaning of lighting lanterns, 2. Explaining ritual procedure, 3. Recalling Buddhist historical memory, 4 Concluding the ritual with vows and prayers. See Chen (2014), 237-38. Specific to lantern-lighting, the first and third components can be generalized as the introduction and Buddhological basis of the ritual. These components can respectively correspond to the opening section and the ritual section of other liturgies.

dedication liturgy against the seven-fold structure slightly modified by the four components model, the following analysis centers on how this medieval Dunhuang liturgy presented the image and how that explanation reflected Buddhist apologetics. For the convenience of analysis, I examine the liturgy in the order of ritual sequences.[398]

As the overture to the ritual, the first section extols the Buddha. At the outset, it emphasizes the unfathomable nature of ultimate truth as seen in the 660 dedicatory inscription of the Udāyana image. The section then goes on to narrate the Buddha's illustrious achievements from his birth to *parinirvāṇa*. Finally, the declaration of the supremacy of the Buddha's teachings concludes the section. It predominantly adopts the style of parallel prose, employing both Buddhist vocabulary and indigenous literary expressions. At first glance, the opening section of this liturgy is not much different from those of other Dunhuang liturgies.[399] However, it is not an original composition, but a collage of passages from two pieces of writing originally composed to honor the renowned apologist Falin (572–640). The very first line, "if numinous marvel is by no means comparable, [it] is not that which can be counted with bamboo tallies. Ultimate truth is crystalized afar, how can it be fathomed with a tapeline? (若夫神妙無方，非籌算之能測，至理凝邈，豈繩准之所知)," came from Yu Shinan's 虞世南 (558–638) preface to the now lost anthology of Falin's works.[400] The entire remainder of the opening section

[398] For the whole text of the liturgy, see appendix, pp. 203-206.

[399] For example, Stephen F. Teiser, "Curing with Karma and Confession: Two Short Liturgies from Dunhuang," in *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*, ed. C. Pierce Salguero (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 324-25.

[400] T 2109, 52: 474c17-18. This preface survives as the preface to Falin's *Poxie lun*, T 2109, 52: 474c17-475a27. Reporting that Yu Shinan's preface originally belonged to the anthology of Falin's works, Yancong's 彥琮 biography of Falin also contains this preface. *Tang hufa shamen Falin biezhuan* 唐護法沙門法琳別傳, T 2051, 50: 212b13-c22.

is from Yancong's 彥琮 (fl. 627–688) eulogy for Falin preserved at the end of his biography.[401] The whole opening section, in other words, is derived from the works produced right around the time when the conflict between anti-Buddhist critics and pro-Buddhist defenders heightened in the early seventh century. Through these literary sources, the opening section carries an apologetic undertone, implying that the Buddha appeared in this world to render the ineffable ultimate truth manifest.

In the second section, the officiant declares the intention of the ritual. The liturgy introduces how the image—likely a mural—is rendered,[402] and then addresses the audience, including the congregation of lay and monastic members as well as Buddhist saints and commoners from all the directions. At the end of the section, he announces that the ritual is to produce merit by way of celebrating the completion of the image.

The explanation about the donor of the image comes in the third section. Most of this section is to laud the donor in a fairly formulaic fashion. He is portrayed as having mastered literary and military skills and comprehended impermanence, which is likened to invariable and easily breakable things like clay or bottle. The metaphor of the moon also stresses the ever-changing and fleeting nature of things.[403] Tellingly, the liturgy praises the donor's apprehension of impermanence in order to acknowledge his vow to have an image fashioned. Daoxuan and the 656 inscription of the Udāyana image made the same proposition that devotees donate to have images created because they

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[401] T 2051, 50: 212c27-213a2.

[402] "Now, painted red and green on silk drapes, bodily marks and three bodies; Drew the substance of jade with jeweled threads, ornaments and purple gold (厥今繪丹青於錦帳，相好三身。圖玉質於寶絲，粧施紫磨)."

