

中華佛學學報第 011 期 (p483-533)：(民國 77 年)，臺北：中華佛學研
究所，<http://www.chibs.edu.tw>
Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 11, (1988)
Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies
ISSN: 1017-7132

Consecrating the Buddha : Legend, Lore, and History of the Imperial Relic-Veneration Ritual in the T'ang Dynasty

Huang Chi-chiang

Associate Professor of Chinese, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

p. 483

Summary

This article deals with an important and intriguing aspect of the history of Buddhism in China—the Buddha's bodily relics and the imperial veneration of these relics. It discusses the relic-veneration ritual performed in the palaces of the imperial dynasties from the Wei-chin period through the T'ang dynasty. Focusing on the ritual performed separately by Kao-tsung (r.650-683), Empress Wu (r.690 ~ 704) Su-tsung (r.756 ~ 761), Te-tsung (r.779 ~ 804), Hsien-tsung (r.805 ~ 819), and I-tsung (r.859 ~ 872), it analyzes possible reasons for the occurrence of each ritual. While acknowledging its existence, the article also calls readers' attention to how this ritual grew out of a created or invented tradition. It reveals the formation and the growth of the tradition as resulting from the creation or historicization undertaken, consciously or unconsciously, by historians and Buddhist scholars at different stages of China's imperial time. The process of this creation or historicization involved the fusion of legend, lore, and historical facts as evidenced by some accounts, including official histories and Buddhist works on the basis of which modern scholars write their historical works. The result of this fusion was the

mixture of logos and mythos, a blending of historical facts and fictions, or what may be called "mythishtory."

The subject in question is discussed under several headings, beginning with the documented relationship between the relics and imperial rulership culled from various secular and Buddhist accounts. All accounts point to the magical property of the legendary Aśoka relics which fascinated a number of emperors, kings, and princes before the T'ang dynasty. These accounts recognize the theurgies associated with the relics and their proselytizing effect, thus reflecting

p. 484

the influence of their lore upon themselves. To elaborate this point, the second portion of this paper centers on the discussion of how the lore was transformed into a historical, or strictly speaking, a quasi-historical narrative. The works of Tao-hsüan, a renowned Buddhist writer, are used to exemplify the complicated process of this transformation. Tao-hsüan's story about Liu Sa-he and his finding of the relics at the Ch'ang-kan ssu is discussed in detail within the context of imperial veneration.

The third section of this article takes note of imperial veneration of the relics which seemingly appeared in two major traditions : the veneration of the Buddha's tooth and the veneration of finger bone. Based on the information provided by Tao-hsüan and the inscription unearthed in 1987 at the Fa-men ssu, this section suggests the possibility that two relic-veneration traditions existed in pre-T'ang times. It points out that the finger bone tradition was made prominent and became the dominant tradition in the T'ang . The fourth section takes up this theme and demonstrates how and why T'ang emperors from Kao-tsung to Te-tsung showed their veneration of the finger-bone relic and performed the relic veneration ritual. It argues that they used this ritual to help solidify their authority whenever they found it had diminished because of weakening health, political instability, military failure, and so forth.

Imperial veneration of the finger-bone relic was written into dramatic episodes in the T'ang history, as is discussed in the fifth section. Based primarily on official historical accounts, this section discusses the sumptuous reception, display, and imperial observance of the relic which occurred during the reigns of Hsien-tsung and I-tsung. It also suggests that official histories, which seem to recognize the finger bone as a co

component of the so-called Aśokarelics, made the rituals held in these two reigns look unprecedented, obscuring its possible historical link to earlier incidents. This missing link is discussed in the sixth section which introduces modern scholars' interpretations of the unearthed inscriptions, pointing out their merits and problems of their interpretations which show an attempt to historicize the notion of imperial veneration of the finger-bone relic provided by the lore. It questions the dating method and asks for a more tenable explanation of the appearance of one piece of so-called "holy bone" and three grains of so-called "duplicate bones" discovered among some seven hundred

p. 485

excavated objects.

The concluding section recapitulates the theme of legend and lore at work in the formation of historical accounts. It raises questions as to how a historian can better use sources which contain fiction and facts when one may have difficulty drawing a clear-cut line between them. While arguing the possibility of reconstructing, or as a matter of fact, constructing the intriguing history of the Buddha's relics and relic-veneration

ritual, the article also poses questions and delineates some problems of this task in hopes of furthering investigation of issues relevant to the subject.

關鍵詞： 1.Relics 2.logos and mythos 3.mythistory 4.King Aśoka
5.Liu Sa-he 6.Fa-men ssu

p. 486

I. Relics and Rulership

Relics of the Buddha have had close ties with Chinese rulership since their emergence in China.

Many emperors of imperial China were fascinated with relics, especially with what are known as "bodily relics" of the Buddha^[1]

Their fascination with the relics prompted them to render their highest reverence to these mythic objects.

Thus few of them thus felt it necessary to question the date and the way by which the relics were brought to China.

They seem to have accepted whatever account had been relayed to them with regard to the provenance of the relics.

As a result, the relics continued to appeal to Chinese rulership until later imperial China.

Despite the dubious nature of their origin, the relics and imperial fascination with them were not only documented in Buddhist texts, but also in the official, dynastic histories of China.

If we are to deny the records in Buddhist texts because we think their authors tended to fabricate things, are we to trust the records in dynastic histories simply because they are official accounts?

In fact, we probably cannot make this choice because both Buddhist texts and official accounts of the earliest appearance of the relics of the Buddha are based on the same Aśoka legend. Both authors of Buddhist and dynastic histories seem to have believed that some fractions of the relics were inhumed in China when the eighty-four thousand pagodas were built in the world under King Aśoka's order.^[2]

The relics of the Buddha were stored in those pagodas built in many prefectures at the same time.

Those pagodas were all named after King Aśoka, known in

Chinese as Ah-yü-wang 阿育王.

Accordingly, all Ah-yü-wang Temples 阿育王

寺 were sites where a portion of the Buddha's relics were installed.

The first official historical account in China regarding the Aśoka legend

and the Buddha's relics appeared in the Wei shu 魏

書 compiled by Wei Shou 魏收

(506-572). Wei Shou says that Aśoka evoked his divine power to divide the Buddha's relics and at his behest, ghosts and spirits built eight-four thousand stupas all over the world on the same day.

Wei Shou named four places where the Ah-yü-wang Temples were built. [3]

Logically, some portions of the relics were installed in each of these four pagodas.

Wei Shou's acceptance of this legend as fact bespoke his further acknowledgment of the magical property of the relics.

At one point, he mentions,

Once Emperor Ming of the Wei 魏明帝 (r. 227-239)

attempted to destroy the temple in the west of the palace.

A foreign monk placed in front of the palace a golden alms-bowl filled with water into which he threw sarira (佛舍利)

As a result, there arose a five-color light.

The emperor exclaimed, saying that "if it were not a numinous object, it would not be so [amazing]."

Thus he moved the temple to the east side of the palace and surrounded it with hundreds of pavilions. [4]

To the modern rational mind, Wei Shou's account raises some questions. In the first place, one may ask from where came the sarira?

If the Buddha's relics had been stored in the eighty-four thousand stupas and Lo-yang had a share, could this sarira be a part of Lo-yang's share? If it was, how could the foreign monk obtain it?

If it was not, did it come from stupas in other places?

Where could those places be?

Second, the emperor seems to have been convinced that this sarira was that of the Buddha's, so he refurbished the temple and honored it with

lavishly adorned pavilions.

Given the emission of magic light, might it not have been something other than the Buddha's relic?

The question is: are we to believe that this five-color light was generated by the relic? Could it be a reflection of the rays of the sun?

Since Wei Shou's depiction was rather sketchy, the reader is left wondering if the incident, if it did occur, might have been the kind of magic which was commonly used by the contemporary foreign monks to proselytize.^[5]

In any case, the presence of the relic came as a surprise to both the emperor in the account as well as to its readers.

Wei Shou's account probably anticipated the imperial worship of the relics that made up an important aspect of Buddhist history in China.

However, this marvel concerning the relics was by no means an isolated incident. Nor was Wei Shou's account the only account of this incident.

A similar story took place in the Kingdom of Wu 吳 in 241 A.D., when it was under the rule of Sun Ch'üan 孫權 (r.229-252).

It was said that Sun Ch'üan summoned the monk K'ang Seng-hui 康僧

會 (d. 280)

to question the efficacy of the Buddha. He demanded K'ang, a foreign monkspreading Buddhism in the capital area of the Wu Kingdom, viz., Chien-k'ang 建

康, byposting the Buddha's image in his hut, to show him the relic when the latter claimed that a relic of the Buddha would appear in any place at any time when one prayed for it.

Sun Ch'üan urged K'ang to pray for one and promised that he would build a pagoda to honor the relic.

After praying for twenty-one days, K'ang did obtain a relic in a jar.

K'ang submitted the relic to Sun Ch'üan at court and said that the relic could sustain crushing or burning and would not be smashed.

His words turned out to be true after a test ordered by Sun Ch'üan.

When the test was done, the relic emitted even more shining light and ascended to the top of the light.

The light then took the form of a big lotus blossom.

Overwhelmed by the scene, Sun Ch'üan became drawn to Buddhism.

He built a pagoda and a temple for the relic.^[6]

p. 489

This account, which was based on a secular historical text, is even more fantastic than the previous one.

It not only shows the magic power of the relic but also partly answers the question regarding how the relic came to the scene.

It points out that one could attain a relic by praying for it and that, once obtained, nothing seemed to be able to destroy it.

While the motif of light remained the same, the lotus blossom shape of the relic was something new.

The entire narrative cannot be a representation of a tenable, factual event. However, the story had originally been told by compilers of a historical record and retold by the monks such as Hui-chiao 慧皎 (fl.

540s-550s) of the Liang dynasty and Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596-667)

of the T'ang dynasty.^[7]

Like Wei Shou's account, it fed the curiosity of rulers of later dynasties and inspired them to admire and use the relics in the interest of their own rule.

Hui-chiao represents the Buddhists who took note of the divine quality of the relics.

Heretold in greater detail the story of K'ang Seng-hui's conversion of Sun Chüan by virtue of the relics and instilled the story in the reader's mind.

He also provided other stories that characterize the auspicious function of the relics.

The most prominent of them is the story about Liu Sa-he 劉薩何.

According to this story, Liu was a foreigner settling as a farmer in north western China and became a monk after having been resuscitated from a seemingly near death experience.

While journeying in the underworld during his near death experience, he was advised to pay homage to the Aśoka temples in Tan-yang 丹陽

(in present-day Kiangsu 江蘇), K'uai-chi 會稽

(in present-day Chekiang 浙江), and Wu County 吳郡

(in present-day Kiangsu).

After his resurrection, he became a monk and took the dharma name

Hui-ta 慧達. During the reign of Hsiao-wu of the [Eastern] Chin 晉孝

武帝 (r.373-385), he traveled from Ping-chou 并州 (in present-day

p. 490

Shansi 山西) to the capital, Chien-k'ang 建康 (present-day Nanking 南京).

In the capital city, he saw strange colors on top of the three-story pagoda at the Ch'ang-kan ssu 長干

寺, which had been known for emitting light every evening since its construction during the reign of Emperor Chien-wen of the [Eastern] Chin 晉簡文帝 (r.371-372).

Hui-ta paid his respect to the temple every morning and evening, thus witnessing the light which issued from the foot of the pagoda.

He then gathered some men to dig in the ground, where they found three stone tablets after digging a hole of sixteen-feet deep.

The tablet in the middle had a niche in which an iron casket was placed. Inside the iron casket was a silver casket which in turn contained an golden reliquary.

Three grains of relic, along with finger nails and a long hair, were in the golden reliquary and all were illuminated.

When the news spread and people realized that this was one of the Asoka pagodas, they built a new pagoda to the west of the old one and h

and the relics installed in it. Some years later

(391), Emperor Hsiao-wu dignified it by erecting an addition of three stories on top of the new pagoda.^[8]

This story seems to suggest that the Buddha's relics were the reason for the emanation of the light at one of the Aśoka pagodas.

However, the narrative only vaguely hints that Emperor Hsiao-wu elevated the new pagoda because of the magic property of the relics.

What made this account of Liu Sa-he important is that anecdotes surrounding the relics accrued because of later additions.

Both the compilers of the Liang shu 梁書 and Tao-hsüan included this story in their works, but with much accretion.

In the Liang shu, Liu Sa-he is said to have located the Aśoka pagoda at the Chang-kan village in Tan-yang by seeing strange colors hovering over the village.

When arriving at the site and seeing the light emanated from the pagoda, he realized that it must be due to the relics.

He then gathered some people to dig and found three stone tablets. Each was six ch'ih 尺.

It is said in Hui-chiao's account that the middle one was where the relics were installed, and a new pagoda was built to the west of the pagoda to house these relics.

Years later, the emperor ordered monks to put three more stories on top of the new pagoda. When it came to the Liang dynasty, Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r.502-549) refurbished the pagoda and exhumed the relics along

p. 491

with the nails and hair.

When the relics were unearthed, they were also placed in a carved golden vase placed in a silver container.

The container was in an iron pot, which was in turn put in a stone casket.

Each grain of relic is described as having the size of a millet, exactly round, and shiningly clean.

In addition to these grains of relics, the stone casket also consisted of four other grains of relics placed in a jar made of lapis lazuli.

On the latter day of the month when these relics were unearthed, the emperor paid his respects at the temple, where he conducted a commu

nal feast and announced a nation-wide amnesty.

