

Daoxuan and the Medieval Chinese Encounter with Relics and Images

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Abstract: This paper will concentrate on Buddhist material culture related to saintly figures, examining Buddhist relics and images as they are presented in the *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 [Collected Record of Miracles Relating to the Three Jewels in China; henceforth the *Record of Miracles*]. The *Record of Miracles* is a collection of miracle tales compiled by the scholar monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) in 664. Daoxuan was a monk of great erudition who read translated Indic Buddhist texts and helped translate many into the Chinese idiom. His was a world at once informed by the experience of Chinese religious and political life, while simultaneously being coloured by his own prolonged literary encounter with the foreign philosophies and rites of Buddhist India. Bearing this in mind, by investigating the literary evidence in the *Record of Miracles* related to relics and images, as well as Daoxuan’s recorded experience with these cult-objects and the place they held in both his writing and his life, this paper will first draw some conclusions about the place of Buddhist objects in Chinese society. It will then demonstrate Daoxuan’s profound investment and personal interest in the cult of saints. Particular attention will be directed at Famen Monastery 法門寺 and Daoxuan’s relationship to the finger bone relic cult out of this important imperially mandated monastery.

Keywords: Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), Famen Monastery 法門寺, cult-objects, miracle tales, Chinese Buddhism

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1. The Many Faces Of Daoxuan

This article centers around the life and works of the Tang dynasty scholar-monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667 CE). Of particular interest is Daoxuan's relationship to the miraculous as it may be gleaned in his expressed views on relics, images, and their powers. This is a topic that Professor Kōichi Shinohara has written extensively about and I hope it may thus be appropriate to publish this article in honour of his eightieth birthday, for an academic whose scholarship has cast light on so many facets of medieval Chinese Buddhist religious life and practice.

Daoxuan was an early Tang dynasty master of great renown among his fellow monastics and an influential figure among members of the imperial court, playing a central role in debates surrounding the role of the monastic community in relation to secular society. He is best known for his historical works and his exegetical treatises on the monastic codes, primarily through his seminal commentaries on the Four-part monastic regulations (Skt. *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*; Ch. *Sifen lü* 四分律). Daoxuan is to this day recognized for his commentaries and work within the monastic community as the de facto founder of the Four-part Vinaya School in China, also known as the South Mountain School (Nanshan zong 南山宗).

He was a prolific thinker and writer, producing works that went far afield from the proscriptive codes of conduct in the Vinaya, composing and compiling texts throughout his religious career ranging from the exegetical to the apologetic and from the historical to the supernatural. Daoxuan was a dedicated apologist, a scrupulous cataloguer, and an assiduous compiler of biographies as well as miracle tales. Similar to many of his pious Buddhist contemporaries, Daoxuan had an interest in the manifest power of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, divine beings, and cult objects of China. Indeed, taking from Daoxuan's writings and from writings about him, we can gather that he was no stranger to the supernatural phenomena associated to these places and objects, having visited many of the sites he wrote about, sometimes even bearing witness to the supernatural phenomena he wrote about. As a well-read and well-traveled cosmopolitan monk, he visited as well as studied the origins of China's sacred Buddhist sites and the cult objects

preserved therein. Many of these places and objects were believed to have supernormal qualities, either by their connection to past—or enduring—manifest miracles, by their recognized therapeutic efficacy, by their established apotropaic abilities, or by a variety of other supernormal associations. In his role as a Buddhist historian, Daoxuan sought out and committed to writing the accounts of those places, objects, as well as individuals that were officially and popularly associated to Buddhist miracles.

Bearing this in mind, the study at hand intends to paint a portrait of this Tang dynasty scholar monk in relation to the miraculous in China. For the purposes of this paper, attention will only be directed at miracles as they relate to two aspects of Buddhist material culture: relics and images. The sources of choice in this article are miracle tales, those recorded stories of monks, lay believers, patrons, accounts of sacred places as well as cult objects, structures, and scriptures. Specifically, this study will analyse a late work completed in 664 by Daoxuan called the *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 [Collected Record of Miracles Relating to the Three Treasures in China; *T* no. 2106; hereafter *Record of Miracles*]. The *Record of Miracles* was a collection of stories edited and organised by Daoxuan. The sources of this compilation varied from stele inscriptions to local lore, and from texts kept in the capital's monastic libraries to the author's own personal experiences. This paper will investigate miracles, relics, and images as they appear in the *Record of Miracles*, drawing out information on Daoxuan and casting light on relevant details concerning cult object culture during the early Tang period.

Although the *Record of Miracles* was primarily a collection of secondary sources, Daoxuan consistently inserted himself into these narratives, including anecdotes when relevant related to his first-hand experiences of miracles, sacred places, and cult objects. It is worth noting that the *Record of Miracles* is not the first reference one might look to when studying this monk's experiences of the supernormal. Indeed, many before have looked to Daoxuan's late revealed texts, for it was in the years before his death that he had—and recorded—encounters with supernormal beings who passed on revealed truths regarding various points of Buddhist doctrine, discipline, and history. There are two extant versions of his interviews with supernormal

beings included in the Taishō canon: the *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* 道宣律師感通錄 [Vinaya Master Daoxuan's Record of Miraculous (Experiences)] and the *Lüxiang gantong zhuan* 律相感通傳 [Record of Vinaya (Master Daoxuan's) Miraculous Encounters]—both presumed to be first-hand accounts recorded in 667, the year of his death.¹ His close colleague, Daoshi 道世 (596?–683), also included in his Buddhist encyclopedia some of Daoxuan's revealed texts. Perhaps most significant in this regard was the preface to a revealed version of the Buddha's final sermon, copied in fascicle ninety-eight of the encyclopedia under the title *Yifa zhuchi ganying ji* 遺法住持感應集 [Record of Miracles on the Preservation of the Teaching Bequeathed by the Buddha].²

Indeed, Daoxuan's contemporaries as well as later generations of Chinese Buddhists were aware of his inclination for the supernatural. In the *Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Song Biography of Eminent Monks; 988], Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001) placed Daoxuan among the masters of monastic regulations—the account is full of miraculous elements and reads more like the biography of a wonder-worker. Reading the *Shishi liu tie* 釋氏六帖 [The Śākya Clan's Six Tablets; 954] by Yichu 義楚, one scholar noted that Daoxuan appeared predominantly in sections related to the miraculous, indicating that

¹ The *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* 道宣律師感通錄 was dated 664, though it most likely was composed in 667. The content is essentially the same as the *Lüxiang gantong zhuan* 律相感通傳. Fujiyoshi argues that the different dating was caused by a confusion between the *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* and the *Record of Miracles* which also contains the characters *gantong lu* 感通錄 and was written in 664 ('Dōsen no zepitsu sanshu', 200ff.; *Dōsen den no kenkyū*, 372f.). Whether or not Daoxuan authored this text is difficult to gauge. As Campany states, if it is an author other than Daoxuan then he must have been very knowledgeable of the monasteries and monastic communities at that time ('Buddhist Revelation', 15 note 46). Zürcher noted that this text was listed as having been carried to Japan in the early ninth century (*Buddhist Conquest*, 421 note 148).

² Daoshi lists the *Yifa zhuchi ganying ji* 遺法住持感應集 in seven fascicles among Daoxuan's works (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, T no. 2122, 1023c12). Analysed briefly in Barrett, *Early Printing*, 14f.

late-Tang dynasty monks did not primarily associate him to his role as a master of monastic codes, but might instead have given primacy to his role as a wonder-worker (*gantong* 感通).³ Over one thousand years later on a different continent, the eminent Sinologist Paul Demiéville (1894–1979) also noted Daoxuan’s latter-day penchant for the supernatural. However, he saw Daoxuan’s visionary experiences as detrimental to the quality of his work, claiming that the scholar monk’s later works should be dismissed because they had been tainted by ‘morbid spiritism’.⁴

Daoxuan’s interest in the supernatural was not solely a later phenomenon. He was a fervent reader of miracle tales as a youth,⁵ and as early as 645 was already dedicating far more space to the biographies of ‘wonder-workers’ in his *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued Biography of Eminent Monks] than any other major Buddhist biographers before or after him.⁶ Although the *Record of Miracles* composed in 664 is considered a late text, it includes accounts from his earlier years as a monk in the capital, as well as his years of travel to China’s sacred Buddhist sites from 630 to 640. Moreover, unlike the biographies of Daoxuan recorded by others,

³ Yamazaki, ‘Tō Seimeiji Dosen to kantsū’, 169. For example, he is mentioned in a section dedicated to ‘The transformation of things by spiritual powers’ (*shengtong huawu* 神通化物) under the heading ‘Daoxuan communicates with spirits’ (*Daoxuan ganshen* 道宣感神) in the *Shishi liutie* (B no. 79, 13: 11.236a15–237a5).

⁴ Cited in Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias*, 40. No mention of this is made in any of Demiéville’s writings so it must have been something that he said and never wrote. Arthur Waley, one of Demiéville’s contemporaries probably writing in response to the ‘rationalist’ stance represented by the Swiss-French scholar’s statement, claimed that ‘in those days it was considered a mark of the highest sanity and perspicacity to have visions; a sign of craziness to ignore them’ (Waley, *The Real Tripitaka*, 130).

⁵ *Daoxuan lüshi gantong lu*, T no. 2107, 52: 1.436a4–8; *Lüxiang gantong zhuan*, T no. 1898, 45: 1.875a23–28. C.f. translated to English in Campamy, ‘Buddhist Revelation’, 17.

⁶ Shinohara, ‘Two Sources’, 128.

the *Record of Miracles* is a text that he undoubtedly authored.⁷ It is a useful autobiographical source in this regard, and there is plenty of material specific to relics and images in the *Record of Miracles* that warrant further study.

Throughout the ages, Daoxuan's revelations have interested many within the monastic community, and his latter-day revealed texts have received a fair amount of attention in the field of Buddhist studies.⁸ However, while the discourse on his later-revealed texts informs this work, the revealed texts themselves will not be discussed. Suffice it to say that there is much cross-over between the *Record of Miracles* and Daoxuan's interviews, insofar as the recorded visions were in many instances dialogues with supernatural beings confirming the truth-value of stories found in his collection of miracle tales—a connection between the two sets of texts that this author is presently working on. The *Record of Miracles* is often considered a piece of Buddhist historiography, closer to encyclopedic writing than it is to biography. However, this paper will show that the *Record of Miracles* is worth studying not only because of the cultural and historical insights it provides, but because it also divulges important information on Daoxuan, the learned and devout monk who recorded many personal anecdotes and observations in his compilation.⁹

⁷ Regarding the interviews supposedly recorded in 667, although they were most likely authored by Daoxuan, Robert Campany notes that they did not appear in Chinese catalogues. Therefore, it is possible that they were apocryphal, although whoever composed them would certainly have needed to have great insider knowledge on early Tang monastic life, as well as Daoxuan's life and works (Campany, 'Buddhist Revelation', 15 note 46).

