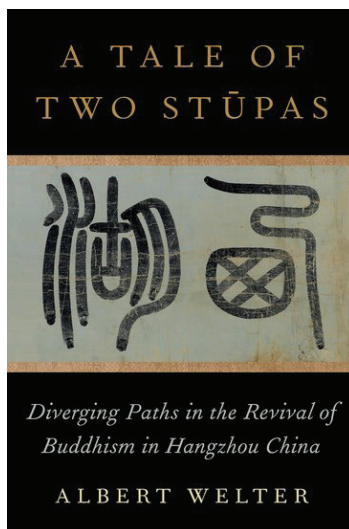


Book Review

Albert Welter. *A Tale of Two Stūpas: Diverging Paths in the Revival of Buddhism in China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 240 pp.



Albert Welter has a wealth of knowledge to share about Chinese Buddhism at the beginning of the Song dynasty (960–1279). He has published extensively on two important monastic figures from that period—the Chan and Huayan thinker Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (905–976) and Zanning 贊寧 (920–1001), chronicler of and advocate for the saṃgha in China. In this new book, Welter brings together his expertise in texts with a material culture approach to explore the history of Buddhism in China from a new angle. *A Tale of Two Stūpas: Diverging Paths in the Revival of Buddhism in China* is a fascinating and well-researched study of the history and significance of two Buddhist monuments in Hangzhou: the Yongming Stūpa (Yongming ta 永明塔) and the Leifeng Pagoda (Leifeng ta 雷峯塔). The book traces the origins, development, destruction, and reconstruction of these two stūpas, and illuminates how they reflect the changing fortunes and aspirations of Buddhism in China. As the title of the book indicates, Welter envisages the stūpas to represent diverging paths in the revival of Buddhism in Hangzhou: the Yongming Stūpa was dedicated to the memory of Yongming Yanshou, a dedicated practitioner and scholar who advocated a comprehensive

and universal vision of Buddhism; the Leifeng Pagoda was built to house the relics of the historical Buddha, and was associated with the transmission of the *Precious Chest Seal Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Whole Body Relics Concealed in All Buddhas' Minds* (*Yiqie rulai xin mimi quanshen sheli baoqie yin tuoluoni jing* 一切如来心秘密全身舍利宝篋印陀羅尼經), a text that promised miraculous benefits and protection to its devotees. He demonstrates how these two stūpas embody different aspects of Buddhist culture and practice, such as relic veneration, dhāraṇī recitation, state patronage, and local folklore. The book also examines how the stūpas have been revived and reinterpreted in modern times, especially in relation to the popular legend of the White Snake and the development of tourism and heritage preservation in Hangzhou. The book has five chapters, and two appendices with translations of important primary sources. It contains many interesting colour photographs and images.

The Introduction, titled 'Buddhist Relic Veneration, Buddhist Sites and Translocations, and the Transformation of the Hangzhou/Jiangnan Region into an Indian Buddhist Homeland', introduces the main themes and methods of the study. Here, Welter lays out his argument that the two stūpas represent the complex process of translocating and transforming Indian Buddhism into a Chinese context, especially in the region of Jiangnan, where Hangzhou served as a centre of Buddhist culture and politics. He uses three approaches to explore the significance of the two stūpas: relic veneration, Buddhist sites and institutions, and regional approaches towards Buddhism. The introduction also provides an overview of the historical background of Hangzhou and its relation to India, as well as the legends and legends associated with the stūpas and their patrons. Buddhist relics have been collected, distributed, enshrined, and venerated in various ways throughout Buddhist history, and have served as symbols of legitimacy, authority, and power for both religious and political actors. As Welter points out, Yongming Stūpa and the Leifeng Pagoda housed different types of relics and thus reflected distinct aspects of Buddhist relic veneration in Hangzhou.

Alongside the cult of relics, Hangzhou and its environs became a new Buddhist homeland that replicated and rivaled the original Indian setting of Buddhism by incorporating and reimagining vari-

ous features such as stūpas, monasteries, and mountains. This translocation of Buddhism to Hangzhou was influenced by political, economic, and cultural factors, such as the late ninth-century kingdom of Wuyue, maritime trade, and the conscious imitation of the model of the legendary Buddhist King Aśoka by Wuyue rulers. The two stūpas in Hangzhou thus represent for Welter the culmination and manifestation of the translocation and transformation of Buddhism in the Jiangnan region. They embody the complex and dynamic interactions between Indian and Chinese Buddhism, as well as the local and global dimensions of Buddhist culture and history.

Chapter 2, 'Hangzhou Buddhism in Historical Perspective', traces the history of Buddhism in Hangzhou from the Six Dynasties period to the Song dynasty, focusing on the major monasteries, schools, and figures that shaped the Buddhist landscape of the city. The chapter outlines the political, social, and cultural factors that influenced the rise and decline of Buddhism in Hangzhou over time. Welter emphasizes in particular the innovative aspects of Buddhism developed through the textual production emanating from masters associated with the Wuyue Kingdom, namely the *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄 [Record of the Source-Mirror] by Yongming Yanshou, the *Da Song Seng shilüe* 大宋僧史略 [Topical Compendium of the Buddhist Clergy] by Zanning, and the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 [Record of the Transmission of the Lamp Compiled in the Jingde Era] by Daoyuan 道原 (d.u.). In Welter's vision a decisive role was played by the kingdom of Wuyue, a southern principality that emerged during the Tang-Song transition that supported Buddhism as a cornerstone of its cultural policy and sought to revive the glory of the Tang dynasty. This chapter highlights the role of Qian Chu 錢俶, the last ruler of Wuyue (King Zhongyi 忠懿王, r. 948–978), and his spiritual advisors, Tiantai Deshao 天台德紹 (891–972) and Zanning, in promoting Buddhism throughout the region, constructing monasteries and stūpas, and disseminating scriptures.

