

SURVIVING NIRVANA

Death of the Buddha in Chinese Visual Culture

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CONTENTS

List of Maps and Tables	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Conventions	xv
INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1 Doubles: Stone Implements	25
CHAPTER 2 Transformation: Pictorial Narratives	83
CHAPTER 3 Family Matters: Nirvana Caves	139
CHAPTER 4 Impermanent Burials: Relic Deposits	203
EPILOGUE	265
APPENDICES Chinese Texts of Inscriptional Materials	271
1 The Chicago Stele	273
2 The Shanxi Stele	275
3 The Shengli Stele from Mogao Cave 332	278
4 The Dali Stele from Mogao Cave 148	282
5 From the Jingzhi Monastery Pagoda Crypt	284
6 From the Jingzhong Cloister Pagoda Crypt	288
Abbreviations	291
Notes	293
Character List	321
Bibliography	325
Index	347

MAPS AND TABLES

Map 1	Geographic distribution of nirvana images in medieval China and other parts of Asia.	20
Map 2	Sites related to the development of the nirvana image before the sixth century.	29
Map 3	Location of Li family caves and other related caves at Mogao.	139
Map 4	Northeastern China in the tenth century.	204
Table 1	Nirvana-related texts in medieval Chinese Buddhist canon.	89
Table 2	Major episodes in textual narratives on the Buddha's nirvana.	91
Table 3	Comparison of narrative structure between textual and pictorial nirvana narratives.	98
Table 4	The five relic deposits at Jingzhi Monastery.	211

INTRODUCTION

The word “survival” conjures ordeal, suffering, and endurance. In the twenty-first century as in earlier times, it is common to make these associations based on experience from everyday life. From news headlines around the world, we read about nuclear weapons, terrorist attacks, global warming, flu pandemics, earthquakes, or civil wars. Closer to home, we learn first-hand of a friend’s illness, a co-worker’s skiing accident, a drive-by shooting incident at a local school, or the loss of a loved one. It is difficult to know how well we would respond to any of these life-defining challenges ourselves. But the element of uncertainty often spawns action, and in so doing brings about the will to continue and live on. This unlikely combination of despair and hope, calamity and resolution, no doubt underlines the resilience of the human spirit. It is also what defines the theme of survival in world history.

This book in many ways is about a series of remarkable cases of survival from medieval China roughly of the sixth to twelfth centuries. Despite the vast span of time and the great physical distance that separate them, the examples at hand all share one common bond: a pictorial image that depicts the Buddha Śākyamuni at the moment of his nirvana. This is one of the quintessential motifs in Buddhism, commonly known as the nirvana image in short. As seen on a stone stele dated 691 in the Shanxi Museum, the composition consists of two basic components: a reclining Buddha with head pointing to the left and feet to the right, and an accompanying group of mourners observing his passage in the background (fig. I.1). The emotional outpour of the mourners strikes an uncanny balance with the motionless tranquility of the deity in recline. The interweaving of two extreme emotions fuels a kind of quiet dynamism in the visual layout, which pivots around a horizontal field enveloped within a circle of contrasting elements. Yet it is the one-on-one encounter with the nirvana Buddha that compels the beholders to connect what they see with their own worlds. The full exposure of the figure’s body for uninhibited viewing clashes with the shunning effects of his closed eyes, thus underscoring a deep-seeded ambiguity in representation that prompts one to wonder: Is the Buddha alive or dead? As a follower, why am I praying to a deity who is shown passing into nothingness? Although I know from scriptures and lectures by the monks that the Buddha is all powerful, will I still

be able to continue on without his illuminating presence? And will the world at large?

The curious spectacle of the Buddha's "death" so vividly presented through the nirvana image was held by many in medieval China as a powerful allegory of survival, something of a utopian vision that could empower its beholders to look beyond the presentness of their existence and imagine other possibilities out there.¹ Over the centuries, Buddhist devotees in different parts of the country had repeatedly returned to this motif in search of new ways to make their faith relevant. The perennial appeal of the nirvana image in part lies in its capability to help adepts and beginners alike to come to terms with the fundamental message in Buddhism. As the professed founder of Buddhism, Śākyamuni's attainment of ultimate release at the end of his life had fully demonstrated the promise of nirvana, which was at the heart of Buddhist doctrine and practice. His subsequent absence from the human realm, however, became a cause of great confusion and anxiety among his followers. The nirvana image, more than any subject in Buddhist iconography, proved to be especially apt to lay bare the seeming paradox by compelling its beholders to reflect and question on the one hand, and to confront and believe on the other hand. Its affective power was often seized upon to recast a moment of loss and despair as a harbinger of hope and confidence. In so doing, not only did the motif warrant memories of the Buddha to last over time, it also helped generate new knowledge of what he ought to be so as to better resonate with ever-shifting religious, social, or personal agendas.

Any attempt at assessing the legacy of the nirvana image from the perspective of the period beholder is an exercise in critical analysis as much as in historical imagination.² At the more elemental level, this book offers close readings on a range of representative specimens from medieval China, with the aim to reconstruct the original context in which each became meaningful through its visuality and functionality. My license to interpret rests in the fact that many of these examples, unlike their counterparts from South or Central Asia, do come with reliable provenance, date, and internal documentations left by patrons, makers, and viewers. The extensive archive of evidence thus makes it possible to explain the nirvana image within a network of human relationships and a matrix of historical conditions that had informed its creation and initial reception. The objective to reconstitute the subject's historicity is part and parcel of an underlying analytical imperative to treat the nirvana image as a cultural artifact that is at

once a product of and an active agent in shaping a range of social interactions, institutions, and practices.³ While this conceptualization does not engage any discussion of aesthetics, it does take the formal properties of each specimen as the key to understanding aspects of change and continuity that the motif embodied through the course of its development in China. Likewise, in positing the nirvana image within a web of complex relations, the present study does not intend to construe the whole as a semiological circuit in which our subject is a “sign-vehicle” of constant meaning. Rather, the significance of the motif lies precisely in its ability to remain fluid in meaning, as it traverses from one context to another.

When read together, the many close readings that form this book amount to a broader project to rethink the continued engagement of Buddhism in Chinese society through the lens of visual culture.⁴ A full assessment from this perspective is of great importance for both historical and historiographical reasons. From the fifth to tenth centuries, the Buddhist faith reached the greatest extent of its popularity in the middle kingdom. Its permeation into nearly every aspect of life precipitated fundamental changes in the outlook and value system of the Chinese populace that would pave the way for the country’s momentous transition into the early modern world. While the importance of Buddhism in defining China’s medieval period is beyond doubt, there have been marked differences in approach to explicate the religion’s unique character and the modes of cultural exchange that the long, complex processes of its adaptation exemplify.

In recent years historians of Chinese religion have fiercely contested the master narratives handed down from previous generations, in particular the “encounter paradigm” that conceives Chinese Buddhism as the product of two monolithic religious traditions (i.e., Indian and Chinese) that came into contact and mutually influenced one another.⁵ In light of new insights into Indian Buddhism on the one hand and other native Chinese practices—notably Daoism—on the other hand, scholars are now more inclined to sidestep simplistic assumptions implied by terms like “sinicization” or “indianization,” and opt for assessing what we call “Chinese Buddhism” on its own terms.⁶ Accordingly, there is a greater emphasis on socio-cultural and geographical diversities, popular beliefs and customs, individual and group identities, or in sum localized factors that are specific to the lived experiences of devotees in China. What emerges is a rather different kind of discourse that no longer interprets the subject’s historical

trajectory as some regressive recovery of authenticity from Śākyamuni's time and place, or as a veiled demonstration of cultural superiority of one over the other. Instead, it is one that projects Chinese Buddhism as a series of organic yet non-teleological growths resulting from interactions with diverse elements at home in intense, reciprocal manners. This reorientation is sustained by close readings of canonical texts and non-canonical sources such as apocrypha, ritual manuals, spells, anecdotes, and biographies.

This book engages the ongoing debate on Chinese Buddhism with a study of a pictorial subject that promises to complement and supplement the hermeneutic field as outlined above. The enduring legacy of the nirvana image across time and space highlights aspects of the religion that are often untouched by texts and left unaddressed by textual discourses. The choice of artifacts and monuments as the primary subject of scrutiny opens up a vista of visual culture that enables us to reexamine key episodes in the history of Chinese Buddhism and arrive at a rather different understanding thereof. In making sense of those factors that separate one historical scenario from another, we come to better appreciate the many ways in which the motif had contributed to the religion's ever-changing character. For one, the extraordinary range of extant specimens that the motif encompasses brings to light innovative strategies in communicating abstract ideas in concrete terms, which contrast markedly with those deployed in the creation and dissemination of texts. For another, the wishes and goals the devotees brought to the making and viewing of their works unveil a world of devotion that was not well documented in any other media. And most crucially, in representing Buddhism's founder at the final moment of his life, the nirvana image offers the ideal setting in which to gauge one quintessential characteristic of Buddhism as a world religion, namely, the evolving identity of the Buddha in practice and in the imagination of his later followers.

As a way to begin our story on the nirvana image, it is helpful to reflect on how a visual image like this came to be a part of a new cultural sphere after being introduced from another. The situation can best be understood as an accumulation of many small steps taken by individuals who somehow chose the nirvana theme out of interests stemming from a particular moment in their lives, rather than out of any self-conscious efforts to make or evaluate history. The simple acts of deciding on what to keep from an antecedent or how to make a

new specimen more agreeable may appear to be inconsequential at the outset. Yet decisions like this would inevitably bear an impact, as the finished product became known to others and might even inspire new creations on the same theme. Needless to say, the dissemination of the nirvana image from the place of its origin to other parts of the Eurasian landmass had never been a linear route of relay. Nor had the ways people made decisions about visual imageries ever been systematic, straightforward processes. Remarkably, given the myriad possibilities in the unfolding of its history, the nirvana image had somehow retained one element of constancy throughout, namely, the basic figuration of a reclining Buddha surrounded by mourners. This was found in the earliest surviving specimens from the Indic world around the second century C.E., if not earlier. It was also what stayed in place in all subsequent renditions, including those from China.

The ubiquity of the iconographic layout that anchors the nirvana image provides the present study with added reassurance that any visual imagery with a similar composition can confidently be identified as such. It also helps frame the ensuing analysis as one that looks for explanations of the seeming continuity in the changes that lie underneath. Indeed, one key argument to be made is that the ways the nirvana image was rendered meaningful in China, whether via format, iconography, style, programmatic context, or spatial setting, had changed dramatically throughout the six centuries under discussion here. These changes were prompted by different motivations and circumstances, as they were inspired by sources of various kinds. In retrospect, nirvana images from medieval China form a distinct tradition of their own within the motif's pan-Asian legacy. When compared to earlier incarnations in South and Central Asia, specimens from China exhibit greater diversity in material format than ever before, ranging from stone relief carvings to painted murals, colossal sculptures, architectural plans, and designs on metalwork. The locality for these works too was equally varied, as they were found in rock-cut cave temples, monastery-complexes in urban centers, and in underground deposits that were inaccessible and hidden from view.

Extant evidence shows that the nirvana image first became widespread in Chinese cultural sphere in the second half of the fifth century.⁷ Not long afterward, written signifiers began to appear in accompanying documentations as well. What we have hitherto referred to as the "nirvana image" was consciously identified as such by their makers and donors for the first time in this period.



Fig. I.2, left
Donor cartouches
containing the label, “Great
image of Śākyamuni
entering nirvana.” Detail
of the north side, stone
pillar, dated 582. Henan
Museum, Zhengzhou.
Photograph by the author.



Fig. I.3, right
Donor dedication. Detail
of the “back” side,
stone stele, dated 691.
Shanxi Museum, Taiyuan.
Photograph by the author.

First, there was the descriptive label “Great image of Śākyamuni entering nirvana” 釋迦入涅槃大像 (fig. I.2), which appeared in five separate donor cartouches inscribed next to a monoscenic composition of this subject on one side of a stone pillar dated 582 (Kaihuang 2, Sui), now in the Henan Museum. Second, the term “nirvana transformation,” or *niepan bian* 涅槃變, helped launch a full-fledged pictorial narrative format, a representative example of which can be found on the aforementioned stone stele from Shanxi Museum (fig. I.3).

These two labels registered a rapidly developing awareness of nirvana images as a distinct category within medieval Chinese visual culture. As such the images had embodied in their creation many of those artistic practices and socio-religious institutions responsible for the tens of thousands of Buddhist objects and structures that once enlivened the metropolis and countryside everywhere. Accordingly, one basic fact to reckon with is that the majority of the works to be examined in this book belong to this general category of religious artifacts, as

they were made to facilitate certain aspects of personal or group devotion rather than as vehicles of self-expression or aesthetic pleasure. In fact, one of the most commonly stated purposes for making images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas was for the donors, regardless of their standing in society or within the Buddhist Church, to venerate these deities and thereby accumulate merits for themselves and for their living and deceased relatives. The search for a work's meaning in its religious function is encouraged by the much asserted presence of the donors in documentation.⁸ In shifting the critical focus to the realm of patronage, however, it is not to deny the contribution of the makers, who often remained silent and anonymous in the creative process. On the contrary, while they might not have the kind of artistic license or cultural prestige that famous painters and calligraphers of the time enjoyed, sculptors and builders of medieval China certainly had the skills and expertise to provide their patrons with a full gamut of compositional and stylistic options to fully realize the latter's intentions. This is firmly attested by the tremendous level of ingenuity and craftsmanship that many extant specimens of the nirvana image have exhibited.

As we acknowledge the dominance of the patrons over the makers in shaping the meaning of a religious artifact, it is also necessary to further consider the functionality of the nirvana image, especially the ways in which patrons defined it vis-à-vis the demands of the Buddhist monastic community. The crux of the matter can be broached via the two aforementioned naming labels for the motif. Their introduction exposes a fissure between the world of doctrine as encapsulated in scriptures and writings of monastic elites on the one hand, and the reality of devotion as represented by material artifacts made for and by lay worshippers on the other hand. That the word for “nirvāṇa” (*niepan* 涅槃) rather than “parinirvāṇa” (*ban niepan* 般涅槃) was used in both signifiers clearly marks a departure from the more standard way of referring to the Buddha's attainment of final release in Chinese Buddhist texts. Whether it was a convenient shorthand or simply a misunderstanding, the word choice was a telltale indicator that the Buddhism as understood and practiced by the lay devotees was often quite different from what it was projected to be by the monastic elites. The coining of these labels and their application on devotional implements can thus be understood as a larger effort by local monks to bridge the gap by making key lessons in Buddhism more palpable and appealing to a wider audience. As a way to better reflect the unique historical ramifications entailed in the two terms, all

pertinent works from China are referred to in this book as “nirvana images” rather than as “parinirvāna images,” by which they are also known in today’s literature on Buddhist art.

Methodologically, taking the interactions of lay patrons, artisans, and monastic instigators in the creative process as the primary context for investigation is a response to a tradition of scholarship on nirvana images that has been grounded chiefly on the iconographic method. Best exemplified by the works of Jorinde Ebert (1985) and Miyaji Akira (1992) on specimens respectively from South and Central Asia, this approach aims to locate meanings of visual objects in pertinent religious doctrines to which they are supposed to correspond in subject matter.⁹ Implicit in the interpretative scheme are two diametrically opposed assumptions about pictorial representation. On the one hand, religious doctrines and scriptures are recognized as the ultimate source of meaning for an image, a view which in turn coincides with a generally rationalist portrayal of Buddhism as a system of beliefs, thoughts, and ethics rather than as a cult that relies on objects of devotion like icons or relics for the veneration of Buddhas and other deities.¹⁰ On the other hand, the evolution of a pictorial subject like the nirvana motif is often seen as an autonomous process independent from its content, involving the appropriation and remaking of non-Buddhist elements into new versions that become commensurate with Buddhist doctrines.¹¹ The coexistence of these two contrasting views on the origin of a pictorial image underlines the immense difficulty in pinpointing where meaning lies in a network of disparate representational media sharing a similar theme. In highlighting the textuality of the image, one indirectly dismisses the sheer play of form that artisans evidently partook in the process of design and composition. In stressing the autonomy of form, one runs the risk of disregarding the image’s capacity to reveal the deep structure of the world that produced it. At the end, as Miyaji argues, one must acknowledge both aspects while trying to explain each notable change in form and content in relation to a particular configuration of factors like geography, ethnicity, and culture, which led to the image’s creation in the first place.¹²

Building on the works of Ebert and Miyaji, the present volume examines nirvana images in China as the first book-length study on the subject.¹³ At the same time, it puts into practice an alternative approach that conceives the development as a series of disparate historical microcosms, in each of which the same motif was responded to under different socio-cultural conditions. My

decision to avoid any single narrative on the evolution of the motif's iconography or style as the overarching framework acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the database at our disposal. Opting for well-chosen specificity rather than sweeping generalization, I aim to reconstruct each scenario with as much detail as possible so as to map out the course through which a particular specimen was made meaningful by those directly involved in the undertaking. The choice to highlight the polysemous nature of the nirvana image helps defuse the propensity to construe historical significance from one vantage point as some deep cultural secrets awaiting discovery by the modern investigator.¹⁴ By emphasizing the agency of real people in the creative process, I also intend to redefine the tenor of the image-text dialectic, which has been the hermeneutic cornerstone in Buddhist iconographic studies at large.¹⁵ Instead of reserving a privileged position for texts as the ultimate source of explanation for what an image meant, this book asks why the image looked the way it did. The shift necessarily prompts us to examine each example at hand in relation to an array of interrelated contexts that focus on the physical (the image's relationship to its immediate spatial environment); the categorical (its standing among other objects similar in design and function); and the historical (its patronage and viewership). While there is no question that the nirvana image, especially in its narrative format, bore a close relationship to various kinds of texts on the Buddha's life, it did not always function like a linguistic sign.¹⁶ It is precisely because the motif had such a long history and wide geographic distribution, neither of which had guaranteed a closed-circuit type of transference of form and meaning from one place or period to another. It was often the case that the meaning once attached to a visual form was lost while being retrieved by an audience unfamiliar with its previous usage, thus resulting in an utter reinvention of what the image could mean.

The present argument about the multiplicity of meaning in the nirvana image also places a greater emphasis on the role of the beholder in the motif's continuous transformation. In recognizing that a pictorial image like this is capable of eliciting a range of responses from its beholders within a given historical situation, it comes as no surprise that these responses often become the basis for introducing further changes in the image's formal configuration that in turn help generate different kinds of responses. The dual agency in the dynamic relation between image and beholder is key to further nuancing my interpretative scheme. In a country where regionalism rooted in geographical, climatic, and

cultural differences was a fact of life, the motif had helped spawn new ways of understanding the Buddha, his life story, and more broadly Buddhism itself in disparate environments. Some viewpoints might find ready recipients in one area, while some might bear little or no impact away from their home base. In either case, that the nirvana image had persisted under so many guises in different parts of China attests the motif's conceptual richness as much as its visual appeal.

When applied to our examples from China, the methodology hitherto outlined has yielded a most significant pattern in the ways nirvana images were received and understood in their individual contexts. It was one that can be characterized as an “allegory of survival,” whereby the image had compelled Buddhist devotees to confront some fundamental concerns in their lives by reflecting on the Buddha’s “death.” Time and again, whether it was done on purpose or out of sheer misunderstanding, earthly death served as the necessary rhetorical foil with which to represent and comprehend nirvana. This manifests clearly in the depiction of the Buddha transgressing various symbolic boundaries of death in order to demonstrate his superhuman power and everlasting presence. The Buddha’s transcendence in representation must have struck a chord deep in a culture that had long been obsessed with death and ways to defy, defer, or erase it altogether. While the present study does not deal in detail with the Buddhist notion of death and its complex enmeshing with local beliefs, it does recognize that the nirvana image had inspired people of medieval China to imagine and realize a utopian vision that reformulated the meaning of death through the promise of the Buddha’s nirvana.¹⁷ The inevitable collision of discourses thus warranted our subject a vital role in the ensuing negotiation between various forces in society to find new resolutions to age-old problems.

The Buddhist concept of nirvana was an utter novelty to medieval China. To be sure, centuries before it became known to the Chinese, its introduction by Siddhārtha Gautama created quite a stir in India as well. In a culture where the belief in *samsāra* was paramount, the Buddha’s promise of a way out of the endless cycles of births and rebirths to which all sentient beings are subject was a radical departure.¹⁸ Nirvāṇa, literally meaning “quenching” or “blowing out” in Sanskrit (*nibbāna* in Pali; *niepan* 涅槃 in Chinese), refers to the cessation of this process, to the ending of all conditioned, impermanent, and unsatisfactory elements of

existence.¹⁹ The word by extension also alludes to the state of an enlightened person after death, as well as the enlightened state realized within that person's lifetime. According to the early Buddhist doctrinal position, the latter denotes the release from "defilements" (*kilesa*) while still alive, a state of mind which is more or less equivalent of enlightenment or arhatship. For the former, however, it is the cessation of the "aggregates" or constituents of personhood (*khandhā*) that leads to an unconditioned existence beyond all suffering and impermanence, a timeless bliss which is supposedly inaccessible to imagination, consciousness, or any discursive thought that is by nature conditioned. Because this final release generally takes place at the end of an enlightened person's life, the prefix "pari-" (*ban* 般 in Chinese) is often added to the term "nirvāṇa" for slight intensification, though the basic meaning practically remains the same in common practice.²⁰

Despite the professed claim of inexpressibility, the concept of nirvana was soon given tangible imageries in word and image with which to help early practitioners better grasp this novel idea. Notwithstanding its finite temporality, the life story of Śākyamuni soon became the preferred mode of discourse in which to promote the timelessness of the state following the ultimate release. The choice of means seems to have befitted the purpose of expediency. After all, the Buddha was without a doubt the archetypal embodiment of this highest ideal in Buddhism, an inspiring exemplar who fully fulfilled the promise of nirvana in the dual sense of the word: enlightenment at age thirty-five under the *bodhi* tree in Bodh Gayā, and final extinction in his eightieth year in the *sala* grove outside Kuśinagara.²¹ Not surprisingly, for its greater propagation and explication in the visual realm, the concept of nirvana also came to be associated closely with certain biographical details of the historical Buddha. The choice is significant, for there was a stock of verbal metaphors common in early scriptures that could have been utilized for the same purpose.²²

Within this new arena of representation, the twofold etymology of nirvana was further streamlined and delineated such that the two entailed meanings, i.e., enlightenment and final extinction, were articulated as two separate events, each with its respective iconographic configuration. For the purpose of the ongoing discussion, the latter is of particular interest to us, for there were two distinct pictorial forms that became closely associated with it from the very beginning of Buddhist art in Asia. The first was the anthropomorphic figuration centering on a reclining body and a group of mourners in the surrounding, which so far has

served as our definition of the nirvana image. One particularly fine example can be found on a stone relief fragment from Gandhāra now in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. (fig. I.4), which is part of a four-panel set that depicts the life of the Buddha, including his birth, moment of enlightenment, and the first lecture (fig. I.5).²³ The second pertains to the image of a *stūpa* or a semi-spherical funerary mound, as seen in the top panel of a fragment from the Great Stūpa complex at Amarāvati (fig. I.6).²⁴ The inclusion of the first lecture at the Deer Park (middle panel) and enlightenment (bottom panel) on the same piece indicates that the life of the Buddha serves as the work's broader thematic context. Given the near identical biographical structure shared by both pieces, it is reasonable to take the reclining figure and *stūpa* image as two disparate signs referring to the same signified subject, namely, the moment of the Buddha's nirvana.