[403] "Deeply pondered on the substance of clay, [it is] ephemeral like moon in the water. Suddenly realized about the body of a bottle, [it is] inconstant like the moonlight (尋思坯質，如水月之非堅。頓悟瓶軀，比蟾光而不久)."

understand impermanence. This section ends with the confirmation that the donor has kept his vow by dedicating the image through this ritual.

Comprised of three subsections, the fourth section marks the main actions of the ritual. The first subsection is confession. After reaffirming that the production of an image as a meritorious undertaking has been completed prior to this ritual, the officiant urges the congregation to confess their transgressions. Not all Dunhuang liturgies have this part. Nonetheless, it indeed appears in other liturgies, especially in the one for healing monks.[404] The repentance ritual, such as *poṣadha*, constitutes an independent ritual on its own.[405] This subsection as part of the image dedication suggests that performing confession as part of ritual programs of which the main purpose was not repentance was also not unusual. While some of repentance ritual requires the presence of a Buddha image,[406] the ritual dedicating images also required confession. It is unclear whether rituals with the component of repentance were deemed more significant than those without it. In any case, this subsection attests to the significance of confession in the Buddhist ritual performance.[407]

In the second subsection, the ritual centers on the image. The prevalent theme in

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[404] For example, liturgies for curing monks have the confession and repentance sequence. Teiser (2017), 329.

[405] Sylvie Hureau, "Buddhist Rituals," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)*, ed. by John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1213-16. Wang Juan 王娟, *Dunhuang lichanwen yanjiu* 敦煌禮懺文研究 (Taipei: Fagu wenhua shiye gongsi, 1998); James Robson, "Sin, Sinification, Sinology: On the Notion of Sin in Buddhism and Chinese Religions," in *Sins and Sinners: Perspectives from Asian Religions*, ed. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 73-92.

[406] Hureau (2010), 1223.

[407] Bentor (1996), 43-44. For the transformative power of confession in Buddhist ritual, see Wendi L. Adamek, "Addressing the Mind: Developments in the Culture of Confession in Sui-Tang China," *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 28 (2015): 117-52.

this subsection is the physical beauty of the image. The liturgy praises the colors and form of the image, particularly its facial features and bodily marks. The admiration of the image's appearance culminates in the remark on the pupils.[408] One may consider this mention of the eyes to be a signal that image dedication also served as the eye-opening ceremony to consecrate the image. However, as part of a self-contained liturgy, this subsection does not equate the image with the Buddha. Immediately following this note on the image's eyes, the liturgy rather *compares* the image to the manifestations of the Buddha, as in the Rooster Peak or the Vulture Peak,[409] laying the groundwork for the following part on action: pay respect to the image like the Buddha and gaze at it, and you will be liberated from delusions (*wuming* 無明) and afflictions (*fannao* 煩惱).[410] Although this liturgy does not elaborate on how exactly the veneration and observation of the image would lead to the salvific achievements, the logic that images help devotees to remove the three poisons by manifesting the physical absence of the Buddha resonates with Buddhist apologetic accounts of images as well as the dedicatory formula for the

[408] "This image, then, utilizes myriad colors to paint the portrait of the sage; elicits wondrous hue to match his true countenance. [As if] a scarlet round fruit is placed at the tip of the lips; vermilion flush blossoms decorate the cheeks. Emerald-green mountains coagulate at the crown of his head; the powdered moon (halo) opens the wisp of hair (*ūrṇā*). Like painted dark leaves, the eyebrows appear freshened; like enclosed by green lotus leaves, the pupils seem purified (其像乃絢眾彩而繪聖，運妙色以儀真。朱艷果於唇端，丹秀花於臉際。翠山凝頂，粉月開毫。黛葉寫而眉鮮，青蓮披而目淨)."

