

Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This paper represents an attempt to reconstruct Buddhist practice in rural north China during the fifth and sixth centuries. Most of the data for this project come from dedicatory Buddhist statuary inscriptions (*tsao-hsiang chi* 造像記 or *tsao-hsiang pei-chi* 碑記), texts carved on statuary stelae (*tsao-hsiang pei* 造像碑) displaying images of Buddhist deities and/or stories recounted in Buddhist sūtras.¹ Such inscriptions constitute an extremely valuable source for the study of rural Buddhism during the Northern Dynasties, because they provide a much more detailed and vivid record than the few scattered passages on Buddhist practice which may be found in other written sources. Fortunately, thousands of statuary inscriptions still exist, and can be found in epigraphical collections, on rubbings, or on those stelae that have survived. An exciting development of recent years has been the excavation of many Buddhist stelae carved during the fifth and sixth centuries, and chances are good that more will

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¹ For an introduction to these texts, see Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, "Inscribed Stelae during the Wei, Chin, and Nan-ch'ao," in Laurence G. Thompson, ed., *Studia Asiatica: Essays in Asian Studies in Felicitation of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Professor Ch'en Shou-yi* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1975); Satō Chisui 佐藤智水, "Hokuchō zōzōmei kō" 北朝造像銘考, *SZ* 86.10 (1977): 1421–1467; and Zhao Chao, "Stone Inscriptions of the Wei-Jin Nanbeichao Period," trans. Victor Xiong, *Early Medieval China* 1 (1994): 84–96. Dorothy Ching-fun Wong (Wang Ching-fen 王靜芬), a graduate student at Harvard University currently teaching at Florida State University, is also completing a promising Ph.D. thesis on this subject. See also her "The Flourishing of Chinese Buddhist Steles in the Early Sixth Century: A Legacy of the Late Northern Wei Period (494–534)," paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Washington D.C., April 6–9, 1995.

be discovered in the future.²

The images carved on these statuary stelae were many and varied. According to the survey of Northern Dynasty statuary stelae conducted by Sato Chisui, the vast majority tend to feature images of Buddhist deities, the most popular being Sakyamuni Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan-yin), the Prabhūtaratna Buddha (To-pao Fo 多寶佛), and Amitabha Buddha.³ Certain scenes from Buddhist scriptures were also portrayed, perhaps most commonly those from the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Miao-fa tien-hua-ching* 妙法蓮華經 [T. no. 262]) and the *Vimalakirtinirdeśa Sūtra* (*Wei-mo-chieh ching* 維摩詰經 [T. no. 754]). There is also evidence that scenes showing the birth of the Buddha, as well as the tortures of the underworld, could also be carved on statuary stelae (see below).

As for the inscriptions below these images, Sato's research indicates that most conformed to one of the following two standardized forms. Texts belonging to the first form tend to begin with the date the stela was carved, followed by the identity of the donor(s), including native place. At this point, the text goes on to cite the motivation behind erecting a Buddhist statuary stele, the actual process involved, and the identity of the Buddhist deity or deities carved on the stele. The text usually concludes with a more detailed description of the motives the donor(s) had for erecting such a stele, including wishes for the longevity of the emperor and family members, as well as the desire to be reborn in a Buddhist paradise. Texts belonging to the second form usually open with a passage of Buddhist scripture or a discussion of Buddhist doctrine; often the ideas contained in these passages justify the practice of worshipping images of the Buddha (see below). The donors are then identified, and the process of erecting the stele as well as the motives behind such an action described. This is followed by the name(s) of the Buddhist deity or deities carved on

² There is a long list of excavated Buddhist stelae found during the past few decades, among the most impressive being the excavation of Hsiu-te Ssu 修德寺 in Ch'ü-yang Hsien of Hopeh province in 1954. Over 2,000 items were found, including 247 dated items ranging from 520 through 750 AD. See Yang Po-ta 楊伯達, "Ch'ü-yang Hsiu-te Ssu ch'u-t'u chi-nien tsao-hsiang te i-shu feng-ke yu t'e-cheng" 曲陽修德寺出土紀年造像的藝術風格與特徵, *Ku-kung po-wu-yuan yuan-kan* 故宮博物院院刊 2 (1960): 43. For more recent finds of significance, see "Yao-hsien hsin fa-hsien te i p'i tsao-hsiang pei" 耀縣新發現的一批造像, *K'ao-ku yü wen-wu* 考古與文物 2 (1994): 45-58; and, Chai Sheng-jung 翟盛榮 and Yang Ch'un-yuan 楊純淵, "Shan-hsi Hsi-yang ch'u-t'u i p'i Pei-ch'ao tsao-hsiang pei" 山西昔陽出土一批北朝造像碑, *WW* 12 (1991): 38-41.

