

**THE FUNERARY BUDDHA: MATERIAL CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN
“THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM TO CHINA”**

by

Margarita Angelica Delgado Creamer

B.A. in Philosophy, Catholic University of Peru, Lima, 1996

M.A. in Religious Studies, Queen’s University, Kingston, 2008

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences

This dissertation was presented

by

MARGARITA ANGELICA DELGADO CREAMER

It was defended on

March 30, 2016

and approved by

Clark Chilson, PhD, Associate Professor

Katheryn Linduff, PhD, Professor

Adam Shear, PhD, Associate Professor

Dissertation Advisor: Linda Penkower, PhD, Associate Professor

Copyright © by Margarita Angelica Delgado Creamer

2016

**THE FUNERARY BUDDHA: MATERIAL CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE
IN “THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM TO CHINA”**

Margarita Angelica Delgado Creamer, Ph.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2016

How could Buddhism gain initial acceptance in China? This question has long perplexed scholars of Chinese religions mainly on account of (1) the alleged deep ethnocentrism of Chinese civilization—that should have prevented the acceptance of a “barbarian” religion and god—and (2) the dearth of reliable relevant information for the period (first through fourth centuries CE). On the basis of the fragmentary textual sources available, the traditional narrative resolved the first problem by arguing that the initial misunderstanding or assimilation of Buddhism in terms of Daoism was pivotal in the initial acceptance of the foreign religion. The second problem has been partially ameliorated by the archaeological discovery in the last decades of dozens of objects bearing recognizably Buddhist motifs that have been dated to this period. However, previous studies on this archaeological record have generally seen them as further confirmation of the tenet of the initial misunderstanding of Buddhism as Daoism.

In contrast, this dissertation inquires primarily into the significance of the archaeological record and takes it as an opportunity to reassess the traditional narrative trope. Thus, rather than formulating the question in terms of historically and hermeneutically problematic reified units (i.e. Buddhism, Daoism and China), it approaches the issue from the perspective of the reception of elements of a foreign repertoire. It argues that situating the artifacts into their local cultural landscape reveals that the appropriation of the Buddha figure though geographically diffuse was much more organic than has heretofore been considered. Indeed, this dissertation contends that

the earliest Chinese material Buddha images constituted an innovation that was both the consequence and trigger of further synergistic cultural interaction. This means that far from being only a case of cultural misunderstanding or random borrowing, these images gave expression to a re-envisioning of the relationship between human and supernatural beings, and contributed to effecting a lasting transformation in the Chinese religious praxis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	X
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION	5
1.2 THE MATERIAL RECORD AND THE “FUNERARY BUDDHA”	7
1.3 PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND SOURCES	10
1.4 APPROACH AND OVERVIEW	13
1.5 OUTLINE	17
2.0 THE NARRATIVE OF “THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA”	20
2.1 DEFINITION AND CHRONOLOGY	22
2.2 THE STORY OF “THE INTRODUCTION”	27
2.2.1 Dating the official introduction	31
2.2.2 Xiang Kai’s memorial (166 CE)	36
2.2.3 Pengcheng 彭城(modern-day Jiangsu area)	41
2.2.3.1 The story of Liu Ying, King of Chu (65 CE)	41
2.2.3.2 Ze Rong’s pagoda	45
2.2.4 Pencheng and Chu 楚	49
2.3 “BUDDHISM” AS “DAOISM” AND THE BUDDHA AS LAOZI	51

2.3.1	The <i>huahu</i> 化胡 legend.....	52
2.3.2	<i>Geyi</i> 格義.....	63
2.4	CONCLUDING REMARKS	68
3.0	THE MATERIAL RECORD	72
3.1	MOTIFS OTHER THAN THE BUDDHA.....	77
3.1.1	Stupas/Pagodas	77
3.1.1.1	Maduizi 馬堆子, Sichuan.....	78
3.1.1.2	Xiangfan 襄樊, Hubei	80
3.1.1.3	Wu Liang Shrine, Shandong.....	81
3.1.2	Lotus designs.....	82
3.1.3	Elephants and relics.....	85
3.1.4	Human figures ostensibly related to Buddhism.....	87
3.1.4.1	Yi'nan pillar, Shandong	89
3.1.5	Kongwangshan 孔望山.....	89
3.1.6	Concluding remarks: Interpreting the motifs as material traces of Buddhism	93
3.2	THE ISSUE OF TRANSMISSION AND MODES OF RECEPTION	95
3.3	FUNERARY BUDDHA-FIGURES	100
3.3.1	Earliest traces: Sichuan in the Eastern Han	101
3.3.1.1	Tomb carvings.....	103
3.3.1.2	Money trees (<i>yaoqianshu</i> 搖錢樹)	107
3.3.2	Concluding remarks	109
3.4	WU KINGDOM: ARTIFACTS OF THE WUCHANG AREA	113

3.4.1	Bronze mirrors.....	114
3.4.1.1	The case of the Echeng mirror.....	122
3.4.2	Glazed pottery Buddha figure.....	124
3.4.3	Gilt bronze belt buckle (262 CE).....	126
3.4.4	Censer with Buddha figure (ca. 270-280).....	128
3.4.5	Concluding remarks.....	129
3.5	WU KINGDOM AND JIN DYNASTY: ARTIFACTS OF JIANGNAN...	132
3.5.1	Figured jars (<i>duisuguan</i> 堆塑罐).....	132
3.5.2	Covered jar (<i>Lian</i> 奩).....	136
3.5.3	Ewer.....	137
4.0	THE MATERIAL RECORD AND “THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM”	139
4.1	ZÜRCHER’S STUDY.....	140
4.2	THEORETICAL PROBLEMS.....	144
4.2.1	The place of material culture in the study of religion.....	144
4.2.2	Syncretism as a model and a problem.....	148
4.3	REPERTOIRES AND SYNERGISTIC CULTURAL INTERACTION ...	158
5.0	THE WORLD OF THE FUNERARY BUDDHA.....	161
5.1	CONTEXT AND GEOGRAPHY.....	162
5.2	THE FUNERARY WORLD.....	166
5.2.1	The tomb: structure and iconography.....	168
5.2.2	The pantheon.....	172
5.2.2.1	The case of the Buddha in the funerary setting.....	175

5.2.3	Immortality	178
5.3	THE BUDDHA FIGURE	180
5.3.1	The Buddha's foreignness and the issue of 'exoticism'	184
5.3.2	A deity?	190
5.3.3	Human figures.....	192
5.3.4	<i>Xiwangmu</i>	194
5.3.4.1	A brief biography.....	195
5.3.4.2	Issues of identity and function	200
5.3.4.3	A female deity: the issue of gender in the divine realm.....	205
5.3.4.4	<i>Xiwangmu</i> and the Buddha	208
5.4	CONCLUDING REMARKS	211
6.0	CONCLUSIONS	213
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	218

PREFACE

I write these lines with deep gratitude and humility as I acknowledge the preciousness of the time, support, generous care and resources given to me by so many people and institutions in order to complete this project.

I owe the utmost gratitude to my committee for their unflagging support and indispensable critical reading. I deeply thank my advisor, Dr. Linda Penkower, for always challenging me to go one step beyond; to Dr. Katheryn Linduff, for giving me the confidence and expert advice to venture into the fascinating world of material culture, and for her unbounded generosity and friendship; to Dr. Clark Chilson for his steadfast guidance and encouragement at every step of the process; and to Dr. Adam Shear for his perspicacious comments always offered with a dose of good humor.

I also owe an immense debt of gratitude to the institutions that supported me in my graduate studies and dissertation research. The University Center for International Studies/Asian Studies Center have supported me with the Chancellor's Graduate Fellowship in Chinese Studies, a summer East Asian Language Study Japan Scholarship, and tuition remission, and the Department of Religious Studies with teaching fellowships; the Mellon Doctoral Fellowship from the University of Pittsburgh and Doctoral Fellowship of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange enabled me to fully devote myself to writing the first chapters of my research.

My research in China was not only extremely fruitful, it was thoroughly enjoyable, and I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Hong Xiuping 洪修平, my mentor during my postgraduate studies in China and now curator of Nanjing University library, for sharing his thoughts and for providing invaluable letters of introduction. I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude to the Chinese museums where I did research for the assistance provided. Most especially I would like to thank Dr. Wang Yifeng 王屹峰 of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum for his insightful comments and generously sharing his own research with me, as well as Ms. Shen Yiping 沈一萍, director of the exhibition department of the Shaoxing Museum for going through the relevant artifacts with me.

In the process of writing this dissertation I have had many encounters and exchanges in which I have experienced the best that academia has to offer. The list is too long (fortunately!) but I would like to thank a few scholars who have shown me with their generosity that the purpose of academia is truly to build a community to advance learning: Dr. Kathy Carlitz, Dr. Vincent Gossaert and Dr. Timothy Barrett.

I have immensely benefited from the generous support of the faculty and fellow graduate students of the Department of Religious Studies. I cannot but especially mention my friends Wu Hongyu, and Pematana Soorakkulame who have been the source of so much encouragement and joy throughout these years. The assistance I have received from Pitt Hillman librarians cannot be overstated. I particularly thank Zhang Haihui for the many times she has gone out of her way to help me. I also want to thank Dissertation Boot Camp and Writers' Day organizers Ellen Smith and Jean Grace, the pleasant atmosphere and the help they provide are invaluable.

To my mother and father, and my family for their care, steadfast support and love, I thank you from "my heart of heart," many lifetimes would not suffice to pay this debt. To my friends,

for their timely words and acts of encouragement, their understanding and for sharing my pathos and my joy along the way. To Graciela and Kathy, for providing me with a “safe haven” in times of despondency, for the many meals and rides, for their interest in even my most convoluted elucubrations, I cannot but thank you very especially. And to the one person who has supported me through it all, Muki, without you I would have not brought this project to completion. I will never be able to thank you enough, but let me at least, very humbly, dedicate you this work.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an inquiry into the significance of the material record—the earliest objects bearing Buddhist motifs—for our understanding of what is commonly known as the “introduction of Buddhism to China.” It contributes to our knowledge about the introduction of Buddhism to China in two ways. First, it argues for the fundamental role of the Buddha figure as an innovation that both resulted from and triggered synergistic cultural interactions, which contributed to transformations in the Chinese religious praxis of the period. Second, it argues against the widespread assumption that Buddhism was initially misinterpreted as a form of Daoism, one of the hallmarks of the prevalent historical narrative of the “introduction of Buddhism” that has, in turn, deeply conditioned the interpretation of the material record.

The introduction of Buddhism in China and the concomitant acceptance of the Buddha as a god have long been considered to be among the great enigmas of Asian religions (Maspero, [1940] 1981, p. 251 and Ch'en 1964, p. 50). Indeed, as tradition has it, how are we to explain the success of a foreign religion and the generalized acceptance of a foreign deity in view of the

often-invoked Chinese “ethnocentrism” and the deep, seemingly insurmountable cultural differences between India and China?¹ The most common and still prevalent explanation posits a conflation of Buddhism with Daoism, and of the Buddha with Laozi (or Huanglao)²: that the confusion between Buddhism and Daoism, and these two deities (which includes understanding of the one in terms of the other) is the reason that Buddhism and the Buddha were able to gain initial acceptance by the Chinese, especially at the level of the imperial family.

This traditional narrative has certainly not gone unchallenged. The problematic and extremely fragmentary character of the sources (Zürcher, 1972, pp.1-40), the hermeneutically problematic category of syncretism (Sharf, 2002 pp. 1-27 and 77), and more specifically, the controversial model of “sinicization” (Gimello, 1978) along with the concomitant

¹ While the conquest of Northern China by the Tuoba in 386 CE and their subsequent rule for almost 150 years gave Buddhism unprecedented political support, these foreign conquerors did not introduce the religion by brute force as, for instance, the Spaniards did in Latin America. In fact, according to historical records, long before their invasion—as early as the middle of the first century—the Buddha was already receiving sacrifices from a Chinese king of his own accord (*Hou Hanshu* 42 p. 1428).

² Classical formulations of these extremely common claims can be found in Ch'en, 1964, pp. 48-53; Maspero, 1934, p. 91 and 1981, pp. 405-406; Wright, 1959, pp. 32-33; Zürcher, 1972, pp. 36-37 and pp. 290-293.

essentialization of religious traditions (Campany, 2012a) have all been noted and discussed. These observations, allied to our own experience of cultural interaction in a globalizing world, certainly invite us to suspect that the processes of interaction must have been more complex.

However, what was sorely lacking was new data. This situation changed thanks to the intensive archaeological work of the last decades that has yielded dozens of representations of Buddhist motifs from a wide geographic area dating roughly to the second through fourth centuries. They are the centerpiece of the present dissertation. Although parts of this material record have received sustained academic attention, there are at least two important reasons for presenting yet another study: (1) the increase in the number of discovered pieces and the attendant increase of relevant literature, and (2) the different approach this study takes.

The importance of the unearthing of new pieces and the literature they have spawned is largely self-explanatory, but the issue of the approach needs at least a preliminary explanation. This dissertation diverges from the most substantial previous analyses because that scholarship has generally pigeonholed the new data into the prevalent template, that is, it has largely followed in the steps of the prevailing narrative and concludes that the material record also evinces the conflation of Buddhism and Daoism, and that the funerary placement and usage of

the Buddhist motifs further confirm that the Chinese “misunderstood” Buddhism in this early period.³

In contrast, this dissertation takes the material record as an opportunity to re-assess the prevalent narrative and to argue that the appropriation of the Buddha image evinces an organic process of interaction that related to the evolving ethos of the period. In order to achieve these goals, this project follows an approach whose most basic tenets are that (a) beyond their significance in the history of Chinese Buddhism, these artifacts were the result of processes of quotidian cultural contact and exchange, and thus the outcome should not be judged according to doctrinal standards; (b) the processes of reception are as important as those of transmission; and (c) textual sources should not be privileged over material ones.

Anchored in these assumptions I first evaluate the extent to which the narrative based on the textual record can or should be used to frame the inquiry into the significance of the material record. Second, I analyze the artifacts by firmly placing them into their immediate and wider context. I then confront the outcome of this analysis with the prevalent narrative and current interpretations. Finally, I discuss the significance of the Buddha figure in the milieu it appeared and in relation to the theoretical problem of the reception of discrete alien religious symbols,

³ See especially Wu, 1986 and Zürcher, 1990b.

proposing that we adopt the notion of “synergistic interaction.” I argue that the representation of a supernatural being in the form of a male foreign human being was an innovation in the funerary context, and that this is key to understanding the ambiguity, appeal and various functions ascribed to the motif. I further contend that this innovation resonated with and stimulated some important developments in the shifting religious landscape, in particular the ways in which the relationship between human beings and deities was being re-envisioned.

1.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION

In the last decades archaeologists have unearthed a number of artifacts, carvings and frescoes throughout a vast geographic area that bear figures identified as the Buddha or other Buddhist motifs and have been dated to the Eastern Han (25-220 CE) through the Western Jin (265-316 CE). Despite their generally small size and their often-crude finish they are truly remarkable. Not only do we find among them the earliest material evidence of anything recognizably Buddhist in Chinese territory but their usage is also completely out of the known or ordinary. Indeed, a large number of these figures have been found in, and were most probably made specifically for, tombs—a heretofore-unseen deployment of the Buddha image anywhere else in the world. To add to their interest, their chronology and geographic distribution contrast notably with the

historical development we are able to glean from the scarce textual sources, which center on activity in and around the capital.

Archaeologists, historians and art historians have, in general, received this newly discovered material corpus enthusiastically as they have seen in it the opportunity to rekindle the debate over the earliest routes of transmission, as well as the debate over the original artistic sources of the Chinese counterparts.⁴ Their reception by specialists of Chinese Buddhism and Chinese religions, on the other hand, has been very uneven, ranging from a hopeful expectation that they could hold a key to understand early popular Chinese Buddhism,⁵ to a disillusioned outlook that by themselves they will not give us any new insights.⁶ Indeed, one of the oft-noted features is their complete disjunction with Buddhist textual sources, and without these to illuminate what they may have meant we seem to be left in a rut.

This may partially explain why, to date, there has been no systematic investigation of this material corpus from the specific perspective of the study of religion beyond the late Erik Zürcher's study of a small group of pieces dated to the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) excavated at six sites before 1990. This dissertation aims at remediating this situation as the last

⁴ See, for instance, He, 1993; Rhie, 1999 and Wu, 1986.

⁵ See especially Barrett, 2010.

⁶ Kieschnick, 2003, pp. 83-84 is an interesting example of this position.

decades of arduous archaeological work have yielded not only more finds of ‘funerary Buddhas’ but have also markedly transformed the field of the early history of China to the point of triggering a historical revision as substantial as the one concretized in the new volume *The Cambridge history of ancient China: from origins of civilization to 221 B.C.* (Nylan and Loewe, 2010). That is to say, that not only do we need to complement previous studies by incorporating more recently discovered pieces but it is also essential to bring to bear more recent scholarly insights into funerary practices and historical processes when contextualizing them.

1.2 THE MATERIAL RECORD AND THE “FUNERARY BUDDHA”

The material corpus that is the centerpiece of this dissertation encompasses a few dozen figures that exhibit some of the standard iconographic markers of the Buddha image that have been unearthed from tombs in the southwestern and southeastern modern provinces of Sichuan, Chongqing, Hubei, Anhui Zhejiang and Jiangsu in recent decades. The earliest of these have been dated to the Western Han (206-9 CE) and the latest to the Jin dynasty. This corpus comprises a few carvings and various types of artifacts. Most prominent among them are the intriguing *yaoqianshu* 搖錢樹 (money trees) and *duisuguan* 堆塑罐 (figured jars). The majority are pottery items with a celadon glaze, while a few, mirrors and money trees are made of bronze.

The group of artifacts bearing Buddha-figures is part of a larger record, which comprises around one hundred objects.⁷ This larger record includes some frescoes and other artifacts that ostensibly represent Buddhist motifs other than the Buddha such as lotuses, elephants, people with a dot on the forehead, and other figures that have been interpreted as owing to Buddhist influence. These have been found in a wider geographic area: in Helingeer (Inner Mongolia) as well as the modern-day northern provinces of Shandong, Shanxi and Ningxia.

These objects too have a place in this dissertation but my treatment diverges greatly from most of the preceding scholarship. To wit, previous scholarship has taken these pieces as indices of the “presence” or “influence” of Buddhism in the geographic areas where they have been found.⁸ Such a project is in itself rather problematic as it presupposes certain contradictory definitions, especially regarding what is to be considered Buddhist or not. In fact, their reading as Buddhist motifs is often based on very tenuous similarities. And, to further compound the problem, while their geographic distribution is very wide, we often have only a few exemplars. Such is the case, for instance, of a fragment of a stone from an Eastern Han tomb in Shandong: we find here a six-tusked elephant followed by a Chinese mythological animal, which may

⁷ It is only possible to give an approximate number (around one hundred) since the authenticity and/or dating of some pieces is subject to debate.

⁸ See for instance Rhie, 1999 and Zürcher, 1990.

represent a *qilin* 麒麟 or a dragon. Although it is known that in Indian Buddhism an elephant with six tusks stood for one of the Buddha's former incarnations, thusfar this is the only example of such an elephant in China for this period, making it very difficult to draw any conclusions. This is the case because, in general, it is nearly impossible to establish reliable comparisons or work out any patterns, both of which are fundamental steps in the interpretation of material culture in terms of practice rather than as mere indexical evidence.

In this sense, this group of artifacts is important because of its contrast with the case of the funerary Buddhas. The latter are found in clusters, both geographic and chronological, and in much larger quantities and wider distribution. In my view, this quantitative difference points to a marked preference for the Buddha-figure as compared to other Buddhist motifs. I have coined the expression "funerary Buddhas" to somehow reproduce linguistically the awkward and surprising fact, for anybody familiar with Buddha images, that results from the placement of Buddha figures within mortuary contexts, clearly setting them apart from other representations of the Buddha. It is also meant to highlight the way I approach these figures: rather than approaching these artifacts from the perspective of Chinese Buddhism as an organismic system and assessing how —post-factum— they fit (or did not) in its development, I seek to re-frame our view of these items in their funerary, local and ideological context.

1.3 PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND SOURCES

This study is the result of the convergence of multiple areas and problems—among which we find the history of the early period of Chinese Buddhism, theoretical work on syncretism, cultural contact, material culture and symbolism, the role of funerary objects and images, Chinese regional histories as well as funerary cultures and mythologies. In this chapter I deal only with the academic work done in relation to the material record. As will be noticed the literature I draw on often focuses on either single items or various combinations of artifacts whereas I deal with the material record as whole and the place of the funerary Buddha figures therein.

As early as 1954 art historian Richard Edwards claimed that one of the stone relief images in a Han tomb discovered in 1940 at Mahao in Sichuan province exhibited the iconographic marks of a sitting Buddha.⁹ This finding was followed by a few others: a Buddha image on the clay stand of a *yaoqianshu* (money tree) from a tomb in Pengshan, also in the province of Sichuan; a six-tusked elephant in a fragment of an Eastern Han relief from Tengxian

⁹ To be more precise Edwards visited the Mahao site in 1949 and 1950 but published his report in a two-part article that appeared in 1954 and 1955 under the title “The cave reliefs at Mahao” in *Artibus Asiae*.

in Shandong province.¹⁰ Although these and other finds that followed were too isolated and geographically scattered to allow for any strong general hypothesis they did serve to fuel the discussion over the earliest Chinese Buddhist art.

Later, when subsequent archaeological work yielded dozens of pieces that included Buddhist motifs in geographic and chronological clusters, it became clear that these images were not just the result of some idiosyncratic choices, and they became the focus of heated scholarly debates: the debate over the routes of transmission of Buddhism into China, and the debate over the earliest Chinese Buddhist art. Although neither debate has been settled, these discussions have spawned a large and important literature, much of which has served as reference matter for this dissertation. The debate over the routes of transmission seemed to have been pretty much settled several decades ago with Tang Yongtong's 湯用彤 still authoritative *Buddhist history in the Han Wei Liang-Jin Northern and Southern dynasties* (*Han Wei Liangjin Nanbei chao fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史) from 1938, where he convincingly argued for a northern land route. However, representatives of the alternative view have seen in the material corpus the corroboration that Buddhism had reached China via the sea route, a thesis promoted early on by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1921) and Paul Pelliot (1920).

¹⁰ A six-tusked elephant stood for one of the Buddha's former incarnations in Indian Buddhism. See Wu, 1986, p. 272.

Meanwhile the debate over the earliest Chinese Buddhist art continued and was further fueled by archaeologist Yu Weichao 俞偉超 with the publication of his article “Eastern Han Buddhist images” in 1980. It was, however, Wu Hung’s first work on the material corpus that would be instrumental in bringing it to the attention of Western scholars. In his extended article Wu offered both a critical review of previous work on the issue and a new interpretation. Since its publication in 1986 it has been one of the main if not the sole source of reference on the material record for scholars of Chinese religions. Wu’s “Buddhist elements in early Chinese art: 2nd and 3rd centuries AD” is without a doubt a seminal article.¹¹

Four years later one of the preeminent scholars of early Chinese Buddhism, Erik Zürcher, published an article in which he dealt with a few of the “examples of Buddhist elements in the context of Han religious art” (Zürcher 1990, 158). Zürcher’s attempt to integrate the pieces dated to the Han dynasty to the picture of Han Buddhism he had presented in his *Buddhist conquest of China* (1959) resulted in a more analytical approach in which Han Buddhism is presented as “a composite phenomenon, consisting of at least three well-defined sectors” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 159). To the two sectors he had described in his *Buddhist conquest* (namely, a cult centered on

¹¹ Despite my many disagreements with this essay, I fully acknowledge my immense debt to it as it prompted me to further investigate a dimension that was clearly missing from the prevalent account of the history of early Chinese Buddhism.

the court and the first nucleus of monastic Buddhism) he adds “the diffuse and unsystematic adoption of Buddhist elements in indigenous beliefs and cults” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 159), and links these sectors to the nature of the channels of transmission. This article is a fundamental dialogical partner of the present project.

1.4 APPROACH AND OVERVIEW

Building on the excellent work of a number of scholars who have investigated these pieces either as a group or individually, in particular the work of art historians, I approach the material record with questions about the introduction of Buddhism in China that have long intrigued scholars of Chinese religions—such as the reasons for the success of a foreign religion in an ethnocentric empire, or the early appreciation of Buddhism by social groups other than the imperial elite. Just as important are the new questions that the material record motivates, such as, the funerary location of the Buddha image, the iconographic context, and the processes involved in religious exchange.

This is an object-driven study, that is, it approaches the material record as material culture whose meaning is grounded in practice and thus seeks to understand how the funerary Buddha figures relate to the peoples and cultures that produced and used them rather than as

passive evidence for the presence and level of accuracy of the interpretation of Buddhism in China at a certain point in time. However, as the latter has been the predominant way in which material records in general have found a place in the study of Chinese religions, I start by briefly discussing some of the problems and challenges involved in dealing with material culture from the perspective of religious studies.

John Kieschnick has noted that “[w]ith the exception of a select group of objects attributed with sacred power, most religious artifacts seem entirely too ordinary, too profane, to offer interesting insights into the nature of religion.... [These] seem to be better left to archaeologists, historians of popular culture, or economists than to mainstream historians of religion, particularly since the study of such objects inevitably involves discussions of techniques of manufacture and often economic negotiations between craftsmen and client, both of which seem far removed from the search for distinctively religious ideas and values” (Kieschnick 2003, pp. 20-21). It is indeed challenging to deal with those aspects inherent in the materiality of objects but there is no way around it. Simply put, we do not interact with things in the same way we do with texts. This is precisely what makes objects interesting beyond their evidentiary potential. However, more often than not when historians of religion have shown an interest in things, this interest has been largely circumscribed to their evidentiary potential. How can this other type of evidence complement or confirm the textual one? But things are not the

handmaidens of texts, as material culturalists have demonstrated things have lives and histories of their own. Thus by seeing things as the handmaidens of texts we can miss their ontological complexity and historical importance.

Furthermore, although it is true that scholars of religion may take issue with the use of material culture because of the premium put in connoisseur expertise, already in the early 1990s a material culturalist, Bernard Herman (1992), had made the useful distinction between studies that are object-centered and those that are object-driven. Object-centered studies are usually concerned with single objects, often as they relate to technological advances and issues, or in terms of their aesthetic value. Object-driven studies, however, are interested in the object in context; it is the interaction of object and context that allows us to determine their meaning. In this sense, historian Karen Harvey (2009) emphasizes in her definition of material culture that object-driven studies are not composed simply of objects that we can make and then discard, but that it is imperative not to exclude the surroundings, and the people that made, purchased or used objects from our interpretation.

In the last decades this type of studies have caused material culture to gain relevance in various academic fields, and the emphasis has concomitantly shifted from the evidentiary potential to “the dialectical and recursive relationship between persons and things,” that is, to the fact “that persons make and use things and that the things make persons. Subjects and objects are

indelibly linked" (Tilley et al. 2006, p. 4). This dialectical relationship not only encompasses social actors and artifacts, but also institutions, spaces, and imaginaries, thus assigning 'things' an agentive role in the making of culture.

I am aware that the agentive quality of artifacts, although taken for granted among many material culturalists and art historians, may prove rather problematic in other disciplines. This is the case, especially, if we associate "agency" to action, intentionality and consciousness, all of which we do not commonly predicate on things. This deserves further explanation. According to art historian theorist Alfred Gell, when "agency" is used to refer to things it shows them as actively having effects (or consequences) in relation to people, insofar as they may alter their consciousness, systems of values and actions, and insofar as they are invested with some of the intentionality of their creators. From here Gell asserts that the significance of things does not lie in what they mean in the world but on what they do (Gell 1998). It is in this sense that I use "agency" to refer to things, largely as an antidote to viewing them semiologically, that is, exclusively in terms of their meaning, or reducing them to serving as indices of something else.

This change of emphasis has created awareness that materiality is an integral dimension of culture, generally, and of religion, specifically, and that there are dimensions of social existence that can only be very partially understood without incorporating materiality. This awareness coupled with the fact that, in the particular case of China, recent archaeological

discoveries are constantly challenging (or superseding) received knowledge adds to the urgency to integrate these recently discovered materials into mainstream history. This dissertation is one such attempt.

1.5 OUTLINE

The introduction offers a critical review of the works that have largely defined what we understand by “the introduction of Buddhism in China.” The aim is to outline their fundamental theoretical underpinnings—such as the normative understanding of religions and the biological model of their development—and to show how, despite general criticism, these have been carried over to the interpretation of the material record as is evident in the two most relevant studies by Erik Zürcher and Wu Hung.

I also analyze how these pieces have been approached: as indices of the presence of Buddhism and as the result of exoticism. That is to say, in general, as one type of object. I claim that the objects that make up the record are far from uniform and that it is of the utmost importance to introduce a typology that emerges from a close contextualized analysis. One of the purposes of this analysis is to place the discussion within a comparative framework. I suggest that we avoid the tendency towards the exceptionalism that has characterized much of the study

of Chinese culture. On the other hand, it is not my intent to let theory direct the interpretation of data but to introduce two elements that have been sorely absent from most of the discussion: comparative and theoretical dimensions. Furthermore, both are instrumental in the endeavor to extricate the material record from the overriding interpretation that qualifies them as the result of misunderstanding.

The second chapter is a critical review of the most relevant historical allusions on which the narrative of “the introduction” is based. I discuss some of the fundamental notions that have served as explanatory principles, and assess the extent to which the narrative based on the textual record serves as a reliable framework of reference for the interpretation of the material record.

The third chapter analyzes the group of representations of the Buddha, Buddhist motifs and isolated elements usually associated with Buddhist iconography that date to the second through fourth centuries of our era, many of which have been found in tombs. While the fourth chapter discusses theoretical problems related to their interpretation and more general problems related to the use of material culture in the study of religion and the controversial category of syncretism, the last chapter discusses the Buddha figure at several levels: within the intellectual context, comparing it to related figures, and in the funerary setting. The conclusion establishes that only by situating the Buddha figures in their cultural horizon can we see that they were an innovation that gave expression to a re-envisioning of the relationship between human and

supernatural beings, and contributed to effecting a lasting transformation in the Chinese religious praxis.

2.0 THE NARRATIVE OF “THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA”

The framework of reference of this dissertation is what I designate as the prevalent narrative of the “introduction of Buddhism in China.” The main aim of this chapter is to present and discuss said narrative. In order to do so, out of an enormous literature I have selected a few works on the basis of their importance and authority in the field of Chinese Buddhism. To them we owe the picture we have of its early period. Their authors were well aware of the paucity of sources and only through very strenuous study and thanks to their monumental scholarship could they discern certain traits of the early story of Buddhism in China.

These remarkable works all hail from the last century, most from the first half, a fact that bitterly reveals the dearth of new information. As Erik Zürcher so eloquently expressed, already in the sixties “the study of Han Buddhism seemed to have reached its saturation point. The historical and pseudo-historical data had been collected, sifted and interpreted by dozens of scholars; reliable evidence was scanty and fragmentary, and every drop of information appeared to have been squeezed out of it” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 158).

Besides the limitations inhering in such paucity of data, these works bear the marks of modernity: in general, they approach cultures in essentialist terms, religions as biological entities, and syncretism as a mixture of such entities— all of which are characteristics that postmodern sensibilities find troublesome.

That is one the important reasons why I do not think we should simply add the material corpus into the template of the introduction of Buddhism in China as has all too often been done. The problem I see is that by pigeonholing this new information in such a template, we do not only continue to support a narrative that is clearly problematic but also severely limit the potential insight the new record can give us.

Having said this, my intention is not to argue against this model *per se*. Rather, this is an inevitable consequence of giving primacy to the material record in my inquiry. Also, I will not offer a new version of the “introduction of Buddhism in China,” this would contradict my intent. The scope of this research is more limited. It is an inquiry into the initial reception of the Buddha figure in China. That is, it focuses on one theme out of the many that make up the narrative of the introduction. Concretely, I argue that, a contextualized study of the material record leads us to conclude that the Buddha figure was understood to have a variety of functions and that its form, that is, the representation of a supernatural being as foreign, human and male, deeply resonated with the contemporaneous religious ethos. This argument seemingly defies the well-

established notion that the Buddha was understood as an embodiment of Laozi, and, by extension, the idea that the conflation of Buddhism with Daoism was one of the fundamental conditions for the acceptance of Buddhism.

2.1 DEFINITION AND CHRONOLOGY

In an article purported to summarize the state of the field of the study of Chinese Buddhism in English language up to 1995, the late John R. McRae, a well-respected specialist in East Asian Buddhism, recommended three texts for a general introduction to the subject: Arthur F. Wright's classical *Buddhism in Chinese history* (1959), the historical survey by Kenneth K. S. Ch'en (1964) and Zürcher's entry in Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987). While acknowledging that these last two texts were dated, McRae considered that they were "still the best book-length introductions to Chinese Buddhism" (McRae, 1995, p. 355). Although other scholars may have misgivings about this choice, these three specialists of Chinese Buddhism are certainly among the most authoritative and oft cited. Thus, despite the fact that they do not agree on all points, and their accounts differ with regard to various issues, I will use McRae's selection as a useful starting point. In fact, among other virtues these three texts stand out for their clarity,

their approachability and their clear organization. Coupled with the vast and solid scholarship they exhibit, there is much to recommend them.

Among the several traits these texts share, the most noticeable is the conception of religious traditions in terms of a biological model: religions are born or transplanted, grow, debilitate and may eventually die. Zürcher chooses a periodization in five phases based on social and institutional developments:

a. “The embryonic phase: from the first appearance of Buddhism in China in the mid-first century CE to c. 300 CE. This was a phase in which Buddhism played only a marginal role in religious and intellectual life. In Chinese dynastic terms it covers the later Han (25-220 CE), the era of the Three Kingdoms (220-265), and the Western Chin [Jin] (265-326)” (Zürcher, 1987, 143). This phase corresponds to the chronological appearance and spread of the funerary Buddha figures.

b. The formative phase (c. 300-589 CE): It covers the period of division or disunion. “Intellectually, it marks the penetration of Buddhism into the educated minority, and within the clergy itself, the formation of an elite group of scholarly monks. During this period Buddhism spread to all regions of China and to all social levels, including the Chinese and ‘barbarian’ courts. By the end of this period the stage was set for the rise of indigenous Chinese Buddhist schools” (Zürcher, 1987, p. 143).

c. The phase of independent growth (589-906 CE). This was “the ‘High Middle Ages’ of Chinese history. On the one hand, indigenous Chinese sects or schools formed; on the other hand, some Indian forms of Buddhism were transplanted to China [...]. In 845 a severe repression occurred that is commonly regarded as the beginning of the gradual decline of Buddhism in China” (Zürcher, 1987, pp. 143-144).

d. Buddhism in premodern China (tenth to nineteenth century). In this phase “Buddhism gradually lost the support of the cultured elite and was more and more reduced to a despised popular religion. Ch’an (meditation) Buddhism alone continued to exert limited appeal in intellectual circles” (Zürcher, 1987, p. 144).

e. Buddhism in modern and contemporary China (c. 1880-present). “The attempt to revive Buddhism remains a small and rather elitist movement. In the twentieth century, and especially since the 1920s, Buddhism has been increasingly exposed to the combined pressure of nationalism, modernization, and Marxism-Leninism” (Zürcher, 1987, p. 144).

I have preferred to cite than to summarize because the language in which this periodization is couched is quite revealing, and, I think it is essential to the articulation of the narrative. The terminological choices expressed in phrases such as “the penetration of Buddhism into the educated minority...”, “Indian forms of Buddhism were transplanted to China” clearly

points at the way in which the process is conceptualized: from the point of view of those doing the transmission, and taking Buddhism as a distinct entity.

In this schematic division it is clear that Chinese Buddhism is depicted as going through the periods of the life of an organism: a process of inception, growth, development, decadence and (near) death. This scheme is quite similar to Ch'en's fourfold division:

Introduction and early development that correspond to the Han dynasty

Growth and domestication from the Eastern Jin to Northern Zhou and Sui dynasties

Maturity and acceptance in the Tang dynasty

Decline from the Song dynasty to the modern period

Wright's periodization is also equivalent:

The period of preparation: ca. 65 to 317 CE

The period of domestication: ca. 317 to 589 CE

The period of independent growth: ca. 589 to 900 CE

The period of appropriation: 900 to 1900 CE

Thus, Zürcher's "embryonic phase" corresponds to Wright's "period of preparation," and largely to Ch'en's "introduction and early development," although Ch'en practically skips the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin. In the present work, "the introduction of Buddhism in China"

refers to the period that has been conceptualized as the earliest phase and, therefore, refers to any of these appellations.

I have chosen to use this expression for no other reason that it is quite common in current scholarship. I use it in quotation marks to emphasize the fact that it is part of a discourse that I find problematic, and is, therefore, under discussion.¹² Considering that the chronological extent of this phase corresponds to the appearance and spread of the funerary Buddhist figures, choosing it as the main frame of reference hardly requires any further justification.

Although it is true that historians of religion “have begun to let go of the biological model of birth, florescence, and decay” (Weidner, 2001, p. 1), it is not less accurate to say that this model has continued to shape important studies on the material record. The consequences of approaching it using a biological model will become clearer in the section dealing with Zürcher’s essay on Han Buddhism. Suffice it to say here that the features that are said to define this period, i.e. marginality and lack of understanding, will also be employed to characterize the material record.

In order to assess the significance of the material record we need to have at the very least a sense of this narrative and what is traditionally accepted. Clearly, an important drive for

¹² Another common way of referring to this period is the “transplantation of Buddhism to China,” a metaphor whose botanical (i.e. biological) roots are also evident.

scholars of Chinese Buddhism has been to establish a chronology. Other aspects that have received attention are the historical and sociopolitical context in which the introduction took place, the geographic spread, routes of transmission, the degree of “influence,” as well as the areas of interest as deduced from the translated texts. One of the most prominent features that is said to have characterized the process of introduction is the relationship, or rather, conflation with Daoism.

2.2 THE STORY OF “THE INTRODUCTION”

I will first delineate quite roughly some major points about which most scholars are in agreement and then analyze and discuss some of the sources on which they are based, and end with a few of the relevant problems that emerge. The prevalent picture of the introduction depicts it as a process whereby a few Buddhist missionaries made their way into at least three important centers of the Chinese empire: Luoyang, the capital city; Pengcheng, in present day Jiangsu’ and Tonkin in the deep southern boundary of the Han empire. From the extremely few and casual allusions extant we know that these missionaries “infiltrated” the courts and gained the interest and, in at least two notable cases, also gained the patronage of a king and an emperor. This has led a large number of scholars to assume that, at least initially, the spread of Buddhism was a

top-down process in which Buddhist communities were formed around the imperial family. At this stage the production of translations was very meager.

From the extant sources we learn that the Buddha received sacrifices at least as early as 65 CE from King Ying in Pengcheng and a hundred years later from Emperor Huan at the imperial palace. In both instances the records mention the Buddha alongside Huanglao 黃老.¹³ This has been taken as an indication that the Buddha was at the beginning conflated with Laozi that Buddhism was seen as closely related to Daoism, providing practices and techniques that promoted immortality.

As the Han dynasty neared its end a profound crisis could be felt in all aspects of life. Wright (1959), for one, greatly emphasized the context of crisis as a precondition for the spread and growing influence of Buddhism. He reasons that the breakdown of the Han led to an “urgent quest for a new basis for life and thought that created a favorable climate for the spread of Buddhism among the elite” (p. 28). And more forcefully yet: “Chinese self-confidence, the surest antitoxin against the viruses of innovation and xenophilia, had been seriously undermined” (Wright [1957] 1990, 7).

¹³ Most scholars understand Huanglao to mean the Yellow emperor and Laozi, while others argue that it refers solely to Laozi. I will discuss this point in some more detail below.

It is commonly ascertained that the official ideology, Han Confucianism, had failed and was not able to provide any solace to a disenchanting population. Daoism did offer some answers but its practices were too extreme and forbidding, and sometimes outright immoral. Buddhism, on the other hand, although perceived as a strand of Daoism, offered the promise of universal salvation and simpler practices for the attainment of the much-coveted immortality.

As the acceptance and interest in Buddhism grew so did the number of communities and translations. The Buddha, despite being a foreign god, could be accepted on account of the *huahu* legend, according to which, the Buddha was no other than Laozi who had transformed himself in order to teach and convert the barbarians of the West. Translations, according to this narrative, resorted to the philosophical and technical vocabulary of Daoism, thus reinforcing the impression that Buddhism was but a strand of the native religion.

For around three centuries Buddhism depended on Daoism, it was probably Daoist communities that also contributed to the spread of Buddhism, and *geyi* (the method of pairing Buddhist with Daoist terms) remained pivotal in translation efforts. It was through this misunderstanding of the Buddha as Laozi and of Buddhist doctrine as Daoist teachings that the deity and the religion could gain a foothold in the Middle Kingdom.

In this line, the notable Japanese scholar Tsukamoto Zenryu explains:

However distinguished a universalistic religion Buddhism might be, for it to shove aside China's traditional systems of thought and/or religion and to be fully accepted in their stead was no easy task. A concrete illustration of this is the actual historical development, in which Buddhism, upon its first introduction into China, was received as a sort of "Taoistic Buddhism," by being united with the indigenous Chinese beliefs in the Yellow Emperor, in Lao-tzu, and in superhuman sylphs; then proceeded to the stage of *ko yi [geyi]*, at which Buddhist doctrine was interpreted by resort to the ideas of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu; finally developed to the stage at which the saṃgha itself was obliged to make strenuous efforts to restore Buddhism to its pristine shape. What this means is that, for Buddhism to be accepted into [...] Chinese society [...] doctrines peculiar to Buddhism had somehow to be made to match the mood of the times." (Tsukamoto, 1985, Vol. I, p. 248)

Similarly, Kenneth Ch'en states that:

In the eyes of the Han Chinese, Buddhism was but another aspect of Taoism, since its practices and tenets were akin to those of the Taoists. To the Taoists, Buddhism was a new method of obtaining immortality [...] on the whole, the points of similarity were so numerous that the Chinese overlooked the differences and considered Buddhism as but another sect of Taoism. (Ch'en, 1964, p. 50)

These are the broad strokes along which various versions of the “initial phase of Chinese Buddhism” have been painted. In order to have a sense of where this narrative comes from it is imperative to at least briefly present some of the key allusions found in the textual record. What follows is a critical reexamination of the main sources.

2.2.1 Dating the official introduction

Legends have supplied what hard evidence has not, a way to date when Buddhism was officially introduced in China. A number of legends circulated to this effect. Most of them were probably responding to one or another criticism leveled against Buddhism, or, as Stephen Teiser (2005) has pointed out, we can also read them as illuminating “what later generations thought was important about the enculturation of Buddhism” (p. 1163). The most famous of these legends is the dream of the emperor Ming.

In fact, in order to establish an approximate chronology for the introduction of Buddhism in China it used to be common to recount one of the many versions of the dream of Emperor Ming (r. 58-75) of the Latter Han dynasty. Scholars have noted that despite its legendary character, some grain of truth can be found in it, meaning that we can assume that there was some kind of Buddhist activity around emperor Ming, and that there must have been a Buddhist community in Luoyang around that period.¹⁴

In the literature on Chinese Buddhism it is not uncommon to find a stereotyped version of this story with the following elements: The emperor dreamt of a golden man. After asking his ministers, one of them indicated that the subject of his dream was probably the Buddha, a deity

¹⁴ See for instance Zürcher, 1990b, p. 159.

from the West. Han Ming di then dispatched emissaries to bring back his teachings (*daofa* 道法). The envoys duly brought back an image of the Buddha, two monks, and one or several sutra scrolls.

If we want to strip the story to its basic elements this would pretty much be an accurate account but if we look at some of the surviving versions we find that there is hardly agreement in the details: the golden man may or may not appear flying, his place of origin can either be India or, more generically, the West; the minister who recognizes the spirit as being the Buddha may or may not be identified by name, just like the emissaries, whose identification was sometimes the product of blatant anachronism. The envoys bring back either one or a combination of the three elements. In what follows I analyze just those discrepancies that are relevant to the aim at hand.

Although this is a subject of debate, there is some agreement that the first account of the legend is the one found in an early preface to the *Sishier Zhang Jing* 四十二章經 (*Scripture in Forty-two Sections*) dated to the middle of the third century:¹⁵

One night Emperor Ming had a dream in which he saw a spirit flying around in front of his palace. The spirit had a golden body, and the top of his head emitted rays of light. The following day the emperor asked his ministers to identify the spirit. One minister replied that he had heard of a sage in India called “Buddha” who had attained the Way and was able to fly. It seemed that the spirit observed by the emperor must have been he.

¹⁵ No Indian or Central Asian versions of this text have been found to date, which leads scholars to think that it was probably composed in China. The dating is also problematic but there is general agreement that it must have existed in some form already before the memorial Xiang Kai submitted to the throne in 166. See below.

Thereupon the emperor dispatched a group of envoys led by Zhang Qian who journeyed to Yuezhi (Scythia?) and returned with a copy of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*. The text was later deposited in a temple.¹⁶

Here there is no mention of the envoys bringing back any monks (as in other accounts) or any images as in the following version found in Yuan Hong's (328-397 CE) *Hou Han ji* 後漢紀 (*Record of the Latter Han*):

Once in the past, Emperor Ming, having dreamt of a golden man great and tall, the light of the sun and the moon issuing from the nape of his neck, questioned his ministers about this. When a certain person said that in the west there was a superhuman being named Fo [*but*], whose form was great and tall, [the emperor] inquired into the latter's Way¹⁷ and recipes¹⁸ and had them brought to China, and had copies of his image made.¹⁹

In the version from the *Scripture in forty-two sections* the Buddha is identified as having attained the Way (dao) and being able to fly, these two characteristics –that interestingly enough are the markers of the Daoist *xian* (immortal)—are absent from the *Hou Han Ji* version, in which the distinguishing markers are his golden body, his size and height, and the emission of light. The place of origin of this deity is the West, not India. One of the most interesting points is that whereas in the preface version the envoy brings back just one sutra that is then deposited in a

¹⁶ Translated by Sharf 1996, 360. This preface is quoted in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collection of records concerning the issuing of the Three Storehouses), initially compiled by Sengyou 僧祐 in 515.