⁸ The reader may refer to other works on the topic: Yamazaki, 'Tō no Dosen no kantsū ni tsuite'; Yamazaki, 'Tō Seimeiji Dosen to kantsū'; Fujiyoshi, *Dōsen den no kenkyū*, 371f.; Suwa, 'Dōsen ni okeru "kantsū" no igi'; Sakamoto, 'Dōsen no kan tsūkan ni tsuite'; Wang, 'Tangdai daoxuan yu ta de fojiao gantong shijie'. Some English sources on the topic include Campany, 'Buddhist Revelation', 15–21; Ho, 'The Ideal Monastery'; Tan, 'Daoxuan's Vision of Jetavana'; McRae, 'Vision of Jetavana'; Chen, *Revival*, 57–93.

⁹ For more on this text see works by Shinohara: 'Two Sources'; *idem*, 'Ji

Finally, this paper will study relics and images in medieval Chinese society through the lens of Daoxuan's own experiences as recorded in the *Record of Miracles* and in other relevant works. A small caveat: given the limited length and scope of this article, emphasis will be—artificially—placed on what will here be called 'relics' and 'images'. Regrettably, this paper's emphasis of relics and images breaks away from the *Record of Miracles*' five-part categorization of the 'miraculous': (a) pagodas and their relics, (b) religious images, (c) holy monasteries, (d) auspicious texts, and (e) exceptional monks. Images and relics will be the focus of this article because Daoxuan mentions them in his own recorded experiences and because, as will be explained below, they are the most symbolically and ritually important cult objects in Buddhist doctrine and practice. The various topics other than relics and images covered in the *Record of Miracles*—namely sacred place, the cult of the book, and extraordinary monks—are subjects that this author is currently researching in tandem with this current topic.

The two first sections of this paper on 'cult objects' and 'sacred history of cult objects' provide definitions and context to better understand the webs of meaning undergirding a medieval Chinese Buddhist worldview that took as given the efficacy of relics and images as well as the existence of supernormal beings. The following section turns to Daoxuan's interest in relics and images. The subsection titled 'Famen and the Mauryan King' covers the history of Famen Monastery 法門寺. In reading scholarship on Famen—as well as in Chinese Buddhist social history more generally—this monastery and its relics are usually associated to the Tang imperial cult or Famen is used to paint a portrait of medieval religious life.¹⁰ While Daoxuan is often quoted as a source, his relation to the monastery and its ceremonies is only mentioned

Shenzhou Sanbao Gantong-Lu'; *idem*, 'Changing Roles for Miraculous Images'; *idem*, 'Dynastic Politics and Miraculous Images'; *idem*, 'Stories of Miraculous Images'.

¹⁰ For some examples, see Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang*, 37, 46, 58; Li, 'Lun Tang ren dui Famen fozhi gu de chongjing'; Han, *Famen si*; Yang, 'Sui Tang de Fo sheli gongyang he famen si'; Sharf, 'The Buddha's Finger Bones', 43–51; Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 178ff.

in passing.¹¹ Past scholarship has provided important information on the multifaceted history of Famen, but because Daoxuan was not the object of study, his association to it is usually glossed over. The connection between monk and monastery is important because it draws a common thread between Daoxuan and one of the most potent relics of the early Tang: the Buddha's finger bone. This is an oversight in the study of Famen—and, indeed, of Daoxuan—that this article will remedy.¹² The final subsection titled 'personal experience of cult objects' covers Daoxuan's recorded experiences of cult objects and how these might have affected his worldview.

2. Cult Objects

This article concentrates on two aspects of Buddhist material culture related to saintly figures, examining Buddhist relics and images as they are presented in both secular and Buddhist texts. Religious structures such as pagodas and monasteries, as well as other cult objects (e.g. talismans, musical instruments, quotidian religious implements such as the almsbowl, the robe, etc.), also fall into the category of Buddhist

¹¹ For example, in an article by Huang Chi-chiang which includes a summary of Daoxuan's history of Famen, Huang studies the historical shift from Southern imperial veneration of tooth relics to Northern worship of finger relics during the Tang without ever dwelling on the Daoxuan's personal involvement in the cult (Huang, 'Consecrating the Buddha', 501, 506). In another article by Eugene Wang on the Chinese Buddhist intellectual history of 'true body' thought in relation to Famen, he reads Daoshi's rendering of the relevant passage in the *Record of Miracles* which, as we will see below, alters the original to strip it of its first-person voice (Wang, 'Of the True Body', 86). Similarly, Tansen Sen does not elaborate on the matter either, only noting that the *Record of Miracles* describes the object as 'shaped like a small finger' (Sen, 'Relic Worship at the Famen Temple', 35).

¹² Daoxuan's association to Famen is studied in neither of the main two monographs dedicated to his life (Fujiyoshi, *Dōsen den no kenkyū*; Ang, *The Life of Daoxuan*).

material culture, although it is not within the purview of this paper to cover them. The term ‘cult of saints’ will here refer to all ritual activities surrounding Buddhist relics and images. The term ‘saint’ indicates those figures whose lives, practices and virtues gave them special religious status. First among them was, of course, Siddhārtha Gautama (d. ca. 400 BCE), the historical Buddha, whose remains became objects of veneration soon after he passed.¹³ The term ‘cult’ is used in its most restricted sense, denoting particular forms or systems of religious worship expressed in ceremonies directed towards figures or objects. In this case ‘cult’ refers almost exclusively to relic and image veneration practises. The relics and images in question will therefore be referred to as ‘cult objects’ to address the cult dedicated to them.¹⁴

Robert Sharf claims that Buddhism’s spread in China should not be studied as the diffusion of a creed or faith, but is better understood ‘in terms of the diffusion of sacred objects’.¹⁵ These sacred cult objects were endowed with miraculous powers, they answered the prayers of the needy, and piqued the curiosity of those who would

¹³ ‘Saints’ also includes those followers whose teachings and practices raised them to a level of sanctity that inspired reverence and devotion. For more on hagiography the status of ‘saints’ in religious narrative, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Verellen, ‘Luo Gongyuan’; Kieschnick, *Eminent Monk*, 1–15; Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 15–43; Flood, *Ascetic Self*, 122–38. Although the term ‘saint’ may hold certain Christian connotations, it is warranted in this case and has in the past been used in the Chinese Buddhist context. See, for example, Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 270; Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs*, 15.

¹⁴ For a full list of what Daoxuan might have considered cult objects, see the prayer recorded in *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集, T no. 2103, 52: 27.318b2–c12. They include corporeal remains, the Buddha’s monastic implements, pagodas and images.

¹⁵ Sharf, ‘On the Allure of Buddhist Relics’, 77. For contrasting position, see J. W. de Jong’s statement: ‘The sacred texts are [...] the *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of Buddhism. Buddhism in China depended, above all, on a knowledge of sacred scriptures’ (de Jong, ‘Buddha’s Word’, 49).

otherwise have been left indifferent by the doctrinal complexities of Buddhism.¹⁶ Among the medieval Chinese gentry, detractors often presented Buddhism as a foreign ‘barbarian’ religion, and proponents of this new creed faced challenges every step of the way.¹⁷ However, the narratives preserved in the histories, miracle tales, and apologetic texts deliberately showcased the many miracles produced by sacred objects, attesting to the fact that Buddhist missionaries had recourse to the power and potency of these objects when facing such challenges. For this reason, stories such as those contained in miracle tales reveal how the faith was propagated not only by preaching the Dharma and translating scriptures, but also by simultaneously converting people through miraculous works and convincing them of the miraculous qualities of Buddhist objects.

Relics and images are both essentially similar insofar as they are objects of devotion acting as points of convergence for the rituals and the practices of the faithful. Doctrinally, they are believed to be worldly remnants of the virtue and benevolence of past holy figures—stand-ins for the life and attainments of these exalted individuals. Ontologically, relics and images imply the ‘presence’ of the saints—they *are* the saints, just as the portrait of Caesar is said to actually *be* Caesar.¹⁸ Historically, while different kinds of cult objects

¹⁶ Kieschnick, *Eminent Monk*, 31.

¹⁷ Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 255; in medieval China a common criticism against Buddhists was that their beliefs were foreign to Chinese systems of rites and belief. Therefore, I use the term ‘barbarian’ because, as Zürcher and Yang (‘Replacing Hu with Fan’, 157) note, it is a close approximation to indigenous terms such as *hu* 胡 or *fan* 梵 used to designate people, cultures, and texts from outside or at the margins of the Sinosphere. Some have argued that such ‘Sino-barbarian dichotomies’, present in Chinese culture as early as the Western Zhou, persist in the conversation on race in China today (e.g. Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 30). That being said, while detractors may well have meant for terms such as *hu* or *fan* to be derogatory, Daniel Boucher argues that, in fact, these terms were more nuanced and not altogether negative in medieval China (Boucher, ‘On Hu and Fan Again’, 23f.).

¹⁸ Chen, *Revival*, 77; Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 172.

may play equally important roles in daily religious life and practice, each class of objects is also distinct one from the other, satisfying different needs, serving different purposes, and occupying different places in the hearts and minds of the faithful. Central to this distinction is the belief that the relic in particular is the ‘living’ remains of a saint, establishing the relic’s place as the axial point of merit-making ideology.¹⁹ As vital and living entities, relics possess what Jennifer S. Hughes refers to as ‘agentic potency’ because they have the power to affect ‘social relations, behaviours, and outcomes’, not to mention other lifelike qualities attributed to relics—as well as images—such as moving at will, flying, shaking, walking, bouncing, and more.²⁰ One would be correct in noting that the cult of the book, considered part of the cult of relics, has a place in this discussion. However, because Daoxuan does not include any first-hand experiences of miracles related to scriptures in his *Record of Miracles*, this article will not touch upon the subject.²¹ Therefore, the term ‘relic’ in this paper designates either corporeal relics, crystalline or pearl-like beads popularly believed to be relics, or ‘objects of use’ associated to saints, such as an almsbowl or a staff presumed to have been touched or used by the saint. Bearing this in mind, the following will briefly describe what relics and images represented in Chinese society, outlining the role they played in both religious and secular life.