Chapter 3, 'The Origins and Development of the Yongming Stūpa', focuses on the stūpa dedicated to the memory of Yanshou. It explores the motivations behind the construction of the monument, as well as its symbolism, function, and its impact on the Buddhism of Hangzhou. Welter recounts the life of Yanshou, highlighting some

key events and aspects of his career, such as his transition from a civil official to a Buddhist monk, his abbotships of important monasteries, and his writings, especially the *Wanshan tonggui ji* 萬善同歸集 [Anthology on the Common Destiny of Myriad Good Deeds] and the *Zongjing lu*. Welter has published extensively elsewhere on both of these works and has an unrivalled command of their contents. In this chapter we learn much about the construction and relocation of the stūpa that housed Yanshou's relics. In later times, Ming dynasty literati composed various remembrances, tributes, and poems dedicated to the Yongming Stūpa. The prominent Ming monk Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535–1615) and Yu Chunxi 虞淳熙 (1553–1621), one of the most active literati in the Jiangnan region, were both actively involved in the reconstruction and rededication of the stūpa in the early seventeenth century.

In Chapter 4, 'The Origins and Development of Leifeng Pagoda', we are introduced to the origins and development of the stūpa built to house relics of the Buddha that were brought to Hangzhou by the last king of Wuyue, Qian Chu. Welter traces the history of the site from its construction in the tenth century to its collapse in the twentieth century and finally its reconstruction in the twenty-first century. It was originally built to house relics of the Buddha, including his hair and bones, as well as copies of a dhāraṇī sūtra translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774). The inspiration behind the project was King Aśoka, who was credited with erecting 84,000 stūpas containing the Buddha's relics throughout his realm. Qian Chu printed 84,000 copies of the dhāraṇī sūtra and placed them in stūpas, thus creating a 'living stūpa' that represented the sacred body of the Buddha and transformed his kingdom into a Buddha-land. In addition to its impeccable Buddhist heritage, Leifeng Pagoda also became associated with the legend of the White Snake, a popular tale about a snake-woman who falls in love with a human man and is imprisoned under the pagoda by a Buddhist monk. The chapter recounts how this legend inspired various literary and artistic works that gave new meanings and interpretations to both the pagoda and the characters in the tale of the White Snake.

Finally, in Chapter 5, 'A Tale of Two Stūpas: The Parameters of Buddhist Revival in China', Welter compares and contrasts the two

stūpas, highlighting their similarities and differences in terms of conception, construction, function, and meaning. The Yongming Stūpa offers a traditionalist and conservative model that reanimates continuities with the past, while the Leifeng Pagoda represents a progressive and inventive model that creatively manifests new conceptions of Buddhist thought and practice. The book's final chapter evaluates the significance of the two stūpas for the revival of Buddhism in China, especially in the modern era, when both stūpas were reconstructed and reactivated after periods of destruction and neglect.

Appendix 1 contains English translations along with the Chinese text of four documents concerned with the rediscovery, reconstruction, and reestablishment of the Yongming Stūpa in the early seventeenth century. In Appendix 2 we find English translations of The Precious Chest Seal Dhāraṇī Sūtra and selections from the *Chijian Jingci Monastery Gazetteer* (*Chijian Jingci sizhi* 勅建淨慈寺志) compiled in the early nineteenth century.

It is inspiring to see an experienced and knowledgeable scholar of Chinese Buddhism tackle a project like this in a way that brings together his expertise on the textual and doctrinal tradition with new perspectives on material culture and regional Buddhism. The book shows the value of what can be accomplished by considering a wide range of historical material through a perspective that is situated in specific Buddhist monuments set within their landscapes. The author's evident enthusiasm to bring the project to the reader has meant that some corners have been cut with regard to standard scholarly practice. For example, important primary sources in Chinese are cited not from their standard printed editions but from ctext.org. Can we be confident that a URL will still work in twenty years time? Occasionally, references to primary sources and page numbers in any edition are omitted entirely, as in note 8 to Appendix 1: 'See the verse of the Tang poet Li Yi 李益 entitled *Dali bi huangdi yu dan feng men gaiyuan jian zhong dashe* 大禮畢皇帝御丹鳳門改元建中大赦: "The spirit rooster inspires heavenly amnesty" 靈雞鼓舞承天赦, 高翔百尺垂朱幡.' Anthony DeBlasi's entry on 'Chen Guan 陳瓘' in the *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism* is listed in the Bibliography as 'page number unavailable', despite its location on pages 46–47.

Overall, Welter's new book is a valuable contribution to the study of Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist material culture. He draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including historical records, inscriptions, gazetteers, biographies, sūtras, and modern scholarship. He provides annotated translations of some key texts related to the stūpas in the appendices. Welter writes in a clear and engaging style, and offers insightful analysis and comparison of the two stūpas and their contexts. The study is thoughtfully situated within the broader framework of Buddhist relic veneration and translocation and the transformation of the Hangzhou region into an Indian Buddhist homeland. The book addresses some of the methodological and theoretical issues involved in studying Buddhist monuments and sites, such as the role of memory, narrative, and identity. Alongside its historical perspective the book raises important questions about the nature of the Buddhist revival in China, and the challenges and opportunities it poses both for contemporary Buddhism and for society.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of Chinese Buddhism, Buddhist art and architecture, and the history and culture of Hangzhou. It is a rich and nuanced exploration of two stūpas that have shaped and been shaped by the Buddhist tradition and the local community for over a thousand years. It is also a timely and thoughtful reflection on the past, present, and future of Buddhism in China and beyond.

References

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