¹⁷ 道法

¹⁸ 術

¹⁹ *Hou Han Ji* 10 T. 55.42c . Translated by Hurvitz in Tsukamoto 1985, Vol I p. 42.

temple, the *Hou Han Ji*, as well as later the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書 (*Book of the Latter Han*), end the account stating that “From then on, representations [of the Buddha] were depicted in China.”

In the case of the first version, understandably, the author highlights the importance and pedigree of the text he is writing the preface for, i.e. *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*. It is less clear why a supposedly later text would add images, and here we are not told for what purpose they were used. Interestingly enough, in the fifth century rendering found in Wang Yan’s 王琰 *Ming Xiang Ji* 冥祥記 (*Records of Signs from the Unseen Realm*)²⁰ assembled around 490 CE—that according to Henri Maspero derives directly from the *Hou Han Ji* ²¹—there is an addition in this regard:

When first the envoy Ts’ai Yin brought back from the West the *śramanas* Kāśyapa Mātanga etc, and presented to the throne an *i* image of Śākyamuni that had been painted for King Udyāna, the emperor paid it all respect, finding it just like his dream. He commissioned his painters to make several copies of it, for adoration on the Ch’ing-ling Terrace of the Southern Palace, and on the upper parts of the K’ai-yang Gateway and of the Hsien-chieh Mausoleum. Also at Pai-ma-ssu the walls were painted with 1,000 chariots and 10,000 riders in a triple procession around a pagoda. All this is fully told in various histories.²²

Of special note is the mention that besides those meant for the Palace and a front gate to the capital, a copy of the Buddha image was ordered to be made by Emperor Ming in order to be

²⁰ A collection of Buddhist miracle tales.

²¹ See Maspero 1910, pp. 122-124

²² T 52.413c. Translated by Soper, 1959, p. 1.

placed in his future mausoleum, the Xian Jie. We cannot assess the historical accuracy of this account but it is noticeable that in this description the Buddha image seems to have a protective role for the living emperor, the empire, as well as for the deceased emperor. Alexander Soper has also noted that this description suggests that the three images were used as guardians of the emperor. In trying to trace the precedents for this kind of treatment he proposes to look at the Near East where the Byzantines set an image of Christ over the entrance of the Chalke Palace.²³ Although any explanation for this addition will of necessity remain hypothetical, it is perhaps worthwhile noting that in the period this work was compiled devotional images of the Buddha and Buddhist stories and motifs were becoming increasingly common, and the dedications explicitly stated that they were made for the protection of the empire, the health of one's parents, and/or the protection of deceased relatives, among others. It may well be that given the character of the text, the purpose of the author was to show the antiquity and royal precedent of these practices.²⁴

Considering that this is a very short story it seems logical to infer that the variations were purposefully intended. Thus, beyond the chronological problems and anachronisms discussed most comprehensively by Henri Maspero (1910) in his "Le songe et l'ambassade de l'empereur Ming. Etude critique de sources," these various renderings give us some insight into what those authors considered relevant or useful to their purposes. Also, as Maspero, Soper, Zürcher and others have pointed out, it is important to note the resilience of this story and how it ended up being accepted as historical truth.

²³ See Soper, 1959, p. 4.

²⁴ This explanation would also, by extension, agree with Robert Campany's (2012) statement that one of the purposes of recording miraculous events in the late fourth century was "to prove the efficacy of Buddhist devotional practices" (p. 2).

Although Zürcher (1989) considers this story as “no more than a propagandistic tale that is probably not older than the late second century” he notes that “[i]t may, however, contain a memory of the existence of Buddhism in court circles at the time of the emperor Ming, as an early reliable historical source refers to the presence of Buddhist monks and laymen in the entourage of an imperial prince in 65 CE” (p. 144). Here Zürcher is alluding to the story of King Ying of Chu, which is generally deemed as setting the *terminus ante quem* Buddhism had gained the patronage of a member of the royal family. This is also considered “the first authentic—but, unfortunately, quite isolated—sign of the existence of Buddhism in China” (p. 144).²⁵

2.2.2 Xiang Kai’s memorial (166 CE)

A record that is generally considered to be historically reliable is the memorial that Xiang Kai sent to Emperor Huan (r. 146-168) despite the risk of being imprisoned. Xiang Kai was from southern Shandong, and is said to have been a specialist in astrological and cosmological speculations. He wrote a memorial addressing emperor Huan and giving account of recent inauspicious portents by which Heaven was showing its disapproval with the situation in the court. He mentions how emperor Shun 順—who had reigned just before Huan—failed to practice the doctrines of Gong Chong 宮崇 contained in his *Taiping Qingling Shu* 太平清領書 (Book of the Pure Acceptance of Great Peace) and, as a consequence, his descendants did not flourish. This is followed by Xiang’s remonstrance to the emperor:

Moreover, I have heard that in the palace sacrifices have been performed to Huang-lao

²⁵ Teiser (2005, p. 1163) suggests that it was probably around the middle of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) that Buddhist monks, texts and images started to trickle into China.

and the Buddha. This doctrine (teaches) purity and emptiness; it venerates non-activity (*wu-wei* 無為); it loves (keeping) alive and hates slaughter; it (serves to) diminish the desires and to expel intemperance. Now your majesty does not expel your desires; slaughter and (the application of) punishments exceed the proper limit. Since (Your Majesty) deviates from the doctrine, how could you (expect to) obtain the happiness resulting from its (observance)? Some people say that Lao-tzu has gone into the region of the barbarians and (there) has become the Buddha.

The Buddha ‘did not sleep three nights under the (same) mulberry tree’, for he did not want (by dwelling) a long time to give rise to feelings of affection: this is the perfection of spirituality (精). A heavenly spirit (天神) presented him with beautiful girls, but the Buddha said: ‘These are no more than bags of skin filled with blood’, and he paid no attention to them any more. If one has reached this degree of mental concentration (守一) then one is able to realize the Way. Now the lascivious girls and the seductive ladies of Your Majesty are the most beautiful of all the world, and the delicacy of your food and the sweet taste of your drink are unique in all the world. How would you then become the equal of Huang-Lao?²⁶

This memorial contains the first mention of what would later be known as the *huahu* (conversion of the barbarians) legend in which the Buddha becomes a reincarnation of Laozi. It also criticizes the emperor for not following the ethical practices of their doctrine, which, the author seems to view as one and the same one.

²⁶ *Hou Hanshu* 60. Translated by Zürcher (1972, p. 37).

According to the *Hou Hanshu* section on emperor Huan these sacrifices were offered in the Zhuolong Park 濯龍園²⁷ and included the setting up of a floral canopy and the performance of music that was usually reserved for the sacrifices to Heaven (*jiao tian* 郊天). Mizuno Seiichi surmises that considering that it was customary to place flowered canopies over the seats of noble personages—as can be gathered from stone reliefs and mirrors from the second and third century CE—that the canopy erected by Emperor Huan must have been of the same type, and further suggests that the small bronze Buddha under a bronze canopy unearthed in Beisong, Shijiazhuang in Hebei Province can be taken as a rather close representation.

As Mizuno has pointed out there are almost no descriptions of either the construction of temples or the making of images. There is, however, a notice of the building of a Buddhist shrine at Xuzhou 徐州²⁸ around 190 CE by Emperor Xian of the Eastern Han. The shrine seems to have been a multi-story wooden pagoda surrounded by a corridor, where a gilded Buddha dressed in brocade was placed. He also indicates that “Chang Yen 張晏 of the state of Wei, in writing a few decades later, mentions in a gloss on the term ‘golden man’ in the *Han Shu* ch. 55 that Buddhists worship gilt-bronze images, while Sun Hao 孫皓 (264-280 A.D.) of the state of Wu also notes in his *Kan-ying-t’an* 感應談 that standing gilt-bronze images were worshipped by the Buddhists.”²⁹

²⁷ Yi-t’ung Wang translates it as park (see Yang Hsüan-chih, 1984, p. 161 n.236) but, he also notes that, according to Rafe de Crespigny the Zhuolong was a palace (not a park) built by Emperor Huan to house his increasing number of concubines. See also de Crespigny, 1975, p. 21 n.28.

²⁸ Xuzhou is the modern name of Pengcheng in Jiangsu.

²⁹ Mizuno 1960, 8-9. It is worth of notice that while Sun indicates that the bronze images were standing ones, the representations on the *duisuguan* in the Wu area are in a sitting position.

Fan Ye 范曄 (the compiler of the *Hou Han shu*) also tells us that: "...Emperor Huan [r. 147-168] in his fondness for the supernatural, frequently sacrificed to Fou-t'u and Lao-tzu, and [even] among commoners there were some who venerated [the Buddha], later growing into ever larger numbers" (*Hou Han Shu* 88.78).³⁰ To what extent these texts reflect the authors' idiosyncrasy is a question that will have to remain a matter of contention. As an interesting illustration of how an author can insert his veiled criticism, Édouard Chavannes notes how Fan Ye may have maliciously referred to the peoples of the West (戎 *rong*) with terms commonly used to refer to the Northern and Eastern Tribes 狄 *di* and yi 夷, that were traditionally considered inferior. This leads him to suspect that:

In qualifying the homeland of Buddhism, that is actually the country of the Rong (Jong), as the country of the Yi and Di (Ti), there may more or less be a malicious application (of these terms), that by its insolence was the revenge of the orthodoxy against the foreign religion. (Chavannes, 1906, pp. 386-387 n.2)³¹

Another important aspect is the pairing of the Buddha and Huanglao.³² We know with certainty that the deification of Laozi took place before 165 thanks to the inscription (Laozi ming 老子銘) by the court official Bian Shao 邊韶 which purports to explain the reasons for Han emperor Huan's sacrifices to Laozi performed both in Laozi's birthplace and at the imperial palace in Luoyang. The inscription presents Laozi in a threefold manner: as a historical character who attains immortality, as the central deity of the cosmos, and as personification of the Dao.

³⁰ Cited in Tsukamoto 1985 I, 476 n. 4

³¹ "A qualifier la patrie du bouddhisme, bien qu'en fait pays de Jong, de terre de Yi et de Ti, on y sous-entendait peut-être plus ou moins une application malicieuse qui, par son insolence, était la revanche de l'orthodoxie contre la religion étrangère."

³² I deal with this issue in more detail in the section of Laozi.

Like the Buddha, Laozi also “joins the radiance of the Sun and the Moon,” (Kohn 2008, 621) and perhaps echoing emperor Ming’s dream, emperor Huan is also said to have seen Laozi in a dream which motivated him to make sacrifices to the sage. As has been noted above, the similarities between the two deities are more than incidental. Furthermore, Livia Kohn (1998) has argued that following the introduction of Buddhism in China, “the divinity of the Buddha was also described in terms of the deified Laozi, as a god who underwent transformations, reappeared in different periods of history, had multiple bodies, and was one with the cosmic power of the Dao” (p. 116).

Although I agree with Kohn’s statement to the effect that “the divinity of the Buddha was also described in terms of the deified Laozi” I find it difficult to agree with her corollary that: “Laozi, the cultic deity of late Han movements, thus became the model on which the early Chinese understanding of the Buddha was based” (Kohn, 1998, p. 116). I beg to dissent based on the generally accepted chronology of available texts, which makes it difficult if not impossible to determine which description circulated first. Furthermore, the deification of Laozi may have been a response to the existence of a Buddhist deity, as well as its iconic representation. In other words, they may have each served to the development of the hagiography of the other in a dialectical manner.

Just as Christine Mollier (2008) has argued based on substantial textual evidence that Buddhism and Daoism “contributed to shaping one another in many ways” (p. 1) in the medieval period, would it not be similarly possible to argue that the presence of Buddhists in various areas stimulated the development of organized Daoism, especially considering that this would only take place in the second century of the common era? Furthermore, for the period Mollier deals with, there already was, as she claims, a clear sense of identity of both groups, and acute

competition to gain adepts. Kohn (1998) also considers that “[i]n the early middle ages, Lord Lao first exerted a hagiographic influence on the Buddha, who was seen as a foreign version of the Chinese sage and was cast in the image of Lord Lao, so that the two central gods mutually enhanced each other’s position and myth” (p. 115).

2.2.3 Pengcheng 彭城(modern-day Jiangsu area)

We find in the southeast two figures that seem to have practiced some form of worship of the Buddha. First, the son of an emperor who is said to have entertained Buddhist monks and laypeople, and to have sacrificed to the Buddha. And, some 130 years later a warlord, who the histories castigate as an opportunist who erected a Buddhist temple (or pagoda) to house a bronze semblance of the Buddha in order to attract people to his cause. It is remarkable that these two figures, Prince Liu Ying and Ze Rong, were considered rebels against the central empire.

2.2.3.1 The story of Liu Ying, King of Chu (65 CE)

If the story of Emperor Ming’s dream bears the marks of a legend, the account of the practices of King Ying is generally accepted as historically reliable and thus allows us to establish year 65 CE as the *terminus ante quem* contacts with Buddhists started to take place, at least in the Jiangsu area. The connection with some form of Buddhist activity is mentioned in passing. Liu Ying 劉英 was one of the sons of emperor Guang Wu 光武 (25-58 CE), and a younger brother of the aforementioned emperor Ming. He was first enfeoffed as duke of Chu and

later in 41 CE as king. The kingdom comprised the southern part of Shandong and the northern part of Jiangsu.³³

The capital was Pengcheng 彭城 (present day Xuzhou 徐州), a flourishing center of commerce that was at the eastern crossroads of the Silk Road. Ying lived in this city from 52 to 71 CE, and from an imperial record we can deduce that there was some sort of Buddhist community under his protection, although it may be an exaggeration to say that this was a large community.

The king of Ch'u recites the subtle words of Huang-lao, and respectfully performs the gentle sacrifices to the Buddha. After three months of purification and fasting, he has made a solemn covenant (or: a vow 誓) with the spirits. What dislike or suspicion (from Our part) could there be, that he must repent (of his sins)? Let (the silk that he sent for) redemption be sent back, in order thereby to contribute to the lavish entertainment of the *upāsakas* (*i-p'u-sai* 伊蒲塞) and *śramanas* (*sang-men* 桑門).³⁴

Liu Ying had sent thirty pieces of yellow and white silk to redeem the punishment he seemed to have assumed to deserve after emperor Ming's decree in 65 CE to the effect that "all those who had committed crimes warranting death penalty were to be given an opportunity to redeem their punishment" (Zürcher 1972, 27).

³³ As we will see below a large number of *duisuguan* bearing the Buddha image have been found in this area.

³⁴ 楚王誦黃老之微言，尚浮屠之仁祠，潔齋三月，與神為誓，何嫌何疑，當有悔吝？其還贖，以助伊蒲塞桑門之。 *Hou Hanshu* 42, p. 1428. Translated by Zürcher (1972, p. 27).

Of relevance for us is the approving tone of the edict,³⁵ and the fact that in conjunction with the recitation of the words of Huanglao he performed sacrifices to the Buddha. In my view, it is important to highlight that while the Buddha was already considered a deity here (thus, sacrifices could be performed to him, “尚浮屠之仁祠”), no mention is made of sacrifices to Huanglao (rather we learn that the king recites Huanglao’s words, 楚王誦黃老之微言). Also, the edict qualifies the sacrifices as “gentle” or humane 仁, which probably implies some knowledge that these sacrifices did not entail any killing of animals.

Also of relevance is the fact that he must have had a noticeable enough number of monks and Buddhist laypeople in his court already around the year 65 CE. It would probably be an overstatement to conclude from here that he was either a Daoist, a Buddhist, or even both. The records do not give us further insight into his practices to extract any definite conclusions.³⁶ But it certainly attests to the presence of a Buddhist community in an area that the *Hou Hanshu* (112) describes as one of the centers of Daoism, the same area that would see the birth of the rise of the Yellow Turban rebellion that broke out in 184 CE. In this connection, it is important to note that we will find Huanglao and Buddha mentioned together in several occasions. The vast majority of

³⁵ Paul Demiéville (1986) also observes that “the indulgence of the emperor indicates that the cult of the Buddha was kindly regarded even at the capital, Lo-yang, where it was associated with that of Huang-Lao” (p. 822).

³⁶ Additionally, we know that royalty were in the habit of keeping in their courts people who professed different philosophical ideas to hold debates. A case in point was Liu An, the King of Huainan under whose patronage the eclectic *Huainanzi* was composed some time before 139 BCE. Interestingly enough, he also was accused of treason and like Liu Ying took his own life.

scholars have followed the *Hou Hanshu* (1) in explaining that Huanglao actually refers to the Yellow Emperor and Laozi.³⁷

The discussion about Huanglao vis-à-vis Laozi in this period has not been settled and deserves an in-depth treatment that is not justified within the context of the present work. But a couple of points are relevant to the issues under discussion: the assemblage of two deities within one is documented in other cases. Thus, this was a mechanism of creation, or rather of modification of deities. Who had the capacity to effect such assemblages, and whether at the official level it needed to be sanctioned by the emperor or not is an open question. If, on the other hand, Huanglao indeed referred to Huanglao jun (the divinized Laozi) as claimed by Maspero and others, then the fact that the same deity would be worshiped at imperial palace and serve as the main deity of a millenarian popular movement also points to an interesting dynamic in which the representation of deities was clearly fluid, and the pantheon was quite malleable. In the *Hou Han shu*, in the section on the Western Regions, we also find: "...beginning with Ying of Ch'u, for the first time conducted with ceremonies the sacrifices having to do with maigre fare and the monastic code, while emperor Huan [r. 147-168] also cultivated the adornments of the flower-bedecked canopies. No doubt this is because the subtle meaning was not interpreted [into Chinese], while the gods were merely..." (*Hou Hanshu* 88). Unfortunately, as Tsukamoto notes, the text is corrupt³⁸ and we are left wondering what statement the author was making but given

³⁷ However, Henri Maspero (1934) has argued that in this period Huanglao actually refers to the divinized Laozi, Huang Lao Jun 黃老君, that a century later would become the main deity of the Yellow Turbans, and this would be the same deity to whom emperor Huan too, just twenty years before their revolt, had worshipped in the palace in 166 CE (p. 90, n.1).

³⁸ Tsukamoto 1985, I, 479 n. k.

the tone of the first part it seems logical that the author is criticizing the practices of both Ying and Huan as merely ceremonial without a real understanding of the teachings.

To Zürcher's mind: "To Liu Ying and the Chinese devotees at his court the 'Buddhist' ceremonies of fasting and sacrifice were probably no more than a variation of existing Taoist practices; this peculiar mixture of Buddhist and Taoist elements remains characteristic of Han Buddhism as a whole" (Zürcher 1972, 27). This generalization remains widely accepted.

2.2.3.2 Ze Rong's pagoda

The very first pagoda (or temple)³⁹ we have a record of was built in modern-day Yangzhou at the end of the Han dynasty (around 194 CE) by Ze Rong 笮融, a minor warlord, who, according to the *Hou Hanshu* 后汉书 (Book of the Latter Han), was in charge of the transportation of grain to the prefectures of Guangling, Xiabei and Pengcheng and profited by cutting it off. We find it described both in this book and in the *Sanguo zhi* 三国志 (Records of the three kingdoms). The *Book of the Latter Han* also informs us that every time the Buddha was bathed, large amounts of food and drink were always served and mats were spread out on the road for the 10,000 people who attended the ceremony.⁴⁰ This was a period of great disarray; the Latter Han was about to collapse, the infamous Cao Cao 曹操, who would play such an fundamental role in the Three Kingdoms period, was steadily rising to power and imperial troops

³⁹ Whether this building was a temple or a pagoda has been a matter of some contention partly because it was described in the *Hou Hanshu* 90 as *futusi* 浮屠寺, which may mean either one. The description, however, inclines me to agree with Mizuno and Nagahiro (1952-1956 Vol. XI, 78, cited in Rhie 1990, 20) that this was a pagoda.

⁴⁰ 每浴佛，輒多設飲飯，布席於路，其有就食及觀者且萬餘人 (*Hou Hanshu* 90).

tried to control the southern regions. The description in Hou Hanshu 73 clearly depicts this state of disorder:

When Ts'ao Ts'ao⁴¹ 曹操 routed [T'ao] Ch'ien, the Hsü [-chou] region was not peaceful. [Tse] Jung⁴² had his eyes on the wealth of Kuang-ling. Then taking advantage of the wine and merrymaking (i.e., at the banquet), he killed Yü and let his army loose to ravage and loot. Afterwards [Tse Jung] crossed the Yangtse [River], and fled south to Yü-chan 豫章, [where] he killed the commander [...] and took over the city (ch'eng). Later [Tse Jung] was destroyed by the Yang-chou 揚州 censor [...]. [Tse Jung] went into the mountains and was killed by [some] person."⁴³

In addition to the textual reference to Ze Rong's pagoda, it has been suggested that it must have closely resembled the representation in a tile in Maduizi 马堆子 (Sichuan).⁴⁴ The pagoda in this tile has a rather high platform base, three stories, each divided by four columns and a Chinese style roof. The representation in this tile generally matches the description we find in the *Book of the Latter Han* 后汉书 and the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三国志 except that according to the latter the hasta consisted of nine plates (*chattrā*) instead of the three that appear in the tile. According to these texts the temple had a capacity for 3,000 people, and every time the Buddha was bathed Zuo Rong would not only give out wine and food to the 10,000 people who went to partake in the ceremony but would also incite participants to accept the religion.

⁴¹ Cao Cao.

⁴² Ze Rong.

⁴³ Translated by Rhie (1999, pp. 19-20).

⁴⁴ Rhie 1999, 20.

[H]e erected a large Buddhist temple. From bronze he had a human (effigy) made, the body of which was gilded and dressed in silk and brocade. (At the top of the building) nine layers of bronze scales were suspended, and below there was a building of several storeys with covered ways, which could contain more than three thousand people, who all studied and read Buddhist scriptures. He ordered the Buddhist devotees (好佛者) from the region (under his supervision) and from the adjacent prefectures to listen and to accept the doctrine (受道). Those people he exempted from the other statute labour duties in order to attract them. Those who on account of this from near and afar came to (the monastery) numbered more than five thousand. Whenever there was (the ceremony of) 'bathing the Buddha' (浴佛), he had always great quantities of wine (*sic!*) and food set out for distribution, and mats were spread along the roads over a distance of several tens of *li*. (On these occasions) some ten thousand people came to enjoy the spectacle and the food. The expenses (of such ceremony) amounted to many millions (of cash).⁴⁵

If the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* is correct in its description of the *hasta* as having nine chattra, this is a very important detail in this period where self-appointed kings were not scarce. Not only was nine the number associated with the Chinese emperor, but we also know that the regular number of *chattra*, was only three or five. This could mean that this was a conscious attempt to usurp or, at least, coopt imperial symbolism. But even if this datum is not correct, or the numbers of people attending are exaggerated, and despite the fact that we cannot know whether the construction of this building, the performance of massive rituals and the active

⁴⁵ *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Sanguozhi 三國志 Wu Zhi 4.515b. Translated by Zürcher (1972, p. 28).

proselytizing were a matter of faith and merit, we do know that they were also clearly a matter of display and presence of the patron's power, wealth and ambitions.

Given the means by which Ze Rong raised money for these activities, the facts that wine was part of the ceremony, that he assassinated for gain, and that the ulterior motive behind the promotion of the Buddha seems to have been to rally troops, it is not surprising that Zuo Rong would never become an honored patron of Buddhism. Indeed, as Zürcher has noted, he is practically never referred to in Buddhist sources. On the contrary he would be exploited as an example of immorality coupled with Buddhist devotion in an anti-Buddhist treatise of the fourth century, the *Zhengwu lun* 正誣論.⁴⁶

We do not know whether or to what extent this “Buddhism” was related to King Liu Ying's practices, as the histories are silent about the hundred years that separate him from Ze Rong. Zürcher (1972), however, has reasoned that the Buddhist community related to Liu probably survived even after his removal as we find in the same region the “prosperous Buddhist community” related to Ze (p. 27). This is quite plausible and this would be an indication that ‘Buddhism’ was not seen as playing a part in the seditious activities of Liu Ying. However, we can only conjecture to what extent either of these figures saw in Buddhism an instrument to achieve their political goals or how their unfortunate fates would impact the perception of the practices they promoted or the groups they had sponsored. But even if these were two isolated developments in the same area what is remarkable is that the only two figures associated to some form of Buddhist practice in Pengcheng of whom the histories have left notice had political ambitions that were not in line with those of the central government.

⁴⁶ See Zürcher, 1972, p. 28.

2.2.4 Pencheng and Chu 楚

It is also worth mentioning that this was not the first time Pengcheng had been the site of rebellious activities. This is not at all surprising since this city was part of the former Chu kingdom/state 楚 that had remained the most powerful among the Warring kingdoms defeated by the founder of the Qin dynasty 秦朝 (221-206 CE). Indeed Pengcheng was the site of the battle in which the Chu general Xiangyu 項羽 initially defeated Liu Bang 劉邦—who would later inaugurate the Han dynasty. Xiangyu made Pengcheng the capital of the western Chu kingdom and declared himself king. Eventually Liu Bang defeated Xiangyu but rather than attempting to subjugate Chu by force as the emperor of the vanquished Qin had, he instituted a policy of respect for its remarkably distinct culture. Much of the Chu area would form part of the Eastern Wu kingdom, one of the three contending powers in the Three Kingdom period (220-280 CE) that followed the fall of the Han.

The competition between, what we could broadly designate as, the southern and the northern states goes much far earlier in history, and it is relevant inasmuch as the areas where most of the artifacts bearing Buddha figures have been found correspond to the southern states. The *Shiji* records that in 703 BCE Xiong Tong 熊通 (r. 740-690 CE) assumed the title of king (王) of Chu, an act that has long been interpreted as a radical defiance of the king of Zhou.⁴⁷ Even if this was not the initial intent we know from bronze inscriptions from the mid-sixth century BCE onward that “the use of the royal title by the Chu ruler does seem to connote a

⁴⁷ Lothar von Falkenhausen (1999 p. 516) reasons that the change in designation may have owed to a problem of conventions rather than an assertion of power at this stage.

claim to exclusive, quasi-numinous authority, both over his own subjects and over the rulers of allied polities” (Falkenhausen, 1999, p. 517). In the Warring States period (481-221 BCE), although under the nominal power of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, Chu had continued to expand and grow in power to the point that it would not be subdued by the Qin dynasty.

Ethnically and culturally the southern areas differed markedly from the northern states, and although the official records depict southerners as generally barbaric and in need of being civilized, archaeological finds abundantly demonstrate what literary sources hardly mentioned, i.e. that there were important cultural exchanges taking place between the Zhou and non-Zhou peoples already in the Spring and Autumn period (770-481 BCE) and the Warring States.⁴⁸

My intention in including this very brief historical reference is not to try to suggest some kind of political continuity from the Zhou period to the Han but simply to underline the fact that the areas south of the Han 漢 River (where we find modern-day Hunan, Zhejiang and Jiangsu) were quite powerful and far from submissive. They were not easily conquered and even when they were, they consistently struggled to maintain a degree of autonomy from the Central Plains, and when the opportunity arose they rebelled and attempted to prevail over competing states. We will see these dynamics at play once again towards the end of the Eastern Han, when the empire is one more time divided into three great kingdoms. Pencheng will also be the center of the Yellow Turban rebellion in 184 CE, the movement inspired by the Daoist utopia of the Great Peace, Taiping 太平.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cf. Cho-yun Hsu 1999, pp. 565-570.

⁴⁹ As was the Wudoumidao 五斗米道 rebellion in Sichuan.

2.3 “BUDDHISM” AS “DAOISM” AND THE BUDDHA AS LAOZI

One of the pivotal notions of the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in China is that Buddhism not only borrowed copiously from Daoism but was initially seen as a branch of the native religion. Similarly, according to it, the Buddha was seen as either a manifestation of Laozi or as a Daoist immortal.⁵⁰ Such views have a very long history and have continued to be espoused by a large number of scholars. This issue is central to this dissertation because there has been a tendency to interpret the funerary Buddha-figures as a confirmation, or at the very least, in terms of this dynamic (of Buddhism borrowing from Daoism).

It is undeniable that in the earliest reliable allusions the Buddha is mentioned alongside Huanglao (or Laozi). Added to the fact that Xiang Kai’s memorial contains the first mention of the *huahu* legend, according to which “Laozi has gone into the region of the barbarians and (there) has become the Buddha” (cited in Zürcher, 1972, p. 37) this had led to the logical conclusion that Buddha was initially understood—or rather, misunderstood—as Laozi.

However, taking this hypothesis as a template to interpret new data may owe more to the deference to tradition than to what is granted by the sources themselves. As Robert Sharf (2002) has keenly observed with regards to Wu Hung’s conclusion that the earliest Buddhist motifs should be considered as the earliest examples of Daoist art, “the inertia of well-ingrained scholarly habit is reflected in the need, in the face of singular and indeterminate complexity, to resort to convenient markers of dubious historical or descriptive value” (p. 22).

In addition to the fact that the Buddha is mentioned alongside Huanglao/Laozi in the first

⁵⁰ The latter assumption has more recently served to shape or at least inspire one of the boldest interpretations of the funerary Buddha-figure as the tangible representation of Laozi as we will see in the next chapter.

recorded allusions, there was a long line of elaboration of this theme. Indeed, we find that the *huahu* 化胡 (conversion of the barbarians) theory or legend that explained the Buddha as a manifestation of Laozi. The conflation of Buddhism and Daoism has also found stark support on what has long been understood as the practice of *geyi* 格義 (commonly translated as matching concepts).

2.3.1 The *huahu* 化胡 legend

After having briefly reviewed some of the earliest allusions to Buddhism, it is clear that the presumed identity of the Buddha and Laozi is not without textual basis. As we have seen, it has often been noted that in the earliest reliable allusions they are mentioned alongside. Furthermore, the fact that Xiang Kai's memorial contains the first mention of the *huahu* legend, according to which "Laozi has gone into the region of the barbarians and (there) has become the Buddha"⁵¹ seems to provide confirmation of such perceived identity.

But the question that remains is how widespread the notion that the Buddha was a manifestation of Laozi or the *huahu* legend (or theory) were. In my view, it is quite problematic to assume that this was the way the Buddha was commonly understood simply because that is all the information the earliest extant written sources gave us. It is well-known that that the official histories were biased and were interested in rather specific issues, and, clearly, they were written and read by a minuscule social group. The statements expressed in this memorial should be taken with even more restraint as they may very well represent the rationalization of Daoist scholars.

⁵¹ Cited in Zürcher 1972, 37.

Thus it is even more problematic to use those sources to explain the “acceptance” of the Buddha. Such an argument is perhaps epitomized by Ch’en’s notion that it was the *huahu* legend that accounts for the fact that the Chinese could accept a foreign deity:

Yet how was it that the Chinese could have accepted a foreign deity from a foreign country and worshiped it as equal with Huang-Lao? The explanation for this is to be sought in a remarkable doctrine developed by the Taoists—that of *hua-hu*, the conversion of the barbarians. According to this doctrine, Lao-tzu, after disappearing in the west, went all the way to India, where he converted the barbarians and became the Buddha. Therefore the founders of Buddhism and Taoism were one and the same person, for the Buddha was but an incarnation of Lao-Tzu. Since the two religions originated from the same source, there was no difference between them, so that it was quite proper for the deities Buddha and Huang-Lao to be worshipped on the same altar (Ch’en, 1964, p. 50).

The truth of the matter is that although we know that the *huahu* legend (or doctrine, as Ch’en calls it) would be used by Daoist apologetes to criticize Buddhism since the early fourth century, we do not know how or in what circles it originated. What is more, it is Xiang Kai who alludes to it in order to further criticize emperor Huan’s moral misdemeanor. He states “There are some who say that Lao-tzu went among the barbarians and became the Buddha,” to then use two stories about the Buddha—that he did not sleep three nights under the same mulberry tree and rejected the beautiful girls offered by a heavenly spirit—to denounce the emperor specifically on account of his attachment to worldly affairs and his like for “licentious girls and

seductive women” as well as “fine food and splendid wine.” He concludes, “How can you expect to equal Huang-Lao?”⁵²

It seems plausible to interpret the allusion to Laozi’s transformation into the Buddha as a strategy to use a story of the Buddha’s life that was probably well-known in certain circles to be able to criticize emperor Huan specifically on account of his infamous lustful behavior. But even if this hypothesis were wrong, the fact that Xiang Kai introduces the comment by stating, “There are some who say” (或言) already gives us an indication that this was not a general or accepted notion. Thus, we do not need to assume that emperor Huan performed these joint sacrifices because of the presumed identity of both deities or even that he thought them identical.

Quite plausibly rather than taking the acceptance of the Buddha as a consequence of the *huahu* legend as an explanation, we can see it as a rationalization of what was seen as an unprecedented phenomenon (i.e. the adoption of a foreign deity) that was taking place. In other words, there is nothing in this text that leads to unequivocally conclude as Ch’en does that the presumed identity of Laozi and the Buddha made it “quite proper for the deities Buddha and Huang-Lao to be worshipped on the same altar” (Ch’en, 1964, p. 50).

To illustrate the resilience of the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in China and the notion that the Buddha’s image was formed in terms of Laozi’s, let me cite one of the most prominent scholars of Chinese religions:

⁵² All quotes in this paragraph are taken from de Crespigny’s annotated translation (1976, pp. 29-30). The whole text reads: 又聞宮中立黃老、浮屠之祠。此道清虛，貴尚無為，好生惡殺，省慾去奢。今陛下嗜欲不去，殺罰過理，既乖其道，豈獲其祚哉！或言老子入夷狄為浮屠。浮屠不三宿桑下，不欲久生恩愛，精之至也。天神遺以好女，浮屠曰：「此但革囊盛血。」遂不眄之。其守一如此，乃能成道。今陛下媵女豔婦，極天下之麗，甘肥飲美，單天下之味，柰何欲如黃老乎？(*Hou Hanshu* 30B, pp. 1082-1083).

Buddhism, as is generally known, was first officially introduced to China in the first century C.E., when it was understood to be a variant of Daoism. At that time, the divinity of the Buddha was also described in terms of the deified Laozi, as a god who underwent transformation, reappeared in different periods of history, had multiple bodies, and was with the cosmic power of the Dao. Laozi, the cultic deity of late Han movements, thus became the model on which the early Chinese understanding of the Buddha was based, as may be seen in several passages found among early translations and commentaries on Buddhist texts (Kohn, 1998, pp. 115-116).

Kohn, following Yoshioka Yoshitoyo's selection of related texts, notes a number of similarities:

The Buddha can rise up into the air and undergo many transformations...He may turn into stone and iron, or appear as gold and diamonds; he may show himself on the wall of a house or a city or again appear on the sheer cliff of a high mountain. Lacking solidity, he passes through all, he emerges from and dives deep into the earth. He is like flowing water, unstable and without firm shape...

Transforming his body, he reaches the Brahma heavens, sitting, lying, and walking freely through empty air, or again appearing as flames and smoke." (Kohn, 1998, p. 115)⁵³

⁵³ T. 149, 2.874-75. Cited and translated in Kohn, 1998, p. 116. This is a passage from the A'nan tongxue jing 阿難同學經 (Sutra of the disciple Ananda) translated by An Shigao 安世高 who was a native from Parthia and is the first translator known to us from the historical record. He is said to have arrived in Luoyang in the second half of the 2nd century, during the reign of emperor Huan (r. 147-168 CE). He stayed there for more than twenty years dedicated to the translation of Buddhist scriptures. Traditionally he is said to have traveled to the south towards the end of emperor Ling's reign (r. 168-189). There is, however, no complete agreement about the facticity of this trip: See Zürcher, 1972, pp. 30-33 and Nattier, 2008, pp. 38-39.

Kohn (1998) points out that “[t]his description not only uses the term ‘transformation’ commonly applied to Laozi but also shows the Buddha as a deity without definite form, who can appear and disappear at will and pass through air and stone. Resembling the Dao, he is like flowing water; like Daoist immortals, he can walk on air, is invulnerable to fire and water, and controls the elements of the world” (p. 116). We certainly find here a remarkable number of similarities, and were it not for the mention of the Brahma heavens without a context we would not know if this were a description of Laozi or the Buddha. Does this, however, firmly support the notion that “the divinity of the Buddha was also described in terms of the deified Laozi”?

As Demiéville (1986, 819) noted, the opposite process of borrowing is also conceivable, “the idea of Lao-tzu’s apparitional transformations (*pien-hua*) might well have taken their inspiration from the metamorphic bodies (*hua-shen, nirmāna-kaya*) of the Buddha”. Although he also acknowledged that due to the uncertainty in the dating of sources it is difficult to decide if this hypothesis is accurate, and most specialists⁵⁴ doubt that any borrowing from Buddhism took place, his own position was that “it would be surprising if the great crowds of Taoist believers had had no contact whatsoever with the large numbers of Buddhist converts described to us elsewhere as existing in 194 in the northeast of the land of Ch’u, at P’eng-ch’eng in the heart of the Yellow Turban country. These Buddhists worshipped both Buddha and Huang-lao. In any case, the Taoist movements must have prepared large numbers of Chinese to accept and uphold a religious community independent of the state such as the Buddhist sangha.”

Regardless of whether we choose to give precedence to one or the other, the main conclusion scholars have drawn is that there was a high degree of identification between the Buddha and Laozi (and, more generally between Buddhism and Daoism). As in the case of the

⁵⁴ He refers specifically to Stein, Ōfuchi Ninji and Seidel. See Demiéville 1986, 819 n. 30.

huahu legend, the questions that remain are whether this identification explains the acceptance of “a foreign deity from a foreign country” and the fact that the Buddha was worshipped “as equal with Huang-Lao” (Ch’en 1964, 50), and whether this identification was common among people or only among certain groups.

Furthermore, it is important to note also that most of the characteristics of Daoist immortals are quite similar to those of the advanced practitioner of Buddhist meditation. A common description found in several places in the Digha Nikaya speaks of such a person as having supranormal powers:

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to the modes of supranormal powers. He wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun and moon, so mighty and powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds. Just as a skilled potter or his assistant could craft from well-prepared clay whatever kind of pottery vessel he likes, or as a skilled ivory-carver or his assistant could craft from well-prepared ivory any kind of ivory-work he likes, or as a skilled goldsmith or his assistant could craft from well-prepared gold any kind of gold article he likes; in the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to the modes of supranormal

powers... He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds” (Long Discourses (Digha Nikaya) D I 53.⁵⁵

Victor Mair has also noted that the Daoist immortals resemble the “ancient Indian ascetics and holy men known as *r̥ṣi* (rishi) who possessed similar traits” (Mair 1994, 376). With the available evidence we cannot argue for a case of exchange in which Chinese borrowed from Indians, or the other way around. Indeed, the question of who borrowed from whom may not be that productive; the Digha Nikaya was collected around 400 BCE and the description of Daoist immortals can be found in texts as early as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 dated to around the third century CE. What is more, the description of superhuman powers may not be as closely tied to cultural boundaries.

Despite these counter-arguments the resilience of the claim that Laozi served as the model on which the early Chinese understanding of the Buddha was based is truly remarkable. It certainly fits well with the more general trope that initially Buddhism borrowed extensively from Daoism. We may perhaps contend that it owes its force as much to the scant textual sources as to the venerable tradition that stands behind it. To mention but one example, the very prominent and highly authoritative Chinese scholar Tang Yong Tong 湯用彤 argued in his seminal book *Buddhist history in the Han Wei Liang-Jin Northern and Southern dynasties* that the geographic location of King Ying, Zerong and Xiangkai—that was quite close to where Daoism originated—should lead us to conclude that Buddhism was practiced together with Huanglao Daoism. Although we could logically equally well argue for an inverse causal order (i.e. that Daoist movements were inspired by the presence of Buddhist communities) there has been a

⁵⁵ I would like to thank Bhante Pematana Soorakulame for helping me find a comparable citation, and, for generously helping me navigate through the vast Buddhist literature.

tenacious insistence that initially there was one direction in the process of cultural transfer (Buddhism borrowed from Daoism),⁵⁶ may this not perhaps obey more to ideological than historical reasons?

One of the problems inherent in this model is the question of what we should understand by Daoism at this stage. In the words of one of the most prominent scholars of Daoism, the late Isabelle Robinet, Daoism “took shape only gradually, during a slow gestation that was actually a progressive integration of various lines of thought. No precise date can be set for its birth and the integration of outside elements into the religion has never ceased. If we add to this the enrichment of Taoism throughout its history with new revelations or new inspirations we can see how open a religion it is, constantly progressing and evolving, and how difficult it is not only to date its first appearance but also to define its boundaries” (Robinet 1997, 1).

Such a depiction of Daoism does not seem to tally with the model of Daoism presented above. To start with, the chronology is problematic. Unless we mean by Daoism what has traditionally been called “philosophical Daoism”⁵⁷ or the practices of the *fangshi* 方士 (magicians, shamans). Seidel, on her side, has taken a much more cautious position as she concluded that the state of knowledge did not allow for a final solution to this issue. And probably the discussion, without further evidence, will remain moot. It seems safer to assume, however, in view of the available data, that the “borrowing” was not unidirectional. Indeed

⁵⁶ It must be noted that this model is applied basically to the first two centuries of contact. It has long been acknowledged that the inverse process –even if this impact was considered superficial and formal- took place from the fourth century onwards when competition was at the heart of the relationship between the exponents of the two religions. See for instance Robinet, 2004, pp. 412-501.

⁵⁷ Important scholars have distanced themselves from this traditional distinction between philosophical and religious Daoism. See, for instance, Robinet, 1997 and Kohn, 2000.

representatives of both sides continued to borrow from the other to the point of blatant plagiarism. At this stage, as later, however, the borrowing was not indiscriminate. Robinet has noted, for instance, how in the third century, while Daoists were appropriating parts of the Buddhist cosmology (the heavens, hells and so forth), and the Buddhists were criticizing them for doing so, some Buddhists were simultaneously appropriating and even plagiarizing from Daoist texts that dealt with incantations, and magical potions.⁵⁸

There seems to have been a drive in the various religious groups to supplement what they saw they were lacking from each other's repertoires. This, of course, did not prevent the rise of discourses of authenticity to validate the position of one group or the other. In fact, in the third century some Daoist practitioners were already claiming their doctrine as "*the* religion of the Chinese people" and were distinguishing themselves "from the restricted imperial cult, the assorted practices of popular religion, and the imported religion of Buddhism" (Bokenkamp 1997, xiii). As Bokenkamp has indicated from the second through the fifth century the three major scriptural traditions of Daoism—the Celestial Masters, the Shangqing (Upper Clarity), and the Lingbao (Numinous Gem)—were taking shape through codification of doctrines, creation of rituals, meditations, practices, along with the establishment of a professional priesthood with temples for communal and private worship.⁵⁹

At the imperial level the struggle for legitimation among Buddhists and scholars of Daoist leanings is powerfully expressed in the *huahu* literature of the fourth century and onwards. We see in those debates the urgency to establish a clear-cut identity through claims of authenticity, chronological precedence, differentiation and anti-syncretic claims. What we do not

⁵⁸ Robinet, 1984, Vol. 2, pp. 97-100.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bokenkamp, 1997, p. xiii.

know is how the imperial debates or the extant textual sources of the various groups reflect what was actually taking place on the ground. Similarly, we cannot know to what extent the content of translated sutras was known to wider sectors of the population beyond the educated elite.

It is for this reason that I take issue with the approach taken by Wu Hung in his seminal “Buddhist elements in early Chinese art (2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.). In it he states:

“Examining the fragmentary descriptions of the Buddha recorded in early texts, we see that people had a rather uniform understanding of the formal characteristics of the Buddha” (Wu 1986, 264). Referring to *The Sutra in forty-two sections* 四十二章經, the *Li huo lun* 理惑論 and the *Hou Han ji* 后汉纪, Wu concludes that these texts “show that in the time around the third century Buddha was generally believed to be an Indian god, who had an imposing physique, is golden in color, and has light emanating from his neck. Furthermore, he is believed to be capable of flight and transmutation, and therefore capable of helping people as had the ancient Chinese sages.” He explains that: “The immortals and perfect men of the School of Immortality can live forever, and are capable of flying and transmutation, while the sages of Confucianism help the world and the people. The ‘Buddha’, in turn, is a combination of the two. The *Sutra in Forty-two Sections* also states that those who obtained the way of Buddhism became arhats, who could fly and transmute themselves, could live forever, and could influence heaven and earth. Such a concept is almost identical with the Taoist ideal of practicing to become an immortal, and of ascending to heaven in broad daylight” (Wu, 1986, pp. 265-266).

The *Sutra in forty-two sections* is generally considered the first Buddhist scripture in Chinese language. Its legendary origin, however, has led to the questioning of its authenticity

and dating.⁶⁰ Even more debatable is the dating of the *Mouzi Lihuo lun* which Japanese Buddhistologist Tokiwa Daijō pushes to as late as the mid-fifth century.⁶¹ Even if we were to disregard the debates around the dating and authenticity, it would still be very problematic to use these texts as indicators of what the general understanding of the Buddha was. In fact, we have no way of knowing whether the content the *Sutra in forty-two sections* or the *Lihuo lun* were known to the general population, and we can be certain that the content of historical annals, such as the *Hou Han ji*, were not written with the general population in mind.

The notions that Wu compiles from these texts—immortality and succoring people—will be very useful for him to make one of the most important points he will argue for in his paper, namely, the interchangeability between the image of Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong, and the Buddha. Wu takes this interchangeability to indicate “that during the third century the Buddha not only occupied a place among the Taoist gods and the Confucian sages, but that he was also incorporated into indigenous cults” (Wu, 1986, pp. 268-269). Zürcher will take up some of Wu’s suggestions, making them all the more relevant to the issues under discussion. I will return to this point in the fourth chapter.