[409] "The posture contains myriad hues; like the dormancy on the Rooster Peak; the shadow carries thousand rays; like the re-manifestation on the Vulture Peak (姿含萬彩，疑湛質於雞峰。影佩千光，似再臨於鷲嶺)." The Rooster Peak reference here originated in the legend about the future descent of Maitreya, for whom Mahākāśyapa is waiting to hand over a robe at Mt. Rooster's Foot (Kukkuṭapādagiri, Jizu shan 雞足山) or the re-manifestation of Śākyamuni. This legend is known to the Chinese audience through the accounts by Faxian and Xuanzang. Karen L. Brock, "Awaiting Maitreya at Kasagi," in *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, ed. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 224-26.

[410] "For anyone who venerates it, the ocean of delusions will dry up; for anyone who witnesses it, the mountain of afflictions will fall apart (禮之者，無明海竭。睹之者，煩惱山摧)."

Udāyana image.

The last subsection of the main ritual eulogizes achievements of a bodhisattva being. As with the previous subsection on the image, the action part comes last. Here, the liturgist encourages the audience to visualize and venerate the bodhisattva for merit granted and misfortune dispelled.[411] This subsection is primarily to reaffirm that this ritual is for making merit. At first glance, this subsection may seem to veer off course. As the image to be dedicated is a portrait of the Buddha, one would naturally expect the focus of the ritual to be its subject—the Buddha. This is especially true if image dedication had partly served as consecration to imbue the image with qualities of its sacred subject, i.e., to *enliven* the image, the ritual should have articulated the transformation of an image of the Buddha to the presence of the Buddha. Instead, the liturgy speaks of a bodhisattva immediately after the image section and urges the ritual audience to witness and venerate him. While being defined as superior to *pratyekabuddha*, this bodhisattva is also said to take up the Buddha's seat.[412] This means that this bodhisattva being refers to one who is destined to become a buddha in the next lifetime. By arranging this section on this somewhat obscure bodhisattva immediately after the section on the dedicated image, this liturgy avoids a straightforward equation of a Buddha image with the Buddha.[413] As a bodhisattva is a being with the potential to

[411] "For anyone who envisions him, in accordance with the heart, [merit] will be bestowed; For anyone who venerates him, in response to the vow, calamities will be eliminated (念之者，隨心所降[福]。禮之者，應願[以]消災)."

[412] "Suddenly transcend the vehicle of solitary realizer; Next [will] complement the seat of the Thus Come One (頓超緣覺之乘，次補如來之坐)."

[413] Also see Bentor (1996), 22-33, especially 25. The difficulty of consecrating an image, a receptacle of the *lha* or divine essence of the Buddha, is that the *lha*, invited to reside in the image as the Buddha, is already divine and thus does not need to be transformed. In the Tibetan consecration, this problem was resolved by treating an image as a disciple who would go through

become a buddha in the next and last station of rebirth, this liturgy implies that the image may be undergoing a transformation into a soon-to-be-buddha while entertaining the possibility that this bodhisattva will someday become the Buddha—the embodiment of ultimate reality.

Picking up the emphasis on merit at the end of the bodhisattva subsection, the rest of the liturgy alternates between ornamentation and prayers to conclude the ritual. In the ornamentation sections, the ritual distributes the merit generated through image dedication.[414] The prayer sections wish for all good fortune. Focusing on the general level, the first ornamentation-prayer section transfers the merit to all beings in the six realms and wishes for the safety of the state and the people and the longevity of the ruler and his ministers. The second ornamentation-prayer section revolves around the donor. Through this ritual, he has acquired due merit and thus can expect all imaginable bliss, including for material prosperity and social prestige. The two remainders of the prayer sections wish for benefits at multiple cosmological levels. The third prayer section hopes for the benefits in the agricultural cycle and consanguineous lineage—good harvests and familial perpetuation. The fourth prayer section first expresses a wish for the orderly maintenance of the universe in indigenous terms and then the achievement of ultimate

initiation. In the formative period of the Buddhist practice of making anthropomorphic images as the focus of devotional practices, the images in the type of iconography later identified as the Buddha were inscribed and conceived as the bodhisattva before the enlightenment. Ju-hyung Rhi, "From Bodhisattva to Buddha: The Beginning of Iconic Representation in Buddhist Art," *Artibus Asiae* 54, nos. 3-4 (1994): 207-25. These studies suggest that Buddhist ritualists and devotees were well aware of the problem of equating the image with the Buddha, and thus coined several discursive tactics to circumvent it.