2.1. Relics

First, a word on English terminology. The term ‘relic’ comes from Latin by way of the old French word ‘*relique*’, which designates the physical remains of, or articles associated with, a saint, martyr, or any other exalted figure. In its plural form, it simply means ‘remains’, ‘remnants’, ‘something left over’.²² However, ‘relics’ can be far more

¹⁹ Schopen, ‘Burial “Ad Sanctos”’, 154.

²⁰ Hughes, ‘Mysterium Materiae’, 20.

²¹ For some preliminary readings relating to the cult of the book, see Schopen, ‘The Phrase “Sa Pṛthivīpradeśāś Caityabhūto Bhavet”’; Barrett, ‘Stūpa, Sūtra, Śāṁra’, 1667f.; Faure, ‘Dato’, 1128–33.

than just ‘remains’. The Sanskrit term for ‘relic’ is *śarīra*, which in the singular means ‘body’, and in the plural refers to anything left over after death.²³ It is a polysemous term, though it is most often used to designate saintly remains.²⁴ In the Chinese context, *śarīra* is transliterated as *sheli* 舍利, *shililuo* 室利羅, and *sheliluo* 設利羅. According to Yuanzhao’s 元照 (1048–1116) *Sifen lü xingshi chao zichij* 四分律行事鈔資持記 [Aid in Upholding the Vinaya: (A Commentary on Daoxuan’s) *Sifen lü xingshi chao*], *śarīra/sheli* are corporeal remains—either fragmented or whole—such as bones, nails, teeth, or ash, and may designate the mortal remains of a holy or a lay person. Daoxuan is more specific, and in the preface to the *Record of Miracles* he states that he would use the term *sheli* 舍利 to distinguish the Chinese term for ordinary corporeal remains (*gushen* 骨身) from the remains of saints.²⁵ Therefore, ‘relics’ will in this text designate all remains, be they material or corporeal, of the saints. This definition includes symbolic relics which appear as round crystalline or pearl-like objects of varying sizes.²⁶ Additionally, there also were ‘contact relics’, which were those objects that the past buddhas and saints

²² *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Relic’.

²³ Faure, ‘Dato’, 1128; Silk, *Body Language*, 11; *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. ‘śarīra’; another Sanskrit term often translated in English to ‘relic’ is *Dhatu* (Ch. *Duodu* 馱都) which can mean: constituent part, ingredient, element, primitive part. More on the term *Dhatu*, see (Schopen, ‘On the Buddha and His Bones’, 531).

²⁴ More on the polysemy of the term *śarīra/sheli* in Silk, *Body Language*, 11; within the Buddhist tradition, relics are generally split into two modalities: corporeal and textual relics. For an example of this, see *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju*, T no. 1718, 34: 8.110c2–3; the Theravada tradition, moreover, recognizes three different kinds of relics: the corporeal remains, the objects Buddha used and the objects which remind believers of him (Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 158–63; Faure, ‘Les cloches de la terre’, 26; *idem*, ‘Dato’).

²⁵ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.404a26–27.

²⁶ Pearls in China stood for wealth, beauty, as well supernormal power (Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 163).

touched (e.g. alms bowl, pilgrim staff, a shadow imprint). Unlike corporeal relics, these objects were not allusions to a saint's death, but rather reminders of their asceticism, compassion, and enlightened status.²⁷

While the practice of venerating objects was not new to China, the veneration of relics was a distinct Buddhist innovation. Accounts of the cult surrounding relics in China appear in most Buddhist as well as court histories dating back to the Six Dynasties.²⁸ In Wei Shou's 魏收 (507–552) court history of the Wei period, he dedicates a section of the *Shilao zhi* 釋老志 [Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism] chapter exclusively to relics. The chapter mentions that the Buddha died and was cremated, leaving behind his 'numinous bones' (*linggu* 靈骨) in many fragments the size of rice pellets. These relics could produce miracles and when struck or burned they remained unaffected. They were also known to miraculously produce light. Wei Shou noted that they were kept in reliquaries stored away in pagodas (Skt. *stūpa*; Ch. *ta* 塔), which he compared to ancestral temples (*zongmiao* 宗廟). He then recounted how King Aśoka (r. ca. 268–ca. 232 BCE) took the original relics of the Buddha and ordered 84,000 spirits to establish pagodas and relics throughout the Buddhist world (Skt. *Jambudvīpa*; Ch. *Yanfuti* 閻浮提).²⁹ Aside from slight divergences in the rendering of this legend, such was the generally accepted narrative about the transmission of Buddhist relics to China.

For Daoxuan, relics were the synecdochical representations of

²⁷ Although Daoxuan also wrote about contact relics, these topics have been dealt with elsewhere. The subject will not be further elaborated in this article. For relevant studies, see Wang-Toutain, 'Le Bol du Buddha'; Shinohara, 'The *Kāśāya* Robe'; *idem*, 'The Story of the Buddha's Begging Bowl'.

²⁸ Some have claimed that pictorial depictions found in Horinger would go back as far as the Eastern Han. For more on the mysterious now-vanished relic (*sheli* 捨利) inscription in Eastern Han tombs at Horinger and how they are unrelated to Buddhism, see article by Kim, 'Claims of Buddhist Relics', 144.

²⁹ *Wei shu* 114.3028; translated to French in Faure, 'Les cloches de la terre', 25f.; c.f. Henderson and Hurvitz, 'The Buddha of Seiryōji', 42f. More on the *Shilao zhi*, see Ware, 'Wei Shou on Buddhism'; interestingly, the *Wei shu* is the earliest official court history to record the story of Aśoka.

not only the Buddha, but of Buddhism itself, and accounts of their miraculous efficacy vindicated his religion's place in China. This is attested to in his compilation of miracle tales, for the *Record of Miracles* provides influential accounts of China's most notable relics. In it he writes that:

From the Han until the Tang, there was never a moment when [relics] were not appearing [in China], and they were called 'numinous bones' (*linggu*). You cannot obtain them by ordinary means. Only in instances where favourable conditions arise do they appear. Having arrived, they are revered. They touch men (*shi* 士) of faith and, emitting a divine light, [they] then resonate with the heart-minds [of the faithful]. Those men who doubt [these relics] rely on [scholastic] refinement and accordingly form their thinking. [To appeal to the sceptics, I have] looked through all the ancient accounts, as well as those manifest auspicious signs [that are recorded and those that I have seen myself], and have thus composed this preface so that those that read [this text] can know that which must be said about the Śākya Gate [i.e. Buddhism]. [This is so] that even in 10,000 years, it will be difficult for the [gathered] dust to destroy [the faith]. 自漢洎唐，無時不有，既稱靈骨，不可以事求。任緣而舉，止得以敬。及通信之士，舉神光而應心；懷疑之夫，假琢磨而發念。所以討尋往傳，及以現祥，故依續序。庶有披者，識釋門之骨鯁，萬載之後，難可塵沒矣。³⁰

Daoxuan writes about the power of relics and the necessity of recording their history. Relics were important because they served the immediate needs of believers by acting as powerful merit-making objects as well as potent healing agents.³¹ They also played a key role in medieval Chinese Buddhist life because they were believed to be transtemporal materializations of the founder himself, which was important when justifying Buddhism's 'foreign' presence in China.³²

³⁰ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.410a23–b5.

³¹ Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 31.

³² For more on relics as the 'True body' (*zhen shen* 真身) of the Buddha, espe-

It is important to note that the foreignness of relics was particularly important. Foreign cult objects were gathered by Chinese pilgrims such as Faxian 法顯 (377–422), Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) and Yijing 義淨 (635–713), who had travelled west to learn more about Buddhism as well as to collect sacred images and relics, which they later brought back to vindicate the faith of devotees at home. Xuanzang famously travelled to the Buddha's homeland to gather sacred texts. He later returned to China carrying scriptures, images and 'more than a hundred grains of *śarīra*'.³³ Yijing was also said to have brought back many relics, and Wukong 悟空, another pilgrim returning to Chang'an in 790, brought back one of the Buddha's teeth obtained from a monastery in Udyāna.³⁴ This was one of four teeth then kept in the monasteries at Chang'an.

Another tooth relic was famously gifted to Daoxuan by the deity Nezha.³⁵ Although due attention cannot here be given to this narrative, suffice it to say that such a divine gift speaks to a broader current in medieval China of homegrown relics with religious authority independent of foreign provenance. Local monastics and laypeople were constantly discovering new relics that competed with their foreign counterparts, occupying an important place in local religious life and merit-making activities. To confirm Buddhism's relevance in Chinese society, many relics were associated not only to King Aśoka's

cially relating to the finger bone at Famen Monastery, see article by Wang, 'Of the True Body'.

³³ *Da Cien si sanzang fashi*, T no. 2053, 50: 10.279a; translated to English in Li, *Biography of the Tripitaka*, 343.

³⁴ Wukong's biography (*Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50: 3.722b26–29). Translated to French by Chavannes and Lévi, 'Voyages des pèlerins', 359f.