Could we not perhaps think in terms of a combination of processes and of elements that resonated in one way or another with various groups? Indeed, this early period seems to have been one of cooperation and mutual borrowing, where different groups impelled dynamism on the others. In other words, we need not assume that the struggle to define each religious group’s identity—through claims of authenticity, chronological precedence, differentiation and anti-

⁶⁰ See Zürcher, 1972, Vol. I, pp. 29-30, and Vol.II, p. 329 n. 61.

⁶¹ See Keenan, 1994, pp. 3-6 for a summary of the debate around the authenticity and dating of this text.

syncretic claims that are so clearly expressed in the *huahu* literature of the fourth century and onwards—was already rampant in the second and third centuries, or that the common people were necessarily interested in defining their practices in terms of one or other religion. Rather there was a common repertoire.⁶² For this reason, although many scholars believe that the image of the Buddha portrayed in the literature was heavily dependent on Laozi’s image, would it not be just as plausible to imagine that the divinization of Laozi was inspired by the presence of the Buddha images that some people venerated?

2.3.2 *Geyi* 格義

Another factor that has greatly contributed to the generalized impression that Buddhism was initially conflated with Daoism is the alleged dependence of Buddhist translations on Daoist terminology, specifically, on the technique of translation known as *geyi* 格義. *Geyi* is commonly understood to be a method of comparison and equation, and until quite recently the idea that this technique of “matching concepts” was fundamental in the process of introduction of Buddhism in China permeated the literature on this topic. However, two well-respected scholars, Jan Nattier and Victor Mair, have recently taken issue with this widespread assumption. Nattier has made in-depth studies of early Buddhist translation procedures and lately has attempted to show that the supposed borrowing from Daoism may not be so accurate after all. Mair (2010) has done exhaustive research on *geyi* and proved that what was a brief and insignificant episode (i.e. the

⁶² Jan Nattier also makes this point with regards to the lexical resources used in early translations.

See next section.

practice of *geyi*) has been “enshrined in modern scholarship as a cardinal principle of early Buddho-Daoist interactions” (p. 249).

Mair elucidates how *geyi* was historically understood and how later scholars transformed it into a central translation technique in the earliest phase of transmission and assimilation of Buddhism in China. The ubiquitous rendering in English is “matching concepts” or “matching meanings” a process that is putatively understood as pairing Sanskrit Buddhist terms with Sinitic Daoist terms. Mair contends that this understanding is a thoroughly modern construction. In order to demonstrate this he gathers all available references to *geyi* inside and outside the Buddhist canon, to then proceed to translate and annotate them in context.

His argument is very convincing: the references are extremely few and none of them grants the overblown position that *geyi* would later acquire in the scholarly imagination. To understand how this happened, Mair analyzes the process through which *geyi* was turned into an essential element of Chinese Buddhist historiography starting in the twentieth century. He forcibly demonstrates that *geyi* was in fact a hermeneutical method used only by a small number of Chinese teachers to try to deal with the overwhelming flood of stymieing numbered lists of categories, ideas and so forth (*shishu* 事數) by drawing from a variety of Chinese works, not exclusively Daoist. The experiment must not have gone well since it was repudiated by the next generation of Chinese Buddhist teachers under the leadership of Dao’an 道安 (312-385).⁶³

But then, what translation techniques were actually used? Nattier speaks, for instance, of “Chinese cultural calques” that are “translations that make no attempt to reflect the etymology of

⁶³ Cf. Mair, 2010.

the Indian term, but instead employ what was viewed as a suitable counterpart in Chinese.”⁶⁴ Among the terms she mentions we find *junzi* 君子, *zhenren* 真人, *taishan* 太山, *wuwei* 無為. As Mair comments: “By no means can all of these terms, even by the remotest stretch of the imagination, be characterized as ‘Daoist.’ Indeed, if one were pressed to denominate their intellectual-religious orientation, they may be classified as variously belonging to Confucian, Daoist, popular, and whimsical outlooks.” There is probably no better example for this than the case of “*wuwei*.”

Even *wuwei*, which *geyi* enthusiasts constantly evoke as one of their favorite examples of an early Buddhist borrowing of “Daoist” terminology, was certainly not restricted to Daoist texts, but was used more broadly by Confucians and others as well. There is no question that *nirvana/nibbāna* was occasionally rendered as *wuwei* in early Buddhist translations, yet there is no evidence that this was part of a systematic, conscious policy to appropriate Daoist terminology that was allegedly known as *geyi*. Furthermore, *wuwei* is used to render more than half-dozen different Sanskrit terms, and the negative *wu* is used at the beginning of more than two thousand words translated from Sanskrit. It would be ludicrous to insist that any Buddhist text that uses the terms *wu* or *wuwei* be branded as Daoistic simply because they also occur in Daoist texts. (Mair, 2010, p. 248)

In this sense, Nattier (2008) has also contended that An Shigao’s use of terms, such as, *de dao* 得道 “attain the dao” or *zhi wuwei* 致無為 to express the idea of the experience of nirvana “suggests that the expressions *dao* and *wuwei* were so pervasive in the Chinese language and culture at the time (and by no means specifically ‘Daoist,’ as has sometimes been suggested) that

⁶⁴ Cited in Mair, 2010, p. 247.

it would have been difficult to express the idea of an ultimate, unconditioned reality to a Chinese-speaking audience without using them.” In contrast, it is noteworthy that other terms as, for instance, “the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 spirits, Mt. Tai 太山 as a destination for the dead, and even the (especially Confucian) virtue of *ren* 仁 humaneness are entirely absent from An Shigao’s translations” (p. 40, n. 28).

And this is certainly the case for a large portion of the terminology used. We find translators struggling to find rough equivalences for terms that were clearly incommensurate but they did not draw exclusively from Daoist texts, they drew from the wider, larger, philosophical or otherwise, available linguistic repertoire. Much of it was shared by various schools of thought very possibly with varying interpretations or emphases, as is commonly the case.

How could then *geyi* evolve into the fundamental translation technique it is now believed to be? Mair (2010) traces the genealogy of modern scholars, starting with the much respected historian Chen Yinke through Tang Yong Tong, Tsukamoto, Wright, Ch’en and others, who effected the transformation of the once “obscure notion of *geyi*” into “the unjustifiably key term in Buddhism that it has become” (p. 241). The account is at once fascinating, enlightening and deeply disturbing. One sees *geyi* being transformed into a useful device to substantiate various claims and becoming “a cardinal principle of early Buddho-Daoist interactions” (p. 249). The consequence of such transformation is in no way trivial. On the contrary, as Mair concludes “the erroneous understanding of *geyi* distorts both the history of Buddhism and of Daoism individually, especially the former” (p. 250).

Mair goes one step further:

Although (according to the modern doctrine of *geyi*) it is commonly asserted that, when Buddhism arrived in China during the Eastern Han period, it instinctively turned to Daoism for

its technical terminology and other religious attributes, what actually transpired is more nearly just the opposite. Namely, Buddhism came to China as an already highly sophisticated religion with an extensive corpus of texts, an elaborate system of thought, complex institutional structures, and an advanced tradition of artistic representation. Conversely, it was at this very same time (around the second century CE) that Daoist religion began to take shape. Consequently, Daoism was in no position to serve as a model for the development of Buddhism in China. In other words, we may say that Daoism as a formal, organized religion with a body of texts, monastic rules and institutions, nascent iconography, and set of ritualized practice was to a large extent a response to the advent of Buddhism. (Mair, 2010, pp. 249-250)⁶⁵

Buddho-Daoist interactions constitute without doubt, as Mair puts it, “a large and daunting topic,” and one that “deserves to be worked out in much more detail, specificity, and accuracy than heretofore” (p. 250). I completely concur with Mair’s assessment, and, in fact, see the present dissertation as an effort in that direction, in the sense that it contributes to erode the pivotal notion of the initial assimilation of the Buddha in terms of Laozi (or another Daoist deity),⁶⁶ and inquires into the micro-processes whereby the Buddha figure was appropriated in China.

⁶⁵ I will return to the issue of precedence later when I discuss the funerary Buddha figures.

⁶⁶ My intention, however, is not to deny that “Daoism” must have provided some of the resources that could be used to render “Buddhism” comprehensible but to provide sufficient reasons to make it abundantly clear that to consider it as the only or even main lens through which Buddhism was refracted is a misleading overstatement.

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The notion that Buddhism had to rely on Daoist vocabulary and doctrine to be translated and understood still prevails. Closely related to it is the notion that the Buddha was understood either as an “incarnation” of Laozi or that “the divinity of the Buddha was also described in terms of the deified Laozi” (Kohn, 1998, p. 116). These ideas have served as explanatory principles, and have proved extremely resilient. This connection is not fortuitous. It is based on the three earliest mentions of the Buddha: the edict issued in 65 CE, in which Emperor Ming forgives his brother, Prince Ying, states that “The king of Chu recites the subtle words of Huang-lao, and respectfully performs the gentle sacrifices to the Buddha” (*Hou Hanshu* 42). A hundred years later in his memorial to emperor Huan, Xiang Kai frames his criticism by saying: “I have heard that in the palace sacrifices have been performed to Huang-lao and the Buddha” (*Hou Han Shu* 60B.18b). This memorial also contains the first mention of the *huahu* legend, according to which “Laozi has gone into the region of the barbarians and (there) has become the Buddha.”⁶⁷ Thus, in two of the very few allusions, the Buddha is mentioned alongside Huanglao, and in one as being no other than Laozi. The perceived relationship is reinforced by the fact that the Yellow Turbans were centered in the eastern coastal regions where Pengcheng was located.⁶⁸ It was also in the Pengcheng area where Prince Ying lived and was said to be surrounded by both Buddhist laypeople and monks (“upāsakas and śramanas”).

⁶⁷ Cited in Zürcher, 1972, p. 37.

⁶⁸ Cf. Demiéville, 1995, p. 815.

Furthermore, commenting on Xiang Kai's memorial Zürcher indicates that at the beginning it mentions the *Tai ping jing* that was transmitted by a Daoist master to his disciple at Langye in Southern Shandong.

In the last decades of the second century the *T'ai-p'ing ching* became the fundamental scripture of the ideology of the Taoist movement of the Yellow Turbans. We have seen that Hsiang K'ai himself came from the same region (Southern Shantung) which was a stronghold of Taoism, and this again testifies of the close connection between Taoism and Buddhism in Later Han times." (Zürcher, 1972, p. 38)⁶⁹

Despite this additional evidence, which could be considered rather incidental, essentially, the argument of the Buddha understood as Laozi hinges on the three allusions. However, the issue is not as straightforward as it may seem at first sight: The first point that stands out is the problem of identifying Huang-lao as Laozi. The second is a chronological issue that seems to have gone unnoticed: in the earliest mention, in Emperor Ming's edict, sacrifices are performed only to the Buddha, not jointly to the Buddha and Laozi as is often implied. All that is said is that "the King of Chu recites the subtle words of Huang-lao."⁷⁰ But at this point in time, 65 CE, we have no evidence that Laozi had already been deified (either among commoners or at the imperial level). We will only have evidence of the deification of Laozi 100 years later.⁷¹

⁶⁹ It must also be noted that Zürcher also points out that although Tang Yongtong had found "in this Taoist scripture a great number of passages which testify of Buddhist influence," in his view, "Taoist scriptures in general form very unstable and unreliable material for this kind of research [...] We have no guarantee that the passages mentioned by T'ang Yung-t'ung figured in the original text of the second century AD" (Zürcher, 1972, Vol. II, p. 333 n. 106).

⁷⁰ From other contemporaneous evidence it is highly plausible that this means that King Ying of Chu recited the Daodejing, a common practice among the Yellow Turbans.

⁷¹ Here again the issue of whether Huang-lao is the same as Laozi or not is relevant.

My main purpose in this chapter has been to assess the extent to which the narrative based on the textual record serves as a reliable framework of reference for the interpretation of the material record. This narrative is based on three interrelated elements: extremely scattered historical allusions to the Buddha or Buddhism from official records dating to the first and second century. The early *huahu* legend and its subsequent development, and the alleged common practice of *geyi*. Seen as a totality they seem to give a rather coherent picture where each element reinforces the other.

On closer analysis, however, the interpretation of the historical allusions is quite problematic at various levels: when there is more than one source the content may differ in significant ways; the dating of foundational texts such as the *Sutra in forty-two sections* is highly problematic; the rhetorical aspect of the texts, especially those subsumed under the *huahu* literature, has been largely ignored, and they have been taken as representative of what “the Chinese people” thought.

After discussing the historical allusions, the *huahu* legend (or theory) and *geyi*, my view is that the alleged conflation of Buddhism and Daoism, and of the Buddha and Laozi, rests on debatable premises. Thus, far from providing a template against which new data should be measured or into which new data should find a place, the prevalent narrative is actually a hypothetical construct that is in need of firmer support.

My contention, however, is not that there was no such connection between the two religious traditions. Indeed, based on the histories of both, I agree with the aforementioned scholars, that there is no doubt that a close relationship developed between the two, the question for me, is what forms this relationship took. I find it problematic to ascertain the precedence of Daoism, just as I find it dangerously anachronistic to consider Xiwangmu—and by extension her

imagery—Daoist in the first and second centuries on account of the fact that Daoists will later include her in their pantheon. Rather, her imagery seems to support quite a different interpretation, as we shall see in section 5.2.4. What is more, the insistence on the dependence of Buddhism on Daoism seems to be an apologetic statement closely connected to the *huahu* theory.

Theoretically, it seems to be anchored on the notion that religious syncretism consists, at least initially, in a process of assimilation of the unknown into what is known or at least familiar, thus turning syncretism into a process of misunderstanding or mistranslation. Although at first sight, this seems sensible enough when we scrutinize it we see that it leaves important questions unanswered: why is the new appealing? If a novelty is translated into something familiar would it not, in consequence, lose the appeal of the new? More to the point in the case of the Buddha figure, should we assume that images and other forms of representation follow a process akin to linguistic translation? In other words, should we analyze them as semiological signs, i.e. in terms of their meaning?

In view of the weaknesses and problems of the narrative of the introduction of Buddhism and the theoretical model on which it seems to be premised, my proposal is to first approach the material record without framing it within this narrative and without assuming that the “meaning” of the Buddha is to be found in the textual record.

3.0 THE MATERIAL RECORD

The object of study of this chapter is the group of representations of the Buddha, Buddhist motifs and isolated elements usually associated with Buddhist iconography that date to the second through fourth centuries of our era, many of which have been found in tombs. These representations may be part of various artifacts and in a few cases of the tomb decoration itself. Due to the type of objects, the materials and the techniques used, we can be certain that most if not all of the artifacts were produced in China. Thus, these are not imported goods but Chinese goods onto which Buddhist motifs have been depicted. Indeed, these motifs are in the majority of cases surrounded by traditional Chinese imagery.

To have a sense of what place they may have occupied and how widespread their use was, we may imagine a tomb that belonging to a minor official will still be richly furnished with a hundred or more objects, some of which were of personal use, some of which were especially made for his tomb, some that were purchased while others were gifted to him. The walls may be decorated with Confucian historical tropes of loyalty and filio-piety, as well as with scenes of imaginary locations and supernatural beings. Among these decorations and furnishings we find a bronze mirror with a figure of the Buddha and some traditional Chinese deities that is placed inside the coffin just by the side of the body of the deceased along with a few other objects of special value or significance to him. Or, we may find a very big and impressive jar bearing the image of a Buddha and a variety of acrobats that despite being made of precious celadon is

placed in a remote corner of the tomb along with other artifacts of much less value. In the same area of this tomb there are dozens of tombs that have been properly unearthed by archaeologists and contain a wide array of objects none of which seems to have any Buddhist iconography. There are probably many more dozens that will not be subjected to archaeological investigation for a variety of reasons that may include some conscious choices on the part of researchers but also a variety of random processes and situations. Those tombs may or may not contain Buddhist-related artifacts. In terms of percentage then, our material corpus seems to be quite small. However, when we limit the sample to be compared to one kind of artifact, the situation changes. As we will see below the case of the *duisuguan* is especially notable because for a period of time those with Buddhist motifs will reach the point of outnumbering those without.

To the above caveats we need to add another important one: the record we have now is neither complete nor final. To complicate things further, we need to bear in mind that a number of those tombs have been robbed or otherwise disturbed, while there is an even larger number of much humbler tombs pertaining to commoners that are currently, and will most probably remain, unknown to us. It would be unwise not to pay constant heed to the limitations of this record but it would be equally misguided, as I hope to show, to assume that those limitations are too great for this material corpus to deserve further consideration. Indeed, as I hope to have shown in the previous chapter, when we approach the extant textual record for this period—based on which the history of the introduction of Buddhism in China has been written—we realize that their interpretation too is fraught with problems and difficulties. As distinguished historians Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy have succinctly put it in their discussion of the sources for the study of ancient China in general,

neither textual nor archaeological evidence is by itself of greater validity than the other. It is only by treating the two types of evidence as being complimentary to each other, and with a full realization of the accidental circumstances of their survival, that either type can be handled with the criticism that it is due. If the written accounts can in no way be regarded as comprehensive or free of bias, so must the excavated sites and materials be seen only as examples of much that may yet lie underground [...] Just as the inferences drawn from archaeological evidence must always be subject to revision in the light of further discoveries and research, so are the inferences that historians draw from their texts likewise ever open to reinterpretation. (Loewe & Shaughnessy, 1999, p. 7)

Indeed, a number of distinguished art historians have seen in these pieces the opportunity to reassess the beginnings of Chinese Buddhist art history, whereas historians have rekindled the discussion about the geographical direction and spread of Buddhism. As a student of religion, the incontrovertible fact that in China Buddhist motifs were incorporated into funerary artifacts for a period of at least two centuries is an invitation to a critical reappraisal of the received narrative of the introduction of Buddhism and, concomitantly, of the theoretical issues involved in understanding the dynamics of borrowing and appropriation.

Since the material record basically consists of mortuary artifacts, a brief explanation about the types of objects that could be found in tombs for this period is in order. Broadly speaking, there are two types of objects: (1) those that were made specifically for the tomb (*mingqi* 明),⁷² and (2) those that were made for living people (人器) but were eventually placed in tombs. *Mingqi* were usually made of earthenware and the term has been translated as “brilliant

⁷² They are alternatively called 凶器 *xiongqi* (fearsome artifacts), or 鬼器 *guiqi* (objects for the dead).

artifacts” and sometimes as “replica.” They included “storehouses, stoves and wells, also statuettes of servants. Bronze articles included a few pieces of personal adornment (belt-hooks), a few weapons, ornaments for vehicles, cash (often in quite large quantities), one or two mirrors, and sometimes a censer” (Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, 1982, p. 134).

There are, however, other items that have a magical or talismanic function that seem to cut through this distinction: items such as bronze mirrors and censers that also have a utilitarian function. These were everyday items often found in tombs. It is interesting to note that examples of the Buddha figure appeared in all three kinds of objects, a characteristic that is rather extraordinary considering that only certain mythical animals and the Queen Mother of the West seem to have had such versatility. Other major mythological beings, such as the couple Nüwa and Fuxi, appear only in mortuary art, not on mirrors or other artifacts.⁷³

As Cary Liu (2005) has observed, the issue of what items should be included in the tomb was controversial as can be seen in the “Tang Gong” chapters of the *Liji* 禮記 (Classic of Rites), where it is said that one of Confucius’s disciples, Zengzi, decried Duke Xiang of Song for placing real vinegars and pickles in vessels that were meant to be “*mingqi*” (p. 210). Commenting on this passage Zheng Xuan of the Han dynasty explains that Duke Xiang’s action “confuses objects for the dead (*guiqi*) with objects for living people (*renqi*).”⁷⁴ It is interesting to note here a tension that seems to have been present in other aspects of the tomb, i.e. how to interpret the ritual value and function of objects and representations. Should we understand them to have merely symbolic value or was it meant to have some sort of concrete efficacy? Or, in other words, how to understand the functionality of artifacts in a funerary setting.

⁷³ See Hayashi Minao, 1989, p. 294; Lewis, 2009, pp. 577-582.

⁷⁴ Cited in Liu, 2005, p. 210.

In an oft cited passage from the *Liji* 禮記, Confucius is said to have admonished that the dead should not be treated as if they were entirely dead, as this would show a lack of affection; treating them as entirely alive, on the other hand, would show a lack of wisdom. None of these should therefore be done.

“On this account bamboo artifacts (used in connection with the burial of the dead) are not fit for actual use; those of earthenware cannot be used to wash in; those of wood are incapable of being carved; the lutes and harps are strung, but not evenly; the reed pipes are complete, but not in tune; the bells and musical stones are there, but they have no stands. They are called brilliant artifacts (*mingqi*); that is, [the dead] are thus treated as if they were spirit brilliances (*shenming*).”⁷⁵

A point that emerges is that there was no unified vision of the function or nature of *mingqi*, not even among the intellectual elite or those who were in a position to prescribe the use of *mingqi*. Confucius prescription may be summarized as: objects for the deceased may look like the object, may even be the actual object without serving its actual function. Thus, they appear the same without being susceptible of the same use. In brief, *mingqi* are as-if things. This would imply that the living can make a statement about their filial piety without falling into the absurd notion that the dead have the same needs as the living. It is not clear though if they do have any needs or if the appurtenances included in the tomb are more prescribed to *show* affection than to fulfill any actual service to the deceased. We are not told what *shenming* really are.

⁷⁵ Translated by Liu (2005, p. 210).

3.1 MOTIFS OTHER THAN THE BUDDHA

The record of artifacts and depictions of motifs that ostensibly originated in Buddhist iconography, of which the Buddha-figure is but one, now exceeds a hundred pieces. Although the main theme of this research is the representation of Buddha, I am compelled to deal, at least briefly, with this larger record basically for two reasons. First, most scholars have not made any distinction between the group featuring the Buddha-figure and other motifs. This fact gives us an indication of the way the record has been approached and is, therefore, an important issue to discuss in order to understand how the material record has both depended on and served to support the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in China. Second, comparing the group of Buddha-figures with the complete record underscores the striking geographic and quantitative differences between the former and the group of other motifs.

There is not complete agreement as to which motifs should be identified as Buddhist. Most, if not all scholars, however, concur that the figures that present the basic iconographic markers (the *uṣṇīṣa*, halo and a known mudra) of the Buddha should be considered as a representation of the Buddha. However, the case of other motifs is much more contentious as we will see in what follows.

3.1.1 Stupas/Pagodas

Stupas have been inextricably linked to Buddhist praxis since the Buddhas paranirvana. A few representations have been found in China in a funerary context.

3.1.1.1 Maduizi 馬堆子, Sichuan

A fragment of a tile representing a multi-storied pagoda (*lougeta* 樓閣塔), flanked by two lotus flowers was found north of Chengdu, Sichuan (see Fig. 3.1). According to the report it can be dated to the Eastern Han and was found in a tomb located in Maduizi 馬堆子, Baiguo village 白果村, county of Shifang 什邡縣.⁷⁶

This is a particularly interesting depiction because the pagoda is not a copy of a foreign design, as is the case with most other motifs, but is quite close to a Chinese watchtower in structure. Indeed it looks like a three-story watchtower to which a mast with three umbrellas has been added on top which can be very plausibly interpreted as a hasta. Additionally, as Rhie points out, the presence of the lotuses bolsters the interpretation of the depiction as a Buddhist motif.

Precisely on account of its hybrid nature I would think it is possible to argue that such a representation was probably modeled on an actual building—rather than on a model—which, in turn, could be taken as an indication of the existence of a Buddhist community, be it small or large, lay or monastic. This hypothesis is also reinforced by the fact that at least one more building can be seen on the left-hand side. Rhie has observed that the pagoda was probably only part of the theme of the tile, which may have been a temple or a monastery complex as other structures appear to have been present. Unfortunately, as the tile is badly damaged it is not possible to corroborate it.

However, there is at least another alternative explanation that cannot be discarded. It is also possible to argue that this representation was based on a model or on an oral account. I

⁷⁶ Zhang, 2014, pp. 200-201; Rhie, 1999, p. 61; Wu Zhuo, 1992, pp. 40-41; Xie, 1987.

consider this explanation is less plausible in view of the fact that, in general, representations of buildings, when present in a funerary setting, tend to be quite realistic.

Rhie (1999, p. 62) suggests that the pagoda of this tile mostly matches the description of the structure built by Zerong in 194 in Pengcheng. The building is described as a *lougedao* 樓閣道, which can be translated as a pavilion or more generally, a building. On top of it, there were nine piled up metal plates. The description is clearly quite generic as is the representation on the Sichuan tile: this is a building that combines a Chinese traditional multi-storied pavilion with a hasta, a combination that would continue to be an accurate description of Chinese pagodas for a long time. As Alexander Soper has noted: “Nothing is clearer than the difference between the original stūpa of India and the wood pagoda. The two cannot, in fact, stand in any closer relationship than that involved in the transmission of masts and parasols” (Soper and Sickman 1950: 389). It is, thus, important to underscore that this combination and the fact that the early Chinese pagodas and the Indian stūpas were structurally very different buildings would not be just a stage towards the development of a more “accurate” building (that is, closer to Indian prototypes).⁷⁷

There are several good reasons to suspect that there probably were some Buddhist communities in the area. By the first half of the first century BCE, as China was consolidating her power in Central Asia, one of the consequences was the presence in Chinese territory of foreign envoys, merchants, refugees and hostages, and, in fact, although very sparingly, the presence of foreign communities is attested in the official records.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ This also underscores the important differences that arise in the transmission and reception of foreign objects.

⁷⁸ See for instance *Han Shu* 28 B.5a-6a.

3.1.1.2 Xiangfan 襄樊, Hubei

Another model building that can be interpreted as representing a pagoda was found much more recently, in 2008, in the Xiangfan district of Hubei in a tomb dated to the Three Kingdoms.⁷⁹ This was a richly furnished tomb: the large number of burial objects found in it included jades and objects of bronze, silver and gold besides objects of pottery, porcelain, lacquer, iron and stone. It also includes the largest bronze horse ever unearthed in China. This, and the structural features of the tomb have led archaeological researchers to propose that this must have been the tomb of a military of a rank just below that of a feudal lord, and his wife.

The pottery tower was found near the exit of the western corridor of the coffin located in the west (Fig. 3.3). In the adjacent room the bronze horse and a bronze knife indicate that the western coffin belonged to the presumed general. If this hypothesis were correct, and it is highly plausible, this would greatly support my own claim that the military and, presumably, the royal family of the Wu Kingdom, were among those who, at the very least, appropriated Buddhist motifs for funerary use. Taking into account that according to textual sources the royal family of Wu patronized Buddhist monks, this makes an interesting case against Zürcher's dichotomy of "contact expansion" and "long-distance transmission" since the "unsystematic borrowing of elements that are largely detached from their original context" characteristic of the latter, seems to have coexisted with doctrinal teachings and the translation of a large body of scriptures that characterize the former. The *duisuguan* will serve as a case in point as well.

As in the case of the Shifang pagoda, this is structurally a watchtower to which a hasta has been added. In fact, the report simply describes it as a "very beautiful pottery tower"

⁷⁹ Xiangfan Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2010, 4-20. I would like to thank Dr. Yu Xiyun 余西云 from Wuhan University for this reference.

(Xiangfan Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2010, 20). Given that there is plenty of evidence that wooden tower pagodas would continue to be built it is highly plausible that this one, as the Shifang pagoda, depicted actual buildings. In the case of the Xiangfan pagoda this is especially plausible taking into account that the depiction is very detailed.⁸⁰

3.1.1.3 Wu Liang Shrine, Shandong

To the aforementioned pagodas we should perhaps add one that Wu Hung lists in his 1986 essay. Wu (1986) interprets a composition from the Wu Liang shrine⁸¹ of an object that “looks like a broadbased wine bottle” which, according to him, is being worshipped by two winged figures, as a scene of stūpa-worship (Fig. 3.4). He avers that the possible sources of this composition were scenes of stūpa-worship in Indian Buddhist art, a point that the comparison with a scene from Bhārhut (Fig. 3.5) he offers seems to support (p. 271).

As he notes, although the scene from the Wu Liang shrine is much simpler, a comparison between these two scenes shows similarities in composition, namely, the basic shape of the stūpa and the flanking celestial beings and worshippers, although the latter have been transformed into winged immortals, which, according to Wu, were popular in Han art. Wu (1986) contends that the fact that the scene is next to two others that depict “immortals worshipping auspicious plants and clouds, both of which were frequently mentioned in Han texts concerning *xiangrui*” (p. 271) allows us to infer that the scene in question also represents *xiangrui* worship. However, it is

⁸⁰ Qinghua Guo (2010) has made a similar observation about pottery towers in general, “The striking realism of the towers leads us to suggest that they were modeled on actual buildings” (p. 53).

⁸¹ The Wu Liang shrine is located in the Jiexiang area of Shandong province and is said to have been erected in 152 CE.

relevant to remember that one of the characteristics of *xian* or immortals was their power over the natural world. The figures on the same register seem to be doing something with or to the plants or clouds, just as the figure on the register above seems to be holding onto the birds (Fig. 3.6).

What the image that Wu identifies as a pagoda was meant to represent is certainly much less evident. But that scene and the one from Bhārhut do seem indeed to show some similarity in composition, especially the apsaras and the winged beings. How significant this similarity is, and whether it is sufficient to posit that it represents some form of pagoda worship is, I think, quite debatable. First, we would need to find other comparable depictions and, second, the notion that all three scenes in the Wu Liang shrine represent *xiangrui* worship is not so clear-cut. The ways the Chinese showed reverence with their bodies was “raising the hand in salutation, kneeling on the floor, bending over entirely” (*Nan Qi Shu* 南齊書 54), none of which actions can be found in these scenes. Indeed, there is no more indication of worship than the physical proximity of the winged beings to the objects.

The case of this presumed pagoda illustrates some of the problems of dealing with isolated representations. Precisely because they are unique we cannot establish any patterns and can only compare them with ad hoc depictions that may or may have not served as their sources or models. This allows for highly interpretive hypotheses that may be very appealing but must remain tentative. This is not unlike the case of the lotus also presented by Wu Hung.

3.1.2 Lotus designs

Among what he considers to be Buddhist elements in Han art, Wu Hung (1986) includes the stone carving of a giant lotus (Fig. 3.7) from the Wu Liang shrine (dated to the middle of the

second century). He interprets it as one more of the group of *xiangrui* (roughly, good omen) symbols that appear in the shrine, and notes that the “theme of the lotus had appeared in decorations of bronzes before the Han dynasty, but it had never been an object of worship. This concept undoubtedly derives from Indian Buddhist art” (p. 270-271). Wu presents an illustration of a stone carving in Bodhgaya (Fig. 3.8) dated to the second century to support this hypothesis, and concludes that when the lotus “first entered Chinese art works, it ceased to be a Buddhist symbol, and became instead a *xiangrui*” (p. 271).

In this case, the two anthropomorphic figures that appear near the lotus do seem to be, if not venerating, at least showing respect to it. It is, however, quite difficult to draw any straightforward conclusions from this image. To start with, the Wu Liang shrine, whereof this image and the presumed pagoda were depicted, has a very complex visual program. Wu Liang is known as an extraordinary scholar, and according to Wu Hung, he was the intellectual author of pictorial program that was both coherent and political.⁸² Wu (1989), himself, has made one of the most complete study of the shrine. However, fascinating and inspiring as this work is, many assertions must remain hypothetical as noted by host of scholars.⁸³ Second, the use of the lotus as an auspicious symbol may be found in early Han Chinese palace architecture, as suggested by Uehara Kazu. Uehara (1994, pp. 82-86) even finds evidence that as early as the Warring States period the lotus was described as the seat of immortality. It is also pertinent to indicate that the lotus motif was used in Chinese funerary art since at least the Warring States.⁸⁴

⁸² This point is discussed in Hay, 1993, p. 171.

⁸³ See especially Liu et al., 2008 and Hay, 1993

⁸⁴ For some examples see Hayashi, 1989, pp. 254-255.

Rhie's observation with regards to a large open lotus found in another later Han tomb at Leitai, in Gansu province aptly summarizes the conjectural character of any propositions regarding the interpretation of the lotus. "It is [...] difficult to be certain if there is or is not any Buddhistic or foreign content or allusion intended in the usage of the lotus among the late Later Han tombs. Either it is a totally traditional Chinese usage coming from palace architecture, or is a completely Buddhist motif, or is a combination of the two, with the newer, Buddhist motif overlaying, reinforcing, merging or supplanting the traditional Chinese usage" (Rhie, 1999, p. 66).

In the present state of knowledge it is very difficult to ascertain which is the case. I have mentioned the reasons that recommend caution with regards to Wu's hypotheses. There are, however, also good reasons not to disregard them besides the ones argued by him. For one, there are noticeable differences in the representation of lotuses in earlier tombs and mirrors, and the one in the Wu Liang shrine. These formal differences deserve an in-depth study that may help us decide this issue (See Figs. 3.9 and 3.10). Also, Uehara (1994, pp. 82-83) suggests that the lotus, as a Buddhist symbol, was amalgamated with the native one. Furthermore, considering the location (in Gansu) and dating of this tomb (to ca. 186-219 CE) the probability that there were, among others, processes of "overlaying, reinforcing, merging or supplanting" of motifs is extremely high. The Xiongnu and other tribes had formerly inhabited the area of Gansu until the first century CE when the Han army gained control of the region. This resulted in the opening of the Silk Road and the forcible relocation of around a million Chinese to the Gansu corridor that served as the entry point for an unknown number of Western and Central Asian peoples. Notable among these, were the Yuezhi of the Kushan empire. One of the most famous and significant patrons of Buddhism, king Kanishka I, ruled the empire in the early second century CE,

sponsoring the building of religious monuments and, generally, greatly supporting missionary work that resulted in a mighty spread of Buddhism.⁸⁵ It was also under his rule that the Kushan empire reached its greatest extent.

By mentioning this situation I do not mean to imply that the lotus or other motifs that may be related to Buddhist iconography ought to be interpreted as Buddhist. In fact, that is precisely the kind of inference I find problematic. However, it would be just as negligent to ignore the situation outside Chinese borders when it is known. Even more so, when Buddhist motifs of the Han and Three Kingdom period are clearly related to the Gandhara style, a style of Greco-Roman origin that flourished precisely during the Kushan dynasty.

3.1.3 Elephants and relics

The walls of a tomb antechamber in Helingeer, Inner Mongolia, dated to the middle of the Eastern Han (ca. 100 CE), have paintings of a figure riding a white elephant with an inscription that reads “immortal riding an [elephant],”⁸⁶ and ball-shaped objects on a plate with an inscription that identifies them as relics of the Buddha, *sheli* 捨利. Yu maintains that this scene represents the legend of the conception of the Buddha.⁸⁷

These occupy the south and north walls, respectively, while Dongwanggong appears on the east wall and Xiwangmu on the west wall. This combination was greatly emphasized by Yu

⁸⁵ Tsukamoto, 1979, Vol. I, pp. 16-18; Juliano & Lerner, 2001, pp. 28-33.

⁸⁶ Instead of the character *xiang* 像, the inscription has the character *juan* 券, that makes no sense in this context and is probably a mistake. See Yu, 1980, p. 69.

⁸⁷ See Yu, 1980, pp. 68-69.

Weichao and Wu Hung. Yu (1980, p. 72) considers that these two deities had already become part of the Daoist pantheon by this time and concludes that their representations can therefore be seen as part of the belief system of *Taipingdao* 太平道 (the Way of the Great Peace)⁸⁸ and thus an expression of Daoism. Furthermore, he states that Dongwanggong and Xiwangmu were spirits to be worshiped, which implies, to his mind, that the images of the white elephant and the relics that occupied similar positions must have been meant to be worshiped as well.

It is quite difficult to ascertain the accuracy of the latter claim. We do not know if images in certain placements, or certain images within the tomb were meant to be worshiped. Even if we could assume they were, the question would still be who should worship them: the deceased, the living or both? In any case, the most relevant question, in my view, is whether we should consider as equivalent all elements in a composition of this kind, and if so, in what terms would they be equivalent? Yu (1980) claims that this composition shows that “the Buddhist religion was still mixed with early Daoism” (p.72).⁸⁹ Although it is true that Xiwangmu would become a very important goddess in the Daoist pantheon, it would probably be quite anachronistic to consider her as a Daoist deity for a period in which we know that her worship was not circumscribed to the budding Daoist-inspired communities. It is well-known that her worship was much more widespread as shown by the imperial edict of 6 BCE that called for sacrifices to the goddess in order to obtain her protection from a baleful comet, as well as by the widespread soteriological outbreak centered on her of just three years later. Thus, in my view, the explanation for this combination in terms of the mixture of Buddhism and Daoism seems to be

⁸⁸ Also commonly known as the Yellow Turbans.

⁸⁹ “佛教信仰仍然是和早期道教交糅在一起。”

more guided by the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in China than by the elements in the pictorial representation of this tomb.

3.1.4 Human figures ostensibly related to Buddhism

A large number of scholars have seen the group of human figures with a bump—interpreted as an ūrna—on the forehead as the product of “Buddhist influence” (Bai 2010, 1003). I am not sure exactly what is meant by this expression but these items are quite interesting. They are generally understood to be tomb attendants, and to date more than 60 pieces have been found in tombs in Chongqing, Hubei, Hunan and Anhui, and they have been dated to the Three Kingdoms through the western and eastern Jin dynasties.⁹⁰ They are made of either earthenware or porcelain. The geographic location is quite significant, as Buddha figures have been found in three of these provinces, i.e. Hubei, Hunan and Anhui. The question is whether we can draw any conclusion from these facts. Before we do so, in my view, we would need to have a clearer idea of the function of the so-called tomb attendants. Many of them represent trades or professions, especially, musicians and military, while others are simply kneeling or sitting. One wonders if their function was akin to that of the *mingqi*, to serve the deceased as they would serve in life, or if they were mainly apotropaic.

Whether we should infer any “Buddhist influence” is a different matter. As Abe has pointed out we need to reconsider “what it means to find motifs, postures, or figural types known in early Indian Buddhist imagery in China” because “[r]ecent scholarship on the southern route

⁹⁰ For a comprehensive study of these figures see Wu Guibing, 2003. For a discussion, see Bai Bin, 2010, pp. 1000-1009.

has extended the range of Buddhist elements even further to include tomb figures that appear to be non-Han Chinese (*huren* 胡人), labeled as foreign Buddhists or monks, or any figures with their right hands raised, the familiar *abhaya* mudra of the Buddha. The awareness that Buddhist visual elements may have been adopted in an unsystematic manner appears to have encouraged scholars to discover an ever-increasing number of ‘Buddhist’ motifs in early Chinese imagery” (Abe 2002, 12). In fact, besides the *urna*-marked figures, figures of Central Asian men⁹¹ have also been considered as “related to the dissemination of Buddhism” (Bai 2010, 1000). These have been dated to the Wei and Western Jin (220-316 CE) and have been unearthed in a broader geographic area that includes the present day provinces of Henan, Shaanxi, Shandong and Beijing in the north; those in the central reaches of the Yangzi have been dated to Eastern Wu and Western Jin (220-316 CE) and have been found in tombs in Hubei and Hunan; the few ones unearthed in the Chongqing area have been dated to the Shu Han period (221-263 CE).⁹²

I fully concur with Abe that the relationship of all these figures with “Buddhism” needs reconsideration. The problem in my view is more complex than what it looks at first sight. In any event, what is interesting for me is the use of foreign figures in the mortuary context. Interpreting them is also more complex than what it looks at first sight. Even in the cases where they represent quite straightforwardly certain professions, for instance, ensembles of foreign musicians, can we infer that these document that they were common in the area? Or should we posit rather that foreign musicians were so valued that the inclusion of these pieces expresses the desire to provide the deceased with what he could not have in life? Was this practice the result of certain

⁹¹ These figures are identified as Central Asian men based on their caucasoid eyes and noses, as well as on their peaked caps.

⁹² See Bai, 2010, 1000-1003; and Wu Zhuo, 1992, pp. 43-44.

“exoticism”? In either case, the presence of these depictions of foreigners in this period calls for a thorough investigation. The cases of those figures that seem to be representing one or more iconographic feature typical of the Buddha image are also of interest. I do not think labeling them as “Buddhist” is very useful but they can provide suggestive points of reference.

3.1.4.1 Yi’nan pillar, Shandong

The carvings on this octagonal pillar present a combination of images of Xiwangmu, Dogwanggong, what looks like a winged Buddha and haloed foreigners among others. It is problematic to draw any conclusions from this representations as the dating of the tomb has been quite controversial with some scholars dating it to as early as the Eastern Han while others date it to the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE).⁹³ What I find interesting is the depiction of what seems to be a Buddha figure with wings. In the pillar located in the rear of a three-chamber tomb shrine, we find a seated figure making the abhaya mudra, it lacks a halo but has what could be interpreted as an ushnisha although it could also a cap. This hybrid representation is indeed quite unique.

3.1.5 Kongwangshan 孔望山

This small mountain located only 30 miles west of Pengcheng in Jiangsu displays a few more than a hundred carved figures of humans and deities (Figs. 3.12-3.14). Among them we find seated and standing Buddha figures, foreign-looking worshippers, as well as what resembles a rendering of the parinirvana scene. The main image though seems to be that of Xiwangmu as she

⁹³ For the chronological discussion see An, 1955, p. 1620; Wu, 1986, p. 268; Yu 1980, 68-69. For discussions of these depictions see Abe, 2002, p. 13; Rhie, 1999, p. 42 n.70; Wu, 1986, pp. 267-268; Yu, 1980, pp. 68-71.

is carved on the highest location. This complex has served to support the thesis that Buddhist elements were incorporated into the Daoist repertoire in the early period of contact. However, the dating of the cliff carvings at this site has been the subject of fierce debate.⁹⁴ Since this debate has not been resolved, with some scholars dating it to as early as Eastern Han (25-220 CE) and others as late as the Tang (618-907 CE),⁹⁵ I will only briefly deal with this site. Given the chronological uncertainty any conclusions drawn from this assemblage of figures would have to remain speculative at best. On the other hand, I cannot simply ignore this group of depictions as it has occupied a prominent place in important studies.⁹⁶

Kongwangshan is part of a branch of the Yutai range, located very close to Lianyungang 連雲港 in modern-day Jiangsu province. It is only 30 miles west of the Pengcheng and Xiabei region. As noted in the chapter on textual sources in the mid 1st century Prince Ying was said to perform obeisance to the Buddha and Laozi, while the infamous Zerong was said to have built a pagoda around the year 192 CE in Pengcheng. According to the reports there are 105 individual images, many of which have not been identified yet, but there are also some images with Buddhist iconographic traits, and others, such as, Xiwangmu, whose seated figure is carved at the highest location. Only this image and two more have a concave space carved out in front of them to presumably hold a lamp or candle.

⁹⁴ See, especially, the papers presented in *Wenwu* 1981, 7 and 1982, 9; Ding, 1984; Ruan, 1985; Zürcher, 1990, pp. 165-166; Wu, 1986, pp. 292-300; Wang Xiaoyang 2005 and 2015.

⁹⁵ A third alternative is that the carving started in the Eastern Han and continued to the Tang. For the thesis that they should be dated to the Tang dynasty see especially Ruan Rongchun, 1985.

⁹⁶ Especially Zürcher, 1990 and Wu, 1986. It has also had a pivotal place in the debates around the routes of transmission.

Below Xiwangmu there is a relief figure of about the same size dressed in Han style and with a headgear that has been identified as part of a military costume typical of the Eastern Han. In front of this figure there is a niche-like space and a circular level space, that are understood to be for worship. This image has been interpreted to represent a donor, one of the official attendants to Xiwangmu or alternatively Dongwanggong.⁹⁷ There are other carvings of human figures close by.

There are also several images of the Buddha, among these, we find a standing image that exhibits the basic iconographic marks of the Buddha including the usnisa and abhaya mudra. Despite marked differences with this one, another standing figure near the parinirvana scene is also interpreted as a standing Buddha. A seated Buddha and a representation of the Mahāsattva jātaka—the story of Mahāsattva’s sacrifice of his body to a starving tigress—are the most easily recognizable Buddhist motifs. These are surrounded by a multiplicity of images that include Xiwangmu, guardians (both foreign and Han Chinese), human figures that are interpreted as worshippers or patrons, some dressed in foreign attire, and an elephant stone.⁹⁸

Of notice is the fact Wu Hung (1986, 296) has pointed out, that the Buddhist elements that appear in Kongwangshan are the same that appear in Han art in general: isolated Buddha images, representation of Buddhist legends, and Buddhist symbols, such as the lotus and white elephant. Thus, despite the controversies surrounding the dating of the Kongwangshan carvings,

⁹⁷ Li Hongfu, 1982, p. 67; Rhie, 1999, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁸ Scholars have presented diverse interpretations. For a balanced iconographic and stylistic analysis see Rhie, 1999, pp. 27-47. Lai, 1999 offers a detailed study of the elephant sculpture at the Kongwangshan site. Out of the various articles published in specialized journals the comprehensive report in *Wenwu* 1981, No. 7 连云港市孔望山摩崖造像调查报告 “Lianyungang Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang diaocha baogao” (A report on the stone statues discovered in Kongwangshan, Lianyungang) continues to be the main reference for this site.

they have to be taken into account for any generalization we make about Buddhist elements of this time period, even if only as controversial data.