[414] "[As we have] the merit of painting the image, praise the cause of merit (圖像功德，慶贊福因)."

salvific liberation in Buddhist terms.[415] Finally, the benediction of "*Mahā-prajñā* (*Mohe bore* 摩訶般若)," the great wisdom of emptiness, marks the end of the ritual, as in other Dunhuang liturgies.[416]

The message and objectives that this liturgy states are clear. By dedicating images, Buddhists demonstrate their understanding of impermanence, practice to remove delusions about and attachments to illusory phenomena, acquire merit and share it with all sentient beings, and then wish to be released from the vicious cycle of relegated rebirth and suffering and finally to ascend to awakening. For most of the ritual, the most commonly repeated theme is merit—the salvific currency to earn by carrying out good Buddhist work. Even if the liturgy identifies the dedicated image as a portrait of the Buddha, no indication exists at all about whether the dedicated image will become that which is conceived to be a living embodiment of the Buddha. Instead, the liturgy of image dedication continues to remind the ritual audience to distinguish the image of the Buddha from the Buddha. Through the ritual, the image is rather cast as a bodhisattva. According to the liturgy, devotion to the image leads to liberation, and devotion to the bodhisattva secures merit. Taking these together, then, the ritual presents the image as a means of attaining awakening, the professed ultimate goal of all Buddhist practices, as wished at the conclusion of the ritual.

A few final words may be warranted to conclude this analysis. In the subsection that centers on the act of dedicating the image, the primary concern is the physical beauty

[415] "May the paths to the three evil rebirths be forever blocked and the gate to salvation open for long; may all depart the source of suffering, and together ascend to the fruit of awakening (永截三途之路，長開[解脫之門]。同離苦源，齊登覺果)."

[416] Only P. 2072 and P. 2588 preserve benediction.

of the image, although it was couched in generally formulaic terms. A full exploration of the implication of this aesthetic interest in the image would require a separate, in-depth study on its own. In this dissertation, suffice it to say, this emphasis on the visual splendor of Buddhist images defies the dominant scholarly account that the aesthetical appreciation of Buddhist images was a modern intervention by the Western discipline of art history applied to Asian religious images in the late nineteenth century.[417] This Dunhuang liturgy testifies that exquisite artistry for Buddhist images clearly mattered, at least to medieval Chinese Buddhists who partook in these dedication rituals. For them, the ritual functions and sensory allure of Buddhist images were not mutually exclusive.

Conclusion

The legends about the first Buddhist image in the capital of Han China, the dedicatory inscriptions of Buddha images inspired by those legends, and the liturgy to be recited at the dedication of an image have a great deal in common. They all seem to be important parts of a shared discourse on images. First and foremost, Buddhist writers carefully avoided the straightforward equation of the Buddha with his images. Buddhist discourse on images, instead, centered on how they are instrumental in awakening—the soteriological end of Buddhist practices. In addition to the canonical account that images help to generate and accumulate merit, Buddhist writers brought further nuances to bear on the explanation about the salvific role of images. According to this explanation, as donors realize the fleeting nature of material things, they give away their properties to have images crafted. In doing so, the same explanation goes, they can remove the

[417] Faure (1998): 770-74.

attachments to material possessions and the illusion of lasting life, helping others to realize emptiness of beings; this good deed cancels evil deeds in the past and thus delivers devotees from the realms of relegated rebirth.