³⁵ For a complete monograph on Nezha, see Shahar, *Oedipal God*. For Daoxuan's encounter with Nezha, see *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2061, 50: 14.791a9–26. for more on the Buddha's teeth in China, see the chapter by Chen, 'Foya gushi'; For more on the different traditions related to Daoxuan's tooth relic, see Hastings, 'Relics', 659ff.; Jayawackrima, *The Chronicle of the Thūpa and the Thūpavaṃsa*, 34; Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 187ff.

distribution of cult objects, but also to Chinese antiquity.³⁶ Daoxuan writes that some of the earliest relics might have been discovered during the Zhou dynasty under King Wen (c. 1050 BCE):

Ancient tradition states: ‘In the past, King Wen of the [Western] Zhou went to [Mount Tantai 檀臺山 (near Chang’an)] for a hunting trip. He saw a monk at the head of the mountain holding a staff and an almsbowl. He called him but the monk would not come. The lord sought him out, but did not see him when he arrived, even though he could see him [before, when looking] from afar. So, he ordered his subordinates to dig in the place [where he saw the monk]. They dug three *zhang* deep and found a staff and a bowl. King [Wen] returned there to erect a tiled thirteen-tier pagoda.’ 古老傳云，昔周文王於此遊獵。見有沙門執錫持鉢山頭立住，喚下不來。王遣往捉，將至不見。遠看仍在時。乃勅掘所立處，深三丈獲鉢及杖而已。王重之為起甃塔一十三級。³⁷

Daoxuan then writes that the ancient foundations of this pagoda—supposedly containing the staff and the almsbowl—would be rediscovered in 661 by a monk called Huigui 龍朔元年，京師大慈恩寺沙門惠貴，after which he stayed to oversee its reconstruction. The origin of the above ‘ancient tradition’ is impossible to account for given that it probably represents regional traditions preserved in the memories of locals, later recorded by historians (proto-folklorists?) like Daoxuan. In fact, at the end of this item Daoxuan critically analyses his sources, comparing the ‘ancient tradition’ to information provided by an ancient inscription, concluding that the pagoda probably dates back to the Eastern Han (25–220)—not the Zhou.³⁸ Additionally, the Western Zhou predates the Buddha’s

³⁶ For some examples of Chinese rulers emulating Aśoka, see Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 75f.; Janousch, ‘The Aśoka of China’, 255f. Chen Jinhua’s monograph pays particular attention to Emperor Wen of the Sui’s relic distribution campaign during the Renshou period.

³⁷ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.409c1–5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.409c16–22.

estimated chronology by around 600 years, making this story all the more unlikely. Regardless of its validity, from the standpoint of historiography, in claiming the antiquity of the relics and the pagoda foundations, the presence of the Zhou in this story is meant to confer the prestige of China's revered past onto a new pagoda reconstructed in the 660s.

The rhetorical use of King Wen here represents the localization of Buddhism by recruiting exalted figures from China's past. This new localized access to sacred relics served the purpose of establishing a new Buddhist world centred in China, with new sacred spaces drawing on indigenous sources. By compiling and systematizing such stories in his *Record of Miracles*, Daoxuan was one of the primary authors of China's Buddhist history of the sacred. For a modern readership, that means that because of this text we may glean the content and meaning of some of these accounts, which in turn allows for a better understanding of their place in the medieval Chinese *imaginaire*.

2.2. Images

In the *Record of Miracles*—indeed, across Chinese Buddhist literature—the term for ‘Buddhist image’ is *xiang* 像, a character that can also mean: ‘To outline, depict, delineate, represent, map’.³⁹ In this article, *xiang* designates what will hereafter be called ‘images’, that is depictions of holy figures in all artistic mediums with a special emphasis on statues. These images may be sculptures made of varying material such as wood, clay, and stone, as well as drawn depictions done on any variety of drawing or painting surface. Relevant here are the popular narratives and myths passed down in written records of miracles produced by images and how these images came to be revered as cult objects within communities of worshippers.⁴⁰ The

³⁹ Behr, “‘To Translate’ Is ‘To Exchange’”, 216f.

⁴⁰ Sharf and Sharf, ‘Living Images’, 14; for more on narrative and its relation to the sacred in the case of Chinese devotional practices, see article by Campamy, ‘The Real Presence’; for more examples of narratives about the miraculous occurrences surrounding images, see Dudbridge, ‘Buddhist Images in Action’.

Record of Miracles is just such a written record with at least fifty separate items dedicated to images in the second fascicle—not to mention the images that appear in passing in the other two fascicles. Each item in the second fascicle tells the history of one or sometimes multiple images. Twenty-seven images are attributed to dynasties earlier than the Liang (502–557) and many items trace their histories until shortly before Daoxuan finished compiling this work.⁴¹

Images were widely distributed in China. The accessibility of their form facilitated the widespread diffusion of Buddhist teachings and practices. In fact, the role of images in transmitting the faith was indispensable, so that it has even been said that Buddhism entered China ‘on the coattails of images’.⁴² However, figural images were possibly not a Buddhist import, and non-Buddhist images imbued with supernormal powers, sometimes also known as ‘figures’ (*ouren* 偶人), appear in textual sources dating back as far as the Eastern Han dynasty.⁴³ Ritual sacrifice to images of gods or spirits, moreover, appeared in early sources such as the *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 [Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Habits], which mentioned ritual and sacrifice to the image of a god called the Controller of Destiny (Siming 司命).⁴⁴ That being said, Buddhism in China was popularly

⁴¹ A thorough study of the second fascicle and the role of images has been done in a lengthy article by Shinohara, ‘Changing Roles for Miraculous Images’.

⁴² Tsukamoto, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, 1:17; Sharf and Sharf, ‘Living Images’, 3; Bronkhorst, ‘Reliques’, 76. It has been argued that in China it was not until the late fifth century that the worship of sacred images was taken to be a singularly Buddhist practice (Greene, ‘Religion of Images’, 456).

⁴³ Yu, ‘Dong Han fojiao tuxiang kao’, 67–77; for more on the tale of Ding Lan 丁蘭 and the wooden statue of his father recorded in the Eastern Han collection, the *Ersbisi xiao* 二十四孝 [Twenty-four Filial Exemplars], see Greene, ‘Religion of Images’, 474; Barend ter Haar also mentions ‘puppets’ called ‘camphor and willow deities’ that came to life when ritual specialists placed the stolen life force of other individuals within them (ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 95ff.).

⁴⁴ *Fengsu tongyi* 8.384; cited in Greene, ‘Religion of Images’, 476. On Buddhist images in early China and in literary records, see Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 391–410.

associated with its images and was even disparagingly referred to as the ‘religion of images’ (*xiangjiao* 像教).⁴⁵

The story of the production of the first image of the Buddha provides many insights on how figural images were used and perceived at the time. One version of the story tells that the image was produced in Kauśāmbī at the behest of King Udayana, a contemporary of the Buddha, when he requested that the Buddha’s disciple, Maugdalyāyana, supervise his artisans while they fashioned a wooden likeness of the Buddha. Upon completion the image rose up to the heavens to greet the Buddha who responded by paying homage and stating that in the future this image would play an important role.⁴⁶ The original wooden Udayana image—if there ever was such a statue—must have decayed long ago and survives to this day through its reproductions, having travelled east where it was replicated first in China and, perhaps most famously, in Japan.⁴⁷

The story of King Udayana’s image occupied an important place in the medieval Chinese Buddhist *imaginaire*. For example, in the record of Xuanzang’s travels, he gives a traditional account of its

⁴⁵ Daoxuan speaks of how miracles abound since the ‘religion of images’ began moving east during the Han dynasty (*Guang Hongming ji*, T no. 2103, 52: 11.161b10–11). This name may have been coined because of Buddhism’s emphasis on ritual practice surrounding images, or perhaps because Buddhism was believed to have introduced these foreign objects to China, or because it somehow marked Buddhism out from the rest (Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 53). The term *xiangjiao* is also tied in with ideas of a semblance age for Buddhist teachings (*xiangfa* 像法), where the Buddha and his teaching could no longer properly manifest in this realm and must thus appear in different guises, such as relics, images, and stūpas (Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*, 66–89; Greene, ‘Religion of Images’, 457f.).

⁴⁶ *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志, T no. 2088, 51: 1.958c14–18. This story is mentioned in Waley, ‘Did the Buddha Die Eating Pork?’, 353; Sharf and Sharf, ‘Living Images’, 14; Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 142. For more on the precedent set by the Udayana story, see Brown, ‘Expected Miracles’, 26–31.

⁴⁷ For more on the Udayana image at Seiryōji in Kyoto, see Henderson and Hurvitz, ‘The Buddha of Seiryōji’; Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 145–49.

supernormal powers and how it miraculously flew from India to Khotan.⁴⁸ Moreover, facsimiles of the image travelled back with him and he made copies that were later reproduced in China to adorn the Buddhist halls of Chang'an.⁴⁹ The Udayana Buddha also appears in the *Record of Miracles*. One story begins with the legend of Buddhism's introduction to China when Emperor Ming (r. 58–75) dreamed of a golden man and sent emissaries west. The mission was a success and the emissaries accompanied two missionary monks back to China where they founded the first monastery, Baima Monastery 白馬寺, and installed therein a painted reproduction of King Udayana's image.⁵⁰ In this interesting juxtaposition of narratives, the story of Buddhism's origins in China, the arrival of foreign monks, and the establishment of a monastery, all allude to the legend of the first Buddha image ever produced.

The image is also mentioned in a story related to the pious Emperor Wu of the Liang (r. 502–549) who dreamed of a sandalwood statue and requested the real Udayana image be brought to China from the West. In India, the king said that he could not provide the emissaries with the original, though he had his artisans produce a replica which, when presented to the Chinese delegates, had 'features that were excellent and complete and a light shone from the crown of the image's head'. Then, as a sign of the power of this replica, a 'fine rain fell accompanied by an extraordinary fragrance'.⁵¹ It did not bother the medieval Chinese that the religious authority of this image

⁴⁸ *Da Cien si sanzang fashi*, T no. 2053, 50: 5.252a18–20. For more on the King Udayana image in Khotan, see Anderl, 'Linking Khotan and Dūnhuáng', 259–66.

⁴⁹ *Da Cien si sanzang fashi*, T no. 2053, 50: 3.234b21–28; for a monograph on King Udayana, see Adaval, *Story of King Udayana*. On King Udayana's image in China, see Carter, *Mystery*; Wenzel, 'The Image of the Buddha', 275f.; on the Udayana image at the Longmen grottoes, see article by Tamami, 'On the Udayana King Images'.

⁵⁰ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 2.413c2–8. More in Palumbo, 'Dharmaraksa and Kanthaka'.

⁵¹ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 2.419b7–c5.

did not come from possession of the original but was instead carried on in China through facsimile versions. In fact, replication in China was a powerful votive act that did not necessarily take away from the authenticity of either the original or the replicas.⁵²

Images were central both to the story of Buddhism's introduction to China, as well as to the continued spread of its teachings and practices. They were not only representations of the Buddha, but also strong points of convergence for various economic, technological, ritual, spiritual, and political interests in Chinese society. In turn, images and their miracles bolstered the political interest of people at court, so that those Buddhists who had a say in official matters were always keen to speak of the miracles produced by images as auspicious signs related to potential patrons. Moreover, Buddhist sacred objects were different from other objects insofar as they represented the material culture of societies and traditions foreign to the Chinese believers that venerated them.⁵³ They therefore acted as a bridge between two radically different times and cultures. By the intervention of images in Chinese history, Buddhism was gradually sinicized one miracle at a time, slowly crystallizing into a tradition of its own.