Furthermore, the relevance of this site for the present research also lies in the importance that studies, such as Wu Hung's and Zürcher's, have attributed to it to support the thesis that Buddhism was assimilated in the guise of Daoism. To witness, Wu considers we can tentatively conclude that "the Kongwang Shan carvings are Taoist in content. Although many of their features emanate from Buddhism, they neither follow the strict formal and iconographical conventions of Buddhist art, nor propagate the Buddhist canon. The images of the Buddha and of other deities taken from traditional Chinese art at the site could well be part of the burgeoning Taoist pantheon" (Wu, 1986, p. 303). Along the same lines, Zürcher (1990) claims that in this site "disparate Buddhist elements have been incorporated into a Chinese (notably Taoist) religious *répertoire*: there are some indications that the dominant image represents Xiwang mu, and the whole complex probably was associated with a late Han Taoist sanctuary devoted to the 'Lord of the Eastern Sea,' *Donghai jun* 東海君" (p. 166). Wu Hung (1986), on his part, uses it to reinforce the thesis he had presented with regards to the artifacts and depictions from Sichuan, Shandong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, namely, that Kongwangshan carvings "reveal an extremely superficial understanding of these Buddhist forms on the part of their creators." To the extent that "[s]ometimes the original intent was even completely misconstrued. For example, the 'usnīsa' appears not only on the Buddha's head but also on the heads of the disciples in the Nirvana scene." Also, "certain 'Buddhist' forms at Kongwang Shan have the same meaning as those found in secular art of the Han dynasty (p. 296)." He concludes that "Kongwang Shan stone carvings do not represent concepts found in the orthodox Buddhist tradition. Rather, these

similarities resulted from a certain degree of absorption of some fragmentary Buddhist elements in the Chinese cultural tradition” (p. 297).

A few points deserve attention. First, in the case of Wu, the dissociation between form and meaning, i.e. elements of Buddhist iconography are used to express Daoist meanings. Even if we were to accept that the meaning (or content) was Daoist we would still need to determine what “Daoist” means at this point. The second question is, why would the artists or patrons want to use Buddhist-like forms to express such content? Explaining it as a misconception of the original intent is clearly insufficient. For that matter, why would the artists or patrons want to follow the “strict formal and iconographical conventions of Buddhist art” or “propagate the Buddhist canon”? There seems to be an implicit assumption that this should be the case.

Wu notes that “a certain degree of absorption of some fragmentary Buddhist elements in the Chinese cultural tradition,” in quite a similar fashion, Zürcher’s formulation “disparate Buddhist elements have been incorporated into a Chinese (notably Taoist) religious *repertoire*” bring to mind two traditions merging, a figure of speech that deeply marked the traditional understanding of syncretism. As has been noted, one of the problems of this trope is that it elides the actors who do the “absorbing” or the “incorporating,” effectively turning the operation into one of influence or addition. Not only are the agents suppressed, the context is also elided. As a result, the material record ends up having mainly indexical value.

3.1.6 Concluding remarks: Interpreting the motifs as material traces of Buddhism

One of the important points to notice is the very vast geographic expanse where these motifs have been found, namely, to the north in Horinger (Helingeer) county in Inner Mongolia and the eastern coastal province of Shandong, to the southwest, in Sichuan and to the southeast in

Jiangsu. As we will see below, in Sichuan and Jiangsu we find an important number of artifacts bearing the Buddha motif as well.

In general, the material record has been approached as evincing traces of “Buddhism” or as evidence of some form of Buddhist presence or influence regardless of the particular motif depicted. In addition to Zürcher’s and Wu Hung’s, another telling formulation of such an approach is Rhie’s (1999, p. 47) who in dealing with the pieces from Sichuan states that: “Art related to Buddhism from Szechwan [Sichuan] province in the southwest casts an interesting light on Buddhist practice in this region around the end of the Han Dynasty and into Shu Han kingdom of the subsequent Three Kingdoms period (220-265). Most of the objects consisting primarily of small sculptures from tombs, some known for decades, others newly discovered, reflect a surprising knowledge of Central Asian and Indian art styles and an assimilation of Buddhism into the local funerary practices, especially in the west-central area around the Min River and Ch’engtu as well as in the Mien-yang area of the Fu-chiang River valley of north-central Szechwan.” Similarly, in Gansu “though with much less indication of Buddhist activity than Szechwan or the central plains at this time, the appearance of Buddhist motifs may suggest a modicum of interest in Buddhism in this area, which lies on the main trade route into China from the west and, at this time, is primarily comprised of military commanderies related to political control, expansion and defense.”

In other cases the language may not be as straightforward but there is often a very ambiguous use of the term “Buddhism” that lends itself to rather problematic generalizations and conclusions. I take issue with such an approach because it assumes that these pieces serve as an index of a certain degree of “assimilation,” “influence” of Buddhism,” “knowledge” of Buddhist iconographic styles, or an “interest in Buddhism.” Such assumptions can be quite misleading

because they imply that in the minds of the people doing the appropriation of certain motifs, these were understood as “Buddhist,” that is as being indelibly linked to a specific, recognizable religious tradition, which is something we cannot be certain about. Or, what is worse, this manner of speaking virtually elides the need to pay attention to those effecting the reception. This is also clear when, speaking of the significance of the archaeological discoveries, Zürcher comments that before the seventies “only very few material relics of Han Buddhism (or, more vaguely, of Buddhist influence on Han representational art) were known...” (Zürcher 1990, 158). The expression “Buddhist influence on Han representational art” depicts Buddhism as an active entity (in other words, as the agent) that causes changes in a passive “Han representational art.” We know this is an economic manner of speaking, but that awareness does not suffice to counteract the reification of Buddhism or Han representational art. It is as if the sole “presence” of “Buddhism” caused certain changes.

One way of avoiding this reification would probably be to try and inquire what each of these authors seems to understand by Buddhism in each case. However, this method would be riddled with many of the problems we are seeking to avoid. In my view, a more productive way to avoid them is to focus on the agents of transmission and the modes of reception.

3.2 THE ISSUE OF TRANSMISSION AND MODES OF RECEPTION

In my view, it is much more accurate to speak of the assimilation of and/or interest in certain Buddhist motifs with the caveat that they may or may have not been recognized as Buddhist (i.e. as pertaining to a specific religion) by the people on the receiving end. We also need to consider various ways in which the models on which the motifs may have become

available for reception. For instance, they may have become available as the result of some form of proselytizing, or as elements of ritual practices of certain communities, or they may have been transmitted in an isolated and decontextualized manner. This implies that symbols may be made available in a more or less contextualized manner, with or without intent, with a variety of purposes, if any.

As a case in point, Zürcher (1990b) has suggested that since the geographic spread of the objects appears to have no connection to the spread of monastic Buddhism “[t]he channels of transmission must have been of a quite different nature. It may well be that such Buddhist visual traits were spread through the circulation of material objects (amulets, small portable images, decorative patterns on vessels, relic-containers and the like) that could easily find their way into far-away regions, and for that reason also easily could lose their original Buddhist meaning” (p. 166). Zürcher bases this proposition on the fact that “monastic Buddhism [...] is not attested in Sichuan before the very end of the fourth century (not to speak of the steppe region in the far north), and the representations cannot be traced back to any archaic translated text” (p. 166). Furthermore, “[t]he use of such portable cultic objects is amply attested in the whole Buddhist world; early examples have been found at various sites in Central Asia” (pp. 166-167).⁹⁹

Although to date no such Buddhist cultic objects has been excavated in China I agree that they probably circulated there. However, here and in several other occasions we will find a similar position, namely, there seems to be an assumption that circulation, that is, availability

⁹⁹ Here Zürcher refers the reader to a couple of examples from the magnificent Stein Collection of the British Museum. Unfortunately, neither of these exemplars date to period in question but are dated to the fifth century.

necessarily results in their adoption.¹⁰⁰ I agree that availability is fundamental to processes of exchange but it is certainly not sufficient to explain it. In the case of China in this period, the wide circulation of foreign goods and images is very well documented. However, we would not assume that the discovery of, for instance, a plate of foreign make decorated with the god Bacchus sitting on a lion excavated in Gansu signals any interest in Roman religion or Roman religious practice in the area, nor would we assume that this motif must have also been adopted and reproduced by Chinese artisans. It would certainly be possible but by no means necessary.¹⁰¹

My main contention is that we need not and should not apply one single explanation to all cases. In other words, we do not need to assume that the motifs were transmitted nor received in one single manner. As for the question of transmission, taking into account that the Silk Roads allowed a substantial flow of people and things, I reckon that there are at least six main options. Motifs may have circulated as:

- (i) market goods brought by merchants. That is, probably, in a highly decontextualized fashion, as in the probable scenario of an object for sale in a market.
- (ii) mementos brought back by people living in China. Military, diplomats or envoys that may have received them as gifts or purchased them.
- (iii) part of the repertoire of foreign artists and craftspeople, (either in the form of abstract knowledge or in model books).

¹⁰⁰ In this case it seems that the word “spread” is the one that does the trick, especially due to the embedded biological connotations, as in the spread of illness.

¹⁰¹ This item is discussed in Pirazzoli, 1994, pp. 21-22.

- (iv) part of the ritual practices or paraphernalia of certain communities or itinerant merchants, monks, or other travelers. That is, with a certain level of contextualization.
- (v) instruments of proselytizing activities by monks or laity, which would place them within a larger framework of reference.
- (vi) descriptions in texts.

Considering alternative options is important because we need not assume that goods circulated either completely devoid of context or as part as monastic activities. In other words, we need not assume the reason the Buddhist motifs could be adopted in the funerary realm was because they had lost “their original Buddhist meaning” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 166) in the process of circulation. The manner the motifs were made available may have had an important impact on the ways they were received, but reception is far from passive. On the contrary, agents of reception often select, transform and re-create. The extent and freedom to do this, however, will also be related to a number of constraints, some of which may owe to the mode of transmission or to the ritual value of form for instance.

As we saw above in the case of the representation of the pagoda from Sichuan dated to the Eastern Han (and also of the later pagoda from Hunan), it is clearly not modeled on representations of Indian or Central Asian pagodas. Rather they are a combination of something akin to a traditional Chinese watchtower with the distinctive hasta of pagodas. The hybridity exhibited by these images can be very plausibly explained by the presence of actual buildings that served as models, which would point to the presence of communities even if they were not monastic. If this were the case Zürcher’s contention that this, as all other Han pieces, can be explained by the circulation of goods, and the associated hypothesis that they were the result of

long-distance transmission loses traction. It also highlights the need to make a distinction that is all too often not made, i.e. that the circulation solely addresses the condition of possibility, that is, the availability of the model, it does not explain the specific choice or use. And this is an important distinction that has all too often not been made. It points, in my view, to the fact that transmission has continued to be privileged to the detriment of the analysis of processes of reception. I will say more about this issue in what follows.

On the other hand, we can be quite certain that they were recognized as foreign and/or uncommon. Taking into consideration that the areas where artifacts bearing 'Buddhist' motifs have been found may have been part of trade routes or may have had colonies of foreigners nearby, we can also suppose that some people did recognize them as Buddhist, i.e. as related to a specific tradition most probably associated with certain ethnic groups. But that is as far as we can reasonably go in the absence of any other record related to Buddhism.

My treatment diverges greatly from most of the preceding scholarship on the material corpus. To witness, previous works have taken these pieces as indices of the "presence" or "influence" of Buddhism in the geographic areas where they have been found. I consider such a project rather problematic. First, what is meant by the presence or influence of Buddhism? Does this mean the presence of Buddhist communities? Or does it mean the "influence" of Buddhism? Rather paradoxically they are taken as traces of Buddhism while at the same time claiming that they cannot be properly called Buddhist. This makes it quite unclear what is to be considered Buddhist or not. In fact, their reading as Buddhist motifs is often based on very tenuous similarities. And, to further compound the problem, their geographic distribution is very wide but often with only few exemplars. Such is the case, for instance, of a fragment of a stone from an Eastern Han tomb in Shandong: we find here a six-tusked elephant followed by a Chinese

mythological animal (which could be a *qilin* or a dragon). Although it is known that in Indian Buddhism an elephant with six tusks stood for one of the Buddha's former incarnations thus far this is the only example of such an elephant in China for this period, making it very difficult to draw any conclusions. This is the case because, in general, it is nearly impossible to establish reliable comparisons or work out any patterns, both of which are fundamental steps in the interpretation of material culture in terms of practice rather than as mere indexical evidence.

In this sense, this group of artifacts is important because of their contrast with the case of the funerary Buddhas. These are found in clusters, both geographic and chronological, and in much larger quantities. In my view, this quantitative difference points to a marked preference for the Buddha-figure as compared to other Buddhist motifs.

3.3 FUNERARY BUDDHA-FIGURES

As noted above, we cannot be certain that each and every artifact bearing Buddhist motifs was made specifically for funerary purposes but the large majority certainly were. The questions why and how these motifs were put to this unprecedented use have generally been answered in congruence with the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in China, i.e. they were misunderstood or assimilated in terms of Daoism, or with other native beliefs and cults. Just as the Chinese initially thought that immortality of the soul was one of Buddhism's main doctrines, and (mis-)understood the Buddha in terms of Laozi so did they confuse the Buddha with Xiwangmu or other funerary figures, or took other motifs as auspicious symbols. This may be a rather simplified depiction but what is indisputable is that the notion of misunderstanding has been central to the various positions.

I have coined the expression “funerary Buddhas” to somehow reproduce linguistically the awkward and surprising fact that results from the placement of Buddha figures within mortuary contexts, clearly setting them apart from other representations of the Buddha. It is also meant to highlight the way I approach these figures: rather than approaching these artifacts from the perspective of Chinese Buddhism as an organismic system and assessing how they diverged from doctrinally acceptable uses, I seek to re-frame our view of these items in their funerary, local and ideological context. For that reason, rather than relying on a narrative constructed on scarce textual evidence to interpret the material corpus I propose to first approach them in their own context, and only from there construct any explanatory hypotheses.

3.3.1 Earliest traces: Sichuan in the Eastern Han

In the previous chapter we saw that, from what we could gather from the textual record, some form of Buddhist activity was limited mainly to three areas, the imperial capital, Chang’an, Pengcheng in the north of Jiangsu and Tonkin in present-day Vietnam. In contrast, one of the most unexpected revelations was the finding of the earliest artifacts bearing Buddha figures in Sichuan, a region that was considered negligible in relation to the early contacts with Buddhism. In fact, in his *Buddhist Conquest* in a survey of the state of Buddhism in China from 345 to 400 CE Zürcher (1972) observed that only in this period, as Buddhism continued to spread out, “the first communities” were “established in isolated Sichuan” (p. 114). However, although the tombs and artifacts bearing Buddha figures in this area are not dated by inscription, archaeologists have placed them as either late Eastern Han (25 – 220 CE) or Shu-Han (221 – 263 CE), and are thus the earliest examples discovered in China to date. For this reason, Zürcher (1990b) avers, in the

case of Sichuan “[t]here appears to be no connection with the spread of monastic Buddhism [...] and the representations cannot be traced back to any archaic translated text” (p. 166).

These pieces do show, however, that the Buddha image was being used beyond the confines of foreign communities in the area, at least among some people who had integrated it into the local funerary repertoire.

There is another important fact: in the history of Chinese religions Sichuan finds its place in the Han period rather as the cradle of the first organized Daoist group that deserved recording in the official annals, the *Taiping Dao* 太平道 (Way of the Great Peace) whose followers would be the protagonists of the Yellow Turban rebellion. This outbreak took place in 184 CE and it was so massive that it could only be repressed with much military force and bloodshed leaving the Han empire on the brink of dissolution. We know that the development and organization of some form of Daoist-inspired movement, the *Wudoumi dao* 五斗米道 (the way of the five pecks of rice) had started earlier. The founder of this group, Zhang Ling (also known as Zhang Dao Ling), is said to have received Laozi’s revelations in 142 CE.¹⁰²

¹⁰² It is important to note that Sichuan was an ethnically diverse area, and that culturally, it had a very rich prehistory. In this respect, mention has to be made of Sanxingdui 三星堆, a walled city in Guanghan 廣漢 county, 40 km north of Chengdu 成都 dating to around 1200 BCE. See Bagley 1999, 212-219

3.3.1.1 Tomb carvings¹⁰³

According to Rhie's iconographic analysis (1999) the Buddha figures of Mahao Cave IX and Shiziwan tomb I are quite similar to the early Kushana Mathurā, western Central Asia and the Khotan region Buddhas, which leads her to date them to the late 2nd or first half of the third century CE (pp. 47-57). This assertion contradicts Zürcher's conclusion that "in all cases where Buddhist images still have a clearly recognizable 'iconographic identity', they invariably exhibit the features of the Indo-Greek style of Buddhist art that took its rise in the Gandhāra region (in present day Pakistan) around the beginning of the second century of our era" (Zürcher 1990b, 167). From this observation Zürcher had further suggested that the borrowings were "roughly synchronous with the date of the Indian originals," and also, that well-known Chinese conventions accounted for the non-Indian features, in other words, that there was "no sign of any formal distortion due to a non-Chinese artistic tradition originating from some intermediate zone of transmission" (Zürcher 1990b, 167). Rhie (1999) compares each feature of the figure with images from elsewhere and observes that the way the garment falls ("in spreading 'S' curve of delicate parallel pleats in front of the cross legs") as well as the abhaya mudra with the left hand holding up the hem of the tunic are "most common in the Kushana period seated Buddhas of the Mathurā school in Central India during the 2nd century" (p. 52). The hands, in contrast, are similar to those of the charioteer of the figure of a foreigner found in Hunan and also to portrayals in the wall paintings of a shrine in Miran on the southern Silk Road in eastern Central Asia. The loose folds of drapery are similarly used in the depiction of Xiwangmu on a Latter Han

¹⁰³ Abe, 2002; Edwards, 1954, pp. 18-30; Gao Wen, 1987; Rhie, 1999, pp. 47-56, Tang Changshou, 1989; Wu Hung, 1986, pp. 266-268; Wu Zhuo, 1992; Yu Weichao, 1980, pp. 74-75 all provide relevant information and discussions about the tomb carvings.

time from a tomb near Chengdu. “With considerable sophistication and rhythmic spirit, the lumpy folds, thick body, small hands and lively pleat folds of the Ma Hao Cave IX Buddha combine to produce an image highly Chinese in style” (p.53). Despite this, some other features are similar to Central Asian and Indian works, since the number of correspondences is more than incidental, Rhie concludes that these

suggest some relation with the art of the Mathūra school and of major sites of the Silk Road in Central Asia, especially those along the southern route and Lou-lan, that is from the territory associated with the kingdom of Shan-shan. These elements, however, have all been ingeniously combined and fashioned into a coherent Chinese variant style. (Rhie 1999, 54)

Although the comparison with other pieces at times seems problematic or far-fetched, especially when such procedure is closely connected to a diffusionist approach as in Rhie’s case, it at least has the advantage of highlighting each figure as an individual piece of work. In this regard, the question that remains for me is whether we should understand that the artisan took inspiration from various sources to create this figure, or whether he used a single model that already comprised a variety of styles and further stylized it according to Chinese artistic conventions.

3.3.1.1.1 Shiziwan 柿子灣 tomb I

This tomb is located across the Min 岷 river in the city of Leshan 樂山 in Western Sichuan. Most tombs in this area are small and have little if any decoration. This one, however, has a large antechamber with carvings in the back and side walls. These include, as is common in other Chinese tombs, scenes depicting themes of loyalty and filial piety, as well as guardian

figures. Above the middle doorway we find a figure that exhibits the traits of a seated Buddha, with halo and usnisa, with the right hand displaying the *abhaya* mudra and the left hand holding the hem of the robes, which fall in front of the crossed legs.¹⁰⁴ The unambiguous consensus among scholars is that this is a Buddha image. Rhie has observed that this mudra and the style of the falling drape was most common in the seated Buddhas of the Kushana period of the Mathurā school in Central India.¹⁰⁵

3.3.1.1.2 Mahao 麻浩 tomb IX

This relatively large cave-tomb has been generally dated to the Latter Han¹⁰⁶ and is also located near the Min river. In 1954 Richard Edwards reported the finding of an isolated Buddha image in the form of a stone relief in the first chamber (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17). This image, like the ones in Shiziwan, displays all the iconographical traits of a Buddha despite being rather worn.

Except for this figure, the relief carvings that can be discerned are traditional.¹⁰⁷ Those at the entrance depict a motif typical in Latter Han tombs, a bearded ram with two embracing figures, and an ensemble of three people playing musical instruments. In the antechamber we find the very common depiction of Jing Ke's attempted assassination of the Qin emperor.

¹⁰⁴ There is one more Buddha image in this tomb but less well preserved in the center of the lintel above the right tomb entrance. See Fig. 3.15.

¹⁰⁵ Rhie (1999, 52-52) also notes that some figures from the Swat Gandhāran schools around the Kushana capital of Purusapura (present-day Peshawar in northern Pakistan) also exhibit the *abhaya* gesture and the style of the falling drape.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards (1954) suggested that it could be dated to the Shu Han period (221-263), while Rhie posits that the tomb was probably worked on over several generations extending from the Latter Han to Shu Han.

¹⁰⁷ Some reliefs are badly damaged.

In his comprehensive study of these images Wu Hung concluded that the practice of carving a Buddha image in tombs must have been quite widespread in the area (Wu, 1985, p. 266). However, so far these are the only three examples found out of thousands of early tombs excavated on the Sichuan plain. What is undeniable is that they attest to the incorporation of the Buddha motif into mortuary settings at least 200 years before we have any textual evidence of Buddhist monastic presence in this area. Although we cannot conclude that these were cases of ‘conversion’ or that this is evidence of a significant Buddhist presence, they open up questions of routes and modes of transmission.

Abe (2002, p. 30) has pointed out that these images’ function can be considered anything but Buddhist. Wu attempted to establish the equivalence of this figure to that of the Queen Mother of West by arguing that the position in which we find the Buddha images would have normally been occupied by her. This is important to notice because this interpretation is quite widespread in recent scholarly literature¹⁰⁸ and because this can be easily used to support the common claim that Buddhism initially relied on Daoism to gain a foothold. Wu Hung, however, has since abandoned that hypothesis.

I should clarify that I agree that there is an important relationship between the figures of Xiwangmu and the Buddha, but not necessarily a straightforward relationship of interchangeability or assimilation. Rather, I argue that it is a case of synergistic interaction. I present this argument in section 5.3.4.4 on Xiwangmu and the Buddha.

Wu Zhuo (1992, 46-49) has presented a compelling hypothesis according to which a minority people who mostly lived in the area around the Min river may have been involved with

¹⁰⁸ To mention but recent examples, see Barrett, 2010, p. 435; Bumbacher, 2007, p. 201 and Zürcher, 1999, p. xv.

Buddhism. Through the analysis of tomb inscriptions and figurines he first establishes that members of this group had gained prominence, especially in the military, at the beginning of the Han dynasty. Later, and well into the Shu Han period some families of this minority group had attained high social status and may have been involved with Buddhism. Rhie (1999, 55) reasons that if this is the case possibly the Buddhist images in the tombs may have been related to those minority families.

While the possibility of the involvement of minority groups remains an attractive option, in view of the paucity of evidence to confirm this claim, we have to consider it as conjectural. What we can be certain about, however, is that these two tombs were not just average in terms of size or ornamentation. They must have clearly belonged to wealthier families.

3.3.1.2 Money trees (*yaoqianshu* 搖錢樹)

The *yaoqianshu*, often translated as Money Tree, has been so called by modern scholars for its most salient feature: coins attached to its branches (Fig. 1.1). They contain images of deities as well as real or fantastic animals. In general, Money Trees are larger than most Han dynasty artifacts (an example from Pengshan in Sichuan measures 53 inches). The tombs in which these Money Trees have been found have been dated through analysis of their structure and the objects they contain to the late first to early third centuries CE. One of the pieces that can be dated with more precision is precisely the money tree base that has a Buddha-image as it has a brick stamped with a date equivalent to 102 CE (Nanjing bowuyuan, 1991, p. 97).

The base is generally made of clay (ranging in height from 14 to 64cm) and sometimes stone, while the “branches” are made of a very thin layer of bronze, which explains why in most cases the base has been much better preserved than the branches. This was clearly an expensive

item. The use of Money Trees seems to have been limited to the area of five modern-day provinces in western China in the area that extends along a corridor reaching north to Shaanxi, northwest to Qinghai, and south to Guizhou and Yunnan, with the most sites located in Sichuan. Erickson (1999, p. 27) suggests that Sichuan must have been the center of production for these artifacts.¹⁰⁹ This area was not only an important economic zone for agricultural production and mineral resources but it was also a center of production of lacquer wares that were exported to other parts of the empire. It emerges from archaeological evidence that the local artisans were familiar with Han conventions and taste.

Some scholars have associated money trees with the merchant class¹¹⁰ but there is no certainty that this was actually the case. We do know, however, that excavated Money Trees were part of wealthy tombs. The general contention is that these trees were not meant to be used for any practical purposes but were made to be placed in a tomb. One scholar, however, contends that they were objects of worship based on the extraordinarily large size (as compared to most funerary objects). It has also been surmised that they were related to cults of the earth and Xiwangmu. These hypotheses reveal how little we know with certainty about actual funerary practices and beliefs in this area despite the hundreds of tombs that have already been excavated and thus how tentative any conclusions about the motivations for the choice of the Buddha image would be. What their function was is still a matter of debate. Yu Weichao has argued that given

¹⁰⁹ The type of tomb that predominated in Sichuan was the *yamu*, which are cave-like chambers carved into the side of a mountain. See Erickson, 1994, p. 27.

¹¹⁰ Irisawa, 1993; James, 1995, p. 38.

the social context in which they appear they were “most likely used to symbolize the deity *She* 社” that was often represented by trees.¹¹¹

3.3.1.2.1 Ceramic Money Tree base from Pengshan 彭山

This is a green glaze ceramic excavated from a cliff tomb at Pengshan between Chengdu and Jiading on the Min River in west-central Sichuan (Fig. 3.18). The Buddha is sitting cross-legged, apparently there is an usnisa, and as in the case of the Mahao Buddha his right hand is in the abhayā mudra and although the section of the left hand is quite damaged it would seem that it is holding the hem of the robe. As in the case of the Mahao Buddha, Rhie maintains that it reflects prevailing Mathurā Kushana imagery of ca. 2nd century CE, which can be explained because of the direct route from Sichuan through Burma to central India.

3.3.2 Concluding remarks

Carvings of the Buddha on the lintels of tomb entrances are unique to the Sichuan area, at least according to the present archaeological data. This, their formal similarity and the fact that the tombs in question are geographically quite close seem to support Wu Zhuo’s thesis that this peculiar use may have been related to a minority, or, we could also propose, to a wealthy group inhabiting this area. As to the function of these Buddha figures, given that they occupy a position that is consistently taken by motifs with apotropaic function¹¹² it seems quite plausible that the Buddha figures were also intended to protect the tomb and its occupants.

¹¹¹ “最可能是用来 象征社神” (Yu, 1980, p. 75).

¹¹² Cf. Abe, 2002, pp. 28-30.

In addition to tomb lintels, Buddha figures have been found on money trees, which are artifacts unique to southwest China. They continue to intrigue scholars as the determination of their functions is hampered by the variety of motifs in individual trees. However, as their main characteristic among this diversity is an abundance of coins on the branches, it would seem that it served a basic auspicious function.

Abe (2002) concludes that “although the features of the figures accord with Indian Buddha images of the period, the function and meaning of the Buddha-like figure in these tombs is anything but Buddhist” (p.30). Similarly, Wu Hung referring to these Buddha figures and other Buddhist motifs dated to the Han surmises that:

Although these elements came from Indian Buddhist art, in none of the examples discussed above do these elements have either an inherently Buddhist content, or a Buddhist religious function. Rather, as novel forms, they served to enrich the representations of Chinese indigenous cults and traditional ideas. It would be misleading to identify these works as early Chinese Buddhist art and take them as the true embodiment of the original Buddhist meaning. In fact, these works cannot even be seen as reflecting a fusion of Buddhism and the Chinese tradition. They only reflect a random borrowing of Buddhist elements by Han popular art. In my opinion, this was the dominant situation when Buddhist art was first introduced into China. (Wu 1986, 273)

Zürcher (1990, 166) too referring to the motifs dated to the Han concluded that these “material relics illustrate how Buddhist elements found their way into Chinese cultic practices, and the extent to which they lost their original function in the process.” And this has been the commonly accepted position with regards not only to this part of the record but to the ‘material

corpus' in general. Although it would seem that this is as far as we can get, there are in fact a number of points that need to be made.

First, the notion of “original function” is not as straightforward as it would seem, especially in the case of the Buddha figure. Let us remember that there is still no conclusive evidence about the origins of the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha.¹¹³ We know that as an icon it was commonly used for worship. However, we also know that, although not so common, it was stamped on gold coins just as several other deities of Greek, Iranian or Hindu origin during the Kushan empire (30-375 CE). In fact, it has even been surmised that the earliest Buddha image is found on a coin dating from 75 BCE.¹¹⁴

Second, the assumption that this was the result of random borrowing needs to be scrutinized as it figures prominently in the current interpretation of the ‘material record.’ Zürcher (1990) describes it as “the diffuse and unsystematic adoption of Buddhist elements in indigenous beliefs and cults” (p. 159), while Wu Hung (1986) sees it as reflecting “a random borrowing of Buddhist elements by Han popular art” (p. 273) To the extent that these statements refer to the pieces dated to the Han, it is quite tempting to agree with them. However, we do know now that the chronological and geographic distribution is much larger. It also appears to be clear that Buddha figures formally vary according to the region. These facts run counter the assumption of randomness and rather compel us to ask whether this appropriation was not culturally ordered, which leads us to the third point.

Abe, Wu, Zürcher and other scholars have highlighted the fact that the use to which the Buddha image was first put did not fulfill a Buddhist religious function, in the sense that they

¹¹³ See Krishan, 1996, pp. 28-45.

¹¹⁴ See Altekar, 1952, pp. 52-53.

were not used as icons of worship. I agree with this conclusion. However, there is another important point that has not been made. The Buddha image was also an innovation, along with the representation of the Queen Mother of the West, in the Chinese funerary context. Indeed, in this period we do not find in these areas the *consistent* depiction of other funerary deities in human form.¹¹⁵

This is not to say that there are no human images in tombs in these areas in this period. On the contrary, there is a plethora of them. But clearly they are not representing supernatural beings rather they represent historical or legendary scenes, by mimesis they may also represent the same function as in the natural world.

It is also relevant to notice that Buddhist iconography was not the only foreign artistic repertoire available. Far from that, there was a large variety of exotics in circulation.¹¹⁶ This, in my view, indicates that there was an important element of choice that has been consistently overlooked. The element of choice, I believe, is fundamental to understand that (i) this was not a farraginous process—as it is often considered to be, and thus (ii) that we should be able to work out possible motivations for the choices made by placing them in context.

¹¹⁵ I must underscore here that I am referring to the period from the early Eastern Han to the Jin dynasty. I am well aware of Sanxingdui culture dating to circa the twelfth century BCE. I am also referring to the *consistent* depiction of funerary deities in *entirely* human form as we may find occasional human representations of what seem to be supernatural beings and we certainly find a variety of these beings represented as partly human but with various hybrid, often animal, characteristics.

¹¹⁶ See for instance Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, 1994.

Indeed, of the wide array of foreign motifs in circulation the Buddha figure is clearly one in which a number of people from Sichuan to Zhejiang had special interest, enough to manufacture items containing it.¹¹⁷ Perhaps I can better illustrate this point by way of an analogy. We know, for instance, that some of the earliest texts that were translated into Chinese could be considered peripheral within the Buddhist tradition (in the sense that, from a normative point of view, they would not be considered necessary to understand the essentials of Buddhist doctrine). This could lead us to conclude that the translation of this kind of peripheral texts, for instance those that dealt with respiratory exercises, was the result of random borrowing and/or an expression of the ignorance of the main Buddhist tenets. This may well be so but when we situate these translations in its socio-historical context we see that this choice clearly reflected the interest in this kind of psychophysical practices in certain milieus. Similarly, in view of the chronological and geographic distribution of the Buddha figures we can rule out idiosyncratic choice as a final explanation and attempt to elucidate whether and in what ways this choice was culturally ordered.

3.4 WU KINGDOM: ARTIFACTS OF THE WUCHANG AREA

Wuchang 武昌 (in present-day Hubei province) was the first capital of the Wu Kingdom from 221 to 229, when it was moved to Jianye. It is in this area that one of the most distinctive

¹¹⁷ We will also see below, in section 5.2.4 on Xiwangmu that it is quite probable that the visual representation of this deity could have been inspired directly by Kybele.

mortuary objects related to Buddhism was excavated from a tomb in Echeng: a free-standing Buddha figure. Although it has been used as evidence for the existence of some kind of Buddha-image worship in this period the fact remains that it continues to be the only piece of its kind recovered to present. Gao Wen includes the description of a bronze Buddha statuette among the items with “Buddhist influence” found in Sichuan. He describes it as measuring 14.1 cm in height and as seated in a kneeling position.

It is characterized by a high-bridged nose and a stern facial expression. The forehead has a protuberance, and the hair is tied in a knot. Both arms hang down. The body is marked with lines, its lower portion being unclear. The torso is bare. The statuette is supported by a stand made up of four animals with curved limbs and heads turned back. They seem to resemble either lions or tigers. The base is circular in shape, its sides decorated with a pattern of pointed leaves. The whole structure is extremely unusual. The statuette was perhaps made by the Buddhist Hinayana sect and has been tentatively called a ‘bronze Buddhist statuette of the Later Han (Gao, 1987, p. 50).

It is most unfortunate, however, that neither an image nor reference to the pertinent report was included by the author, so that there is nothing we can add besides this short reference. Other relevant artifacts found in tombs in nearby areas include two bronze mirrors and a bronze buckle.

3.4.1 Bronze mirrors

Bronze mirrors have long been objects of scholarly fascination. This can be partially explained by their sheer beauty, artistic complexity, the intricacy of many compositions, as well as the intriguing forms and characters that appear in them. It is not surprising then that a group of

mirrors bearing Buddha images or Buddhist iconographic elements should have been at the center of very intense debates for more than sixty years now. They would occupy a central place in this dissertation were it not for the fact that of the more than twenty Buddha-mirrors found only two have been excavated in Chinese territory¹¹⁸ while the others have all been found in Japan. The lack of agreement among scholars as to the origin of their production further complicates the issue. Indeed, while some scholars maintain they were made in Japan by Chinese artisans, others argue for a northern Chinese origin, while still others make a strong case for a southern production.¹¹⁹ The dating is also a subject of considerable debate, the earliest date proposed being around 240 CE (the Shinyama mirror) and the latest, fifth century.¹²⁰ On the bright side, however, in either case, there is agreement that they were made by Chinese hands. Thus, although I am fully aware that the various proposed origins and dates would be suggestive of quite different hypotheses they do give us some insights when compared to other mirrors and to the other types of artifacts considered in this research.

Furthermore, this group of mirrors cannot simply be ignored since they have commanded so much scholarly attention, and despite the uncertainties surrounding them, they constitute an important reference for other pieces in the material record. In order to understand their place in the Chinese religious landscape some background information is in order. There is agreement that bronze mirrors were expensive luxury goods that only privileged individuals could afford, but even so, their production was greatly increased from the period of the Warring States (475-

¹¹⁸ It is more accurate to say that one *kuifeng* mirror with depictions of the Buddha, and one *shenshou* mirror with a damaged figure that is read as the Buddha have been excavated in China.

¹¹⁹ See Rhie, 1999, p. 120; Wang, 1981; Wu, 1986, pp. 282-283.

¹²⁰ Wu, 1986, pp. 278-283; Wang, 1982; Mizuno, 1960, pp. 9-10.

206 BCE) through the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE). Thousands have been excavated and in most cases they were found on top of or next to the corpse probably showing the important place they occupied for the deceased in relation to other objects.

Mirrors generally had two sides; the frontal one was a polished reflective surface while the back was variously ornamented. Besides the fact that bronze was a precious ritual material, the reflective property of these artifacts seems to have served beyond the practical every day use to protect the person carrying it from evil, in general, and especially from ghosts. Indeed, although it would seem self-evident that the main function of mirrors was to serve the very mundane one of grooming oneself, the earliest evidence of such use dates only to the fourth or fifth century CE.¹²¹ We find literary evidence for their decorative and prophylactic functions already in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes)¹²². In the early Western Han mirrors with inscriptions with incantations or prayers start to appear, making at least some of their ascribed functions more explicit. Many of those inscriptions express wishes for longevity, immortality, success in a promotion, or the good health of the emperor.

Mirrors most commonly had a central boss with two openings that allowed the user to wear it attached to a belt. A late source indicates that Daoists carried it on their back to protect themselves against evil spirits. In a mortuary setting, it is generally accepted that they equally served to protect the deceased from evil influences. The motifs that appear on mirrors went

¹²¹ In the Gukaizhi scroll (Loewe ,1979, p. 65). If we accept that a pottery figure excavated in Chengdu depicts a woman holding a mirror then we could assume that this use was already present in the Eastern Han. This of course does not necessarily imply that mirrors were not used for this purpose at an earlier period but that we have no evidence to prove it.

¹²² A work probably compiled in the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE) that contains poems from the 11th to 7th century.

through a very complex evolution, scholars have identified several types and sub-types, some of which have been interpreted as cosmological patterns.¹²³

As for the group of Buddha-mirrors, there are basically two types in terms of their ornamental content: mirrors with designs of deities and mythical animals (*shenshou jing* 神獸鏡), and mirrors with designs of phoenixes (*kuifeng jing* 夔鳳鏡).¹²⁴ According to Mizuno and Nagahiro there are a few *shenshou* mirrors with Buddhist motifs (*foshenshou* 佛神獸) in Japanese collections. However, the only *foshenshou* piece excavated from a Chinese tomb was found in Echeng 鄂城, in the area of Wuchang 武昌 (Figs. 3.19 and 3.20). There are six figures, five of which are interpreted as deities, besides the good omen animals. Wang Zhong Shu (1982) identified the deities as Dongwanggong, Xiwangmu, the Buddha flanked by a standing attendant, and two unknown deities. These four are interspersed with mythical beasts. Wang identifies the Buddha on the basis of the posture and the lotus pedestal but the figure is badly damaged by erosion to allow for certainty. Although at least one scholar¹²⁵ prefers to disregard this piece precisely on the grounds that the figure is too damaged, if we compare it with the Japanese *foshenshou* mirrors and pay heed to the detailed analysis undertaken by Wu Hung, even if we cannot know whether this was a Buddha figure, it is still important to note that it has some of the common iconographic markers of the Buddha.

Indeed, Wu Hung (1986, p. 276) has noted that although various scholars have maintained that seven of these contain Buddha images, none of them has all the standard

¹²³ See Loewe, 1979.

¹²⁴ Mizuno Seiichi (1950) proposed three types, sub-dividing the *shenshou jing* according to the kind of rim. This classification is important to understand the debates around origin and dating but not so relevant for the purpose of this section.

¹²⁵ Stanley Abe, 2002, p. 53).

iconographic markers of the Buddha. He suggests that a more precise classification would consist of a series of variations between two polar types, with Chinese deities on one pole and the Buddha on the other. He notes several interesting variations in the depiction: images of a deity with a close-fitting costume, and hands joint in front of the body added to a cross-legged sitting position that closely resembles the dhyāna mudrā of Indian Buddhist art. They have, however, the typical crown of Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong, and are winged. While some scholars have identified these images as a Buddha, Wu suggests that these should be read as Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong, and explicates this mixing as the product of “conceptual confusion.”¹²⁶

I will deal with this notion more fully in the next chapter but here I would like to point out that even if we want to keep the notion of “conceptual confusion” as an explanatory option, we may also consider another approach to the borrowing of iconographic elements. Maybe it is not so much that artisans (or patrons) confused them as that they interpreted them as having similar functions, that is, as functionally commensurate, or to borrow a term from linguistics, as “translatable.” This may also imply that it was not so much the particular deity itself that was important, or, in other words, that their intention was not necessarily so much to depict a particular deity as to include a motif or representation that performed a certain function, at least to the mind of the beholder. Yet, another option, would be to think of the process in terms of evocation, what did these elements evoke for the artist or patron?

¹²⁶ Wu (1986) states that “these variations reflect [...] a conceptual confusion about the gods in the minds of contemporary people, and the random borrowing of divine features from different sources both traditional and foreign” (p. 276).

The main problem I see with conceptualizing the operation of integrating bits and pieces from an alien repertoire into one's own as "confusion," or, more commonly, as misunderstanding, is that it is premised on the assumption that this was an unconscious process. This is not to deny that there may have been instances of misunderstanding and confusion but to underscore the fact that by resorting to it as a general explanation we are concurrently assuming a lack of agency on the receiving end. One possible way of avoiding the all too common resort to 'misunderstanding' is to think in terms of translation, or, rather cultural translation. This metaphor is also not without problems, perhaps the most important one is that the comparison with natural languages is not always productive, and may sometimes be seriously misleading. On the positive side it at least has two important advantages: it does not depict the 'receiver' as passive, and it calls attention to the possibilities of combination, and functional similarity *and* contrast of signs or symbols. In the process of translation one sign may be closely equivalent to another but it may also produce a higher or lower degree of shift in denotation or connotation: there are indeed several possible outcomes in this model that can, to a certain extent, be represented in mathematical form: the new sign adds (excess) to the "original" meaning; the new sign limits/decreases the "original" meaning; the new sign is closely similar. But beyond these, it may alter and/or disturb the composition in ways that can be unpredictable. For instance, in the traditional pre-Han representation of Xiwangmu this deity was commonly surrounded by mythical beasts, and followers; her attributes were displayed symbolically by the rabbit, the moon, the twig, etc. That is, the different ways in which she could impart deathlessness or immortality. Her functions, powers, origins were all represented in standard ways, but they were not necessarily all present at the same time every time. If we wanted to find the essential marker we could ask: what makes Xiwangmu Xiwangmu? Her crown, her attributes, the animals that

surround her? Her dress? Her throne? Is it the addition of all of these? How many of these would be enough to indicate unequivocally that this was a representation of Xiwangmu? How often would an artisan be confronted with such a question? How free was he to stylize or replace those attributes?

It is in this context, I think, that we can view the deities with mixed attributes as something other than conceptual confusion. We must here face precisely the question that scholars have tried to tackle: is an image that resembles Xiwangmu¹²⁷ with her hands clearly in dhyana mudra, Xiwangmu or the Buddha? But the question is rather blunt, unless we find a mirror that states what figure is being represented, we will probably never know, and even in the event we were fortunate enough to come by such a piece, we would not be entitled to generalize this identification to all other representations. Furthermore, even if we found such a mirror with a hybrid figure and a textual identification we would still not be sure in what terms that particular artisan or patron was representing the Buddha or Xiwangmu, or if he was not understanding one in terms of the other, or to what extent he was understanding one in terms of the other.

While Wu Hung's explanation is very appealing to common sense, the reason for morphological changes, as those of the hairdos or halo, is not easy to explain, and it is tempting to dismiss them as carelessness or insufficient understanding. The association of a mixture of heterogeneous elements (that is often called "syncretism") with "confusion" has a long historical pedigree. However, cognitive scientists (most prominently, Pascal Boyer), postcolonial scholars, anthropologists (for instance, Bastide) and other cultural theorists have argued against such an

¹²⁷ The common iconographic markers of Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong on mirrors are: a crown (usually with three points on top), traditional Chinese long wide sleeves that conceal the hands, they are accompanied by winged immortals and mythical animals, their lower bodies are not clearly shown.

association. From a comparative perspective these variations (or adaptations) are not unique at all. Indeed, the interaction among missionaries, patrons, artisans in the most diverse situations and places of contact, be it Latin America or India, have elicited various adaptations or modifications. Gilberto Freyre (2000, p. 223) suggests, for instance, that the transformation of English models of furniture by African-American hands in Brazil can be understood in terms of the 'habitus' of the artisans, in the sense Pierre Bourdieu uses the term. I would like to contend that the notion of 'habitus,' understood as a generative structure (more specifically, as a kind of embodied knowledge) that both limits and enables individuals to improvise, is extremely useful to deal with religious interaction. On the one hand it sets it firmly in the more general realm of cultural interaction, and helps us avoid, to a certain extent, conceptualizing the problem in terms of belief. Surely, beliefs also constitute and are constituted by social habitus but they need not be considered as a privileged part of it. In other words, mental depictions or conceptions did not necessarily precede material form. Artisanal creations were probably based on models, which may have been small or large (when available), or even verbal descriptions, but they did not need be exact copies.

If the decoration served the purpose of enhancing the mirror's talismanic power, as it seems to, such mixtures could have been seen almost as alchemical experiments. That is, certain attributes were re-employed with this purpose. We may wonder, how different is this from the hybrid beasts that populated so much of the Han imagination?¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Cognitive scientists would probably explain these occurrences in terms of our mental makeup, which would be important to understand the mechanics of the processes involved but would still leave the task of understanding each instance in its own socio-historical context.

Although it seems self-evident that we interpret one sign in terms of others, beyond its referential capacity, each sign is constituted by syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, that are not always present or presented, that it enables and at the same time constrains or expands its meaning and function. So that framing the question in terms of a one-to-one sign relationship greatly limits what we can perceive of the various possible alternatives in which we can establish relationships among signs.

3.4.1.1 The case of the Echeng mirror

On the other side of the spectrum we find (on one side, we have the selective borrowing of iconographic elements) the other mirror excavated in Chinese soil (Illustration 3.21). It was also found in Echeng, Hubei but this is a *kuifeng* (facing phoenixes) exemplar. In this mirror the four leaf vignettes contain Buddhist figures: three are seated Buddhas in dhyana mudra on a seat that seems to combine lion and dragon attributes, on top of a lotus. Interestingly enough, a mirror held by the Tokyo National Museum (a piece of unknown origin) is almost identical.¹²⁹

The three seated Buddha-figures have a round head halo with double lined rim and an encompassing halo (mandorla). The fourth figure has been identified as a contemplative (also called, pensive) Bodhisattva. Junghee Lee (1993, 319 n. 47) has described the figure kneeling by his side as Siddhārtha's father, King Śuddhodana, bowing to his son during his first meditation, and the standing figure beside Siddhārtha and holding a parasol for him as Chandaka, his cousin and groom. Rhie (1999) suggests "this may be the clear representation in Chinese art of the contemplative Bodhisattva, possibly Siddhārtha" (p. 124). And considers that the fact that all the

¹²⁹ I should note here that in the Han through Jin dynasty periods the main known form of production of mirrors was by lost wax. This means that some mirrors could be made with the same mold, or the mold could be slightly altered before making a second one.

major deities of the mirror are Buddhist “raises the question of meaning and interpretation, not only in the usual auspicious terms associated with mirrors, but in Buddhist terms. One possible explanation,” she suggests, “is the representation of the four Buddhas of this bhadra-kalpa...the four directional alignment could also relate to these images with the Four-Direction Buddhas” (p. 124). Rhie bases this hypothesis on Faxian’s reporting that he saw many Four-Direction Buddhas in the early 5th century in India, and also on the fact that “[s]ince Chinese mirrors frequently have a cosmological significance, it may be interpreted here in relation to Buddhist cosmology” (p. 124).