All the strands of this logic appeared in the Buddhist defense of images during the debates with the anti-Buddhist critics. According to some of the most articulate accounts, material beings disperse just as the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa*, and thus Buddhists donate their properties to the cause of producing images to exercise the Buddha's teaching of impermanence, to detach themselves from material possessions, and to accumulate merit so that they can avoid karmic retribution and eventually awaken to emptiness as images of the Buddha themselves manifest. Based on this reasoning, Buddhist apologists argued that material representations of Buddhism could bolster comprehension of the Buddha's teachings.

This almost seamless continuity in tone and rhetoric that cuts across different genres suggests that Buddhist communities were compelled to make sense of images not only for external critics but also for themselves. Debate records may have been products of dialogues amongst members of the educated elite. Legends, dedicatory inscriptions, and liturgies, on the other hand, were intended to go beyond such a narrow league. The Buddhist defense of images was encapsulated and formularized by these genres other than debate records. These non-canonical genres became instruments for disseminating and consolidating the gist of the elite discourse of images among broader Buddhist communities in medieval China.

Chapter Seven
CONCLUSION: A BUDDHIST SOTERIOLOGY OF IMAGES

From the fourth through seventh centuries, Buddhist cultic images divided Chinese learned circles into two camps. These Chinese intellectuals debated over the worthiness of the Buddha—the subject of the images, the morality of those who committed to fashioning images, and the viability of representing the ultimate truth through images. The language employed in these debates suggests that the two sides shared the same semiotic presupposition about images. That is, images by definition refer to something extrinsic to themselves. Consequently, the debates came to touch on seemingly disparate matters that the debaters considered Buddhist images to signify. This study argues that this semiotic understanding of images underpinned the arguments of both sides in some of the most heated debates between detractors and proponents of Buddhism in medieval China.

By examining both Chinese classical and Buddhist canonical texts, this dissertation explains that the semiotic consideration of images cannot be unambiguously identified as either *Chinese* or *Buddhist*. In both traditions, images were conceptualized as an epistemic instrument of grasping ultimate reality, which would be otherwise unknowable without images. Images were also justified as physical surrogates for those who passed away and became incorporeal. These presuppositions did not straightforwardly equate images with their formless originals but rather maintained the distinction between the two. At the same time, this awareness of the difference between images and their intangible referents led to divergent stances on the utility of images. On the one end, images were considered to evoke the presence of an absent original effectively to the extent that the difference was negligible; on the other, it was undeniable

that images could never *be* the real. By the time when the earliest extant debates took place in the early fourth century, both indigenous classics and translated Buddhist texts already contained these diverse positions regarding the semiotic function of images. It is highly likely that Chinese intellectuals, regardless of their stances in the debates, were familiar with these presuppositions when they confronted each other over the issues posed by Buddhist cultic images.

It was against this shared intellectual backdrop, this dissertation argues, that the Buddhist religion brought new ideas to the Chinese intellectual sphere and generated dialectical hermeneutic situations. Buddhist canonical sources only alluded to the soteriological view that the making of images helps devotees to obtain merit for better rebirth in future lifetimes. The anti-Buddhist critics considered it as unfounded and thus, incompatible with Chinese mores. Over the course of engaging with this opposition, Buddhist apologists came to weave principal tenets of Buddhism into fuller soteriological accounts than that which could be found in canonical sources, articulating how exactly images could help Buddhists to achieve the professed goals of Buddhist practice.

This reinforced Buddhist position merits a reiteration here: Buddhist devotees donate their possessions to have images crafted because they have grasped the transitory nature of material things. The Buddha demonstrated this lesson of impermanence by entering *parinirvāṇa*. Gazing at his images leads to a deeper understanding of emptiness; erecting his images exponentially yields merit for all sentient beings. By means of images, Buddhists thus can escape from delusional attachments to the material realm and the vicious cycle of downgraded rebirth in future lifetimes. These steps will lead them to

attain true awakening. Images lay the material foundation for disseminating these profound teachings by the Buddha.