He used a golden alms-bowl filled with water to carry the relics, but found the smallestone was submerged in the water and did not float on the surface like the others.

Afterworshipping in prostration many times, it issued forth light in the alms-bowl, circled aroundthe other relics, and then flowed to the center of the alms-bowl and stopped moving.

Uponseeing this, the emperor said to the Grand Rectifier of the Monk (ta seng cheng 大僧正)bythe name of Hui-nien 慧念(date unknown), "Wouldn't this be an inconceivable thing if I didn't witness [the relic] today?"^[9]

The account in the Liang shu is only one example that tells how the story of the relics grew.

Compilers of the history of the Liang dynasty apparently conflated Hui-chiao's and otherwriters' texts to come up with their version of the Liu Sa-he story.

They made the renowned emperor and devout patron of Buddhism dedicate himself to the Buddha after he had revealed the relics.

To show how the relics appealed to him, they tell us that the emperor,

after posing the above question to Hui-nien, stated that he wanted to bring one of the relics to his palace for personal worship and offerings. Before long, he arranged a communal feast at the temple again and dispatched the crown prince, ranking officials, and nobles to fetch the relic.

They donated lavishly decorated gold and silver offering utensils, along with a million units of cash, to the temple for its continued growth.

This occurred in the third year of his reign.

A year later, the emperor visited the temple and arranged another communal feast. He ordered

p. 492

that the relics be put in golden and jade jars and placed in two miniature seven-gem pagodas (ch'i pao t'a 七寶塔), which were put in separate stone caskets and installed in the old and new pagodas.

The Liang shu goes so far as to say that Liu Sa-he also located the Asoka pagoda in the Mao County 鄆

縣 of K'uai-chi and that Emperor Wu of the Liang also unearthed the relics there and had them brought to his palace for personal worship.

The relics derived from this site were also installed in a new pagoda[10]

Clearly, the story about Liu Sa-he in the Liang shu indicates that there were two sets of the Buddha's relics, one in the Ch'ang-kan pagoda in the capital and the other in the Mao County in K'uai-chi.

Emperor Wu of the Liang witnessed both, paid personal obeisance to them, and built new pagodas in their honor.

The Liang shu also suggests that during the reign of Ta-t'ung 大同 (535-545), the Emperor revealed another set of relics at the Wa-kuan ssu 瓦官

寺 and ordered that the land of several hundred households surrounding the temple be purchased in order for the temple to undergo expansion.

This made the actual existence of another set of relics known publicly.

Later historians, both Buddhist and secular, finding these accounts in the Liang shu highly indicative of Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism, were pleased to include them in their own historical writings.

Li Yen-shou 李延壽 (ca.601-675), the author of the Nan shih 南

史, duplicated the above accounts in his history, taking words from the Liang shu almost verbatim.[\[11\]](#)

Buddhist historian Tao-hsüan, on the other hand, put together the existing accounts, conflated their texts, and wrote up his own version of the story about Liu Sa-he and the relics with which Emperor Wu of the Liang was involved.

Tao-hsüan not only made every effort to convince his readers of the existence of the Aśoka pagodas and the Buddha's relics, but also presented an elaborate and systematized account of the Liu Sa-he story.

Since his account might have been an important source for later accounts, including those in the Liang shu and Nan

p. 493

shih, it may not be unfair to argue that he helped create the lore of the relics, which was crucial to the imperial veneration of the relics after his time and our perception of the relics in traditional China.

II. Lore and History

According to Tao-hsüan's accounts, all the Aśoka temples in China had the relics of the Buddha.

However, the numbers of temples he listed in his works, the Kuang Hui-mingchi 廣弘明集 and the Chi Shen-chou san-pao kan-t'ung lu 集神州三寶感通

錄 vary and most of the relics had never been unearthed or seen before his time. Therefore, although he noted that divine signs (shen-jui 神瑞)

often appeared at these temples, he was unable to describe most of the relics and activities in connection with them.

Only the relics in a number of pagodas were described and those connected with the Liu Sa-he story figured prominently in Tao-hsüan's account.

Tao-hsüan's account of the Liu Sa-he story contains more additional anecdotes that are not found in the Liang shu, although they seem to have been based on the same archetype.

After stating Emperor Hsiao-wu's construction of three stories on top of the new Ch'ang-kan pagoda, Tao-hsüan's account says that the same

emperor ordered the Prince of K'uai-chi, Ssu-ma Tao-tzu 司馬道

子 to take the Prince of Tan-yang, Ssu-ma Ya 司馬

雅, to visit the new temple and relics because the latter had been a follower of the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (wu-tou-mi tao 五斗米道) and often recommended that pagodas and temples be demolished and Buddhism be rejected.

When they arrived at the temple, the monks were carrying relics to show them.

Ssu-ma Ya tipped over the alms bowl, expecting to see the relics fall.

To his surprise, the relics remained attached to the bowl.

Ssu-ma Ya poured water in the bowl, burnt incense, and requested that the Buddha show him a sign to rid him of his disbelief.

The relics immediately began to glow in response.

Astounded, the prince swore that he would never again malign Buddhism, although he did not practice Buddhism as much as he could have.

[12]

Tao-hsuan also notes that Emperor Wu of the Liang refurbished the Ch'ang-

p. 494

kan pagoda during the Ta-t'ung period and revealed the relics, includi

ng the nails and hair in the pagoda.

He issued an edict in which he announced that

Now the true form of the śarira has reappeared in the world and in encountering such a rare event, one feels that he/she may not come across it again.

Therefore now I will have it put on public display and arrange a communal maigre feast. I will grant amnesty to all criminals regardless of the severity of their crimes. [13]

This account clarifies the vagueness in the Liang shu where both the edict and the year when it was issued are not given.

It also helps to clarify the simple statement,

"in the eighth month of the third year during the reign of Ta-t'ung, the emperor visited the Ah-yü-wang ssu and announced a state-wide amnesty," appeared in the Basic Annals (pen-chi 本紀) section of the Liang shu. [14]

Tao-hsüan also tells his readers that he personally witnessed the relics of this pagoda in the capital, Ch'ang-an.

He says that when Emperor Yang of the Sui 隋煬帝 (r.605-617)

was stationed in Huai-hai 淮

海, he moved the relics in the Ch'ang-kan pagoda to the capital because there were no relics in any of the pagodas there. Once the relics had been moved, they were installed beneath the pagoda at Jih-yen ssu 日嚴寺 to which Tao-hsüan later was assigned as the abbot.

He also notes that as many as some fifty Buddhist masters in the Kiangnan area claimed that the relics in the capital were not genuine Aśoka relics as those which were installed in the Ch'ang-kan pagoda.

He says that the disagreement arose because many people did not realize what had happened during the previous dynasty.

In any case, he states that when the Jih-yen ssu was abandoned and confiscated by the authorities in 624 under Emperor Kao-tsu of the T'ang 唐高祖

(r. 619-626), monks were reassigned to other temples, leaving the pagoda unprotected. Tao-hsüan, who was reassigned to Ch'ung-i ssu 崇義寺, along with ten of his disciples, managed to move the relics to the new temple and to re-enshrine them.

He described how he witnessed the relics when he and his

p. 495

disciples were exhuming them for re-enshrinement, saying that "We dug in the ground of the pagoda and obtained three grains of relics.

White and shining, each is as big as a kernel of corn in size."

Accompanying the relics were a yellowish nail and several dozen strands of white hair.

There were also old vessels made of various kinds of gems including lapis lazuli.

Tao-hsüan put all of them in a big bronze container, which he carried to the Ch'ung-issu.

He placed the bronze container in a big stone casket and reburied it under the pagoda in the southwestern side of the temple.

A stela was made to cover it. Ibid. [15]

Despite his knowledge of the relics and his confidence of the relocation of the relics from Ch'ang-kan to the capital, Tao-hsüan still wondered why the old Ch'ang-kan pagoda in Tan-yang was still showing theurgic signs, whereas the pagoda in the Ch'ung-issu was devoid of similar happenings. [16]

All in all, Tao-hsüan provided an extensive account of the Ch'ang-kan

pagoda and its relics, making them much more visible than they had originally been.

Likewise, he also offered an elaborate explanation about the relics in the Aśoka pagoda in the Mao county of K'uai-chi. Unlike the Liang shu, which only mentions in passing that Liu Sa-he also located the pagoda, Tao-hsüan presented a rather dramatic synopsis.

He says that Liu traveled to seashores, mountains, and swamps in K'uai-chi to look for the site of the Aśoka pagoda, but his effort was to no avail.

Much disappointed, he lamented his want of recourse and at this juncture he heard the bell sounding underground nearby in the middle of the night.

He moved to the site and contemplated building a temple there.

Three days later, however, he saw a miniature pagoda and relics welling up from under the ground.

Tao-hsüan described the pagoda in detail as if he had actually seen it.

He even believed that the pagoda, one ch'ih 尺 and four ts'un 寸 in height and carved with images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, devas, holy monks, and many other things, is a divine creation of a level of craftsmans

hip which is unreachable by human intelligence.

He quotes a number of geographical texts to authenticate the provenance of this pagoda which emerged in the county of Mao, saying that it is indeed one of the Aśoka pagodas.

One of the texts, the K'uai-chi chi 會稽記,

p. 496

even states.

Wang Tao 王導

(267-330), the minister of the Eastern Chin, once said that when he was crossing the [Yangtze] River he met a monk whose department was that of no common stock.

The monk said that he came from the sea to pay me a visit.

He also said that he had traveled together with King Aśoka to the county of Mao where they buried the relics in a subterranean cave and built a pagoda to protect them. [[17](#)]

After stating that this pagoda had survived a turmoil, Tao-hsüan points out that it was refurbished by Emperor Wu of the Liang.

He says that during the P'u-t'ung 普通 period

(520-526), Emperor Wu constructed a temple to honor this historical site and surrounded the place by halls, rooms, and corridors.

He named the temple Ah-yü-wangssu.

From then on, people often saw numinous and auspicious signs and that holy monks circumambulating the pagoda and chanting sutras became a common occurrence.[\[18\]](#)

Tao-hsüan's accounts as such need to be evaluated as they resulted from the growth of lore rather than from historical fact.

The subject matter of the stories—Liu Sa-he and the relics he says he witnessed—was based on legends.

While these stories were written into history, their historicity cannot be substantiated.

However, once the lore continued to grow and its constituent elements became appealing to the ruling authorities, it was written into history again and was viewed as historical fact.

At a certain point of time, these stories might stop growing or be integrated into a composite whole as evidenced by the Liu Sa-hehe-shang yin-yüan chi 劉薩訶和尚因緣記.[\[19\]](#) Even if the Liu Sa-he

stories stopped growing, other stories revolved around different objects might sustain.

Of all those stories, perhaps the one about the Aśoka relics and pagoda as at the Fa-men ssu 法門寺 in Feng-hsiang 鳳翔 of Ch'i-chou 岐州 figured most prominently.

The pagoda and relics there best demonstrate how legend, lore, and history intertwined. The hybridity of lore and reality had a great impact on the later history.

It also affects the modern perceptions and interpretations of the imperial worship of the relics in the T'ang.

According to Tao-hsüan, the Fa-men ssu was originally known as Ah-yü-wang ssu which housed five hundred monks. Apparently a big temple, it was reduced to merely two halls during the Northern Chou 北周 persecution in 574. In the fifth year of the Ta-yeh 大業 period of the Sui

(581-617), the temple, now known as Ch'eng-shih ssu 成實寺, was abandoned because its population dwindled to fewer than fifty—a number required for a temple to be officially recognized.

Its monks were reassigned to the Pao-ch'eng ssu 寶昌寺 in the capital, where in the early T'ang, a monk by the name of P'u-hsien 普

賢 submitted a memorial requesting that the temple be reinstated.

His request was approved and a new name, Fa-men ssu, was granted.

From then on, the temple ebbed and flowed in its fortune.

In the second year of Wu-te 武

德 reign of Emperor Kao-tsu of the T'ang, Tao-hsüan met the abbot Hu i-yeh 慧業 (dates unknown)

and was told that a town had been built in the last year of the Sui to protect the temple from being attacked by bandits.

Still, the temple was burnt down after it had been caught up in a fire that spread to this area from another place.

At this time the entire temple, including the two primary halls, was reduced to ashes.

However, Tao-hsüan seems to have suggested that the temple experienced a swift turn and once again flourished when Chang Liang 張亮 (dates unknown) was appointed the prefect of Ch'i-chou.

If the history of the temple is in agreement with Tao-hsüan's accounts,

then we probably can argue that this vicissitude of the fortunes of the temple also contributed to the change of destiny of the T'ang dynasty.

p. 498

The reason is that the mysterious Aśoka relic in this temple turns out to have been the one among all of the Aśoka relics most appealing to the T'ang emperors.

A number of aspiring T'ang emperors were said to have embarked on a sumptuous ceremony to pay their homage to the relic.

Official histories indicate that two of them ended up being regarded as notoriously obsessed with the relic, and they paid an unbelievably costly price—their lives. One ceremony involved Emperor Hsien-tsung 憲宗 (r.806-820) and his outspoken minister Han Yü 韓愈 (768-824).

Hsien-tsung's admiration of the Buddha's relic and his action taken in its honor elicited a protest from the renowned, austere Confucian whose memorial became one of the most important historical documents in the history of Chinese Buddhism and literature.

I will return to what was called Hsien-tsung's reception of the Buddha's relic in the latter part of this article.

What we must take note here is that the relic, although it was highly respected in the T'ang, had not been of any particular significance to emperors in previous and later dynasties.