This is an interesting suggestion. We could also posit that as the design of this type of mirrors already had four areas, they were simply “filled,” as it were, with Buddha images, three of which were identical and one that was different. We may also argue that because this was the case there was a good “match” between the compositional design and the cosmological arrangement of the Four-Direction Buddhas. Or rather, that this design agreed better with the idiosyncratic view of the patron or artisan. What is more, we do not need to suppose that these options are mutually exclusive.

In general, the tendency has been to identify these figures as Buddha images.¹³⁰ However, as Abe notes this identification has been mainly based on the presence of halos and the thrones supported by lotus petals. He contends that it is also possible

that the throne of three of the figures is the dragon/tiger throne of the Queen Mother, which would make these a hybrid of Chinese and Buddhist elements. Such a possibility then opens the question of what is represented by the fourth image, which is a haloed

¹³⁰ See Rhie, 1999, pp. 123-124; Ruan Rongchun, 1998, p. 202; Wang Zhongshu, p. 1982; Wu Hung, 1986, p. 282.

figure with one lowered leg, leaning toward a kneeling supplicant. Of the four images, the last is the most likely candidate to be a Buddha image. Yet the posture and gesture are not conventional in this period, leaving open the possibility that the image was meant to represent something other than a Buddha figure. The Echeng mirror illustrates the difficulty in determining the meaning of hybrid images of this type even if one were able to disentangle the Buddhist and non-Buddhist motifs. (Abe, 2002, p. 53)

The risk of reading too much or too little in an image is always present. Beyond the difficulties, these hybrid images also underscore, in my view, the ambiguity of elements, at least for us as interpreters. We cannot be sure if the contemporaneous beholder would have been aware what was represented, and any “meaning” we suggest will have to remain hypothetical. Beyond this, it underlies another very important aspect that sometimes goes unnoticed, the agency of the artisan. Indeed, the realization that these hybrid figures and compositions were not copies of images that may have been circulating in the period, but the product of some selective choices (that we do not understand or cannot account for with certainty), that implied some form of re-accommodation, that may have been guided by some principles, or may have been rather random, that may have succeeded (or not) in creating the effect intended. It is also tempting to try and create an evolutionary typology that would go from more hybrid to more “authentic” but the dated artifacts make such an attempt vain.

3.4.2 Glazed pottery

Another intriguing object is a 20.6 cm tall glazed pottery seated Buddha figure found in a tomb in Tangjiatou 塘角頭, in Ezhou city, Hubei (Figs. 3.22 and 3.23). This is the largest stand alone Buddha figure of the period unearthed thus far. The team of excavators has dated it to

sometime before 261 CE.¹³¹ Although we do not know who the occupant of this tomb was, it is a medium-sized tomb (8.72 m long), an indication that it must have been a rather wealthy individual (Fig. 3.24).

Once again we are confronted with several interpretations as to its use but first a brief description of the location and relative position is in order. Whereas other porcelain and pottery objects were placed in the front room, the Buddha figure was found in the corridor connecting the front and rear rooms along with one of the two standing pottery figures (Fig. 3.24). Abe (2002) reasons that since these were the only figures found in the corridor and the Buddha figure was found in two pieces, it may have been moved and broken by tomb robbers. As a second alternative he proposes that the figure may have already been broken when it was placed in the tomb, and that its conspicuous position would indicate that it served a special function “possibly to guard the deceased in the back room” (p. 55). Since it is also the largest pottery figure of the group (it measures 20.6 cm, while the standing attendant figures are 15.5 to 18.2 cm tall) it seems plausible that it may have held pride of place. In view of this, Yang Hong (1996, p. 30) suggests that this figure served as an object of reverence and worship to the deceased.

It is worth mentioning that tomb 4 in which the Buddha pottery was found is part of a group of neighboring tombs. According to the report, the other ones carry standard items and not any pieces exhibiting Buddhist iconographic markers.¹³² Abe refers to this figure as a Buddha-like one. Since the face and top of the head are damaged and the lower right arm is lost it is difficult to discern at least two of the most common iconographic markers, the ushnisha and the abhaya or dhyana mudra. According to the archaeological report, the hands overlap on the

¹³¹ Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Ezhou shi bowuguan, 1996.

¹³² Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Ezhou shi bowuguan, 1996.

abdomen although this gesture is covered by the clothing. However, as Abe maintains, the lower part of a squarish ushnisha can still be discerned.¹³³ The drapery style, however, is quite similar to other Buddha figures. It is almost certain that this piece was designed to be set on another piece (a base, perhaps) since the bottom is not even. Furthermore, the figure is pitched forward which suggests that it was meant to be in an elevated position.¹³⁴ However, we can also observe this inclination/tilt in other seated Buddhas (for instance, the Later Chao gilt bronze dated 338 CE or the “Harvard” Buddha).

3.4.3 Gilt bronze belt buckle (262 CE)

This 4.9cm-long and 3.1cm-wide pear-shaped object (Fig. 3.24) was found in tomb 475¹³⁵ at Lianchisi in present-day Wuchang,¹³⁶ not far from the tomb containing the stand-alone Buddha pottery. It is a small ornament, possibly a belt buckle that features the relief figure of a bodhisattva identifiable by the round head halo, bare chest, and the lotus pedestal. According to art historians this is the most detailed representation of a bodhisattva for that period.¹³⁷ The tomb in which it was found can be precisely dated to 262 CE (Wu Kingdom) thanks to a land record it contained. Because this tomb was disturbed at an early date, and the buckle item was found just

¹³³ I will use a simplified Sanskrit notation throughout unless quoting directly, the ś and s. will be transcribed as sh, and the dot under the ṇ will be omitted.

¹³⁴ Abe, 2002, pp. 54-55; Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Ezhou shi bowuguan 1996, 15-16.

¹³⁵ The tomb is 8.46 m long and 5.60 m wide with a front room, two small rooms to each side, and a rectangular rear room.

¹³⁶ Present-day Wuchang is close to Wu-Kingdom Wuchang but should not be confused.

¹³⁷ Abe, 2002, p. 56; Rhie, 1999, p. 128.

inside the front door of the tomb, Abe (2002) has speculated that it may not have been originally from the tomb or contemporary in date but could have been dropped there or placed at the doorway by a later intruder (p. 57). To this, we could perhaps also add an alternative explanation, since the tomb was disturbed it may have been the case that the intruder was intending to take the buckle but dropped it at the entrance. Even if it were the case, Abe's suggestion that this item may not have been made locally but brought to Hubei from another place is not to be dismissed. With these caveats in mind, it is also possible that this item did belong to the occupant of the tomb, the military officer/local commandant (xiaowei 校尉) Peng Lu 彭廬. The fact that he was a military official should also alert us to the fact that rather than representing the choice of this person, this ornament may well have been the booty of some war. This possibility is tempered, however, by the fact that among the fifty-six objects that could be recovered, there were three kneeling figures that feature small circles on the foreheads. The hands on the laps with the palms facing up seem to indicate a dhyana mudra, added to the circles that have been interpreted as the Buddha's ūrnā (one of his special marks), have led some scholars to identify them as Buddhist images. Abe, however, considers that

“[t]he round or pointed caps rather than an ushnīsha and the lack of monk's robes as well as the position of the legs, not crossed as is usual for a Buddha image, but tucked back, strongly argue against accepting these figures as Buddhist” (Abe, 2002, p. 57)

and that they are more closely related to the attendant figures found in other southeastern tombs of the period. My sense is that these are other exemplars of hybrid figures. Abe also raises the question “as to how to interpret the appearance of a single attribute of the Indian Buddha image. Is there a conscious intent of making a figure ‘Buddhist’ by including the ūrnā-like circle? How does an iconographical element from Buddhist art relate to the function of otherwise

common mortuary figures?” (p. 57). The latter is an important question. My tentative answer is that rather than thinking in terms of “buddhification” (or making a figure Buddhist) we could think in terms of attributes, as with the hybrid objects discussed earlier.

3.4.4 Censer with Buddha figure (ca. 270-280)

This burner is especially interesting because the owner of the tomb was a general of Wu, if not Sun Shu, a member of the ruling family of Wu. We know this thanks to a pottery model of a courtyard with a rather slovenly inscription indicating: “the gate/tower of the General Sun.” This has led scholars and excavators to speculate that this must have been Sun Shu, a character mentioned in the Wu history who died around in the 270s or 280s,¹³⁸ which would correspond to the latter part of the Eastern Wu or the beginning of the Western Jin 280.

Considering the large size of the tomb (9.03 m) and its structure¹³⁹ it is highly possible that if this was not General Sun Shu it was a member of the then ruling family of Wu. If the dating is accurate, and even if it could be dated to an earlier period, we are confronted with the fact that a member of the ruling family of the Wu Kingdom, or at least someone of a high status was either given or purchased an item that contained a Buddha image.

According to the report three censers were found in this tomb, two with the shape of *boshanlu* (mountain censer), but the report gives no photo or outline of these other two. The incense burner has three Buddha figures on the base. A single bird on top of the lid serves as a

¹³⁸ Abe, 2002, pp. 58-60; Echeng Xian Bowuguan, 1978, p. 165.

¹³⁹ It has a front room with two small side wings and a long, rectangular rear room. It is similar to Tangjiaotou tomb 4 and to Wuchang tomb 475. It was robbed early but seventy-nine objects were found.

knob. The lid is domed and has triangular openings (Fig. 3.26). Censers with geometric décor date to at least the late Western Han. The perched bird was often the only decoration of early Western Han censers.¹⁴⁰ The Buddha figures have the hands in the dhyana mudra (folded together in the lap). Abe (2002) suggests that they represent a stylistic lineage that differs from the depiction of the Buddha in the Southwest that consistently showed him in abhaya mudra (p. 57).

In the same tomb was found an attendant, similar to the one in the tomb containing the belt buckle, a 16 cm-high keeling figure wearing a cap, apparently with hands folded pressed holding what seems to be a blank tablet against his chest. Burners like bronze mirrors are considered to have had talismanic qualities.¹⁴¹ Both types of items were also probably used by the living as well which could be an indication that the apotropaic and/or auspicious function of the Buddha figure was not necessarily restricted to the funerary realm. In fact, we will come across artifacts that contain a Buddha image that were most probably intended to be used by the living.

3.4.5 Concluding remarks

Mirrors and censers were objects of daily use, but were not entirely products of mundane use, mirrors especially, were known for their prophylactic and apotropaic functions. Censers appear to have had a wide range of functions, too, but almost all were well beyond the realm of the merely mundane. The Buddha icon is a different kind of object and given that it is thus far

¹⁴⁰ Erickson, 1992, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Erickson, 1992, p. 8.

the only one of its kind establishing its function with certainty is not possible. If we think in terms of similar, preexisting objects, the closest would probably be the *yong* 俑, a human figure meant to be buried with the dead.¹⁴² From what we know they were meant to serve the deceased in his new home, the tomb. If compare this item to the known foreign *yong* we notice that the attire is markedly different and that the Buddha figure is bigger and much more elaborate.

In view of its size and position in the tomb, Yang Hong (1996, 30) has suggested that this figure was used as an object of devotion. Abe (2002) dismisses this possibility based on the lack of evidence to support such speculation (p. 35). Perhaps we have here a key to approach the issue. In the available representations, the Buddha is generally represented in entirely human form, by contrast with *xian/shen*, who were human immortals but had non-human attributes: feathers or wings, among others. The attributes that mark the Buddha as a supernatural being were all foreign to the Chinese iconographic repertoire: the halo, urna, ushnisha, were all completely foreign to the representation of superhuman powers to the Chinese.

Thus the ambiguity surrounding this image was superlative, but in all representations, regardless of the combination of features, the figures are clearly foreign. The mudra may differ. A halo may or may not be present. When we take into account that figures of foreigners were not common in tombs in this period as they will become later in different functions: as jugglers, elephant grooms, and also as somehow humanoid, which we may suspect were apotropaic beings, the foreignness becomes more important.

It is important to note that these artifacts are contemporaneous with intensive work of translation in the area. In 222 Zhi Qian had started his translation work at Wuchang 武昌 and

¹⁴² See above, section 3.1.4.

after 229 CE in Jianye 建業. Here he so impressed the ruler of the Wu Kingdom, Sun Quan 孫權, that he was appointed tutor to the crown prince. When the Indian monks Vighna (Weiqinian 維祇難) and Zhu Jiangyan 竺將炎 arrived in Wuchang in 224 they worked with Zhiqian on a translation of the Dhammapada. Zhiqian had undertaken, according to Sengyou, the first translation of the Vimalakirti Sutra some time around 223-228 CE, as well as the Sukhāvātivūha, on Amitābha Buddha and his Pure Land. And also translated a new version of the Buddha's life. Without disregarding the fact that sheer availability of original texts was most certainly a decisive factor in what got to be translated, we may suspect perhaps from this list that he was catering for various audiences. Or the choice could have also obeyed to the rising interest of in Amitābha's Pure Land as Tsukamoto has suggested.¹⁴³ He also wrote a book of hymns in praise of the Bodhisattva.

Although it is tempting to establish a radical disconnect between the textual record and the material one, I would like to surmise that it is possible to see some correlations. I will take these up in the following chapter but it is, for instance, remarkable that one of Zhi Qian's hallmark expressions is: shen bu mie 神不滅 (the spirit is not extinguished) which clearly has much more an aura of immortality than of samsara or karma. Establishing any connections, however, is a very delicate issue as we still have many questions to solve as to the circulation of texts, how they were imparted, if they were ever available to a wider public, and who were the main readers or audience.

¹⁴³ Tsukamoto, 1985, Vol. I, p. 149.

3.5 WU KINGDOM AND JIN DYNASTY: ARTIFACTS OF JIANGNAN

In chapter 2 we encountered Pengcheng in the northern part of Jiangsu as one of the earliest locations where some kind of Buddhist activity was taking place. Prince Liu, Emperor Ming's younger brother was said to be in the habit of paying homage to the Buddha and entertaining shramanas and upasakas. Later we found in the same area a building of what is described as a pagoda/stupa or temple that could hold ten thousand people. Two hundred years later Pengcheng as well as the rest of present-day Jiangsu was part of the Wu Kingdom, and in the southern part of that province, as well as in northern Zhejiang we find a large number of another artifact that has been the subject of considerable debate, the *duisuguan*.

3.5.1 Figured jars (*duisuguan* 堆塑罐)

These artifacts are generally thought to have been produced for funerary purposes. Most extant *duisuguan* 堆塑罐 are quite large as compared to other funerary objects, they are on average 50cm tall, and exhibit a more complex imagery than most other funerary goods as well. There is widespread agreement that they derive from a southern artifact called *wulianguan* 五聯罐 (five connected jars), also called *wuguangping* 五管瓶 (five linked bottles), that have, as the name indicates, five jars on top, like a large number of *duisuguan* also do, as well as some animals, as birds, bears and reptiles on the lower body. Many of them are made with celadon glaze. Although individual *duisuguan* vary, they also share some commonalities: they usually have two sections, the lower section has the form of a jar and generally the images on it are mold figures applied to it. The dozens of known *duisuguan* do not have any residues of food or

beverages, a fact that indicates they were most probably never used as containers but may have served an exclusively ritual function. Some even have a fixed lid, which further supports this point. Wu Hung has importantly observed that at least one *duisuguan* states its usage quite clearly in the inscription (Wu 1996, 286-287. Fig. 3.27). In the miniature memorial tablets carried by turtles of one *duisuguan* we find: “(The ware is made in) Shining, Kuaiji, and is to be used for funerary purposes. It will bring good fortune to the descendants (of the departed)—help them win promotion to high official ranks—and will benefit people infinitely.”¹⁴⁴ Wu further expands on this point with an ethnological report from 1936 in which the author, Zhang Bikang, states that: “There is another type (of the five-spouted vase), which is surmounted by gateways, stele-pavilion, figures, birds and animals; all these are molded freely by hand [...]. The applied decorations signify prosperity for the descendants and the fecundity of the domestic animals. They are intended to put the soul of the departed at peace, and to express the cherished wishes of the living. In present days, a type of vessel called *hunping* is still in use in the Chuchow area in Zhejiang province.”¹⁴⁵ Suggestive as this piece of ethnographic information is, it certainly does not suffice to confirm any claims about this artifact’s use and function twenty centuries before, since we cannot take the continuity of function for granted.

Furthermore, the variety of academic designations reveals the variety of understanding of its main function: in the literature they are variously called relief-sculpted jars (*duisuguan* 堆塑罐), granary jars (*gucangguan* 穀倉罐), spirit pavilion vases (*shenting hu* 神亭壺), and soul urn (*hunping* 魂瓶). The latter is the most common term in English works, but since it, as well as

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Wu Hung, 1996, pp. 286-287. Fig. 3.28.

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Wu Hung, 1996, p. 287.

shenting, presuppose a definite function, I have preferred to use the less common term, *duisuguan*, that is more descriptive. *Gucangguan* does not seem to be very appropriate either since it presupposes a very concrete use of the very plain inferior section (as an imitation of granary jar) completely ignoring the usually very complex upper section. This generally contains much more complex and three-dimensional better-finished elements that include towers (*que*), animals—especially birds and mythical beasts, as well as people.

As noted above, the most common term in English publications continues to be *hunping*, probably owing to the widespread acceptance of an early paper by Wai-Kam Ho in which he speculates that the jar was probably meant to contain the soul of the deceased (1961). However, we now have the benefit of a much larger number of pieces, and the placement of the excavated ones among other artifacts of much less value does not seem to support such a hypothesis. Ho formulated it on the basis of the historical period, in which many people were forced to emigrate to the South and would die somewhere in the process. As a consequence, their close relatives would not have a corpse to inter but by appealing to the ritual calling of the soul they would be able to rest the soul to peace symbolically.

One of the main differences between the Buddha figures on *duisuguan* as compared to other items is the sheer difference in numbers and percentage. Of the more than 130 exemplars of *duisuguan* reported more than a third have at least one Buddha figure. Unfortunately for us, most of them have not been properly excavated and their origin is not always certain. The ones found in controlled excavations come from the areas of southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang in a timeframe of around fifty years of the latter half of the third century. This area also comprises modern-day Nanjing, then called Jianye 建業, the capital of the Wu Kingdom from 229 till its fall to Western Jin in 280 CE. It continued to serve as the capital city and was

renamed Jiankang 建康 in 313 CE. In his compelling study of the *duisuguan*, Albert Dien presents the statistical growth of the number of pieces with Buddha figures taking into account only those that have an adequate description and were unearthed in controlled excavations in Jiangsu and Zhejiang:

Period	Jiangsu		%
	With Buddha figures	Total jars	
Wu	5	14	35.7%
Western Jin	13	17	76.4%
	Zhejiang		
Wu	1	8	12.5
Western Jin	17	34	50%

(After Dien, 2001, p. 529)

Dien concurs with other scholars that the “*décor* of the *duisuguan* is an index of the growing popularity of Buddhism” (2001, 59). As I have repeatedly mentioned throughout this study, I believe this assumption to be problematic. If we are going to take them as an index at all, my position is that we should take them as an index of the popularity of the Buddha figure itself.

Regarding specifically the pieces that are said to contain one or more Buddha-figures, even a summary look at the dated pieces evinces that there were important divergences among individual *duisuguan*: to start with, the Buddha image is not present consistently in one register but it is found on the bottom, the second or third register, a combination thereof, or in all of them. On the basis of the dated pieces, Wu Hung argued in his 1986 article that with the passage of time the Buddha image gained in importance so that it was “promoted” from the lower to the

upper layers.¹⁴⁶ More recently excavated pieces, however, contradict this attractive thesis, and rather confirm that the Buddha figure was not consistently placed in any one register in particular periods but was placed in any of them in different periods (Figs. 3.29 to 3.32).

3.5.2 Covered jar (*Lian* 奩)

The earliest item that bears a Buddha image in the Jiangnan region, however, is not a *duisuguan* but a *lian* 奩 (covered jar) (Fig.33) from Datangling 大塘岭 in northern Zhejiang (7 km west of Shengxian). The tomb has been dated to sometime between or around 257-263 CE. Three seated Buddha images applied to the surface on the diameter of the body alternate with *pushou* of similar size. According to Abe (2002, 63) this is an indication that the Buddha's function was also apotropaic. These appliquéés were most certainly produced from molds (just like the *pushou*).

This *lian* comes from tomb 95 in Dataling 大塘岭 near Shengxian 嵊县 in northern Zhejiang that is dated by an inscribed brick to 263 CE (Wu Kingdom).¹⁴⁷ In the same tomb there were also two fragments of pottery identified as being part of a *duisuguan*. They have birds and seated figures.

In tomb 101 (dated by inscription to 257 CE), in the same area, another *duisuguan*, 45 cm high, was found. It is also decorated with birds, and has acrobats and kneeling foreigners who

¹⁴⁶ The pieces are: A *duisuguan* inscribed with the date Western Jin Taikang 太康 9th year (288 CE), from Pingyang 平陽, 291 CE, from Yuyao 余姚, 294 CE, from Xiaoshang 蕭山, Zhejiang, 322 CE, one dated to 322 CE and shards of Buddha images from 280s.

¹⁴⁷ This is a 9.59 m long tomb, robbed but still contained twenty-nine items.

seem to be praying as they have their hands raised in front of them. Zhang Heng (1992) identified them as monks. Abe, however, has pointed out that since these figures do not wear monastic robes but wear the same pointed or round caps as the musicians and other attendant figures, this would seem doubtful. There is no Buddha image in this piece but the Buddha figure will often appear in a very similar context, surrounded by birds, musicians and acrobats, and the five small jars. This exemplar is also interesting because beings that usually represent the underworld (snakes, reptiles) are placed above the rim at the feet of these characters, and not on the body of the vase as is often the case. According to the report this tomb had not been robbed and the *duisuguan* was in the southeast corner of the front room with a bowl. Brick inscriptions date the tomb to 257 CE, and also identify the maker of the tomb—who Abe considers to also be the occupant—as Pan Yi 潘億, who was a military commander (*jianzhong xiaowei* 建中校尉).

3.5.3 Ewer

Another artifact, a glazed ewer (Fig. 3.33), is considered to be the most spectacular find in the area. It was found in Nanjing Yuhuatai Changang 雨花台長岡 Tomb 5. Although the tomb has not been dated with certainty, by comparison with other tombs in the area it is dated by approximation to the end of the Wu Kingdom or the beginning of Western Jin dynasty (around 280 CE). Abe (2002) has observed that considering the unusual shape and elaborate decoration of the artifact it was probably made for a patron of significant status (p. 68).

This ewer has a combination of appliqués and glazed painting. The painting can be divided into three sections: the lid has bird-hybrids, on the neck there are seven feline creatures, and the body has two registers of slender human-like creatures that are either winged or wearing

feathered garments and are holding staffs or stems with triple knobs. These are most certainly *xian* (immortals). Above the upper register there are two appliqués of a haloed Buddha seated on a lotus-petal throne with lion heads, with the hands in dhyana mudra; one of the images is at the front and the other at the back, two smaller appliqués of *pushou* flank each Buddha figure. The handles represent birds splayed to the sides. This arrangement leads Abe to suggest that the Buddha in this artifact is not part of the ethereal realm of *xianren* but an apotropaic motif (as the *pushou*).¹⁴⁸ However, another possible interpretation is to relate this scene to those from Shandong in which Xiwangmu receives homage from figures holding branches or stalks.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Abe, 2002, pp. 70-71; Spiro, 1991, p. 104; Yi, 1998.

¹⁴⁹ Wu Hung (1989) has called attention to those scenes relating them to accounts in the *Hanshu* (p. 130). Reference made in Spiro, 1991, p. 104.

4.0 THE MATERIAL RECORD AND “THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM”

The narrative of the introduction of Buddhism was partly shaped by a particular understanding of syncretism, prevalent for much of the 20th century, while material culture has been largely absent from such story. My aim in this chapter is to show how the inclusion of material culture gives us the opportunity of not just adding some data but of disrupting and re-framing the way the narrative has been constructed. In other words, what if rather than trying to integrate the material corpus into the prevalent narrative of the introduction of Buddhism and the concomitant understanding of syncretism in which it is framed, we take the material corpus as a case-study to approach the question of “syncretism” as a problem. In other words, what if we take the material corpus to problematize the narrative? Would we still reach the same conclusions?

Some elements in this narrative have been so often repeated that they now seem to be foregone conclusions. Assumptions, such as the dependence on or conflation of Buddhism with Daoism continue to serve as explanations for the success of Buddhism. This is not surprising, they have a long and venerable pedigree. Just to give yet another example: after presenting an overview of the state of religion in China Henri Maspero (1981) concludes that “Scholars’ Doctrine and Taoism were both far removed from Buddhism. Nevertheless, it was in consequence of confusion with Taoism that the new religion was to get a foothold” (p. 257).

One of the conclusions that Zürcher (1990) draws from his study of the Han Buddhist motifs is quite similar: “the close link with religious Taoism is not new or surprising” (p. 167). Since his 1990 essay represents the most notable effort from the side of the history of religions to integrate the material record into historical account of the “introduction of Buddhism in China” I start with a brief analysis of his essay. I then discuss more general theoretical problems related to his (and others’) approach to finally offer an alternative one.

4.1 ZÜRCHER’S STUDY

“Thirty years ago the study of Han Buddhism seemed to have reached its saturation point. The historical and pseudo-historical data had been collected, sifted and interpreted by dozens of scholars; reliable evidence was scanty and fragmentary, and every drop of information appeared to have been squeezed out of it. [...] Only new discoveries could add to our knowledge about the embryonic phase of Buddhism in China that roughly coincides with the Eastern Han period.

Since the early seventies, such new discoveries have been made, notably in the field of material culture” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 158).

A true pioneer in multiple areas of the history of Chinese religions, as early as in 1990 Zürcher was the first Western scholar of Chinese religions to inquire how the earliest pieces of the corpus related to what little was known about Han Buddhism. Zürcher elaborates a more analytical view of Han Buddhism by adding these archaeological finds as a third distinctive sector of the composite phenomenon of Han Buddhism.

In his “Han Buddhism and the Western Region” Zürcher adds the archaeological finds of six sites to the already well-known earliest references to Buddhism in Chinese textual sources

that he had dealt with in his foundational *Buddhist conquest of China*. There he had referred to the period from the first century to the beginning of the fourth century CE as “the period of incubation when Buddhism started to take root in Chinese soil, tolerated and hardly noticed as a creed of foreigners, or adopted in a Taoist guise, as a new road to immortality” (Zürcher, 1972, p. 18).

His analysis follows the model of transmission he had laid out in his “Bouddhisme et Christianisme en Chine, deux types de diffusion” (1990a). He concludes that in light of the new evidence “some commonly held views regarding the first transmission of Buddhism to China have to be revised, and that this in turn affects our perspective of Han Buddhism as a whole.” Zürcher solves the conundrum of having to speak of a Chinese Buddhism that predates the “real start” that takes place only in the late third century when “Chinese Buddhism became an organized religious system with a body of regularly ordained Chinese monks” (Zürcher 1990(b), 182) by conceiving of it as “the prenatal stage,” a label with clear evolutionist and biological undertones. He also proposes to approach Han Buddhism in a more analytical way by establishing that Han Buddhism was a “composite phenomenon, consisting of at least three well-defined sectors: first, a hybrid cult centered upon the court and the imperial family; secondly, the first nucleus of ‘canonical’ monastic Buddhism, and, in the third place, the diffuse and unsystematic adoption of Buddhist elements in indigenous beliefs and cults” (Zürcher, 1990(b), p. 159).

In this division, the actors of the first two sectors are known: courtiers and the imperial family in the first, monastics and translators in the second. No actor is mentioned in relation to the third sector. And for good reason, we do not know exactly who the people behind this “diffuse and unsystematic adoption of Buddhist elements” were. One of my aims, however, has

precisely been to pose this question (who were these people?). Even if precise identification cannot be achieved, we can at least infer who these people were not, which is already a significant step to disentangle them from the undifferentiated realms of ‘popular religion.’ But beyond this, my insistence on pursuing this question is largely a strategy to keep the spotlight on the agents who effected that adoption rather than on the development of a religious system *per se*. Indeed, the prevalent narrative on religious encounter and change was characterized by the conceptualization of religions as systems, which also calls for the preeminence of religious specialists and elites, and, concomitantly, the textual tradition.

We can glean some of the features of such narrative from Zürcher’s vocabulary: he speaks of the Han period as the “embryonic phase of Buddhism in China,” Zürcher, as most other distinguished scholars who have dealt with “Chinese Buddhism,” was interested in the formation and development of “Chinese Buddhism” as a religious system. Often this is translated into an evolutionary and teleological approach (towards Buddhism as a fully developed system with a monastic institution). That is, an inquiry directed to understand how “Chinese Buddhism” evolved into what it would eventually become. In other words, the protagonist of their inquiries has been this entity as constituted by its own history. In this representation we can see Buddhism gaining a foothold, spreading, conquering, converting, penetrating, and so forth. One of the possible consequences of such an approach is that the events that did not directly contribute to this process are easily disregarded as inconsequential. This may also partly explain the general lack of interest among historians of Chinese Buddhism in a corpus that seems to be so completely disconnected from later developments.

With regards to the preeminence of religious specialists, Zürcher clearly encapsulates this point: “The diffusion of Buddhism can be defined in very concrete terms. In spite of the

important role of the lay believers as supporters [...] the nucleus of religious life has always and everywhere been formed by the sangha, the unworldly community of ‘professional’ monks and nuns. Without the clerical nucleus the Doctrine would lose its institutional base. The diffusion of Buddhism, amounts to the diffusion of a well-defined monastic institution—the monastery (vihāra)” (Zürcher 1990b, 169). In other words, the role of monastics is paramount while the role of lay people, while important, is subsidiary to the former. It is just logical that in a purview that clearly privileges the institutional (and doctrinal) side of religion most of the history of Chinese Buddhism will be woven around famous monks and translators.

From a normative point of view, there can be little doubt of the accuracy of Zürcher’s statement. From an existential point of view, however, what religions offer to human beings are rather repertoires of resources to live in the world (and beyond). In this sense, the institutionalism of a religion may or may not matter, and what an individual chooses from those repertoires and how s/he interprets it does not need to be guided by any normative constraints. It is precisely here that my interest lies, in the seemingly inconsequential piecemeal “borrowing” or “adoption” of elements.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Not only in the study of religion but also in linguistics this kind of “borrowing” has been considered superficial as it appears to have no bearing in the long term. My point, however, is that we need to inquire into what guides the selection, the adoption and translation, what processes are involved.

4.2 THEORETICAL PROBLEMS

Two of the greatest challenges of the present research have been (1) to approach the material record without privileging textual sources and (2) to envision the events and processes in a manner that is not distorted by the lens of “syncretism.” Both are interrelated and seem inescapable considering that most authoritative works on what we generally call “early Chinese Buddhism” relied, out of necessity, solely on textual sources, and date from a period in which an essentialist understanding of culture and syncretism was common. To compound the problem, regardless of the fact that many of the textual sources are legendary, apologetic or official, the reiteration of the narrative of the introduction of Buddhism as dependent on Daoism remains widely accepted.

In order to meet the two challenges and to analyze the material record in a manner less constricted by this narrative I take an approach to religion that is quite akin to the “toolkit-repertoire model of culture” and I argue that what transpired with the Buddha figures is best described as a case of “synergistic interaction.” Before explaining these I very briefly present a more general discussion of the place of material culture and syncretism in the study of religion. Then in light of these discussions I argue for my approach.

4.2.1 The place of material culture in the study of religion

Generally for most scholars of Chinese religions the archaeological finds at the center of this dissertation have remained intriguing and yet insufficient to advance our knowledge of Chinese Buddhism in the early period other than to confirm the dependence of Buddhism on Daoism. Such a reaction is not surprising, material culture has traditionally occupied a secondary

place, if any at all, in the study of religion. Gregory Schopen already in 1997 in his groundbreaking *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India (Studies in the Buddhist Traditions)* fiercely criticized traditional scholarship for ignoring the blatant discrepancies between textual and material evidence in the study of Buddhism and for assigning undisputed primacy to textual sources. More recently John Kieschick (2003) elegantly summarized some of the most important reasons for the relative lack of attention given to artifacts in historical studies of religion. He notes, in the first place, the practical difficulties related to the different training of archaeologists and historians.

Certainly, the most salient and evident challenge is that “things” are a very different kind of evidence, and religionists have, for several reasons, traditionally been formed to deal with texts not with things. We may argue that objects can be treated as texts but if we want to treat them as such we should first be aware that they are texts that have a different grammar from discursive texts. David Kingery (1998), borrowing from the American semiotician Charles S. Peirce, has noted that objects are signs, signals and symbols. This means that they are not univocal or equally determined, as is often tempting to think. They involve not only conscious but often unconscious meanings, so that we should not only approach them as regular language but as we approach poetry, mindful of their ambiguity.

This implies then that we need a different kind of expertise. But not only that, dealing with “things” also brings up the need of reevaluating epistemological and methodological questions. What is it that students of religion want to know? How do we go about it? How do we understand religion? In this sense the study of material culture also brings about a much more fundamental challenge as it may imply the reconceptualization of our field.

Beyond this practical challenge, Kieschnick points out a feature quite relevant for this dissertation: “Historians do not in general find artifacts irrelevant or trivial in the course of human development; they are simply unfamiliar with the material. Historians of religion, on the other hand, have expressly placed objects outside their field of inquiry” (Kieschnick 2003, 19-20). He notes how even Johan Huizinga, a pioneer in the use of nontraditional sources, found the presence of objects in religious practice not only distressing but dangerous since the spiritual pursuit should not be drawn into the sphere of crude and primitive ideas. Kieschnick (2003) partly traces this disdain for religious goods, accurately I believe, to Protestant reformers’ (like Zwingli and Calvin’s) discourse against “externalism” and in favor of the return to the scriptures for spiritual insights and strength. He also contends that such a tendency was further reinforced, although in a less direct way, in the area of religious studies in the work of “Durkheim, Weber, and Eliade, who focused on the separation between the sacred and the profane and insisted that religion at its core constituted a separate, special realm. This assumption was tied to the division between spirit and matter” (19-20). The problems of considering the religious field as *sui generis* have been discussed by Russell McCutcheon (1997) and others, and I do not need to rehearse their well-known criticism here but I would just like to highlight, as they have, how this division between spirit and matter clearly relates also to the preeminence of the doctrinal aspects of religion.

Nevertheless, it must also be recognized that in the last years it has become more common to see statements to the effect that material culture should occupy an important place in the study of religions in general, and Buddhism in particular. In fact, we are likely to agree that we have come a long way since de Jong’s assertion (1975) that “[l]iterature is the most important source of knowledge of Buddhism” (p. 14).

However, the statement that follows this assertion probably continues to sound true to most scholarly ears: “Buddhist art, inscriptions and coins have supplied us with useful data, but generally they cannot be fully understood without the support given by texts.” Even if the corollary— “[c]onsequently, the study of Buddhism needs first of all to be concentrated on the texts” (de Jong 1975, 14)—will not necessarily be accepted, the ostensible dependency of the interpretation of material culture on textual sources and the privileging of the latter continues to be a major issue, especially when material evidence conflicts with or is not supported by textual data.

Coningham (1998, p.121 and 2001, p. 61) points out that when there is this kind of conflict, all too often it is resolved by discounting material evidence as a local aberration. Similarly Schopen (1991, pp. 6-8) provides a number of examples of how differences between one kind of evidence and the other are dismissed as the consequence of decline. In the case of the funerary Buddha figures the insistence on interpreting them as a case of “misunderstanding” also illustrates how the dissonance with what is taken to be orthodox is attributed to some form of deviation from the norm.

The problem with such procedure is that it deeply conditions our approach to material culture. For instance, Schopen (1991 and 1997) has demonstrated that it can distort scholars’ judgments to the point of asserting “in one way or another, that they were not really seeing what they saw” (1991, p. 8). Coningham (1998) on his part has shown the many problems that result from persisting in the use of a typology of Buddhist monuments that heavily relies on textual sources to the detriment of material ones.

The challenge, in my view, is to go beyond the conclusion that the material corpus of Buddhist motifs illustrates “how Buddhist elements found their way into Chinese cultic

practices, and the extent to which they lost their original function in the process” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 166) and attempt to understand what the significance of this appropriation was. To clarify, I do not deny that there may have been a change of function but rather that we need to investigate what this change of function may have meant and not content ourselves with corroborating it.

In brief, one of the points I would like to make is that discounting material evidence as an expression of debased interpretations or practices may make sense from the standpoint of orthodoxy or if we adopt a teleological position. But it makes little or no sense if our intent is to understand how and why certain practices developed, and what this can tell us about the people who introduced them, and their significance in the religious landscape.

4.2.2 Syncretism as a model and a problem

Religious change triggered by cultural contact used to be described as syncretism without much need of clarification. The situation after some decades of sustained criticism of the notion of ‘syncretism’ has turned it into a much more uncommon term in current religious studies scholarship except as a subject of debate. However, the terms that have replaced it, such as hybridization or creolization have not resolved all the problems associated with the use of “syncretism,” except perhaps for the removal of the negative connotation the latter often seemed to carry.¹⁵¹ There is of course no easy resolution to the criticisms raised against “syncretism,” since the ontological problem at its root is the very attempt to harness the evanescence of processes of change through the essentializing medium of language.

¹⁵¹ Scholars do not agree that this has been one of the outcomes. Notably, Stewart (1999, pp. 40-45) shows “creole” and “hybrid” to be terms deeply rooted in colonialism and scientific racism.

One of the problems common to all three terms, and one that is especially relevant for this study, is that they are often seen to function as simultaneously descriptive and explanatory notions, turning the problem into a circular and an uninteresting one. For instance, if we say that Chinese religions were syncretistic thus it is easy to understand that they could accrue disparate elements from other religions, what is described as a syncretic process is explained by the syncretistic nature of a given religion or culture. Calling a phenomenon syncretic, however, does not really add much to our knowledge. Indeed, identifying a process as syncretic or a religion as syncretistic can be rather tautological once we lift these terms out of the framework of acculturation, which is to say when “syncretism is no longer a transient ‘stage’ which will disappear when, with time, assimilation occurs. Cultural borrowing and interpenetration are instead seen as part of the very nature of cultures. To phrase it more accurately, syncretism describes the process by which cultures constitute themselves at any given point in time. Today’s hybridization will simply give way to tomorrow’s hybridization, the form of which will be dictated by historico-political events and contingencies” (Stewart, 2004 [1995], p. 274).

Joel Robbins (2011) has noted another very relevant problem. He observes that syncretism and allied notions are applied, at least in the religious domain, by following anthropological models of crypto-religion. He explains:

These models allow anthropologists to assume that the fundamental cultural ordering of any situation is provided by traditional ideas, even if in crypto-fashion such ideas are not evident on the surface of things. Structures of the *longue duree* will always win out, so there is little sense in considering the ways new elements do more than find themselves absorbed by the traditional frameworks that encompass them.

The effect of treating all cultural mixture as ones in which crypto-religious dynamics are in play is nowhere more evident than in the imagery that surrounds

syncretism. In such imagery, new religious ideas and practices are always ‘on the surface,’ an ‘overlay’ that covers over ‘core’ or ‘deeper’ traditional ideas (p. 413).

Although in this article Robbins deals specifically with Christianity, we can appreciate how this notion of superficial grafting has been present in most, if not all, interpretations of the funerary Buddha figures according to which they are the product of confusion or similarity with native elements or both. Furthermore, the present research is an attempt to discover how “such mixtures are culturally ordered” (p. 413), an approach advocated by Robbins.

As Robbins also notes, with the rise of globalization and the concomitant need to better understand processes of “mixing” and “fusion” scholars have time and again noted that ‘syncretism’ and similar notions have not been well theorized (p. 413). Correcting this problem is a huge endeavor, and one that I do not intend to undertake in this dissertation. Rather I bring to bear the issue of syncretism because it is very helpful to locate the problem of the significance ascribed to the material body I am dealing with. In one of the most elaborate attempts to elucidate religious change under the aegis of the notion of syncretism Ulrich Berner (2004) endeavored to turn the concept into an analytical tool of historical insight and to harness the “confusing diversity of possibilities when viewing the use of the term ‘syncretism’ in the study of religion (Religiongeschichte)” (p. 296) by producing binding terminology and a model based on the concepts of “system” and “element.” He defines syncretism as “a process in the historical development of religion, which takes place on the system level where two systems enter into an association, which remains to be defined. It can also be a process on the elemental level, where the association concerns only elements, but not the entire associated systems” (p. 297).

As intuitive as this division taken from Niklas Luhmann is, it is quite problematic. Of the several conundrums it generates one of the most relevant to this study is the apparent disconnect it seems to advocate between elemental and systemic syncretism. One of the most serious and

interesting recent scholarly attempts to formulate a theoretical model for the study of dynamics in the history of religions that builds on Berner's typology while at the same time attempting to overcome some of its limitations is Volkard Krech's (2012) complex typology of the contact between religions, albeit a provisional one.

He asserts that one of the hermeneutic issues "relates to the question of how religious contacts can be understood without falling prey to essentialisms" (p. 69), and acknowledges that although "[i]t is true that the cultural sciences talk in general of cultural flows, transfer processes and hybrid structures [...] the problem of how to understand exchange processes without presupposing set cultural units has yet to be sufficiently resolved. This also applies to research on religious contacts. Instead of speaking of transfer processes and cultural flows, it would appear to make more sense to see contact as a constitutive process in which cultural units in general and religious formations in particular form" (pp. 69-70). And here he clearly agrees with Stewart's claim (2004) that "syncretism describes the process by which cultures constitute themselves at any given point in time (p. 274)."

I could not agree more with these statements, the question is how to instrumentalize them so that our approach reflects this insight. Under "synchronic inter-religious contact" Krech (2012) considers only "constellations of religious contact involving two identifiable networks of religious traditions identifying themselves as such" (p. 61). This definition already presents us with a problem as one of the first questions we would need to resolve is, what is the religious tradition in the case of China? In other words, what should we identify as the receiving religious tradition? The problem is that we cannot assume the existence of an overarching Chinese religious tradition or what would be the relationship between such tradition and regional funerary practices. This, in turn, is related to another issue, the issue of who represents or speaks for a

given tradition. For the sake of argument I will posit a “Chinese funerary tradition.” That of course still leaves the question of what is the donor tradition. Again, for the sake of argument we can say it is some form of Buddhism. Of the twelve types Krech presents I can make the case that the Buddha figure falls at least under six of those types. It must be noted that the types are self-descriptive and rather than a definition Krech offers pertinent examples. Interestingly enough, none of the examples offered comes from the realm of material culture.

Type 2: Identifying elements with elements of one’s own religion. As we have seen this has been by far the most common interpretation. Wu first argued that the Buddha-figure was interchangeable with the figure of Xiwangmu. Later he proposed that Buddha-figures may have actually served to represent Laozi. Abe, on his side, has argued that they performed a function similar to that of the bear or the monster. In my view, rather than assuming that there was a relationship of interchangeability we can take these similarities to suggest that the people who adopted the Buddha figure may have drawn connections with more familiar motifs. For some this may have taken the form of “interchangeability,” for others, of similarity of function, some may have even seen a qualitative advantage in the use of a foreign figure. What is important is to be aware that the material record supports various possibilities of interpretation and motivation. To witness, as we have seen, the use of the Buddha figure in the Sichuan area is quite different from the use we see in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas, the stand-alone Buddha figure of Hunan suggests a yet different possible use, and the features we find in some human figures (especially the urna) suggest yet other possible forms of appropriation.

These may correspond to other types proposed by Krech:

Type 3: Incorporation of alien elements with remaining visibility.

Type 4: Adaptive, but transformative use of alien elements in one's own religious tradition.

Type 5: Innovative use of alien elements in the established religion (consciously or unconsciously): "The innovative use of alien elements in one's own tradition has a mimetic character in terms of its outer form. The meaning and functioning of the elements used however vary a great deal from the original context" (65).

Type 8: Coexistence (of elements) of one religious tradition with another

Type 10: Stimulated development triggered by alien elements.

Types 5 and 10 seem to be the most similar to my proposed "synergistic interaction," and I would have gladly adopted them as descriptive labels were it not for the fact that they seem to create some problems and that I would need to use them in conjunction, which does not seem to fit well with the purposeful distinction among types. As to the problems they can potentially create, with regards to type 5 the most evident is the emphasis on the difference with the original context, which would only be valid if we posit that this original context corresponded to a certain normative discourse. The case of type 10 is complicated by the examples used to illustrate it. Both are drawn from the European history of ideas: one is the impact of Confucian morals on the European Enlightenment and the other is the role of India in the romantic period. These processes are so enmeshed with Orientalism that it is utterly difficult to see the role of alien elements other than as (imagined) idealizations. Indeed, Krech (2012) acknowledges that this type relates to Günter Lanczkowski's "affinities, eclectic elective affinities and idealized projections (p. 67)."

This idealization contrasts with one of the points that I am trying to make, namely, that form (i.e. its human form) was of the utmost importance in the case of the Buddha figure. We

observe here at play some of the difficulties of using theories that exclude (or at least do not include prime examples of) material culture. I am not saying that parallels cannot be drawn, and these may even be mutually illuminating. What I am pointing out is that using this type may complicate (rather than help clarify) the way to approach an already complex issue. Additionally, I aver that the notion of synergism encompasses both types 5 and 10 in a complementary fashion—in that the Buddha figure can be both understood as an innovation and as stimulating certain developments—and because this notion underscores action and interaction rather than solely the effect.