3. Sacred History of Cult Objects in China

The following sections sketch out some broad features of the history of Chinese cult objects that Daoxuan helped to compose. The product of this historiographical endeavour was the *Record of Miracles*, a selection of miracle stories relating to cult objects, holy places, pious deeds and missionary works in the East.⁵⁴ To draw out this sacred history this section will take from the narratives of one place in particular, Famen Monastery.

⁵² On authenticity, replicas, and satisfying aspirations through replicas, see Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 2ff.

⁵³ Dudbridge, 'Buddhist Images in Action', 377.

⁵⁴ I say 'the East' because on at least two occasions, Daoxuan mentions Korea and Japan.

3.1. Notes on Famen Monastery

In Daoxuan's *Record of Miracles*, the account of Famen Monastery was among the primary pagoda and relic histories.⁵⁵ As we will see below, Daoxuan was personally involved in the cult of saints out of Famen and recorded much on both the monastery, its pagoda, and its cult objects. In its function as one of the religio-political centres of cult near Chang'an, Famen Monastery played a pivotal role in the history of Buddhism during the Tang.⁵⁶ Aside from its proximity to the capital, Famen's success was due in large part to the fact that it housed the Buddha's finger bone, one of the few 'true body' (*zhenshen* 真身) relics then preserved in China.⁵⁷ It was an important object of imperial cult throughout the Tang and, as a product of its popularity, the finger bone was a prominent target for detractors of Buddhism. The most famous critic was the literatus Han Yü 韓愈 (768–824) who in 819 submitted a memorial asking the emperor to halt the intended ritual procession of the finger bone. Criticizing Buddhist processions writ large as unseemly cults to a foreign saint, he stated: 'now that he [i.e. Buddha] has long been dead, is it fitting that his decayed and rotten bone, his ill-omened and filthy remains, should be allowed to enter in the forbidden pre-

⁵⁵ Of these histories in the first fascicle, more than a dozen were said to contain authentic corporeal relics associated to Aśoka. More on the excavated objects discovered at Famen, see Whitfield, 'Discoveries from the Famen Monastery'.

⁵⁶ More on Famen in Sui-Tang history, see Huang, 'Consecrating the Buddha', 493–98; Yang, 'Sui Tang de fo sheli gongyang he famen si'; Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 118–26; Faure, 'Dato', 1141; Wang, 'Of the True Body'; Sheng, *Zhongguo fojiao xinyang yu shenghuo shi*, 179–84; translated to English in Sheng, *History*, 284–94. The pagoda itself collapsed in 1981. In 1984 they decided to rebuild it and it was not until 1987 that they excavated it, at which time they found treasures such as relics and reliquaries there that had remained untouched for 1,100 years.

⁵⁷ Other *zhenshen* mentioned in literary sources were at Puguangwang Monastery in Jiangsu and at Wutai in Shanxi (Whitfield, 'Famen Monastery and Empress Wu', 393).

cincts of the Palace?’⁵⁸ However, this strong anti-Buddhist rhetoric did not deter the emperor and Han Yü was reprimanded for speaking out against the ruling family, losing his status as he was ordered away to live out the rest of his days in political exile. The importance of Famen as a site of cult was later noted by the Japanese pilgrim Ennin 圓仁 (c. 793–864) who recorded how five monasteries in the capital housed tooth relics and that three monasteries had finger bones. He went on to note that that while they all received lavish imperial donations, none was so favoured as Famen Monastery.⁵⁹

The account of Famen in *Record of Miracles* begins with some geographical and historical details. There had been in Fufeng 扶風 (north of modern-day Xi’an) a bustling monastic community that supposedly dated back to the fourth century at what locals called Aśoka Monastery. The original site was left in ruin when the monastery complex was completely razed to the ground during the Zhou persecution of Buddhism (574–577). Daoxuan noted that a monastery and pagoda structure had been erected by Emperor Wen (r. 581–604) of the Sui dynasty near a place called Phoenix Spring, south of Mount Qi 岐山.⁶⁰ At the time, Emperor Wen conferred the name Chengshi Monastery 成實寺 on this complex. Daoxuan visited

⁵⁸ ‘Lun Fogu biao’, 30.265; translated in part in Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 46; translated in whole in Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 123–26. Square brackets mine.

⁵⁹ Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 66; full-length studies of Famen Monastery, see Bo Ming, *Famen si yu fojiao wenhua*; Han, *Famen si*; archaeological work on steles discovered there in 1987, see Chen, *Famen si*, 11ff.

⁶⁰ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.406b9–14. The location had an auspicious past going all the way back to the Zhou dynasty. The story goes that a young phoenix came there to drink from the spring. This first section of the history of Famen pagoda constitutes an interesting folk history of the Mount Qi range. It reads more like a gazetteer than a historical entry and brings to light those aspects of that space would that have been significant in the memories of those who lived there at that time. This young phoenix also appears in the *Guo yu* 國語 [Discourses of the States]: ‘At the height of the Zhou dynasty, the young phoenix cried out in the Qishan range’ (1.10f.).

the abandoned Sui pagoda site, which he was distraught to find out was dilapidated and overgrown. The so-called Aśoka Monastery complex was again renovated around 632, at which point multiple relics including the Buddha's finger bone were discovered within its foundations. It was then prophesied that every thirty years, miraculous events would occur and the relic would need once more to be taken out. The Famen cult objects manifested many miraculous signs which were duly recorded throughout the Tang.

The Famen pagoda and its relics was popularly believed to be of Aśokan origin. The name 'Aśoka Monastery' given to Famen refers to the legend of King Aśoka, emperor of the Mauryan dynasty and great promoter of Buddhism, who ordered celestial beings to distribute and enshrine relics throughout the world. For this pious act, as well as many others, the figure of Aśoka became the centrifugal point of reference in many narratives related to the cult of saints.⁶¹ The records of Aśoka's deeds as they were recorded in the *Aśokavadana* (Ch. *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經; *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳), or more localized records such as the *Thūpavaṃsa* in Ceylon, resonated with people throughout Asia.⁶² In China, from the Jin dynasty (266–420)

⁶¹ For more biographical detail on King Aśoka, see Basham, 'Asoka and Buddhism'; Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka*, 3–37; after his cremation, Aśoka also gained the venerable status of a *cakravartin* king. Beginning in the Eastern Jin, his remains were supposedly discovered in China where they promptly became objects of veneration (Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 267; Strong, 'Images of Aśoka', 172).

⁶² The *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (T no. 2154, 55: 1.479a5) also records an earlier translation in one fascicle attributed to Han dynasty Yuezhi monk Lokakṣema (Ch. Zhi Chen 支讖) called the *Ayuwang taizi fayi huaimu yinyuan jing* 阿育王太子法益壞目因緣經; also see Tang, *Tang Yongtong quanji*, 1:4f.; the pious deeds of Aśoka became well known in China during the fourth century, when texts recounting his story were translated. Though these stūpas and relics most likely were not authentic Aśokan objects, the narratives in themselves are symptomatic of the rising popularity of relic veneration at that time (Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 59; Shi, 'From Bodily Relic to Dharma Relic Stupa', 85–91).

onward, varied sources recounted how so-called Aśokan relics, images, and pagodas were discovered or excavated on Chinese soil. In practice, claims of Aśokan origins for objects and structures effectively vindicated Buddhist claims to legitimacy by drawing a bridge to an ancient world closer to the life and times of the Buddha. Moreover, the authenticity of Famen and its relics were vindicated at the state level by two excavated sixth-century tablets discovered with the finger bone beneath the pagoda's foundations in 632. Although the *Record of Miracles* noted that the tablets were illegible, their association to past dynasties and to Chinese custom confirmed the relative antiquity and imperial importance of the pagoda foundations and the objects contained therein.⁶³

Miracles produced by the pagoda as well as the cult objects within inspired awe by different means such as emitting dazzling light, or, perhaps most remarkably, by producing those fearsome peering eyes that glared down from the caisson ceiling, scaring away a pious monk named Huiman 惠滿.⁶⁴ The relics and other cult objects in Famen could display not only their miraculous qualities, but also their therapeutic potency. There were at least two accounts in the *Record of Miracles* of people being cured at Famen Monastery. In one case, an old blind man strained his eyes to see the relic until he regained his sight.⁶⁵ The case of the faithless Ping Xuansi 憑玄嗣 was particularly interesting because his salvation was the result of his conversion. In the story, he fell ill and went to the hell realm after harming a Buddhist image. Only after returning from death did he heed his family's advice to go to Famen to see the relic, repent for his sins, and be cured.⁶⁶ These stories of miracles and instant karma would have resonated with believers at the time.

Famen Monastery was also the setting for the significant religio-

⁶³ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.406c8–13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.407b7–10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.406c13–15.

⁶⁶ This story is interesting because it presents a narrative on both the therapeutic potency of cult objects as well as the risk of karmic retribution if one harms them.

political events that took place in 660. By order of the court, the hermit-monk Zhicong 智琮 and others were sent to do observances at the pagoda.⁶⁷ When they exhumed the relics, an edict was passed, and monks were ordered to carry the finger bone to the eastern capital in Luoyang. Moreover, there was a great confluence of holy relics in the capital at that time because a diplomat to India named Wang Xuance 王玄策 (fl. 648–660) brought what he claimed was the Buddha’s parietal bone.⁶⁸ Monks escorted the finger and the parietal bone to Luoyang where they carried the objects to the palace. It was then proclaimed that the finger bone was the Buddha’s ‘true body’ and that the monks in the capital should venerate it.⁶⁹ The relics were received with much fanfare and Wu Zhao 武曩 (624–705), who at that time was not yet empress regnant, made lavish offerings of silks and other things as well as an ornate gold and silver reliquary. The parietal bone remained in Luoyang while the finger bone was sent back to Famen Monastery where it would be resealed in 662.⁷⁰ Famen Monastery was restored in 632 and again in 659, whereafter it became a state-supported shrine for important cult objects. The finger bone was again paraded in 760, 790, 819, and finally 873, receiving lavish gifts all the while from both the court and the people.