Strangely enough, it was said to have been revered continuously by a number of T'ang emperors after it had been identified as a finger-bone relic of the Buddha.

One may raise questions as to what happened to other unidentified Aśoka relics which had been enshrined in other pagodas and previously had enjoyed imperial reverence?

Did they simply fall into obscurity for no particular reason?

What about the relics that do not seem to be part of the Aśoka relics?

These questions have no acceptable answers given by official histories. Even if we consult the lore of which Tao-hsüan was the primary architect, we still have no satisfactory answers.

However, Tao-hsüan's accounts, along with some other private accounts, at least give us some grounds to come up with possible answers.

For instance, his accounts seem to indicate that the lore suggested the existence of two traditions of imperial veneration of the relics.

One of these traditions was concerned with the tooth, and the other with the finger bones.

III. Two Traditions of Relics: Tooth and Finger Bone

S

As suggested earlier, Tao-hsüan did not make it clear to which part of the body the Aśokarelics belonged, although he did specify the size and colors of some of them.

However, according to Buddhist tradition, relics in white color should be the remains of bones and teeth after cremation.

Official histories and

p. 499

Buddhist sources refer to most, if not all, of the relics as teeth, skull bone, and finger bones, if not simply śarira. While Tao-hsüan tended to mention hair and nails separately from śarira, he almost never talked about the relics that came out of flesh.

This leaves us to see that the tooth and the finger-bone relics were two major objects to which emperors paid their reverence.[\[20\]](#)

The head relics occasionally figured prominently, but they were not as

visible as tooth and finger bone.

In other words, tooth and finger bone constituted the two traditions of relics associated with imperial ritual of relic veneration.

The question remains how much weight either of them had in these rituals and whether their role was gauged on the basis of being genuine Aśoka relics or not?

Both official histories and Tao-hsüan's account indicate that the tooth relics received imperial respect in early times.

Tao-hsüan calls our attention to a ritual in honor of the Buddha's tooth relic taking place in the last year of the reign of Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 494-502) of the Southern Ch'i 南齊 (479-502).

The tooth relic, which is said to have been brought from Khotan 于闐 by the monk, Fa-hsien 法獻

(424-498), to the court of Emperor Ming was enshrined in the Shang Ting-lin ssu 上定林寺 (in present-day Nanking) .[\[21\]](#)

However, it does not seem to have caught the attention of Emperor Wu of the Liang who succeeded

him.

Rather, as one source indicates, Emperor Wu came into possession of another toothrelic, which was presented to him by a certain tributary state called P'an-p'an 槃槃.[22]

It is not clear whether he ever brought this tooth relic to his palace for personal observance.

As indicated earlier, Emperor Wu held a ritual consecrating the Aśoka relics when he was refurbishing the pagodas at the Ch'ang-kan ssu and the county of Mao.

During this ritual, he arranged a large communal maigre feast (Pañcavārṣikapariṣad)

and erected two new pagodas, in which he enshrined the relics.

Although the enshrinement of the relics was carried out ceremoniously and respectfully, there is no indication that they actually were the tooth or the finger-bone relics.[23]

What is clear to us is that they were not so-called "Fa-hsien's Buddha Tooth" (Fa-hsien fo-ya 法獻佛牙) .

This leaves us to wonder where the "Fa-hsien's Buddha Tooth" was?

The lore says that this tooth was stolen from the Shang Ting-lin ssu and for thirty five years until the Ch'en dynasty its whereabouts was a mystery. Emperor Wu of the Ch'en 陳武帝

(r.557-559) , who succeeded the last ruler of the Liang, is said to have been in possession of the tooth.[\[24\]](#)

At his coronation, he ordered a public display of the tooth and gathered four varga (groups, orders)

to hold a Buddhist maigre feast during which he himself paid homage to the tooth relic.

This seems to have ended the short tradition of the imperial worship of the

p. 501

tooth relic, because after this ritual no similar ritual was performed, neither by the succeeding emperors of the Liang and the Ch'en dynasties nor by the founder of the Sui, Emperor Wen 隋文帝

(r.581-604) . The tooth relic seems to have disappeared again, although another tooth relic of the Buddha, commonly referred to as "Tao-hsüan Buddha Tooth" (Tao-hsüanfo-ya 道宣佛

牙) , came into view and became an alternate object of imperial veneration during the T'ang.[\[25\]](#)

In any case, the lore seems to have led historians and scholars like Ta o-hsüan to believe that a number of emperors in South China venerated the Buddha's tooth relics, making this veneration a tradition albeit it was a short one.

It might have also led them to think that a parallel tradition was formed in North China where rulers venerated the Buddha's bone relics, especially the finger.

For example, some later Buddhist monks seem to have suggested that at the court of the Northern Wei 北魏 (424-534) , the ritual of relic veneration was practiced.[\[26\]](#)

This veneration found its expression in the observance of the Buddha's bone. For instance, one of these monks, who was responsible for the writing of the stela inscription unearthed in 1987 by Chinese archeologists at the site of Fa-men ssu, believed that in the second year of the Great Wei (Ta-wei 大魏) , the reigning

emperor, Fei-ti 廢帝 (r.

531-532) , held some sort of ritual to consecrate the Buddha's bone that had been discovered by a certain Prefect of the Ch'i-yang County named T'o-pa Yü 拓跋育.

The latter refurbished the Fa-men ssu, opened the crypt under it, and discovered the bone relic.

On that occasion, the emperor held a ritual to pay his homage to the bone relic.[\[27\]](#)

These monks also believed that Emperor Wen held similar rituals in honor of some relics presented to him.

A special ritual was held in honor of the bone relic in the crypt of the Fa-men ssu after Li Min 李敏, prefect of Ch'i-chou, had refurbished the temple in the last year of his reign.

These monks seem to have based their information on Tao-hsüan's account in the Kuang Hung-ming chi, where it says that Emperor Wen paid homage to thirty relics presented to him by a certain Brahman monk and built thirty pagodas to enshrine them, even though Tao-hsüan's account does not mention the ritual held at the Fa-men ssu and the rel

ics were bones. [28]

It is likely that the monks in the T'ang added new anecdotes to the existing lore, thus sanctifying the status of the Fa-men ssu.

Their story shows that the bone in the crypt of the Fa-men ssu was not a part of the newly obtained relics.

Rather, it was one of the Aśoka relics which had long existed in the hidden crypt in the underground of the temple and had been the object of imperial worship. Since they claimed that this was a finger-bone relic, they established a tradition that characterizes imperial veneration of finger-bone relic, hence the formation of the finger-relic tradition in North China.

If there were indeed two traditions in the imperial worship of the Buddha

p. 503

relics, apparently the monks at the Fa-men ssu wanted to make the finger-bone the dominant tradition because they claimed that the finger bone at the temple was the same bone relic that had been worshipped by the emperors in the North Wei and the Sui.

They managed to build this link between the T'ang and the pre-T'ang relic of the Fa-men ssu by reaffirming the lore, using it to substantiate the continuity of the northern tradition.

In the meantime, they had Tao-hsüan's account to bolster and systematize their theory, thus blending the lore and reality.

In their systematization, they treated all references of "the Buddha's bone" (fo-ku 佛骨) or of "the Buddha's relic" (fo-she-li 佛舍利) as the Buddha's finger bone (fo-chih-ku 佛指骨), which Tao-hsuan used to refer to the relic at the Fa-men ssu. This brings us back to Tao-hsuan's account of Chang Liang and the finger-bone relic at the temple mentioned earlier.

IV · Relic-Veneration Ritual in the T'ang

The story of imperial veneration of the finger-bone relic began to bloom when Chang Liang assumed his position as the Prefect of Ch'i-chou. In fact, the lore seems to have suggested that it was Chang Liang who brought to light the legendary finger-bone relic in the Fa-men ssu from its obscurity.

Although there is no official historical record to corroborate the lore an

d Chang Liang's station at Ch'i-chou, Tao-hsüan might not be wrong in his account that Chang Liang served as the Prefect there because he was a contemporary of Chang Liang and was very attentive to the finger-bone relic there. Besides, Chang Liang was a devout patron of Buddhism who had won the emperor's trust in his early career and was likely to convince T'ai-tsung 太宗 (r.627-649) about what he thought of the relic at the Fa-men ssu. [29]

p. 504

In any case, Chang Liang is said to have petitioned Emperor T'ai-tsung, in 631, to reconstruct the pagoda at the Fa-men ssu because the temple had recently regained some of its popularity and people had started to come and pay their respects after hearing that a so-called "divine light" (shen kuang 神光), which seemed to manifest the magical properties of the relic, had cast a halo about the temple precincts.

Chang's petition immediately received the emperor's approval. It was suggested that Chang believed in the lore regarding the propitious effect of uncovering the crypt under the pagoda.

He agreed with the popular notion that the exposure of the Buddha's bone in a thirty-year cycle after the previous closure of the crypt would draw blessings and help the populace to perform good deeds.

He also suggested that the crypt under the pagoda had been opened before and the exposure of the Buddha's bone preserved in it had helped bring good fortune to earlier dynasties.[\[30\]](#)

While at this point Tao-hsüan did not describe in detail how the relic had been enshrined, he apparently agreed and recognized the existence of the finger bone before the T'ang.

He describes that during the ceremony arranged for the reopening of the crypt, both the monks and common people vied with one another to view the relic.

He also noted that those living near the capital area flooded into the temple precincts to pay their homage to the relic. Numbering several thousand a day, they gathered around the temple unwilling to depart without seeing the relic.[\[31\]](#)

On the other hand, even though Tao-hsüan says nothing about T'ai-tsung's worship of the relic, he was the first to describe public veneration of the Buddha's bone in detail. His depiction reflected to some degree

a common knowledge of the lore shared by those who were concerned with the temple and the relic.

This explains why in 659 the monks Chih-ts'ung 智

琮 and Hung-ching 弘

靜 were able to relate the lore about the Fa-men ssu to Emperor Kao-tung 高宗 (r.650-683) .

p. 505

After Chang Liang's exposure of the relic, the lore grew further and received wider recognition.

Thus in Tao-hsüan's report, he notes that at Kao-tung's court, the monks Chih-ts'ung and Hung-ching brought to the emperor's attention the advantage of the reopening of the crypt in a thirty-year cycle, as evidenced by Chang Liang's operation during the reign of Chen-kuan 貞觀.

They reminded the emperor that some action needed to be considered because another thirty-year cycle was approaching.

To this reminder, Kao-tung responded with some hesitation but he agreed to have the crypt reopened should an auspicious sign be discovered.

He dispatched Chih-ts'ung and the palacecommissioners to the temple to pray and search for the auspicious sign. Chih-ts'sung andhis entourage soon arrived at the temple, and in its main hall he undertook a meditativeprayer.

On the fifth day of a supposedly week-long prayer, he heard cracking sound underthe statues where he saw some auspicious rays of light.

The feet of three images alsoemitted rays of red and white, which swirled around the images from the bottom to the top.

A group of monks folding their palms stood around him, claiming that they had previouslylived in the temple.

After a while, the rays slowly faded away and the monks disappeared.

At this juncture, Chih-ts'ung called in the commissioners to witness what was happeningand they obtained a śarira before the remainder of the light vanished.

They found sevenmore pieces of śarira after a further search.

They put this cluster of śarira in a pan filledwith water and saw one of them revolving around the others.

Each one also emitted adazzling light.[\[32\]](#)

When Chih-ts'ung reported this news to the emperor, he was so thrilled that he ordered that an image of King Aśoka equal to his own height be built at the temple precincts and that the Buddha's relic be dug out of the crypt.

On the day the crypt was uncovered, a score of workers unearthed the Buddha's finger-bone relic.

Since the relic was believed to have engendered the red light, which shot through the roof of the temple and illuminated the surrounding areas, the monks of the temple predicted that it would bring on the same auspicious times that had occurred during the reign of T'ai-tsung.[\[33\]](#)

Accordingly, the finger-bone relic was

p. 506

immediately put on display and people from all walks of life again flooded the temple as soon as the news of this display spread.

For nearly two hundred li between the capital and the temple, crowds of travelers walked in procession to the temple to pay their homage to the relic.

In the following year, the emperor ordered that the relic be brought to the imperial palace in Lo-yang for his personal observance and reveren

ce.

He worshipped the finger-bone relic, along with a portion of Buddha's skull presented to him by a certain Chou Yü 周愚

(dates unknown), in the palace and kept it there for approximately three years before he sent it back to the Fa-men ssu. In the initial period of worship, he summoned seven monks from the capital to the Lo-ya ng palace to perform a consecratory ritual.

He showed both the finger bone and the skull bone to these monks, who acknowledged that both were real relics of the Buddha. Then he permitted them to pay personal homage for one night.

The empress, who later was to become Empress Wu, donated a thousand bolts of silk and linen to show her respect.

She also provided elaborately carved reliquaries made of gold and silver, and had the relic put inside a small casket enclosed by eight other caskets in different sizes. [\[34\]](#)

Tao-hsüan shows that Kao-tsung revered the finger-bone relic with genuine enthusiasm.

He not only extended the time of the relic-veneration but also instituted a special ritual in the palace to consecrate the relic.

The entire relic-reception process, from the public display at the temple site, through the imperial observance in the palace, to its re-enshrinement, was very carefully orchestrated.

Many more people were able to see the relic, which is portrayed in Tao-hsüan's account as having a shape like the upper phalanx of the little finger and being one ts'un and two fen in length.^[35]

They also had opportunities to witness the "rays" it

p. 507

gave off.