In this regard, there is, in my view, need to make a basic distinction, albeit artificial, between (a) how an element is adopted, (b) the motivation for the adoption and (c) what the consequences are. To illustrate this point, we can think of type 2, which can encompass conscious and unconscious identification of an alien element with a native one. We would probably have no problem in calling the latter a case of misinterpretation, which may have very little to no effect on the receiving group. A clear example is provided by Rudolf Wittkower (1977, 184). He compares a bowl with head and animal friezes from the Mildenhall Treasure (fourth century CE) with a silver bowl from the second century. In the latter the heads clearly represent “Bacchic masks, and behind each mask appears the fir-cone of the thyrsus, the pole carried by Dionysus and his retinue during their revels.” The master of the Mildenhall bowl, however, “no longer understood these symbols. He transformed the masks into heads, and the thyrsus into an arrow. The symbol, originally charged with ritualistic meaning, had been turned into decoration, it has been emptied of its content.” This leads Wittkower to conclude that “[t]his little story is rather illuminating when you consider the date of the bowl, about AD 350: the classical world was disintegrating” (1977, 184). This illustrates my tripartite division: (a) we

know how the element was adopted: this is a case in which there is an attempted imitation that results in the transformation of the form and meaning of a given symbol. (b) The reproduction of this motif probably owed to a persistence in depicting classical motifs that by this time were becoming clearly alien. (c) As to its significance, besides the formal transformation we do not know if this was an isolated case or if this was a more general practice.

My point here is quite simple, we cannot decide at the outset whether the adoption of an isolated motif should be considered as the consequence of misunderstanding or as a form of consequential appropriation, i.e. what I call synergistic interaction. This issue also merits mentioning other considerations that are often not taken into account in the extant typologies of religious contact: (1) the circumstance under which contact take place: are there inequities of power—as in the case of military conquest, or the official mandate to adopt (or convert to) a religion?¹⁵² (2) Is there competition among religious traditions? (3) What is the discourse about syncretism and what are the actual practices? This is an important point because all too often the discourse is taken as representative of praxis.

I find it equally problematic to establish a direct correlation between the form of transmission and the form reception takes, the model that was advocated by Zürcher in relation to both Christianity and Buddhism in China. According to Zürcher (1990b) there are two main processes: long distance and contact transmission. Long distance contact is “incidental and intermittent; communications are difficult, and there is no feed-back. The transmission is defective and can easily take the form of an unsystematic borrowing of elements largely detached from their original context, and therefore easily are changed beyond recognition in their

¹⁵² Benavides 1991 has made an important contribution in this area.

new cultural environment” (Zürcher 1990b). This made of Han Buddhism, according to Zürcher, “an anomalous phenomenon” in a certain way. Thus it should not be regarded as “the first, heroic period of Buddhism in China” but rather as its “embryonic stage.”

In contrast, contact transmission “is characterized by proximity, continuity, and feedback; not only individual elements of a religious system are transmitted but also coherent complexes: an integrated doctrine, a body of scriptures, a complicated organization, retaining much of their original content” (Zürcher 1990b, 181), which he reckons was the case of Chinese Buddhism since the second half of the third century CE.

From a doctrinal and normative point of view the unsystematic borrowing of elements seems to be not only inconsequential but also uninteresting. Indeed, they seem to have played a very limited role, if any at all, in the formation of the “system” of Chinese Buddhism. However, other aspects come to light by taking the perspective of the people who did the adoption and of the elements adopted: transmission may make some parts or elements of the repertoire of the religious system available to a group of people who would otherwise remain unaware of it but the availability itself does not explain the “borrowing,” this is effected by individuals or groups and may require a certain implementation. Why do people adopt certain symbols only to “change them beyond recognition?” What impels an individual or a group to incorporate non-traditional elements in ritual contexts?

Some scholars suggest that misinterpretation may be at the root of these actions. Specifically, in the case of the Buddha motif, Wu Hung (1986) has suggested that it may have been misinterpreted or even confused with the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母). This suggestion caught the fancy of a number of historians of Chinese religions, some of whom

saw in this yet another proof of the early relationship and conflation between Buddhism and Daoism.

However, as we have seen the situation is much more complex and it is extremely doubtful that there was a univocal correspondence of function. Stanley Abe (2002) has argued that it is much more probable that the image of the Buddha had a similar function to that of the bear and monster motifs (Abe 2002, 41-47). He, like Wu, reaches this conclusion through comparison with similar objects of the same or slightly earlier period. In either case, both postulate that there was a certain degree of “misunderstanding” of the figure of the Buddha.

In fact, the notion that the Chinese initially misunderstood Buddhism in general is still quite common a trope. However, I have two main reservations regarding the use of ‘misunderstanding’ as a descriptive or explanatory notion: first, the notion of misunderstanding necessarily implies the adoption of a normative position; it presupposes that we know what the Buddha and Buddhism essentially were (or should have been), which is already problematic enough. But in addition to this, “misunderstanding” works as a mechanism that somehow explains away the adoption of foreign symbols, doctrines or practices. It can be useful insofar as it highlights the ambiguity that often characterizes ‘otherness’ but it becomes an obstacle to our inquiry when, just like syncretism, it is invoked as a self-explanatory process that deems questions of motivation and agency blunt. For these reasons, the analysis that follows will conscientiously avoid resorting to any version of this way of approaching the issue of symbolic change. Rather than the outcome of faulty understanding, I will argue that it is more productive to view these pieces as the result of a creative appropriation that unfolds dynamics between artifact, patron, artisan, model and context that we need to investigate.

4.3 **REPERTOIRES AND SYNERGISTIC CULTURAL INTERACTION**

In this section I briefly explain why I have deemed it useful to introduce in the analysis the notion of synergistic interaction—that is more commonly used in chemistry and psychology—instead of resorting to available typologies or concepts and categories commonly used in the study of religion.

As I have noted above one of the aims of this dissertation is to go beyond the conclusion that the material corpus of Buddhist motifs illustrates “how Buddhist elements found their way into Chinese cultic practices, and the extent to which they lost their original function in the process” (Zürcher 1990, 166) and attempt to understand what the significance of this appropriation was.

One of the first steps in this direction is stop discounting material evidence as an expression of debased interpretations or practices. Such procedure may make sense from the standpoint of orthodoxy or if we adopt a teleological position but it makes little or no sense if our intent is to understand their cultural ordering (i.e. how and why certain practices developed, and their consequences), and what this can tell us about the people who introduced them, and their significance in the religious landscape. This pursuit is also closely connected to the aim of envisioning the events and processes in a manner that is not distorted by notions of purity or authenticity that are so often connected to the lens of “syncretism.” Indeed, it is difficult to assess the insidiousness of these notions in the approaches to cultural interaction.

A strategy that I have found very useful to stay clear of these notions is to follow Anne Swidler’s (1986) lead in conceptualizing cultures as repertoires. The sociological paradigm of culture she champions is not without problems but for the purposes of this research it serves to counterbalance the power that the opposite paradigm, the “Seamless Web,” holds on our

understanding of cultures and, by extension, of cultural interaction.¹⁵³ Swidler (1986, 273) subscribes the definition of culture as “the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning [...] including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”

In this conceptualization actors and cultural elements (rather than traditions) can become the focus of analysis. This does not mean that I ignore the horizons of practice and signification. On the contrary, they have a fundamental place since actors and elements cannot be understood without reference to those horizons. My intent is not to subscribe to one sociological paradigm or the other but rather to avoid being constricted by normative discourses or by the “seamless web model” of religion and culture. One of the advantages of “Toolkit Repertoire” model is that in it elements are not essentially connected to a given tradition but it is rather the actor who makes the connections, and also the agency of each element can be highlighted. Both features are very useful to steer the discussion away from normative concerns.

The interactions between human and material agents can take many forms, one of them can be described as synergism. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines this term as “interaction of discrete agencies (as industrial firms), agents (as drugs), or conditions such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the individual effects.” This is related to the definition given in the Encyclopedia of Molecular Pharmacology: “Interaction in which the combined effect is greater

¹⁵³ Here I use Stephen Vaisey’s (2010) useful shorthand labels: the “Seamless Web” and the “Toolkit-Repertoire” models of culture, and also share his general and succinct definitions: “The Seamless Web model holds that culture is a coherent force that powerfully shapes people’s thoughts and actions. The Repertoire model treats culture as a disorganized collection of strategies that people use to solve life’s problems” (p. 4).

than the sum of the effects of each drug administered separately.” In human interactions, especially in business, the Merriam Webster defines it as “a mutually advantageous conjunction or compatibility of distinct business participants or elements (as resources or efforts).” All three definitions emphasize the fact that the outcome is larger than the addition of elements. Another interesting characteristic of this term is that it allows us to analyze a number of variables—that would normally be separated—in conjunction, e.g. human agents, things, ethos, trends, needs and practices. If we accept that social formations are being continually reconfigured by cultural contact and exchange we need to instrumentalize this conceptualization, and, in my view, one of the ways to do it is to find out and describe specific instances in which contact and exchange effectively yield a transforming effect. That is why I find the notion of synergistic (cultural) interaction useful, it helps us focus our attention on the elements, the agents, conditions, horizons of meaning that converge and diverge in particular ways. I apply it below in the section on Xiwangmu and the Buddha where I highlight the fact that things do not only make changes visible but are part of the constellation of forces that cause change.

5.0 THE WORLD OF THE FUNERARY BUDDHA

The question about the significance of the material record has been related to the history of Chinese Buddhism: what does the material record dating to the Han tell us about the history of Chinese Buddhism?¹⁵⁴ It has also been considered in relation to Chinese Buddhist art: is this the earliest Chinese Buddhist art? As we have seen the final assessment has been in both cases that the Chinese misunderstood the meaning and function of the Buddha, an assessment that clearly presupposes a normative doctrinal standpoint. In terms of what this meant for the development of Chinese Buddhism, Zürcher has argued that the funerary Buddha belongs to “the prenatal stage” of Chinese Buddhism that was, in turn, the result of long-distance transmission. Wu Hung has suggested that the dominant situation when Buddhist art was first introduced into China was that of a “random borrowing” of Buddhist elements by Han popular art.¹⁵⁵

In this chapter, rather, I pose the question of the significance of the funerary Buddha more broadly in relation to the Chinese religious landscape. In other words, rather than approaching the material record from the perspective of the history of either Chinese Buddhism or alternatively—and closely related—of Chinese Buddhist art, I approach it by first attempting to firmly situate it in its historical context and in the funerary world of the period, to then inquire

¹⁵⁴ Also, to the temporal and geographic primacy of routes in the spread of Buddhism, to argue for a southern route of transmission.

¹⁵⁵ Zürcher, 1990 and Wu Hung, 1986.

whether the funerary re-employment of the Buddha-figure resonated with larger cultural developments.

I make a conscious effort to avoid a normative standpoint since I do not intend to make yet another judgment as to the accuracy of the manner artists and patrons interpreted the Buddha. Rather, my intent is to, first, look at the place the Buddha-figure may have had within the Chinese funerary repertoire. One of the advantages of taking this perspective is that it allows us to approach the material record with less conceptual overlay. That is, it helps us avoid the pitfall of positing the legitimacy of the use of the Buddha-figure in direct relation to a Buddhist use or understanding. As my intention is to focus on the dynamic processes of re-interpretation and re-location, in brief, of re-employment, my emphasis is on the horizon of practices and meaning pertaining to the agents doing the re-employment (“the receivers”) rather than the normative doctrinal view (“the donors”). The Buddha-figure also serves as a window, albeit small, into the Chinese graves and funerary culture of this period.¹⁵⁶

5.1 CONTEXT AND GEOGRAPHY

One of the problems of analyzing the material corpus within the framework of the “introduction of Buddhism in China” is that this approach is characterized by an understanding of China as a rather uniform entity. What we find in actuality, however, are different, often competing, cultural spheres that fall under the umbrella of imperial China. This makes

¹⁵⁶ With the exception of Xiwangmu, no other motif has received such sustained attention.

generalizations about Chinese ethnocentrism quite problematic since we cannot expect that what was seen as ‘foreign’ and the value attached to it would be the same in different cultural spheres.

That is why, the location of the tombs where these artifacts have been found is so fundamental. These are areas that were considered peripheral and had traditions that differed markedly from the Central Plains. The area of Sichuan is heir to Sanxingdui and later had very close contact with the Kingdom of Chu; while the areas corresponding to modern-day Hubei, Zhejiang and Jiangsu inherited the rich traditions of Chu, Wu and Yue. Interestingly enough, in the period where the artifacts bearing Buddha figures appear, the areas of Hubei, Zhejiang and Jiangsu were part of the Wu Kingdom, one of the contenders for the rule of the now severed empire.

At the end of the second century CE the formal authority of the Han imperial government extended to all southern China whose territory was divided into three provinces, with a substructure of commanderies and counties. Although during the Han there were large migrations of Chinese subjects into these lands, these areas had been inhabited by non-Han people. These migrations placed increasing pressure on them and caused deep disturbance to the region worsened by the cultural aggression that the central government often promoted with the aim of integrating these territories into the Chinese cultural sphere.¹⁵⁷ This observation however must be tempered by another: pioneer immigrants normally did not share this purpose, on the contrary, theirs was to escape the control of the central imperial government so that they relied on the family, the extended clan, or a local system for defense. As a result, when the central government was losing its strength by the end of the second century CE “the new settlers in the south maintained no particular sense of allegiance to the unified empire. Moreover, whereas in

¹⁵⁷ For this section see de Crespigny, 1990, especially pp. 1-69.

earlier times the territory of the south had been easily and naturally held under the control of whichever power could dominate the north, the increase in population south of the Yangzi now meant there was the possibility of establishing a separate state, Chinese by culture and tradition, but politically independent from the lands of the Yellow River” (de Crespigny, 1990, p. 2).

By comparing the censuses from 2 CE and 140 CE Bielenstein (1947) shows that there was a significant increase in the populations south of the Huai River and the Yangzi basin. The latter census shows that Han Chinese were inhabiting areas that had earlier not been settled by them, also, they now represented a much greater proportion of the total population of the empire which also shows not only the growing authority of the Han in this area but also its increasing importance to the empire.¹⁵⁸ Bielenstein argued that migration of Han Chinese within the empire probably accounted for this increase as it tallied with a decrease in the numbers of people and households registered in the north. Given the difficulties and unrest in the north explains the motivation to take refuge in other lands (de Crespigny, 1990, p. 8)

While this was certainly an important factor, de Crespigny presents a more nuanced explanation. As the authority of the government declined in the north a number of former Chinese subjects disappeared from its registers. Conversely, in the south the Han brought some native people under imperial control, and we can safely assume that there was some intermarriage between the locals and the immigrants.

This province was quite large and not every region was affected by Chinese migration and control in the same way for different reasons. One important factor was geography. There

¹⁵⁸ Four million Chinese citizens living in the lower and middle Yangzi basin and the south, out of over fifty-seven million in the whole empire. In the 140s this figure increased to seven and a half million people in the south out of an overall population of forty-eight million (de Crespigny 1990, 17).

was a clear preference for river valleys and areas favorable to Han style farming. On the other hand, “the intermediate ranges of hills, where the slopes are too steep for farming, gave opportunity for the non-Chinese native people, and some Chinese refugees, to evade and resist the influence of Chinese culture and the attention of the imperial government. Formal Chinese control thus followed the rivers towards the south, and those people who would not accept that development were driven into the hills.” It would be these people who often saw their lives disrupted in many ways and challenged the authority of the leaders and their religion by colonization that the Book of the Latter Han would describe as “rebel barbarians” (de Crespigny, 1990, p. 9). Their resistance was sometimes successful.

As in other parts of the world, colonization implied more than brute physical movement, civilizing the natives, from the point of view of the Chinese, was part of what some administrators, at least those celebrated by the Book of Han, were concerned with the spread of Confucian education, which included among others, mourning rites, and the destruction of local cults that they saw as *yin si* 淫祀 (that is, “practices of an impure or lewd nature, or religious abuses such as sacrifices to deities who were not acceptable” (Loewe, 1982, p. 109).¹⁵⁹ Evidently, the “civilizing” enterprise also served the purpose of increased government control, and in many cases directly challenged the underpinnings of the local society by challenging the authority of the native religious practices.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ See also de Crespigny, 1990, p. 11.

¹⁶⁰ As Loewe (1982, pp. 104-108 and 1974, 81-90) and de Crespigny (1990, p. 12) have noted the cultures of the region of the Yangzi placed special emphasis on the concept of the *wu* (roughly, shaman) and texts and archaeological records evince strong concern for the dead and with the spirits of nature.

There were several waves of migration, migration motivated for different circumstances and personal reasons: there were individuals fleeing governmental control, others were looking for better opportunities, some were loyal to the empire, some married with locals, others would take the side of locals (and rebel) against Han immigrants.

5.2 THE FUNERARY WORLD

The concern for the welfare and destiny of the dead was an overriding one in early China and continued to be for many centuries. The care given to the building and furnishing of graves largely attests to this concern, it is thus extremely significant that we should find Buddha-figures in the mortuary context in quite a widespread area.

The realm of the living and that of the dead were not discontinuous: the dead could become ancestors, and, therefore, very much part of the destiny of the living; they could also become ghosts and bring trouble or even wreak havoc to the living. Furthermore, the dead person was conceptualized in the early Confucian tradition as not completely dead and not completely alive, and thus they were themselves exposed to dangers, such as demonic forces. Various practices address these problems, as well as others related to the corpse such as, the placement, construction and structure of the tomb, the treatment of the body, the rituals, the objects and funerary program in ceilings and coffins.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ The dead present a number of problems to society. Peter Nickerson has aptly summarized some of the fundamental ones in the case of China: The corpse due to the process of decomposition can become polluted. This, however, can be prevented through practices like

If dangers and fears seem to have motivated much of what we see in a tomb, hopes and aspirations are also very much part of it. Besides these, rank and identity as well as ideology could also find expression there.¹⁶² There can be little doubt that tombs constitute complex ritual and semantic worlds that can be interpreted in various keys, and for all we know, thus far we have only quite an incomplete understanding of that complexity.

Very few Han texts deal with funerary practices, and, except for the formulation of sumptuary laws, when they do, they do so very sparingly so that they do not allow us any deep understanding of their rationale or evolution. What is more, as Pirazzoli-T'serstevens has noted there is no correspondence between the received sources and the images: "The images often seem disconnected from the texts; they appear to come from a parallel discourse, coherent and autonomous with regard to the texts" (Pirazzoli-T'serstevens, 2009, p. 980).¹⁶³ We are faced with a world of practice whose rules and meaning we can only glean from funerary assemblages and scattered inscriptions and a few textual records.

exorcism. The corpse itself can also be polluting, which causes the loathing of the living who find ways to hide it, using shrouds or curtains, for instance. The corpse also needs to be buried, which requires the action of tomb digging, that in turn causes disturbances to the spirits of soil and others (Nickerson, 2006, pp. 10-40).

¹⁶² See, for instance, Linduff, 2006 and Powers, 1991.

¹⁶³ As I mentioned in the second chapter, Zürcher had also pointed out the disconnection between texts and the funerary Buddha-figures. This dissociation, however, is not a special feature of the Buddha image, rather, it seems to be a characteristic of the funerary world more generally.

5.2.1 The tomb: structure and iconography

The funerary milieu into which the Buddha-figure was incorporated had been undergoing some radical changes. Some of these started toward the end of the Warring States period (ca. 200 BCE): in the Chu area¹⁶⁴ coffins and caskets begin to exhibit decorative motifs that resemble windows and doors, whereas in the Central Plain tombs whose structure resembled the houses of the living begin to appear. The archaeological record shows that in the Han this tendency to replicate the world of the living in the tomb had become quite widespread among those who could afford such an expensive undertaking.¹⁶⁵

The invention of the chamber grave meant that there was much more interior space (ceilings, corridors, walls, etc.) that could be decorated with murals and carvings. Wu Hung has noted that “the richness of the murals was accomplished by multiplying the thematic subjects of representation without establishing logical connections between them,” the result of which was “an essentially ‘polycentric’ tomb.” He further asserts that “[i]n addition to the few images in the rear chamber which accompanied the dead, three different realms are depicted in the front chamber and include a cosmic environment, the immortal paradise and a ‘happy home’ on earth.” He makes an important suggestion: “The relationship between these realms is by no means clear. It is even difficult to determine the position of the deceased: in which realm was he

¹⁶⁴ The powerful state of Chu (ca. 1030-223 BCE) was located in the Yangzi valley and comprised most of the present-day provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Hubei among others.

¹⁶⁵ Commoners, on the other hand, were either buried in common pits or their tombs were just big enough to place the body that would sometimes be accompanied by a few items. See for instance Sichuan sheng wenwu guanli weiyuanhui and Baoxing xian wenhuaguan, 1987.

expected to abide? It seems that in their eagerness to express their filial piety and to please the dead, the tomb builders provided all the answers they knew to questions about the afterlife” (Wu, 2010, p. 35). This observation is followed by another one that we need to keep in mind when discussing the funerary art of the period: “Unlike Buddhist or Taoist art, Chinese funerary art never developed a standard iconography. The reason may be simple: tombs belonged to individuals and embodied individual desires. But because tomb decoration was bound to convention and utilized common motifs, it also never became a form of individual expression as did literati painting and calligraphy” (Wu, 2010, p. 35).

It is precisely, in my view, this tension and interplay between individual choices and tradition that is at the heart of the polyvalence of interpretations and the dynamism of representation, and it is, therefore, within that space that innovation takes place. The lack of a standard iconography means, among other things, that every effort we make to interpret funerary symbols must remain tentative and approximate.

Concurrent with this change was the appearance and, in the Han, prevalence of surrogates of everyday items (*mingqi*)¹⁶⁶ that represented a variety of human and animal subjects (such as, servants, dancers, story-tellers, cattle, chicken, and so forth), and objects of daily use, such as carriages, beautification items, various pots, among others. These *mingqi* have been generally interpreted by some as providing the same service as the real items in the postmortem life of the deceased. Whether they were expected to fulfill such a function or if they were just symbolic of the intention of the family to provide the deceased with the comfort of their earthly life, is subject to controversy. Such is also the case for the scenes represented on tomb bricks and walls that may depict banquets, or other festive events. They can be interpreted as activities either

¹⁶⁶ See section 4.0.

commonly performed or especially enjoyed by the deceased, or as the expression of the desire that they would enjoy such moments in their postmortem life, or why not, all of these.

What is clear is that tombs in this period recreate and imitate the realm of the living but this was not the only important change. Whereas in the Shang and Zhou dynasties the tomb was a place for the dead only—which we can clearly gather from the fact that burials were hermetically sealed, in the Han rites and offerings start to be performed repeatedly in tombs, turning it into “a place where the living and the dead communicate” (Pirazzoli-T’serstevens 2009, 953). Thanks to the horizontal design that replaced the vertical pits it was now possible to circulate inside the tomb. Here we also observe the relaxation of boundaries between the dead and the living. This development can be clearly observed in the standard structure of wealthy tombs in this period¹⁶⁷ that would now include a reception room (*chao* 朝) on the medial axis where the rites took place, a chamber in the back, where the coffin or coffins were placed, and the reserves and annexes along the sides.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, this “open” structure of tombs also served the promotion of the burial of the couple from the 1st century BCE and later the family tomb in the 2nd century CE.¹⁶⁹

In brief, the tomb had earlier been an enclosure that served to quite literally put the corpse away, to seal it and physically separate it from the realm of the living. In the Han we see a rapprochement of the realms of the dead and the living, not only in that the grave imitates the dwelling of the living in terms of structure and decoration, but also in the fact that renewed contact becomes not only possible, but at times, necessary.

¹⁶⁷ Court officials’ tombs also included an antechamber.

¹⁶⁸ Pirazzoli-T’serstevens, 2009, p. 952.

¹⁶⁹ In relation to this point, Wu Hung (1995) has also noted that in this period the tomb gained primacy in relation to the ancestral temple.

Thus, should we conclude that the tomb was conceived of as the final destination of the deceased? Although this may seem a foregone conclusion there is, in fact, no agreement on this point. There are at least two overarching models regarding the destiny after death: one proposes that the dead will go on a journey that will take them either to Heaven, a paradise or the land of the dead. The other dominant model maintains that the tomb is indeed the final abode for the deceased, and the beginning of afterlife.¹⁷⁰ These models can also be reconciled as shown by Loewe and Seidel¹⁷¹ by relating these two models to the separation of the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 souls. As they point out another important development in this period is the incorporation of depictions of paradise, Xiwangmu and other deities, immortals, and other related motifs—among which we may consider the Buddha-figure—to the iconographic program. In interpreting these scenes and motifs a number of scholars have considered that these were aids for the soul of the deceased on their way to paradise, while others aver that they simply express the hopes of the deceased and the family.

Attempting to understand through what processes the Buddha-figure could be relocated in a funerary setting beckons us to try to understand the world of funerary deities¹⁷² and images as well as their function more generally. This, however, is a research that, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be undertaken. Indeed, the “[s]tudy of images and their place in the Han religious imagination and ritual is in its infancy and the archaeology which documents above all the tombs, enables us to make out only a certain number of divinities linked to the common religion and, more particularly, to dealing with the dead and death” (Pirazzoli-T’serstevens,

¹⁷⁰ For a brief summary see Guo, 2011, pp. 88-94.

¹⁷¹ Loewe, 1979 and Seidel, 1982.

¹⁷² That is, of deities that appear in a mortuary context.

2009, p. 980). As I consider them in relation to the Buddha-figure several questions emerge: were these “funerary” deities part of the larger pantheon? Are there any texts that can give us any insight into how people conceptualized the dead and what their final abode was supposed to be? And, how are we to understand post-mortem immortality?

5.2.2 The pantheon

The Chinese pantheon (or rather pantheons) is overwhelming. As Julian Pas has noticed, its complexity reflects the complexity of Chinese religion itself.¹⁷³ Thus here I will limit myself to noting some features germane to the discussion at hand without going into much detail.¹⁷⁴

The Chinese had an open official pantheon from which deities could be withdrawn and into which new deities could be included. It was also hierarchical, and deities could be promoted or demoted, even forbidden or banished by the emperor in turn. Although these changes may have been the direct consequence of the whims of an emperor—or those holding the actual political power—they could also be the outcome of calculated decisions emerging from philosophical, cosmological and religious trends and debates. These sanctioned ideologies sometimes had a direct bearing in the policies affecting popular (or, more generally, non-official) worship, and the histories record the massive destruction of shrines to gods that were considered deviant or dangerous. We have no way of knowing, however, to what extent the imperially

¹⁷³ Pas, 1992, p. 129.

¹⁷⁴ For this section I have consulted an extensive literature but the description I present has benefited especially from Pas, 1982; Birrell, 1993; Loewe, 1982; Pirazzoli-T’serstevens, 2009 and Puett, 2002. There is consensus among these scholars on most points mentioned below. A specific treatment of something akin to what I call the “funerary pantheon” can be found in Bai, 2010.

sanctioned pantheon was shared by or relevant to the lives of the common people or even to those closer to imperial power, i.e. officials, scholars or the military.

At the top of the hierarchy, that is usually divided into gods, *shen* 神 (spirits) and *gui* 鬼 (spirits of the dead)¹⁷⁵ were the *di* 帝, first conceived as a single power by the Shang (ca.1600-1046 BCE) but later associated with the five colors which, in turn, related to the five orders of the universe. Of these, the Yellow Emperor, *Huangdi* 黃帝, is the most conspicuous in religion and philosophy, and before 100 BCE we will already find him related to practices for the attainment of immortality. Two other high powers appear towards the end of the 2nd century BCE, *hou土* 后土 (deity of the earth) and *taiyi* 太乙 (Grand Unity), the latter will later be personified by Laozi. Before that, the Zhou (1046-256 BCE) had worshipped Heaven (天 *tian*) as the supreme deity, and the house of Han re-introduced its worship as part of the imperial cults (those that the emperor and his officials had to observe) probably from 31 BCE onwards. Whereas all these deities were related to political power and legitimacy and to the general order of the universe, the *shen* often represented local powers and were associated especially to mountains. In the *Shanhaijing* the *shen* are described as hybrid beings, often with human heads and snake's, dragon's or another animal's body. They were also worshipped and it is well known that animals were sacrificed to them. They could bring good or evil to humankind, and there was also a hierarchy among them: "some holy spirits were entitled to be worshipped by the son of heaven or by noblemen; others were said to be the preserve of shamans; and there were those who could be the object of prayer, hope or fear on the part of lesser mortals" (Loewe, 1982, p. 23). A goddess

¹⁷⁵ However, the differences and limits among them are far from clear, and, for that reason, in general, I prefer to refer to beings with superhuman powers simply as deities rather than in terms of specific categories. See below, section 5.2.1.

that was a *shen* but was also related to issues of legitimacy was Xiwangmu, of whom more will be said below.

An important question for us is what the relationship between this divine repertoire was with the funerary one. Was the funerary divine repertoire one portion of a “general” divine repertoire, or despite some clear overlaps the funerary repertoire was generated from other sources? Should we assume a correspondence of some kind between the deities as found in narratives and as depicted in tombs? Could any deity be used for funerary purposes or only some were deemed appropriate? And if that was the case, what were the conditions or restrictions? From the historical and funerary records it seems quite clear that only some deities were represented in mortuary contexts. However, we do not know what drove the selection. Although, in some cases, there seems to be a logical association—for instance, when the directional spirits/animals are represented in the corresponding direction—in many cases the relationship between what we can gather from texts and the mortuary representation is far from straightforward.

Abe’s discussion of the meaning of the mortuary bear-figure¹⁷⁶ provides us with a relevant example of the fact that we do not know what correspondences there were, or even if there were any between textual descriptions and funerary representations: if we relate the bear to a description found in the Zhouli 周禮 (the Rites of Zhou, one of the classics of Confucianism dated to the 2nd century BCE) the bear’s apotropaic function would seem to be reminiscent of the exorcist who wears a bearskin to ritually drive demons from the tomb. If, on the other hand, we relate the bear to the *Shanhaijing*, then it could be interpreted as representing Gun 鯀, the father

¹⁷⁶ According to Abe in Sichuan the Buddha-figure was probably replacing the bear.

of the legendary ruler Yu the Great 大禹, who was transformed into a bear for daring to steal from the gods to aid humans.¹⁷⁷ Given the plethora of references to the bear in Chinese texts there is a wide array of possibilities, some of which make perfect sense within the various theses presented by scholars, but we still can have no certainty. We can draw a second example from Poo Mu-chou who notes that we cannot be sure whether the Yellow Emperor or Yellow God that presides over the local officials of the underworld can be identified with the Yellow Emperor worshipped in the official cults.¹⁷⁸

Another question of interest relates to the relationship of gods and human beings. In the Shang we see a supreme deity, *di* 帝, or *shangdi* 上帝, which seems to have been conceived in anthropomorphic terms.¹⁷⁹ The kings of Shang viewed themselves as descendants of *di*, and at their death they too would become lesser *di*. Later with the appearance of the five *di*, one of them—Huangdi—will start to be invoked as a means to attain immortality around 100 BCE. Later, we will see that humans—other than shamans—can also aspire to other divine powers such as controlling the weather, and so forth.

5.2.2.1 The case of the Buddha in the funerary setting

The funerary re-location of the Buddha-figure has generally been considered the product of misinterpretation on the part of the Chinese in the sense that there was a loss of the image's original function, and/or that its meaning was juxtaposed to those of native deities. Referring to

¹⁷⁷ Abe, 2002, pp. 44-47.

¹⁷⁸ Poo, 1998, p. 169.

¹⁷⁹ See Loewe, 1982, p. 18.

the Buddha-figure Wu Hung asks “why did this holy image, when it was first introduced to China, leave the sanctuaries where it was worshipped by the people, and appear in secular tombs where it was buried with the deceased” (Wu, 1986, p. 267).

In his 1986 paper Wu contended that the meaning and function of the funerary Buddha reflect the general understanding of the Buddha. He further suggested that the Buddha “was naturally linked with the images of Dong Wanggong and Xi Wangmu in the minds of the Han people” (Wu, 1986, p. 267) and was, therefore, “comparable” in terms of function, which would explain why the Buddha image could replace that of Xiwangmu in the Mahao tomb to express the same hope for immortality.¹⁸⁰ Concurring with Wu, Zürcher concludes that “The material relics illustrate how Buddhist elements found their way into Chinese cultic practices, and the extent to which they lost their original function in the process” (Zürcher, 1990b, p. 166).¹⁸¹ They both assume that the funerary relocation of the Buddha-figure signals (1) a certain misinterpretation, and (2) that the Buddha-figure was directly absorbed into the funerary realm.

However, a point I would like to emphasize, is that the funerary functions need not preclude other possible understandings: as we will see below other deities appearing in mortuary settings were multi-dimensional, they could be cosmic creators and yet be represented in tombs with a purpose we can only approximately fathom. That is, when we compare the Buddha-figure to other deities, it emerges that their function need not be restricted exclusively to a funerary one.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Lewis has also stated that initially “associated with the Queen Mother of the West as a saving divinity from the western edge of the world, the Buddha and his teaching became the most influential foreign exotic brought into China during the first centuries of our era” (Lewis 2007, 154).

¹⁸¹ The “material relics” Zürcher refers to include other motifs besides the Buddha-figure. See Chapter 2.

Deities, such as Nüwa and Xiwangmu, especially the latter, had various functions and their funerary use did not preclude the dedication of shrines to them, just as their dimension as cosmic deities did not preclude their representation in tombs and artifacts.

An important point that should be underscored is that the funerary pantheon constituted an idiom in itself. What seems to be an erratic and mistaken translation of the Buddha image was not specific to the case of the Buddha. As noted above, some scholars have pointed out how common and striking the disconnection between texts and images can be in the case of deities. We will see below the wide array of functions attributed to Xiwangmu, as well as the differences between the pictorial and narrative representations, the contrast between the goddess Nüwa as a cosmic creator and her apotropaic role in tombs. Both of these goddesses had shrines dedicated to their worship as well.

A further point that emerges from this discussion is that the notion that the fact that the Buddha was represented in mortuary settings does not imply that this was the only way he was understood. We do not need to assume, owing to the difference in functions and conceptualization, that this was how the Buddha was initially translated. There is no reason not to think that there was a process of double translation: that is that the Buddha-image was not directly enlisted into the funerary pantheon but that this was a secondary translation.

Comparing the Buddha figure with other divine figures that served as mortuary motifs also has a bearing on the question of why the Buddha figure disappears from the mortuary setting after about two centuries. This has often been interpreted as the result of a better understanding of the religion, but what I am positing here is that, just like the image of Xiwangmu, it had a period of use where it was fashionable in mortuary settings. That fashion as many others died out. Just as with other changes in trends of fashion, the reasons for this change are not entirely clear

but we have no safe grounds to attribute it solely to better doctrinal understanding. A further point should be made in this regard. Whereas from the perspective of the study of religions we tend to emphasize the ritual and doctrinal aspects, we should not lose sight of the concreteness of funerary objects: they were produced, marketed and consumed. They are social phenomena not just religious ones, they respond and guide fashion by representing the hopes and fears of people, or some groups. One of the overriding concerns of many people in the Han seems to have been related to immortality, which was envisioned in various ways.

5.2.3 Immortality

In the secondary literature on immortality, immortals 仙人 (*xianren*) and transcendents 神人 (*shenren*) are often considered to be hallmarks of Daoism. However, the goal of immortality and associated practices were neither exclusive of Daoist practitioners nor was there a definite coherent idea of immortality or the methods to attain it. In the Han there were individual seekers of immortality, often called magical practitioners, *fangshi* 方士.¹⁸²

The paradise of immortals also had various locations. In some texts it was said to be located on far away elusive islands, while in others it is on the peak of a steep mountain, that could be Kunlun 崑崙山 or Penglai 蓬萊山. Yet according to other texts, paradise is said to be in Heaven. Miura notes that already in chapter 12 of the *Zhuangzi* there is an indication in this sense: “After a thousand years of life, he grows weary of the world: he departs and rises up, and

¹⁸² They adopted Laozi as their patriarch. See Kohn, 1998, p. 10.

riding on a white cloud he reaches the realm of the [Celestial] Emperor” (Miura, 2008, p. 1092 citing Watson’s translation).¹⁸³

Already in the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian) written in 91 BCE there are descriptions of immortals some of whom are identified by name. The *Book of the Feng and Shan Ceremonies* (封禪書) describes how the first emperor, Qing Shi Huang (r. 221-210 BCE) “toured the eastern seaboard, made sacrifices to illustrious mountains and great rivers, and sought out companions of the immortal Xianmen [Gao] 羨門[高].”¹⁸⁴ Another passage of the *Shiji* (6.263) narrates how after a *fangshi* by the name of Xu Fu’s submitted a memorial to Qin Shi Huang requesting to be provided with children to help him fetch herbs of immortality from three mountains of immortals in the middle of the ocean, Penglai 蓬萊, Fangzhang 方丈 and Yingzhou 瀛洲.

The notions of mortality and immortality were also not discontinuous in this period. Birrell has observed that “In early Chinese mythology the dividing line between immortality and mortality is often blurred, and there are degrees of both states,” and that “the terms mortality and immortality are inappropriate for the nebulous existence and transformational powers of the gods

¹⁸³ Anne Birrell has noticed it is in a description of a shenren (a holy man) in the *Zhuangzi* that we find the earliest reference to immortality: “He said there is a Holy Man living on faraway Ku-she Mountain, with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like a young girl. He doesn’t eat the five grains, but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas. By concentrating his spirit, he can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful.” (Watson, 1968, p. 33 cited in Birrell, 1993, pp. 181-182)

¹⁸⁴ Cited in Miura, 2008, p. 1092.

known as Ti, Huang, Shen, Ling, Kuei, and Po, terms for divine beings, besides variously named elves, goblins, and monsters” (Birrell, 1993, p. 181).

These observations are relevant because the term immortality is often related to the aims or dreams of people of the Han and subsequent period, but especially of the Han, as explaining the motifs and representations in tombs. But it must be underscored that immortality could mean a number of things: curiously, if not contradictorily, being immortal did not prevent some great primeval gods from dying.¹⁸⁵

What is interesting in the Han is that immortality becomes an attainable boon, through various technologies: either through a combination of physical and psycho-spiritual practices, through the ingestions of certain concoctions, or through the aid of certain people who could communicate with the unseen powers, or a combination thereof. But not only that, it would seem that immortality becomes achievable even after death.

5.3 THE BUDDHA FIGURE

As we saw in chapter 3, there was no uniform representation of the Buddha figure, neither was there one single function. In the Sichuan area the predominant features are: the abhaya mudra, the halo may or may not be present, and the figure may be standing or sitting. In terms of its function there, scholars have argued that the Buddha-image is closely related to either Xiwangmu or the bear. In Hubei, the situation is more complex in terms of the function,

¹⁸⁵ Namely, the Flame Emperor, brother of the Yellow Emperor, Chi Yu and Kuafu. See Birrell, 1993, p. 181.

especially considering the stand-alone Buddha; the depiction is not uniform either, in some cases we find the Buddha sitting on a throne with the hands in *dhyana* mudra, we also find a representation of what has been interpreted as Maitreya or a pensive Buddha. In Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the largest number and also the crudest representations of the Buddha have been found. In most cases, however, it is possible to recognize the halo, a throne, and the pleated garment.

When we try to find formal commonalities among them there are basically three: this is a male human figure with clearly foreign attributes. A fourth one is valid for the majority of Buddha figures but not for all: its placement and/or the figures that surround it indicate that this is a supernatural being. This is what we can gather from the representation and spatial location and context. We have also seen that the nouvelle formal attributes (nouvelle relative to the traditional Chinese funerary iconography) of the Buddha-figure, such as, the halo, urna, hand positions were also seen as markers of a yet to be determined function and meaning when added to other figures (such as, foreigners or Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong).

The observation that the Buddha was represented as a male foreign supernatural human being may seem so evident that it should go without saying. However, this is one of the very few claims that the material record actually concedes with a degree of certainty, but by overlaying our notion of the Buddha on these figures these four evident characteristics have gone unnoticed. It could be argued that the artist simply copied or imitated the model he received, and that, therefore, drawing any conclusions from the figure's form makes little or no sense. And this would be a valid criticism if the facts of the foreignness and the human form were not extraordinary characteristics in the context where the figures were integrated. Whereas it is undeniable that the artists were, in all probability, copying from a model, the act of staying true to the model itself is not without meaning. For instance, in order to make explicit the divine

nature of the Buddha figure, the artist could have added a common marker, such as wings, to denote divinity or his superhuman attributes, or to identify him as an immortal, and, in fact, we have one such example in one of the bronze mirrors found in Japan, and arguably in the pillars of a tomb on Shandong.

Indeed, when we consider these two features in context, they are quite striking: neither funerary deities nor motifs attached to artifacts were generally represented in human form, and much less yet in foreign human form.¹⁸⁶ If we intellectually bracket our identification of the figure as a Buddha, and what we know about the figure, and we focus solely on the primary meaning in context, we can notice how extraordinary the adoption of this form was. Although for clarity's sake I have been calling, and will continue to call it, the Buddha-figure, I do so 'under erasure' (*sous rature*). An explanation of my choice of this philosophical strategy is in order.

In general, the attempt to understand or decode the meaning and function of the Buddha-figure has translated into the search for an equivalent, that is, for the image or sign it is replacing¹⁸⁷. This procedure has given us important insights in relation to its possible functions. The foregone conclusion has been that since the Buddha-figure does not have, in the funerary context, a "Buddhist" meaning or function, it was clearly misunderstood. I have mentioned above that from a normative perspective such conclusion is undoubtedly correct. My own view, however, is that by shedding such perspective we can focus on other aspects and try to unpack

¹⁸⁶ I have not found a single example of another foreign human deity (besides those featured in imported goods) in the many reports I have seen for this period. However, I prefer not to risk stating that there is no such a figure. The most important point I want to make here is that the occurrence is quite extraordinary.

¹⁸⁷ As is especially clear in the cases of Wu, 1986 and Abe, 2002.

what is involved in the notion of “misunderstanding” and the related notion of random borrowing.

The material record allows us to conclude that there were various interpretations of the Buddha-figure, a variety that is congruent with the inherent instability of a new and foreign sign. For that reason, I use the strategy devised by Martin Heidegger (1956) and further developed by Jacques Derrida (1997) of using a sign ‘under erasure.’ This allows us to write a word and cross it out, while at the same time keeping both the word and the deletion. Thus, we speak of the Buddha-figure as if we understood it but with the caveat that we are aware that we are actually trying to discover its meanings and functions in context. Moreover, investigating the Buddha-figure ‘under erasure’ highlights the need to move away from the common practice of establishing meaning by reference to similarities and to focus on difference as also constituting meaning. Thus, in our case, the fact of the choice of a figure with human form and foreign attributes may be alerting us to a process of translation beyond the mere replacement of or confusion of one motif with another. In other words, my view is that we should pay heed to form to fathom “meaning,” or what the figure may have evoked in the beholder. Not so much in the sense of similarity of form only¹⁸⁸ but by investigating what the characteristics of the figure may have meant in their specific contexts, these characteristics being human form, foreignness, male gender and supernatural status.

¹⁸⁸ For instance, Abe has suggested that in the case of Money Trees the visual similarity of the bear motif with the Buddha-figure may have caused them to be easily mistaken for each other. Cf. Abe 2002, 47.

5.3.1 The Buddha's foreignness and the issue of 'exoticism'

In the mortuary context the Buddha is generally represented in foreign garb, and, when they are noticeable, with foreign facial features. The gestures, or mudras, such as holding the hem of his garment or the raised hand, are clearly different from traditional gestures. The usnisa and halo were also novelties. Thus there can be little doubt that the artists and patrons recognized the foreignness of the Buddha, and it is probably also safe to conclude that they were, at the very minimum, not adverse to it.

Analogously, explaining the most common Chinese term to refer to Buddhism, *fojiao* 佛教, Stephen Teiser has noted that this term “appears to be a member of the same class as Confucianism and Daoism: the three teachings are Rujiao [...], Daojiao [...], and Fojiao [...]. But there is an interesting difference here, one that requires close attention to language. As semantic units in Chinese, the words Ru and Dao work differently than does Fo. The word Ru refers to a group of people, and the word Dao refers to a concept, but the word Fo does not make literal sense in Chinese. Instead it represents a sound, a word with no semantic value that in the ancient language was pronounced as ‘bud,’ like the beginning of the Sanskrit word ‘buddha.’ The meaning of the Chinese term derives from the fact that it refers to a foreign sound.” As Teiser points out the Chinese, or for that matter English-speaking people, could have chosen to translate the meaning of “buddha,” i.e. enlightened or awakened one, but instead they have preferred to name the teaching “‘Buddhism’ often without knowing precisely what the word ‘Buddha’ means. Referring to Buddhism in China as *Fojiao* involves the recognition that this teaching, unlike the other two, originated in a foreign land. Its strangeness, its non-native origin, its power are all bound up in its name” (Teiser, 1996, p. 13).

Let me expand on this point. Besides the direct factual meaning as something or someone of a non-native origin, as Teiser notes, the foreignness of the term *fojiao*, and analogously, the foreignness expressed in the figure's form, is also intimately tied to its "strangeness" and "power." Indeed, recognizing or marking something as 'foreign' is also a form of 'othering,' that is also coterminous with a process of the determination of one's own cultural (and human) identity. The foreignness of Buddhism and the Buddha was always an important characteristic and it was dealt with in various ways: the most prominent was through the interpretation it would get in the *huahu* theory that would eventually be used as a weapon against the foreign religion by apologists of Daoism. In the early allusions recorded in the Chinese histories, however, there is no sense of discomfort with or rejection of the fact of the foreignness of the Buddha. Indeed, quite the opposite, especially in Emperor Ming's comments regarding his brother, Prince Ying, there is rather an aura of admiration and exoticism in his comments: he uses transcriptions of foreign words as if to show a certain degree of acquaintance with the religion, and expresses a laudatory appreciation of the ritual practices performed by Prince Ying.