It has long been argued by scholars of Indian art that the *stūpa* image represents the Buddha at the moment of his nirvana, alongside other so-called “aniconic” symbols to stand for the human figure of the Buddha in pictorial renditions of his life story; and that these symbols were replaced by the anthropomorphic form by the second century C.E.²⁵ While the specifics of the debate need not concern us here, what is important to point out is that both images at hand draw on the symbolic trappings of death as the rudimentary cues for visual legibility, although the respective evocative affects are markedly different. The reclining body, on the one hand, lends itself to a reading of finality, of a reluctant end to life and personhood, of an irresolute moment of transition from the known to the unknown. It reckons the past by rousing in its surrounding



Fig. 1.6
Scenes from the life
of the Buddha
(from top to bottom):
enlightenment, first lecture,
and nirvana. From the
dome of the Great Stūpa at
Amarāvati, second century
C.E., stone relief sculpture.
The Trustees of British
Museum, London.



witnesses a sense of loss, which stems from a knowledge of the subject gained from previous personal encounters. The funerary mound, on the other hand, signals a site of remembrance at which the dead is now transformed into a permanent monument with a new posthumous identity. It emphasizes the present through the act of remembering, which the figures in the surrounding eagerly embrace as if to turn a source of grief into a cause for rejoicing. In short, the difference in symbolic meaning between the two images is defined internally by their respective audience in attendance. The latter's reaction in many ways offers viewers outside the picture frame a viable guide on how to respond and behave.

In retrospect, it was the anthropomorphic model that ultimately remained in Buddhist iconography as the corresponding signifier of the Buddha at the moment of his nirvana. What

is more, the image soon gained prevalence as an icon of worship independent from the biographical narrative. Archaeological evidence shows that this crucial development occurred in the subcontinent sometime around the fifth century during the Gupta period, as instantiated by the famous reclining Buddha statue over six meters long in a rectangular worship hall adjacent to the main *stūpa*

at Kuśinagara.²⁶ A particularly fine example has survived in Cave 26 at Ajantā, which was initiated in 478 by the monk Buddhahadra (fig. I.7).²⁷ The conceptual implications in this new mode of representing the Buddha's nirvana are especially relevant to our discussion. Like any major deity in the Buddhist tradition, Śākyamuni is represented both as imposing iconic statues centrally positioned inside great halls of worship, and as a protagonist in pictorial narratives detailing his words and deeds. Presenting Buddha images simultaneously in these two modes within a single setting is in fact a common feature at Buddhist sites across Asia. Until the development of the esoteric pantheon, the historical Buddha was one of the few Buddhist deities that entailed multiple, at times contrasting, manifestations as primary objects of worship. From the seated pose in meditation to the standing preaching mode, these appearances of Śākyamuni were originally rooted in certain events in his life story. When re-presented as the visual foci in spaces of worship, however, they came to take on symbolic values that would supplant the fleeting temporality of narrative episodes, thereby becoming the

Fig. I.7
The colossal reclining Buddha. West corridor, Cave 26, Ajantā, late fifth, early sixth century, stone relief sculpture. Huntington Photographic Archive of Asian Art.



immanent embodiment of divinity, the direct channel through which devotees sought to communicate with the worlds beyond. In this light, the iconization of the nirvana moment—namely, giving the Buddha at the moment of nirvana a lasting, independent form as an object of worship—was no doubt the most extraordinary. More than any Buddhist icons, the nirvana Buddha dramatizes the event that gives Buddhism its *raison d'être* as a distinctive system of beliefs, and invites its viewers to ponder about its significance through a grand spectacle. The inception of this form clearly marks a profound change in the notion of Buddhahood and the perceived limits of representation that the religion had yet witnessed in its history.

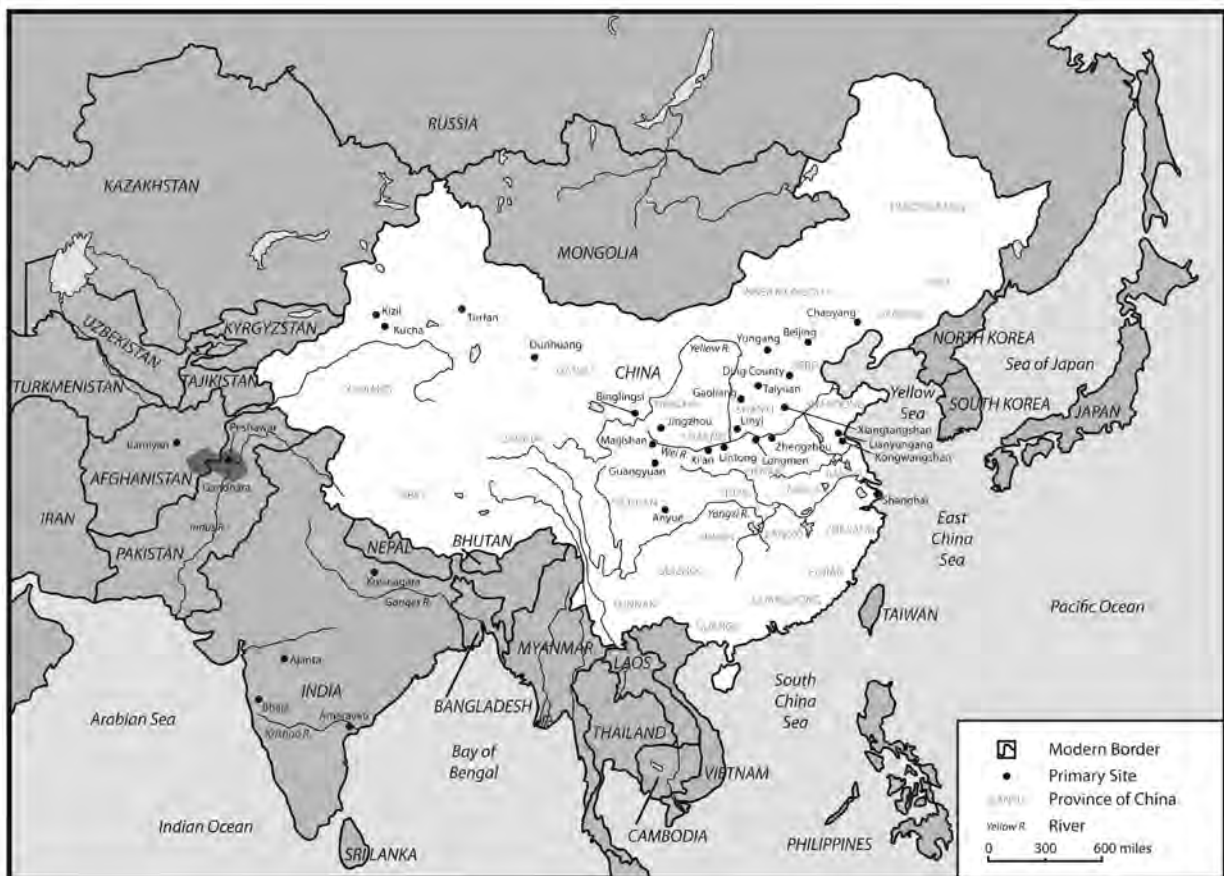
The general lack of *in-situ* documentations at South and Central Asian sites makes it difficult to fully explain why the Buddha Śākyamuni needed to be seen and worshipped at the moment of his nirvana within any specific context. In the nirvana motif's subsequent dissemination eastward, however, the continued popularity of the anthropomorphic model both as part of the biographical narrative and as an independent object of worship turned out to be a phenomenon of considerable importance. The preference for seeing the human body in recline to a funerary monument in the form of a *stūpa* underlines an elemental impulse among Buddhist devotees to make the Buddha present again, rather than to engage him merely in historical memory. Indeed, the Buddha himself had anticipated the anxiety to be felt by his followers about his imminent absence, as he advocated throughout his teaching career the expediency of the Three Treasures, namely, the Buddha (in iconic form), his teachings (in word), and the monastic community. These were the primary means by which Buddhist communities around the world have sought to keep the Buddha “alive” in every sense of the word, thereby making him a constant embodiment of their faith. They also offered monastic elites through the ages the basic discursive parameters with which to make sense of Śākyamuni's absence as much as his everlasting presence.²⁸

In the world of medieval China, the nirvana motif had inspired a significant category of material objects and structures to deal with the emotional and intellectual fallouts of the Buddha's nirvana, which was also instrumental in shaping the landscape of Chinese Buddhist communities and beyond. At places of congregation where our subject was featured, devotees had the opportunity to

come face-to-face with Śākyamuni at the moment of his final release. They might ponder about the sight with sermons they heard or scriptures they read. They might connect the Buddha's life story with those struggles and accomplishments in their own experiences. They might even allow their imagination to take flight by envisioning a better world out there toward which they could strive. Significantly, traces of the myriad responses elicited by the nirvana image have survived from medieval China. Through careful historical reconstructions and rigorous visual analyses, it thus becomes possible to retrieve once again some of those utopian dreams that had fueled the creation and reception of this extraordinary pictorial subject.

In what follows, I provide an account of the adaptation and reinvention of the nirvana image in China from the sixth to twelfth centuries. The story is told through the four major material formats of the motif that attained prevalence successively throughout this period: stone implements, pictorial narratives, cave temple designs, and relic deposits. Each in turn forms the principal subject of a chapter in the book. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey of all the extant specimens pertaining to each format, the respective analysis concerns one or a few representative cases that can best flesh out the range of historical issues and methodological concerns at stake, as well as pinpoint those factors that helped define the character of the medium in question at a given cultural moment. The synopsis below serves as an overview, and its linear narrative is to be superseded by the historical specificities of each chapter.

Chapter 1 focuses on the sixth century, a period in which the nirvana image first asserted itself as a significant category in Chinese visual culture via a range of stone objects made in the middle Yellow River region of Shanxi and Henan (map 1). A close reading of a key example, a large-size stone stele dated 551 in the Art Institute of Chicago (fig. 1.1), shows that the motif's rise in prevalence was in keeping with the intensely local character of the adaptive process that Buddhism had undergone since its introduction to China. That is, from its earliest known appearance at Kongwangshan sometime in the late third century, the nirvana image had tended to shed its primordial tie to the life story of Śākyamuni that was once the normative setting for its previous incarnations in South and Central Asia. By the time of the Chicago stele, it was presented



Map 1
Geographic distribution
of nirvana images in
medieval China and
other parts of Asia. Map
by John M. Marston.

within a much expanded timeframe, in which the Buddha's nirvana came to mark a critical transition between present and future as part of the all-encompassing Buddhas of Three Ages motif. This boldness in adaptation also manifested clearly in the iconography of the nirvana image, as evidenced by the inclusion of elements that had no basis in textual accounts of the event or in pictorial precedents from abroad. Perhaps the most notable is the pairing of the reclining figure with the coffin in the same compositional context on the Chicago stele (fig. 1.19). The dynamic juxtaposition is articulated through two side-by-side frames of equal size, which in effect turns the coffin into a symbiotic double of the nirvana Buddha. The strategy of utilizing various accoutrements related to death in the nirvana image was to recur in different guises in the ensuing centuries.

The kind of pictorial program of which the nirvana image formed a part on the Chicago stele and other similar implements was the product of Buddhist devotion as practiced by lay devotees at various levels of society. The localized nature of patronage was to remain the basis of production and reception in subsequent times. Indeed, the many innovations in form and function that the motif sustained in the sixth century laid the foundation for another period of significant reformulation that the motif would soon undergo. By the late seventh century, the nirvana image became a fully independent pictorial motif for the first time, often serving as the primary object of viewing within a given spatial setting. In achieving this aim, its makers were apparently more interested in creating new visual tricks than borrowing well-trodden formulae from preexisting models. This is evident in the tremendous level of visual affectivity and viewer participation that the various specimens from the Tang dynasty (618–905) had embodied. The penchant for the spectacular was materialized through two new forms: first, as a polyscenic pictorial narrative depicting events taken place shortly before and after the nirvana moment; and second, as an architectural design for displaying colossal reclining Buddhas inside cave temples.

Chapters 2 and 3 are respectively devoted to explicating these two new ways of representing the Buddha's nirvana in the eighth century. The two chapters complement each other in both concept and material, for they deal with artistic undertakings precipitated by the controversial reign of Empress Wu Zetian (r. 690–705). On the one hand, the analysis of nirvana pictorial narratives focuses on their use as a political propaganda in legitimizing the empress's claim to the throne via her new identity as the rightful custodian of the Buddha's relics. The key example is the aforementioned Shanxi stele from 691 (fig. 2.1). On the other hand, the discussion on Cave 332 at Mogao Caves of Dunhuang reads this "nirvana cave" built by the Li family in 698 as a calculated local response in support of Empress Wu's reign in the capital (fig. 3.2). When examined together, well-preserved material artifacts and structures like these have much to add to the current scholarship on the one and only female emperor in Chinese history. As none of the monumental projects that the empress herself initiated have survived, the examples at hand are a crucial

testimony to the indispensable role that pictorial representations had played throughout the Wu Zhou regime, both at the court and among its supporters elsewhere in the country.²⁹

The appearance of the nirvana image in relic deposits of the tenth to twelfth centuries marks the final episode in this account of the motif's development in medieval China. Chapter 4 takes up the topic by offering a close analysis of two important finds from the late tenth century in Dingzhou, Hebei. In addition to serving as a surface décor on some of the metal and stone containers in the deposit assemblage, the nirvana motif also figured prominently in the underground structures respectively at Jingzhi Monastery (fig. 4.2) and Jingzhong Cloister (fig. 4.25) in the form of painted murals. Its increasingly malleable character points to the sophisticated use of visual images to define the kind of Buddhist relics that they accompanied. More importantly, the motif's move from aboveground to underground realities prompts us to rethink some of the basic issues that we tend to take for granted in the more familiar setting of cave temples and monastery complexes. Particularly central to the discussion is viewership and the very act of seeing in the hidden space of relic deposits.

The two deposits in Dingzhou present a new way of understanding Buddhist relic worship as practiced in medieval China. The example of Jingzhi Monastery compellingly shows that relic deposits were made to be seen insofar as the contents were meticulously preserved for a future generation to inherit and pass on to the next. The history of repeated discoveries and reburials attests the fact that each generation of devotees had become more self-conscious of the legacy they would leave behind and thus furnished the deposit to the effects of such awareness. With the case of Jingzhong Cloister, the elemental difference in function between tombs and relic deposits is made clear by the treatment of the very subject of burial, namely, the relics of the Buddha as opposed to a dead human body. What makes the Jingzhong Cloister unique is that the deposit was built to enshrine the cremated remains of a prominent local monk as if they were authentic remains from the Buddha's body.

When deployed to sanctify materials that were far from being the supposedly genuine relics of the Buddha, the symbolic value of the nirvana image was pushed to the breaking point, where the temporal specificity of the

nirvana moment was no longer the basis of the signification process or the motif's associative power. The result was a radical reformulation of the subject such that a nirvana image was not exactly about Śākyamuni's attainment of ultimate release anymore. With the example in Jingzhong Cloister crypt, our inquiry has come full circle, as we must ask once again what the nirvana image really meant. The centuries of examples under discussion here have already revealed that answers to this question are simply infinite.

EPILOGUE

On July 1, 2006, the Dafo or Great Buddha Monastery of Zhangye in Gansu province celebrated its newly reinstated status as a place of religious activity with much fanfare. In the largest gathering ever in over a century, dozens of Buddhist masters led public rituals to extend blessings to the multitudes who swamped the temple ground.¹ For three consecutive days, local residents had the first look at the nearly completed renovation of the monastery, which the central government had set in motion with the hope to transform the temple into a major tourist attraction.² At the center of all the attention was the site's principal icon, a thirty-five-meter-long statue of Śākyamuni in recline that was housed inside the main hall. Its indispensable role in the temple's latest transformation was duly acknowledged by a massive banner that was hung outside as the visual backdrop for the festivities (fig. E.1).³ Featuring a Photoshop-manipulated photograph of the statue in its entirety, the banner literally brought the venerable icon out of its architectural shelter and revealed it in a way that would have been unattainable in the actual setting under normal viewing condition. The hyper-realism of the image, at once rooted in real life and in fantasy, reminded its beholders that the nirvana Buddha is one constant source of hope and pride for the community, whose power can be activated time and again through seeing as well as making.

Like the many specimens under discussion in this book, the nirvana image in Zhangye has a long, memorable history of interactions with its patrons, makers, and viewers. Aside from its latest re-presentation in computer-generated form, the colossal statue had actively demanded interventions from its human partners on numerous occasions in the past. Each time, its dilapidated state—especially any deterioration in the head—was the cause of chagrin for its monastic caretakers and lay devotees, as well as the *raison d'être* of their resolve to restore the icon to its full glory.⁴ What is more, its creation was inspired by the miraculous discovery of yet another nirvana image. Sometime in 1098 (Yong'an 1, Western Xia), a monk named Sineng, formally from the imperial Tangut clan with the surname Weimie, unearthed a reclining Buddha statue from an underground hoard at the foothills of a nearby mountain, after witnessing numinous lights and hearing heavenly sounds coming thence.⁵ Taking the extraordinary find as a sign of divine approval, the monk vowed to build a great temple in honor of the excavated image. His

promise was fulfilled five years later in 1103, when Xia Emperor Chongzong (r. 1086–1139) provided the necessary funds to begin what would become today's Great Buddha Monastery, which was built on the grounds of an earlier temple named Jiaye rulai or Kāśyapa Tathāgata Monastery. It was at this time that the colossal nirvana statue was first constructed.

As expected, any official account of the establishment of the Great Buddha Monastery like this is an amalgamation of historical facts and fiction. While the exact circumstances of the temple's founding might well have been mythologized, there is evidence indicating that the nirvana image Sineng excavated had survived well into the twentieth century. It is reported to have been once buried in a deposit underneath the massive statue and subsequently removed to the interior of its belly.⁶ The practice of inserting nirvana images into hidden deposits is certainly reminiscent of the pagoda crypts at Jingzhi Monastery and Jingzhong Cloister in Dingzhou, as well as a handful of others built between the tenth and twelfth centuries. What makes our example in Zhangye unique is the doubling of the nirvana motif as a nesting set of sculptures, made possible by the statue's construction as a wooden armature core with an outer shell in stucco and a built-in storage capacity inside. The design drew upon an age-old practice of inserting sacred objects like the relics of the Buddha or a monastic saint into a man-made, representational image as a way to bring it to life.⁷ By depositing a found object into a statue of the same theme and made in its honor, the makers of the Great Buddha in Zhangye clearly sought to endow the colossal statue with the sanctity and authority of its supposed predecessor. In this way, a legitimizing link with the past was established and a new icon was born.

The coexistence of two types of nirvana images at the Great Buddha Monastery of Zhangye, one visible and one invisible, aptly encapsulates the motif's legacy in Chinese visual culture and its contribution to the current discussion on vision and belief. On the first point, the many examples we have examined, whether on stone implements or inside cave temples, prove to be objects of seeing from inception. Nirvana images were made to be seen, insofar as their immediate spatial environment was set up to encourage viewing, often to promote a particular way of making sense of the depicted subject. Even in underground pagoda crypts, the specimens were set up therein to provide some form of symbolic commentaries on the buried relics for their future discoverers. In all cases, the determination to convey the message—whatever it entailed—with all

its desired effects to the intended viewers had led to extraordinary sophistication in the use of diverse media, techniques, and settings throughout the motif's long history in China. The richness of the nirvana theme, moreover, had allowed Buddhist devotees to reinterpret Śākyamuni Buddha, whose life now took on cosmological significance at various fronts: as a superhuman deity, as forerunner of the messianic Future Buddha, as a guarantor of Buddhism's permanence in this world, and as the ultimate embodiment of the ideal of nirvana.

That nirvana images were meant to be seen, however, did not necessarily warrant visibility of their subject. Likewise, our examples did not always fulfill their function as objects of belief through the act of seeing alone. These two complications thus underscore the second point to be made here. As observed throughout the book, the inherent ambiguity in representing the Buddha at the moment of his nirvana had generated much of the tension within the image to rouse its beholders' curiosity, thereby compelling them to embark on a search of meaning within their own worlds. The resulting search might provoke self-doubt; it might lead to reaffirmation; or it might well amount to nothing. Regardless, the entire process invariably began with the beholders' looking at a nirvana image but without knowing what it could mean beyond its basic iconographic identification. The image became religiously significant to individuals only when they attempted to derive certain truth values from it. This delay in equating seeing as a form of believing at the first instant was due to the fact that the image's subject was masked while remaining in plain sight. The paradox at hand was inscribed into a pictorial configuration that promoted the Buddha's deliberate shunning of eye contact with the viewer, while fully exposing his body in frontal view.

To further complicate the situation, many nirvana images were designated to remain invisible for much of their lifespan, while making their presence felt through some other symbolically related outer structures like a pagoda or another nirvana image as in Zhangye. Upon rediscovery or reintroduction to the visible world, these specimens were likely to carry even greater impact on their human partners because of their status as found objects, which were perceived to possess inherent historical values or divinely endowed power. Their influence was often affirmed by their subsequent reburial or the undertaking of a new project involving the same theme. This was indeed the case at the Great Buddha Monastery in 1098, and again in 2006. In the speech he gave at the opening of the celebration, Master Jueming specifically referred to the event as "a festival of exposing the

Buddha to the sun” (*shaifojie* 曬佛節). He also declared that the significance of the renovation lies in allowing the nirvana Buddha “to meet the people of Zhangye in public for the first time after being in a slumber for more than a thousand years.”⁸ In this characterization, the modern-day endeavor was not unlike the discovery of relics in that both instances had shared many of the expected commotions and outcomes.

The incorporation of certain effects of invisibility into a visible object prompts us to reconsider more broadly the character of Buddhist icons and their impact on the practice of the Buddhist faith. Given the complexity and enormity of the topic, what the nirvana image has to offer can be broached in terms of a central argument in recent scholarship on visual culture, namely, to construe vision not so much as a neutral physiological apparatus but as the product of a specific time and place.⁹ Accordingly, our case has helped illuminate one particular history of vision that entails myriad scenarios of belief, each realized within the parameters of Chinese Buddhism as understood at the local level. One significant pattern to emerge is that seeing and believing were bound to a representational image that was charged with the dual task of proclaiming the absence of a religious deity and of making him present again. Despite the apparent contradiction in terms, what the many nirvana images across time and space had in common was an underlying imperative to engage the viewers through different modes of seeing in real space, to compel them to identify what is to be believed with the invisible and the visible.¹⁰

Like all Buddhist icons, the nirvana image offers a concrete site for devotees to worship and contemplate the deity that the image represents both in physical appearance and symbolic quality. But more than any other motif, it exposes the fundamental incongruity between matter and representation by adopting the nirvana of Śākyamuni Buddha as its subject matter. Signifying a moment of transition, the image in many ways undermines the iconic stability expected of a being far superior to his human followers. As a result, the nirvana image demands its viewer to take a great leap of faith in order to convince oneself that the Buddha is in fact alive and well, having defied death and reached a state of bliss and void. This exercise in believing in that which is beyond the visible has fascinated Buddhist thinkers for ages, as it is the focus of numerous philosophical and theological expositions.¹¹ For those who encounter the subject through the visual, however, what is remarkable is that they are invariably drawn into the

nirvana image not by a voluntary submission to the Buddha's penetrating gaze, which the motif adroitly denies, but rather by the inner strength required of them to make sense of the paradox that lies in front. The resolve to act and delve into the invisible is akin to that of the original mourning audience, who descended at will upon Kuśinagara from all over the universe so as to witness the Buddha's momentous passage. The power of the nirvana image to engage its beholders, in short, lies in its capacity to reenact the drama of its subject and invite participation therein through its very figuration. If not only for one moment, seeing the image allows for the attainment of a vision that suspends the reality of this world as imagination of the beyond becomes a truth.