When the emperor ordered the monk Chih-ts'ng, Hung-ching and other monks from the capital to escort the relic back to the Fa-men ssu, thousands of people including officials and temple monks accompanied them along the road.

Together they attended to the relic and completed its re-enshrinement.

It was placed in a stone room concealed in the crypt under the pagoda

Thus Tao-hsüan presents to us a case which suggests that Kao-tsung set an example of imperial veneration of the relic for later T'ang rulers such as Empress Wu 武后 (r.690-704) and Emperors Su-tsung 肅宗

(r. 756-761) , Te-tsung 德宗 (779-804) , Hsien-tsung

(r.805-819) , and I-tsung 懿宗 (r. 859-872) .

These rulers, with the exception of Te-tsung during the early period of his reign, consecrated the relic in a manner similar to that of Kao-tsung and demonstrated unreserved support for Buddhism.[\[36\]](#)

One record indicates that Empress Wu embarked on another exemplary ceremony for the finger-bone relic soon after she met the prominent monk Fa-tsang 法藏

(643-715) , who broached the issue of relic-veneration.

In 704, more than thirty years after the previous display of the relic, Empress Wu delegated the ranking official Ts'ui Hsüan-wei 崔玄暉 (fl. 700s) , the monk Fa-tsang, and ten other Buddhist dignitaries to fetch the relic and escort it to her palace in Lo-yang.

When they arrived at the temple, Fa-tsang led his cohort to conduct a formal observance of the relic for seven days and nights.

On their way back to Lo-yang, they displayed the relic to the public, which moved spectators, caused much commotion, and attracted profuse donations.

On New Year's Eve, when the procession arrived at the Ch'ung-fu ssu

崇福

寺 in Ch'ang-an, Prince K'uai-chi, then overseeing the capital city on the Empress's behalf, led the officials and monks in the capital in a salute. They joined the procession, donated bounteous valuables, and provided scented flowers and felicitous music.

p. 508

Once the procession entered Lo-yang, the Empress ordered all ministers, princes and their subordinates, as well as all patrons of Buddhism in the city, to make elaborate banners and canopies to escort it.

Chamberlains for the Ceremonial (T'aci-ch'ang 太常)

played music when the relic was received and placed in the Hall of Light (ming-t'ang 明

堂). There the Empress performed a special ritual on the Lantern Festival Day.

Purifying herself and addressing piously, she offered her prayers to the relic under the guidance of Fa-tsang.[\[37\]](#)

Official histories indicate that Empress Wu had regularly offered sacrifices at the Hall of Light in the previous fifteen years or so, particularly from 689 to 699.[\[38\]](#)

Although these were supposedly traditional sacrifices to imperial ancestors, Empress Wu seems to have tried to link them to Buddhism by having constructed behind the ming-t'ang a "celestial hall" (t'ien-t'ang 天堂), in which a statue, perhaps of Bodhisattva Maitreya was installed. In the ming-t'ang, she held conferences for the representatives of the three teachings to debate and conducted Buddhist pañcavarṣika assembly with enthusiasm.

In the t'ien-t'ang on the other hand, she lectured on Buddhism and encouraged ranking officials to listen to her lectures. [\[39\]](#)

Since she was greatly concerned with her own image, she may have overlooked the relic of the Buddha.

Even though the thirty-year cycle for the display of the relic fell in 689, which was the year of the first ming-t'ang sacrifice, she seemed to be oblivious to the relic.

Moreover, after 693, when she made herself a Buddhist Cakravartin king known as the "Holy and Divine Emperor of the Golden Wheels"

(Chin-lunsheng-shen huang-ti 金輪聖神皇

帝), paying reverence to the Buddha's relic, along with the ming-t'ang

sacrifice, became even more insignificant because she was now the Universal "King," assuming the role of the Buddha and the Son [or Daughter] of Heaven herself.][[40](#)]

However, she did resume the ming-t'ang sacrifice in 696, but only after she had abandoned her Cakravartin title.

In any case, the year 699 witnessed the last ming-t'ang sacrifice, which occurred six months after she had recovered from a serious illness.

She did not hold any relic-veneration ceremony in that year, nor in the following four years.

In mid-703 when she was eighty-one years old, she fell ill again and court politics turned against her. Officials conspired to get rid of the

p. 510

Chang brothers, who were the empress' protégées and lovers.

These officials were contemplating ways to take over the rulership by establishing a new emperor belonging to the Li family.

The empress' credibility and authority dwindled to an all time low.

A desire to regain power and popularity prompted her to return to Lo-yang from Ch'ang-an and make some administrative adjustments.

The reception of the Buddha's bone in the first month of 704 seems to

have been part of her plans to build public support.

This was followed by the construction of an expensive image of the Buddha in the winter of the same year, despite the strenuous objections voiced by some forthright officials at court.[\[41\]](#)

The lore suggested that more than fifty years after Empress Wu's relic-veneration ritual had passed, another one took place in the reign of Su-tsung, who assumed the throne after his father, Hsüan-tsung 玄宗 (r. 712-756), fled to Szechwan during the An Lu-shan Rebellion.[\[42\]](#) The ritual was performed in 760,

p. 511

when the relic was brought to the palace chapel in Ch'ang-an, where the emperor paid his reverence to it for several days and nights.

He kept the relic in the chapel for nearly two months during which time he ordered it be put on public display. After returning it to the Fa-men ssu, he awarded the temple liturgical vessels made of gold and silver, rosaries in jade, and sandalwood incense in a total of three hundred taels.[\[43\]](#)

Su-tsung's ritual was incomparable to previous ones in terms of magnitude and scale of celebration, even though he is generally portrayed as devoted to Buddhism.

This smaller scale was partly due to political and social disarray during his reign.

He was faced with rebellion and had difficulties restoring the imperial order.

His limited resources did not permit him to hold an extravagant ritual similar to that of Kao-tsung and Empress Wu.

In fact, he had to make the sale of ordination certificates official policy in order to increase government revenue from which he might be able to, among other things, draw funds for an imperial ritual for the relic.[\[44\]](#)

Even the ritual per se served the function of his fund-raising.

It would elicit a large number of donations because people were hoping the relic could help end the turmoil as their emperor seemed to be showing a genuine respect for the sacred object.

A Buddhist history even records that Su-tsung did not hesitate to pay tribute to the relic when he ascended the throne in 756, in Ling-wu 靈武, which was only of a short distance from Feng-hsiang 鳳

翔 where the Fa-men ssu was located.[45]

This record, however, is suspect because

p. 512

the capital was not restored until 757, thus permitting Su-tsung to build the palace chapel for the purpose of relic observation.[46]

After the construction of the palace chapel, Su-tsung did gather monks, often several hundred in number, to chant sutras and prayers to the Buddha every morning and evening.[47]

The chanting was loud enough to be heard beyond the palace walls. One minister even admonished the emperor for his unwisdom upon Buddhism.[48]

Notwithstanding this advice, the emperor insisted on holding the relic veneration ritual.

Buddhist history suggests that he held this ritual twice in his short reign, but the unearthed inscription indicates that he did it only once in 760. If he did feel compelled to hold this ritual to show his esteem to the Buddha, it is more likely that he did it once in 760 rather than twice in both 757 and 760 because of the above reason.

This fits in better with the notion of the thirty-year cycle.

This being the case, it is understandable why the next reception of the relic occurred thirty years later in 790 under Emperor Te-tsung.

This reception attested to its significance even during the difficult time of imperial rulership. Histories say that Te-tsung had actually attempted to curb Buddhism at the beginning of his reign when he was relatively young. Until late 786, he appeared

p. 513

to have little intention of changing his unfavorable policy toward Buddhism.[\[49\]](#)

Most of the time, he concentrated on political, social, and economic reforms.

He had also struggled hard to pacify a number of recalcitrant military governors who had rebelled against him and almost removed him from the throne.[\[50\]](#)

Only after he had been frustrated by the failure of his military endeavors did he show some sympathy for Buddhism and start to pay some attention to it.[\[51\]](#)

Some historians think that this frustration in his military efforts may well have prompted him to turn to the relic in hopes of bringing him some

psychological relief from his trying experiences of attempting to become a dutiful emperor.[\[52\]](#)

Official histories say that Te-tsung issued an edict in the spring of 790 to have the "Buddha's finger bone" brought to the inner palace.

After paying homage to the relic, he ordered it be carried to various temples in the capital for public display, which drew people from the capital to worship and brought in a prodigious amount of donations.

The emperor then sent a commissioner, along with court officials and monks, to escort the relic back to its temple to be re-enshrined at the original site.[\[53\]](#) The entire process took no more than one month,

p. 514

leaving some scholars to wonder if the emperor had any genuine respect for the relic.[\[54\]](#)

Whether or not the emperor was serious or was just making a show, it seems obvious that he had come to recognize the necessity of this ritual—one which had been respectfully performed three times by his ancestors and had been recognized as one of the most favored religious activities in the capital.

It had a healing effect upon the emperor's agony over his failures. When other means for reordering the state had proven futile, it seemed a justifiable recourse for him to attempt to assure his own fortune and future success.

Perhaps he wished to regain his own strength and win trust from his subjects.

By invoking the magical power allegedly inherent in the highly revered relic.

V. The Relic under Hsien-tsung and I-tsung

The relic-veneration ritual was reenacted in a most dramatic fashion during the reign of Hsien-tsung, Te-tsung's grandson twenty-nine years later. Few students of Chinese history will fail to know the historic incident of Hsien-tsung's "Reception of the Buddha's Relic" (ying fo-ku 迎佛骨).

The unusual event was immortalized partly because of the famous memorial, "Memorial on the Bone of the Buddha," (Lun fo-ku piao 論佛骨表) which Han Yü 韓愈 submitted to the emperor in 819 A.D. to dissuade him from worshipping the relic.

The historical records make Han Yü a cultural hero who spoke undauntingly against the emperor's extravagant ritual held for the relic.

They also acknowledge the existence of the relic as did Han Yü in his memorial.

Now the lore had metamorphosed into history and nobody seemed to question the legendary nature of the relic any more.

Even Han Yü, who did question the healing function of the relic, would acknowledge its true existence by characterizing it as a "decadent and rotten bone" (k'u-hsiu chih ku 枯朽之骨) and a "baneful remnant" (hsiung-hui chih yü 兇穢之餘), which he advised the emperor to order the authorities to either have it blazed in fire or submerged in water.[\[55\]](#)

p. 515

Histories also show that Emperor Hsien-tsung fell a prey to the relic.

Without showing even the slightest doubt, he totally succumbed to the lore which had instilled in people's minds the theurgy of the relic.

Why should he be more suspicious than others if four of his ancestors had actually seen this very relic in person?

How could Han Yü's protestation change his mind to discontinue this long and widely favorable tradition of relic-veneration?

It only made him even more adamant about his plan—he proceeded with the ritual of welcoming the relic after falling into a rage while reading Han's memorial.

On the other hand, disgusted by Han Yü's disdainful tone, he even wanted this "insolent" man dead.

If it had not been without some officials' appeal for leniency in Han's behalf, he would have lost his sanity and had Han executed.

Instead, he sent Han into exile, banishing him far to the south in Ch'ao-chou 潮州.[56]

It was said that Hsien-tsung had the finger-bone relic brought to the capital in the spring of 819, when he had reigned over the empire for thirteen years.

The ritual process was nearly identical with that carried out under Empress Wu.

Perhaps even the motivation was also similar—the emperor was increasingly concerned about his deteriorating health. However, because historians seem to have wanted to make him look much more determi

ned and enmeshed in this ritual, they showed that he had greater respect for the Buddha and his bone relic so that he would not attempt to assume the role of the universal sovereign as Empress Wu had done.

Also unlike Empress Wu who had used monks for promoting her own image, Hsien-tsung had great respect for the monk Ch'eng-kuan (澄觀 (738-839)), with whom he maintained a very close relationship.

From

p. 516

Ch'eng-kuang, the fourth patriarch of the Hua-yen School of Buddhism, he also learned much about Buddhist doctrines, which made him quite receptive to the Buddhist communities.

It also is very likely that he witnessed the relic-veneration ritual previously held under Te-tsung when he was thirteen and Ch'eng-kuan was the leading monk. We are told that one year after the ritual

(791), Ch'eng-kuan was summoned to the inner palace to expound Buddhist doctrine to the emperor.

And in both 796 and 799, he was twice invited to lecture on the Hua-yen Sutra when the capital was celebrating the emperor's birthday.

Hsien-tsung was nineteen and twenty-two on those occasions.

Being well aware of Te-tsung's rulership, he knew that Te-tsung was highly respectful of Ch'eng-kuan and had conferred upon him such titles as "National Preceptor Who Cleanses and Cools"

(Ch'ing-liang kuo-shih 清涼國師) .[\[57\]](#)

Likewise, he also knew that his father, Emperor Shun-tsung 順宗 (r. 805) , had consulted with Ch'eng-kuan and also had held him in high esteem.[\[58\]](#)

It is clear that because of Ch'eng-kuan's close connection with his family, along with his own desire to learn something from the monk, he summoned Ch'eng-kuan to discuss the dharma in the inner palace, in 810.

As a recently enthroned emperor, he was particularly intrigued by the meaning of the dharma realm (Chin. fa-chieh 法界; dharmadhātu) of the Hua-yen Sutra and is said to have understood it better after their meeting.