³ Sato, pp. 1435-37.

the stele. Finally, the detailed description of the motives of the donor(s) is given, following by the date the stele was erected.⁴

In a recent article on the state of the study of Chinese Buddhism, Erik Zürcher points out that the overwhelming mass of material on medieval Buddhism in the dynastic histories, biographical sources like the *Kao-seng chuan* 高僧傳, and sectarian compilations like the *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 佛祖統紀, is in fact a mixed blessing. Such sources generally present only one aspect of the Buddhist religion in medieval China – the doctrines, monastic regulations, and meditation rituals which appealed to the aristocrats, officials and monks responsible for compiling the collections mentioned above. In light of this, and the fact that we only have biographical material representing one-twentieth of one percent of the Chinese sangha, Zürcher's claim that: "... our picture of Chinese Buddhism as a historical phenomenon is not merely unbalanced, it is distorted beyond all proportions," seems to have more than a little merit.⁵ Buddhist statuary inscriptions, with their wealth of data on beliefs and practices rarely mentioned in the written sources mentioned above, can provide critical information for the modern historian attempting to develop a more balanced picture of early Chinese Buddhism. These inscriptions also allow us to convincingly reconstruct many important aspects of medieval Buddhist practice, particularly if used in conjunction with medieval *dharani* sūtras and other liturgical texts, as well as works of art.⁶

Buddhist statuary stelae also functioned as sacred sites dotting the rural landscape of medieval north China, particularly more isolated areas which

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1424-25.

⁵ See Erik Zürcher, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," *JRAS* (1982): 161-76. See also the comments by Jacques Gernet in *A History of Chinese Civilization*, trans. J. R. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), p. 215, as well as Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), pp. 17-20.

⁶ See Whalen Lai, *The Chan-ch'a-ching: Religion and Magic in Medieval China*, in Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1990), pp. 173-206; Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, 1994); Michel Strickmann, "The *Consecration Sūtra*: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, pp. 73-118; Marsha Weidner, ed., *Latter Days of the Law. Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850* (Kansas City: Spencer Museum of Art, 1994); Wu Hung, "What is Bianxiang? – On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *HJAS* 52.1 (June 1992): 111-92; and Lai Ming-chiu, "On the Image Procession in China from the 2nd to 6th Centuries AD: The Connection of Buddhist Iconography and Indian Mythology," paper presented at the Conference on Politics and Religions in Ancient and Medieval Europe & Asia, Hong Kong, March 26-27, 1996.

lacked the resources to build large temples, monasteries, or cave-temples. In their introduction to the conference volume on pilgrims and sacred sites, Susan Naquin and Yü Chün-fang note that Buddhist images became important objects of devotion in the famous cave-temples of Lung-men, Yun-kang, Tun-huang, and Ta-tsu. They also mention the importance of Buddhist associations formed to fund the creation of these images, and even speculate that these may have developed into pilgrimage organizations.⁷ At the same time, however, it is important not to remember overlook the impact of Buddhist statuary stelae on the sacred geography of rural north China. The images carved on them became objects of devotion, while the associations formed to support them engaged in numerous religious and charitable activities which became an integral part of rural life. Therefore, the data on these inscriptions can provide an important supplement to the more frequently researched inscriptions from the cave temples mentioned above, as well as data on urban Buddhist temples contained in works such as the such as the *Lo-yang chia-lan chi*.⁸

The iconographical and textual data from medieval Buddhist stelae also have enormous potential for helping scholars understand the process of "cultural assimilation" Buddhism gradually underwent following its spread to China.⁹ While most work on this topic has tended to focus on doctrinal issues or monastic institutions, the data on Buddhist statuary stelae enable us to better understand which scriptures were being transmitted to China's masses, as well as the deities and rituals which enjoyed the greatest popularity. In addition, a detailed study of the iconography of the Buddhist deities on these stelae may also allow us to determine the process by which Indian and Central Asian iconographical traditions eventually became "simplified."¹⁰

Finally, the data from these statuary inscriptions can help scholars assess the degree to which Buddhism changed during the T'ang and Sung

dynasties.¹¹ Because many scholars working on post-Sung forms of Buddhism have not read extensively in medieval Buddhist epigraphy, they tend to see great differences between the pre-Sung and post-Sung eras. For example, Valerie Hansen draws on the work of the Japanese Buddhologist Takao Giken¹² to argue that the Sung dynasty witnessed the increasing participation of less educated people in Buddhist activities, overlooking the vast amount of data on such popular participation to be found in medieval Buddhist stelae.¹³ In addition, Timothy Brook, in the Introduction to his path-breaking new book on gentry patronage of late-Ming Buddhism, focuses solely on the court and the national elite as major supporters of medieval Buddhism,¹⁴ and also claims that patronage before the Ming "had little to do with power" and was "an individual rather than a social gesture."¹⁵ In fact, as we shall see below, leading families, officials, and members of the local elite in rural north China joined together to support the erection of Buddhist statuary stelae and lead various charitable activities.¹⁶ Such people even resemble the Ming gentry discussed by Brook in that their efforts appear to have been aimed at acquiring or maintaining what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "symbolic capital."¹⁷

Buddhist inscriptions reveal other forms of continuity as well. Scholars researching the interaction of Ch'an Buddhism with more popular forms of Chinese Buddhism and non-Buddhist traditions¹⁸ may find of interest the

⁷ For more on this problem, see Peter N. Gregory and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "The Religious and Historical Landscape," in Gregory and Ebrey, eds., *Religion and Society in Tang and Sung China* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1993), pp. 1-44.