⁶⁷ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.407a7–9. Also mentioned in *Guang Hongming ji*, T no. 2103, 52: 15.201c12–17; interesting variation in *Fayuan zhulin* T no. 2122, 52: 38.586b15–17.

⁶⁸ Sen, ‘Relic Worship at the Famen Temple’, 38; Wang Xuance is not mentioned in the *Record of Miracles*.

⁶⁹ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.407b15. From the text it is unclear whether the term true body (*zhenshen* 真身) was meant to designate the parietal or the finger bone. Considering that the finger bone continued to be called a *zhenshen* afterward, and after the reading of these similar passages done by Wang, ‘Of the True Body’, 87. I believe the edict meant to indicate that the finger bone, and not the parietal bone, was the ‘true body’ (T no. 2106, 52: 1.407b10–18).

⁷⁰ Daoxuan remarked that the parietal bone stayed in the palace (T no. 2106, 52: 1.407c11–12).

4. Daoxuan and Cult Objects

As a medieval monk, Daoxuan partook of a worldview that assumed the sacredness and efficaciousness of cult objects, affecting the world through miraculous signs. He had a successful monastic career and was, in his role as a religious leader, a strong proponent of the Buddha's teachings. He promoted Buddhist teachings by various means: consolidating monastic law as well as cataloguing scriptures, compiling histories, and by actively participating in the vibrant religious life of the early Tang. As a historian he played an active role in crafting the history of the miraculous in China. As a believer, if we are to believe the accounts, he also witnessed miracles and much more first-hand—experiences of the miraculous that must have shaped his outlook. The following subsections narrow the scope from the analysis given above of China's miraculous past to the accounts of Daoxuan's own experiences with cult objects, ultimately explaining in what ways he was an active promoter and innovator of the cult of saints.

4.1. Famen and the Mauryan King

One question that this article poses is: What is Daoxuan's relationship to the so-called true body relic out of Famen? As we have seen above, the finger bone relic was arguably one of the most prominent Buddhist cult objects during the Tang. As a Buddhist master, and later as an abbot, Daoxuan would have been responsible for coordinating ceremonial affairs related to cult objects around the capital such as the finger bone. His association to it would have been not only ceremonial, but also historiographical. According to the *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, he composed the now lost *Famen wenji* 法門文記 [Literary Record of Famen],⁷¹ a text that was possibly related to his entry in the *Record of Miracles*. Most notably, while this relic was mentioned in earlier textual and epigraphic sources, it was Daoxuan that first provided many of the detailed descriptions of its public veneration that we can still read today.⁷²

⁷¹ *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2061, 50: 14.790c25–26.

There is scanty evidence from the early Tang of Daoxuan's role with regards to the relic, though Song dynasty histories and biographies mention that Empress Wu Zhao ordered him to accompany the relic on its way back to Famen Monastery from Luoyang in 662.⁷³ The truth value of this is questionable, though it is safe to say that Daoxuan was no stranger to the imperial cult of saints and at least one scholar states that he was intimately related to relic worship out of Famen.⁷⁴

In his critical biography of Daoxuan, Wang Yarong 王亞榮 makes the altogether unconvincing argument that Daoxuan participated fully in the cult at Famen, claiming that Daoxuan handled the relic and even presented it before the masses.⁷⁵ While textual evidence would indicate that in principle Wang's statement may be true, he does not really support his claim. That being said, there is further proof in the literature that supports Daoxuan's involvement. This section takes Wang's claims as a launching pad, providing a different reading of a key passage in the *Record of Miracles* that allows us to place the scholar-monk at an important religious and political event in early Tang history.

Daoxuan noted that Zhicong and others were officially responsible for the first relic procession of the finger bone from Fufeng to Luoyang

⁷² Huang, 'Consecrating the Buddha', 504

⁷³ *Fozu tongji*, T no. 2035, 49: 39.367b16–17; *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2061, 53: 14.790c24. Although Gaozong was technically in power in 662, after 660 it was Wu Zhao that effectively took control. *Fozu tongji* records that Daoxuan was ordered (*ming* 命) to return with the finger bone to Famen. In the *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, Zanning calls Famen Monastery by the name *Wuyou wang si* 無憂王寺 (lit. King of No Sorrow Monastery). According to a stele inscription by Zhang Yu, Famen was renamed *Wuyou wang si* in 710 during Zhongzong's 中宗 reign (*Quan Tang wen* 516.5246). Kumārajīva (344–413) states that some Buddhist texts use *Wuyou wang* to translate the name of Aśoka (also written *Alunjia* 阿輸伽) (*Dazhi dulun*, T no. 1509, 25: 13.147a18). Zanning was thus referring to Famen as Aśoka Monastery, one of its many alternate names.

⁷⁴ Sen, 'Relic Worship at the Famen Temple', 34; Wang, *Daoxuan pingchuan*, 132; 146.

⁷⁵ Wang, *Daoxuan pingchuan*, 146.

in 660.⁷⁶ He does not write explicitly about his relation to Famen, nor does he mention exactly what role he played in the proceedings. He does, however, mention that he visited the old ruins of the Famen pagoda before its renovation in 632:

People in that area are altogether scarce, the hazelnut thickets are overgrown, and the stūpa is on the verge of collapse. [I know this because] I have been to see it. Though the broomcorn does not lie heavy [at Famen],⁷⁷ yet there is the same deep sense of melancholy. 人物全希, 塔將頽壞。余往觀焉, 榛叢彌滿。雖無黍離之實, 深切黍離之悲。⁷⁸

Daoxuan here notes his sense of sadness after visiting the dilapidated remains of this ancient sacred site. Daoxuan's personal lamentations aside, there are two reasons why it can be said that he was at the new Famen some thirty years later when the relics were exhibited for official functions in 660. First, the relic procession was a public event. Daoxuan wrote that people from all around the capital went to see the relic, so it would be safe to assume that, as both the newly appointed abbot at the imperially affiliated Ximing Monastery 西明寺 and as an earnest believer, Daoxuan would not have missed such an opportunity.⁷⁹

Second, there is literary evidence that Daoxuan partook and perhaps even handled the relic. In the *Record of Miracles*, he gives a very detailed description of the hallowed finger bone:

⁷⁶ Direct mention of Zhicong in relation to the relic procession in *Guang Hongming ji*, T no. 2103, 52: 15.201c12–17.

⁷⁷ Daoxuan here uses the term *shuli* 黍離 (The broomcorn millet hangs heavy) to evoke a poem by the same name in the *Shi jing* 詩經 [Book of Odes]. The 'Lesser Preface' in the *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 explains that this poem laments the subjugation and downfall of the Zhou capital. For translation of the above-mentioned *Shi jing* and *Maoshi zhengyi* passages, as well as more on ruin and remembrance in classical Chinese poetry, see Knechtges, 'Ruin and Remembrance', 58ff.

⁷⁸ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.406b16–17.

⁷⁹ He was made abbot at Ximing Monastery around 657 (*Fozu tongji*, T no. 2035, 49: 39.367a24–27).

The relic's form was like a small finger. Originally, the relic was one *cun* two *fen* in length and it was hollow and perfectly square inside. The outside corners of the relic were the same. The bottom [of the relic] was flat and it was rounded near the top. Both within and without it was bright and pure. 其舍利形狀如小指。初骨長寸二分，內孔正方，外楞亦爾。下平上圓，外光淨。⁸⁰

The description is like a personal account of an object studied in detail. Daoxuan places himself at the scene when he states that:

I [could] insert my small finger in the hollow middle and it fit exactly. 余內小指於孔中，恰受。⁸¹

In combination with the detailed description, the presence of the first-person pronoun *yu* 余 reads as though he held the relic.⁸² According to Wang's line of argument, this passage was the 'smoking gun' proving that Daoxuan was at Famen in 660.⁸³ While this passage compelling evidence, the language remains ambiguous and the argument needs further support. The proof of the pudding is provided by Daoxuan's close colleague Daoshi, paraphrasing the above passage in his *Fayuan zhubin* as follows:

⁸⁰ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.407b2–5; *Fayuan zhubin*, T no. 2122, 53: 38.586c19–25; interestingly, this description is close to the true finger relic discovered in the Famen pagoda in the 1980s. Even the modern measurements of 3.7 cm and 4.1 cm for the four finger bone relics match Daoxuan's approximation of 'one *cun* two *fen*', about 4 cm.

⁸¹ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52.407b2–5; I here read *nei* 內, as a verb meaning 'to insert' or 'enter'.

⁸² Although relics were usually kept hidden away, it was not necessarily prohibited for people to hold or touch these relics. One instance in the *Record of Miracles* shows how a believer held the finger bone and could feel its weight, though he still could not see it (ibid., 1.407a23–27).

⁸³ Wang, *Daoxuan pingchuan*, 146.

Putting one's finger into the [relic's hollow middle], [the finger] just fits. 以指內孔, 恰得受指.⁸⁴

On more than one occasion Daoshi took Daoxuan's personal accounts and converted them to the third person.⁸⁵ Daoshi, who worked closely with Daoxuan, deliberately exchanged *yu* 余 with the co-verb *yi* 以 so that there is little doubt that *yu* 余 in Daoxuan's text is a personal pronoun. The *Record of Miracles* continues: '[The relic] was held up and presented to the masses' 便得勝戴, 以示大眾.⁸⁶ In his critical history, Wang described a scene wherein Daoxuan, placing the relic bone on his little finger, showed it to the masses gathered at Famen.⁸⁷ Regrettably, provided there is only one textual source placing him there and a second edited source confirming that it was indeed a first-person account, it still seems further evidence would be needed. The one thing that is certain is that the personal pronoun is there on purpose and is not a scribal error. Daoxuan most likely saw and maybe even touched the relic, but the personal pronoun used in the *Record of Miracles* is not hard evidence that he held the relic aloft and presented it to the masses. Finally, the lengthy account given in the *Record of Miracles* of the relic procession is, perhaps most importantly, proof enough of his interest in it as an object of historical study.⁸⁸

Now, Daoxuan was not only interested in seeing or holding cult objects but also in proving their authenticity. Prevalent in the discourse on authenticity in medieval Chinese Buddhism was the

⁸⁴ *Fayuan zbulin*, T no. 2122, 53: 38.586c22.