These involvements with Buddhism, in particular his comprehension of

dharmadhātu, prepared him to pay his homage to the finger-bone relic [59]

On the other hand, the emperor's preoccupation with religious magic, which had a close link with his experiences in Taoism, also was a factor in his reception of the relic. In the early period of his reign, when he was twenty-three, he had exhibited a keen interest in the concept of immortality. Although discouraged by his ministers from pursuing immortality by ingesting elixirs, he never stopped entertaining the idea. [60]

He is known to have searched for fang-shih 方士 magicians to provide "life-expansion elixirs" (ch'ang-sheng-yao 長生藥) for him. As a result, a certain Liu Mi 柳泌

(date unknown) who claimed that he had ability to collect immortal herbs at Mt. T'ien-t'ai 天臺

was introduced to the court in 818 and was appointed as the prefect of T'ai-chou 臺州. [61]

This took place only a few days before the Commissioners of Merit and Virtue recommended that the emperor commence the reception and the display of the finger-bone relic.

Records make it evident that Hsien-tsung was desirous of longevity, if not immortality. Both the search for immortal herbs and the veneration of the relic attest to his craving for long life. He raged at Han Yü's memorial because it revealed his secret—that he was worshipping the relic to benefit himself rather than the state and populace. At 41, the emperor was in the prime of his life, but Han

p. 518

Yü was suggesting that his mortality would come early like those rulers in the Southern Dynasties who had devoted themselves to the Buddha.[\[62\]](#)

It was only natural that he could not tolerate Han Yü's portentous remarks when he was expecting to see his faith rewarded.

He must have also thought that Han Yü deserved the death penalty because he distorted history to curse him.

As a matter of fact, Han's notion regarding the early mortality of those rulers who had sought blessings from the Buddha simply was untrue. In the cases of T'ang emperors who had worshipped Buddhism, only Hsien-tsung's father had died before the age of fifty.[\[63\]](#)

Hsien-tsung himself had just accomplished a propitious restoration of i

imperial power and provincial order by putting an end to military governors' insubordination, which might have haunted his grandfather badly enough to loosen up his policy toward Buddhism. [64]

Perhaps Hsien-tsung felt he was being blessed with much success and this should justify the relic-veneration ritual which was his way of reciprocating favor to the Buddhist communities.

Furthermore, this ritual, along with the use of immortal herbs and elixirs might well double the efficacy of his prayers for long life and eternal peace.

How could it be bearable that Han Yü relegated his self-proclaimed benign action to a worthless aberration!

Ironically, Han Yü's good-faith warning did presage the emperor's misfortune.

Hsien-tsung died one year after the ceremony in honor of the relic.

Although his death was linked to the murder conspiracy by the eunuch

Ch'eng Hung-chih 陳弘

志, historians tended to suggest the negative effect of drugs and the worship of the

relic.[\[65\]](#)

In any case, we are almost certain that the relic was one of the antidotes on which Hsien-tsung relied to look for spiritual peace and physical strength.

He does not see any incongruity between the two and the magic they might engender, because both were believed to be beneficial to one's life.

Most importantly, he seems to have felt it was perfectly legitimate to hold the relic-veneration ritual because it had been periodically conducted by his ancestors.

He had good reasons to accord the relic an unqualified and extravagant reception ceremony.

The finger-bone relic and its associated ritual was very much a tradition and history by now.

No emperor in the later T'ang would not acknowledge that Hsien-tsung had venerated the relic.

Although not every emperor would venerate the relic the way Hsien-tsung had done, there may have been good reasons why they did not sh

ow the same reverence.

The one emperor who indeed demonstrated the same degree of reverence to the relic was I-tsung.

Official histories suggest that I-tsung had long been a devout Buddhist before learning anything about the finger-bone relic and that the relic was always preserved in the Fa-men ssu. Logically, I-tsung could plan on a reception ritual any time he felt he could benefit from it.

This seems to have been how I-tsung's worship of the

p. 520

relic is portrayed in official histories.

Be that as it may, why was there no mention of the relic and the temple during the interim? Why did emperors like Wen-tsung 文宗

(r.827-840) and Hsuan-tsung 宣宗 (r.847-859)

both of whom were highly interested in Buddhism, never perform any ritual? And did the relic remain secured in the same place during the reign of Wu-tsung 武宗 (r.841-846)

when he launched out an outright suppression of Buddhism?

Why did I-tsung hold the ritual after waiting for thirteen years? Can we

actually talk about the tradition of relic-veneration ritual without ascertaining that the relic was always there in the crypt of the Fa-men ssu pagoda?

Since official histories simply assume that the relic had been brought back to the Fa-men ssu after Hsien-tsung's ritual, naturally any emperor after Hsien-tsung could perform a ritual if he wanted.

It is also likely that he would be familiar with this tradition. Records do indicate that I-tsung wanted to see the relic so badly that he rode roughshod over all objections to his plan and claimed he would die without regret should he see it.

They also show that the emperor began planning the relic-veneration ritual in 873 when his political authority had virtually collapsed and the empire was on the verge of disintegration.

It would appear to be a perfect time for him to hold a ceremony that could help reclaim his authority.

In any case, he seems to have demonstrated an unflagging support of Buddhism and picked a favorable time to reinstate the ritual. [\[66\]](#)

Like Hsien-tsung, he also erected a large number of elaborately decorated shrines, tents, scented carts, wreaths, flowery banners, canopies

,and other paraphernalia made for Buddhist ceremonies, having them lined up in the capital for imperial reception of the relic.

It was reported that the entire reception process, from the dispatching of monks to the temple site to the placement of the relic in the palace chapel, was identical to that of the Hsien-tsung's ritual.

The difference was that this ritual was of a much larger magnitude of public celebration

p. 521

and of much more stunning display of imperial extravagance than before. The vociferous chanting could jolt the ground.

Once the relic was being brought into the palace, the emperor, who was overseeing the procession at the upper level of the An-fu Gate 安福門, stepped down to prostrate himself before the relic.

Tears streamed down from his face and dampened his chest he was so overjoyed at the presence of the relic.[\[67\]](#)

There he rewarded those monks and old residents of the capital who had witnessed the previous ceremony held in Hsien-tsung's time.

Then he kept the relic in the palace chapel for three days before putting

g it on public display in the capital.

The relic remained in the capital for four months until he died [\[68\]](#)

Although I-tsung's personal devotion to Buddhism motivated him to reinstate the ritual, he had to proclaim that he did it in order to pray for the people of the state. [\[69\]](#)

This was in fact a tradition and records indicated that the people were convinced of the efficacy of his pledge.

Unfortunately, less than three months after the ritual, the emperor fell ill. The illness took a toll of his life in a month.

Interestingly enough, his Confucian courtiers led by Li Wei 李蔚, Right Assistant Director of the Department of State Affairs, had warned him about Hsien-tsung's imminent death after the relic-veneration ritual.

They did what Han Yü had done long ago, but they were luckier than Han for they suffered no penalty.

The emperor was so desperate that the officials' prognostication did not concern him much.

Historians seemed to suggest that he was hoping to regain his dwindling authority by displaying the imperial wealth in the ritual and by prayi

ng to the relic for its magical protection.

Much to his disappointment, nothing seemed to be powerful enough to keep him from losing the Mandate of Heaven.

He died at forty-one, two years younger than Hsien-tsung.

VI. Discrepancies in History

In his recent overview of Buddhism during the T'ang, Stanley Weinstein offers a succinct account of Hsien-tsung's reception of the relic as follows:

p. 522

[Hsien-tsung] dispatched a group of monks led by a commissioner of the Inner Palace (Chung-shih 中使) to fetch the relic from the Fa-men ssu.

When the group, on its return journey, reached the post-station at Lin-kao, ten li west of Ch'ang-an, it was met by another commissioner who had been especially sent by the Emperor to provide an escort of imperial guards (chin-ping 禁兵) to conduct the procession to the palace, where the relic was ens

hrined for three days before being exhibited at the various monasteries in Ch'ang-an to frenetic crowds of worshipers.

People of all classes from the princes and aristocrats at the top to the commoners at the bottom appear to have outdone one another in paying homage and making monetary contributions.

The more fanatical worshiper, a variety of sources tells us, was not content merely to squander his resources on religious offerings, but also mutilated his body by searing the crown of his head (shao-ting 燒頂) or scarring his arms with fire (cho-pi 灼臂).

Still others, pretending to be ascetics, set up stalls where they deliberately seared their limbs in the hope of attracting donations from the superstitious crowds that gathered about them. [70]

While Weinstein's account is a faithful summation of what has been said in official historical records, it also acknowledges the existence of the legendary relic, the lore associated with it, and the history brought forth from it.

In fact, it acknowledges the tradition and history by saying that Hsien-tung's act of reverence towards the relic was in no way unique, since at least four of his predecessors on the T'ang throne had likewise paid

homage to it."[\[71\]](#)

Historians, while being very precise about Hsien-tsung's act, never say explicitly how earlier emperors had paid their homage to the relic and how they performed their ceremonies.

And when they describe Hsien-tsung's act, they unwittingly accept the stories or the lore surrounding the relic as a de facto tradition or history because they

p. 523

never question the origin and the vicissitude of the relic and pagoda at the Fa-men ssu.

Other questions one may ask are: Why did Hsien-tsung never consider the Feng and Shan 封

禪 sacrifice—a ritual of utmost gravity performed by the emperor to reaffirm his undeniable acceptance of the Mandate of Heaven.[\[72\]](#)

If Hsien-tsung was so concerned about his spiritual peace and his august image, why did he never consider performing the Feng and Shan sacrifice which had long existed before the relic-veneration ritual?

The emperor should be aware that it had been a "means of acknowled

ging Heaven and Earth for the blessings they had bestowed on the ruler," and of "repaying them for their kindness."[\[73\]](#)

Being an ambitious emperor whose attempted self-aggrandizement would be best served by the Feng and Shan sacrifice, he must have known that two of his ancestors, Kao-tsung and Hsüan-tsung, had been among the five previous emperors who had carried out this exalted ceremonial to profess their accomplishments and merits.[\[74\]](#)

Another ancestor, T'ai-tsung, had made several attempts to perform the ceremony, only to find himself forced to cancel his plan again and again.[\[75\]](#)

It seems possible that the emperor felt he saw less demand in the relic-veneration ritual than the Feng and Shan sacrifice because he did not have to mobilize the imperial army and many local governments to embark on this extremely lavish ceremony.

The relic-veneration ritual would meet little objection as it did in previous cases, thus needing no justification.

He must have been emboldened by earlier examples and decided to take his action.

The tradition made him aware that only the emperor could invoke the

magic properties of the relic

p. 524

to answer his prayer for a peaceful and propitious time.

If we can accept that Hsien-tsung's ritual could vouch for every aspect of the tradition revolving around the relic, are we sure the situation of the relic remained unchanged during the Hui-ch'ang Suppression when the Fa-men ssu was also subject to the imperial order of destruction? [[76](#)]

Obviously, after Hsien-tsung's death, there was a lapse of approximately sixty years during which no similar ritual was performed.

One account indicates that patrons and believers of Buddhism were left in deep solicitude for the fate of the relic and themselves.

When the ritual was restored by I-tsung, people in the capital area were extremely excited.

However, they were also wary of what might happen to the relic if another emperor should follow Wu-tsung to proscribe Buddhism again.

Therefore, while watching with excitement the ceremony arranged by I-tsung, many of them also expressed their concern over the future of the relic, lamenting that "[Only] every sixty years, the true body is recei

ved; will it reappear [again], for all of us to see?"[\[77\]](#)

They seem to have long recognized the legitimacy, sanctity, and felicity of the ritual, from which they anticipated much blessing.

Many of them must have believed that the Hui-ch'ang Suppression had inflicted such enormous pain and trauma on the Buddhist institutions that few monks dared to trust the relic to their volatile emperor.

It has been suggested that, based on the inscription unearthed in 1987, the relic was almost destroyed by Wu-tsung's relentless persecution of Buddhism.

It somehow escaped the Hui-ch'ang Suppression because the monks in the Fa-men ssu were said to have made some replicas and had one of them destroyed to feign their compliance with the imperial order to have the relic destroyed.[\[78\]](#) They

p. 525

allegedly made three duplicates and hid the original in the recess of the Fa-men ssu pagoda.

It turns out that no one after this incident knew the whereabouts of the original relic.

Scholars involved in the Fa-men ssu excavation seem to believe that this can explain why Emperor Hsüan-tsung, the father of I-tsung and a devout Buddhist, did not pay his homage to the relic—he simply could not find it.

In other words, they believe that the relic reappeared in I-tsung's reign after a rather strenuous search.

While this seems a sound interpretation of why there was no display and worship of the relic after another thirty year cycle arrived in 849 during Hsüan-tsung's reign, there are some inherent problems with this interpretation. In the first place, the existence of four grains of the unearthed relic is probably misinterpreted by these scholars.

Second, the method used to determine the nature and date of the "genuine" relic is never explained. We are told that among the wide array of the excavated objects, four grains of finger-bone relic have been identified as consisting of a piece of "holy bone" (ling ku 靈骨) or "genuine" finger bone of the Buddha and three pieces of "duplicate bone" (ying ku 影骨)

or replica. All these four grains of finger bone have been referred to as the objects to which Emperor I-tsung paid his homage during his relic r

ception and reverence ceremony, which took place in 873.

According to Chao P'u-ch'u 趙樸

初, an eminent Buddhologist and President of the Association for Chinese Buddhism in the People's Republic of China during the excavation, one of these four finger bones, viz., the "genuine" bone, may well have been the relic that existed prior to the Hui-ch'ang Suppression of the mid-840s.

Chao explains that the monks of the Fa-men ssu replicated the original genuine relic when they anticipated an imminent occurrence of large-scale persecution of Buddhism.