⁸ Takao Giken 高雄義堅, "Sō igo no Jōdokyō" 宋以後の淨土教, *Shina Bukkyōgaku* 支那佛教學 3 (1939):57-93.

⁹ See Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990), p. 42.

¹⁰ See Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1993), p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹² In the case of Tun-huang, Paul Magnin has shown that the dedicatory colophons in some Buddhist manuscripts found there indicate that lay people, often illiterate or only functionally literate, commissioned the copying of these texts. See "Pratique religieuse et manuscrits datés," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 3 (1987).

¹³ Brook, *Praying for Power*, pp. 19-20. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *An Outline of a Theory in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1977), pp. 171 ff.

¹⁴ See for example Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991). See also T. Griffith Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," in Gregory and Ebrey, eds., *Religion and Society*, pp. 147-208.

⁷ See Susan Naquin and Yü Chün-fang, "Introduction," in Naquin and Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1992), pp. 16 and 28.

⁸ See Yang Hsüan-chih, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Loyang*, trans. Yi-t'ung Wang (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983).

⁹ For more on this problem, see Gernet, *Chinese Civilization*, pp. 214-17; Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, pp. 10-13; and Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, rev. edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

¹⁰ See, e. g., H. A. van Oort, *The Iconography of Chinese Buddhism in Traditional China*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 1, pp. 4-19.

data from the inscriptions mentioned below describing the ways in which Flower Garland (Hua-yen 華嚴) and Tantric Buddhism engaged in a somewhat similar type of interaction. In addition, scholars working on lay Buddhism during the Sung and later dynasties, particularly the charitable activities these groups engaged in, will also find a wealth of similar and relevant data in the inscriptions discussed below.¹⁹

REASONS FOR THE POPULARITY OF BUDDHIST STATUARY STELAE

We have no firm data as to how many Buddhist statuary stelae were erected in rural north China during the medieval era, but the figure was surely in the thousands, and one contemporary monk (Fa-lin 法琳; 572-640) even claimed that the total may have exceeded one million.²⁰ Why were so many statuary stelae erected in rural areas? Wang Ch'ang suggests that because people suffered from incessant warfare during the chaotic years of the northern dynasties, they began to believe in Buddhism and then carve Buddhist images on stelae.²¹ This explanation, while not without merit, places too much emphasis on the influence of external factors while overlooking the religious beliefs and personal motives of those who contributed towards erecting such stelae. Three factors can be found in Buddhist scriptures and practice which were important in stimulating the stelae-building activities described above.

First of all, Buddhist practitioners believed that they could gain merit for themselves, their family members, and their ancestors by building Buddhist statues. This view was encouraged by popular Mahayana sūtras such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Po-chou san-mei ching* 般舟三昧經 (Skt.: **Pratyutpannabuddha-sammukhāvasthitasamādhi sūtra*, T. no. 418).²² Consider the

following passage from the *Lotus Sūtra*:

... Or there are those who in open fields,
Heaping up earth, make Buddha-shrines.
There are even children who in play
Gather sand and make it into Buddha-stupas.
Persons like these
Have achieved the Buddha Path.
If any persons for the Buddha's sake
Erect images,
With carvings perfecting the multitudinous marks,
They have all achieved the Buddha Path.²³

Two sūtras translated into Chinese before the fourth century also describe the merits one could gain by making donations towards the erection of Buddhist statues. According to these sūtras, such donors would be reborn in wealthy families, be blessed with attractive features, and be able to lead a life of leisure. They would gain the admiration of family and friends, and in the future would achieve better and better rebirths eventually culminating in the attainment of Nirvana.²⁴

A second and more practical reason for building Buddhist statuary stelae is that they were essential items in the formation of sacred areas (*tao-ch'ang* 道場) where Buddhist rituals were performed. Those villages in medieval north China which lacked the resources to construct Buddhist temples frequently used these sacred areas as sites for Buddhist rituals. According to an untitled Tun-huang manuscript describing regulations for monastic organizations which appears to reflect conditions throughout north China during the fifth and sixth centuries,²⁵ Buddhist believers were

源と大乘佛教, in idem, *Bukkyōshi shū kenkyū* 佛教史話研究 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Bukkyō kenkyūjo, 1937), pp. 53-59.

²¹ Leon Hurvitz, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1976), pp. 38-39.