In addition to their religious efficacy, persuasive icons like the nirvana image are also recognized throughout the ages for their allegorical potential to shape worldly matters. This twofold appeal may well be the reason why the nirvana motif had remained a vital part of Chinese visual culture for over 1,500 years. Beyond the heydays of the medieval period, significant examples were continually initiated throughout the country, the most recent being a 108-meter-long reclining statue in red sandstone at Sanshuiqu of Foshan, Guangdong, completed in 1988. At sites with longstanding specimens, the motif's relevance had been maintained through repeated renovations, often involving sponsorship by ruling regimes at both local and national levels. The latest round of rebuilding at the Great Buddha Monastery, for instance, again demonstrates the interdependence of religion and politics, which has been a recurrent theme throughout the development of the nirvana image in China. The generous funding provided by the central government is no doubt reminiscent of regimes in the past, which often made use of Buddhist ideas and techniques to legitimize the current rule and garner popular support. As Master Jueming publicly stated in his speech at the revival celebration, the timely reappearance of the great reclining statue was an "important symbol of the true realization of the policy adopted by government agencies and party leadership toward religious matters."¹² In seeking divine approval from the Buddhas, the Chinese Communist Party willingly gave up their by-default atheistic stance in order to co-opt religion into the state's service. The benefits to do so apparently outweighed the fallouts of an obvious ideological flip-flop.

Politics aside, the gains that the government sponsors for the Great Buddha Monastery had hoped to reap from the restoration project are also measured in hard cash. As in pre-modern times, a major religious icon like the one in Zhangye

is the spiritual center of a local community as it is the driving force behind a vibrant pilgrimage network that draws multitudes of visitors from afar every year. With a growing market of domestic and international tourism countrywide, cultural monuments in China are increasingly subject to conservation practices that are aimed to maximize the economic benefits resulting from an increase in travelers to these sites. While the impact of tourism and related economic developments on the preservation of Buddhist icons remains to be seen, the situation in Zhangye appears to be unfolding according to plan. For one thing, the restoration project has readily turned the Great Buddha Monastery into one of only seventeen AAAA-level tourist attractions in Gansu, which in turn has contributed to a steady rise in the number of tourists and related revenues for the local economy since 2006. It is projected that the industry will constitute nearly 5 percent of the municipal GDP by the year 2010 and over 11 percent by 2020.¹³ Given the enormous stake in the future well-being of Zhangye, the Great Buddha will continue to be at the center of all attention in the foreseeable future. The statue's immense visual appeal, which in many ways defines its character as an object of worship, has come to be perceived as its marketing trademark for a vast social and economic enterprise that banks on it for both worldly and other-worldly benefits. Whether a blessing or a liability, the Great Buddha of Zhangye would no doubt play a role in the survival of the nirvana image in the twenty-first century and beyond, as some of its myriad visitors might decide to attempt a version of the motif upon return to their own neighborhood.

NOTES

Introduction

- ¹ My use of the word “allegory” is similar to how it is construed in Walter Benjamin’s writings, especially in his *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1927). As Bainard Cowan explains, it is a kind of experience that arises when one realizes the transitoriness of things and the impermanence of the world; in allegory the world ceases to be purely physical and becomes an aggregation of signs (“Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory,” 110).
- ² Art historians have been grappling with the daunting task of retrieving the original meanings of visual objects since the beginning of the discipline in the late nineteenth century. The debate is still very much on the minds of leading art historians of our time. See, for example, Thomas Crow, “The Practice of Art History in America.”
- ³ My argument has benefited from Alfred Gell’s anthropological theory of art, in particular his characterization of art as a social agent (*Art and Agency*, 5–11), as well as the rapidly growing scholarship on visual culture (see, for example, James D. Herbert, “Visual Culture/Visual Studies”).
- ⁴ This approach has been taken up by a number of recent monographs on Chinese Buddhist art. See, for example, Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, xix–xx. Although the term is not used explicitly, Stanley Abe’s study from 2002 also advocates a critical shift from “art” to “image” (*Ordinary Images*, 3–4).
- ⁵ See, in particular, Robert H. Sharf’s provocative critique in his *Coming to Terms of Chinese Buddhism*, 1–27.
- ⁶ See, for example, Stephen F. Teiser’s *The Scripture of the Ten Kings*; and Stephen Bokenkamp’s discussion of the notion of rebirth in *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 7–20. For seminal works on Indian Buddhism, see the various articles collected in Gregory Schopen’s *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*.
- ⁷ Although now situated in Xinjiang Autonomous Region of modern China, examples from the Buddhist cave temples of the Kuqa region (dating from the third century onward) are treated in this book as a distinct tradition of Central Asia.
- ⁸ The emphasis on the religious function of Buddhist art has been a recurrent theme in many recent works on Chinese Buddhist art. See, for example, Marilyn Martin Rhie’s *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, Abe’s *Ordinary Images*, Dorothy Wong’s *Chinese Steles*, and Amy McNair’s *Donors of Longmen*.
- ⁹ Jorinde Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*; and Miyaji Akira, *Nehan to Miroku no zuzōgaku*. For more recent critiques on iconography as a viable method of inquiry in art history, see the essays in Brendan Cassidy, *Iconography at the Crossroads*, and Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History.”
- ¹⁰ For a further discussion on the development of Buddhist studies in the West, see the introduction to Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Curators of the Buddha*. As Lopez remarks, “Buddhist Studies has thus been to a great degree a history of master texts, dominated by the scholastic categories it seeks to elucidate, what Said has called a ‘paradigmatic fossilization’ based upon ‘the finality and closure of antiquarian or curatorial knowledge’” (*Curators of the Buddha*, 7; the quote by Said is from his essay “Orientalism Reconsidered,” *Race and Class* 27.2 [1985]: 5, 14).
- ¹¹ Ebert’s argument about the Roman origin of the reclining form is a case in point (*Parinirvāṇa*, 66). Miyaji also makes similar observations regarding the earliest forms of Maitreya in India art, which he believes were appropriated from the iconography for the Hindu deity Brahmā (*Nehan to Miroku*, 214).
- ¹² Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 11.

- ¹³ Since the 1950s, there have been a number of article-length studies devoted to examining nirvana images from China, including: Alexander C. Soper, “A T’ang Parinirvana Stele”; Yasuda Haruki, “Tōdai Sokuten ki no nehan hensō”; He Shizhe, “Dunhuang Mogaoku de niepan jingbian”; Hirano Kyōko, “Chūgoku hokuchōki no nehanzu”; Li Jingjie, “Zaoxiang bei de niepan jingbian”; and Hsueh-man Shen, “Pictorial Representations of the Buddha’s Nirvāna in Chinese Relic Deposits.”
- ¹⁴ This is Creighton Gilbert’s criticism of the kind of iconological studies championed by Erwin Panofsky. Cited in Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, 164.
- ¹⁵ This model is still perpetuated by Lokesh Chandra’s multi-volume *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography*, the most ambitious specimen of its kind in recent decades.
- ¹⁶ This reading of the pictorial motif as a sign with meaning is based on Bal and Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” 207.
- ¹⁷ For a concise introduction to death and rebirth in Buddhist context, see Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel*, 3–49. My use of the term “utopia” on one level reflects the everyday sense of the word, defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.” On another level, it draws on one aspect of Steven Collins’s important discussion, namely, that nirvana is not a social utopia, but in most cases individual-based (*Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, 561–562). As Collins has already offered a detailed account of how the Buddhist concept of nirvana relates to the broader field of Utopian studies (especially *ibid.*, 112–114, 289–295, 555–562), I do not intend to delve into this topic here.
- ¹⁸ For the most comprehensive treatment of the subject within the context of South Asian civilizational history, see Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, part 1. Paul Mus’s *Barabudur* still remains the most provocative analysis on the conceptual ramifications of the Buddhist “nirvāṇa” in early Indic culture.
- ¹⁹ I am following the definition provided in Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, 96–97; see also BKG, 1076b–c. For the heated debate about the term throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters*. The controversy centered on whether nirvana ought to be understood as annihilation or bliss.
- ²⁰ The five aggregates of the self are: body (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions/ideas (*saññā*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), and inherited karmic force (*saṃkhāra*). For further discussions of the term “nirvana” within the Hinayana and Mahayana traditions, see Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, especially 191–198; and Shimoda Masahiro, *Nehangyō no kenkyū*, 67–75.
- ²¹ The life story of the Buddha is a complex amalgamation of facts and myths. For a study that assesses both aspects and provides a concise summary of each major episode, see John S. Strong, *The Buddha*.
- ²² For a discussion of these verbal imageries (e.g., quenching of fire, unfathomable ocean, and city of nirvana), see Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, 213–233.
- ²³ For a further discussion of the nirvana panel, see Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, 121–123.
- ²⁴ The interpretation was first proposed by Alfred Foucher in his *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, 73; it was most recently followed by Robert Knox in his *Amaravati*, 163–164. Knox dates the panel to the first phase of the Amarāvati High Period in the second century C.E. See also the discussion in Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, 36–42.
- ²⁵ The articles by Vidya Dehejia and Susan Huntington in the 1991 and 1992 issues of *Ars Orientalis* capture the many issues at stake in interpreting the “aniconic” images in early Indian art. But as Paul Mus reminds us, there was a long tradition of using visual symbols like these before the advent of Buddhism in India: “They were the instrument suited to the power of its mystical imagination,” which in many ways were considered superior to the direct representation of the human form (*Barabudur*, 68). Within the context of nirvana imagery, Ebert—following Foucher and John Marshall—has argued that the anthropomorphic figuration can be dated to as early as the first

century C.E., and that the iconography is likely to have stemmed from urban Roman tomb reliefs (*Parinirvāṇa*, 53–67).

- ²⁶ The structure was rediscovered in 1876, but was rebuilt in 1956. Based on coins and other artifacts found at the site, the excavators have dated both the *stūpa* and the colossal statue originally to the fifth century (D. R. Patil, *Kuśinagara*, 16–29). There are a number of colossal reclining Buddhas in India and Central Asia still extant today, including Cave 26 at Ajantā, Cave 23 at Nasik, Cave 9 at Aurangabad, as well as Tapar Sardar in Afghanistan and Adjina Tepe in Tajikistan. In September 2008, the discovery of a nineteen-meter-long reclining Buddha at a ruined temple near the Bamiyan Caves was announced.
- ²⁷ Walter M. Spink, *Ajanta*, 5: 327–328.
- ²⁸ For a discussion of the philosophical debate on the Buddha's absence and its many ramifications in Indian Buddhism, see Malcolm D. Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 73–113.
- ²⁹ Two of the most well-known projects undertaken by Empress Wu during her reign were the Bright Hall complex and the Great Bronze Buddha of Baisima Slope. Both projects are recorded in the annals on the reign of Empress Wu in *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 204, 6455; *juan* 207, 6549–6550; and *juan* 207, 6571. This and all other related texts have been extensively discussed in Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias*, 60–93. See also Matsumoto Bunsaburō's analysis on the bronze Buddha in his “Sokuten bukō no Haku shiba daizō ni tsuite.”

Chapter One Doubles: Stone Implements

- ¹ See figure 1.17 for the location of donor cartouches on the Chicago stele.
- ² The stele was purchased by the museum from C. T. Loo of New York in 1927 (accession no. 1927.591). It was first published in Osvald Sirén's *Chinese Sculpture*, plates 169–171, then in two short publications by the Art Institute of Chicago: Charles F. Kelley, “A Chinese Buddhist Monument of the Sixth Century A.D.”; and Kelley, *Chinese Buddhist Stele of the Wei Dynasty*.
- ³ A more extensive excerpt from the dedication, from which this quote is taken, appears on pages 50–51.
- ⁴ For a discussion on the political situation of the time, see Wan Shengnan, *Chen Yinke Wei Jin Nanbei chao*, 301–326, 337–363.
- ⁵ Paul Pelliot was the first to propose the Fen River area as the stele's possible provenance (Kelley, “A Chinese Buddhist Monument,” 19). There are two factors that support his claim. First, a few official titles among donor inscriptions refer explicitly to locations along the Lower Fen River such as Gaoliang (Appendix 1 BBL). Second, the surname Ning 甯, which was shared by nearly half of the eight hundred donors recorded on the stele, was one closely associated with this area. Granted that the character underwent slight changes in orthography through time, we still find variants of the two characters (*ning* 寧 and 甯) in the names of several towns and villages along the Lower Fen River, as they were given in several local gazetteers of Ming and Qing times. In fact, there was even a village named Ningjiagou 甯家溝, or literally the Valley of the Ning Family, which was about thirty-five *li* southwest of the county seat in Xiangning County (*Xiangning xianzhi*, *juan* 1, 10–11).
- ⁶ Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 2–3.
- ⁷ The ongoing debate about the style of the Buddha's robes in the Northern Wei period is a case in point. See, for example, the discussion in Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 173–180.
- ⁸ One such example is a triangular miniature gilt bronze now in the collections of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, which contains a nirvana image in the lower right corner on one narrower side. In my opinion, the object was originally part of a so-called “Aśoka” miniature *stūpa* in metal, specifically as one of the four vertical ornamental

appendages attached to the corners of the upper platform. Although the earliest textual document of this kind of *stūpas* date from the third century, most examples extant today were made during the relic distribution campaign under Qian Hongchu of Wu Yue Kingdom from 960 to 970. Some very fine examples have recently been excavated from pagoda crypts, including the Jingzhi Monastery in Dingzhou and Leifeng Pagoda in Hangzhou. The size and shape, archaic figural style, and biographical contents of the San Francisco piece are all in keeping with the appropriate parts of these Aśoka miniature *stūpas*, thus pointing to a much later date than what Marilyn Rhie has proposed (*Early Buddhist Art*, 1: 68–72). For further discussions on the metal Aśoka *stūpas*, see Okasaki Jōji, “Sen Kō-shuku hachiman yon-sen tō kō” and Sekine Shun’ichi, “Sen Kō-shuku hachiman yon-sen tō.”

- ⁹ My characterization here corresponds roughly to what Erik Zürcher has called “the diffuse borrowing of Buddhist elements,” which marks one of three key aspects in Han Buddhism (“Han Buddhism and the Western Regions,” 164–169).
- ¹⁰ A series of preliminary reports on Kongwangshan first appeared in 1981 and 1982, including: Lianyungang shi bowuguan, “Lianyungang shi Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang”; Yu Weichao and Xin Lixiang, “Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang de niandai kaocha”; Yan Wenru, “Kongwangshan fojiao zaoxiang de tici”; and Bu Liansheng, “Kongwangshan Dong Han moya fojiao zaoxiang chubian.” Wen Yucheng has provided a useful summary of many recent studies on Kongwangshan in his 2003 article. Since 2003, the Archaeology Department of the National Museum of China in Beijing and Lianyungang City Cultural Relics Protection Institute have compiled a comprehensive report on the site, to be published by Wenwu Press in 2010. I would like to thank researchers from both agencies for sharing with me their latest findings on the subject.
- ¹¹ The numbering system used in this chapter follows the one in the new Kongwangshan report (Zhongguo guojia bowuguan kaogubu, *Lianyungang Kongwangshan baogao*).
- ¹² Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art*, 1: 36.
- ¹³ The identification of Queen Mother of the West has been argued forcefully in Sofukawa Hiroshi, “Han, Sanguo fojiao yiwu”; see also Wen Yucheng, “Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang.” Wang Rui has introduced the identification of X71 as Laozi converting barbarians in Zhongguo guojia bowuguan kaogubu, *Lianyungang Kongwangshan baogao*.
- ¹⁴ See Wen Yucheng, “Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang.” The new Kongwangshan report also proposes a late Eastern Han date.
- ¹⁵ Yu Weichao and Xin Lixiang, “Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang de niandai kaocha,” 14–15. See also Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art,” 292–303.
- ¹⁶ See, in particular, Wu, “Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art”; Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region”; and Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 11–101.
- ¹⁷ Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, 53–62, 115–135.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 25.
- ¹⁹ The Mahāsattva *jātaka* is identified in Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art*, 1: 37–38.
- ²⁰ The resemblance to the Miran fragment has been suggested in ibid., 1: 36.
- ²¹ For a discussion of Buddha-like images on *hunping* from this region, see Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 60–97.
- ²² Erik Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, 1: 57–58.
- ²³ Wang Rui has noted that only a few figures at the entire site wear Han Chinese garbs, including X73 as Laozi, the neighboring X74, and the large guardian of X1. A dozen of individual figures (X75–90) to their west are mostly

foreign-looking in appearance and facial features. This unusual grouping of Chinese and non-Chinese figures has led Wang to read the images centering on X73 as Laozi converting barbarians, a theme which was to be featured prominently in debates between Buddhist and Daoists in later times. See *Lianyungang Kongwangshan baogao*.

- ²⁴ Wu Hung has provided by far the most elaborate reading of Kongwangshan from this angle, arguing that all carvings there be read as “Daoist” in content (“Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art,” 297–303).
- ²⁵ Mizuno Seiichi and Naghiro Toshio, *Yün-kang*, 8/9: 89–93; Alexander C. Soper, “Imperial Cave-Chapels,” 243–246.
- ²⁶ For the pertinent discussions on the development in India, see Ebert, *Parinirvāna*, 18–163; and Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 153–203.
- ²⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the history of Cave 6, see Mizuno and Naghiro, *Yün-kang*, 3: 101–117; and Soper, “Imperial Cave-Chapels,” 244–245.
- ²⁸ Mizuno and Naghiro, *Yün-kang*, 7: 73–82; Yang Hong, “Yungang di liu ku,” 36–40.
- ²⁹ For more detailed discussions of the Huangxing fifth year altar, see Audrey Spiro, “Hybrid Vigor”; Chang Qing, “Bei Wei Huangxing zaixiang kao”; and Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 47–52.
- ³⁰ The story of Dīpaṃkara and Sumedha is recorded in *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*, T. 3: 620–622. For Gandhāran examples, see Kurita Isao, *Gandara bijutsu*, 1: plates 2–9.
- ³¹ Spiro, “Hybrid Vigor,” 134–138.
- ³² From the little that remains in the damaged top register, the feet of a kneeling figure and a standing one suggest a preaching scene in which a seated Buddha probably occupied the center. The limited space in the top register rules out any possible depiction of a narrative scene like a *jātaka*.
- ³³ For a related discussion on the Twin Buddhas motif, see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 3–66.
- ³⁴ I am following the date proposed by Jin Shen, who reads the date in the donor inscription as “Yongping second year” (509) rather than “Heping second year” (461) (*Fojiao diaosu mingpin tulu*, entry for 80 and 81). Matsubara Saburō, on the other hand, favors the earlier date (*Chūgoku bukkyō chōkoku shiron*, Text Volume, 245). In my opinion, although the figural style would have appeared somewhat outdated by the early sixth century (especially after the removal of the Northern Wei capital to Luoyang), the inclusion of the Maitreya Bodhisattva on the back panel points to a later date. Moreover, the disappearance of the horizontal grid as a spatial organizer for the biographical narrative also signals a more mature form of design from the later period.
- ³⁵ Eugene Wang has interpreted the nirvana image in Yungang Cave 38 as part of a symbolic topography of death and rebirth that was articulated through the cave’s pictorial program. Specifically, the image marks “entering death,” which is paired with “entering the womb” as represented by an elephant rider below (*Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 52–66).
- ³⁶ The identification of the motif was first proposed in Mizuno and Naghiro, *Yün-kang*, 8/9: 73–76. But the term “Buddhas of Three Ages” was not linked explicitly to the “Three Buddhas” until the work of Liu Huida (“Bei Wei shiku zhong de ‘san fo,’” 91–101).
- ³⁷ The identification is explicitly stated in a dedicatory inscription from the year 589. See Henan sheng gudai jianzhu baohu yanjiusuo, “Henan Anyang Lingquansi shiku,” 3. For a detailed discussion on the iconographic program of the Dazhusheng Cave, see Yu-min Lee, “Preserving the Dharma in Word and Image.”
- ³⁸ These three features can be observed in many examples from the Northern dynasties. See the examples discussed in Ishimatsu Hinako, “Miroku zō zase kenkyū.”

- ³⁹ The pairing of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī has been a well-studied topic in Chinese Buddhist art. See, for example, Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics*, 52–55; and Emma C. Bunker, “Early Chinese Representation of Vimalakīrti.”
- ⁴⁰ See Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 482–517.
- ⁴¹ For a discussion on Dunhuang examples, see Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, “Dunhuang bihua zhong de Mile jingbian.” Examples on pictorial steles, to name just a few, include: Stele No. 10 from Maijishan Cave 133, the Kaihuang stele, an undated Northern Qi pillar from Jun County, Henan, and a stele dated to 562 in the Shanxi Museum (fig. 1.23).
- ⁴² This piece was first introduced and analyzed by Mizuno Seiichi in his “Kaikō ninen shimen juni gansō.”
- ⁴³ The coffin was the subject of much emotional outpour in the Gandhāran tradition too, as seen in three examples illustrated in Kurita, *Gandara bijutsu*, 1: plates 502–504. Given the fragmentary state of most surviving reliefs, I have not found a single case in which the reclining Buddha and the coffin are juxtaposed side-by-side, both with the same kind of emotional reception from their respective mourners.
- ⁴⁴ T. 1: 189c. A longer but essentially identical account is found in *Chang Ahan jing*, T. 1: 28c–29b.
- ⁴⁵ The four examples are: Stele no. 10 in Cave 133 at Maijishan, an undated five-storied stone pillar in the Gansu Provincial Museum, the Chicago stele, and the stone block in the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art.
- ⁴⁶ See table 2 for a list of pertinent texts from the Chinese Buddhist canon that include this episode.
- ⁴⁷ For a list of all the legible names on the front side of this stele, see Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 145.
- ⁴⁸ See the respective entries on these sutras (T. nos. 440–448) in DZK, 128–131. For a discussion on how these *Sutras of Buddhas’ Names* were represented as clusters of Buddha niches in cave temples of the sixth century, see Sonya S. Lee, “Transmitting Buddhism to a Future Age.”
- ⁴⁹ Yu-min Lee, “Preserving the Dharma in Word and Image,” 23–29.
- ⁵⁰ Many scholars have agreed that the panel represents a Buddhist Pure Land, but its exact identity still has not been determined satisfactorily. See Howard et al., *Chinese Sculpture*, 275.
- ⁵¹ This interpretation was first given in Kelley, *Chinese Buddhist Stele*, explanation for plate 9.
- ⁵² For a general discussion of the group of steles found inside Cave 133, see Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 121–130.
- ⁵³ According to the curatorial files in the museum, the stele is believed to have been made between 535–540 in Ruicheng, Shaanxi, an area which is near Gaoliang in the Lower Fen River area.
- ⁵⁴ For an illustration of the back side of the Nelson stele, see Matsubara, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkoku shiron*, plates 315 and 316.
- ⁵⁵ See the entry by Annette Juliano in *Catalogue of the Miho Museum*, 238–240.
- ⁵⁶ Although severely damaged, an altar dated 503 (Jingming 4, Northern Wei) depicts a standing Buddha with the “no fear” gesture in the front. In the back, there is a dedicatory inscription in which the name “Śākyamuni” is recorded. See Ishimatsu Hinako, “Hokugi Kanan no ikkō sanson zō,” plates nos. 11–13. For the identification of Maitreya Bodhisattva, one may refer to a stone altar dated to the sixth century, now in the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art. Accompanying a seated, cross-legged bodhisattva image with headdress at the center of the back side is a donor cartouche that names the image as Maitreya: 開彌勒光明主孟莫開.
- ⁵⁷ For an extensive list of major scholarly works on the Maitreya cult and related images, see Wang Huimin, “Mile xinyang yu Mile tuxiang yanjiu.”