Before the beginning of the Hui-ch'ang Suppression, the monks of the temple had hidden the real bone at a safe place in the temple to prevent it from being destroyed. Chao

p. 526

made this speculation when he was examining the aforementioned stela inscription or "chih-wen." [\[79\]](#)

The stela inscription, however, only notes briefly that the monks "destroyed a duplicate bone,

[instead of the genuine bone,] in compliance with imperial order" issued

ed by Wu-tsung.

Although the "chih-wen" offers a brief historical account of the crypt under the Fa-men ssu and imperial receptions of the relic from the Northern Wei to the T'ang, it does not show any specific information regarding the dates of the three replicas.

Nor does it show the process of their manufacturing.

There is no reasonable explanation of the number of the replicas—that is, why three of them?

According to Chao, the three replicas are almost identical in terms of texture, shape and color.

This suggests the possibility of their having been made at the same time, perhaps sometimes near the beginning of the suppression when the monks foresaw the magnitude of the purge of Buddhism.^[80]

In other words, the existence of replicas, whether they were produced in the time around the 840s or later, remained secret and unknown to all but the forgers.

The "chih-wen" also tells us that the real finger-bone relic was rediscovered in 871 by the Ch'an monk Shih-I 師益 (dates unknown)

of Mt. Chiu-lung 九龍

山 at the north-western corner of the crypt's tunnel under the Fa-men s
su. While the rediscovery of the relic took place in the reign of I-tsung,
Shih-i had previously submitted a memorial to Hsüan-tsung 宣
宗 requesting that he be permitted to erect an altar near the foot of the
pagoda so that he could search for the finger-bone relic to gratify the
emperor. [81]

Does this suggest that Shi-i was one of those surviving forgers who kn
ew where to find the genuine relic?

Does it also suggest that Hsuan-tsung had been led to believe that the
relic had already been destroyed during the Hui-ch'ang Suppression u
ntil Shih-i told him the truth?

Might the emperor have also considered conducting a reception ritual
but his plan was frustrated by the fact that no one seemed to know wh
ere the relic was? The

p. 527

unavailability of the relic may help explain why official histories are sil
ent about his interest in the relic and why he turned to the worship of th
e Buddha' tooth. [82]

The discovery of the relic came twelve years after Hsüan-tsung's demi

se.

One wonders if it had occurred earlier, would he have given the relic another sumptuous ceremony?

In any case, Hsüan-tsung is known in Buddhist history for his unflagging support of Buddhism.

There are reasons for us to believe that he may have thought of paying homage to the relic and that he had been informed of its destruction during the reign of previous emperor.

Even if this may be a plausible interpretation, there are still difficulties to explain why there were three pieces of duplicate finger bone.

In fact, adding the destroyed one, there should have been four duplicates.

Is it possible that the secrecy of the duplication could be kept so well that only a few members of the temple knew the truth?

If that were so, Shih-i must have known and have been one of the high ranking monks involved in the stratagem?

Moreover, when Shih-i discovered the relic, did he see four pieces of bone or just the genuine one?

Official histories seem to suggest that Emperor I-tsung paid his homa

ge to one relic. Then where were the other three replicas?

Since the "chih-wen" does mention the duplicate bones, why did they not appear in any other account about I-tsung's ritual?

Last but not least, if this was a secret, how did the writer of the "chih-wen," Seng-ch'e, learn it? Was he also involved in this forgery?

If he was involved in it, why did he not offer to search for the relic?

There are questions and puzzles in scholars' attempts to resolve the mystery of the relic so as to construct a tradition or history that is somewhat like "mythistory," to borrow William McNeill's term.^[83]

Although much of the story told in the inscription remains nebulous, the cases of Hsien-tsung's and I-tsung's rituals could attest to the existence of the relic-veneration tradition and reveal precisely how T'ang rulers consecrated the Buddha and Buddhism. This ritual

p. 528

made the T'ang veneration of the Buddha's finger-bone relic unique in Chinese history.

It was conceived to be instrumental for the enhancement of the imperial rulership and reaffirmation of the imperial authority when it was chal

enged.

It also underscored the influence of Buddhist culture, helping it to prevail in the T'ang capital.

It cast a spell on the people in Ch'ang-an who developed an unabated fanatical zeal for Buddhism and an unswerving piety for the relic of the Buddha.[\[84\]](#)

It extracted numerous valuables from the people in the capital area, where the opulent wealthy and nobles converged.

It provided an opportunity for them to join the congregational worship that would otherwise be a rare event.

Given the privilege to witness this finger-bone relic of the Buddha, they were further convinced that higher merits would accrue to them from their generous donations.

These donations made up the hundreds of priceless objects that were used to shield the relic every time it was ensconced in the Fa-men ssu.

Those objects donated in the last ritual of the T'ang survived the turmoil which occurred during the changes of imperial dynasties and arose from an obscurity of more than a thousand-year history.

The seven excavated caskets used to protect the finger-bone relic and

the accompanying valuables are the most eloquent testimony of this unique T'ang ritual and its powerful influence.^[85]

They have left an indelible mark in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

Interestingly enough, the ritual came to a halt after I-tsung's death and was

p. 529

never again reinstated in later dynasties.

The pendulum of worship seems to have swung to the Buddha's tooth relic in the Sung dynasty.

Whether this change was due to the same kind of secrecy planned during the re-enshrinement of the relic after its returning to the Fa-men ssu remains a question.

What we know for sure is that while Sung emperors were respectful to the tooth relic, they did not sponsor any lavish or costly rituals like their T'ang counterparts.

VII. Concluding Remarks

On his way to Ch'ao-yang to which he was banished because of his daring critique of the imperial relic-veneration ritual, Han Yü despaired of his failure to right the emperor's wrong and composed a poem which reveals his frustration. In this poem, Han Yü laments the injustice being done to him and regrets being rendered worthless after dedicating his life to serving the emperor and the state with unswerving loyalty[86]

While he was protesting against the emperor's act, it was probably not his knowledge that he might have also criticized something whose existence resulted from the fusion of legend, lore, and history.

He may have never anticipated that his own action was again woven in this complicated fusion.

He probably could never understand that Emperor Hsien-tsung was so adamant about his act because he believed he had a tradition and history to back him up.

This tradition, which very well may have consisted of invented tradition, allowed the emperor to have more reasons to perform the ritual than Han Yü could have comprehended. However, how this tradition was formed is, to our knowledge, not the emperor's concern.

It is not this writer's attempt to deny or assert the formation of this relic
-veneration tradition.

Rather, the writer wants to question the historicity of this

p. 530

tradition, which was in all likelihood an amalgamation of legend, lore,
and history.

It appears that both Buddhist scholars and secular historians conflated
one another's accounts and fortuitously created this tradition.

There existed an unambiguous process of historicization which made the
lore transform into history.

This historicization reached its pinnacle when Seng-ch'e recounted I-tsun's
ritual in the "chih-wen."

The foregoing discussions show that much of what is said in the "chih-wen"
cannot be taken at its face value, because the sources on which the
writer drew contain both logos and mythos, or factual and fictional
components of cultural phenomena in the societies of the periods surveyed.

Today, we have difficulties distinguishing fact from fiction because historians
depicting this aspect of history did not always tell us logos. Con

versely, Buddhists did not necessarily tell us myths either [87]

The progress of time blurs the reality and prevents us from making a clear distinction between history and myth. While we may argue for the existence of the relic veneration tradition, we should also take note of the complicated process of historicization. Whether it was history or myth, this tradition began with a legend and ended with another legend.

Between these two ends was a continued melding and accretion of legendary tales and reality. The various partakers of this history or myth, be they historians or Buddhist scholars, past or present, might mislead us with their idiosyncratic and idealized account of what they had learned.

Although what modern scholars have learned from the unearthed artifacts and relics is intriguing and may help shed some light on their related histories, there is still room for further investigation.

If the basis of the subject matter, viz., the finger-bone relic, of the history remains problematic, what is the substance of the distinction between the duplicate finger bones and the genuine finger bone other than the determination of their approximate dates. How can

p. 531

the genuine bone be "genuine" in the real sense of the word when there have been diverse forms of relics and little is as well known of them as is known of the finger-bone relic?

p. 532

奉獻佛陀——唐代帝王王奉迎 佛舍利的傳說、民俗、與歷史

黃啓江

哈伯和威廉史密斯學院中文系副教授

提要

本文旨在處厘中國佛史上一相當重要且耐人味之課題——佛的生身舍利及帝王禮拜舍利之現象。文中敘述自魏晉至唐代以來，帝王在宮殿裡所舉行的奉迎舍利儀式，並以唐高宗（r.650~683）、武后（r.690~704）肅宗（r.756~761）、德宗（r.779~804）、憲宗（r.805~819）及懿宗（r.859~870）等皇帝之尊禮舍利為焦點，分析各朝禮拜舍利之可能因素。本文雖大致同意歷史文獻對奉迎佛舍利之描述，但要提醒讀者注意此禮拜儀式的歷史背景，了解人為的、刻意塑造成的「傳統」對佛舍利之存在及此儀式產生的作用。文中揭示各個歷史段裡，史家與佛教學者有意無意地捲入塑造成「歷史化」佛舍利及其奉迎之過程，而使其成為一歷史傳統。此塑造過程，表現於正史及佛教著作裡結合傳說、民俗、與史實而成之歷史敘述。此類歷史敘述多為近代史家作為撰寫佛教歷史之依據；而此一

結合之結果，實類似歷史事實與虛構故事之混合體，為某些西方史家所謂的「迷思歷史」（mythistory）。

本文大致分成七節。首先略述正史及佛教著作中有關佛舍利與帝王之關聯，說明多數記錄都稱傳說中阿王佛利之神異性。其神蹟吸引唐以前不少皇帝與親王。這些記載都認定佛舍利之神奇及其改變人們信仰之用，顯示他們受到俗裡有關佛舍利說法之影響。為了說明此點，本文之第二節集中討論民俗觀裡的佛舍利如何轉化成歷史性或「準歷史性」

（quasi-historcial）之敘述，採名僧道宣（596~667）之著作為範例，說明此一變化之複雜過程。並將道宣著作中有關劉薩何及其發現佛舍利之故事，置於帝王迎拜、瞻仰佛舍利之脈絡中詳加討論。

本文第三節專論帝王奉禮迎、尊禮佛舍利之詳情，舉出兩種禮拜佛舍利之傳統：拜佛牙及拜佛指骨。本節根據道宣著作所提供之資料，及 1987 年在陝西法門寺所挖掘之碑銘，認為唐以前可能已形成上述兩種禮拜佛舍利傳統。其中禮拜佛指骨在唐代躍為最盛行之傳統。第四節專論此一傳統，說明高宗至德宗以來諸帝為何並如何表達他們指骨之敬仰，

p. 533

及舉行迎拜佛指骨之儀式。這些皇帝大致因健康不佳、政治不穩、軍事不利，等各種原因，覺其王權之削弱，發現奉佛之重要，而欲以奉迎佛骨之儀式來幫助鞏固、安定其為人主之威權。

第五節指出唐代帝王迎佛指骨利舍一事史家寫成戲劇化之篇章。尤其憲宗與懿宗之奉迎佛指骨至京，皇帝之私下禮拜等過程，莊嚴隆重，耗費巨大，而百姓沿途瞻仰，頂禮膜拜，燒頂灼臂，如痴如狂，正史之記載，彰彰在目。本節指出正史作者似認定此佛教指骨亦為所謂的阿育王佛舍利之部份，而特別渲染憲宗、懿宗兩朝奉迎佛骨，使其顯得史無前例，隱晦了其與前代奉佛及民俗的關聯。第六節即在討論此一落失之關聯，略述現代學者對發掘出之法門寺碑銘所作的解釋。並指出其說法之優點及問題，懷疑學者將迎拜佛指骨之民俗說法歷史化的潛在意圖。此節並質疑學者對佛骨年代與歸屬之斷定法及其對所謂的「靈骨」與「影骨」來源的解釋。此「靈骨」與「影骨」為法門寺掘之七百餘種遺物之一，但「影骨」之複製成「靈骨」，仍有問題尚未釐清。

本文結論重申傳說與民俗對歷史記載形成之影響，並提醒史家在遇到含史實及故事之史料而難以分辨其虛實之時，應如何小心處理及運用這些史料。雖然本文承認重建可靠的佛舍利及奉迎舍利之歷史，不無可能，但亦提出若干疑義，以供更進一步的研及討論。

關鍵詞：1.佛舍利 2.歷史化 3.迷思歷史 4.準歷史性 5.道宣 6.劉薩何故事 7.佛指骨 8.法門寺

[1] This article concerns primarily "bodily relics" which refer to remains of the Buddha's physical body, such as the cremated bone, hair, teeth.

"Contact relics," including everything the Buddha had touched, things he had used and places he had lived, preached, and so forth, and "reminder relics," such as scripture and images, are not the major concerns of this article.

For a contrast between these two kinds of relics, see Phyllis Brooks trans., Bernard Faure, *Visions of Powers: Imaging Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, 1996) pp. 158-163.

[2] For the Aśoka legend and his treatment of the Buddha's relics, see John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 113-119.

[3] These four places are: Lo-yang 洛陽, P'eng-ch'eng 彭城, Ku-tsang 姑臧, and Lin-tzu 臨淄. See Wei Shou, *Wei shu* 魏書

(Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü edition) , chüan 114, p.

3027. Wei Shou's record was included in the Kuang hung-ming chi 廣弘明集 by Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596-667)

in Taishō shihshū daizōkyō [hereafter, Taishō] Vol.52. 2103, p.101c.