²² See the *Scripture of the Buddha's Sermon on the Creation of Buddhist Images (Fo-shuo tso-fu hsiang-ching* 佛說作佛形像經; *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-35; hereafter, T), no. 692, 788; and the *Scripture of the Buddha's Sermon on the Merit Derived from Creating and Erecting Images (Fo-shuo tsao-li hsiang-ching fu-pao ching* 佛說造立形像福報經; T. no. 693, 788-90). These two sūtra are actually different translations of the same original Sanskrit text, the *Tathāgata pratibimba pratisthā nūsamā*. The former text has been translated by Robert H. Sharf in Donald S. Lopez, ed., *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 261-67.

²⁵ Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, "Tonko-hon: Chūgoku Bukkyō kyōdan no seiki" 敦煌

¹⁹ See for example Chikusa Masaaki 竺沙雅章, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中國佛教社會史研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1982); Robert Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986); and Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 16-63.

²⁰ For more on this problem, see Liu Shufen, "Wu chih liu shih-chi Hua-pei hsiang-ts'un te fo-chiao hsin-yang" 五至六世紀華北鄉村的佛教信仰, *CNY* 63.3 (1993): 499-501.

²¹ Wang Ch'ang 王昶, "Pei-ch'ao tsao-hsiang chu-pei (sung-lun)" 北朝造像諸碑總論, in *Chin-shih ts'ui-pien* 金石萃編, 39: 16-17. See *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien* (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng ch'u-pan kung-ssu, 1977), series 1, volume 1.

²² Mochizuki Shinko 望月信亨, "Butsuzō zōrū no kigen to Daijō Bukkyō" 佛像造立の起

supposed to choose a clean and spacious flat area and erect Buddhist statuary stelae there in order to form a sacred area or *tao-ch'ang*. At such sites they could make offerings to Buddhist deities and engage in the ritual of circumambulation (*hsing-tao* 行壇; Skt.: *pradakṣinā*) (see below). The Tun-huang manuscript explains that:

There are numerous merits one can attain from decorating Buddhist statues. Parade Buddhist images everywhere; be sure people can see them. When the people want to give offerings, yet either the space inside the temple nearby is narrow or the site of the temple is distant and out-of-the-way, the offerings made by those who parade Buddhist statues might not be complete. From now on, all Buddhist disciples, monks, nuns and lay people should choose a wide and clean site to form a *tao-ch'ang*. The statues should be brought there one day ahead of time, and many kinds of music, incense and flowers should be made as offerings. In this way, all the faithful can gather together and engage in circumambulation rituals.²⁶

The third and final factor which led to so many stelae being erected in rural areas involved the large numbers of Buddhist monks and nuns who travelled throughout north China. As we shall see below, these members of the sangha became so prevalent in rural regions of medieval north China that the state repeatedly attempted (and failed) to regulate their activities, including the staging of large-scale rituals and preaching to the masses. One important issue to be dealt with below involves the function of the images carved on statuary stelae, particularly those produced by lay organizations led by members of the sangha. As we shall see, the fact that the images on such stelae derive from popular Buddhist texts like the *Lotus Sūtra* may indicate that these images were not merely decorative but may also have been used by Buddhist monks and nuns in order to preach the *dharma* to a largely illiterate rural populace.

中國佛教教團の制規, in *Tsukamoto Zenryū chosaku shū* 塚本善隆著作集 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1975) 3, p. 288.

²⁶ Ibid. 3, p. 291.

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN RURAL AREAS OF MEDIEVAL NORTH CHINA

Although we admittedly know very little about medieval village life, archaeological finds combined with data from written sources have allowed some scholars to reconstruct some of the details of these villages.²⁷ Some villages were located along hillsides or next to rivers and streams, using these topographical features to provide protection. Other villages were situated in plains areas, and relied on man-made bamboo fences. During the frequent outbreaks of warfare in medieval north China, many villages constructed low walls and entrenchments, known as "village fortifications" (*ts'un-wu* 村塢). In terms of ethnic composition, some villages were inhabited exclusively by Han Chinese, and others solely by members of various northern tribes. Some villages even featured members of these two groups living side by side, a state of affairs reflected in some Buddhist inscriptions. One scholar has even used these and other epigraphic sources to research the process of sinification as it affected the Hsien-pei people who settled in western Shensi.²⁸

In terms of size, we know that the smallest villages in medieval north China were comprised of only a few dozen households, while the largest ones could exceed one thousand. The inscriptions I have collected from statuary stelae erected by villagers reflect the extreme variations in size between medieval north China villages. For example, one statuary stele erected in 559 in rural Shansi was erected by the Buddhist monk Fa-yüeh 法悅 and over one thousand believers.²⁹ Another stele, erected in San-chiao Ts'un 三交村 in Chi-hsien 稷縣 of Shansi province contains the names of over 490 villagers which can be recognized (more have been obliterated).³⁰

Some wealthier villages even had the resources to erect more than one

²⁷ Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志, *Rikuchō shi kenkyū* 六朝史研究 (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1964), chapter 7.