⁸⁵ For two more examples of Daoshi's editorial exclusion of Daoxuan's voice, refer to these two pairs comparing items from the first fascicle of the *Record of Miracles* and their *Fayuan zbulin* renditions: T no. 2106, 52: 1.406a5–6; T no. 2122, 53: 586a12–13; also see T no. 2106, 52: 1.410a1–2; T no. 2122, 53: 67.799a23–24. In the latter, Daoshi erases the dialogue Daoxuan recorded between himself and a local monk.

⁸⁶ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.407b5.

⁸⁷ Wang, *Daoxuan pingchuan*, 146.

⁸⁸ A similar argument is made in *ibid.*, 132–47.

Aśokan origins of cult objects. Nowhere in Daoxuan's writings was this discourse on authenticity more obvious than in the *Record of Miracles*, where Aśokan themes constituted a predominant leitmotif and most items throughout the three fascicles were in some way or another related to the pagodas, monasteries, and cult objects of Aśoka.⁸⁹ This was also true of Famen Monastery which, according to legend, used to bear the name of Aśoka Monastery (Ayuwang si 阿育王寺).⁹⁰ Aśokan origins are a recurring trope in the *Record of Miracles*, where Daoxuan mentions a story, a traditional account, or local lore to confirm an object's sacred origins. One such example is of a holy image kept at Changgan Monastery 長干寺. The story goes that monks from the Western Regions 西域 visited Changgan where they noticed the statue, confirming that they had obtained this same image, an original Aśokan statue, in India. They recounted how they buried it near the city of Ye during a time of great unrest. Later again, the nimbus and pedestal were retrieved from the ocean floor by a pearl diver. At the time, only Gunavarman (367–431)⁹¹ could read the Indic script on the back which stated that the image was by King Aśoka's fourth daughter.⁹² Such accounts abound in the *Record of Miracles*.

⁸⁹ The items where Aśoka is explicitly mentioned in the first fascicle make up fifteen items in all, and are numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 18. This does not include the other Aśokan items mentioned in the two other fascicles.

⁹⁰ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.406b18; Famen also contained a statue of Aśoka done in Emperor Gaozong's likeness (T no. 2106, 52: 1.407a18–19).

⁹¹ Gunavarman belonged to the royal house of Kashmir. He would have gone to southern China via Java and was known for his ability to spread the Dharma. His biography may be found in *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 3.340a15–b4; translation of Gunavarman's biography in Stache-Rosen, 'Gunavarman (367–431)'.

⁹² *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 2.414b16–17. In his *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao*, Daoxuan explicitly notes that 'Aśoka's fourth daughter wrote the inscription on the foot of the pedestal' (T no. 1804, 40: 11.133c6–7).

Daoxuan did more than just refer to the pious king in his compilations, but also added to the discourse on authenticity, formulating his own theories about the Aśokan cult object distribution. In the *Record of Miracles* there is mention of the monk Huida 慧達 (also known as Liu Sahe 劉薩何), who confirmed the location of at least two Aśokan pagodas in Kuaiji (present-day Shaoxing in Zhejiang) and in Pengcheng (present-day Xuzhou in Jiangsu). Daoxuan added to this list, claiming that there was also one in Jiangnan at Changgan Monastery, speculating that there must be more. Drawing from historical records, miracle tales, as well as local lore, he added to Huida's discovered pagodas stating that according to scriptures: 'There should be one [Aśokan] pagoda per 100,000 Chinese families'.⁹³ That did not include cult objects such as images and relics. Considering that Aśoka's objects were distributed according to the number of potential converts, it seemed absurd to Daoxuan that there would only be the two associated to Huida. By expanding the scope of the king's cult object distribution, we see how Aśokan origins became one of many useful sources of authority used and developed throughout the *Record of Miracles*. The inclusion of these objects and places in the *Record of Miracles* gave these sacred sites a certain degree of recognition and authority. When an object's status was challenged, the mention of the Mauryan king or the appearance of miraculous signs acted as initial confirmations, while Daoxuan's inclusion of these narratives in his works was as a seal of authenticity. He knew that writing this history would provide sacred validation for many places and objects. Therefore, selecting and recording these miracle narratives attests to Daoxuan's vested interest in the cult of saints. The *Record of Miracles*, itself a compilation of miracle tales, figured prominently in Daoshi's Buddhist encyclopedia, and would touch many other texts after it. In the end, as an author writing about

⁹³ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52:1.404c27–405a2; *Fayuan zbulin*, T no. 2122, 53: 38.585b23–27. There are differing calculations in the *Ayuwang zhuan*, T no. 2042, 50: 1.102a17–29, and the *Ayuwang jing*, T no. 2043, 50: 1.135a11–21. The various arguments are summarized in Durt, 'Meaning of Archeology', 1227.

cult objects and the miraculous, the scope of his *Record of Miracles* and the reach of these stories paid tribute to his success as a historian of the sacred in China.

4.2. Personal Experience of Cult Objects

Daoxuan also had a personal interest in seeking out and viewing cult objects. In his lifelong encounter with these objects he experienced the miraculous on multiple occasions. Miracles, however, are not always timely, nor do they manifest for everyone. To a certain extent, they only manifest according to expediency, appearing to those of high spiritual attainment or to those that need to see them. Daoxuan was no exception to the rule. In the *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [The Expanded Collection for the Propagation and Clarification (of Buddhism)], he mentions the difficulty of encountering the Buddha through his cult objects.

It is difficult to encounter the true form of the Tathāgata's relics. [His true form] shines forth as a jewelled vessel brimming with bright virtuous water. As it is with grasping a subtle [point] or seeing a dragon pearl (Skt. Nāga *maṇi*), [if] one does not have saintly merit and a noble spirit, then one cannot encounter such rarities. 難遇者乃如來真形舍利。[照]景寶瓶浮光德水。如觀鉤[瑣]似見龍珠，自非聖德威神，無以值斯希有。⁹⁴

In the *Record of Miracles*, he mentions his experience of the three sacred cave shrine images in the mountains of Mianshang County, Qinzhou (present-day Shanxi). Oral accounts claimed that these images emitted miraculous light, although when he visited during the 630s, he saw no such emanations. Interestingly, this was something he attributed to his own level of spiritual attainment.

⁹⁴ *Guang Hongming ji*, T no. 2103, 52: 16.209a15–19. Square brackets contain Song dynasty corrections to the text provided by CBETA; c.f. Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, 186.

The mountains and the woods are marvellously scenic, and [among] the stone cave Buddha images are many ancient vestiges, although [I could find] no details about their origins and [I] did not see any miraculous signs. So it is that my [mental] hindrances must be substantial. 山林勝地。石龕佛像大有古迹，莫委其初，然不覩瑞。故是障[厚]。⁹⁵

Self-cultivation and devotional acts were common practice, and many accounts tell of believers praying and making relics manifest *ex nihilo*, or finally seeing objects only once they had performed certain practices or penances. In a later account of Daoxuan's life, for example, Zanning records that at around the age of twenty Daoxuan did rigorous meditative practice, bringing about the miraculous appearance of a relic.⁹⁶ While this may be a later embellishment of Daoxuan's life story, it does provide insight into the belief in and mechanics of the miraculous—namely that miracles only occur for those that are supposed to see them.

Daoxuan mentions another experience of the struggle he had viewing a holy image while at Riyan Monastery 日嚴寺.

Assemblies of monks in the capital regularly came to see [the mysterious emanation at Riyan Monastery]. I lived at this monastery and did not believe it. On multiple occasions, I saw upon the stone a flickering golden light and suspected it was in the likeness of a Buddha image. Yet, of the many eminent and pious monks [I] encountered [who had seen the image], all of their descriptions were different, and they all [spoke of how they could see it] clearly and distinctly. [For them] its features and countenance were never obscure. I was frustrated that I had not seen [what they had]. Then, for seven days I abstained from impure activities and did my penances, after which I

⁹⁵ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 2.422c6–8. The original reads *yuan* 源. I have taken this alternative reading from the Song, Yuan, and Ming corrections.

⁹⁶ *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2061, 50: 14.790b17–19; c.f. Wagner, 'Buddhism, Biography and Power', 256.

went forward to see [the object]. I [first] saw a silver pagoda. Later, I looked at it again and saw a silver Buddha. 京邑僧眾常來瞻觀。余住此寺，亦未之信。重以見石中，金光晃晃。疑似佛像耳。仍見名行諸僧互說不同，咸言了了分明。面目相狀，未曾有味。余慨無所見，又潔齋別懺七日。後依前觀之，見有銀塔。後又觀之，見有銀佛。⁹⁷

At first, he was frustrated that he could not see the emanations that others had seen. Therefore, to gain a clearer view of the image he purified himself by fasting and practising penances. After these penances, he saw the object first as a pagoda and then as a Buddha. What is telling is that he associated, as many of his contemporaries would have, the absence of expected miraculous occurrences to his own shortcoming, not to the objects themselves.

Many of the accounts in the *Record of Miracles* of China's cult objects described objects that were not readily accessible to anyone. While images could be displayed in their respective monastery halls or in shrines, relics were kept out of sight, often deposited in reliquaries or interred in pagodas, only coming out on special occasions such as religious processions. The presence of relics at sacred sites mentioned in the *Record of Miracles* were usually confirmed by miraculous signs, historical accounts, or local opinion. Very few relics would actually be taken out and handled by monks, and Daoxuan only mentions seeing two relics in the *Record of Miracles*. First, the above section argued that Daoxuan most likely saw the Buddha's finger bone at Famen Monastery. The second instance was the hallowed relics translated from Riyan Monastery to Chongyi Monastery 崇義寺 in the capital.

In 625 the monks of Riyan Monastery, including Daoxuan, were relocated to Chongyi Monastery. Riyan had been converted into government property, although the pagoda still needed to be excavated.