This dissertation describes the continuity between this elite monastic stance on Buddhist images and popular discourse surrounding the Buddhist practice of crafting images. Miracle tales, dedicatory inscriptions on statues, and liturgies recited at image dedication ceremonies exhibited a soteriological logic very similar, if not identical, to the Buddhist defense of images. These genres were composed by semi-literate officiants and delivered to and circulated among devotees who participated in the production of images on the ground. This suggests that broad Buddhist communities in medieval China remained anxious to justify the indispensability of images in practicing the Buddhist religion.

These findings lead us to revisit three central assumptions that have shaped recent scholarly discussions regarding Buddhist images in medieval China. First of all, by analyzing Buddhist apologetic literature, this dissertation points out that Chinese Buddhists stayed attentive to conceptual issues inherent in the cultic use of images. Previous scholarship has long assumed that Buddhist theorists remained indifferent to conceptual complexities involved in the cultic use of images. As a result, it has been modern scholars who have identified problems involved in the use of images, defined what Buddhist cultic images could mean, and constructed models to theorize the ritual function of images. This study shows that the cultic use of images was not only a modern issue which has arisen in line with the methodological development of Buddhist studies, but also a historical issue with which Buddhists in the past wrestled. By examining Buddhist stances on their cultic images, this dissertation retrieves the forgotten voices of

Buddhists in medieval China, thereby offering concrete evidence of prior scholarly hypotheses.

Secondly, as the conceptual issues of cultic images have been framed from etic perspectives, scholarly discussions of the meaning and role of Buddhist cultic images have lost sight of the internal diversity of Buddhist understanding of images. Employing the language of presence, recent studies of Buddhist images have assumed the autonomous agency or even ontology of images. While framing the discussion of outward ritual actions and speeches in theoretically attractive terms, this explicatory model has failed to encompass several important aspects of Buddhist image discourse. Debates over Buddhist images persistently show that the absence of the physical Buddha not only motivated the inception of Buddhist images but also continuously informed the ways some Buddhists conceived the role of cultic images. These debates also testify that the conflation of the Buddha with his images was often the anti-Buddhists' move to disparage the Buddhist religion. Both Buddhist writers and devotees endeavored not to obfuscate the distinction between the Buddha and his images. Most importantly, the import of Buddhist soteriological concerns in the Buddhist justification of images was by no means diminished. This dissertation brings to light these diverse aspects of the medieval Chinese discourse surrounding Buddhist cultic images.

Thirdly, by carefully examining the multifaceted discourse of Buddhist images in medieval China, this study presents a case in which not all aspects of Chinese Buddhism amount to the transformation of Buddhism into "Chinese" form. Assuming essential differences between Chinese indigenous traditions and the Buddhist religion, previous studies have considered the cultic use of images to be a Buddhist import to Chinese ritual

culture. This study instead demonstrates that both Buddhism and Chinese indigenous teachings shared much of the underlying conceptual framework for explaining the relationship between images and their intangible referents. The two traditions exhibited the awareness of the tension between images and the real and acknowledged both the utility and epistemic risk of the cultic use of images. Buddhism's new soteriological ideas only intensified disagreements that already existed prior to the arrival of Buddhist images. The debates suggest that Chinese intellectuals saw more commonalities between indigenous teachings and the foreign teaching than previous studies would have us believe. In the meantime, Buddhist apologists were keen to draw out what made Buddhism different from indigenous teachings. Multiple apologetic moves that Buddhist debaters made to counter their opponents indicate that Chinese Buddhists made conscious endeavors to elucidate what they thought critical to their religion rather than simply projecting indigenous predilections or norms onto the imported religion. The formation of Chinese Buddhism, therefore, was not only the incorporation of indigenous Chinese features into Buddhism, but also involved the process of making Buddhism more distinct from the rest of Chinese traditions.