[4] See Wei shu, chüan 114, p. 3029.

[5] See Arthur F. Wright,

"Fu-tu-teng: A Biography" in Robert M. Somers ed., Studies in Chinese Buddhism (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) pp. 34-68.

[6] See Tao-hsuan, Chi Shen-chou san-pao kan-t'ung lu 集神州三寶感通錄 (hereafter, KTL) , in Taishō 52.

2106, p.410b and Kuang Hung-ming chi 廣弘明集, in Taishō 52.

2103, p.99c. The latter account is slightly different in wording. Both see

m to have been based on Wu shu 吳

書, apparently a non-Buddhist historical record concerning the Kingdom

of Wu which is no longer extant.

[7] Ibid. Also see Hui-chiao, Kao seng chuan 高僧傳

(Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü , 1992, punctuated edition) pp.15-19.

Hui-chiao has the most elaborate account of this event. For his other account of the relics, see discussion below.

For his work, see Arthur Wright,

"Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks" in

Robert M. Somers op.cit., pp. 73-111; Koichi Shinohara,

"Biographies of Eminent Monks in a Comparative Perspective: The Function of the Holy in Medieval Chinese Buddhism," in Chung-hwafo-h

süeh hsüeh-pao, no. 7 (1994), pp. 479-498.

süeh hsüeh-pao, no. 7 (1994), pp. 479-498.

[8] See Kao seng chüan, pp.477-479.

[9] See Liang su (Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1973) chüan 54, pp.

791-792. The Liangshu was compiled by Yao Ch'a 姚察 (533-606)

and his son Yao Ssu-lien 姚思廉 (557-637) in the early T'ang.

[10] Ibid

[11] See Nan shih (Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1973) chuan 178, pp.

1954-1957. Note that Li Yen-shou also served during T'ai-tsung's reign

and was only a little later than Yao Ssu-lien.

[12] See KTL, p.405c

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See KTL, pp.405c-406a.

[16] Ibid.

[17] KTL, pp. 404b-405a.

[18] [KTL, pp. 405ab.

[19] Tao-hsüan also provided a further story about Liu Sa-he in his *Hsü Kao-seng chuan* 續高僧傳, where Liu is described as very active in the Northern Wei and the Sui dynasties. See *Hsü Kao-seng chuan* 續高僧傳 in Taishō 50, 2060, pp. 644c-645a.

The accounts in this and other texts are clearly the sources of the story Liu Sa-he he-shang yin-yüan chi appeared in three Tun-huang scrolls.

See Ch'en Tso-lung 陳祚龍,

"Liu Sa-heyen-chiu—Tun-huang fo-chiao wen-hsien chieh-hsi chih i" 劉薩河研究——敦煌佛教文獻解析之

一, in *Hua-kang fo-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 華崗佛學學報, vol.3 (1973), pp.

33-56. Note the three variants of the last character of Liu's name (何, 河, 訶) are used in different texts.

[20] Interestingly, Tsan-ning says in Tao-hsüan's biography that Emperor Tai-tsung 代宗 (r. 763-779)

of the T'ang dynasty wanted to do reverence to the tooth relic and a lump of flesh relic that Tao-hsüan had obtained. Tao-hsüan, however, seems never to have mentioned this flesh relic.

See Tsan-ning, *Sung Kao-seng chuan* [hereafter, SKSC]

(Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü punctuated edition, 1987), chüan 14, pp. 329-330.

[21] This Fa-hsien, Preceptor of the Monastics in the Ch'i, is not to be confused with Fa-hsien 法顯 (d. 423) of the [Liu] Sung 劉

宋 of the Southern dynasty. See Ch'en Yün 陳垣, "Fo-ya ku-shih" 佛牙故事 and "Fa-hsien fo-ya yin-hsien chi" 法獻佛牙隱現

記, first included in the Ch'en Yün hsien-sheng chin nien-nien shih-hsüeh lun-chi 陳垣先生近廿年史學論集

(Hong Kong: Ch'eng-wen shu-tien, 1971), pp. 33-40,

41-43, and later included in the Ch'en Yün hsien-sheng lun-wen chi 陳

垣先生論文集 (Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982), pp. 88-398,

399-401. In Fa-men ssu yü fo-chiao wen hua 法門寺與佛教文化

(Shensi: Shensi shih-fan ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan she, 1988) , Po Ming 柏明 and his co-authors quote Ch'en Yüan's articles, but they mix up the names of the two monks.

[22] Ibid. Ch'en reference is the Shih-shih t'ung-chien 釋氏通

鑑, which simply says the state P'an-p'an presented the tooth relic.

In fact, the Nan-shih 南

史 also points out that P'an-p'an presented a tooth relic to Emperor Wu in the first year of Ta-t'ung 大通 (527-528) .

[23] See above discussion, especially the reference to KTL, Taisho 52 , p. 405bc and PoMing et. al., op. cit., pp. 67-68.

[24] See Ch'en Yün, op. cit.

Ch'en Yün's account is based on the Ch'en Shu 陳

書, which says that Emperor Wu of the Ch'en received the tooth from a certain monk called Hui-chih 慧志

(dates unknown) , a dharma brother of Hui-hsing 慧興

(dates unknown) .

The latter had safeguarded the tooth for the Liang emperor at his mon

astery, Ch'ing-yün ssu 慶雲

寺, and entrusted Hui-chih with the tooth before his death.

See Ch'en shu (Beijing:Chung-hua shu-chü, punctuated edition) p.34.

[25] The biography of Tao-hsüan in SKSC pp.

329 shows that Tao-hsüan received this tooth from Nata, who is said to be the eldest son of Vaiśravaṇa, one of the four Maharajas. In addition to this tooth, there were other tooth relics.

Some of them were considered fake, even though we cannot prove whether the genuine ones were also Aśoka relics.

See Ch'en Yüan, op. cit.

[26] I am referring to the monks at the Fa-men ssu, especially the writer(s) of "Ta-T'ang Hsien-t'ung ch'i-sung ch'i-yang chen-shen chih-wen" 大唐咸通啓送岐陽真身志文 [hereafter,

"chih-wen"], ascribed to Seng Ch'e 僧徹 (dates unknown)

who held an official title "The Head Monk of the Inner Palace and the Purple-Robed Great Master of Purity and Light on the Left-and-Right Streets"

(Nei-tien shou-tso tso-yu-chieh Ching-kuang ta-shih ssu-tzu sha-me

n 內殿首座左右街淨光大師賜紫沙門) .

This inscription, unearthed in the 1987 excavation, consists of 1087 characters which outline the history of imperial worship of the relic in the Fa-men ssu.

The entirety of the inscription is included in Ch'en Chüan-fang 陳全方, Fa-men ssu yü fo-chiao 法門寺與佛教 (Taipei: Shui-niu ch'u-pan she, reprint, 1989) .

[27] Ta-Wei has been identified as the second year of Fei-ti of the Wei (r.531-532) , which was either the second year of the reign P'u-t'ai 普泰 or Chung-hsing 中興.

It was also the first year of the reign T'ai-ch'ang 太昌.

The three reign titles were used because a swift change of the rulership occurred in that year.

Also T'o-pa Yü has been identified as Prince Huai-an 懷安 under Fei-ti.

See Ch'en Ching-fu 陳景富, Fa-men ssu 法門寺 (Sian: San-ch'in ch'u-pan she, 1988) , pp.11-13.

[28] See Kuang Hung-ming chi, pp.213c-214ab. For Sui Wen-ti's patronage of Buddhism, see a brief discussion in Arthur Wright., The Sui Dy

nasty: the Unification of China., A.D. 581-617

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) , pp 135-136.

[29] Chang Liang's station at Ch'i-chou is not listed in his biography in official history. See Chiu T'ang shu 舊唐書

[hereafter, CTS], chüan 69, pp.

2514-16. In his early career, Chang Liang was one of ten meritorious officials whom Emperor T'ai-tsung enfeoffed with four hundred households. He once held the title of Minister of the Department of Justice

(Hsing-pu shang-shu 刑部尚

書) . Once T'ai-tsung asked him why he had not become a monk if he

had been so dedicated to Buddhism. What was Chang's answer is not

given in the CTS. See CTS, chüan 2, p.31, chüan 3, p.

56, chüan 57, p.2295, chüan 63, p.2404.

[30] See KTL, p. 406c

[31] See *ibid.*

According to Tao-hsüan, two stelae believed to have been erected in the [Northern] Chou and [Northern] Wei were found during the opening of the crypt ceremony conducted by Chang Liang.

Tao-hsüan, however, did not take note of anything from these stelae, thinking that they were not worth reading.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 407ab. Also, Fa-yuan chu-lin, pp.

586b-587a. Stanley Weinstein, Buddhism under the T'ang

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.

37, has a brief note on the installation of King Aśoka's image. But the statue of Kao-tsung is mistaken for that of Kao-tzu.

[34] It seems the finger bone and the skull bone were not put together, because the reliquaries were made for the finger bone, which the text refers to as "she-li", śarira or relic. The skull bone seems to have been referred to as "ting-ku" all the time.

[35] One ts'un in T'ang measurement is slightly shorter than a modern English inch. Therefore one ts'un and two fen is little longer than a modern inch.

"Chih-wen" offers the same account in terms of the length of the finger bone. Another source, which is probably based on the Chü tan lu 劇

談錄 by K'ang Pien 康

駢 of the T'ang, gives a much higher measurement, viz., one ts'un and eight fen. See Chang Chung-su 張仲素, "Fo-ku pei," 佛骨碑 dated 819, included in the Chin shih lu 金石錄 and quoted in Ch'en Ching-fu, op. cit., p. 39.

[36] For Te-tsung's attitude toward Buddhism, see Weinstein, op. cit., pp. 89-99.

[37] See Ts'ui Chih-yüan 崔致遠, "T'ang Ta-chien-fu ssu ku ssu-chu fan-ching ta-teFa-tsang ho-shang chuan" 唐大薦福寺故寺主翻經大德法藏和尚傳

[Biography of the monk Fa-tsang, the former abbot of the great Chien-fu Temple and the great master of the translation of scriptures], included in the Chung-kuo fo-chiao ssu-hsiang tzu-liao hsüan-pien 中國佛教思想資料選編 [hereafter, FCTL], volume two, book two (Beijing: Chung-huashu-chü, 1983) pp. 316-317.

For the construction and functions of the ming-t'ang [Hall of Light], see Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock* (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1988) .

Forte gives a thorough documentation regarding the construction of what he refers to as the "ming-t'ang complex" and its link with Buddhism. But he fails to note its connection with Empress Wu's relic-veneration ritual.

[38] Although the construction of the ming-t'ang was completed on February 17th, 688, according to Forte, *op. cit.*, pp.

141-145, the beginning of the ming-t'ang sacrifice was in 689 according to CTS (chüan 6, pp.

118-127). Between 689 and 698, Empress Wu regularly sacrificed at the Hall of Light at least once a year, with the exception of 694 and 695.

The two-year lapse was apparently due to the destruction of the building by fire, perhaps arson.

The perpetrator was generally believed to be none other than the Empress's monk lover Hsüeh Huai-i 薛懷

義, who had supervised its construction in 688 and reconstruction in 695 as imperial commissioner. See CTS, chüan 183, pp.

4741-4743; c.f., Richard W. L. Guisso,

"The Chou Dynasty" in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, p. 312.

Forte argues that Hsüeh might have been made the scapegoat by Con

fucian historians who wanted to justify the murder of Hsüeh and the persecution of his followers. See Forte, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66.

[39] See CTS, chüan 22, pp. 863-867, and Forte, *op. cit.*, pp. 161, 185, 192, 209-229. Empress Wu was apparently making a step further to sanctify and apotheosize herself.

[40] For the emergence of this title in China and its adoption by Empress Wu, see Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century*

(Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1976), pp.

136-144. When Empress Wu claimed this title in 693, it was only four years after she had become the first woman emperor of China

(690). During this period, she was very likely indulging herself in an euphoria which resulted from a potential Maitreyan movement, which eventually made her a self-proclaimed incarnation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. See Forte (1988), *op. cit.*, pp. 209-255.

[41] Among them were Ti Jen-chieh 狄仁傑

(630-700), Chang T'ing-kuei 張廷珪

(dates unknown) , and Li Chiao 李嶠

(644-713) . Official records, however, disagree in the Empress's response to their memorials. The biographies of Ti Jen-chieh and Chang Ting-kuei in CTS say that the Empress stopped her plan after hearing Ti's and Chang's complaints (CTS, chüan 88, pp. 2893-94, chüan 101, pp. 3151-52) . This was followed by the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien [hereafter, TCTC].

The biography of Li Chiao in CTS says that the empress rejected Li's view and went ahead with the construction (CTS, chüan 94, pp.

2994-95) . Southern Sung Buddhist historians Chih-p'an 志磐

(dates unknown) and Tsu-hsiu 祖琇 (dates unknown)

concluded that the image was constructed despite the objections of the three officials. Tsu-hsiu, however, commended Ti for braving a memorial to correct the Empress's wrongdoing.

See Lung-hsing fo-chiao pien-nien t'ung-lun 隆興佛教編年通論

(Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng ch'u-pan she, 卅 Hsü -tsang-ching 續藏

經 edition) chüan 14, pp. 560-562 and Fo-tsu t'ung-chi 佛祖統紀

[hereafter, FTTC], Taisho 49, 2035, p.370c.

The latter mistakenly dates the construction in 700.

Forte remarks that the official criticisms were "effective enough to make Wu Chao 武曌 give up her grandiose project." See Forte (1988), op. cit., pp.151-153.