In this period if there continued to be a sense of contempt for the foreigner—a contempt encapsulated in the multiple terms to refer to other peoples as 'barbarians'— there seems to be also a curiosity for and valuation of the foreign in various forms and degrees, not only as the exotic. It goes without saying that for a very long time literati posited a rather rigid dichotomy between cultured China and her 'barbarian' neighbors. And, just as Europeans saw Asian cultures and peoples as essentially different, bizarre and abnormal, and, therefore, inferior, so did the Chinese seem to have viewed their neighbors.

One of the counterparts of this essentializing difference, however, is the ambiguous fascination with this "other" that can be seen in the sometimes fetishistic exoticism of the

Chinese elites.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, exoticism has been quite commonly used as an “explanation” for the acceptance of the Buddha figure. This would not be surprising considering that in the literature the Han is considered as a period of widespread “exoticism.” But this is another vague term that rather than serving to explain can actually serve to confuse a variety of phenomena. Thus before jumping from the assertion of the factual representation of the Buddha in foreign garb to justifying its appeal in terms of exoticism we would need to specify what we are to understand by this term. As with other key terms it has an important history that makes it a rich and complex notion. Just to consider the range of meanings it has we may consider the discussions by Edward Said and Victor Segalen.¹⁹⁰ This leaves open the question of whether the term is useful or if it should be used at all, and if it should, how we are to understand it in this context. Just to give an example of how problematic its use can be, especially when it serves as an explanation of the adoption of the Buddha figure, I would like to refer to Robert Campany’s statement.

In his otherwise fascinating work on miracle tales in early Medieval China, Campany states that: “the Buddhalike images that have been unearthed seem to be examples of the cross-culturally attested use of imported bits of exotic cultures as apotropaic devices—things deemed powerful not necessarily because the sacred knowledge and soteriological practices behind them were well understood but precisely for the opposite reason” (Campany, 2012, p. 1). Although such a statement is consistent with various interpretations—especially Abe’s reading of the Buddha-figures in Sichuan—in a footnote Campany compares them to the examples presented

¹⁸⁹ See section 3.2.4.

¹⁹⁰ Especially in Said, 1978 and Segalen, 2002. Whereas Said emphasized the practice of representing the Oriental as exotic as a way of othering entwined in the Western imperialistic project, Segalen underlined the role of the fascination by the exotic other as a way to conceive of oneself in terms of the other.

by Mary Helms in her *Ulysses' sail*. This is quite a perplexing comparison as Helms is here talking about exotic *goods*, that is, objects, not only representing things foreign but also made abroad in what are perhaps considered to be exotic, spiritually powerful places: “the value accorded to foreign material goods,” as Helms explains, “may in some (though not necessarily all) cases derive from the very fact of their derivation from spiritually (as well as physically) dangerous or powerfully charged locales” (Helms, 1988, p. 53). The Buddha-figures cannot be described as *exotica* in this sense. Most of the examples found in China were made in China.¹⁹¹ That a scholar of the stature of Campany should fail to see the distinction is an indication, to my mind, of the lack of clarity surrounding the ontological status of the Buddhist motifs, especially, the Buddha-figures. We could argue, in Campany’s defense, that he is thinking of the Buddha figures, or, Buddhalike images—as he calls them—in terms of their foreignness. However, one thing is to say, as Helms does, that an object *made* abroad may derive its apotropaic value from the association with its origin, and a different thing, to say that a motif or symbol may derive its value from such association. Even more so when Helms points out that she is dealing with “material items” that include not only manufactured goods but also raw materials.¹⁹² In her examples the symbolic value derives not from the object as cultural sign but from the significance attached to the place of production. This is a key difference. This, however, is not to say that a similar argument cannot be made for foreign symbols but that it stands to reason that the many examples and connections provided by Helms do not serve to support such an argument.

¹⁹¹ Probably all. The one item that might have been manufactured abroad is the bronze buckle bearing a bodhisattva.

¹⁹² See for instance Helms, 1988, p. 115.

Although both terms have dominated much of the discussion about “the introduction of Buddhism in China” and the Buddha figure, there are, however, no good reasons why we should remain trapped by these problematic notions. Beyond their conceptual problems, we need to recognize that the sources on which we rely to characterize “the Chinese” are mainly official records or texts written by and for the cultured class. These thus depict a worldview and practices that were shared by a particular group of people, many of whom were in positions of power and were often located in or near the empire’s capital. Their view of a unified empire, and our tendency to take their word as representative of the Chinese mind, however, starkly contrast with the generalized fragmentation of the period.

Indeed, after placing the Buddha figures in their social context something that becomes evident is that inhabitants of the areas of the modern-day provinces of Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangsu and Zhejiang had had tense, at times, belligerent relations with the cultures of the Central Plains. They were seen as outsiders and they may have considered themselves outsiders. This is important because it has bearing on how foreignness is perceived and the associated attitude to peoples and things foreign. If we assume pervasive ethnocentrism it makes sense to argue that it was possible for the Chinese to accept the Buddha as a deity by assimilating him as Laozi because by turning the Buddha into one of Laozi’s transformations he was being effectively de-foreignized. However, the Buddha’s foreignness may not have been a problem for everybody, or at least not in the same measure, we may even plausibly imagine that in some cases it may have been advantageous. But not necessarily, as has been commonly posited, in the guise of exoticism.

Here again it is more productive to think in terms of processes of cultural contact, more generally. In this sense, a model like the one recently proposed by Christof Ulf (2009) is very

useful in that it emphasizes the importance of the differences among contact zones. He speaks of open contact zones, zones of intense contact and the middle ground (pp.86-105). This typology is important because it highlights the possible diversity of contact situations. Factors such as hierarchal structures, the conduit of transmission (whether there is direct or indirect contact between producers and recipients), location with regards to trade routes, levels of coercive authority and the presence of multicultural settlements, among others, serve as an antidote to the tendency to essentialize China, and the concomitant tendency to view the Chinese from one single perspective and their perception of the foreign as uniformly ethnocentric.¹⁹³

In brief, of the characteristics of the Buddha figure the one that has been more widely noted is its foreignness. Similarly in the narrative of “the introduction of Buddhism” the foreignness of the Buddha and the religion have often been noted. While the appeal of the Buddha has often been connected to exoticism, it has also been explained in terms of assimilation to a native deity as a way to overcome ethnocentrism. Both positions can hardly be reconciled not because ethnocentrism and exoticism are dichotomous but because in the first case the Buddha’s foreignness is used to explain its appeal and in the second it is a feature that needs to be overcome by assimilation. That both lines of explanation are sometimes found in the same texts serves to corroborate the fact that these notions are problematic and even confusing unless very clearly defined and circumscribed. My point in this section has been to show that the description of the Chinese of this period as ethnocentric is a problematic generalization, as is the notion of exoticism. Thus none of them serves to provide a general explanation.

¹⁹³ I have considered some of these factors, although focusing especially on some historical developments, under Context and Geography to make precisely this point.

5.3.2 A deity?

For the most part, I have been assuming that the Buddha-figure is understood as representing a deity, the question that may logically arise is, how can we be sure that this the case? And, this question should be preceded by an even more basic question, what are we to understand by the term ‘deity’? As we have seen, there were divine hierarchies but it is not possible to neatly differentiate among divine categories. Beings that possess some supernatural qualities are referred to as gods, higher and lesser deities or spiritual beings in the literature, and there is no general scholarly agreement on what the best nomenclature is. It is probably more accurate to agree with Roel Sterckx who has aptly observed that for the Qin and Han periods: “No systematic theology in which spirit entities were classified or ranked dominated daily life. Modern scholarly attempts to distinguish propitious numinous powers (*shen* 神) from harmful ghosts or ancestors (*gui* 鬼) do not portray the full complexity of a constantly mutating spirit world in which benign forces transform into malign demons and auspicious spirits adopt daemonic characteristics. Some spirits assume anthropomorphic features, yet others, less tangible, forces of nature were viewed as equally potent.” (Sterckx, 2010, p. 419). It is interesting to notice that notions of higher and lesser deities have been used to attempt to explain the presence and absence of certain deities in mortuary settings. Given the complexity and ambiguity of the spirit world of this period this may not be the most productive criterion.

Notions of gods and deities are certainly two of the most contested in the study of religion,¹⁹⁴ in general. My own understanding is quite close in some aspects to Raimundo

¹⁹⁴ Pyysiäinen and Ketola (2014) have aptly summarized the scholarly discussion around the notion of god.

Panikkar's formulation, that proposes that the notion of "deity" represents "humanity's effort to discover its identity in confrontation with the limits of its universe. Deity is the symbol of what transcends the human being and the symbol of what lies hidden most deeply within" (Pannikar 2005, 2252). Perhaps, more generally, I understand "deity" to signal that "other" in confrontation as well as in cooperation with whom, we as human beings set both our own existential limits and potential. In other words, I frame the concept of deity in terms of alterity.

What was expected of the representations of deities in the mortuary context, though, is not entirely clear. Were they supposed to be efficacious or did they just materialize the good will of the living towards the deceased? Most probably the attitudes toward funerary images of deities were at least as varied as the attitudes towards deities in general. How did images of auspicious deities differ from tokens of good luck? Or, to go back to our original question, how can we be sure that the Buddha-figure was understood as representing a deity?

The short answer is that we cannot be sure in all cases, and it has been surmised that this figure may have just been understood as a lucky charm. However, there are some cases in which the context and position leave little doubt that this was the representation of a deity, for instance, in the bronze mirrors where the Buddha-figure is surrounded by Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong. To complicate things, in the case of the Buddha-figure, there also seems to have been a certain ambiguity as to the figure's humanity and/or divinity. This is nowhere most clearly evinced than in the *duisuguan*, where artists did in some cases conflate the (Buddhist) adept with the Buddha. That being said, it is also true that objects on which the Buddha-figure appears, such as mirrors, censers, money-trees, are commonly interpreted as closely related to ideas or wishes of immortality. The strongest argument to consider that the Buddha-figure represented something

other than a foreign human being comes from a brief investigation of the place of human figures in the grave.

5.3.3 Human figures

One of the notable features of tombs from the Han onwards was the production of clay figurines. Among these, human figures were among the most popular subjects, to the extent that to date they number in the hundreds of thousands. At first, military figures predominated, later these gave way to civil officials, male and female attendants and servants, cooks, peasants, entertainers of different sorts, etc.¹⁹⁵ Ann Paludan describes the world of figurines as “a cheerful place. It is a mirror of the world as it ought to be. A man could not change his status in the next world through tomb furnishings, but he could improve his lot. Figurines provided him with what he would like to have had rather than what he actually possessed. In keeping with the idea that images and models have the power to influence its surroundings, there were certain unwritten restrictions on their use.” These comprised restrictions of material, only some subjects could be modeled in clay while others, such as the world of imperial officialdom, fine hunters and chariots were suitable for stone. The land of immortals is not commonly depicted as clay figures. Following the conventions of spatial realism, clay figurines were placed “on the ground, belonging quite literally to the daily life of ordinary, not elevated, people” (Paludan, 1994, pp. 28-29). Representations of death, illness, mutilation or violence were all excluded.

These, as much as the representations of the deceased in banquets, and so forth also served to display and provide the deceased and their descendants with status. The clay tomb

¹⁹⁵ Paludan, 1994, pp. 10-17.

figurines are also supposed to have served to cater for the needs of the deceased whose soul and body remained in the tomb. However, as we saw above, this is a contentious point, and it is difficult to establish exactly what the function of these figurines was. But be that as it may, what is clear is that these figures represented various social functions and human activities. Other human figures represented in the funerary context are also imitative: we find the likeness of the deceased represented in murals, and sometimes in funerary banners. Other human figures include historical or mythological heroes, or representations of well-known morally instructive historical scenes.

Interestingly enough, the human representation of Huangdi and other gods appear in this context on stone relief in the Wu Liang Shrine. The inscription reads, “The Yellow Emperor created and changed a great many things, he invented weapons and the wells and fields system; he devised upper and lower garments, and established palaces and houses” (Birrell, 1993, p. 48 Fig. 2b). The addition of this historical (or rather, mythological) account that describes him as a culture bearer seems to indicate a didactic, rather than apotropaic, function, as does the fact that two other deities, genealogically related to Huangdi are also depicted: the god Zhuan Xu, identified by inscription as the grandson of the Yellow Emperor, and the god Di Ku, identified as the great grandson of the Yellow Emperor.

Human images then were found in mortuary settings of this period in murals and in clay or stone figures. Although their precise function or functions continue to be a matter of contention the human figure seems to have been largely limited to these didactic or mimetic uses. Also, in sharp contrast with the Greek arts, Chinese artists hardly ever depicted deities in entirely human form in this period. A notable exception was Xiwangmu.

5.3.4 *Xiwangmu*

In his 1986 article, Wu Hung surmised that there was a close association between Xiwangmu and the Buddha, what is more, he suggested that the two figures were interchangeable (Wu, 1986, 268-269). This hypothesis was very well received in the scholarly community as a possible clue to understand how commoners may have understood Buddhism. On the basis of the evidence presented by Wu, Zürcher also surmised the possibility of a cultic relationship between the Buddha and Xiwangmu. In the same vein Lewis has also stated that “At first associated with the Queen Mother of the West as a saving divinity from the western edge of the world, the Buddha and his teaching became the most influential foreign exotic brought into China during the first centuries of our era” (Lewis, 2007, p. 154).

Wu later disavowed this hypothesis, and Abe showed that the data on which such a hypothesis had been premised did not really support it.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, I do think that Wu highlighted an important relationship since there are some very interesting parallels and points of contact between the Buddha and Xiwangmu that are worthwhile analyzing that go beyond the geographic and chronological. Furthermore, comparisons with this goddess may be particularly fruitful given that we have much more information about Xiwangmu than any other funerary deity, especially considering they have been found together on mirrors. To start with, chronologically, although Xiwangmu’s representation appears earlier in tombs (middle of the 1st century BCE)¹⁹⁷ both images disappear from the mortuary context at around the same time (3rd

¹⁹⁶ In a later article, Wu Hung reappraised his position to suggest that in the case of Sichuan the Buddha figure actually stood for Laozi.

¹⁹⁷ It is interesting to note, however, that these early representations show Xiwangmu in a three-quarter pose, while in the extant examples from the Eastern Han she is depicted frontally with

century CE). The geographic distribution of the Xiwangmu image is wider but both do appear in funerary settings in some common areas, notably, Sichuan, Henan, and presumably Hubei.¹⁹⁸

5.3.4.1 A brief biography

Xiwangmu first appears in the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (Scripture of Mountains and Seas)—a collection that probably dates to the fourth or third century BCE. In the first entry she is said to dwell near Jade Mountain (*Yushan* 玉山) and to “resemble a human with a leopard’s tail and tiger’s teeth. She is adept at whistling and wears a Sheng-Crown on top of her unkempt hair. She administers calamities from heaven as well as five punishments” (Strassberg, 2002, p. 109). Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), the first commentator of the *Shanhaijing* interprets her whistling as a shamanistic technique used for summoning gods and demons. Clearly, she was then a goddess to be feared. In the fourth century CE, however, she is presented in the *Mutianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (The Chronicle of King Mu) as the daughter of the Supreme God (in Guo Pu’s interpretation) and as holding a banquet for King Mu of the Zhou dynasty (r. 976-922 BCE) on the banks of the Turquoise Pond (*Yaochi* 瑤池) during which she sings ritual songs to him in response to his. According to a later legend she visited emperor Wu (r. 141-87 BCE), considered to be the greatest emperor of the Han.¹⁹⁹ In the *Huainanzi* (second century BCE) she becomes the keeper

her court and attendants in profile. Jean James (1996, p. 74) agrees with Wu Hung that the frontal image “could have been derived from the iconic Buddha statue as it was used on an altar.” In our present state of knowledge, however, this suggestive hypothesis will have to remain inconclusive.

¹⁹⁸ See section on mirrors.

¹⁹⁹ For a study of this legend see Cahill, 1993, pp. 143-189.

of the elixir of immortality, and therefore, a goddess able to bestow immortality. The literary career of this goddess will continue and become much more formidable in the Tang dynasty.

Although she is often categorized as an originally Daoist deity, it is only historically accurate to consider her thus after her incorporation into the religious system of Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) Daoism that originated when purportedly Yang Xi (330-386), a young visionary who lived in the southeast—was revealed a corpus of scriptures between 364 and 370.²⁰⁰ In my view, it is also very significant that it was precisely a religious movement that rose out of competition with Buddhism that would incorporate Xiwangmu into its divine hierarchy. Indeed, as Cahill (1993, p. 32) has noted “no contemporary record of either popular or elite cults to the Queen Mother during the Han dynasty survives in the Taoist canon. The earliest reference to her found in the patrology may be a line in the *T'ai-p'ing ching* (Classic of grand peace), a text originating in the Celestial Masters school. One line in a section of the classic entitled ‘Declarations of the Celestial Masters’ reads: ‘Let a person have longevity like that of the Queen Mother of the West,’ a phrase almost identical to Han mirror inscriptions. The Celestial Masters school connects her with long life but shows the goddess no special reverence.” Furthermore, Xiwangmu will not only be considered one among other female deities in Shangqing Daoism but will become the highest goddess in the doctrinal systematization by Tao Hongjing (456-536) that defined the Shangqing.²⁰¹ I consider this significant because it may be yet another indication of the complex relationships that people may have established between the two deities, the Buddha and Xiwangmu.

²⁰⁰ See Cahill, 1993, pp. 32-33 and Pregadio, 2008, p. 858.

²⁰¹ See Cahill, 1993, pp. 32-33.

Xiwangmu is one of the common motifs in the pictorial programs and furnishings of Han tombs.²⁰² Her representation varies but she is commonly depicted wearing her characteristic headdress (*sheng*)²⁰³ dressed in traditional Han garments. She is often surrounded by animals performing actions related to very well-known legends: a hare pounding an elixir (understood as the elixir of immortality), a toad (commonly associated with the idea of rebirth and longevity supposedly because of the shedding of its skin), a nine-tailed fox, attendants, and hybrid figures, and sometimes one or more worshippers will be shown paying homage to her. Less commonly, she is depicted seated on a dragon and tiger throne, which, as Loewe has surmised, bring to mind the description in the *Shanhaijing* in which *Xiwangmu* is said to possess the tail of a leopard and the teeth of a tiger. The first known representation was found in a tomb in Luoyang dated to late Western Han, 86-49 BCE, in the tomb of Bu Qianqiu 卜千秋 and wife, located in Henan.

Some of her funerary iconographic attributes “correspond with the descriptions of literature; others invest her with the power of enjoying and conferring immortality; and some proclaim that her correct situation lies at the center of the universe, whence she may control the rhythm of the cosmos” (Loewe 1979, 103). There are many aspects of *Xiwangmu* that merit detailed study but which greatly exceed the limits of this research. What we observe in, what I hope is, a balanced summary description of this deity is that in her funerary representation she would become a more humanized deity, as opposed to the hybrid goddess of the extant textual sources. Indeed, as we have seen, she enters the funerary pantheon, at least formally, as a rather tame goddess, i.e. she has lost her most fierce and hybrid characteristics—even to the point of

²⁰² There are excellent studies about *Xiwangmu*, among which I have especially relied on Cahill, 1993; Fracasso, 1988; James, 1995; Li Song, 2004; Loewe, 1979 and Knauer, 2006.

²⁰³ As Sheri Lullo (2005, p. 391) has pointed out the *sheng* is one of the few attributes that textual and pictorial representations share.

being ascribed a consort to better suit the Confucian mores, and probably the yin-yang cosmology as well—and now her divine status is indicated by only a few of her original attributes. How to explain the evolution from a fierce and feared goddess of destruction to a tame and sought after goddess of immortality in human form is a thought-provoking question.

To be more precise, *Xiwangmu* is represented differently in different regions: which shows there was an important regional component. While in Sichuan she has no hybrid features in some pictorial reliefs dated to the first and second century (Latter Han), in others she has what seem to be schematic or suggested wings.²⁰⁴ In contrast with the variety of objects (money trees, pottery tomb reliefs, stone sarcophagi, and more rarely as free-standing sculpture) on which *Xiwangmu* appears in the Southwest, in the Southeast mirrors are the only mortuary objects that contain her image, and here she is often paired with *Dongwanggong* unlike the Southwest, where she appears without a partner.²⁰⁵

Certainly *Xiwangmu* is one of the most multifaceted deities of the Chinese pantheon: she was variously depicted as a cosmic deity, who as other creator deities continues to maintain cosmic harmony; as a fierce and terrible deity in control of evil forces and thus able to bring about calamities and punishments; as a deity capable of bestowing immortality. She was also closely associated with royalty, and with political legitimacy. According to Suzanne Cahill (1993, p. 24) she was also seen as a “conductor of souls of the dead to paradise.” She was also the central figure of a peasant millenarian rebellion, so massive that it deserved recording in the

²⁰⁴ This is the case in some reliefs from Shandong from the second to third century. See Cahill, 1993, p. 23; Lim, 1987, pp. 164-176, plates 61-63 and figure.

²⁰⁵ Abe 2002, 91. When her image on mirrors is accompanied by inscriptions these make reference to her longevity, the blessed life of immortals, and also mention the fact that she rules over such immortals. See Lewis, 2009, p. 580.

official histories. In this rebellion we observe the presence of the dual character of the goddess: she will wipe out the evil from earth and will save only her followers.

This was certainly an important turn in her divine career and the date of the event is relevant for us. This soteriological movement took place in 3 BCE, shortly before the Western Han dynasty was overthrown, and its importance and magnitude are evinced by the fact that it was recorded in some detail in the *Han Shu*. In fact, it encompasses three accounts of varying detail in different sections.²⁰⁶ They all describe the state of excitement of the people who were preparing for the advent of Xiwangmu.

In the first month of the fourth year of the Chien-p'ing, the population were running around in a state of alarm, each person carrying a manikin of straw or hemp. People exchanged these emblems with one another, saying that they were carrying out the advent procession. Large numbers of persons amounting to thousands, met in this way on the roadsides, some with dishevelled hair or going barefoot. Some of them broke down the barriers of gates by night; some clambered over walls to make their way into [houses]; some harnessed teams of horses to carriages and rode at full gallop, setting up relay stations so as to convey the tokens. They passed through 26 commanderies and kingdoms, until they reached the capital city.

That summer the people came together in meetings in the capital city and in the commanderies and kingdoms. In the village settlements, the lanes and paths across the fields they held services and set up gaming boards for a lucky throw; and they sang and danced in worship of the Queen Mother of the West. They also passed round a written message, saying 'The Mother tells the people that those who wear this talisman will not die; and let those who do not believe Her words look below the pivots on their gates, and

²⁰⁶ The least detailed passage is in the imperial annals, another one is included in the treatise on movements in the heavens, and the most detailed one (quoted above) is in the chapters on strange phenomena. See Loewe, 1979, pp. 98-99.

there will be white hairs there to show that this is true.’ By autumn these practices had abated (Loewe, 1979, p. 99).

Generally, scholars have considered this account as describing shamanistic practices and Xiwangmu as a shaman.²⁰⁷ In contrast, Knauer (2006, p. 66) makes a very thought-provoking observation: “Dry as these official reports are, the phenomena describes are to the last detail more reminiscent of the orgiastic rites celebrated in honor of the Mother of the Gods in the Classical and Hellenistic world than unspecified shamanistic practices [...]”

Would this not imply a significant presence of Greeks or of groups from the Greek cultural sphere in the capital city? Given the very active exchange of goods/commercial activities that were taking place in this period through the Silk Roads that extended from Chang’an (modern-day) Xi’an to the Mediterranean, and considering that the Hellenistic world had expanded well into Bactria and Sogdiana,²⁰⁸ it is quite plausible. Although given our present state of knowledge this must remain hypothetical, Knauer’s comparison of Xiwangmu with the goddess Kybele is on much firmer ground as we shall see in the following section.

5.3.4.2 Issues of identity and function

This variety of functions provokes at least two questions: is this the same goddess that is represented in tombs? And if she is, is it possible that there was a purposeful selection of certain features to depict her in the mortuary context? In other words, did the artists constrain the functions of the goddess by selecting some of her features in her depiction? Or, was it the case

²⁰⁷ See for instance Cahill, 1993, pp. 17-23 and Frühauf, 1991, p. 31. For more details see Knauer, 2006, p. 102 n. 28.

²⁰⁸ Bactria was located between the Hindu Kush Mountain and the Amu Darya (Oxus) river, an area that roughly corresponds to parts of modern-day Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

that despite her humanized, tame representation she was still understood as a dual deity? Or did people represent her in the function that they hoped she would serve for the deceased, as a provider of immortality or as a guide to the paradise of immortals? In the present state of knowledge I do not think it is possible to answer these questions with certainty but they do highlight important issues in relation to the apparent differences between the textual and material sources, and an area in need of thorough research.

Loewe has surmised the possibility that “the myth of the Queen Mother of the West was developed during the first centuries BC and AD, partly as a means of filling the two deficiencies in the cosmology of the day;²⁰⁹ the Queen’s powers and intervention were sought as a means of acquiring immortality, when other means had been seen to fail; and her situation came to be regarded as a means of communicating with heaven. It may also be noticed that it was just from this time onwards, i.e. c. 100 BC that Chinese eyes were being directed towards the west for an entirely different purpose. This purpose may, nonetheless, have suggested a new road towards the sacred; for explorers, merchants, and officials now actively engaged in opening up the routes which Chang Ch’ien had pioneered; they were establishing contact with the far west, where the realm of K’un-lun was thought to lie” (1979, pp. 97-98). This possible overlap between sacred and secular geographies is perhaps best exemplified by a description in the Hou Han Shu: “West of that land [i.e. Ta Ch’in] are the Weak Water and the flowing sands, close the residence of the Queen Mother of the West and near the point where the sun sets” (cited in Loewe, 1979, p. 96).

²⁰⁹ The two major deficiencies that Loewe points out in Dong Zhong Shu’s cosmological system are its failure (i) to answer the question of man’s destiny after death and (ii) to provide a direct means of contact or access between heaven, earth and man, the three accepted realms (1979, 96-97).

As Elfriede Knauer has noted “[i]n a vague way, these details seem to point to westerly regions, beyond the Taklamakan Desert to the high peaks of the western Himalayas (2006, 65).”

In this regard, Knauer (2006) has made important and well-documented connections between the pictorial representation of Xiwangmu and the Anatolian goddess Cybele, best known to us as the Greek Kybele.²¹⁰ She presents a variety material evidence that encompasses textiles, clay sculptures, seals and coins—all portable objects—to show the possible pictorial sources of the mysterious ‘sheng’ (usually translated as crown) worn by the Queen Mother of the West, as well as the depiction of her animal throne. There are no depictions of Xiwangmu from the fifth to around the middle first century BCE when she first appears in the ceiling of Bu Qianqiu’s tomb. In the Latter Han she will appear on money trees, lacquer objects, stone reliefs in tombs and family shrines, stamped bricks and mirrors.

When comparing the evidence compiled by Knauer to establish the Western origins of the pictorial sources of Xiwangmu to the case of the funerary Buddha that will appear a century later I cannot but see a similar pattern of synergistic interaction. It is fundamental to notice that it is only in the first or second century CE that a Xiwangmu in human form starts to appear. This is a major change in her representation—formerly she was depicted as a hybrid—and also in funerary iconography, where for the first time we find a deity consistently represented in human guise. Although this fact has been generally ignored by scholars this shows an important transformation especially considering that “there are no convincing prototypes for her image to

²¹⁰ This is in stark contrast to other scholars’ position. For instance, Jean James (1996. 73) states that Xiwangmu’s image “as it appears initially in Henan and elsewhere later on, must have been based on the various descriptions of her in texts or on folk tradition, or on both because she is frequently shown wearing the *sheng*, as described in the *Shan Hai Jing* and has a standard group of attendants which come out of folk tradition.”

be found in the art of Bronze or Iron Age China. Her iconography is clearly indebted to the West” (Knauer, 2006, p. 73).

It is quite interesting that the change from a theriantropic to an entirely anthropomorphic deity does not seem to have intrigued any scholars, perhaps it is only by comparison with Buddha-figure that this evolution gains relevance. However, there are also at least three important differences between Xiwangmu and the Buddha, a difference of (i) type, (ii) origin and (iii) gender.

There is no straightforward explanation for the choice that artists made to represent her in human form. Other deities, such as Nüwa, continue to be represented as hybrids. It is as if the circulation of images of foreign deities, especially perhaps that of Kybele, had provided the impetus to recast Xiwangmu both as a soteriological deity and as the provider of immortality or, at least, of a safe passage into the netherworld, aspirations that seemed to have been shared by all echelons of the population. It is in this sense that I view the transformation of Xiwangmu as yet another case of synergistic interaction.

Some interesting suggestions have been offered in this sense in relation to Fuxi 伏羲 and Nügua (or Nüwa 女媧). Confronted with the fact that their images in Han art “communicate messages about these deities that are related to but distinct from those found in the texts of the period” Mark Lewis (2006, p. 125) reasons that while this reflects the differences of the two media, the distinctions are also related to the mortuary functions of the art as well as to the interests of the people who commissioned the tombs or built them. In addition to this, he concedes that, as some modern scholars have indicated, “the artistic images preserve suggestions of an earlier version that was deliberately reworked or eliminated in the scholarly texts [...]” Whereas in the texts these two deities appear as creators of the world, humanity and civilization

who also encouraged fertility, their funerary function would seem to be to protect and maintain the order of the tomb. “They did this as snake or dragon spirits, hence beings associated with the power of water, who served as the visual embodiments of the links between Heaven, Earth and man, and of the balance between *yin* and *yang*. As a pair of elongated, highly linear figures, they also framed elements of the tomb’s architecture or its art, and served as ‘doorkeepers’ or guardian figures who marked the division between inner and outer, thereby protecting the denizens of the tomb. These roles as guardian of coffins or the doors to tombs might also have been suggested by their hybrid character as half-human and half-snake, an image that suggested transition from one state to another and thus the crossing of boundaries. However, as beings who maintained order through the imposition of distinctions, and their guarding of boundaries, their role in the tomb *did* echo and extend the attributes of Nü Gua as a tamer of the flood.” As Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫 (1989, 286-294) has noticed, these two deities appear only in funerary art which indicates their close link to the tomb.

Although it is often possible to find ways to establish some form of continuity between known stories and the function of diverse motifs in a mortuary setting we can hardly ascertain that there was any continuity. What we know is that the artists made use of a repertoire that must have been shared with their patrons. While the variations on the same themes and motifs suggest that beside local preferences, artists had a degree of freedom to express creativity and their own interpretation and rendering. This point is especially relevant because it has bearing on the notion that the adoption of the Buddha figure was due to some kind of misunderstanding. Clearly, the selection and deployment of mythological motifs obeyed reasons and mechanisms about which we need to inquire much further.

Furthermore, when we consider the difference in function and status that deities such as Nügua seem to have had in their funerary version as compared to the textual accounts we can appreciate how little the notion of “misunderstanding” contributes to throwing light on the problem at hand. Indeed, we recognize that it would make little sense to assume that artists and patrons “misunderstood” a deity of their own cultural sphere. Thus we prefer to find ways to rationalize the use of such motifs either as a particular interpretation, as responding to certain needs or as being perhaps simply fashionable. Would it not be more productive to analyze the Buddha image from such perspective as well?

5.3.4.3 A female deity: the issue of gender in the divine realm

When comparing the prevalence of the stories of sage kings in the literature with the very important place that female figures had in the funerary art of the same period one cannot but wonder how this contrast may be explained. In other words, what may have motivated the more important role played by female deities in tombs? Lewis has offered three main reasons for which funerary mythology shows more awareness of female powers: first, the fact that in tombs we find the representation of the beliefs and interests of a segment of the population broader than the literate minority. Second, in his view, “the tomb and shrine art preserves a religious character which is hidden in the tales of the sage kings, and female deities played a crucial role throughout the history of Chinese religion.” And third since the tomb was a dwelling place for the deceased, it was the equivalent of the household, an area in which the role of women was much more important in contrast with the role they played in lineage or the state (Lewis, 2009, pp. 581-582). While these hypotheses are all very suggestive, they are also quite problematic and deserve a degree of attention I cannot offer here. However, the first point is one that is important to bear in mind. Indeed, a number of funerary practices were shared by a much larger sector of society and

may have been much more relevant to more people than foundational myths. Another possible reason for the more relevant role of the female in the tomb, in my view, could be found in the yin-yang ideology since the yin principle was associated to death and dying. These principles are also germane to another dynamic—that of assigning partners to female deities.

As mentioned above, in the Han period Xiwangmu appears both with and without a partner. Whereas in the Shang dynasty a Ximu 西母 (Western Mother) appears with a female eastern counterpart Dongmu 東母 (Eastern Mother) in oracle bone inscriptions, after the Shang various male characters, human and divine, will play the role of the goddess's consort (Cf. Cahill, 1993, 26-27). In a funerary setting this role falls on Dongwanggong. Scholars have speculated that this pairing obeyed to the need to satisfy Confucian mores, and/or that it was a response to the current yin-yang cosmology.²¹¹ The case of Xiwangmu, however, is not unique. In the *Chuci* (Songs of the South) 340-278 BCE, Nügua or Nüwa 女媧 appears as a goddess that was the creator of human beings and the savior of the cosmos. Some three centuries later, however, Ban Gu (32-92 CE) the compiler of the *Hanshu*, places Nügua as a minor deity under the major god Tai Hao 太皞. Birrell has surmised that her “divinity was further eroded when she

²¹¹ According to the *Wu Yue chun qiu* 吳越春秋, a history compiled in the first century C.E., the king of Yue set up an altar in the western suburbs of the capital and dedicated it the worship of yin under the name of Xiwangmu, whereas the altar he set up in the eastern suburbs was devoted to the worship of Dongwanggong as the embodiment of yang. If this were a factual record, these events would have taken place some centuries prior to the funerary representations. However, as Cahill points out these annals although purporting to narrate events of the Warring States actually recount beliefs of the Eastern Han. See Cahill, 1993, pp. 23-24.

lost her independent status and became linked to Fu Hsi [Fu Xi] as his consort” (Birrell, 1993, p. 164). She agrees with Edward H. Schafer that “[h]er gradual degradation from her ancient eminence was partly due to the contempt of some eminent and educated men for animalian gods, and partly due to the increasing domination of masculinity in the elite social doctrine” (Schafer, 1973, p. 29 cited in Birrell, 1993, p. 164). Historian Mark E. Lewis takes a different view and considers that the literati may have suppressed “an overly sexualized religious idea” and this would explain why there is no evidence of the couple in earlier textual sources while they are represented together in mortuary settings (Lewis, 2006, p. 116).²¹² While this is an interesting suggestion, when we compare Nügua’s to Xiwangmu’s pairing with a male counterpart, we notice that there is not much in the form of a sexual union or function in the case of Xiwangmu and Dongwanggong making Schafer’s suggestion more plausible on two accounts: Xiwangmu is represented in humanized form, which seems to support the idea of the contempt of “animalian gods,” and the geographic areas where she appears with a consort are those most clearly under the rule of Confucian ethics, which would seem to support his suggestion about the dominant position of masculinity. This also makes it much more plausible to think that both Nügua and Xiwangmu appeared first as independent goddesses and were assigned a male counterpart only during the Han.

Whereas clearly a study of gender in the Chinese pantheon certainly deserves an in-depth study, my interest here has been much more concrete: to very briefly ponder the role of gender in the pantheon in the milieu in which the Buddha-figure appears. Even in this cursory treatment we

²¹² Lewis has also suggested that their shared mythic attributes, i.e. an essential role in the creation of humanity and the invention of the institution of marriage, “might have facilitated their forming a couple under the influence of *yin/yang* cosmology” (Lewis 2006,116).

can observe that there was clearly a concern with the issue of gender in the divine realm. Birrell has observed that “There are fewer goddesses in the classical Chinese pantheon than gods, and, with a few exceptions, goddesses are not equal in importance to the gods in terms of function, cult, or continuity of mythological tradition” (Birrell, 1993, p. 160). Nüwa and Xiwangmu are certainly two of those few exceptions, and in the Han, in certain areas we see a drive to limit their power as independent self-sufficient goddesses. Considering that Xiwangmu along with the Buddha were two of the very few deities depicted in human form in the funerary setting gender may be no insignificant detail.

5.3.4.4 Xiwangmu and the Buddha

Although the widespread idea that the Buddha was conflated with Xiwangmu is no longer defensible, there are important similarities that make their comparison interesting and relevant. Some of these have already been noted. It has been highlighted that in the imaginary geography, one of the places where Xiwangmu was said to reside was Mount Kunlun in the west where she would dispense the elixir of immortality to those who managed to reach her realm. The fact that both the Buddha and Xiwangmu were said to come from the West—or even, more generally, the fact that the West was seen as the realm of immortals—may have served to establish a certain similarity or correlation between them. In the funerary record both of the figures appear in money trees, bronze mirrors and wall carvings. In all three there are a few cases where they appear together, or sharing some mixed iconographic traits. As mentioned above, allegedly in the reconstructed money tree exemplar held at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco dated to 100 to 200 CE where Xiwangmu is positioned on the upper register of the axis of the branches while a Buddha image is in a lower register. The fact that this reconstruction is not the product of a controlled excavation, however, should alert us to the possibility that these

figures belonged to different money trees and were placed together to assemble a whole object. There are some noticeable differences too: while Xiwangmu is placed on either the trunk or branches, the Buddha-figure has been found on the trunk and base. This is significant because of the representations commonly found at the base. Erickson identifies two types of base: the base with auspicious animals, either real or fantastic (rams, a bear, turtles, rabbits, toads—these last two are often associated with the moon and the drug of immortality, and sometimes appear as part of Xiwangmu's entourage), or fantastic animals, such as, the *pixiu* 貔貅 or *qilin* 麒麟.

These are similarities deserving of notice but I would like to call attention to those commonalities that, in turn, differentiate them from other deities. To start with the fact that they were both represented in human guise in mortuary settings. Another notable similarity is that in the period that they served as part of the funerary pantheon they were also viewed as universal deities with soteriological powers. May we not aver that they were part of a larger ideological trend? The fact that in the mortuary setting there is a certain chronological correlation seems to support this proposition. In fact, although Xiwangmu's representation appears earlier in tombs (middle of the 1st century BCE) both images disappear from the mortuary context at around the same time (early 4th century CE). Also, although the geographic distribution of the Xiwangmu image is wider both do appear in funerary settings in some common areas, notably, Sichuan, Henan, Jiangsu and presumably Hubei.²¹³

In brief, the pictorial transformation of this hybrid deity into a human figure, and the subsequent appearance of another deity in human form, i.e. the Buddha-figure, in the funerary setting cannot, I believe, be explained solely in terms of the funerary culture, just as the latter

²¹³ See section on mirrors.

cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of the prevalent narrative of the “introduction of Buddhism” in China. Rather, these phenomena beckon us to inquire into the larger ideological and cosmological trends of the period regarding the relation of the human and the divine. All the more because we find another event that would transform the religious landscape of the period, the official deification of Laozi. From historical sage Laozi becomes no later than 166 CE a preternal deity that has come to the world to save humankind (see Seidel, 1992, pp. 1-3).

As we saw in section 2.4 the reasons for the official deification of Laozi remain unclear. We know, however, that at least at the official level Laozi retains his humanity. Indeed in the *Laozi ming* reference is made to Laozi as a historical character who attains immortality, as the central deity of the cosmos, and as personification of the Dao. The divinized human was not, however, a creation of the Han dynasty, far from that, we have a host of both anthropomorphic deities and theomorphic humans. But as Puett has convincingly argued the goals to which humans could aspire change in different periods. These important changes are often lost within the two prevalent interpretive frameworks: the one that emphasizes a shift from theism to naturalism—whose best-known representative is Max Weber—and the framework that posits an inherent correlation and linkage between man and god, as opposed to the existing disjunction in Western tradition between both. Puett’s (2002) critical work has radically reinterpreted the cosmological texts of the Warring States and the Han showing that paleographic materials of the Bronze Age and received texts dealing with ritual practices evince an overriding concern to anthropomorphize the divine by turning the spirits into ancestors in order to arrange them into a hierarchy (31-79). In the Warring States period (c. 476-221 BCE), however, the goal first changes to becoming like spirits (*ru shen* 如神) instead of anthropomorphizing the divine, and later to be able to become spirits (80-121, especially 97-117) while a number of important texts

such as the Zhuangzi and Mencius reveal an increasingly agonistic²¹⁴ relation between Heaven and man.

The Qin and early Han court practices will evince a prominence of the *fangshi* 方士 (masters of formulas) and the emergence of theomorphic claims of rulership and the related problem of the emperor's proper relationship to the world of spirits (Puett 2002, 225-258). However, at the end of the first century BCE the Han court institutes a sacrificial system based on Confucian arguments that involved a rejection of any claims to self-divinization. And although humans and Heaven are still correlated they are also given a proper and distinct sphere of activity. As a consequence, officially the ruler was defined as human and the notion of divine kingship was rejected. However, not only will millenarian movements—precisely opposing the imperial court—take up the notion of self-divinization and ascension (Puett 2002, 307-315), several chapters of the *Huainanzi* (2nd century BCE) will claim that “there is no distinction between humans and spirits and that humans are fully capable of becoming spirits” (Puett 2002, p. 260).

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general tendency has been to consider that the Chinese misunderstood the ‘Buddha’ or what the ‘Buddha’ stood for. This “misinterpretation,” when framed instead as a process of translation forces us to look at the most basic elements of the figure and the context where it appears. By comparing the dozens of Buddha-figures we observe that their meaning and function

²¹⁴ Aggressive or defensive interactions.

were variously understood. This ambiguity may be seen as inhering in its novelty but as we have seen it also probably stems from its human form and foreign attributes.

We find the Buddha-figure at a complex contextual intersection: this is a world in which deep changes are taking place in the conception of death and afterlife, divine hierarchies and the human power to become divine, not just to acquire supernatural powers. Seen through the lens of the construction of identity, we can view the changes in the structure and iconography of tombs as expressing a rapprochement of the realm of the living and the dead. Similarly, the appearance of the possibility of attaining immortality and/or becoming divine in this life or after death can be seen as the rapprochement of the human and the divine.

We find evidence of the latter in philosophical writings and ideological debates, and also in a development that has gone largely unnoticed, the transformation of Xiwangmu, at least in the funerary realm, into an entirely anthropomorphic deity, and the adoption, without major adaptations, of the Buddha figure.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The material record certainly adds new dimensions to the picture we had of what is known as “the introduction of Buddhism in China.” Not only do they give us new information regarding the geographic and/or chronological spread but allow us to see the prevalent narrative of the introduction in a different light.

Yet how was it that the Chinese could have accepted a foreign deity from a foreign country and worshiped it as equal with Huang-Lao? The explanation for this is to be sought in a remarkable doctrine developed by the Taoists—that of *hua-hu*, the conversion of the barbarians. According to this doctrine, Lao-tzu, after disappearing in the west, went all the way to India, where he converted the barbarians and became the Buddha. Therefore the founders of Buddhism and Taoism were one and the same person, for the Buddha was but an incarnation of Lao-tzu. Since the two religions originated from the same source, there was no difference between them, so that it was quite proper for the deities Buddha and Huang-Lao to be worshiped on the same altar. (Ch'en, 1966, p. 50)

This paragraph encapsulates several relevant and common points usually associated with the narrative of the “introduction.” The first is the assumption that the foreignness of the Buddha should have prevented this deity as well as Buddhism from succeeding in the ethnocentric Chinese empire. Another point is the practice of worshiping the Buddha as equal with Huang-

lao, and closely related to this, the conflation of Huang-lao and Laozi as the same deity. The *huahu* legend (or theory) also figures prominently as an explanatory device.

The assumption that the foreignness of the Buddha should have rendered this deity unsuitable for worship by the Chinese is premised on the very common notion that the Chinese were unabashedly ethnocentric. (And much of the official history certainly confirms this idea). This in turn builds on a view of the Chinese of the period as sharing a rather homogeneous sense of identity, and foreigners as a generic ‘other’ inferior in all senses to the Chinese. However, the peoples we subsume under the umbrella term “Chinese” were not only of many ethnicities but most probably had a sense of identity that can hardly be represented by the term “Chinese.” The view of foreigners and the foreign was also neither unanimous nor static. It is not only that widespread exoticism is documented for at least part of the Han, but the fact that culturally China was very diverse, the types of society were varied and there were also different kinds of contact zones. Thus we cannot assume that ‘foreignness’ *per se* was a problem or disadvantage in general.

The second point, the worshipping the Buddha alongside with Huang-lao was as far as we know a practice that in the Han was only performed by emperor Huan. We do not know if this practice was widespread or if it was limited to this emperor, and thus the implied notion that the “Chinese” accepted the Buddha is quite an overstatement. There is no doubt that the explanation in terms of the *huahu* legend would occupy an important place in the official debates what is problematic is to assume it served as the reason for the acceptance of the Buddha (at the imperial level).

Probably the most far-reaching conclusion is that there is little to make a case for the widespread claim that the Buddha was assimilated in terms of Laozi (and even to Xiwangmu), (or more generally that Buddhism was assimilated to Daoism). It seems just as possible that the official deification of Laozi may have been a response to the (presence of) Buddha. My intention, however, is not to suggest an inversion of the order of events or to claim preeminence for Buddhism, but to show that this version, that has dominated the discussion about early Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, is highly debatable and that there seems to have been a much more dynamic interaction.

Especially after establishing that rather than speaking of “Buddhism” it is more accurate and useful to imagine a continuum between a repertoire that becomes available in several forms and missionary groups. While the latter represent the efforts to transmit the religion as a totality, are interested in doctrines and translation, for others the intent may have been much more mundane.

I hope to have shown that by approaching the pieces in the material record as indices of the presence of Buddhism we fall into conceptual problems and miss important differences and peculiarities. Sichuan is a case in point. Although most scholars have concluded that the Buddhist motifs probably simply evince a diffuse adoption, the analysis of the pagoda carving led me to claim that there may have been indeed a Buddhist community in Sichuan as early as the second or third century CE.