APPENDIX

Celebrating the Image (*Tanxiang wen* 歎像文)

1. 嘆德	I. Opening—Praising the Buddha's virtue
若夫	If
神妙無方，非籌算之能測	Numinous marvel is by no means comparable, [it] is not that which can be counted with bamboo tallies.
至理凝邈，豈繩准之所知?	Ultimate truth is crystalized afar, how can it be fathomed with a tapeline?
故以	Therefore, [the Buddha]
利見閻浮，龍飛道樹	Benefitted Jambudvīpa with his manifestation, and soared like a dragon to the tree of the Way;
施安品物，託質迦維	Provided all classes of beings with comfort, and turned to substances in Kapilavastu.
淨五眼於三明	Purified the five eyes with the three kinds of awareness;
具六通於万德	Achieved the six penetrations in every virtue.
輝輝神於此界	Shone luminous numen on this realm;
放毫相於他方	Emitted the *ūrṇā* mark to other directions.
動大地以驚群迷	Awakened the deluded by shaking the earth;
震雷音而該(駭)群品	Alerted all classes [of beings] by striking the thunder sound.
方始居於鹿苑，蔭波(彼)小根	Then, first took a seat at the Deer Park (Mṛgadāva in Sārnāth), casting shades for those little roots;
終灑潤於鶴林，霑茲大業	Finally sprinkled the Crane Forest (Kuśinagara), saturating this great estate.
闡玉鼓法聖之訓	Expounded the lessons of the Dharma sage with the jade drum;
揚金口惠(慧)日之光	Lifted the rays of the benevolent sun through the golden gate.
盪盪魏魏，難可稱量者矣!	Towering and soaring! How is it possible to weigh and measure?
2. 齋意	II. Intention of Ritual
厥今	Now,
繪丹青於錦帳，相好三身	Painted red and green on silk drapes, bodily marks and three bodies;
圖玉質於寶絲，粧施(莊飾)紫磨	Drew the substance of jade with jeweled threads, ornaments and purple gold.
遂乃	Finally
會僧[請]凡聖，祈(祇)告十方	The congregation and monastics implore all commoners

and sages to pray and propagate towards the ten directions.

延(筵)四眾於像前，焚天香於寶蓋
Summon (a banquet for) the four-fold assembly before the image, and kindle the heavenly incense under the jeweled canopy.

如斯廣贊，誰之作(知施)焉?
Like this, the paean broadly spreads out. Whose work is this?

時則有持爐施主慶楊(揚)功德之福會也
Time has come; the donor of holding the special brazier festively hosts the blissful assembly of merit.

3. 施主
III. The Donor

惟某公乃
Think of Mr. so and so.
英靈獨秀
His heroic spirit surpasses all his peers;
六藝俱全
His six arts are perfectly accomplished.
文波[及]子健之蹤(踪)
His literary art reaches the traces of Zijian;
武亞啼猿之妙
His martial prowess exceeds the marvel of shrieking apes.

更能
Moreover, [the donor]
尋思坯質，如(而)水月之非堅
Deeply pondered on the substance of clay, [it is] ephemeral like moon in the water.
頓悟瓶軀，比蟾(瑩)光而不久
Suddenly realized about the body of a bottle, [it is] inconstant like the moonlight.

所以
Therefore,
虔恭上願，圖繪真儀
[The commissioner] respected and revered the supreme vow; [had] the true countenance painted as a picture.
粉墨光明
Pigment and ink brighten the illumination;
蓮華貫誓
The lotus blossom fulfills the pledge.

4-1. 道場 — 懺悔
IV-1. Ritual 1—Repentance

福事已畢，虔請三尊，披讀(請)煩愆[衍]，希求上路
As meritorious undertaking is now complete, we respect and invoke the venerable triad, confess afflictive transgressions; and seek and pursue the higher path.