[42] For the An Lu-shan Rebellion, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[43] This is based on one of the inscriptions among the objects excavated in 1987. The inscription, entitled "Ta-T'ang sheng-ch'ao Wu-yu-wang-ssu chen-shen pao-t'a pei-mingping-hsü 大唐聖朝無憂王寺真身寶塔碑銘并序

[Preface to the Inscription of the Precious Stupa of the Buddha's True Body (Preserved)

in the Wu-yu-wang Temple during the Holy Dynasties of the Great T'ang], indicates the reception of the relic was in 760 rather than 756 as indicated in FTTC, p.

375a. Interestingly enough, this big event was not recorded in the *Fo-tsu li-tai t'ung-tsai* 佛祖歷代通載 and the *Shih-shih chi-ku-lüeh* 釋氏稽古略. Nor was it recorded in any other Buddhist history.

[44] For the sale of ordination certificates, which began in the reign of Hsüan-tsung 玄宗 (r.712-755) and which became an official policy during the reign of Su-tsung, see Weinstein, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

[45] See FTTC, Taisho 49, 2035, p. 376a. Ling-wu is in present-day Yin-ch'uan 銀川 of Ningsia 寧夏 province.

[46] It should be noted that Su-tsung was now enjoying the successful outcome of a restoration which he believed was partly due to the blessings occasioned by the prayers of the highly respected Tantric monk Pu-k'ung chin-kang 不空金剛 (a. k. a. Amoghavajra, 705-774) .

[47] See CTS, chüan 111, p. 3327. Weinstein followed the FTTC and skillfully linked the reception of the finger-bone relic to the palace chanting. Now the newly discovered source suggests that the FTTC has mixed up the date of the reception.

As a result, the chanting could have been a protracted event, which tie

d in with the emperor's belief in Tantric Buddhism under the guidance of Pu-k'ung.

[48] See CTS, *ibid.* His minister, Chang Hao 張

鎬, believing Buddhism could not bring about the peace, remonstrated with him that if he wanted to invite blessings, he should "provide a good living for the people and rectify mores and customs."

Along with this, he should also "fix his mind on inaction (wu-wei) and not be confused by the small vehicle." Apparently Chang was unable to stem Su-tsung's action, albeit that he did assent to Chang's advice.

[49] See Weinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[50] Te-tsung was forced to flee from Ch'ang-an to Feng-t'ien 奉

天, the present-day Kan county, during what was known as Ching-yüan Mutiny 涇原兵

變 in 783. The following year, he was forced to flee to Liang-chou 涼州 in present-day Nan-cheng 南鄭 of Shensi 陝西 province.

[51] See Weinstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

[52] For instance, Ch'en Ching-fu tends to think in this vein.

See pages 114-115 of his book. He explains that the emperor, feeling that the situation of the military governors was beyond his control, expected to draw "other's power" from the relic to help him rule his state more efficiently and relieve himself [from the pain inflicted upon him because of unsuccessful military expeditions].

Also because the emperor felt the influence of the conventional practice, he simply followed the earlier examples to have the relic brought to the palace chapel and put on public display.

This view, although it has some merit, tends to simplify the process in which the emperor felt it necessary to change his mind-set and reorient his religious policy.

[53] See CTS, chüan 13, p. 369, TCTC, chüan 233, p.

7520. Here CTS indicates that the finger bone is more than a ts'un

(ts'un yü 寸餘).

[54] See *ibid.* p 115.

[55] See Han's memorial included in his collected work, the Han Ch'an g-li chi 韓昌黎集 (Taipei: He-lo t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1975) pp.354-356.

A partial English translation of this memorial is available in Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 225-226; Edwin Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels in T'ang China* (New York: the Ronald Press Co., 1955), pp. 221-224 and William de Bary ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 372-374.

A full translation of the memorial is provided by Homer Dub, in "Han Yü and the Buddha's Relic: An Episode in Medieval Chinese Religion," in *The Review of Religion*, vol. 11 (1946), pp. 5-17.

[56] Han Yü was demoted from his position as Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice (Hsing-pu shih-lang 刑部侍郎) and then banished to Ch'ao-yang 潮陽 in present-day Ch'ao-chou 潮州 of Kwangtung province.

[57] Records indicate that in his youth, Hsien-tsung often kept his grandfather's company and was able to observe his work.

In a conversation with his ministers taking place in 812, he tried to explain away Te-tsung's unwillingness to trust his ministers, saying, "However, this is not entirely Te-tsung's fault.

[I say this because] I was always with him in my youth.

I saw that whenever the advantages and disadvantages of things needed serious discussion, ministers never debated over the pros and cons and provided their advice.

All they wanted was to keep their emoluments and protect their own safety. How could Te-tsung alone be blamed [for what he had done]?"

[58] See Ch'eng-kuan's biography in the SKSC, chüan 5, p.

106, and "Ssu-tsu Ch'ing-liangkuo-shih chuan" in Hsu -fa 續

法., Fa-chieh-tsung wu-tsu lueh-chi 法界宗五祖略記

(A Brief Account of the Five Patriarchs of the Dharma Realm School)

included in the above cited FCTL, vol. two, book two, pp. 380-384.

[59] The Sanskrit origin of dharmadhātu, traditionally translated into "dharma realm"

(fa-chieh), contains the word dhātu which really means "relic."

See Gregory Schopen,

"On the Buddha and His Bones: the Conception of a Relic in the Inscriptions of Nāgārjuna," in Journal of American Oriental Society,

108.4 (1988) pp.

527-537. It is not clear whether Ch'eng-kuan knew and taught the emperor this denotation of "dharma realm," and if he possibly may have influenced the emperor on his reverence of the relic.

[60] See CTS, chüan 14, pp. 431-432. One of the ministers, Li Fan 李藩, advised him of the futility and danger of searching for immortality. He pointed out that the "life expansion elixir" obtained from an Indian monk had caused T'ai-tsung to fall ill so suddenly that no cure could save his life.

[61] See TCTC, chüan 240, pp. 7754-7755.

Despite policy critics' opposition, Hsien-tsung insisted on making this assignment.

He asked his advisors not be so loath to the idea of troubling a prefecture to help seek ways of extending a ruler's life.

[62] See Han Yü ,

"Lun fo-ku piao" cited above, and TCTC, chüan 240, pp. 7758-7759.

[63] Shun-tsung died at forty-six, but he had fallen ill long before he became the emperor.

Other T'ang rulers mentioned earlier all enjoyed a relatively long life b

y contemporary standards: T'ai-tsung fifty-two, Kao-tsung fifty-six, Empress Wu eighty-three, Su-tsung fifty-two, Te-tsung sixty-four.

[64] For Hsien-tsung's military accomplishment, see Charles A. Peterson,

"The Restoration Completed: Hsien-tsung and the Provinces," in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspective on the T'ang*

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) pp.

151-91. Also see Hsien-tsung chapter in Denis Twitchett ed., *Cambridge Chinese History*, vol. 3, part 1, pp. 522-38.

[65] For Hsien-tsung's death, see CTS, chüan 15, p.

472 and TCTC, chüan 241, pp.

7775-7777. It was believed that Hsien-tsung had been ingesting a cert

ain "gold cinnabar" (chintan 金

丹), which the Taoist priest Liu Mi had concocted for him.

This drug caused him to grow so choleric that many eunuchs around him became liable to severe punishments or unexpected execution.

P'ei Lin 裴潏

(dates unknown), an Imperial Diarist, advised him to stop taking the

drug, noting that all medicines are meant to cure illness and are not objects of daily ingestion and that the cinnabar, made from gold dusts and minerals, is inflammatory and poisonous.

It will cause a raging internal combustion which is not something one's five viscera can bear.

P'ei Lin suggested that Liu Mi be required to take the drug for one year to test its efficacy and that Liu's was a quack medicine and a year of trial would prove him right. Unfortunately, his advice infuriated the emperor and got him demoted to a small district.

Homer H. Dubs says in the above quoted article that two days before the emperor died, he had taken "a draught of medicine given [to] him by a eunuch."

This "medicine" is likely to be a kind of poisonous drug, and the eunuch is often regarded as Ch'en Hung-chih.

However, the CTS on the basis of which Dubs writes the above statement does not say it with such certainty.

[66] See TCTC, chüan 252, p. 8165, entry of Hsien-t'ung 咸

通 fourteenth year. See also Tu-yang tsa-pien 杜陽雜

編 included in Jen Chi-yü 任繼

愈, Han-T'ang fo-chiao ssu-hsianglun-chi 漢唐佛教思想論集

(Beijing: Jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1974) , pp.

327-328. For I-tsung's infatuation with Buddhism, see TCTC, chüan 250

, pp. 8097-8098, also see Weinstein, pp. 144-146; Robert Somers,

"I-tsung's Support of Buddhism," in Twitchett ed., Cambridge History o

f China, vol 3, part 1, pp.712-714.

[67] See TCTC, ibid., biography of Li Wei 李

蔚 in the CTS, chüan 19A, p.683 and in the HsinT'ang shu, chüan 181,

p. 5354.

[68] See Tu-yang tsa-pien cited above. Also see TCTC, chüan 252, p.

8168.

[69] See I-tsung's edict in CTS, chüan 19A. p. 683.

[70] See Weinstein, op. cit., p.

103. Chinese characters are my insertions.

Weinstein's account is based on the biography of Han Yü in the CTS a

nd the information provided by the T'ang-hui-yao 唐會要.

[71] See ibid, p.102. His sources are Tao-hsüan's KTL and Chih-p'an's

FTTC

[72] About the Feng and Shan sacrifice, see Howard Wechsler, Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), chapter 9, in particular p. 176ff.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid, pp.

176-183. As Wechsler recounts, T'ai-tsung made several attempts to perform the ritual but did not accomplish any of them for reasons ranging from his minister's opposition to the appearance of ill omens.

He almost carried out the last plan but was forced to cancel it because he was, in his own words,

"concerned with the welfare of people." The true reason for this cancellation remains unclear.

[76] For the liquidation of the Fa-men ssu, see E. O. Reischauer trans., Ennin's Travel in T'ang China (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1955) pp. 237-247.

[77] See Tu-yang tsa-pien cited above.

[78] This speculation is based on the "chih-wen" quoted earlier. Chinese archaeologists and Buddhologists seem to agree with what is said in the "chih-wen."

See the following books discussing the Fa-men ssu excavation quoted earlier: Ch'en Chuan-fang (reprint, 1992), Ch'en Ching-fu (1988), pp. 117-122, Po Ming et al., (1988).

Some other books and articles related to the relic are K'e Wan-ch'eng

柯萬成, "Feng-hsiang fa-men ssu fo-ku k'ao" 鳳翔法門寺佛骨考

[A Specific Study of the Buddha's Bone Placed in the Fa-men Temple

in Feng-hsiang], in Wen-shih yen-chiu lun-chi 文史研究論集

(Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1986), pp.

171-189; Shih Hsing-pang 石興邦, Fa-men ssu ti-kung 法門寺地宮

(Sian: Shensi jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1989); Chang T'ing-hao 張廷

浩, Fa-men ssu 法門寺 (Sian: Shensi lüyu chung-hsin,

1990); Shih Hsing-pang et al., Fa-men wen-wu ta-T'ang i-chen 法門文

物大唐遺珍 (Shensi: Wen-wu ch'u-pan she, 1994).

[79] See note 26 about the "chih-wen" which is quoted in the Fa-men ssu yü fo-chiao, pp. 95-96

[80] We are told that when they were discovered, the three replicas are identically in white, whereas the genuine one is a bit yellowish white and has some stains.

[81] See "chih-wen."

[82] See SKSC, chüan 16, p. 392, biography of Hui-ling 慧靈.

[83] See William H. McNeill,

"Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History and Historians," in William McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays

(Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.

3-22. The same article also appears in American Historical Review, vol. 91 (1986), no. 1, pp. 1-10.

[84] For an example of common veneration of the relics of the Buddha, see Edward Schafer, Golden Peaches of Samarkand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985 reprint) p.

266, and Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism in China

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp.279-280. Note that the relics discussed in these two books are tooth relics.

[85] Approximately one-tenth of the some seven hundred objects unearthed in 1987 are Buddhism-related. They include things such as dharma robes, ritual vessels, images of the Bodhisattva in gold and silver, caskets engraved with images of Maharaja-devas, almsbowls in gold and silver, staffs in gold, silver caskets in which the relics are placed, and so forth. The finger-bone relic is in a miniature stupa contained in eight other caskets, among them the outer and largest one was damaged during the excavation.

[86] This poem is titled, "Tso-ch'ien chih Lan-kuan shih chih-sun Hsiang" 左遷至藍關示姪孫湘

[Poem Shown to My Grand Nephew, Hsiang, at the Lan Pass on My Way to [Ch'ao-yang]. See Ch'ien Erh-sun 錢萼孫 (仲聯), Han Ch'ang-li shih hsi-nien chi-shih 韓昌黎詩繫年集釋

[Collected Commentaries on Han Yü's Poems Arranged Chronologically], included in the Han Ch'ang-li chi, p.486, cited above. For a translation

on of this poem, see Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) , p.282.

[87] While using these two terms, I am not denying the value of legend, lore, or myth.

It will be biased to say that all Buddhist accounts belong to mythos (word as authoritative pronouncement) , whereas official accounts fall all in the category of logos (word as demonstrable truth) .

I am using these terms in the way that Peter Heehs uses in his article, "Myth, History, and Theory" in *History and Theory*, no. 33 (1994) , pp. 1-19.