²⁸ See Ma Ch'ang-shou 馬長壽, *Pei-ming so chien ch'ien-Ch'in tao Sui-ch'u te Kuan-chung pu-tsu* 碑銘所見前秦到隋初的關中部族 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-ch'ü, 1985).

²⁹ See "Ch'an-hui ssu fo-ch'uang" 禪慧寺佛幢, in *Shan-yü shih-k'o ts'ung-pien* 山右石刻叢編, 2:8-9. See *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 1, volume 21.

³⁰ See "Hsieh Feng-kuei teng tsao-hsiang pei" 薛鳳規等造像碑, in *Lu Hsun chi-chiao shih-k'o shou-kao* 魯迅輯校石刻手稿 (Shanghai: Shang-hai shu-hua ch'u-pan-she, 1987), case 2, volume 1, pp. 179-200.

statuary stele. Three such stelae were erected by people who lived in a village called Tang-mo Ts'un 當陌村 in Cho-hsien 涿縣 of Hopei province during the years 503 and 504 AD.³¹ The one dated the twenty-first day of the third lunar month in 503 was built using donations from four hundred villagers, while the one erected on the second day of the fourth lunar month was funded by contributions from three hundred villagers. At least twelve villagers can be identified as having donated money for both stelae. The other stele erected in 504 AD was donated by 121 villagers.³² I also found another three stelae erected by people living in An-lu-chiao Ts'un 安鹿交村 of P'ing-ting Hsien 平定縣 in Shansi province, dated 547, 561 and 563 respectively.³³ Other villagers living in a village called Pan-shih Ts'un 般石村 in Shansi province contributed to building two stelae in 571 and 573.³⁴

Almost all the socioreligious organizations responsible for erecting Buddhist statuary stelae were led by itinerant members of the sangha who were referred to using the title *i-shih* 邑師 (literally "master of charitable organizations"). These religious specialists not only encouraged villagers to erect statuary stelae, but also helped organize various charitable projects and used the images and stories appearing on stelae in preaching Buddhist doctrine to villagers. We do not know exactly how many Buddhist specialists were active throughout rural north China, but by the early fifth century their presence had begun to attract the attention of the state. During the early years of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), the second emperor T'ai-tsung 太宗 (Ming-yüan-ti 明元帝; r. 409–424) even attempted to use Buddhism as a means of controlling his subjects. According to a

³¹ "Liu Hsiung-t'ou teng ssu-pai jen tsao-hsiang chi" 劉雄頭等四百人造像記 (503 AD), in *Pei-ching t'u-shu-kuan ts'ang Chung-kuo li-tai shih-k'o t'o-pen hui-pien* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本匯編 (Peking: Chung-chou ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1989), volume 3, p. 61; "Kao Fu-te san-pai jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" 高伏德三百人造像記 (503), in *Lu Hsun chi-chiao shih-k'o shou-kao*, case II, volume 1, pp. 62–63; and "Kao Lo-chou ch'i-shih jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" 高洛周七十人造像記 (504 AD), in Tuan Fang 端方, *Tao-chai tsang-shih chi* 陶齋藏石記, 6:8–10. See *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 1, volume 11.

³² Although the title of the dedicatory inscription states that 70 people engaged in building this Buddhist stele, the names of 121 donors are engraved on it.

³³ "An-lu chiao Ts'un erh-shih-ssu jen tsao-hsiang chi" 安鹿交村二十四人造像碑 (547); "Chen Shen-i ch'i-shih-erh jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" 陳神忻七十二人造像記 (561); and "An-lu-chiao Ts'un ch'i-shih 七十 jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" (563). All three inscriptions may be found in *Shan-yü shih-k'o ts'ung-pien*, 1:19–20, 2:9–11, 2:16–18.

³⁴ Omura Seigai 大村西崖, *Shina bijutsu shi: chôsô hen* 支那美術史雕塑篇 (Tokyo: Bussho kankôkai zozôbu, 1913) 1, pp. 345 & 352.

passage in the *Wei shu* (*Book of Wei*):

... [T'ai-tsung] both loved the Yellow Emperor and Lao-tzu and held highly the law of the Buddha. In all corners of the Capital he set up images and statues and commanded the sramanas to guide the people's customs.³⁵

While the text only mentions the capital city, it is also reasonable to assume that members of the sangha were also permitted to set up Buddhist images and preach Buddhist doctrine in rural areas as well. The presence of the sangha in the countryside may even have been further encouraged by the persecution of Buddhism, during the years spanning 446 and 452, by the third emperor Shih-tsu 世祖 (T'ai-wu-ti 太武帝; r. 424–452), who issued an edict ordering the execution of all Buddhist specialists at Ch'ang-an and the destruction of all Buddhist images there as well. He even commanded that the rest of the empire was to copy the precedent at Ch'ang-an. Although this latter decree was never enforced, numerous sūtras and temples in Ch'ang-an and other major cities were destroyed. Subsequently, quite a few members of the sangha sought refuge in the countryside and thereby spread Buddhism among villagers.³⁶ According to the *Wei shu*:

Of the sramanas of the four directions, most fled and hid [in the countryside] and were able to escape... Of the gold, silver, treasure, and images, as well as the scriptures and treatises, much could be concealed. But buildings and reliquaries wherever the proclamation reached were completely destroyed... The Buddhist suppression, which ended with the [Shih-tsu] Emperor's reign, continued seven or eight years. But the prohibition was gradually relaxed, and the households of earnest believers were able to secretly hold their services. The extreme among the sramanas still secretly wore religious

³⁵ See "Wei Shou: Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism," English translation of Tsukamoto Zenryu's Japanese annotated translation by Leon Hurvitz, published in Seiichi Mizuno and Toshio Nagahiro, eds., *Yün-kang: The Buddhist Cave-Temples of the Fifth Century AD in North China* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1956) 16 (Supplement and Index), pp. 23–103, esp. p. 52.

³⁶ See Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1964), pp. 147–151.

habits and repeated their incantations. Only they could not openly practice the religion in the Capital.³⁷

By the time the seventh emperor Kao-tsu 高祖 (Hsiao-wen-ti 孝文帝; r. 471-499) had ascended the throne, the presence of the sangha in the countryside, particularly those monks and nuns who lacked ordination certificates and had given themselves the tonsure,³⁸ had become a matter of grave concern to the Wei state. An imperial edict issued during the fourth lunar month of the year 472 decreed that villagers were to stop harboring unregistered monks. It also stated that any member of the sangha desiring to preach Buddhist doctrine in the countryside would be required to carry an official letter from the provincial Overseer (wei-na) in charge of all the sangha in the region. Another edict further exhorted people residing in both urban and rural areas to cease expending their resources on the construction of Buddhist reliquaries and temples.³⁹ These edicts probably had very little effect, as can be seen from the presence of subsequent attempts to regulate the activities of the sangha in the countryside.⁴⁰ The fact that members of the sangha continued to participate in and lead religious organization as *i-shih* during the sixth century⁴¹ (to be discussed below) further testifies to Buddhism's pervasive presence in rural areas, as well as the futility of state efforts to control it.

Members of the sangha could play an important role in the construction of Buddhist statuary stelae. Villagers followed the instructions of monks and nuns by either hiring urban craftsmen to go to their villages to carve a stele there or ordering the stele from urban workshops. Evidence for the former practice can be seen through the frequent occurrence of the words "visiting artisans from faraway places (i.e., cities)" (*yuan-fang ming-chiang* 遠訪名匠) on many inscriptions. For example, one passage from an inscription carved on a statuary stele erected by Liu Shuang-chou states that: "...he exhausted his finances to invite artisans from faraway places. He then had them erect a stele at a crossroads, on which were carved images of

three Buddhas and six bodhisattvas."⁴² An inscription describing the latter practice may be found on a stele dated 572, which records donors spending a total of 500 *wen* 文 to purchase a statuary stele; their names were then engraved on the stele after it arrived.⁴³ This indicates that some lay Buddhists of the fifth and sixth centuries would order statuary stelae on which Buddhist images had already been carved, as opposed to hiring an artisan to carve them from scratch. Many such stelae were ordered from urban workshops which mass-produced Buddhist stelae for sale, with craftsmen carving the Buddhist images and decorations while leaving space for the donors to fill in the dedicatory inscriptions and donors' names. When the completed stele arrived in the village which had ordered it, all that remained was for the villagers to hire a craftsman to carve the names of the donors and perhaps an inscription. Such practices help explain why blank spaces for donors' names may sometimes be found on exquisitely carved stelae, and why such stelae are often accompanied by crudely carved texts riddled with errors.⁴⁴

The presence of nearly identical inscriptions on statuary stelae donated by Buddhists living in different parts of north China also indicates that sometimes even the inscriptions on stelae were ordered in advance. I have compared two inscriptions – "Tung Hung-ta teng tsao-hsiang chi" 董洪達等造像記 (571), and "Sung Mai teng tsao-hsiang chi" 宋賈等造像記 (567) – and determined that the texts are strikingly similar to each other, with some parts being identical.⁴⁵

Buddhist statuary stelae also had the potential to be used by members of the sangha in preaching Buddhist doctrine. Apart from containing images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and disciples, these stelae also featured scenes from texts such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* and the *Lotus Sūtra*. They also portrayed stories from the life of the Buddha as well as scenes of the tortures suffered in the underworld. Take for example the statuary stele erected by Liu Hsiung-t'ou and 400 other villagers living in Tang-mo Ts'un in 503 (see note 29). On the front side of this stele is a scene from the *Lotus Sūtra* featuring Sakyamuni Buddha and the Prabhūtaratna Buddha (see

³⁷ "Wei Shou," pp. 68-69.