- ⁵⁸ *Zhong Ahan jing*, T. 1: 510c–511c; and *Chang Ahan jing*, T. 1: 41c. For further information on these two texts, see their respective entries in DZK.
- ⁵⁹ On the rise of Maitreya belief in China, see Yang Zengwen, “Mile xinyang de chuanru,” 68–75; and Tsukamoto Zenryū, *Chūgoku bukkō tsūshi*, 567–570. For a discussion on the development of the cult outside China, see Jan Nattier, “The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth.”
- ⁶⁰ Dorothy Wong has noted the utopian impulse in the descent doctrine, but did not elaborate on the link with Buddhist eschatological thought of the time (*Chinese Steles*, 92–93). My analysis thus aims to delve further into this connection vis-à-vis pertinent visual materials.
- ⁶¹ Tsukamoto’s rationale for coining this term has to do with the fact that a wave of new schools, including the Three Stages sect of Xinxing (540–594) and Pure Land school of Daochuo (562–645), all geminated in the crucial period of the second half of the sixth century (“Bōzan Ungoji,” 345–346).
- ⁶² David W. Chappell, “Early Forebodings,” 134, 145–146; Yamada Ryūjō, “Mappō shisō nit suite”; and Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*, 110–117 (especially on the Central Asian connection via Narendrayāsas). See also Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the *Mahāmāya Sūtra*.
- ⁶³ T. 46: 786c, 787a. For a more detailed discussion of these terms and their etymology, see Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*, 90–94.
- ⁶⁴ T. 13: 363b.
- ⁶⁵ T. 46: 786c.
- ⁶⁶ Some of the notable studies on the Guyang Cave in recent years include: Wen Yucheng, “Guyang dong yanjiu”; Liu Jinglong, *Guyang dong*; Ishimatsu Hinako, “Ryūmon koyōdō shoki zōzō”; Hyun-sook Jung Lee, “The Longmen Guyang Cave”; Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 173–257; and McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 7–30.
- ⁶⁷ This inscription is located on the north wall. It is documented as no. 1857 in Liu Jinglong and Li Yukun, *Longmen shiku beike tiji huilu*. Other inscriptions with similar content include: nos. 1872 (dated 510), 1970 (undated), 2301 (dated 504), and 2303 (dated 507).
- ⁶⁸ Inscription no. 1871 in *ibid*.
- ⁶⁹ Inscription no. 2011 in *ibid*.
- ⁷⁰ T. 16: 341b.
- ⁷¹ The key passage concerning the merits of reading and copying the *Lotus Sutra* in relation to Maitreya can be found in *Zheng fahua jing*, T. 9: 132b–c.
- ⁷² *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. 9: 5b.
- ⁷³ From the well-known “Apparition of the Treasure Pagoda” chapter, T. 9: 33c.
- ⁷⁴ Dorothy Wong presents a rather different explanation for this curious phenomenon by arguing that the images of Śākyamuni and Maitreya in the Guyang Cave were in fact interchangeable (*Chinese Steles*, 95).
- ⁷⁵ *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T. 50: 562c–564a. For a discussion of Huisi’s writings from a Daoist perspective, see James Robson, “The Polymorphous Space,” 247–252.
- ⁷⁶ T. 50: 562c.
- ⁷⁷ T. 46: 787a.
- ⁷⁸ Sonya Lee, “Transmitting Buddhism to a Future Age.”

⁷⁹ See, for example, the passage in T. 9: 52a.

⁸⁰ This design also appears in a stackable form comprised of four to seven trapezoid blocks of graduating sizes, with the smallest at the top and the largest at the bottom. Many such examples concentrate near the village of Nannieshui in Qin County, Shanxi, where some 760 stone blocks were discovered in a hoard in 1959. Most of the pieces have been dated to the Northern Wei, but a number of them are from as late as the Northern Song. Although no nirvana image has been identified among the pieces on display at the Nannieshui Museum, the similarities in decorative motifs and carving styles do suggest that the Osaka stone block must likely have come from this tradition.

⁸¹ I follow the attributions in Mizuno, “Kaikō ninen shimen juni gansō.”

⁸² In addition to the Kaihuang stele, there are two other comparable examples from Henan: one from Jun County dated 572 (Wuping 3, Northern Qi), which once belonged to a local Buddhist temple named Foshi Monastery, but is now in Henan Museum; and an undated one from Qi County which is believed to have been made in the Northern Qi on the basis of its formal similarities to the aforementioned pillars. For the respective archaeological reports on these two pillars, see Zhou Dao and Lü Pin, “Henan Junxian zaoxiang bei”; and Lü Pin and Geng Qingyan, “Qixian xiancun de shiku he zaoxiang bei,” 28–29.

Chapter Two Transformation: Pictorial Narratives

¹ *Jiu Tangshu*, juan 6, 121; *Xin Tangshu*, juan 4, 91; and *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 204, 6469.

² For a concise assessment of Empress Wu’s reign, see the chapter by Richard Guisso in Denis Twitchett and John King Fairbank, *Cambridge History of China*, 3.1: 290–332.

³ Antonino Forte has argued that it was a commentary on the *Dayun jing*, not the scripture itself, that was stored in the Dayun Monastery (*Political Propaganda*, 51). Titled *Commentary on the Great Cloud Scriptures*, the text was written by Xue Huaiyi and others, and presented to Empress Wu on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Zaichu reign (October 16, 690). A handwritten version has been preserved in the Dunhuang manuscript S. 6502, which forms the central subject in Forte’s *Political Propaganda*.

⁴ Mizuno Seiichi and Hibiya Takeo, *Shansai koseki-shi*, 154 (citing from the local gazetteer of the early eighteenth century, *Yishi xianzhi*, juan 6 and 7).

⁵ The kind of Buddhist pictorial narratives that we deal with here is thus different from those found at early Buddhist sites in India, where pictorial reliefs based on *jātakas* were intended, as Robert Brown has argued, to “historicize and manifest the presence of the Buddha” (“Narrative as Icon,” 74). See also Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*.

⁶ In Zhang Yanyuan’s *Record of Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties* (*Lidai minghua ji*), for example, there are a handful of references to pictorial nirvana narratives that could still be seen in Buddhist monasteries in the two capitals by the mid ninth century. Most references contain the word *niepan bian*, but a few name one specific episode from the narrative as a general signifier (e.g., the division of relics). These locations include: Baochasi, Anguosi, Qianfusi Baoyisi, Yongtaisi, and Longxingsi. See William Acker, *Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts*, respectively 1:264, 272, 280, 298, 301, and 355.

⁷ Eugene Wang and Ning Qiang have shown that a great number of artifacts and monuments locally made in this period can be interpreted in relation to the Wu Zhou regime (Wang, *Shaping of the Lotus Sutra*, 122–178; and Ning, *Art, Religion, and Politics*, 111–115).

⁸ See Soper, “A T’ang Parinirvana Stele”; Yasuda, “Tōdai Sokuten ki no nehan hensō” 2: 5–14; and Li Jingjie, “Zaoxiang bei de niepan jingbian,” 69–73.

- ⁹ There has been a debate on whether or not the nominal term *bian* (commonly in the compound *bianxiang* 變相) ought to be interpreted as a form of narrative art (see Victor Mair, “Records of Transformation Tableaux,” 3–43; Wu Hung, “What is Bianxiang?”; and Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, xiii–xxiv). Insofar as the pictorial nirvana narratives thus identified are concerned, they all entail a unified composition that is especially designed for the purpose of recounting a story by some narrators, thus constituting a pictorial narrative. My definition here is based partly on Lew Andrews, *Story and Space in Renaissance Art*, 120–126; and partly on Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 58–61.
- ¹⁰ The current list of nirvana-related texts expands on Ernst Waldschmidt’s textual analysis of the *Nirvana Sutra*, in which he systematically compares respective Chinese translations of the Pali and Sanskrit versions (*Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha*). For other related texts that are not included here or in Waldschmidt, see the entry on “nirvana” in Mochizuki Shinkō, *Bukkyō daijiten*, 4146–4149; and *Tanjō to nehan no bijutsu*, 40–47.
- ¹¹ My main criterion of selecting these eighteen texts is the inclusion of at least three or more episodes related to the Buddha’s nirvana as listed in table 2. The attribution and date for each text follow the respective entries in DZK.
- ¹² According to Waldschmidt’s grouping, other Chinese translations of the *Nirvana Sutra* in Pali from the Hinayana canon include *Chang Ahan jing* (T. no. 1), *Fo ban nibhanga jing* (T. no. 5), *Fo shuo fangdeng ban nibhanga jing* (T. no. 378), *Da ban niepan jing* (T. no. 7), and *Genben shuo yiqie youbu bi-naïye zashi* (T. no. 1451). For the most comprehensive and up-to-date study on the *Nirvana Sutra* and the history of its recensions in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese, see Shimoda, *Nehangyō no kenkyū*, 60–81 (on the Hinayana tradition) and 155–236 (on the Mahayana). Hubert Durt’s study on the *Nirvana Sutra* and the Nirvana Section in the *Taishō* Tripiṭaka is also useful (*Problems of Chronology and Eschatology*, 57–74).
- ¹³ To date there are three main extant translations of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, namely, one by Faxian completed in 405 (T. no. 376), the so-called “northern version” by Dharmakṣema from 414 (T. no. 374), and the so-called “southern version” by Huiyan, Huiguan, and Xie Lingyun from 430 (T. no. 375). There was also a translation by Zhimeng (ca. 400–453) of the Later Qin which is no longer extant. It is believed that this translation corresponded to the first twenty fascicles in Dharmakṣema’s version. For detailed accounts of the history behind the translation of the *Nirvana Sutra*, see Chen Jinhua, “The Indian Buddhist Missionary Dharmakṣema”; Shimoda, *Nehangyō no kenkyū*; Qu Dacheng, *Dacheng da ban Niepan jing yanjiu*, 9–45; and Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nanbei chao fojiaoshi*, 601–610.
- ¹⁴ Tang, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nanbei chao fojiaoshi*, 677–682, 832–834.
- ¹⁵ Waldschmidt, *Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha*, 15 (all chapters are arranged according to this scheme).
- ¹⁶ My selection of the episodes is based partially on Waldschmidt, *Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha*; and He Shizhe, “Dunhuang Mogaoku de niepan jingbian.”
- ¹⁷ The three early-fifth-century translations of the Mahayana *Nirvana Sutra* (T. nos. 374, 376, and 375) seem to be the only exceptions, for there is no middle or end to the narration due to the fragmentary nature of the manuscripts on which the translations were based. See note 13 for the history of the text’s transmission.
- ¹⁸ This is based on a word count of the two texts: the Dharmakṣema version in the *Taishō* has nearly 400,000 words, whereas Zhiqian’s numbers about 26,000 words and Bai Fazu’s 27,000 words.
- ¹⁹ Strong interprets the Mahākāśyapa episode as an expression of the rivalry between the eldest disciple and Ānanda in the Pali and Sanskrit canons (*The Relics of the Buddha*, 113). Significantly, the Chinese never sought to exploit this theme and chose to introduce Queen Māyā as the foil instead.
- ²⁰ Although the DZK does not list the sutra as such, several recent studies do cast doubt on its authenticity. See Durt, “L’Apparition du Buddha,” 6–8; and *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, 7: 122.

- ²¹ Respectively T. 53: 19a–b and T. 50: 73b–74b. It is worth noting that in the *Chang Aban jing* the name of Queen Māyā is mentioned among the eighteen mourners who offered short eulogies shortly after the Buddha entered nirvana. But the episode of rising from the coffin is not included (T. 1: 27a).
- ²² T. 50: 94b.
- ²³ Specifically, the first fascicle of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* is about the Buddha’s three-month-long visit to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. The second fascicle contains several important episodes in the first half, including the bathing in Nairanjaṇā River, the encounter with Māra, a discussion about funerary arrangement between the Buddha and Ānanda, and the conversion and nirvana of Subhadra. Events after nirvana, especially those concerning the final meeting of the Buddha and Queen Māyā, are recorded in the second half of the second fascicle, with the division of relics marking the end.
- ²⁴ The ultimate source for this sequence of events is the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, T. 12: 1012a–1014a. Of the three later compilations, only the *Jinglu yixiang* contains the episode of the Buddha’s visit to Trāyastriṃśa Heaven before his nirvana. Both *Shijia pu* and *Shijia shipu* relate only the final encounter between the Buddha and his mother. See notes 21 and 22 for exact citations of the concerned passages in these three texts.
- ²⁵ For a further discussion on the theme of filial piety in the scripture, see Durt, “L’Apparition du Buddha,” 19.
- ²⁶ In addition, there is another episode in the second intermediary stage that concerns the Buddha’s transgressing the boundary of the coffin: the revealing of the golden arm when inquiring about the whereabouts of his eldest disciple. This episode was seldom included in the nirvana narrative, as it had appeared for the first time in *Pusa cong doushutian jiang shenmu tai shuo guangpu jing* (T. no. 384), T. 12: 1015b. It was later cited in *Shijia pu*, T. 50: 73b.
- ²⁷ T. 50: 74c. Interestingly, Daoshi puts forth a similar interpretation in his introduction to the entry on the “Nirvana” Section in *Fayuan zhulin*, T. 53: 371b.
- ²⁸ Most of the new episodes can be found in *juan 2*, T. 12: 907a–910a.
- ²⁹ The identification of the Queen Māyā figure in Cave 5 at South Xiangtangshan was first proposed in Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Kyōdōzan sekkutsu*, 29–35.
- ³⁰ For a brief summary of the narrative contents in each of these three caves, see Zhang Baoxi, “Maijishan shiku bihua xuyao,” 195–196.
- ³¹ The battle over relics tends to be described in great detail in textual accounts. See, for example, *Fo ban nibeng jing*, T. 1: 174b–175c; *Chang Aban jing*, T. 1: 29b–30b; and *Fo suoxing zang*, T. 4: 52b–54c. *Da ban niepan jing houfen* (T. no. 377) undoubtedly contains the most detailed account on this episode, but it was not available in the sixth century.
- ³² The Mahākāśyapa episode is depicted on the ceiling of the Northern Zhou Cave 26. Like all later examples, it is confined to the grouping with the reclining Buddha at the moment of nirvana.
- ³³ The stele record was first documented in a Qing epigraphical compilation titled *Shanyou shike congbian* by Weng Pinzhi, *juan 5*, 6a–10b.
- ³⁴ A similar identification was recently proposed by Jinhua Chen, though for a different rationale. See note no. 78 in his “Śarira and Scepter,” 69.
- ³⁵ On the “front” side, much of the stele record is now illegible due to the gradual erosion of the stone surface, and the heads of most figures in the pictorial panels above were rubbed away or simply knocked off. The “back” side, fortunately, is not plagued by the same kind of problem. The damages could not have been made in the past fifty years, for the stele was sheltered inside a pavilion at the old Shanxi Provincial Museum, where the “front” side was set to face the wall, i.e., away from the open.

- ³⁶ I follow Lew Andrews's definition of a continuous narrative as one "in which the passage of time is represented within a unified context" (*Story and Space in Renaissance Art*, 126).
- ³⁷ The Queen Māyā visitation manifests in three separate actions, including the descent from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (the area between the interlacing dragons at the top), the mother's lamentation, and the Buddha's rising from the golden coffin.
- ³⁸ The episode of Cunda's plea was unique to the Mahayana version of the *Nirvana Sutra*, as it was not recorded in any of the Hinayana versions. See T. 12: 371c–376a.
- ³⁹ See *Chang Ahan Jing*, T. 1: 28b; *Ban niheng jing*, T. 1: 189b; and *Fo ban niheng jing*, T. 1: 173b–c.
- ⁴⁰ Robert Brown has kindly pointed out that the three figures could be Śākyamuni in three different guises. But given the widespread prevalence of the pendant pose in representing the Future Buddha in Tang China, I am more inclined to identify the central figure as Maitreya Buddha, which adheres more or less to the general iconographic attribution first proposed by Mizuno Seiichi in "Iza bosatsu zō ni tsuite."
- ⁴¹ Mizuno and Hibiya, *Shansai koseki-shi*, 113–114.
- ⁴² The authenticity of the nirvana narrative on the Hamamatsu stele is subject to debate. The uncertainty about the composition's date has to do with the marked incongruity in carving style and iconography between the nirvana narrative on the back and the rest of the stele. While much of the pictorial contents on the stele is carved in relatively high relief, the nirvana section is rendered in low relief in a linear style. Moreover, the dedicatory inscription on the front side identifies the central icon as Amitābha and makes no reference to the nirvana motif whatsoever. Given these factors, the nirvana section was likely carved at a slightly later date than the rest of the stele, possibly by a different workshop of artisans. The overall narrative structure and the iconographical layout of individual episodes indicate a date no later than the Tang. The inclusion of a prominent Queen Māyā episode, for one, is a characteristic of nirvana narrative of this period. For another, the figural types on the Hamamatsu stele back share considerable stylistic similarities with those appearing on the stone reliquary from a relic deposit at Qingshan Monastery in Lintong County, Shaanxi, dated 741 (fig. 4.29).
- ⁴³ The identification of the last episode in the upper right hand corner still remains unclear. One possible reading is the descent of Queen Māyā from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Another reading takes the central figure as a Buddha, an attribution which appears to be more likely, because the figure appears to have a *uṣṇīsa* and wears a monastic robe. Hsueh-man Shen argues that the scene represents the Buddha's ascent to the Pure Land ("Pictorial Representations of the Buddha's Nirvana in Chinese Relic Deposits," 43).
- ⁴⁴ Albeit some slight modifications, my identification of these ten episodes is in basic agreement with the interpretation first proposed by He Shizhe in "Dunhuang Mogaoku de niepan jingbian," 4–6.
- ⁴⁵ Many fine examples can be found in pre-Tang caves at Mogao. See the discussion in Nagahiro Toshio, *Rokuchō jidai no bijutsu*, 95–104.
- ⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of the historical circumstances behind the construction of Cave 148 and the thematic logic in its elaborate pictorial program, see the last section of Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁷ The nirvana narrative in Cave 148 was based closely on the last section of the *Nirvana Sutra* (T. no. 377). This is attested by the sixty-six cartouches accompanying the various scenes throughout, which were excerpted directly from the text. For a complete transcription of the cartouches, see the appendix in He Shizhe, "Dunhuang Mogaoku de niepan jingbian."
- ⁴⁸ Sengmiao's biography in *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 8, T. 50: 486a.
- ⁴⁹ Tanyan's biography in *ibid.*, T. 50: 488b.

- ⁵⁰ Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter,” 65.
- ⁵¹ For a discussion of other aspects of a wheel-turning ruler, see Kang Le, “Zhuanlunwang guannian.”
- ⁵² In Buddhist cosmography, Mt. Sumeru is at the very center of the universe, on top of which are the so-called Thirty-three Heavens, together constituting one of the Six Heavens. Trāyastriṃśa is in the middle of these Thirty-three Heavens, presided over by Indra. Another one of the Six Heavens (fourth in line) is called Tusita, literally meaning “satiation,” which is headed by Maitreya Bodhisattva. See respective entries in BKG, 470, 1460.
- ⁵³ Empress Wu’s appropriation of many important aspects of Sui Wendi’s political agenda was first recognized by Chen Yinke in his seminal article “Wu Zhao yu fojiao.” More recently, there are further studies on the topic, including T. H. Barrett, “Stūpa, Sutra and Śarīra in China”; and Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter.”
- ⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that the word *ta* is more frequently used to refer to pagodas in sixth-century texts like Yang Xuanzhi’s *Luoyang qielang ji*. The word *chongge*, on the other hand, does not always denote a tall, multi-storied structure in this period. For example, in the biography of Shan Daokai in Huijiao’s *Gaoseng zhuan*, it is used to describe a very high platform inside a room, about eight to nine *chi* in height, and there was a small opening at the top in which the monk would sit to meditate (*Gaoseng zhuan*, T. 50: 387b). For a study on the development of pagodas and their textual references in medieval China, see Li Yumin, “Zhongguo zhaoqi fota suyuan.”
- ⁵⁵ Emperor Wendi’s relic redistribution campaigns are recorded in Daoshi’s encyclopedic *Fayuan zhulin*, *juan* 40, T. 53: 601c–605a; Daoxuan’s *Guang Hongming ji*, *juan* 17, T. 52: 213a–221a; and his *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T. 52: 411c–413a. For studies on the Renshou relic campaigns, see Kosugi Kazuo, *Chūgoku bukkyō bijutsushi no kenkyū*, 9–75; Arthur F. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty*, 134–136; and John Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 40–43. There will also be further discussion on the topic in Chapter 4.
- ⁵⁶ *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 12, T. 50: 517c.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *juan* 26, T. 50: 675b–676a.
- ⁵⁸ John Strong’s monograph by far offers the most detailed discussion on the various types of Buddhist relics (*Relics of the Buddha*, especially 8–12). Additionally, the definition here is based on discussions in Bernard Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 132–178; Robert Sharf, “On the Allure of Buddhist Relics”; Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter,” 34–37; and Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 29–52.
- ⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the concept and its origin in pre-Buddhist Chinese thought, see Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 77–133.
- ⁶⁰ In his study of Aśoka’s legacy, John Strong makes this important link between the distribution of Buddha’s relics and the political ideology implied therein (*Relics of the Buddha*, 144). Although the political system under Aśoka was by no means egalitarian, it marked a considerable advancement from the kind of totalitarianism represented by the earlier models of relic distribution (i.e., the initial division into eight parts and that by King Ajātaśatru). Based on the description of how the relic campaigns were conducted, there is no doubt that the Sui emperor modeled his policy closely after the Mauryan ruler.
- ⁶¹ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T. 52: 404a.
- ⁶² Kieschnick has pointed out that the willingness of the Buddhist monastic elite to participate in the Renshou campaigns led many to remain silent about the authenticity of the relics in question (*Impact of Buddhism*, 41).
- ⁶³ Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui, “Gansu sheng Jingchuanxian.”
- ⁶⁴ For a discussion on Meng, see Kaneko Kansai, “Keisen Suisenji.”
- ⁶⁵ For a summary and translation of the concerned passage on the prophecy in the *Great Cloud Scripture*, see Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 268–270. A more blatant interpolation of the prophecy is also found in another key text called

the *Treasure Rain Scripture* (*Ratnamegha Sūtra*; *Baoyu jing*, T. no. 660). See the discussion in Chapter 3 as well as Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 125–136.

⁶⁶ Based on Forte's translation of the *Commentary* in *Political Propaganda*, 202–203.

⁶⁷ There will be more discussion on the topic of heavenly mandate and auspicious omens in Chapter 3. On the manipulation of portents in the legitimization politics of the Tang, see Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 55–77.

⁶⁸ Cited in Tsukamoto, *Nisshi bukkyō kōshōshi kenkyū*, 30. The inscription is originally recorded in *Wenyuan yinghua*, juan 855.

⁶⁹ From a stele record entitled “Stele of the Dayun Monastery,” by Jia Xingfu. Recorded in *Quan Tang wen*, juan 259, 1559a–1560b.

⁷⁰ Tsukamoto, *Nisshi bukkyō kōshōshi kenkyū*, 30–31.

⁷¹ Empress Wu's veneration of the Famen Monastery relic is a familiar topic in the literature. See Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter,” 37–48, 97–103; Eugene Wang, “Of the True Body,” 85–91; and Roderick Whitfield, “The Famen Monastery and Empress Wu.”