A question that I have tentatively tried to answer is about the choice to reproduce Buddhist motifs and especially the Buddha figure. Indeed Zürcher has claimed that the mode of transmission largely determined the outcome, while Wu and Abe have looked into the possible instances of formal similarity (and confusion). To be fair, Zürcher proposes that the channel of

transmission must have been material objects to explain why there does not appear to be a connection with the spread of monastic Buddhism or any archaic translated texts, not to explain the particular selection. We are left wondering, however, why the particular choice of some Buddhist motifs and the Buddha and not other foreign representations, many of which were widely circulating in the same period. In fact, the case of the Buddhist motifs is important not only in relation to Chinese Buddhism but, more generally, because of the scale of adoption of a foreign motif. It is important to note here that the reproduction of a motif without radical adaptation is also remarkable. The studies of the exchanges with the steppes in the Western Zhou generally show that in the process of borrowing Chinese artisans changed the motif and style.²¹⁵ Wu and Abe have looked into the possible instances of formal similarity (and confusion). But again, this hardly explains the specific choice and wide distribution.

I have addressed this question by analyzing the main features of the Buddha figure—that is, that it represented a foreign male human deity—and by comparing it to similar figures, as well as by placing it firmly in its various contexts, and it is clear that no single explanation can be applied to all cases. This in view that there are differences among the different areas where it appears, the function seems to have been variable. This variability can be related to the varying levels of ambiguity and constraints. In this respect, one of the important insights of this dissertation is that, with the exception of Xiwangmu, human figures did not generally serve apotropaic functions in the mortuary context. Thus the Buddha figure (and also Xiwangmu) represented an innovation. This may explain, to a certain extent, the variability of functions. This is also related to the tension between social convention and individual interpretation. While undoubtedly there is a social ethos that informs particular interpretations, it does not determine it.

²¹⁵ See especially Weber, 1968; Bunker, 1983-1985 and Jacobson, 1988.

In this sense, the most compatible theoretical framework I have found is Dan Sperber's naturalistic approach to culture. He claims that one of the basic points to understand the cultural role of symbolism is that "evocation is never totally determined; there always remain to the individual a considerable degree of freedom; cultural symbolism focusses the attention of the members of a single society in the same directions, determines parallel evocational fields that are structured in the same way, but leaves the individual free to effect an evocation in them as he likes. Cultural symbolism creates a commonality of interest but not of opinions, which—be said it in passing—has always troubled churchmen and politicians, manufacturers of ideology, obstinate misappropriators of symbolism" (Sperber, 1975, p. 137).

This is precisely one of the reasons why the funerary Buddha figures deserved detailed analysis, they are the product of a reception that is much less constrained by religious specialists and political agendas than in the following centuries. Above all they give us a privileged view of some of the ways in which often-slighted actors such as artisans and people outside the imperial circles appropriated a symbol that would play such a transcendent role in Chinese and Asian history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collections

Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) (1975). *Hanshu* 漢書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445) (1965). *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書. Beijing: Zhongguo shuju.

Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) (1991). *Hongming ji* 宏明集. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe.

Sishu wujing 四書五經 (1989) 2 vols. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe.

Sima Qian (135-86 BCE) (1965). *Shiji* 史記. Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju.

Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經 (1985). Eds. T. Junjirō, W. Kaikyoku & O. Genmyō 小野玄妙. (Vols 1-85). Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932. Reprint, Taipei: Xinwenfeng.

The long discourses of the Buddha (2nd ed.) (1995). Walshe, M (Trans.). Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Secondary sources

Works in Western languages

Abe, S. K. (2002). *Ordinary images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ajimer, G. (Ed.). (1995). *Syncretism and the commerce of symbols*. Göteborg: The Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology (IASSA).

Altekar, A. S. (1952). Buddha on Indo-Scythian coins. *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, 14(June), 52–53.

Balazs, E. (1964). *Chinese civilization and bureaucracy; variations on a theme*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Barbieri-Low, Anthony J. (2007). *Artisans in early imperial China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Barfield, T. J. (1989). *The perilous frontier: nomadic empires and China*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Barker, J. (2008) *The flowering of a foreign faith: new studies in Chinese Buddhist art*. Mumbai, India: Marg Publications.
- Barrett, T. H. (2001). "Stupa, sutra, and Sarira in China, c. 656-706 CE," *Buddhist Studies Review* 18: 1-64.
- Barrett, T. H. (2010). Religious change under Eastern Han and its successors: Some current perspectives and problems. In M. Nylan & M. Loewe (Eds.), *China's early empires: a re-appraisal* (pp. 430-448). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bechert, H., ed. (1978). *Buddhism in Ceylon and studies in religious syncretism in Buddhist countries*. Symposien zur Buddhismusforschung, 11. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Beck, B. J. M. (1980). The date of the "Taiping Jing." *T'oung Pao*, 66 (4/5), 149–182.
doi:10.2307/4528198
- Benavides, G. (1991). ¿Sincretismo religioso o resistencia política en los Andes? *Humanitas* 20, 5-19.
- Benavides, G. (2002). Power, intelligibility and the boundaries of religions. *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 27(3), 481-498.
- Berling, J. A. (1980). *The syncretic religion of Lin Chao-En*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Berner, U. (1982). *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Bielenstein, H. (1947). The census of China during the period 2-742 A.D. *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 19, 125–163.
- Boucher, D. (1996). *Buddhist translation procedures in third-century China. A study of Dharmarakṣa and his translation idiom*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Pennsylvania.
- Birnbaum, R. (1985). Seeking longevity in Chinese Buddhism: long life Deities and their symbolism. *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 13(1), 143–176.
doi.10.1179/073776985805308185
- Boyer, P. (1990). *Tradition as truth and communication: a cognitive description of traditional discourse* (Vol. 68). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Boyer, P. (2001). *Religion explained: the evolutionary origins of religious thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brashier, K. E. (1995). Longevity like metal and stone: the role of the mirror in Han burials. *T'oung Pao*, 81(4-5), 201–229.
- Brashier, K.E. (1996). Han thanatology and the division of “souls.” *Early China* 21, 25-58.
- Bunker, E. (1983). The Steppe connection. *Early China*, 9-10, 70–76.
- Burke, P. (2001) *Eyewitnessing: the uses of image as historical evidence*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Burke, P. (2009). *Cultural hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cahill, S. (1993). *Transcendence and divine passion: the Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Campany, R. F. (1991). Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dynasties Zhiguai. *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 13, 15-34.
- Campany, R. F. (2012a). Religious repertoires and contestation: a case study based on Buddhist miracle tales. *History of Religions*, 52(2), 99–141.
- Campany, R. F. (2012b). *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*. Honolulu, HI, USA: University of Hawaii Press. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pitt/docDetail.action?docID=10755811>
- Chang, K. C. (1983). *Art, myth, and ritual the path to political authority in ancient China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chappell, D. W. (Ed.). (1987). *Buddhist and Taoist practice in medieval Chinese society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press.
- Chavannes, E. (1907). Les pays d'Occident d'après le “Heou Han chou:” avant-propos. *T'oung Pao*, 8(2), 149–234 doi.10.2307/4525933
- Chen, X. (1997). On the designation “Money Tree.” *Orientalism*, 28(8), 67–71.
- Ch'en, K. (1973). *The Chinese transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Ch'en, K. (1964). *Buddhism in China, a historical survey*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Clements, R. P., & Haberman, D. L. (2010). *Social lives of religious symbols: An evolutionary approach to explaining religious change*. Indiana University, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from

<http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/734607418?accountid=14709>

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1994). *Emulating the Yellow Emperor: the theory and practice of Huanglao, 180-141 B.C.E.* (Doctoral dissertation). Stanford University.
- Dallapiccola, A. L., ed. (1980). *The stūpa: its religious, historical and architectural significance.* Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- de Bary, T. (1969). *The Buddhist tradition in India, China, and Japan.* New York: The Modern Library.
- de Certeau, M. (1997). *Culture in the plural.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- de Crespigny, R. (1990). *Generals of the South: the foundation and early history of the Three Kingdoms State of Wu.* Canberra: Australian National University.
- de Crespigny, R. (1991a). The Three Kingdoms and Western Jin: a history of China in the 3rd century AD-Part I. *East Asian History*, 1(June), 1–36.
- de Crespigny, R. (1991b). The Three Kingdoms and Western Jin: a history of China in the 3rd century AD-Part II. *East Asian History*, 2(December), 143–165.
- de Groot, J. J. M. (1972). *The religious system of China: its ancient forms, evolution, history and present aspect, manners, custom and social institutions connected therewith* (Vols 1-6). Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company.
- Dehejia, V. (1991). Aniconism and the multivalence of emblems. *Ars Orientalis*, 21, 45–
doi.10.2307/4629413
- Demiéville, P. (1986). Philosophy and religion from Han to Sui. In D. Twitchett & M. Loewe (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of China. Volume I: the Ch'in and Han empires 221 B.C.-A.D. 220* (pp. 808–872). Cambridge [Eng], New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Despeux, C. (Ed.). (2002). *Buddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale.* Paris and Louvain: Centre d'Etudes Chinoises.
- Di Cosmo, N. & Wyatt, D. (Eds.). (2003) *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Dikötter, Frank (1992). *The discourse of race in modern China.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Dikötter, Frank (1997). *The construction of racial identities in China and Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Dien, A. E. (1991). *State and society in early medieval China.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

- Dien, A. E. (1995). Instructions for the grave: the case of Yan Zhitui. *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 8, 41-58.
- Dien, A.E. (2001). Developments in funerary practices in the Six Dynasties period: the *duisuguan*, or “figured jar,” as a case in point. In H. Wu (Ed.) *Between Han and Tang: cultural and artistic interaction in a transformative period* (pp. 509-546). Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House.
- Dien, A. E. (2007). *Six dynasties civilization*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Droge, A. J. (2001). Retrofitting/retiring syncretism. *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 27(3), 357-388.
- Dubs, H. H. (1942). An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 35(4), 221–240. doi.10.2307/1508356
- Ebrey, P. B. (1983). Patron-client relations in the later Han. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103(3), 533-542.
- Edwards, R. (1954a). The cave reliefs at Mahao - Part I. *Artibus Asiae*, 17(1), 5–25.
- Edwards, R. (1954b). The cave reliefs at Mahao - Part II. *Artibus Asiae*, 17(2), 103–129.
- Erickson, S. N. (1992). Boshanlu: Mountain censors of the Western Han period: a typological and iconological analysis. *Archives of Asian Art*, 45, 6-28. doi.10.2307/20062588
- Erickson, S. N. (1994). Money Trees of the Eastern Han dynasty. *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 66, 5-115.
- Erickson, S. N. (Ed.). (2003). *The sweet hereafter: art from Han dynasty tombs*. Alfred Berkowitz Gallery, University of Michigan-Dearborn.
- Finsterbusch, K. (2004). *Verzeichnis und Motivindex der Han-Darstellungen* (Vols. 1-4). Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz.
- Fracasso, R. (1988). Holy mothers of ancient China: a new approach to the Hsi-wang-mu problem. *T'oung Pao*, 74, 1-46.
- Fogelin, L. (2008). ed.. *Religion, archaeology, and the material world*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.
- Freyre, G. (2000). *Ingleses no Brasil* (2nd ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks.
- Gao, W. (1987). A brief overview of the Han tomb reliefs from Sichuan. In L. Lim (Ed.), *Stories from China's past: Han dynasty pictorial tomb reliefs and archaeological objects from Sichuan province, PRC, exhibition catalogue* (pp. 46–50). San Francisco.
- Gernet, J. (1956). *Les aspects économiques du bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du Ve au Xe siècle*. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.

- Gimello, R. M. (1978). "Random reflections on the 'Sinicization' of Buddhism." *Society for the Study of Chinese Religions Bulletin* 5: 52-89.
- Girardot, N. J., & Major, J. S. (1985). Introduction. *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 13(1), 1-14. doi.10.1179/073776985805308167
- Glassie, H. (1999). *Material culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Goepper, R., & Kulturstiftung Ruhr. (1996). *Das alte China: Menschen und Götter im Reich der Mitte, 5000 v. Chr.-220 n. Chr. : [Ausstellung], Kunsthaus Zürich, 4. April 1996-14. Juli 1996*. Zürich: Kunsthaus.
- Gort, J. D., Vroom, R. F. & Wessels A., (Eds.) (1989). *Dialogue and syncretism: An interdisciplinary approach*. Eerdmans, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Gregory, P. N. (1991). *Tsung-mi and the sinification of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gruzinski, S. (2002). *The mestizo mind*. New York: Routledge.
- Gyatso, J. (1992). *In the mirror of memory : reflections on mindfulness and remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=8656&site=ehost-live>
- Hales, S., ed. (2010) *Material culture and social identities in the ancient world*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallam, E. and Street, B. (Eds.). (2000) *Cultural encounters: representing 'otherness.'* London and New York: Routledge.
- Harrison, P. (1992). Commemoration and Identification in Buddhānsmṛti. In J. Gyatso (Ed.), *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism* (pp. 215-238). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Harrison, P. M. (1993). "The earliest Chinese translations of Mahāyāna sūtras. Some notes on the works of Lokakṣema." *Buddhist Studies Review* 10.2: 135-177.
- Hartmann, S. S. (Ed). (1969). *Syncretism*. Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis III. Stockholm: Alquist & Wiksell.
- Harvey, K. (Ed). *History and material culture: A student's guide to approaching alternative sources*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hay, J. (1993, March). Art & political expression in early China (Book Review). *Art Bulletin*. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aft&AN=505660277&site=ehost-live>

- Hayden, R. M. (2002). "Antagonistic tolerance: Competitive sharing of religious sites in South Asia and the Balkans." *Current Anthropology*, 43,(2), 205-231.
- Henare, A., H. Martin, and S. Wastell, eds. (2007). *Thinking through things: theorising artefacts ethnographically*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Herman, B. L. (1992). *The stolen house*. Charlottesville and London: University of Press of Virginia.
- Heirman, A., & Bumbacher, S. P. (Eds.). (2007). *The spread of Buddhism*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Ho, W. (1961). Hun-p'ing: the urn of the soul. *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 48(2), 26-34.
- Hodder, I. (2012). *Entangled: an archaeology of the relationships between humans and things*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hucker, C. O. (1985). *A dictionary of official titles in imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hulsewé, A. F. P. (1979). *China in Central Asia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Insoll, T. (2004). *Archaeology, ritual, religion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Irwin, L. (1990). Divinity and salvation: the great goddesses of China. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 49(1), 53-68. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1177949>
- Jacobson, E. (1988). Beyond the frontier: a reconsideration of cultural interchange between China and the early nomads. *Early China*, 13, 201-240.
- James, J. M. (1995). An iconographic study of xiwangmu during the Han dynasty. *Artibus Asiae*, 55(1/2), 17-41. doi.10.2307/3249761
- James, J. M. (1996). *A guide to the tomb and shrine art of the Han dynasty 206 B.C. - A.D. 220*. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Juliano, A. L. and J.A. Lerner. (2001). *Monks and merchants: Silk Road treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia 4th-7th century*. New York, N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams with the Asia Society.
- Kamstra, J. H. (1967). *Encounter or syncretism. The initial growth of Japanese Buddhism*. Leiden: Brill.
- Karlgren, B. (1934). Early Chinese mirror inscriptions. *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 6, 9-79.
- Karlsson, K. (2006). The formation of early Buddhist visual culture. *Material Religion*, 2(1), 68-95. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=23005760&site=ehost-live>

- Karp, I. (1986). Agency and social theory: A review of Anthony Giddens. *American Ethnologist*, 13(1), 131–137. doi.10.2307/644591
- Kieschnick, J. (2003). *The impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Kieschnick, J. (1997). *The eminent monk: Buddhist ideals in medieval Chinese hagiography*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kitagawa, J. M., & Cummings, M. D. (Eds.). (1987). *Buddhism in Asian history*. New York: MacMillan publishing company.
- Knauer, E. R. (2006). The Queen Mother of the West: a study of Western prototypes on the iconography of the Taoist deity. In V. H. Mair (Ed.), *Contact and exchange in the Ancient World* (pp. 62–115). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kohn, L. (1995). *Laughing at the Tao: debates among Buddhists and Daoists in medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kohn, L. (1998). *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in history and myth*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies. The University of Michigan.
- Krishan, Y. (1996). *The Buddha image: its origin and development*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Lagerwey, J. (Ed). (2009a). *Religion et société en Chine ancienne et médiévale*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf/Institut Ricci.
- Lagerwey, J. & Kalinowski, M. (Eds.). (2009b). *Early Chinese religion: Part one, Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Lagerwey, J., and Lü, P. (Eds.). (2010). *Early Chinese religion: Part two, the period of division (220-589 AD)*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Lai, W. (1981). "Emperor Wu of Liang on the immortal soul, Shen Pu Mieh." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 101.2: 167-175.
- Lancaster, L. R. (1976). "An early Mahayana sermon about the body of the Buddha and the making of images," *Artibus Asiae* 36, 4 (1976).
- Lancaster, L., and C. Yu. (Eds). (1989). *The introduction of Buddhism to Korea: new cultural patterns*. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press.
- Lanczkowski, G. (1971). *Begegnung und Wandel der Religionen*. Düsseldorf: Diederichs.
- Le Blanc, C. (1985). A re-examination of the myth of Huang-ti. *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 13(1), 45–63. doi.10.1179/073776985805308158

- Le Blanc, C. and Mathieu, R. (Eds.). (1992) *Myth et philosophie à l'aube de la Chine impérial: études sur le Huainan Zi*. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Le Blanc, C. and Mathieu, R. (Eds.). (2003) *Philosophes Taoïstes II, Huainanzi*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Ledderose, Lothar. 2000. *Ten thousand things: module and production in Chinese art*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Lee, J. (1993). The origins and development of the pensive bodhisattva images of Asia. *Artibus Asiae*, 53(3/4), 311–357. doi.10.2307/3250524
- Leopold, A. M. (2001). The architecture of syncretism: A methodological illustration of the dynamics of syncretism. *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions Historiques*, 27(3) 401-424.
- Leopold, A. M., and J. S. Jensen. (Eds.). (2004). *Critical categories in the study of religion. Syncretism in religion: a reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Levenson, J. R., and F. Schurmann. (1969). *China: an interpretive history from the beginnings to the fall of Han*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lewis, M. E. (2006). *Flood myths of early China*. New York: State University of New York.
- Lewis, M. E. (2009a). The mythology of early China. In J. Lagerwey & M. Kalinowski (Eds.), *Early Chinese Religion: Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)* (pp. 543–594). Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Lewis, Mark Edward. (2009b). *China between empires: the Northern and Southern dynasties*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Liebethal, W. (1955). Chinese Buddhism during the 4th and 5th centuries. *Monumenta Nipponica* 11(1), 44-83.
- Lim, L. (Ed.). (1987). *Stories from China's past*. San Francisco: Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco.
- Lincoln, B. (2001). "Retiring syncretism." *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 23(3), 453-460.
- Linduff, K. with Wu, J., (2006). The construction of identity: remaining Sogdian in China. *Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series*, 52 (Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference 2005), 119–146.
- Little, S., with S.Eichman. (2000). *Taoism and the arts of China*. Chicago: University of California Press.
- Liu, C. Y., Nylan, M., Barbieri-Low, A. & Noble, N. (Eds.). (2005). *Recarving China's past: art, archaeology, and architecture of the "Wu family shrines."* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum; New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Liu, X. R. (1988). *Ancient India and ancient China: trade and religious exchanges, AD 1-600*. Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Loewe, M. (1972). K'uang Heng and the reform of religious practices (31 B.C.). *Asia Major*, 17, 1-27.
- Loewe, M. (1974). *Crisis and conflict in Han China: 104 B.C. to A.D. 9*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Loewe, M. (1978). Man and beast: the hybrid in early Chinese art and literature. *Numen*, 25(2), 97-117. doi:10.2307/3269782
- Loewe, M. (1979). *Ways to paradise: The Chinese quest for immortality*. London; Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Loewe, M. (1982). *Chinese ideas of life and death: Faith, myth and reason in the Han period (202 BC-AD 220)*. London; Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Loewe, M. (1994). *Divination, mythology and monarchy in Han China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Loewe, M., & Shaughnessy, E. L. (Eds.). (1999). *The Cambridge history of ancient China: from the origins of civilization to 211 B.C.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Loewe, M. (2005). *Everyday life in early imperial China during the Han period, 202 BC-AD 220*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.
- Lopez, D. S., Jr. (Ed.). (1996). *Religions of China in practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lu C. (1979). *Sketchy Account of Origination of Chinese Buddhism*. Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua Publication.
- Mair, V. H. (Ed.). (2006). *Contact and exchange in the ancient world*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Mair, V. H. (2010). What is geyi after all? In A. K. Chan & Y. K. Lo (Eds.), *Philosophy and religion in early Medieval China* (pp. 227-264). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Major, John S. (1993). *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi*. New York: State University of New York.
- Martin, L. H. (2000). "Of religious syncretism, comparative religion and spiritual quests." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 12: 277-286.
- Martin, L. H., & Leopold, A. M. (2004). New approaches to the study of syncretism. In P. Antes, A. W. Geertz, & R. Warne (Eds.), *New Approaches to the study of religion* (pp. 93-107). Berlin and New York: de Gruyter.

- Maspero, H. (1910). Communautés et moines Bouddhistes Chinois aux IIe et IIIe siècles. *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 10, 220–232.
- Maspero, H. (1934). Les origines de la communauté Bouddhiste de Lo-yang. *Journal asiatique*, 225, 87-107.
- Maspero, H. (1981). *Taoism and Chinese religion*. (F. A. Kierman, Trans.). Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Mathieu, R. (1983). *Étude sur la mythologie et l'ethnologie de la Chine ancienne: traduction annotée du Shanhai jing*. Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises.
- Matsunaga, A. (1969). *The Buddhist philosophy of assimilation; the historical development of the honji-suijaku theory*. Tokyo: Sophia University.
- McDermott, J. P. (1999). *State and court ritual in China*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McNair, A. (2007). *Donors of Longmen: faith, politics, and patronage in medieval Chinese Buddhist sculpture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Miller, A. R. (2011). *Patronage, politics and the emergence of rock-cut tombs in Early Han China*. (Doctoral dissertation). Harvard University.
- Miura, K. (2008). Xianren: immortal; transcendent. In *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (pp. 1092–1094). Routledge.
- Mollier, C. (2008). *Buddhism and Taoism face to face: Scripture, ritual, and iconographic exchange in medieval China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Morgan, D., ed. (2010). *Religion and material culture*. London, England; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mu-chou, P. (1990). Ideas Concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China. *Asia Major*, 25–62.
- Mu-chou, Poo (2005). *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China*, New York: State University of New York.
- Nattier, J. (2008). *A guide to the earliest Chinese Buddhist translations: texts from the Eastern Han 東漢 and Three Kingdoms 三國 periods*. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University.
- Nickerson, P. (2006). “Let living and dead take separate paths”: bureaucratisation and textualisation in early Chinese mortuary ritual. In B. Penny (Ed.), *Daoism in history: Essays in honor of Liu Ts'un Yan* (pp. 10–40). London; New York: Routledge.
- Paludan, A. (1994). *Chinese tomb figurines*. Hong Kong, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

- Panikkar, R. (2005). Deity. In *Encyclopedia of Religion Ed. Lindsay Jones* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 2252–2263). Macmillan Reference USA.
- Paper, J. D. (1995). *The spirits are drunk: Comparative approaches to Chinese religion*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Pearce, S., A. G. Spiro, & Ebrey, P. B. (Eds). (2001). *Culture and power in the reconstitution of the Chinese realm, 200-600*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press.
- Pelliot, P. (1920) Meou-tseu ou les doutes levés: Traduit et annoté. *T'oung pao*, 19, 255-433.
- Pelliot, P. (1928). Le terme de siang-kiao comme designation du Bouddhisme. *T'oung Pao*, 25, 92–94.
- Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, M. (1982). *The Han dynasty*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications.
- Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, M. (1994). Pour une archéologie des échanges. Apports étrangers en Chine - transmission, réception, assimilation. *Arts Asiatiques*, 49(1), 21–33. doi.10.3406/arasi.1994.1350
- Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, M. (1998). De l'efficacité plastique à la productivité: les grès porcelaineux du Jiangnan aux IIIe-IVe siècles de notre ère. *T'oung Pao*, 84(1/3), 21–61.
- Poo, M. Z. (1998). *In search of personal welfare: a view of ancient Chinese religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Powers, M. J. (1991). *Art and political expression in early China*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Puett, M. J. (1998). Sages, ministers, and rebels: narratives from early China concerning the initial creation of the state. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 58(2), 425–479. doi.10.2307/2652666
- Puett, M. J. (2002). *To become a god: cosmology, sacrifice, and self-divinization in early China*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute.
- Pye, M. (1969). “The transplantation of religions.” *Numen*, 16, 234-239.
- Pye, M. (1971). “Syncretism and ambiguity.” *Numen*, 18, 83-93.
- Pyysiäinen, I. (2003). Buddhism, religion, and the concept of “God.” *Numen*, 50(2), 147–171. doi.10.2307/3270517
- Qu, T. Z. (1972). *Han social structure*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Rambelli, F. (2007). *Asian religions & cultures. Buddhist materiality: a cultural history of objects in Japanese Buddhism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Rawson, Jessica. (1984). *Chinese ornament: the lotus and the dragon*. London: British Museum Publications Ltd.
- Rawson, J. (2006). The Chinese hill censer, boshan lu: a note on origins, influences and meanings. *Arts Asiatiques*, 61(1), 75–86. doi.10.3406/arasi.2006.1640
- Rhie, M. M. (1998). *Early Buddhist art of China and Central Asia* (Vol 1), Handbuch der Orientalistik vierte Abteilung, China. Boston: Brill.
- Robbins, J. (2011). Crypto-religion and the study of cultural mixtures: anthropology, value and the nature of syncretism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79(2), 408–424.
- Robinet, I. (1985). The Taoist immortal: jesters of light and shadow, heaven and earth. *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 13(1), 87–105. doi.10.1179/073776985805308202
- Robinet, I. (1997). *Taoism: growth of a Religion*, (P. Brooks, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Robinson, R. H. (1978). *Early Madhyamika in India and China*. Delhi; Varanasi; Patna: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Sanders, D. (1990). Behavioral conventions and archaeology: methods for the analysis of ancient architecture. In S. Kent (Ed.), *Domestic architecture and the use of space: an interdisciplinary cross-cultural study*, (pp. 43-72). Cambridge (England), New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schloss, Ezekiel. (1969). *Foreigners in ancient Chinese art*. New York: China House Gallery, the China institute in America.
- Schopen, G. (1997). *Bones, stones, and Buddhist monks: collected papers on the archaeology, epigraphy, and texts of monastic Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Seidel, A. K. (1969). *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le Taoïsme de Han*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Seidel, A. K. (1982). Tokens of Immortality in Han Graves. *Numen*, 29(1). doi.10.2307/3269934
- Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *A mathematical model of communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Sharf, R. H. (2003). "On Pure Land Buddhism and Ch'an/Pure Land syncretism in medieval China," *T'oung Pao*, 88,(4-5), 282-331.
- Sharf, R. H. (2002). *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism: A reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i.
- Sickman, L. C. S., and A. C. Soper. (1950). *The art and architecture of China*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

- Skorupski, T., ed. (1989). *The Buddhist heritage*. Trink, U.K.: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989.
- Soper, A. C. (1959). *Literary evidence for early Buddhist art in China*. Ascona, Artibus Asiae.
- Sperber, D. (1975). *Rethinking symbolism*. Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Sperber, D. (1996). *Explaining culture: a naturalistic approach*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Spiro, A. (1991). Shaping the wind: taste and tradition in fifth-century south China. *Ars Orientalis*, 21, 95–117. doi.10.2307/4629415
- Steinhardt, N. S. (2002). *Chinese architecture: the culture and civilization of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Steinhardt, N. S. (1984). *Chinese Traditional Architecture*. New York City: China Institute in America, China House Gallery.
- Sterckx, R. (2010). Religious practices in Qin and Han. In M. Nylan & M. Loewe (Eds.), *China's early empires: a re-appraisal* (pp. 415–429). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, C. (1999). Syncretism and its synonyms: reflections on cultural mixture. *Diacritics*, 29(3), 40–62.
- Stewart, C., & Shaw, R. (Eds.). (1994). *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The politics of religious synthesis*. London, England: Routledge.
- Strassberg, R. E. (2002). *A Chinese bestiary: strange creatures from the guideways through mountains and seas*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Strong, J. S. (2004). *Relics of the Buddha*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Suzawa, Y. (2008). *The genesis of early Christian art: syncretic juxtaposition in the Roman world*. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51(April), 273–286.
- Tang C. S. (1997). Shiziwan Cliff Tomb no. 1. *Orientalism* 28, 8 (September), 72-77.
- Teeuwen, M., & Rambelli, F. (Eds.). (2003). *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: honji suijaku as a combinatory paradigm*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Teiser, S. F. (1994). *The scriptures on the ten kings and the making of purgatory in medieval Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Teiser, S. F. (1988). *The ghost festival in medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Teiser, S. F. (2005). "Buddhism: Buddhism in China." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*. (2nd ed., pp. 1160–1169). Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA.
- Thompson, Lydia Dupont. (1998) *The Yi'nan tomb: Narrative and ritual in pictorial art of the Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.)*. (Doctoral dissertation). New York University.
- Thote, A. (2006). Au-delà du monde connu : représenter les dieux. *Arts Asiatiques*, 61(1), 57–74. doi.10.3406/arasi.2006.1639
- Trainor, K. and D. Germano. (2004) *Embodying the dharma: Buddhist relic veneration in Asia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Tsukamoto, Z. (1985). *A history of early Chinese Buddhism: from its introduction to the death of Hui-yüan*. (Vols. 1-2). (L. Hurvitz, Trans.). Tokyo; New York, NY: Kodansha International. (Original work published 1979)
- Twitchett, D. & Fairbank, J. (Eds.). (1986). *The Cambridge history of China. Volume I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.-A.D. 220*. Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: a dual process of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1675–1715.
- Van der Leeuw, G. (1933). *Religion in essence and manifestations: A study in phenomenology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and Theories of Practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(2), 131–153. doi.10.1177/1469540505053090
- Weber, C. D. (1968). Chinese pictorial bronze vessels of late Chou period. *Artibus Asiae*, 223–237.
- Wei, R. (2000). *Buddhist Buildings. Ancient Chinese Architecture*. Wien: Springer.
- Weinstein, S. (1987). *Buddhism under the T'ang*. Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wittkower, R. (1977). *Allegory and the migration of symbols*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Wong, D. C. (2004). *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist use of a symbolic form*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Wright, A. F. (1971). *Buddhism in Chinese History*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Wu, H. (1986). Buddhist elements in early Chinese art (2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.). *Artibus Asiae* 47 (3/4). 263-352.
- Wu, H. (1987). Xiwangmu: The Queen Mother of the West. *Orientalism* 18 (4). 24-33.

- Wu, H. (1989). *The Wu Liang Shrine: the ideology of early Chinese pictorial art*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Wu, H. (1995). *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Wu, H. (2000). Mapping early Daoist art: the visual culture of Wudoumi Dao. In S. Little (Ed.), *Taoism and the arts of China* (pp. 77-93). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wu, H., ed. (2001). *Between Han and Tang: cultural and artistic interaction in a transformative period*. Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House.
- Wu, H., ed. (2003). *Between Han and Tang: visual and material culture in a transformative period*. Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House.
- Wu, H. (2010). *The art of the Yellow Springs: understanding Chinese tombs*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Wu, J. (2010). *Mortuary art in the Northern Zhou China (557-581 CE): Visualization of class, role, and cultural identity*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Pittsburgh.
- Yang, C. K. (1967). *Religion in Chinese society: A study of Contemporary Social functions of religion and some of their historical factors*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Yu, Y. S. (1987). "O Soul, Come Back!" A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47. 2: 363-395.
- Yü, Y. (1981). New evidence on the early Chinese conception of afterlife - a review article. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 41(1), 81-85. Retrieved from http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0021911800077391
- Zacchetti, S. (2002). An early Chinese translation corresponding to Chapter 6 of the Petakopadesa: An Shigao's Yin chi ru jing T 603 and its Indian original: a preliminary survey. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 65(01), 74-98.
- Zheng, Y. (1998.) Barbarian images in Han period art. *Orientalism* 29(6), 50-59.
- Zürcher, E. (1972). *The Buddhist conquest of China: the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early medieval China*. Leiden: Brill.
- Zürcher, E. (1977) Late Han vernacular elements in the earliest Buddhist translations. *Journal of the Chinese language teachers' association*, 12, 177-203.
- Zürcher, E. (1980). Buddhist influence on early Taoism: A survey of scriptural evidence. *T'oung Pao* 66(1/3), 84-147.
- Zürcher, E. (1982). "Prince Moonlight," Messianism and Eschatology in early Medieval Chinese Buddhism. *T'oung Pao*, 68, 1-75.
- Zürcher, E. (1989). Buddhism in China. In J. M. Kitagawa and M. D. Cummings (Eds.),

Buddhism in Asian History, (pp. 139–150). New York: Macmillan.

Zürcher, E. (1990a). *Bouddhisme, Christianisme et société Chinoise: conférences, essais et leçons du Collège de France*. Paris: Julliard.

Zürcher, E. (1990b). Han Buddhism and the Western region. In W. L. Idema & E. Zürcher (Eds.), *Thought and law in Qin and Han China* (pp. 158-172). Leiden: Brill.

Zürcher, E. (1991). A new look at the earliest Chinese texts. In K. Shinohara & G. Schopen (Eds.), *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese religion in honour of Prof. Jan Yunhua* (pp. 282-294). Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press.

Zürcher, E. (2007). *The Buddhist conquest of China. The spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early Medieval China*. Leiden: Brill.

Zürcher, E. (1999). Preface. In M. M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia: Late Han, Three Kingdoms and Western Chin in China and Bactria to Shan-shan in Central Asia* (pp. xv–xvi). Leiden: Brill.

Works in Chinese and Japanese

An J. H. and Y. G. 安金槐 and 王與剛 (1972). Mi Xian Dahuting handai huaxiangshimu he bihuamu 密縣、打虎亭漢代畫象石墓和壁畫墓 (Elephant drawings in a Han tomb in Mixian County, Dahuting village). *Wenwu* 10, 49-62.

An, Z. 安志敏 (1955). Lun Yinan shuxiang shimo de niandai wenti 論沂南書像石墨 得年代問題 (On the question of the period of the carvings of Yinan). *Kaogu Tongxun* 考古通訊, 2, 16–20.

Echeng Xian Bowuguan. (1978). Echeng dong Wu Sung jiangjun 鄂城东吴孙将军墓 (Tomb of a General Sun of the Eastern Wu at Echeng). *Kaogu*, 3, 164–167.

Fang L. T. 方立天 (1998). *Zhongguo Fojiao yu chuantong wenhua* 中國佛教與傳統文化 (Chinese Buddhism and traditional culture), Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe.

Gao D. L. 高大伦 (1995). Guanyu ‘Nanfang sichou zhi lu’ de jidian sikao. 关于南方丝绸之路的几点思考 (Some reflections on the southern Silk Road). *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 1995, 2: 131-138.

Gu X. J. 顾学稼 (1993). Nanfang Sichou zhi lu zhiyi. 南方丝绸之路质疑 (Questioning the validity of the Silk Road in South China). *Shixue yuekan* 3, 27-30.

He X. L. 贺西林 (1998). *Donghan qianshu de tuxiang ji yiyi – jianlun Qin Han shenxian sixiang de fazhan, yanbian* 東漢錢樹的圖像及意義 – 兼論秦漢神仙思想的發展、演變 (Images and meanings of money trees in Eastern Han dynasty – Discussion of the

- development and evolution of ideas of immortality in Qin and Han dynasties). Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe.
- Hayashi, M. 林巳奈夫 (1989). *Kandai no kamigami* 漢代の神神 (The spirits of the Han dynasty). Kyōto-shi: Rinsen shoten.
- Hayashi, M. 林巳奈夫(1985). Jūkan Hoshu no jyakkan o megutte” 獸環・鋪首の若干をめぐって (The demon mask with ring from Eastern Zhou to the Tang period) *Tōhō gaku* 57, 1-74.
- He Y. A. 贺云翱 (1991). *Zhongguo nanfang zaoqi fojiao yishu chutan* 中國南方早期佛教藝術初探 (Brief research on early Buddhist art in southern China). Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe.
- He Y. A. 贺云翱 et al. (Eds.). (1993). *Fojiao chuchuan nanfang zhi lu: wenwu tulu* 佛教初傳南方之路:文物圖錄 (The southern spread of Buddhism: catalogue of cultural relics). Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe.
- He Z. G. 何志國 (1991). *Zaoqi fojiao zaoliang nanchuan xitong zhongri xueshu yandaohui shuping* 早期佛教造像南傳系統中日學術研討會述評 (Commentary on the Sino-Japan academic seminar on the southward system of early-stage Buddhist images), *Dongnan Wenhua*, 6, 61-66.
- Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, and Ezhou si bowuguan. (1996). Hubei Ezhou shi Tangjiaotou liuchao mu 湖北鄂州市塘角頭六朝墓 (Tombs of the Six Dynasties period at Tangjiaotou, Ezhou, Hubei). *Kaogu*, 11, 1-27.
- Irisawa, T. 入沢崇 (1993). Yōsenju butszō kō 搖錢樹佛像考 (A consideration of Buddha images on bronze money trees. *Mikkyo Zuzo*, 12(December), 44-60.
- Jiang Y. X. 江玉祥 (2000). “Guanyu kaogu chutu de ‘yaoqianshu’ yanjiu jige wenti 關於考古出土的“搖錢樹”研究的幾個問題 (Issues related to the research of unearthed “money trees”), *Sichuan Wenwu*, 4, 12-18.
- Li S. 李淞 (2004). *Handai yishu zhong de xiwangmu tuxiang* 漢代藝術中的西王母圖像 (Images of the Xiwangmu in Han dynasty art). Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Liang, Q. C. 梁啟超 (1921). Fojiao zhi chu shuru 佛教之出輸入 (Early transmission of Buddhism), *Gaizhao*, 3(12), 69-79.
- Lianyungang Bowuyuan. (1981). *Lianyungang shi kong wang shan moya zaoliang diaocha baogao* 連雲港市孔望山摩崖造像調查報告 (Research reports on images in Kongwang mountain in Lianyungang), *Wenwu*, 7.

- Nanjing Bowuyuan. (1991). *Sichuan Pengshan Handai yamu* 四川彭山漢代崖墓 (The Han dynasty cliff tomb of Pengshan in Sichuan). Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe.
- Ruan R. C. 阮荣春 (1985). “Kongwangshan fojiao zaoxiang shidai kaobian” 孔望山佛教造像時代考辨 (Discussion of the period of the images of Kongwang Mountain), *Kaogu*, 208: 78-87.
- Ruan R. C. 阮荣春 (1990). “Zaoqi fojiao zaoxiang de nanchuan xitong” 早期佛教造像的南傳系統 (Early Buddhist images of the southward system), *Dongnan Wenhua*, 3, 163-177.
- Ruan R.C. 阮荣春 (2000). *Fojiao nanchuan zhi lu* 佛教南傳之路 (The southern route of Buddhism). Changsha: Hunan Meishu.
- Shengxian Wenguanhui. (1988). Zhejiang Shengxian liuchaomu 浙江嵯縣六朝墓 (Six Dynasties tombs from Shengxian, Zhejiang). *Kaogu*, 9, 800-813.
- Su Y. 蘇鈺 (2008). *Zhongguo zaoqi fojiao tuxiang de yutezheng ji qi chengyin chubu yanjiu* 中國早期佛教圖像地域特征及其成因初步研究 (A preliminary study on the regional characteristic and the initial causes of Chinese early Buddhist Images). (Doctoral dissertation). Sichuan University.
- Tang, C. S. 唐長壽 (1989). Leshan Mahao, Shiziwan yamu foxiang niandai xintan 乐山麻浩、柿子灣崖墓佛像年代新探 (New inquiry into the date of the Buddha images in the cliff tomb at Leshan, Mahao and Shiziwan). *Dongnan Wenhua*, 2, 69-74.
- Tang, C. 汤池 (1987). Kongwangshan zaoxiang de hanhua fengge 孔望山造像的汉画风格 (The style of Kongwangshan carvings). *Kaogu*, 11, 1011-1020.
- Tang Y. T. 湯用彤 (1997). *Hanwei liang jin nanchaobei fojiao shi* (History of Buddhism in Han, Wei, Two Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties). Beijing: Beijing University Press.
- Tong E. Z. 童恩正 (1999), *Gudai Zhongguo nanfang yu Indu jiaotong de kaoguxue yanjiu* 古代中国南方与印度交通的考古学研究 (An archaeological study of the communication between ancient southern China and India), *Kaogu*, 4, 79-87.
- Wang, X. Y. 汪小洋 (2015). Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang de tuxiang tixi taolun 孔望山摩崖造像的图像体系讨论 (Discussion of the image system of Kongwangshan). *Minzu Yishu National Arts*, 1.
- Wang, Z. S. 王仲殊 (1981). Guanyu Riben sanjiao foshenshoujing de wenti 关于日本三角缘神兽镜的问题 (Concerning the issue of the triangular rim foshou mirrors from Japan). *Kaogu*, 4, 346-358.

- Wang, Z. S. 王仲殊 (1982). Guanyu Riben sanjiao foshenshoujing- da Nishida Morio xiansheng 关于日本的三角缘佛兽镜——答西田守夫先生 (Concerning the triangular rim foshou mirrors from Japan – reply to Mr. Nishida Morio) . *Kaogu*, 6, 630–639, illustrations 11, 12.
- Wu, G. B. 吴桂兵 (2003). The figures of Baihaoxiang and the early spread of Buddhism in the valley of Yangzi river 白毫相俑与长江流域佛教早期传播. *Dongnan Wenhua*, 3, 59–65.
- Wu H. 巫鸿 (Ed.). (2000). *Han Tang zhijian de zongjiao yishu yu kaogu* 漢唐之間的宗教藝術與考古 (Between Han and Tang: Religious art and archaeology in a transformative period). Beijing: Wenwu.
- Wu H. 巫鸿 (Ed.). (2001). *Han Tang zhijian wenhua yishu de hudong yujiaorong* 漢唐之間文藝術的互動與交融 (Between Han and Tang: Cultural and artistic interaction in a transformative period). Beijing: Wenwu.
- Wu H. 巫鸿 (Ed.). (2003). *Han Tang zhijian de shijue wenhua yu wuzhi wenhua* 漢唐之間的視覺文化與物質文化 (Between Han and Tang: Visual and material culture in a transformative period). Beijing: Wenwu.
- Wu T. & Zheng, P. N. 吴廷 郑彭年 (1995). Fojiao haishang chuanru Zhongguo de yanjiu 佛教海上传入中国的研究 (Research on the entry of Buddhism into China via the sea route). *Lishi yanjiu*, 25-39.
- Wu Z. 吳焯 (1994). *Fojiao dongchuan yu Zhongguo Fojiao yishu* 佛教東傳與中國佛教藝術 (Eastward introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist art in China). Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin chubanshe.
- Wu Z. 吳焯 (1992). Sichuan zaoqi fojiao yiwu jiqi niandai yu chuanbo tujing de kaocha 四川早期佛教遺物及其年代與傳播途徑的考察 (Survey of the period and channels of dissemination of early Buddhist artifacts in Sichuan), *Wenwu*, 11, 40-50.
- Xie M. L. 謝明良 (1985). *Sanguo Liangjin Shiqi Yueyao Qingci Suojian De Foxiang Zhuangshi* 三國兩晉時期越窯青瓷所見的佛像裝飾 (Popular Buddha image decorations on the Yue celadons in the Three Kingdoms and Two Jin dynasties), *Gugong Xueshu Jikan* 3(1), 35-55.
- Xie Z. C. 謝志成 (1987). Sichuan Handai huaxiangzhuang shang de fota tuxiang 四川漢代畫像磚上的佛塔圖像 (Han Dynasty bricks from Sichuan with images of pagodas), *Sichuan Wenwu*, 4, 62-64.

- Yi, J. S. 易家胜 (1988). Nanjing chutu de liuchao zaoqi qingci youxiacai pankouhu 南京出土的六朝早期青瓷釉下彩盘口壶 (Celadon ewer with dish-shaped mouth from the Six dynasties excavated from Nanjing). *Wenwu*, 6, 72–75, 97.
- Yoshioka, Y. 吉岡義豊 (1970). *Dōkyō to Bukkyō* 道教と仏教 (Vols. 1-2). Tōkyō: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai.
- Yu W. C. 俞伟超 (1980) Dong Han fojiao tuxiangkao 東漢佛教圖像考 (A study of the Buddhist imagery of Eastern Han dynasty), *Wenwu*, 5, 68-77.
- Yu W. C. & Xin L. X. 俞伟超 & 信立祥 (1981). Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang de niandai kaocha 孔望山摩崖造像的年代考察 (Research on the period of the images in Kongwang mountain), *Wenwu*, 7, 8-15.
- Zhang, H. 张恒 (1992). Zhejiang Shengxian faxian de zaoqi fojiao yishupin ji xiangguan wenti zhi yanjiu 浙江嵊县发现的早期佛教艺术品及相关问题之研究 (Research and related questions on early Buddhist works discovered in Shengxian, Zhejiang). *Dongnan Wenhua*, 2, 21–25, 144.
- Zhao D. Z. & Yuan S. G. 赵殿增 & 袁曙光 (2001). Cong “shenshu” dao “qianshu” – jiantan “shu chongbai” guannian de fazhan yu yanbian 從“神樹”到“錢樹” – 兼談“樹崇拜”觀念的發展與演變 (From “immortal tree” to “money tree” – Discussion on the development and evolution of tree worship), *Sichuan Wenwu*, 3, 21-34.
- Zhejiang Bowuguan (Ed.). 1999. *Qingci fengyun yongheng de qianfeng cuise*. 青瓷風韻-永恆的千峰翠色 (Charm of celadon – perpetual green scenes on mountains). Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin meishu chubanshe.