Then the pagoda was exhumed and three relics were found: bright, white and large as millet grains. There was also a [finger]nail that was a bit yellowish, and there were about ten white hairs as well as sundry

⁹⁷ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.421b14–22; c.f. Wagner, 'Buddhism, Biography and Power', 53.

treasures such as lapis lazuli and antiquary objects. They [together] filled a large copper box. [We] examined [the box] and there were no curly hairs [which is one of the marks of the Buddha]. There was also this dubious yellow nail that was the size of a normal human nail. It is believed that the nail of the Buddha would be at least two times bigger and bronze in colour. Now, [these hairs and nails] were not so. 乃發掘塔下，得舍利三枚。白色光明，大如黍米。并[爪]一枚。少有黃色。并白髮數十餘。有雜寶琉璃古器等。總以大銅函盛之。檢無螺髮，又疑爪黃而小如人者。尋佛倍人，爪赤銅色。今則不爾。⁹⁸

Although Daoxuan—or anyone for that matter—may never have seen authentic relics of the historical Buddha, he almost certainly read about them. For example, in the *Guanfo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經 [Sūtra on the Ocean-like Samādhi of the Contemplation of the Buddha] it says that the Buddha's hairs were: 'long one *zhang*, two *chi*, and five *cun*. When loose they curled to the right and formed a conch-like [spiral] pattern' 長一丈二尺五寸，放已右旋還成蠡文。⁹⁹ This passage was also mentioned in a passage in the *Liang shu* 梁書 [Liang History] describing the original excavation by Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (502–549), Emperor Wu of the Liang, at Changgan Monastery before translating the relics to Riyan. At the time, the hair was described as dark purple (*qinggan* 青紺), while the fingernails were said to be the colour of agarwood (*chenxiang* 沉香), a kind of copperish brown.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52: 1.406a6–10; *Fayuan zhulin* T no. 2122, 53: 38.586a10–23; square brackets contain Song dynasty correction found in CBETA; in *Record of Miracles* Daoxuan uses the first-person pronoun *yu* 余 to indicate his presence at Riyan Monastery. The context, as well as his detailed description and opinions about the place corroborate his presence. In the same passage in *Fayuan zhulin*, Daoshi places Daoxuan in Riyan, addressing him as 'Vinaya master Daoxuan' 道宣律師 (T no. 2122, 53: 38.586a12). I am grateful to Fu Chong for pointing out to me the many subtleties in this excerpt.

⁹⁹ *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*, T no. 643, 15: 1.649a24.

¹⁰⁰ *Liang shu* 54.790f. The excavation of Changgan is also referred to in the *Record of Miracles*, though Daoxuan does not give details about the relics (*Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T no. 2106, 52:1.405c8–22).

According to Daoxuan, the hair found at Riyan could not be the Buddha's hair because it was white and straight instead of curly. The nails were small and yellow whereas they should have been larger than normal and brown. Without immediately stating they were fake, Daoxuan cast doubt on their authenticity.¹⁰¹ The excerpt continues:

Then, the relics were brought to Chongyi Monastery, placed in the pagoda southwest to the Buddha hall. As it was before [in Changgan Monastery], they were placed in a large stone container. The original engraving, [as well as the stone container holding the relics] were buried in the earth. I questioned southern monks [from Changgan who were active in] the early Sui and they all claimed that the nail and hairs might be from Emperor Wu of the Liang. The [authenticity of these] relics are therefore dubious. 乃將至崇義寺佛堂西南塔下。依舊以大石函盛之，本銘覆上，埋于地府。余問隋初南僧，咸曰：爪髮梁武帝者。舍利則有疑焉。¹⁰²

Daoxuan and others then took the relics and interred them at Chongyi. Having seen very few relics himself, only reading descriptions or hearing accounts from travelling pilgrims, Daoxuan remained

¹⁰¹ Similar standards are mirrored in an essay on the Buddha's teeth by the twelfth-century scholar Cheng Dachang 程大昌 (1123–1195) who said: 'The world reveres the Buddha in large measure because of his marvels. They say that Chinese and foreign people grow according to the same principles. Yet relics of teeth and bones are as much as twice the size [of normal teeth and bones]. In addition, unlike desiccated bones, in colour they are red and shiny. If they are not from the Buddha, they would not be so.' Cited and translated in Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 46.

¹⁰² This passage is ambiguous in the *Record of Miracles*, and could read, as I translated above, as the nail and hair relics not only placed there by Emperor Wu but were actually from his body. The *Fayuan zbulin* is much more to the point, stating that the false relics were placed there by Emperor Wu and he kept the authentic relics for himself (*T* no. 2122, 53: 38.586a19–21). Regardless, the implication was the same: Daoxuan and others doubted the authenticity of these relics.

critical, ultimately claiming that these relics were dubious. This was further confirmed by the southern monks, who stated that the relics might have come from Emperor Wu of the Liang. Interestingly, the relics were still ceremonially interred.

Overall, it is safe to say that Daoxuan was not only acutely aware of the miraculous quality of cult objects, but also took the question of authenticity very seriously. Although he was a believer, he still had the wherewithal to judge them as objectively as possible. This was in part motivated by Daoxuan's wish to bolster the authority of Buddhist cult objects by recording their miraculous qualities and compiling as well as rectifying their histories. This was a project he could realise both as an abbot in Chang'an and as a Buddhist historian of the sacred. Daoxuan's accounts applied a healthy scepticism to the question of authenticity, neither dismissing such objects nor blindly believing the stories. Ultimately, by writing out these records, he was not diminishing the cult of saints, but guarding the social and ritual value of cult objects, ensuring that their value not decrease in the public eye.

5. Conclusion

The authority of miracles and cult objects was founded on the common belief in an unseen realm revealed through visions, ritual practice, or chance encounters with the supernatural. Such experiences allowed practitioners to negotiate the boundaries between seen and unseen as well as the past and the present. In the case of the *Record of Miracles*, it described how supernatural elements were always at play because the transmission of Buddhism to China was in fact taking place on two plains: the seen realm of 'local' China and the unseen realm of the West manifest through 'non-localized', or 'utopic', visions and miracles. As we saw above, sometimes 'local' origin could also be authoritative. The personal experience of seeing miracles or handling cult objects, as well as the transmission of histories or witness accounts about them, provided believers with proof that the land of the founder was paradoxically both far away and close at hand.

Initially, pilgrims travelled to India to study and gather Buddhist

paraphernalia. However, once Chinese practitioners had these objects in hand or when they were manifesting locally, believers no longer depended on access to India because the Dharma had already ostensibly been '[transferred] to the East'.¹⁰³ Moreover, anachronistic claims such as Aśoka's relic distribution taking place at a time when no one in China had ever even heard of Buddhism were seriously discussed. This was because the accumulation of both foreign and indigenous cult objects as well as the compilation of their associated miracle tales were part and parcel of the larger process of Buddhism's 'localization'.¹⁰⁴

These cult objects were prevalent in China and multiplying in numbers. In his commentary to the *Anguttara Nikāya*, Buddhaghosa tells that one day the Buddha's relics will come together near Bodh Gaya at the Bodhi tree where he attained enlightenment. Having gathered there, they will piece by piece reconstitute the Buddha's body to then, in turn, undergo *parinirvāṇa*.¹⁰⁵ The reality of how cult objects are distributed is quite different as they are rarely all gathered in one place. As a matter of fact, they are better served when they are spread out, split up or in small clusters because they have the most reach when scattered. One imagines that if all the 'authentic' *śarīra* from all the nations touched by Buddhism would have gathered together in India sometime during the Tang dynasty, the reconstituted Buddha would dwarf the Bodhi tree which once gave him shade.¹⁰⁶

What of the authenticity of these countless cult objects? The

¹⁰³ Strong and Strong, 'A Tooth Relic of the Buddha in Japan', 24; Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 189.

¹⁰⁴ The terms 'sinicisation' or 'sinification' are also relevant here. More on 'localization' of Buddhism, especially in Arakan chronicle literature, see Leider, 'Relics, Statues, and Predictions', 358.

¹⁰⁵ Taken from the *Manorathapūraṇī* 1:91; cited in Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 224.

¹⁰⁶ These passing comments are not meant to critique the authenticity of or belief in Buddhist cult objects. They are real because of the power they are believed to hold and because of the rituals directed at them which invoke and make real the Buddha's presence.

success of Buddhist cult objects was not solely reliant on the numinous qualities of the objects themselves but on their presumed antiquity. Under the pressing scrutiny of sceptics, for Buddhist practitioners to make a claim to religious authority was a source of great contention. For Daoxuan to declare, solely on his own authority, the hallowed status of one pagoda over another would be problematic during the best of times. Therefore, Daoxuan was not only interested in the manifest numinous qualities of the cult objects, but in their pedigree. He recorded the histories of cult objects and their miracles as indicators of holy status for the sake of reinforcing his and the objects' claims to religious legitimacy. By his preoccupation with pedigree he came, in turn, to play an important role in enhancing pedigree as he compiled and systematized their histories in the *Record of Miracles*. These records became more than historiographical accounts, they were narrative 'seals of authenticity' that vindicated the cult objects in the eyes of the public.

He was personally involved in the Famen relic veneration ceremonies and recorded much on both the monastery and the first official procession of the Buddha's finger bone. On the one hand, as a text the *Record of Miracles* attested to Famen's glorious past as well as to its exalted position during the Tang. On the other hand, through the selection and composition of the Famen history, Daoxuan crafted the history of the finger bone as well as the monastery that contained it. In this way, as was the case in the retelling of the story of relic distribution under the Mauryan king, Daoxuan was playing the role of the historian of the sacred, actively partaking in the dialogue on miracles in the early Tang—an act of knowledge production that would thereafter have lasting authority. Daoxuan's records of the finger relic procession as well as the miraculous phenomena related to it at Famen were part of a bid to further bolster the prestige of this object, as well as the monastery which stayed a centre of imperial Buddhist cult well into the ninth century. As such, Daoxuan acted as a historian of the sacred, reinforcing and constructing the narrative structures that informed the cult directed at these objects.

This article developed on Daoxuan's experience of cult objects at both the personal level and the political level. His importance in relation to cult objects truly culminated in his role as a compiler where

he could select which cult objects were sacred and which were not. In his *Record of Miracles*, Daoxuan took from disparate sources, whether they be court histories, Buddhist histories, or folklore, to feature their miraculous elements and finally consolidate all these accounts into one cohesive text. The compilation of these miracle stories, which would certainly have been accessible and shared at least among monastic communities, also played an important role in relation to imperial veneration because often such objects were considered sacred not by their manifest miraculous qualities, but by the records of past witness to their power. Daoxuan was tracing a map of the relics and images onto a new map of Buddhist China's sacred geography. He was practising a form of sacred historiography as he recorded these accounts while himself embracing as well as expounding on his more universal understanding of China's place in the Buddhist world.

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Abbreviations

- B* *Dazang jing bubian* 大藏經補編. See Secondary Sources, Lan, comp.
- T* *Taishō shinsbū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.
- X* (*Wan*) *Xuzang jing* (卍)字續藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, comp.

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