⁷² Interestingly, a stone stele decorated with Thousand Buddhas and a preaching scene on the front and inscribed with the *Da ban niepan jing houfen* (T. no. 377) on the back was commissioned for Famen Monastery sometime in the Wu Zhou period. Although it is unclear in what way the stele was related to the imperial regime, the pictorial motif readily evokes the cosmological timeframe in the legitimization argument, and the scriptural passage refers to the division of the Buddha's relics. The stele is no longer extant, but a description of it is recorded in Huang Shugu's *Fufeng xian shike ji*. It is cited in Li Faliang, *Famensi zhi*, 236.

⁷³ Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter,” 66.

⁷⁴ T. 12: 1097a; English translation in Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 259.

Chapter Three Family Matters: Nirvana Caves

¹ Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, 50; Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogao*, 2: 194–195.

² Much of the nirvana scene in the west niche of Cave 332 has been modified and repainted. Despite the fairly recent surface paint, the core of the reclining statue is believed to have retained the original eighth-century design. See *Zhongguo shiku diaosu quanji: Dunhuang*, 1: entry for plate 119.

³ My discussion here has benefited from the following studies on the activities of prominent clans at Mogao Caves: Fujieda Akira, “Tonkō senbutsudō no chūkō”; Shi Weixiang, “Shizu yu shiku”; Ma De, “Dunhuang de shizu yu Mogao”; and Ning, *Art, Religion, and Politics*, especially 64–105.

⁴ See note 6 in Chapter 2.

⁵ As William Coaldrake argues, “Architecture serves as a container for authority but inevitably the container helps shape the contained because the relations of power are essentially fluid” (*Architecture and Authority in Japan*, 6). Similarly, in *Dynamics of Architectural Form*, Rudolf Arnheim explores the visual conditions that influence the psychological effect of architecture. His discussion of the relation between design and function is especially illuminating, as he too reaches the conclusion that “[architectural objects] not only reflect the attitudes of the people by and for whom they were made, they also actively shape human behavior” (*Dynamics of Architectural Form*, 268).

- ⁶ See Sonya Lee, “Sichuan da fo zhi dao.”
- ⁷ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, 28–30, and 47.
- ⁸ One of the landmark publications on the *stūpa* was Paul Mus’s *Barabudur* (1932), which still remains the authoritative treatment of the subject today. For useful summaries of more recent studies, see Robert L. Brown, “Recent Stūpa Literature”; and Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 21–54.
- ⁹ Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual and Representation in Buddhism*, 45.
- ¹⁰ Vidya Dehejia, *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*, 71, 152–154.
- ¹¹ For further discussions of material contents found inside or around early Buddhist *stūpas* at major monastic sites, see B. Subrahmanyam, *Buddhist Relic Caskets in South India*, especially under Amarāvati, Bavikonda, Bhattiprolu, and Salihundam; and Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, under Catalogue.
- ¹² See Gregory Schopen’s argument on the cult of the book in *Figments and Fragments*, 25–62; and Eckel on the Dharma Body, *To See the Buddha*, 97–109.
- ¹³ Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, 50.
- ¹⁴ In the *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan has recorded the works of Yang Qidan, Zheng Fashi, and Zhan Ziqian in Buddhist monasteries in the capitals. See Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts*, 1: 264–265, 301, 355.
- ¹⁵ According to the Shengli stele record, the stele is reported to have been placed in front of a “pagoda” (*ta*). See Su Bai, “Wu Zhou Shengli Li jun Mogaoku foka bei he jiao”; and Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, 9–28.
- ¹⁶ See Nancy Falk, “To Gaze on the Sacred Traces.”
- ¹⁷ Peter Hopkirk provides a lively yet poignant account of how the German explorer Albert von Le Coq cut out and carted off hundreds of mural fragments from Kizil back to Berlin (*Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 137–144). Le Coq himself has described in detail the techniques with which he used to remove murals in his memoir, *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan*, 122–141 (especially 127–128).
- ¹⁸ See the discussion and statistic chart in Xinjiang Guici shiku yanjiusuo, *Kezier shiku neirong zonglu*. For more on the central pillar caves at Kizil, see Vignato, “Archaeological Survey of Kizil”; Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 492–494; and Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, 188–191.
- ¹⁹ The dating of Kizil caves is a subject still open to debate. According to the German archaeological survey from the early twentieth century, the caves in question were dated to 600–650 which was described as the second phase of development at the site. But based on a series of Carbon 14 analyses of the cave structures, Su Bai proposes a fifth-century date instead (“Kezier bufen dongku jieduan huafen,” 19–20). In the latest attempt at periodization, Giuseppe Vignato argues that nearly half of the caves at Kizil, including most of the caves with nirvana images, were built in the fourth period which began around 550 (“Archaeological Survey of Kizil,” 403–404, 407).
- ²⁰ Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 484.
- ²¹ The only surviving nirvana Buddha in sculpted form at Kizil was discovered in 1973 in the New Cave No. 1, west of Cave 69.
- ²² Miyaji has classified all cave temples at Kizil with the nirvana motif into four major groups. Those paired with the Maitreya motif belong to the fourth group (*Nehan to Miroku*, 475–477, 512–517).
- ²³ In the central pillar cave of No. 428 at Mogao, the Buddha’s nirvana is painted at the northern end of the west wall, along with two other motifs sharing the same wall surface.
- ²⁴ Until the building of Cave 148 in the later part of the eighth century, four more nirvana scenes were completed during the interim period. Of these four examples, two (Caves 225 and 46) house oversize reclining Buddha statues

in the back niche, whereas the other two (Caves 130 and 120) contain only mural paintings related to the nirvana narrative. Neither did Caves 225 nor 46 retain the central pillar design or the kind of combination of niche setting and mural as exemplified by Cave 332.

- ²⁵ From *Da ban niepan jing* by Huiyan et al., T. 12: 611a. The translation is based on Yamamoto Kosho, *Mahayana Mahaparinirvāna-sutra*, 1: 29–30.
- ²⁶ Chen Wanli first reported seeing the stele in Cave 332 in 1925, but the stone was broken by Russian inhabitants of Dunhuang shortly afterward. The stele text was first recorded in 1820 in Xu Song's *Xiyu shuidao ji*, then again in a number of pre-1949 transcriptions, all of which were fragmentary in nature. In 1932, Wang Zhongmin discovered a complete transcription of the text on the back of Dunhuang manuscript P. 2551. Based on this, the stele, and a set of ink rubbing preserved in the Beijing University Library (made prior to the stele's sabotage in the 1920s), Li Yongning has produced the first reconstruction of the stele text in its entirety, to be followed by the studies of Su Bai and Zheng Binglin.
- ²⁷ The Shengli stele is the first textual document detailing the early history of Mogao Caves. As such, it has been studied intensely by generations of scholars. The most notable one is Su Bai, "Wu Zhou Shengli."
- ²⁸ Li Yongning, "Dunhuang Mogaoku beiwenlun ji," 62. The same opinion has also been expressed in He Shizhe, "Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji xiaokan."
- ²⁹ The statistics is based on Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Dunhuang shiku neirong zonglu*.
- ³⁰ Ma De, "Dunhuang shizu yu Mogaoku."
- ³¹ One telling indication was the marked increase of Amitābha Buddha images at major cave temple sites such as Longmen, a phenomenon which was studied by Tsukamoto Zenryū in his *Shina bukk'yōshi kenkyū*, 380.
- ³² See Chappell, "Chinese Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Lands."
- ³³ Eugene Wang has provided an interesting discussion on the imaginative power of these Pure Land scenes at Mogao, and the whole genre of transformation tableau in general (*Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, especially 67–181).
- ³⁴ As Wang puts it: "As imaginary projections of the living, the tableaux map out the tortuous contours of the way to various paradises. On the journey, demons and spirits have to be pacified, supernatural beings have to be invoked as protective agents, purgatory has to be anticipated but ultimately transcended, and paradises are eventually gained." See *ibid.*, xxii.
- ³⁵ One of the most frequently cited justifications for image-making in the Buddhist context is that seeing a Buddha image is like encountering the Buddha in person. This has been advocated in many visualization sutras.
- ³⁶ Miyaji, *Nehan to Miroku*, 482–517. For a discussion of the various symbolisms associated with Maitreya, see Nattier, "The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth." See also the discussion on the pairing of Śākyamuni and Maitreya images on stone implements in Chapter 1.
- ³⁷ The Kuqa area first came under Tang's rule in the mid seventh century, after Emperor Taizong waged a massive military campaign against the Central Asian kingdom. During the reign of Gaozong, the Tang army was ordered to abandon the area, thus giving the Tibetans an opportunity to occupy Kuqa. In the last decade of seventh century, however, the Chinese policy in Central Asia changed again with Empress Wu's defeat of the Tibetans and reconquest of Kuqa in 692. See *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 198, 5303–5304.
- ³⁸ The identification is based on the images on Vairocana's monastic garb, which depicts heaven in the upper section, human realm in the middle, and hell in the lower. See He Shizhe, "Guanyu Dunhuang Mogaoku de sanshifo yu sanfo zuoxiang," 82.

- ³⁹ This figure has been identified as Amitābha Buddha, because the flanking bodhisattva exhibits two characteristics of Avalokiteśvara, namely, holding a willow branch in the right hand and a clear jar in the left. The Buddha's unusual posture of standing with his right hand extending straight down, however, does not correspond to any identified specimens of Amitābha at Mogao, all of which tend to appear in a seated pose with a preaching hand gesture. For a further discussion on the Fanhe Buddha, see Wu Hung, "Rethinking Liu Sahe."
- ⁴⁰ T. 52: 421a (cited in Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku*, 3: entry for plate 94). See also Matsumoto, *Tonkōga no kenkyū*, 483.
- ⁴¹ Sofukawa Hiroshi, "Ryūmon sekkutsu," 324 and footnote no. 286.
- ⁴² Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku*, 3: entry for plate 93.
- ⁴³ Sofukawa argues that *lokapālas* were typically depicted to offer protection for Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Vairocana, and other historical Buddhas, whereas *vajrapāni* tend to be associated with Amitābha exclusively ("Ryūmon sekkutsu," 368–369). This observation is applicable to most cases at Dunhuang as well, where disciples often appear along with *lokapālas* to flank Śākyamuni, whose identity is confirmed by the jeweled pagoda painted above the head.
- ⁴⁴ Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku*, 3: entry for plate 92.
- ⁴⁵ Shi Weixiang, "Dunhuang Mogaoku de Baoyu jingbian."
- ⁴⁶ The first translation was made in the early sixth century by two Southeast Asian monks with the title *Treasure Cloud Scripture* (*Baoyun jing*, T. no. 658). The retranslation was spear-headed by Xie Huaiyi, who was also responsible for the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Scripture*, which was presented to the empress in 690. See Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 125–136.
- ⁴⁷ For a useful discussion of the variations of the wheel-turning *mudrā* and its symbolisms, see E. Dale Saunders, *Mudrā*, 94–101.
- ⁴⁸ For example, seated Buddhas painted on the dome ceiling of the Western Great Buddha at Bamiyan, Afghanistan, show several distinct variations of the *mudrā*. See *Sekai bijutsu daizenshū: Tōyōben* 3: plates 208 and 209.
- ⁴⁹ For the new reading of the south mural in Cave 217 as *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhāraṇī Sūtra*, see Shimono Akiko, "Tonkō Bakkokutsu dai 217."
- ⁵⁰ See Dunhuang yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku*, 3: entries for plates 53 and 100.
- ⁵¹ Following Shimono Akiko, Wang Huimin has suggested in a lecture given in Dunhuang in July 2007 that a similar reading be made for Cave 321.
- ⁵² As Eugene Wang has pointed out, the many details about demons in the side vignettes do not readily fit within the narrative of the *Treasure Rain Scripture* (*Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 232–235). In my opinion, they might in fact be explained vis-à-vis the *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhāraṇī Sūtra*, which advocates the scripture's power in saving sentient beings from hell.
- ⁵³ Shi Weixiang, "Dunhuang Mogaoku de Baoyu jingbian," 64.
- ⁵⁴ T. 16: 283b–c. Shi Weixiang, "Dunhuang Mogaoku de Baoyu jingbian," 64.
- ⁵⁵ T. 16: 284b–c. The translation here is adapted from Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 129–132.
- ⁵⁶ For a rereading of Empress Wu's legacy from the perspective of gender politics, see Jowen R. Tung, *Fables for the Patriarchs*, 57–72.
- ⁵⁷ The notion of "heavenly mandate" was first introduced via the Zhou conquest of the Shang as recorded in the *Classic of History* (*Shijing*) and *Classic of Document* (*Shujing*). For a discussion of the topic in Chinese political

thought in pre-Qin times, see T'ang Chün-i, "The T'ien Ming [Heavenly Ordinance] in Pre-Ch'in China." Howard Wechsler also provides a concise discussion of the heavenly mandate in Tang legitimization politics in his *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 10–20.

⁵⁸ BKG, 641.

⁵⁹ Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 133.

⁶⁰ Ning, *Art, Religion and Politics*, 111–115; Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 128.

⁶¹ Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 153–168.

⁶² Ibid., 156–157, 187–189. The allusion is based on a passage from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, in which Buddhist virtues are equated with family members of a bodhisattva: "The perfection of wisdom is the mother," "the joy of the Law is the wife," "the benevolent and compassionate mind is the daughter," and "the pious mind and the truth is the son" (T. 14: 576a).

⁶³ The event was recorded in *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 205, 1998b.

⁶⁴ The use of signs and omens in Wu Zetian's case was likely modeled after Wang Mang's campaign at the end of the Western Han dynasty. See Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 96–107.

⁶⁵ *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 6, 119.

⁶⁶ Recorded in Dunhuang manuscript S. 2005 entitled *Shazhou dudufu tujing* 沙州都督府圖經. See the transcription in Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang dili wenshu huiji jiaozhu*, 16–20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19. The Chinese text for the quote is: 王者仁智明愍即至, 動準法度, 則見.

⁶⁸ Most of the caves built in the later part of the high Tang period cluster around two main areas: first, between the two colossal Buddhas in the central section; and second, in the middle level of the southern section near where many Northern dynasties and Sui caves are. See Fan Jinshi and Zhao Qinglan, "Tufan zhanling shiqi Mogao dongku de fenqi yanjiu," 77.

⁶⁹ The high Tang period in central China has traditionally been set between 705–755. The periodization system adopted here follows that of the Dunhuang Academy.

⁷⁰ The stele is still preserved *in situ* in the front chamber of Cave 148; the entire text is transcribed in Li Yongning, "Dunhuang Mogao ku beiwen lun ji," 64–66. There are also contemporaneous records of the stele text found among three Dunhuang documents. P. 3608 was narrated by an official named Yang Shou, and is almost identical in content to the stele text and thus the most useful. P. 4640 and S. 6203, on the other hand, contain incomplete portions of the text in P. 3608. All three documents are transcribed in full with annotations in Zheng, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, 19–28, 39–40.

⁷¹ Following the transcriptions by Zheng Binglin and Gong Weizhang, I here use the name "Li Dabin," which is written as such in all the Dunhuang manuscripts. Li Yongning has transcribed it as "Li Taibin" 李太賓 in "Dunhuang Mogao ku beiwen lun ji," 65.

⁷² For a detailed account of the Li clan genealogy, see Gong Weizhang, *Niepan, jingtu de diantang*, 38–50.

⁷³ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁴ Li Bao 李寶 was a famous statesman in the Northern Wei, who was also from the Longxi region. His given name happens to share the same pronunciation as that of Li Dabin's actual sixth generation forebear, Li Wenbao 李文保, and hence the misuse. See Sun Xiushen, "Dunhuang Li shi shixi kao"; and Ma De, "Dunhuang Li shi shixi dingwu."

- ⁷⁵ *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 220, 7053. The *guanchashi* was a civilian liaison position appointed directly by the imperial court. Second only to the *jiedushi* 節度使 or military governor in terms of administrative power, the inspector general was responsible for ensuring efficiency and justice in local governments. He was given special power to act and punish in situations where imperial policies were not properly enforced.
- ⁷⁶ *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 223 and 224, respectively 7169 and 7185.
- ⁷⁷ Yiuming's murder was vividly described in Dunhuang manuscript P. 2942 titled "Administrative Decisions by the Inspector General of Hexi." See the transcription and discussion in Shi Weixiang, "Hexi jiedushi fomie de qianxi," 120–121.
- ⁷⁸ This is based on *Xin Tangshu*, *juan* 141b, 6101. See Ma De, "Shazhou xianfen niandai zaitan," 98–105.
- ⁷⁹ One of the most respected sources is the Tang imperial gazetteer *Yuanhe junxian zhi*, which records the fall of Dunhuang in 781 (*juan* 40; in JYWYG, vol. 468, shi 226, 631b).
- ⁸⁰ The stele text by Yan Zhenqing is recorded in Wu Tingxie, *Tang fangzhen lianbiao*, 1369. Ma refutes an earlier reading of the same line by Paul Demièvre as a reference to the murder of Zhou Ding by Yan Chao ("Shazhou xianfen niandai zaitan," 98).
- ⁸¹ Ma De, "Shazhou xianfen niandai zaitan," 102–104.
- ⁸² See note 78.
- ⁸³ *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 12, 333.
- ⁸⁴ Shi Weixiang, "Hexi jiedushi fomie de qianxi," 123.
- ⁸⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Sugiyama Yoshio, "Tonkō no tōchi seidō."
- ⁸⁶ The text is transcribed in Li Yongning, "Dunhuang Mogaoku beiwenlun," 66–68. It has also been preserved partially in Dunhuang manuscript S. 6203. See Zheng, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, 27–28.
- ⁸⁷ Li Yongning, "Dunhuang Mogaoku beiwenlun," 66.
- ⁸⁸ The Preface is typically represented by a preaching assemblage. The "Filial Rearing" chapter centers on the Prince Sujati *jātaka*, in which the prince sacrificed his own flesh to feed his starving parents and to save them from being devoured by wild animals during the family's flight from the usurping minister Rahu. The "Evil Friend" chapter is another *jātaka* that relates the travels of Prince Kalyānakarin of Vārānasi Kindgom and his evil brother Pāpakarin to the underwater world to recover the *maṇi* jewels. See *Dunhuang shiku quanji*: 9: 106–107.
- ⁸⁹ See the discussion in Chen Yinke, "Wu Zhao yu fojiao," 183–199; and Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*, 34–37.
- ⁹⁰ This sutra is believed to have been compiled by Chinese monks from scriptures of genuine Indian origin sometime between 445 and 516. Corresponding pictorial imageries, however, did not appear until the late eighth century. See Li Yongning, "Baoen jing," 189–197.
- ⁹¹ See the descriptions in Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, "Dunhuang bihua zhong de Mile jingbian," 255–257.
- ⁹² Li Yi, "Dunhuang bihua zhong de Tianqingwen jingbianxiang."
- ⁹³ T. 15: 124b.
- ⁹⁴ Gong Weizhang thinks that the theft of the Buddha's relics was selected in lieu of the demand for the relics by the eight kings for political reasons that were related to the 137 pieces of Buddhist relics enshrined in Dunhuang at the time (*Niepan, jingtu de diantang*, 221).

- ⁹⁵ The eighth-century site of Wofoyuan in Anyue, Sichuan, also shared a spatial setting similar to Cave 148, but the focus there was on the lessons in the *Nirvana Sutra* rather than the Pure Land doctrine. See Sonya Lee, “The Buddha’s Words at Cave Temples.”
- ⁹⁶ The thematic link between nirvana and the two Pure Lands has also been noted by Gong Weizhang as key to understanding the meaning of Cave 148, but he argues instead for an underlying connection with Tiantai teachings and the *Lotus Sutra* (*Niepan, Jingtu de diantang*, 223–239). For further discussions on the scholarship on Pure Land images at Dunhuang, see Wang Huimin, “Dunhuang xifang jingtu xinyang ziliao”; and Ning, *Art, Religion, and Politics*, 20–50.
- ⁹⁷ Cited in Peng Jinzhang, “Qianyan zhaojian, qianshou huchi,” 23.
- ⁹⁸ Among the eight Chinese translations of the *Amoghapaśa dhārāṇi sutra* (T. nos. 1092–1099), the enumeration of these twenty merits is a standard feature in all of them.
- ⁹⁹ We may even count the Thousand Buddhas pattern in the latter category, if we consider how much wall surface it takes up in Cave 148.
- ¹⁰⁰ My reading thus concurs with Neil Schmid’s characterization of cave temples at Mogao as an “as-if space,” whose function is to create an ideal imagined world rather than to hold ritual exercises. See Schmid, “The Material Culture of Exegesis and Liturgy,” 208.
- ¹⁰¹ *Da ban niepan jing houfen, juan 1*, T. 12: 903b–c.

Chapter Four Impermanent Burials: Relic Deposits

- ¹ The five regimes that had successively ruled the crucial area around Dingzhou were: Later Liang (907–923), Later Tang (923–936), Later Jin (936–946), Later Han (947–950), and Later Zhou (951–960).
- ² This account of Master Zhaoguo is based on an inscription found on the foundation wall of the Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt (Appendix 5F).
- ³ The finds at Jingzhi Monastery (No. 5) and the nearby Jingzhong Cloister (No. 6) had remained little known until 1997, when selected items from the sites were exhibited abroad for the first time at Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Tokyo, Japan. The catalogue produced for this exhibit, together with the initial archaeological report from 1972, are two of the most important sources on the subject (respectively *Chika kyūden no kenbō* and Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian”).
- ⁴ The number is based on two detailed listings of finds provided respectively in Xu Pingfang, “Zhongguo sheli taji,” 418–421; and Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” appendix A.
- ⁵ There are a few notable exceptions to this, including a fine specimen of the narrative format from Chongming Monastery outside Nanjing. See Tokyo National Museum, *Chūgoku kokubō ten*, plates 158–160.
- ⁶ The criteria for my identification scheme differ considerably from those utilized in Hsueh-man Shen’s study. She relies on twelve specific episodes from the Faxian translation of the *Nirvana Sutra* (T. no. 7) as the primary identifying features. See Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 107–114, table 1 and appendix B.
- ⁷ The nine dated deposits are: the former Kaiyuan Monastery in Zhengzhou, Henan 鄭州開元寺 (976); Jingzhi Monastery (977) and Jingzhong Cloister (995) in Dingzhou, Hebei; the Aśoka pagoda at Haiqing Monastery in Lianyungang, Jiangsu 連雲港海清寺 (1023–1031); Fusheng Monastery in Dengxian, Henan 鄧州福勝寺 (1032); Miaodao Monastery in Linyi, Shanxi 臨猗妙道寺 (1069); Xingshengjiao Monastery in Songjiang, Shanghai 松江興聖教寺 (1068–1093); the Śākyamuni Relic pagoda at Zhenxiang Cloister of Changqing County, Shandong

長清真相院釋迦舍利塔 (1087); and Chongming Monastery in Jurong, Jiangsu 句容崇明寺 (1093). This list does not include examples from the Liao and Jin regimes. For a study on this subject, see Hsueh-man Shen, “Realizing the Buddha’s Dharma Body.”