4-2. 道場 — 嘆像
IV-2. Ritual 2—Praising the Image

其像乃
This image, then,
絢眾彩而繪聖
Utilizes myriad colors to paint the portrait of the sage;
運妙色以儀真
Elicits wondrous hue to match his true countenance.

朱艷果於唇端
[As if] a scarlet round fruit is placed at the tip of the lips;
丹秀花於臉際
Vermilion flush blossoms decorate the cheeks.

翠山凝頂
Emerald-green mountains coagulate at the crown of his head;

粉月開毫	The powdered moon (halo) opens the wisp of hair (*ūrṇā*).
黛葉寫而眉鮮	Like painted dark leaves, the eyebrows appear freshened;
青蓮披而目淨	Like enclosed by green lotus leaves, the pupils seem purified.
姿含萬彩，疑湛質於雞峰	The posture contains myriad hues; like the dormancy on the Rooster Peak.
影佩千光，似再臨於鷲嶺	The shadow carries thousand rays; like the re-manifestation on the Vulture Peak.
禮之者，無明海竭	For anyone who venerates it, the ocean of delusions will dry up;
睹之者，煩惱山摧	For anyone who witnesses it, the mountain of afflictions will fall apart.
4-3. 道場 — 嘆菩薩	IV-3. Ritual 3—Praising a Bodhisattva
菩薩乃	Bodhisattva, then,
四弘德備，	Has perfected the four great virtues;
十地功充	Has acquired the qualities of the ten stages.
頓超緣覺之乘，	Suddenly transcends the vehicle of solitary realizer;
次補如來之坐	Next [will] complement the seat of the Thus Come One.
念之者，隨心所降[福]	For anyone who envisions him, in accordance with the heart, [merit] will be bestowed;
禮之者，應願[以]消災	For anyone who venerates him, in response to the vow, calamities will be eliminated.
5-1. 莊嚴	V-1. Ornamentation 1
以斯	Therefore,
圖像功德，慶贊福因，先用莊嚴,	[As we have] the merit of painting the image, praise the cause of merit, first use ornament
上界天仙，下方龍鬼	heavenly immortals in the upper realm, dragon ghosts in the lower division.
6-1. 願文	VI-1. Prayer 1
伏願	Humbly pray:
威光增盛，護國治(救)人	May the light of dignity grow brighter, protect the state and save the people.
郡主官僚，並延遐受[壽]	May the ruler and officials extend their lifespans by far.
5-2. 莊嚴	V-2. Ornamentation 2
又(伏)持勝福，次用莊嚴，施主即體	We further take this superlative merit next to ornament the donor himself.

6-2. 願文	VI-2. Prayer 2
惟願 千祥湊應， 萬福齊臻	We pray: May one thousand auspices respond together; May ten thousand merits arrive in an orderly fashion.
榮祿以[與]劫石而不移 班爵以[與]青松(=鬆)而不變	May glory and fortune not be moved like cornerstones; May ranks and titles not be changed like evergreens.
6-3. 願文	VI-3. Prayer 3
願使 年豐歲稔，家中傳六順之儀 月盛日增，子孫滿千生之俊	Let us pray: May every year be abundant in harvest, and our familial lineage keep the sacrifice of six orders; May every month and every day prosper ever, and our descendants become heroes of one-thousand lives.
6-4. 願文	VI-4. Prayer 4
然後 陰陽順序，日月貞明 地平天成，樂和禮洽 永截三途之路，長開[解脫之門] 同離苦源，齊登覺果	Next, May Yin and Yang stay in the correct sequence, and the sun and the moon shine brightly. May the earth be peaceful and the heaven prosperous, and music be harmonious and rituals properly kept. May the paths to the three evil rebirths be forever blocked and the gate to salvation open for long. May all depart the source of suffering, and together ascend to the fruit of awakening.
7. 號尾	VII. Benediction
摩訶般若	*Mahā-prajñā*

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