³⁸ Ibid., 79-80. For the potential impact such specialists could have on local order, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1991), pp. 7-22, 25-26, 42-46 and 111-115.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 79-80, 85-86.

⁴¹ Liu, "Wu chih liu shih-chi," pp. 511-12.

⁴² "Liu Shuang-chou tsao-t'a chi" 劉雙周造塔記, in *Lu Hsun*, case 1, volume 5, p. 839.

⁴³ Omura, volume 1, p. 344.

⁴⁴ For one example, see "I-i-chu i-pai jen teng (sao ling-t'a chi)" 邑義主一百人等造彌陀記, in *Lu Hsun*, case I, volume 6, p. 1103.

⁴⁵ These inscriptions may be found in Omura, volume 1, pp. 338 and 343.

Figure 1). Another stele erected by the monk Tao-ying 道穎 and others in 546 features a scene depicting various miraculous events accompanying the birth of the Buddha (see Figure 2).⁴⁶ Members of the sangha may have relied on such images when preaching sermons relating to Buddhist doctrine, and perhaps initiated worshippers might have been able to recognize the contents of such scenes.⁴⁷

The above-mentioned statuary stelae merely show scenes from popular Buddhist sūtras. Other stelae featured cartouches (*t'i-chi* 題記) carved next to the scenes, which further indicates that religious specialists may have used these scenes as visual material for preaching, or that lay Buddhists who could read would have been able to explain their contents to others. One stele dated 540 and built using funds contributed by Chū Shih-kuang 巨始光 features a series of illustrations with cartouches indicating what sūtras the scenes derived from.⁴⁸ The front side of this stele was made in a shape of a shrine, inside of which Sakyamuni Buddha and the Prabhūtaratna Buddha sit together preaching, an act described in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The cartouche on the left side of the illustration reads: "image on the left of the Prabhūtaratna Buddha Pagoda bearing witness to the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*tso-hsiang To-pao fo-t'a, cheng yu fa-hua ching* 左相多寶佛塔証有法華經), while that on the right reads: "image on the right of Sakyamuni preaching the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*yu-hsiang shih-chia-fo shuo fa-hua-ching* 右相釋迦佛說法華經). On the back of the stele (also in the shape of a shrine), there is a scene showing Vimalakīrti and the Bodhisatva Mañjuśrī sitting together and preaching, a scene from the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. There are also cartouches accompanying this scene on both pillars, although the words are not completely legible. Another scene on the second register, apparently based on a story in *chüan* 3 of the *Hsien-yü ching* 賢愚經 (*T. no. 202*), contains the image of a standing Buddha with three children on his left and one child on his right, the cartouche on the left reading: "this is Ting-kuang Fo (Skt.: Dīpaṅkara) teaching three children to make charitable contribu-

tions; all three achieved the stage of *śrotāpanna*" (*tz'u shih Ting-kuang Fo chiao-hua san-hsiao-erh pu-shih, chieh te hsiu-t'uo-huan-tao* 此是定光佛教化三小兒補施皆得須陀洹道).

A stele dated 543 erected by a group of 90 monks and lay Buddhists living in Pei-k'ung Ts'un 北孔村 of Honan province provides another example indicating the potential role of statuary inscriptions in Buddhist proselytizing. Nine scenes of the Buddha's life and of the Sudāna 須達拏 Jātaka adorn the reverse side of the stele, each scene being accompanied by a cartouche.⁴⁹ There are also cartouches next to scenes of the underworld on a statuary stele dated 532 donated by Fan Nü-tzu 樊奴子, a native of a village in Shansi province.⁵⁰

In analyzing the series of scenes on the Pei-k'ung Ts'un statuary stele mentioned above, Nagahiro Toshio suggests that because they do not include scenes essential to understanding the meaning of the sūtra, the artists had no intention of representing Buddhist stories but copied scenes picked at random from a long picture-scroll.⁵¹ However, it is important to remember that Buddhist stelae were not constructed simply for aesthetic reasons; they were primarily religious works, and as such functioned within a well-defined ideological framework. Victor Mair's research on transformation texts (*pien-wen* 變文) of the T'ang dynasty indicates that the person who performed such texts for an audience often used pictures to illustrate the story he or she was recounting.⁵² An earlier article by Mair suggests that transformation tableaux (*pien-hsiang* 變相) may have also been used by monks or lay Buddhists to aid their preaching.⁵³

What were the effects of such scenes on the people who viewed them? Unfortunately we do not have direct evidence, but there is a story from the *Hsiu kao-seng chuan* 續高僧傳 which refers to the powerful impact Buddhist art could have on an individual. It describes how a renowned monk

⁴⁶ See "Tao-ying teng tsao-hsiang chi" 道穎等造像記, in *Pei-ching t'u-shu-kuan ts'ang li-tai shih-k'o* 6, p. 133.