- ⁸ Makita Tairyō has noted that the decentralization of China after the An Lushan rebellion in 755 was the starting point of this long development (*Chūgoku bukkyō shi kenkyū*, 3: 78–79).
- ⁹ As Barend J. ter Haar has pointed out, most Chinese in the medieval period shared the same belief in karmic retribution, cycle of endless rebirths, and punishment in the underworld, all of which could be found in Buddhist, Daoist, and even Confucian traditions of the time. In dealing with problems in their lives, the people did not necessarily adhere to one belief system but instead would try whatever method that could bring about a solution. See Haar, “Buddhist-Inspired Options,” 100–101.
- ¹⁰ My argument here has benefitted from Xu Pingfang’s study, which shows that relic worship from the late Tang to the Northern Song reflects an increased level of popularization (“Zhongguo sheli taji,” 432).
- ¹¹ I use the terms “pagoda crypt” and “deposit space” to refer to the physical structure that houses these objects; the subterranean location of the space is basically in keeping with the standard usage of the term “crypt” in English. I reserve the term “relic deposit” to denote the overall practice of enshrining sacred remains in a hidden space, the entire package of objects and structure so to speak.
- ¹² Hsueh-man Shen has made the most systematic analysis from this perspective to date. She continues the position of many Chinese archaeologists (see, for example, Yang Hong, “Famensi taji fajue”) by maintaining the similarities between relic deposits and tombs and by interpreting the many crucial aspects of the former as straightforward derivations from the latter (Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 84–105).
- ¹³ My argument thus disagrees with Hsueh-man Shen’s study again on this point. Shen argues in her study of the pictorial program in the Jingzhong Cloister crypt that the murals aimed to effect a transformative function on the viewers, whereby one would “come in the room as a mourning human but walk out with joy as the heavenly musicians do.” The targeted audience was those donors who sponsored the construction and might have attended some ceremonies inside the deposit before the structure was sealed (“Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 110–111).
- ¹⁴ The passage in Chinese is: 而今而後，又不知幾千百年，其間或廢或興，誰可有緣，乘是願力而相會。遇予固不得而知也，謹記其塔成所藏之歲月雲耳。時元豐元年四月八日記。 Entitled “A Record on Reburying the Relics at Ganlu Monastery of Runzhou,” this inscription was written by a monk named Muzhou; the text is fully transcribed in Jiangsu sheng wenwu gongzuodui, “Jiangsu Zhenjiang Ganlusi,” 315.
- ¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the term, see Eugene Wang, “Of the True Body,” 79–97.
- ¹⁶ Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian,” 40.
- ¹⁷ The discovery of 603 was recorded in an inscription that appeared along the vertical edges of a square gilt bronze case dated to 606, and also in another inscription engraved at the center of the stone epitaph (respectively Appendix 5B and 5D).
- ¹⁸ Hengyu Monastery in Dingzhou was the official recipient of the relics in 601. Soon afterward, an instance of sympathetic resonance was reported at the temple. See *Guang Hongmingji*, *juan* 17, T. 52: 215a; and *Fayuan zhulin*, *juan* 40, T. 53: 603a.
- ¹⁹ Admittedly, the following identification scheme is far from perfect, for there is a likelihood that some of the layers did not get reported in the inscriptions.
- ²⁰ The description is from Wang Shao’s *Account of the Relics’ Sympathetic Responses* (*Sheli ganying ji*), which records the first two campaigns. The text was later collected by Daoxuan in his *Guang Hongming ji*, *juan* 17, T. 52: 213c. For a discussion of the reliquaries from the Renshou campaigns, see Kosugi, *Chūgoku bukkyō bijutsu*, 66–70.

- ²¹ The find yielded a large stone case measuring over 1 m in height, width, and length; and three metal cases of varying sizes and shapes, one of which contained a glass jar inside. In these containers were found bone ashes, three pellets of relics, hair, as well as ornaments made of jade, silver, crystal and jade; pins and utensils; bronze coins of the Sui dynasty; and silver coins from the Sasanian empire. See Zhu Jieyuan and Qin Bo, “Shaanxi Chang’an he Yaoxian,” 127–128.
- ²² Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 85–87.
- ²³ See the discussion of tomb architecture and furnishings in Qin Hao, *Sui Tang kaogu*, 111–240.
- ²⁴ These two deposits have each yielded a modest assemblage of objects. For the Zhengding find, see Zhao Yongping et al., “Hebei sheng Zhengding xian,” 92–95. For the Fangshan find, see Luo Zhao, “Leiyindong sheli yu Fangshan shijing”; Ding Mingyi, “Tan Yunjusi Leiyindong”; and Huang Bingzhang, “Shijingshan Leiyindong sheli.”
- ²⁵ On the stone case from Fangshan, the inscription reads: “On the eighth or *jiazi* day of the fourth or *dingsi* month in the twelfth or *bingzi* year of the Daye era (616), three pieces of the Buddha’s relics were secured in this case. May they stay and uphold the *kalpas* forever.” The inscription on the Zhengding stone case is: “On the twenty-eighth day in the second month of the first year in the Daye reign (605), Meditation Master Zhao reverently offered the relics.”
- ²⁶ See Hebei sheng wenwuju wenwu gongzuodui, “Hebei Dingxian chutu Bei Wei shihan.”
- ²⁷ Recorded in Daoxuan’s *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, *juan* 1, T. 52: 704b.
- ²⁸ It is also important to note that the term *guan* 棺 has not been used at all in describing relic containers throughout the pertinent passages in *Guang Hongming ji*, T. 52: 213a–221a.
- ²⁹ See notes 21 and 24. In describing the contents of the relic deposit found in the Leiyin Cave at Fangshan in 1592, the eminent Ming monk Deqing did not report the discovery of any coffin-shaped containers. See a discussion and transcription of this record in Huang Bingzhang, “Shijingshan Leiyindong sheli.”
- ³⁰ The Japanese monk Ennin provided a vivid account of the impact that the edict of 844 had on small Buddhist monasteries. See Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary*, 353.
- ³¹ For a discussion of this edict, see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T’ang*, 139.
- ³² Two of the most important sources of Famen Monastery’s early history are: a stele inscription titled “Stele Record on the Precious Pagoda of the Great Hallowed One’s True Body at King Worry Free Temple of the Divine Dynasty of the Great Tang” 大唐聖朝無憂王大聖真身寶塔碑銘 (dated 778), which until the Cultural Revolution was preserved at Famensi; and another titled “Inscription on the Transporting and Presenting of the True Body [Relic] of Qiyang during the Xiantong Era of the Great Tang” 大唐咸通啟送岐陽真身志文碑 (dated 874), found inside the underground deposit in 1987. Transcriptions of the two texts can be found in Li Faliang, *Famensi zhi*, 243–250. For an illustration of the latter, see Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan, *Famensi kaogu fajue baogao*, color plates 204–205.
- ³³ Robert Sharf has made a compelling argument about the appeal of the relic worship on the basis of this point (“On the Allure of Buddhist Relics,” 89). Gregory Schopen has also put forth a similar argument concerning the animate quality of Buddhist relics within the early Indic context (*Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, 125–135).
- ³⁴ Huang Chi-chiang furthers the speculation by suggesting that the monks at Famen Monastery were not able to locate the relics until 871 (“Consecrating the Buddha,” 524–527).
- ³⁵ One notable find in the northeastern region was made in 847 at Hongye Monastery in Youzhou (near today’s Beijing). According to a stele record that commemorated the reburial of relics at Minzhong Monastery in 892, the five-story pagoda was first built to enshrine a relic bestowed by Emperor Wendi of Sui during the redistribution campaigns in the early seventh century, but was burned down in 834. Significantly, the relics were not discovered

until 847, just after Xuanzong ascended the throne, and were later transferred to the nearby Minzhong Monastery. A transcription of the inscription is collected in *Jinshi cuibian*, *juan* 118, in SKSLXB, Vol. 1–2, 2151a–2153a. See also the discussion in Kosugi, *Chūgoku bukkyō bijutsu*, 14–16, 37–38.

³⁶ Recorded in the aforementioned “Inscription on the Transporting and Presenting of the True Body [Relic] of Qiyang during the Xiantong Era of the Great Tang.” See note 32 for citation.

³⁷ The term also came to be associated with the physical remains of eminent monks. The topic will be discussed later in conjunction with Jingzhong Cloister.

³⁸ At the very beginning of the 977 inscription from the pagoda crypt foundation, it is said that the pagoda and its name originated in the late Tang period. The timing of the new construction corroborates with the information given in the 858 inscription. See Appendix 5F line 1.

³⁹ At Ganlu Monastery in Jiangsu and Songyue Monastery in Henan, the two other sites that have yielded relic deposits from the ninth century, the term “True Body” did not appear among *in-situ* inscriptions. See Jiangsu sheng wenwu gongzuodui, “Jiangsu Zhenjiang Ganlusi”; and Henan sheng gudai jianzhu baohu yanjiusuo, “Dengfeng Songyuesi.”

⁴⁰ At the beginning of the text, the origin of the pagoda is strategically juxtaposed with a vivid account of the invasion of the Khitans and the ensuing resistance mounted by the people of Dingzhou under Bai Zairong in 947. The narrative then switches to Master Zhaoguo, who returned to Jingzhi Monastery and hoped to revitalize the monastery with the relics. Some of the events referred to in the 977 inscription are also recorded in the chronicles of the local gazetteer, which provide a fuller account of the increased political turmoil that had come to plague the Dingzhou area throughout the first half of the tenth century (*Dingzhou zhi*, *juan* 4).

⁴¹ In the 977 inscription, Qi is simply identified either as the “Commander” (*taiwei* 太尉) or the “reverent believer” (*chongxin* 崇信). But because his name appears at the very end of the text and he is the only official in the list with the appropriate ranks that befit the honorific title “Commander,” there is no question that the primary benefactor at Jingzhi Monastery was Qi Tingxun.

⁴² For a more detailed account of the complex history of northern China at the time, see F. W. Mote, *Imperial China*, 56–71.

⁴³ *Dingzhou zhi*, *juan* 4, 41.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Dingzhou did eventually acquire an impressive thirteen-story pagoda in 1055. Built at the instigation of the monk Huineng, this monument at Kaiyuan Monastery later came to be known as the “Pagoda of Enemy Surveillance” (Liaodita 料敵塔). As the name implies, the pagoda also provided the Song military personnel in Dingzhou with tactical assistance in defending against the Khitans at the northern front. A somewhat diminished version still remains standing today in Dingzhou. See *Dingzhou zhi*, *juan* 5, 46–47.

⁴⁵ The three deposits made before the ninth century are reported to have been unearthed directly from the ground. The situation was in keeping with the practice of the pre-Tang times, in which relic deposits were interred in an underground brick structure that was not large enough for human access.

⁴⁶ Today, the structure is no longer accessible, for it has been permanently resealed for preservation purposes. But a series of color and black-and-white photographs of the interior were taken before the closure and were published in the Idemitsu catalogue *Chika kyūden no kenbō*.

⁴⁷ Hsueh-man Shen has suggested that these illusionistic devices were intended to imitate actual wooden frame structures as a form of allusion to domestic space for the living (“Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 95).

⁴⁸ It is important to stress that the Indra and Brahmā figures from Jingzhi Monastery crypt were not the typical donor images in cave temples and monasteries, even though their rendition was generally in keeping with the

practice of depicting donor processions headed by a pair of kingly and queenly figures and positioning them on the two sides of the main icon.

- 49 The symbolic association of Vaiśravaṇa with the relic cult has been pointed out by Eugene Wang in his study on the Famen Monastery reliquaries (“Of the True Body,” 100–104).
- 50 The writer of the excavation report has noted that the tray had already collapsed due to the rotting of the wood, and that a bronze mirror found on it was originally attached to the ceiling, but dropped down after the string broke.
- 51 According to the Idemitsu catalogue, one glass jar in bluish green and one of the “jade-like” figures have been dated to the seventh century, although the pertinent entries do not provide any explanation of the dating criteria (Idemitsu Museum of Art, *Chika kyūden no kenbō*, entries nos. 39 and 49).
- 52 The 977 date for the silver pagodas can be inferred from an undated donor inscription found on one of them. As the content is near identical to another inscription found on a bronze incense burner that records the date of 977, we can assume that both objects were made at the same time.
- 53 This is a rough estimate based on the preliminary inventory list published in the excavation report.
- 54 For an introduction to the handicraft industry in Dingzhou, see Su Bai, “Dingzhou gongyi.”
- 55 The names of these devotional societies were found on the walls of the crypt. While the resolution of the photographs in the Idemitsu catalogue is not high enough for me to decipher any of the writings, they have been referred to in Yoshiko Yamasaki, “Teishū Jōshiji, Jōshūin sharitō tōki chikyū no hekiga,” 39.
- 56 For the silver pagoda, it is also stated that twelve *lian* and seven *fen* of silver and one *qian* of gold was consumed. Providing precise measurements like this in donor inscriptions became a popular feature of relic deposits beginning in the ninth century. Perhaps the most important example pertained to the find at Famen Monastery. Based on his study of the metal wares in the Famen deposit, Kegasawa Yasunori has speculated that one *lian* in the late Tang period equals to 40 g in today’s metric system, and there were four *fen* or ten *qian* in one *lian* (“Hōmonji shutsudo,” 620–24).
- 57 See the discussion in Satō Chisui, “Hokuchō zōzōmei kō,” 21–25 and especially table 10.
- 58 The name of Master Zhaoguo has not been found among any of the donor inscriptions from the Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt. It is unclear why he was not directly involved in the making of any offerings interred in the 977 deposit.
- 59 The discovery of Jingzhong Cloister pagoda crypt was published in the same excavation report along with the find at Jingzhi Monastery (Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian,” 43–46).
- 60 One particularly fine example can be found in a tomb at Pingmo near Xinmi in Henan Province, dated 1109. See Zhengzhou shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Xinmi shi bowuguan, “Henan Xinmi shi Pingmo Song dai bihua mu.”
- 61 Near the bottom of the Buddha entering nirvana episode in Cave 148, there are six half-naked figures dancing and jumping around. The cartouche nearby identifies the group as the celebration of the infidels, who gleefully took the Buddha’s nirvana as signaling the demise of Buddhism. See *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, 7: fig. 148.
- 62 The writers of the original excavation report identify the feet-touching gentleman and this female figure as the parents of Śākyamuni (Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian,” 43–44). More recently, both Yamasaki Yoshiko and Hsueh-man Shen have disputed the possible presence of the Buddha’s father, but still maintained the interpretation of the female figure as Queen Māyā. See Yamasaki, “Teishū Jōshiji, Jōshūin sharitō,” 42; and Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 108.
- 63 Line drawings of all the murals found inside the Qingshan Monastery deposit are included in the original excavation report (Lintong xian bowuguan, “Lintong Tang Qingshansi sheli ta ji jing she qingli ji,” 32–33). On the

north wall behind the stone case, there was a mountain depicted at the center, flanked by two standing Buddhas, whom the writers of the excavation report arbitrarily identified as Amitābha and Bhaisajyaguru.

⁶⁴ Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian,” 45.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁶ The word *zang* was borrowed from the Song practice of tomb burials (Shen, “Buddhist Relic Deposits,” 85).

⁶⁷ See *Dingzhou zhi*, *juan* 4, 41–42.

⁶⁸ Perhaps the most well known are those in Xuanhua, Hebei, dated to the late eleventh, early twelfth century. See Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo, *Xuanhua Liao mu*; and Shen, “Body Matters.”

⁶⁹ Nishiwaki Tsuneki, “Shari shinkō,” 206–208. For a further discussion on cremation, see Nishiwaki, *Tōdai no shisō to bunka*, 195–224. In this study, Nishiwaki offers some compelling statistics based on the three major collections of biographies of eminent monks respectively by Huijiao, Daoxuan, and Zanning (T. nos. 2059, 2060, and 2061). Of the 656 monks recorded in Zanning’s work (covering the seventh to ninth centuries), there were 89 who were cremated after death. This marks a significant increase over time, from 16 out of 684 in Daoxuan’s account (covering the fifth to seventh centuries), and from 9 out of 500 in Huijiao’s work (covering the third to fifth centuries).

⁷⁰ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 115–116.

⁷¹ Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 136.

⁷² Ibid. See also the discussion in Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 10–12; and Robert H. Sharf, “The Idolization of Enlightenment,” 2–5.

⁷³ On a related point, Patricia Ebrey has argued that the expectation to find relics with magical power after cremation was evidently widespread among both Buddhist and non-Buddhist sectors of the Song populace (“Cremation in Sung China,” 413–414).

⁷⁴ Respectively *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2059), *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060), and the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061).

⁷⁵ For further discussions on ritual suicide and self-sacrifice in Chinese Buddhism, see James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 78–163 (on the Tang); and John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 35–50.

⁷⁶ Jacqueline Stone, “Death,” 58–59.

⁷⁷ In addition to the death posture, Faure has also discussed other dimensions of death rituals such as poetry and setup of funeral and cremation grounds (*Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 184–208).

⁷⁸ For cases of mummification related to Chan masters, see Sharf, “The Idolization of Enlightenment,” 7–16; and Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 148–178.

⁷⁹ The cult of Sengqie has been the subject of many recent studies. See Xu Pingfang, “Sengqie zaoxiang”; Luo Shiping, “Dunhuang Sizhou Sengqie jingxiang”; Makita, *Chūgoku bukkyō shi kenkyū*, 2: 28–55; and Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 211–222.

⁸⁰ Shanghai bowuguan, “Shanghai shi Songjiang xian Xingshengjiao sita.” This site will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁸¹ There are three main biographies of Sengqie from the Tang and early Song period: an early eighth-century stele inscription by Li Yi entitled “Stele of the Great Tang Universal Light King Temple in Linhuai County of Sizhou” (cited in full in Xu Pingfang, “Sengqie zaoxiang,” 50–51); *Taiping guangji*, *juan* 96, 638; and *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 18, T. 50: 822a–823a.

- ⁸² For a survey of some noted extant examples, see Denise Patry Leidy, “A Portrait of the Monk Sengqie.” Significantly, some of these Sengqie figures were found inside relic deposits alongside the remains of other monks. In addition to Xingshengjiao Monastery in Shanghai cited above, other deposits include the Ruiguang Monastery pagoda in Suzhou, Jiangsu (dated 1013–1017); the Huiguang or Xianyansi pagoda in Rui’an, Zhejiang (1042); the Wanfo pagoda in Jinhua, Zhejiang (1062); the Tianfeng pagoda in Ningpo, Zhejiang (1144); and the Baixiang pagoda in Wenzhou, Zhejiang (1115).
- ⁸³ The number of reported cases had nearly doubled from eleven in Daoxuan’s *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* to about two dozen in Zanning’s account. There were only two in Huijiao’s text.
- ⁸⁴ *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 6, T. 50: 740b.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, *juan* 16, T. 50: 811a.
- ⁸⁶ Respectively *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 16, T. 50: 556b; and *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 16, T. 50: 808a.
- ⁸⁷ *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 15, T. 50: 544a.
- ⁸⁸ None of the early texts have given any precise description of the exact quantity other than to say that the *śarira* filled up one golden casket (see Waldschmidt, *Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha*, 309–313). But by the time of the Mahayana version of the *Nirvana Sutra*, it records that Droṇa was able to fill eight golden caskets with the Buddha’s relics (T. 12: 911a).
- ⁸⁹ Nishiwaki, “Shari shinkō,” 208.
- ⁹⁰ *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 16, T. 50: 787c.
- ⁹¹ My interpretation of the term’s usage in mid and late Tang is based on a perusal of biographies of eminent monks such as Zanning’s *Song Gaoseng zhuan* (T. no. 2061) and Buddhist chronicles like Zhipan’s *Fozu tongji* (T. no. 2035). It is worth noting that roughly half of the instances in which the term “True Body” is in use refer to the Famen Monastery relic, while the other instances pertain to descriptions of monks’ bodies or remains, or the pagodas that enshrined them.
- ⁹² Robert Sharf’s argument on the function of mummified Chan masters as “living icons” is particularly helpful in making this distinction (“The Idolization of Enlightenment,” 21–22).
- ⁹³ The relic deposit was discovered in 1974 during a renovation of the temple’s nine-story pagoda. Based on the structural coherence of the crypt in relation to the aboveground pagoda, the excavators have determined that the two units were built at the same time. The original construction was estimated to be some time in the last three decades of the eleventh century, as indicated by the dates of the majority of the coins as well as the style of the stone case, which matches well with other contemporaneous examples in the Jiangnan area such as the one from Ganlu Monastery pagoda of Zhengjiang in Jiangsu (dated 1078). For the excavation report, see Shanghai bowuguan, “Shanghai shi Songjiang xian Xingshengjiao sita.”
- ⁹⁴ During a visit to the offsite storage facility of the Shanghai Museum in June 2007, where the excavated artifacts from Xingshengjiao Monastery are now housed, I noticed that the reclining Buddha statue originally had a bright, gilded surface. While traces of gold colors were still visible on the right arm and parts of the feet, much of the body was now covered in a green patina. The hollow was located in the chest and upper abdomen area, and the rest of the statue was in solid metal. The two relic beads, about 5 mm in width each, were similar in shape and size to the seven other pieces found in the small silver case.
- ⁹⁵ A forensic analysis made by the Shanghai Museum has determined that the two teeth came from a type of Asian elephant called *Elephas maximus* (“Shanghai shi Songjiang xian Xingshengjiao sita,” 1127).

- ⁹⁶ The metal sculpture of a nirvana Buddha from Chongming Monastery (dated 1093), measuring 8 cm in length, might have been intended to hold one small piece of relic in the head, as indicated by an indentation near the top of the head. But because the excavation was not properly documented when the statue was discovered along with some twenty other items in 1970, it is no longer possible to determine what was once fastened onto the figure.
- ⁹⁷ The devotion to the Buddha's teeth had a long, complex history in South China. It began with the monk Faxian who brought the Buddha's tooth from the Western Regions to the Liu Song regime in 475 (the story is recorded in his biography in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 13). For a further discussion on the topic, see Tsukamoto, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyō shi ronko*, 103–128.
- ⁹⁸ During a renovation in 1974 the relic container, along with twenty-seven other objects, were discovered in a hidden chamber located inside the pagoda frame structure on the first floor. The find included a large stone case made in the shape of a coffin, with two processions of mourners depicted along the two longer sides; an undecorated steel case; three gilt silver cases, one containing sixteen pieces of burnt human finger and toe bones that are labeled as "True Body Relics of the Buddha"; four glass jars; one rounded silver box; and over a thousand relic beads. See Lianyungang shi bowuguan, "Lianyungang Haiqingsi Ayuwangta," 31–38.

Epilogue

- ¹ The event was reported in detail at the monastery's official website at www.zydfs.com.
- ² The central government has allocated over two million U.S. dollars for the renovation thus far. Much of the funds came after two visits by then Chinese President Jiang Zemin, respectively in 1992 and 2000.
- ³ The photograph was by Wu Jian, head of photography at the Dunhuang Academy. He revealed the secrets behind its production in an interview recorded at the temple's official website.
- ⁴ See, for example, the stele records commemorating the various repairs during the Ming and Qing periods (specifically in 1477, 1591, 1687, and 1724), as transcribed in Wu Zhengke, *Dafosi shi tan*, 64–67, 100–105.
- ⁵ This event was first recorded *in situ* in a stele record from 1427 (Xuande 2, Ming) titled "Stele Record of the Imperially Conferred Baojue Monastery" 敕賜寶覺寺碑記; and also on a bronze plaque that was placed inside the belly of the nirvana statue, dated 1477 (Chenghua 13, Ming). Both texts are transcribed in full in Wu Zhengke, *Dafosi shi tan*, respectively 56–58 and 64–65. See also the discussion in Ruth Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 78–83.
- ⁶ Unfortunately, at the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the Red Guards broke open the statue's belly and took out all the items deposited inside, many of which were subsequently lost. Wu Zhengke speculates that the excavated nirvana image might have once been stored there, after it was recovered in the eighteenth century (*Dafosi shi tan*, 34–35).
- ⁷ Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, 62. The practice was closely related to the making of "flesh icons" or relic receptacles like the bronze Buddha excavated from Xingshengjiao Monastery (both topics discussed in Chapter 4).
- ⁸ Jueming, "Zhangye Dafosi chanyuan foshi."
- ⁹ The emphasis on the historical specificity of vision in many ways builds on Michael Baxandall's influential notion of the "period eye," which finds its fullest articulation in his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Schwartz and Przyblyski, *Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, 7).
- ¹⁰ I am deriving this argument partly from Michel de Certeau's famous characterization of believing in the modern era as one equated with what can be seen, observed, or shown, which marks a reversal of an earlier model that was predicated on invisibility instead (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 186–187).

- ¹¹ Perhaps the most significant is the doctrine on the Three Bodies of the Buddha (Skt. *trikāya*). See the discussion in Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 95–113.
- ¹² Jueming, “Zhangye Dafosi chanyuan foshi.”
- ¹³ Zhangye lüyouju, “Zhangye shi lüyou fazhan guihua.”

CHARACTER LIST

- An Lushan 安祿山
Anan 阿難
Anguo si 安國寺
Anyang 安陽
Anyue 安岳
Anzhou 安州
Bai 白
Bai Fazu 白法祖
Bai Zairong 白再榮
Baixiang ta 白相塔
ban niepan 般涅槃
Baocha si 寶剎寺
Baochang 寶唱
Baoding 保定
Baoyi si 褒義寺
bei 碑
Beilin 碑林
bianxiang 變相
Binglingsi 炳靈寺
Caozhou 曹州
Chang'an 長安
Changnian si 常念寺
Changqing 長清
Changshou si 長壽寺
Chenghua 成化
chongge 重閣
Chongming si 崇明寺
chongxin 崇信
Chongzong 崇宗 (Western Xia)
Chufa 出法
Chuntuo 純陀
Ci xian 磁縣
Cishi 慈氏
Dafo si 大佛寺
Dali 大歷
dangyangzhu 當陽主
Daochuo 道綽
Daoxuan 道宣
Datong 大同
Datong 大統
Dayun jing 大雲經
Dayun si 大雲寺
Dazhusheng dong 大住聖洞
Deqing 德清
digong 地宮
ding 定
Dingzhou 定州
Dishitian 帝釋天
Dongyang wang 東陽王
Du Deng 杜登
Dunhuang 敦煌
Duobao fo 多寶佛
Ennin 圓仁
Fachang 法常
Fakai 法楷
Faliang 法良
Famen si 法門寺
Fangshan 房山
fanwang 梵王
Faqing 法慶
Faxian 法顯
Faxiang 法相
Fayuan si 法元寺
fen 分
Fen 汾
Foguang si 佛光寺
Foshan 佛山
Foshi si 佛時寺
Fufeng 扶風
Fufeng xian shike ji 扶風縣石刻集
Fusheng si 福勝寺
Ganlu si 甘露寺
gantong 感通
ganying 感應
ganzheng 感徵
Gaoliang 高涼

- Gaoping 高平
Gaozong 高宗 (Tang)
guanchashi 觀察使
Guanyin 觀音
Guazhou 瓜州
Guo Ziyi 郭子儀
Guyang 古陽
Haiqing si 海清寺
han 函
Hangzhou 杭州
Hengyue si 恆嶽寺
Heping 和平
Hexi 河西
Hongye si 弘業寺
Huaizhou 懷州
Huang Shugu 黃樹穀
Huangxing 皇興
hui 慧
Huichang 會昌
Huiguang si 慧光寺
Huijiao 慧皎
Huילang 惠朗
Huineng 慧能
Huisi 慧思
hunping 魂瓶
Jia Xingfu 賈膺福
Jianfu si 荐福寺
Jianping gong 建平公
Jiaye 迦葉
Jiaye rulai si 迦葉如來寺
jie 戒
jiedu guancha chuzhi shi 節度觀察處置使
jiedushi 節度使
Jingchuan 涇川
Jingfan 淨範
Jingguang 淨光
Jingming 景明
Jingtu dong 淨土洞
jinguan yinguo 金棺銀椁
Jingwan 靜琬
Jingye 淨業
Jingzang si 景藏寺
Jingzhi si 靜志寺
Jingzhong yuan 淨眾院
Jingzhou 涇州
Jinhua 金華
Jueming 覺明
Jun xian 浚縣
Juqu Jingsheng 沮渠京聲
Jurong 句容
Kaibao 開寶
Kaifeng 開封
Kaihua si 開化寺
Kaihuang 開皇
Kaiyuan 開元
Kaiyuan si 開元寺
kanzhu 龕主
Kongwangshan 孔望山
Kuche 庫車
Laozi 老子
Leiyin dong 雷音洞
Lezun 樂尊
Li Bao 李寶
Li Cao 李曹
Li Da 李達
Li Dabin 李大賓
Li Gan 李感
Li Jingqian 李敬千
Li Kerang 李克讓
Li Mingzhen 李明振
Li Tandu 李檀度
Li Wukui 李無虧
Li Yi 李義
Li Yongning 李永寧
liang 兩
Liangzhou 涼州
Lianyungang 連雲港
Liao 遼
Liaodi ta 料敵塔
Lingquan si 靈泉寺
Lingwu 靈悟
Lintong 臨潼
Linyi 臨猗
Longmen 龍門

Longxi 隴西	<i>shaifojie</i> 曬佛節
Longxing si 龍興寺	Shan Daokai 單道開
<i>louge</i> 樓閣	Shangzhuguo 上柱國
Luoyang 洛陽	<i>shangzuo</i> 上坐
<i>Luoyang qielan ji</i> 洛陽伽藍記	Shanjing 善靜
Maijishan 麥積山	Shazhou 沙州
Meng Shen 孟詵	<i>sheli</i> 舍利
Miaodao si 妙道寺	<i>Sheli ganying ji</i> 舍利感應記
Miaoyuan 妙遠	<i>sheli ge yi</i> 舍利閣邑
Mile 彌勒	Shengli 聖歷
Minzhong si 憫忠寺	Shensheng huangdi 神聖皇帝
<i>mofa</i> 末法	Shi Congzhen 史從真
Mogao ku 莫高窟	Shijia 釋迦
Moye furen 摩耶夫人	<i>Shijing</i> 詩經
Mozhou 莫州	Shili si 十力寺
Nannieshui 南涅水	<i>shouji</i> 授記
<i>niepan</i> 涅槃	<i>Shujing</i> 書經
<i>niepan bian</i> 涅槃變	Shun 舜
<i>niepanku</i> 涅槃窟	Sineng 思能
Ning 甯/寧	siwei 思惟
Ningjiagou 寧家溝	Sizhou 泗州
Peng Jinzhang 彭金章	Song 宋
<i>ping</i> 瓶/鉈	Song Heng 宋衡
Pingmo 平陌	Songjiang 松江
<i>pusa</i> 菩薩	Songyue 嵩嶽
Putai 普泰	<i>ta</i> 塔
Qi Tingxun 祁廷訓	Taiping 太平
Qi xian 淇縣	Taiping si 太平寺
<i>qian</i> 錢	<i>taiwei</i> 太尉
Qian Hongchu 錢弘俶	Taiyuan 太原
Qianfu si 千福寺	Taizong 太宗 (Northern Song)
Qigou guan 歧溝關	Taizu 太祖 (Northern Song)
Qingshan si 慶山寺	Tanjing 曇景
Renshou si 仁壽寺	Tanyan 曇延
Ruicheng 芮城	<i>tashen</i> 塔身
Ruiguang si 瑞光寺	Tian Qinzuo 田欽祚
Runzhou 潤州	Tianfeng ta 天峰塔
Sanshi fo 三世佛	<i>tiangong</i> 天宮
Sanshuiqu 三水區	Tianshou 天授
Sengmiao 僧妙	Tiantai 天台
Sengqie 僧伽	<i>tonggan</i> 通感
Sengyou 僧祐	Wanfo dong 萬佛洞

Wang Shao 王邵	Yao xian 耀縣
Weimie 嵬咩	Yi 伊
Weimo 維摩	Yin Tingjie 陰庭誠
Wendi 文帝 (Sui)	Yingzhou 瀛州
Wenshu 文殊	Yishi 猗氏
Wenzhou 溫州	<i>Yishi xianzhi</i> 猗氏縣志
Wofoyuan 臥佛院	Yitong 義通
Wu Zetian 武則天	Yixiting 伊西庭
Wu Zhao 武曌	Yiyan 義演
Wu Zhou 武周	Yong'an 永安
Wuping 武平	Yong'an si 永安寺
Wutaishan 五臺山	Yongping 永平
Wutong puta 五通菩薩	Yongtai 永泰
Wuzong 武宗 (Tang)	Yongxi 雍熙
Xi'an 西安	Youzhou 幽州
<i>xiangfa</i> 像法	Yuanfeng 元豐
Xiangning xian 鄉寧縣	Yuanhao 元浩
Xiangtangshan 響堂山	Yuanhe 元和
Xiantong 咸通	Yueguang tianzi 月光天子
Xiao Mo 蕭默	Yungang 雲崗
Xiaogu fu xiaowei 校穀府校尉	Yunju si 雲居寺
Xiaowendi 孝文帝 (Northern Wei)	Zaichu 載初
Xing'an 興安	<i>zang</i> 葬
Xingshengjiao si 興聖教寺	Zanning 贊寧
Xinmi 新密	Zhang Huaishen 張懷深
Xinxing 信行	Zhang Yichao 張義潮
Xixia 西夏	Zhangye 張掖
Xuande 宣德	Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤
Xuanhua 宣化	Zhaoguo 昭果
Xuanzang 玄奘	Zhengding 正定
Xuanzhou 玄州	<i>zhengfa</i> 正法
Xuanzong 宣宗 (Tang)	<i>zhenshen sheli</i> 真身舍利
Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義	Zhenxiang yuan 真相院
Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館	Zhidao 至道
Yan Chao 閻朝	Zhikuan 志寬
Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿	Zhimeng 智猛
Yang Shou 楊綬	Zhiqian 支謙
Yang Xiaofei 楊小妃	Zhirong 至融
Yang Xiuming 楊休明	Zhongzong 中宗 (Tang)
Yang Zhilie 楊志烈	Zhou Ding 周鼎
Yanxing 延興	Zuo yulingwei 左玉玲衛
Yao 堯	

INDEX

Note: Page numbers in *italics* indicate figures and maps; those with a *t* indicate tables.

- Abe, Stanley, 293n4
abhaya-dāna. See “no-fear” gesture
abbiseka, 42–44, 65, 67
 Ajantā Cave #26, 17, 17
 allegory, 4, 12, 269, 293n1
 Amarāvati, Great Stūpa at, 14, 16
 Amitābha, 48, 160–62, 162, 178, 200, 307n31, 308n43; in Dazhusheng Cave, 48; Fifty Bodhisattvas and, 65, 165–66, 168, 178; on Hamamatsu stele, 110, 303n42; on Kaihuang pillar, 79; in Mogao Cave #220, 170, 172
 Amitābha Pure Land: at Kaihua Monastery, 244, 244; in Mogao Cave #148, 184, 192, 196, 197, 199; in Mogao Cave #220, 170, 172; in Mogao Cave #331, 160, 162
 Amituo fo. See Amitābha
 Amoghapaśa, 184, 192, 198, 199
 An Lushan rebellion, 182, 312n8
 Anan. See Ānanda
 Ānanda, 91t, 92, 256, 301n19; on Chicago stele, 51–53, 52; on Kongwangshan cliff, 32
 Andrews, Lew, 303n36
 aniconic symbols, 14, 294n25
 Anurddha, 95, 196
 Anyi stele (now lost), 110
 Arnheim, Rudolf, 305n5
 Aśoka, King, 132, 144–45, 304n60; gift of earth to the Buddha by, 67
 Aśoka stūpa, 260, 295n8
 Avalokiteśvara, 160, 192, 200, 308n39; on Kaihuang pillar, 79; Sengqi and, 253; Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed, 184, 192, 197–98, 198, 199
 Bai Fazu, 89t, 93
 Baichan Monastery, 118, 122
ban niepan. See parinirvāṇa
Ban niheng jing, 57, 88. See also *Nirvana Sutra*
 Baochang, 89t, 94, 95
Baoyu jing. See *Treasure Rain Scripture*
 Baxandall, Michael, 318n9
 Beilin Museum: Huangxing altar of, 42–43, 44, 61; Yongping altar of, 45–46, 46, 67, 297n34
 Benjamin, Walter, 4, 93n1
 Bhaisajyaguru. See Medicine Buddha
 Bhaja Cave #12, 144, 144–45
 Binglingsi Caves, 47
Biographies of Eminent Monks, 73–74, 125–27, 252–57, 316n69, 316n74
 Bodhisattva of Five Channels, 165. See also Amitābha and Fifty Bodhisattvas
 Brahmā, 51, 228, 228–29, 293n11, 314n48
 Brown, Robert, 300n5, 303n40
 Buddha of Accumulated Fragrance, 79
 Buddhahadra, 17
Buddhacarita, 89t, 91t
 Buddhas of Three Ages, 41, 48, 297n36; on Chicago stele, 20, 26–27, 49, 51, 60–61; in Mogao Cave #332, 140, 164, 166, 176; on Shanxi stele, 103, 104, 108, 109, 136; *Sutra of Buddhas’ Names* and, 59
caitya, 143–45. See also stūpas
cakravartin rāja. See wheel-turning ruler
Candragarbha Sutra, 70
 cave temples, 38–42, 39–43, 46–49, 47, 48, 139–43; stūpas and, 153–54; symbolism of, 176; uses of, 180–81, 189, 199–201. See also Mogao Caves
 central pillar caves, 40–43, 114, 145, 176; design of, 146–51, 155, 159–64, 178
 Certeau, Michel de, 318n10
 Chandra, Lokesh, 294n15
Chang Ahan jing. See *Dirghāgama*
 Changnian Monastery, 120. See also Renshou Monastery

- Changshou Monastery of Huaizhou, 133–34
 Chen, Jinhua, 120, 302n34
 Chen, Wanli, 307n26
 Chen, Yinke, 304n53
 Chicago Art Institute Stele (dated 551), 19–20, 25–28, 26, 49–62, 50, 52, 54, 75–80, 102, 241; Buddhas of Three Ages on, 20, 26–27, 49, 51, 60–61; inscriptions on, 49–51, 50, 75, 77–78, 273–74; main preaching assemblage on, 51–53, 52; nirvana Buddha on, 26–27, 53–62, 54
chongge, 125–27
 Chongming Monastery, 311n5, 312n7, 318n96
 Chongzong, Western Xia Emperor, 266
 Chufa, 132
 Chuntuo. *See* Cunda
 Cintāmanicakra, 184, 192, 198, 199
 circumambulation, 147–48, 148, 151, 159, 163, 176
Cishi. *See* Maitreya
 Coaldrake, William, 305n5
 coffin of Śākyamuni, 20, 25–27, 49, 53–57, 54, 57, 84, 92, 298n43, 302n26; in *Nirvana Sutra*, 57–59, 91t, 98t; Queen Maya and, 62, 94–98, 105–17, 106, 111–17, 192. *See also* under Śākyamuni
 coffin-shaped reliquaries, 131, 132, 218–19, 227, 230–33, 232, 233, 285, 318n98
 Collins, Steven, 294n17
Commentary on the Great Cloud Scripture, 133, 177, 179, 300n3, 308n46
Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, 186
 cremation, as burial practice, 250–51. *See also* under Śākyamuni
 Cunda, plea of, 91t, 103, 104, 104–5, 154–55, 303n38

Da ban niepan jing, 89t, 91t. *See also* *Nirvana Sutra*
Da ban niepan jing boufen, 88, 89t, 91t, 93, 97, 303n47, 305n72. *See also* *Nirvana Sutra*
Da fangdeng daji jing. *See* *Mahāsāmnipāta Sūtra*
 Dafo Monastery of Zhangye, 264, 265–70
 Dali stele, of Mogao Cave #148, 182–87, 189, 190, 192, 199, 282–83
 Daochuo, 160, 299n61
 Daoism, 5, 193, 297n23, 312n9; early sects of, 33, 38. *See also* Laozi
 Daoxuan, 73, 89t, 94, 95, 120, 125, 129, 165–66, 252, 256, 312n20
Dayun jing. *See* *Great Cloud Scripture*
 Dayun Monastery, countrywide establishment of, 83, 87, 133–34, 173
 Dayun Monastery of Jingzhou, 131, 131–33, 132
 Dayun Monastery of Yishi, 83–87, 118–19, 120, 123, 125, 134–36
 Dazhusheng Cave, 48, 59–60, 61
 death postures, 252–57, 254
 Deer Park, first lecture at, 14, 15, 16, 42, 170. *See also* under Śākyamuni
Devatā Sūtra, 195–96; murals of, 184, 192, 195–96, 199
 Dharma: Correct, 70, 180; End of, 27–28, 68–71, 73, 74, 76, 123; Imitation, 70
 Dharma Body, 144–45, 319n11
 Dharmakṣema, 89t, 93
digong, 206. *See also* pagoda crypts; relic deposits
ding. *See* *samadhi*
 Ding County stone case, 217, 218
 Ding ware containers, 234, 246, 248, 287, 290. *See also* Jingzhong Cloister
 Dingzhou (prefecture), 203, 212, 220, 224–26, 238. *See also* Jingzhong Cloister; Jingzhi Monastery
 Dīpaṃkara, 43, 61, 62, 65, 79, 174, 175
Dirghāgama, 69, 89t, 91t, 92–93, 107
 Du Deng, 118–23
 Dunhuang, 141, 182, 186–87, 200–201; auspicious omens in, 179–80; Tibetan occupation of, 139, 141, 182, 186–87, 200–201. *See also* Mogao Caves
 Duobao fo. *See* Prabhūtaratna

 Ebert, Jorinde, 10, 294n25
 Ebrey, Patricia, 316n73
 enlightenment, 13, 42, 64, 69, 73–74, 154, 252, 257, 259

 Fachang, 256
 Fakai, 126–29
 Famen Monastery of Fufeng, 134, 218, 220–22, 305n72, 315n56; relic of, 134, 313n34, 317n91

- Fangshan stone case, 217, 218, 313n25
 Fanhe Buddha, at Mogao Cave #332, 164–65, 165, 167
 Fanwang. *See* Brahmā
 Faure, Bernard, 250
 Faxiang, 256
 Fayuan Monastery, 126–27
Fayuan zbulin, 89t, 91t
 flesh icons, 253, 318n7
Fo ban niheng jing, 89t, 91t. *See also* *Nirvana Sutra*
Fo shuo fangdeng ban niheng jing, 89t, 91t
Fo suo xing zang. *See* *Buddhacarita*
Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing. *See* *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhārani Sūtra*
 Foguang Monastery, Wutaishan, 230, 231
 Forte, Antonino, 177, 300n3
 Freer Gallery of Art: Gandhāran relief panels of, 14, 15, 33; Xiangtangshan Cave sculptures of, 62, 63, 161, 163
 Future Buddha. *See* Maitreya

 Gandhāran sculptures, 14, 15, 33–36, 43
 Ganlu Monastery, 208, 312n14, 314n39, 317n93
ganying. *See* sympathetic resonance
 Gaozong, Tang Emperor, 134, 307n37
 Gell, Alfred, 293n3
Genben shuo yiqie youbu bi-naiye zashi. *See* *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya kṣudrakavastu*
 Gilbert, Creighton, 294n14
Golden Light Sutra, 72–73
 Gong Weizhang, 310n94, 311n96
 Great Buddha Monastery of Zhangye, 264, 265–70
Great Cloud Scripture, 83, 133, 136, 173–75, 178; *Commentaries on*, 113, 133, 177, 179, 300n3, 308n46
Great Sutra on Maitreya Becoming Buddha, 69
Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing. *See* *Sutra on Visualizing Maitreya Bodhisattva in Tusita Heaven*
 Guanyin. *See* Avalokiteśvara
 Guazhou, 182

 Guo Ziyi, 186
 Guyang Cave inscriptions (Longmen), 71–75

 Haar, Barend J. ter, 312n9
 hagiographical sources. *See* *Biographies of Eminent Monks*
 Haiqing Monastery, 260–61, 261, 262
 Hamamatsu Art Museum stele (dated 734), 110, 111, 110–111, 303n42
 heavenly mandate, 133, 174, 179–81, 308n57
 Henan Museum pillar. *See* Kaihuang pillar
 Hengyu Monastery, 312n18
 Hibiya Takeo, 110
 Hinayana canon, Buddha's nirvana in, 92–95
 Hongye Monastery, 313n35
 Hopkirk, Peter, 306n17
 Huangxing altar. *See* Beilin Museum
 Huichang persecution, 219, 221
 Huijiao, 252, 316n69
 Huilang, 236, 238
 Huisi, 70–71, 73–74, 76
hunping, 36, 37

 Idemitsu Museum of Art, 311n3
 Indra, 304n52; in Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt, 228–29, 229, 314n48; theft of relics by, 97, 196
 inspector general, 186, 187, 188, 310n75

jātakas, 26, 33–34, 35, 43–44, 300n5, 310n88
Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu, 129, 165
 Jia Xingfu, 134
 Jianfu Monastery, 253
 Jiaye. *See* Mahākāśyapa
jiedushi. *See* inspector general
 Jingchuan pagoda crypt, 131, 132, 131–33
 Jingguang, 174–75
Jinglü yixiang, 89t, 91t, 94
 Jingtu Cave (Longmen), 166
jinguan yinguo. *See* coffin-shaped reliquaries
 Jingye, 125–28
 Jingzang Monastery, 125–27, 129

- Jingzhi Monastery: donors of, 235–38; history of, 203, 205, 225–26, 238; relic worship at, 219–23. *See also* Dingzhou
- Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt, 211t, 266, 284–87; design of, 226–30, 226–30; epitaph from, 212, 215–17, 216, 219–20, 225–26, 284–85; foundation wall of, 218, 219, 222–25, 235, 285–86; Gilt Bronze Case C from, 212–13, 214, 234, 284; glass jars from, 212, 213, 215, 223, 234; relics from, 22, 205–6, 209–23, 245, 250, 257; renaming of, 222; silver incense burner from, 227, 236, 236–38, 286; silver miniature pagoda from, 227, 236–38, 237, 286, 315n56; Stone Case A from, 202, 210, 212, 215–17, 217, 223, 227–34, 284–85; Stone Case B from, 212, 213, 217, 284; stone coffins, 232, 233, 285; wall murals of, 210, 226–30, 228, 229, 231, 244–45, 286. *See also* True Body Relics
- Jingzhong Cloister: history of, 205, 246–49; Pure Land devotional association at, 248–49; record on the establishment of, 247–49, 249, 288–89. *See also* Dingzhou
- Jingzhong Cloister pagoda crypt, 22, 206–7, 238–50, 239–42, 245–48, 266, 288–90; design of, 239, 257, 266; Ding ware containers from, 246, 248, 290; murals of, 239–45, 240–42; nirvana image in, 240, 240–46, 251, 257–58, 261–63; relics in, 245–47, 257; stone case from, 245–47, 247, 251, 289; stone pagoda from, 245, 246, 289
- Jnanabhadra, 88, 89t, 97
- Jueming, Master, 266, 267, 269
- Juqu Jingsheng, 69
- Kaihua Monastery, 244
- Kaihuang pillar, 8, 53–54, 55, 78–81; iconographic motifs on, 79; nirvana image on, 53, 58, 80, 80–81
- Kaiyuan Monastery in Dingzhou, 235, 314n44
- Kāśyapa Tathāgata Monastery, 266
- Khitans. *See* Liao regime
- Kizil Caves, 35, 53, 148–49, 306n19
- Kizil Cave #38, 149–51, 163–64, 167, 170, 178
- Kongwangshan cliff-side carvings, 30–38, 31, 32, 35, 41
- Kumārajīva, 69
- Kuqa region, 37, 148, 164, 293n7, 307n37
- Kuśinagara, 13, 17, 57, 90, 91t, 92, 97, 99, 104, 154, 269, 295n26
- Laozi, 31, 33, 38, 296n13
- Le Coq, Albert von, 306n17
- Leiyin Cave, stone case from, 217, 217–18, 313n25
- Lezun, 156
- Li Bao, 183, 309n74
- Li Cao, 183, 282n4
- Li clan of Longxi, 21, 111, 139–43, 156–58, 164, 178–81, 181–86, 190, 200–201, 309n74
- Li Da, 157, 181, 183, 282n4
- Li Dabin (Li Taibin), 182–83, 185, 200–201, 309n71, 309n74
- Li Gan, 157, 158, 162, 183
- Li Jingqian, 248
- Li Kerang, 156–58, 183
- Li Mingzhen, 190
- Li Tandu, 85
- Li Wukui, 179
- Li Yongning, 158, 278, 282, 307n26, 309n71
- Liangzhou, 186, 188
- Lianyungang, Jiangsu. *See* Kongwangshan cliff-side carvings
- Liao regime, 203, 223–24, 238, 249
- life episodes of Śākyamuni, 14, 33, 40, 43–46, 44–46, 53, 63–64, 65–66, 67, 68, 90–92, 91t, 149, 261; on Chinese stone implements, 42–46, 44–46, 63–64, 65–66, 67, 68; from the Great Stupa at Amarāvati, 16; from the Freer Gallery Gandhāran relief panels, 14–15, 15; at Yungang Caves, 38–42, 42–43. *See also* Śākyamuni
- Lingquan Monastery (Anyang), 48. *See also* Dazhusheng Cave
- Lingwu, Master, 185, 189, 200–201
- lokapāla*, 167, 168, 308n43
- Longmen Caves, 46–47, 71–75, 166, 307n31
- Lopez, Donald S., Jr., 293n10
- Lotus Sutra*, 72–74, 76; Guyang Cave inscriptions and, 74; murals of, 172; Twin Buddhas motif in, 44, 63, 73

- Ma De, 183, 186–88
Madhyaāgama, 69
 Mahākāśyapa, 58, 91t, 195, 301n19; on Chicago stele, 51–53, 52; conferring of Śākyamuni's robes to Maitreya by, 195; conversion of, 41; depicted at nirvana moment, 105, 241, 302n32; homage to Śākyamuni by, 57–58, 241; Queen Māyā and, 94–98, 101; on Shanxi stele, 2, 101, 105, 107
Mahāmāyā Sūtra, 70, 89t, 91t, 93–96, 302n23
Mahāmegha Sūtra. See *Great Cloud Scripture*
Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra. See *Nirvana Sutra*
Mahāsammipāta Sūtra, 70
 Mahasāttva, Prince, 33–34, 35
 Mahayana canon, 92–94, 140; Pure Land doctrine in, 47, 160–62; Queen Māyā and, 95–96
 Maijishan, Stele No. 10 in Cave #133, 61–64, 62, 65, 75, 175
 Maijishan Cave #127, 99–100, 100
 Maijishan Cave #135, 99
 Maitreya: on Chicago stele, 25–28, 26, 51, 54, 62, 76–77; at Dayun Monastery of Yishi, 83, 86, 102, 118–19, 123–25, 135–36; as Future Buddha, 25, 69, 73, 121–23, 170, 194–95; at Jingzhi Monastery, 212t, 213, 220; on Kaihuang pillar, 78–79, 79; life of, 64, 65–66, 67, 68, 194; on Miho Museum altar, 67, 68; in Mogao Cave #148, 184, 192, 194, 194–95, 199; in Mogao Cave #332, 167–68, 176–77; on Nelson-Atkins stele, 64–65; Śākyamuni and, 25–28, 46, 8, 53, 63–75, 65–68, 78–79, 84, 121–22, 163; on Shanxi stele, 108, 109, 118–24, 134–36, 303n40; sixth-century beliefs about, 69–75; three assemblies at Dragon Trees with, 25, 69, 71–74; in Tuṣita Heaven, 25, 51, 53, 67, 69, 121–22, 149, 151, 160, 163, 167–68, 170, 173, 184, 304n52; and the Wu Zetian regime, 123–24, 177; on Yongping altar, 45–46, 46, 67
 Makita Tairyō, 206
 Mañjuśrī, 52, 182, 192, 197
 Mañjuśrī Society of Kaiyuan Monastery, 235
 Māra, 90, 91t, 92, 302n23
 Māyā. See Queen Māyā
 Medicine Buddha, 160, 164, 165, 184, 192, 196, 199
 Meng Shen, 131–33
 methodology, 10–12
 Miaoyuan, 258–59, 259. See also Xingshengjiao Monastery
 Miho Museum stone altar, 65–69, 68
 Mile. See Maitreya
Mile da chengfo jing. See *Great Sutra on Maitreya Becoming Buddha*
Mile xiasheng chengfo jing. See *Sutra on the Descent of Maitreya*
 Minzhong Monastery, 313n35
 Miran Temple #3, 35–36, 36
 Miyaji Akira, 10, 149
 Mizuno Seiichi, 110, 303n40
mofa. See Dharma, End of
 Mogao Caves: founding of, 156; map of, 139
 Mogao Cave #45, 151, 152, 155, 200
 Mogao Cave #57, 161
 Mogao Cave #96, 176
 Mogao Cave #148, 85, 138, 146, 140–43, 181–86, 190, 191, 193–94, 197–98, 241; architectural design of, 146, 152–55, 153; Avalokiteśvara in, 196–98, 198; Dali stele of, 182–87, 190, 192, 199, 282–83; Devatā mural in, 184, 192, 195–96, 199; Maitreya mural in, 184, 192, 194, 194–95, 199; nirvana image in, 115–17, 116–17, 138, 153, 155, 199, 200, 229, 303n47, 310n94; *Paying Back Kindness Sutra* mural in, 184, 192–94, 193, 199; Pure Land scenes in, 184, 192, 196, 197, 199; “True School” pedagogy and, 189–200, 191–94; Zhou Ding's visit to, 186–89
 Mogao Cave #158, 146, 152–53
 Mogao Cave #217, 173
 Mogao Cave #220, 170, 172
 Mogao Cave #280, 98–99, 99
 Mogao Cave #321, 168–69, 171, 174, 175, 178
 Mogao Cave #329, 168, 170
 Mogao Cave #331, 158, 162
 Mogao Cave #332, 21, 56, 85, 140–44, 147–48, 153, 178–81, 200–201; architectural design of, 147–48, 148, 162–64, 165; Buddhas of Three Ages in, 164, 166; murals on east wall, 165–69, 176–78; nirvana images in, 56, 57, 111–15, 112–14, 140, 151, 155, 176, 305n2; pictorial program of, 164–69, 165–71; Shengli stele in, 155–58, 179–80, 278–81; Vimalakīrti mural in, 165, 177–78

- Mogao Cave #333, 158
 Mogao Cave #427, 146–47, 147
Mohemoye jing. See *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*
 monastic sanctification, 207, 250–57, 254
 Moonlight, Heavenly Prince, 172–75, 177, 179, 180
 Moonlight Bodhisattva, 70–71
 mourners of Buddha's nirvana, 3, 7, 13, 16, 26–27, 32, 34, 55–57, 145, 150, 164, 153–55, 205, 227, 244, 269
 Moye furen. See Queen Māyā
 Mozhou, 224
mudrā, 168–69; wheel-turning, 167–74, 170, 177
Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya kṣudrakavastu, 88, 89t, 91t
 mummification, 253, 257, 317n92
 Mus, Paul, 294n25, 306n8
- Nannieshui (Shanxi) stone blocks, 300n80
 Narendrayāsa, 70
 Nelson-Atkins Museum stele, 64–65, 66, 75, 76
niepan. See nirvana
niepan bian, 8, 82, 83, 87; textual sources of, 87–97, 89t, 91t, 117–18
Niepan jing. See *Nirvana Sutra*
niepanku, 139, 145. See also nirvana caves
 Ning clan, 25, 27, 75, 295n5
 nirvana, 9–10, 12–13, 123, 227, 236–37, 294n17, 299n60
 nirvana of Buddha, 12–18, 28, 76, 90, 91t, 92, 95–97; sites related to, 27, 29
 nirvana caves, 21, 138–40, 139–56, 144; design of, 141–42, 145–51, 146–52, 155, 159–64, 181–82; development of, 152–55
 nirvana image(s), 4–12, 266–70; Ajantā Cave #26, 16–17, 17; in central pillar caves, 145–51, 146–52; on Chicago stele, 26–27, 53–62, 54; on Gandhāran relief panels, 15; geographic sites of, 19, 20, 29; at Great Buddha Monastery of Zhangye, 264, 265–66; on Hamamatsu stele, 110–11, 111; in Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt, 204–6, 227; at Jingzhong Cloister pagoda crypt, 240, 240–46, 251, 259, 261–63; on Kaihuang pillar, 53, 55, 58, 79, 80, 80–81; in Kizil Caves, 148–49, 149; at Kongwangshan, 30–38, 31, 32, 35, 41; on Maijishan Cave #133 Stele No. 10, 64, 65; modern examples of, 269; in Mogao Cave #148, 115–17, 116–17, 138, 153, 155, 199, 200, 229, 303n47; in Mogao Cave #332, 56, 57, 111–15, 112–14, 140, 151, 155, 176, 305n2; musicians in, 241–43, 242; narrative structure of, 84, 84–85, 97–98, 98t; on Nelson stele, 64–65, 66; on Osaka Municipal Museum of Art stone block, 55–56, 56, 58, 300n80; on Qingshan Monastery stone case, 243; relic worship and, 124–36, 204–7, 258, 258–63, 260, 262; on Shanxi Museum stele, 2, 82, 82–87, 100–108, 106, 101–9, 134–37; textual sources for, 85–97, 89t, 91t; in Yungang Caves, 39, 47
 Nirvana school, 88
Nirvana Sutra, 57–58, 87–93; Chinese translations of, 87–88, 89t, 301n12, 301n13; *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and, 93–96; master narrative of, 90
 Nishiwaki Tsuneki, 250
 “no-fear” gesture, 14, 39, 51, 67, 68
 Nouette, Charles, 114
- omens, 178–81. See also prophecy
 Osaka Municipal Museum of Art stone block, 55–56, 56, 58, 300n80
- pagoda, construction of, 91t. See also *stūpas*; relics
 pagoda crypts, 226, 226–30, 230, 250, 253, 259, 260, 312n11. See also *specific places*, e.g., Jingzhi Monastery
 Panofsky, Erwin, 294n14
 pantheon, Buddhist, 155
 parinirvāṇa, 4, 9–10, 13. See also nirvana
Paying Back Kindness Sutra mural, 192–94, 193, 199
 Pelliot, Paul, 114, 295n5
 pendant pose, 108, 167–68, 303n40
 Peng Jinzhang, 197
 Pensive Bodhisattva, 52, 79
 Prabhūtaratna, 44, 63, 73, 79
pradakṣiṇā. See circumambulation
pralambapāda āsana. See pendant pose
 prophecy: of Buddhahood, 43, 61–62, 62, 63; of Buddhism's decline, 27, 70, 73–74, 96, 123; of rulership, 133, 172–79
 Pure Land doctrine, 47, 160–62, 199–200

Pure Land paintings, 160, 307n33; at Kaihua Monastery, 244, 244; in Mogao Cave #45, 200; in Mogao Cave #148, 196, 197, 199; in Mogao Cave #331, 160; Mogao Cave #332, 165, 165–67, 168.
See also Amitābha Pure Land

Pusa cong doushutian jiang shenmu tai shuo guangpu jing, 89t, 91t

Putai Cave (Longmen), 46–47

Qi Tingxun, 223–25, 235, 314n41

Qigou Gate, 204, 249

Qingshan Monastery pagoda crypt, 242, 243–44, 303n42

Queen Māyā, 15, 42–43, 90, 91t, 94–98, 241, 301n19, 302n23; on Hamamatsu stele, 110–11, 111, 303n42; in Jingzhong Cloister pagoda crypt, 241, 242, 315n62; Mahākāśyapa and, 94–98, 101; in Mogao Cave #148, 116, 192, 194; in Mogao Cave #280, 99; in Mogao Cave #332, 113–14, 114–15; on Shanxi stele, 103–4, 106–7, 106–7; in Xiangtangshan Cave #5, 48, 98. *See also* Śākyamuni, rising from golden coffin

Queen Mother of the West, 31, 33, 38, 296n13

Ranguang fo. *See* Dipamkara

Ratnamegha Sutra. *See* *Treasure Rain Scripture*

reclining Buddha. *See* nirvana image(s)

relics: battle over, 91t, 99–100, 100, 112, 302n31; coffin-shaped containers for, 132, 218–19, 227; division of, 91t, 99–100, 100, 103, 108, 109, 117, 119, 124, 131, 149, 304n60; enshrinement of, 103, 108, 109, 112, 117; interception of, 126; redistribution campaigns of under Sui Wendi, 125–30, 132, 133, 212, 215; teeth, 259–60, 261, 318n97; theft of, 91t, 97, 117, 195–96, 310n94. *See also* Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt; True Body Relics

relic deposits, 22, 126–27, 203–9, 211t, 214–15, 218, 260, 260–63, 312n11; architectural design of, 206–8; nirvana images in, 204–6, 210, 227, 240, 240–41, 243, 246, 247, 251, 258, 259–63, 262; power of exemplar in, 257–63, 258–62; purposes of, 206–9. *See also* pagoda crypts

Relic Pavilion Society, 235. *See also* Jingzhi Monastery

Relic Society of Jingzhi Monastery, 235. *See also* Jingzhi Monastery

relic worship: under Empress Wu, 128–34, 204, 218; at Famen Monastery, 220–22; at Jingzhi Monastery, 21–22, 203–9, 212, 220–23, 235; of monks, 206, 250–63, 254, 260; nirvana image and, 124–36, 204–7, 258, 258–63, 260, 262; on Shanxi stele, 87, 108, 109, 119; *stūpa* and *caitya* for, 143–44

Renshou Monastery, 119–20, 125, 134–36. *See also* Dayun Monastery of Yishi

Rhie, Marylin, 32

Rutong Bodhisattva, 43. *See also* Dipamkara; prophecy, of Buddhahood

Sacred Divine Imperial Majesty, 83, 136. *See also* Wu Zetian

saddharma. *See* Dharma, Correct

saddharma-pratirūpaka. *See* Dharma, Imitation

saddharma-vipralopa. *See* Dharma, End of

Said, Edward, 293n10

Śākyamuni: birth of, 15, 42–43; cremation of, 84, 91t, 92, 99, 104, 106, 107, 110, 111, 112, 117, 149; departure from princely life of, 42, 43; enlightenment of, 14–16, 42, 170; first lecture of, 14, 15–16, 42, 170; funerary procession of, 91t, 92, 97, 103, 106, 107, 112, 302n23; last lecture of, 91t, 92, 98t, 99, 103–4, 112, 115, 119, 154, 200; Mahākāśyapa's conversion by, 41; Maitreya and, 25–28, 46, 48, 53, 63–75, 65–68, 78–79, 84, 121–22, 163; nirvana of, 12–18; Prabhūtaratna and, 44; preaching at Vulture Peak, 166–67, 168; rising from golden coffin, 91t, 94–95, 97, 106, 107, 110, 111, 112, 114, 116, 192, 241. *See also* coffin of Śākyamuni; life episodes of Śākyamuni; nirvana of Buddha

samadhi, 71, 255–56

Samanthabhadra, 79, 192, 197

samsāra, 12

Sanshuiqu of Foshan, Guangdong, 269

Schmid, Neil, 311n100

“Scripture of Son and Mother Meeting upon the Buddha's Nirvana,” 95

Sengmiao, 120

- Sengqie, 253–55, 254
 Sengyou, 94, 96
 Seven Buddhas of the Past, 44. *See also* Buddhas of Three Ages
 Shanjing, 256
 Shanxi Museum Stele (dated 562), 59, 60
 Shanxi Museum Stele (dated 691), 2, 3, 8, 21, 78, 82, 83–87, 101–4, 118–19, 134–36; condition of, 100–102; inside Dayun Monastery of Yishi, 102, 118–20, 134–36; donor records on, 8, 101, 103, 101–2, 118–23, 275–77; Maitreya imagery on, 110, 108, 109, 118–24, 303n40; pictorial nirvana narrative on, 2, 82, 82–87, 100–108, 106, 101–9, 134–37
 Shazhou. *See* Dunhuang
 Shen Hsueh-man, 312n12, 312n13
 Shengli stele, from Mogao Cave #332, 155–58, 179–80, 278–81
 Shenguang, 177
 Shi Chongzhen, 248
 Shijia. *See* Śākyamuni
Shijia pu, 89t, 91t, 94, 96–97
Shijia shi pu, 89t, 91t, 94
 Siddhārtha, Prince. *See* Śākyamuni
 Silk Road, 35, 186
 Sineng, 265
 Siwei. *See* Pensive Bodhisattva
 Sofukawa Hiroshi, 166
 Song Heng, 187
 Spiro, Audrey, 43
 “Stele of the Multi-Storied Maitreya Pavilion of Dayun Monastery,” 102, 118–23, 275–77
 Strong, John, 304n60
stūpas, 14, 18, 41, 79, 143–45, 306n8; at Amarāvati, 14, 16; in *caitya*, 144, 144–45; at Kuśinagara, 16–17, 295n26; miniature, 128, 295n8; nirvana caves and, 64, 143–45, 147, 153–54, 157–58; in nirvana images, 91t, 97–98, 98; symbolism of, 14–16, 143, 145
 Su Bai, 278, 306n19, 307n26, 312n12
 Subhadras, 90, 91t, 92, 302n23
 Sumedha, 62. *See also* Dipamkara
 Sumeru, Mount, 304n52
 Sumeru throne, 240, 243, 246
 Sun Xiushen, 183
Sutra of Buddhas’ Names, 59–60
Sutra on Deva’s Inquiries, 194, 195
Sutra on the Descent of Maitreya, 69
Sutra on Visualizing Maitreya Bodhisattva in Tusita Heaven, 69
 sympathetic resonance, 127–30, 135, 225, 312n18

ta, 127, 147, 304n54. *See also* *stūpas*
 Taiping sect, 33, 38
 Taizong, Northern Song Emperor, 225, 235, 238, 249
 Taizu, Northern Song Emperor, 224–25, 235
 Tanjing, 70, 94. *See also* *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*
 Tanyan, 120
 teeth relics, 259–60, 261, 318n97
 textual sources on Buddha’s nirvana, 87–98, 89t, 91t, 98t
 Thousand Buddhas motif, 48, 160, 184
 Three Ages. *See* Buddhas of Three Ages
 Three Treasures, 18, 129
 Tian Qinzuo, 224
tiangong, 206
Tianqingwen jing. *See* *Sutra on Deva’s Inquiries*
 Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, 139, 141, 182, 186–87, 200–201
 Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, 95, 106, 107, 122–23, 302n23, 303n37, 304n52. *See also* Queen Māyā
Treasure Rain Scripture, 172–75, 177–79, 305n65; murals of, 169–70, 171, 174, 175, 176
 True Body Relics, 209–23, 210, 231, 245, 250, 257, 317n91, 318n98; definition of, 209–10; deposits of, 211t; record concerning reburial at Jingzhi Monastery of, 219–22, 225–26, 284–85; for sanctified monks, 257; Stone Case A and, 231–32. *See also* Jingzhi Monastery pagoda crypt; relics
 “True School” pedagogy, 190–200, 191–98
 Tsukamoto Zenryū, 69, 307n31
 Tusita Heaven, 25, 51, 53, 67, 69, 121–22, 149, 149–51, 160, 163, 167–68, 170, 173, 184, 304n52. *See also* Maitreya
 Twin Buddhas motif, 42, 44

- Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhārāṇī Sūtra*, 170–72, 173, 308n52
 utopianism, 294n17, 299n60
- Vairocana Buddha, 164, 165
 Vaiśālī, 90, 91t, 92
 Vaiśravaṇa, 230, 231
 Varṣākāras, 90
 Vignato, Giuseppe, 306n19
 Vimalakīrti, 52, 79, 164, 165, 177–78, 309n62
- Waldschmidt, Ernst, 90
 Wanfo Cave (Longmen), 166
 Wang, Eugene Y., 293n4, 297n35, 307n34
 Wang, Huimin, 308n51
 Wang, Mang, 309n64
 Wang, Rui, 296n23
 Wang, Zhongmin, 307n26
 Weimo. *See* Vimalakīrti
 Welbon, Richard, 294n19
 Wendi, Sui Emperor, 125–30, 134, 212, 215, 304n53
 Wenshu. *See* Mañjuśrī
 Western Thousand Buddhas Cave #8, 150, 152
 wheel-turning ruler, 84, 121–24, 133, 135, 175, 177–80; *mudrā* of, 167–76, 168–173, 177
- Wong, Dorothy, 299n60
 Wu Zetian, Empress, 21, 83–85, 120, 128, 130–31, 135–36, 141, 164, 172, 201; conquest of Kuqa by, 164, 307n37; Maitreya and, 122–23, 177, 179–80; Mogao Cave #332 and, 141, 156, 169, 179–81; prophecies about, 169, 172–78, 179–80; relic worship under, 128–34, 204, 218; in Shanxi stele record, 118–25, 275–76
 Wu Zhou regime, 22, 83–87, 118, 122–25, 131–36, 156; Mogao caves and, 141, 169
- xiangfa*. *See* Dharma, Imitation
 Xiangtangshan Cave #2, 62, 63, 161, 163
 Xiangtangshan Cave #5, 47, 48, 98
 Xiao Mo, 145
 Xiaowen, Northern Wei Emperor, 41
 Kingshengjiao Monastery, 261–63; nirvana Buddha from, 258, 258–59, 259, 317n94; Sengqie image from, 253–55, 253; pagoda crypt of, 259, 260
- Xuanzang, 195
 Xuanzong, Tang Emperor, 220, 221, 314n35
- Yamato Bunkakan altar, 44, 45
 Yan Chao, 187, 188
 Yan Zhenqing, 187
 Yang Xiuming, 186
 Yang Zhilie, 186
 Yaoxian find, 215, 218
 Yin, Tingjie, 182, 282n2
 Yin clan, 175. *See also* Mogao Cave #96
 Yingzhou, 204, 224
 Yitong, 118, 135
 Yiyan, Master, 247–52, 257. *See also* Jingzhong Cloister pagoda crypt
 Yong'an Monastery in Xuanzhou, 133
 Yongping altar. *See* Beilin Museum
 Yuanhao, 255
Yuezang fen. *See* *Candragarbha Sutra*
 Yungang Caves, 38–42, 39–43, 46–47, 47
- Zanning, 252–53, 255–56, 316n69
 Zhang Huaishen, 190
 Zhang Yichao, 190
 Zhangye Monastery, 264, 265–70
 Zhao Kuangyin, 224
 Zhaoguo, Master, 203, 222–25, 232–38, 314n40, 315n58
 Zheng Binglin, 278, 282, 307n26
 Zhengding stone case, 217, 218, 313n25
zhengfa. *See* Dharma, Correct
zhenshen sheli. *See* True Body Relics
 Zhikuan, 256
 Zhiqian, 88, 93
 Zhirong, 185
Zhong Ahan jing. *See* *Madhyaāgama*
 Zhongzong, Tang Emperor, 221
 Zhou Ding, 185–89
 Zhou dynasty. *See* Wu Zhou regime
 Zürcher, Erik, 296n9