⁴⁷ For more on this problem, see Victor Mair's provocative book *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1988).

⁴⁸ "Chū Shih-kuang teng tsao-hsiang pei" 巨始光造像碑 (540), in *Lu Hsua*, case II, volume 3, pp. 529 & 533. See also Chou Cheng 周鍾, "Hsi-Wei Chū Shih-kuang tsao-hsiang-pei k'ao-shih" 西魏巨始光等造像碑考釋, *Chung-kuo li-shih po-wu kuan kuan-k'an* 中國歷史博物館館刊 7 (1985):90.

⁴⁹ "Tao-su chiu-shih jen teng tsao-hsiang tsan-pei ping liang-ts'e" 道俗九十人等造像讚碑並兩側, in *Pa-ch'ung-shih chin-shih pu-cheng* 八瓊室金石補正, 19:19-21. See *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 1, volume 7.

⁵⁰ "Fan Nü-tzu tsao-hsiang chi" (532) 樊奴子造像記, in Mao Tzu-lin 毛子林, ed., *Kuan-chung shih-k'o wen-tzu hsin-pien* 關中石刻文字新編, 1:10-11. See *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 1, volume 22.

⁵¹ See Nagahiro Toshio 長廣敏雄, *Rokuchō jidai bijutsu no kenkyū* 六朝時代美術の研究 (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1969), pp. 84-88.

⁵² Victor Mair, *Tang Transformation Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1989), pp. 71-72, 152-70.

⁵³ Victor Mair, "Records of Transformation Tableaux (*pien-hsiang*)," *TP* 72 (1986):3-43.

Ching-ai 靜齋 (534-576), originally from the aristocratic Cheng family in Ying-yang Commandery, decided to convert to Buddhism after viewing the tortures of the underworld in a temple mural. He was deeply moved and told his friends: "Extraordinary! One can see that these are the inevitable results of karma. Who can avoid these tortures?" He left home thereafter, against the wishes of both his parents and clan members, to become a monk.⁵⁴ Scenes portraying the underworld also appeared on statuary stelae, and the presence of cartouches accompanying them indicates that they may have been used as preaching material. Whether such scenes were actually used and the impact they had on those who viewed them is unclear, but one need only recall the popularity of such scenes in late imperial and modern temples, dramas and morality books to realize the potential that was involved.

RURAL BUDDHIST ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Most of the villagers who donated money to build the stelae mentioned above were members of Buddhist socioreligious organizations known as *i-i* 義邑 or *fa-i* 法義. These Buddhist associations first appeared in north China during the early fifth century, and quickly spread throughout the region.⁵⁵ Members of *i-i* were called parishioners (*i-tzu* 邑子), while those belonging to *fa-i* were simply called *fa-i*. At least one monk or nun (called *i-shih*) frequently served as the association's head, and could also be responsible for instructing its members. Lay Buddhists under the leadership of *i-shih* organized *i-i* or *fa-i* in order to build Buddhist stelae or

⁵⁴ *T* 206x, p. 625c. For more examples of the impact of scenes portraying the tortures of hell, see Mair, "Records of Transformation Tableaux," pp. 17-18, 19, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 36, 37 and 39.

⁵⁵ For more on the history of these organizations during the Northern Dynasties, see Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society. An Economic History from the Fifth to Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995), pp. 259-77; Michihata Ryōshū 道端良秀, *Chūgoku Bukkyō to shakai fukushi jigyō* 中國佛教と社會福祉事業 (Kyoto: Hō zōkan, 1967); Takao Giken, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shiron* 中國佛教史論 (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1952), pp. 25-36; Denis Twitchett, "The Monasteries and China's Economy in Medieval Times," *BSOAS* 19.3 (1957): 326-49; and Yamazaki Hiroshi 山崎宏, *Shina chūsei Bukkyō no tenkai* 支那中世佛教の展開, 2d edn. (Tokyo: Kiyomizu shoten, 1947), pp. 675-831. For more on such organizations during the T'ang, see the essays by Naba Toshisada 那波利貞 in his *Tōdai shakai bunkashi kenkyū* 唐代社會文化研究 (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1974), esp. pp. 459-678.

temples, to write or copy Buddhist sūtras for mass circulation, and to hold religious rituals together. Most of the members of these organizations, including the donors listed on the above-mentioned stelae, were commoners. This would indicate that a significant percentage of the people living in rural areas of north China during the fifth and sixth centuries were pious Buddhists, and enthusiastically participated in the building of Buddhist statuary stelae.

It is noteworthy that village women also played a prominent role in the construction of statuary stelae. At least two such stelae were constructed for *i-i* consisting of women members only. One was donated by thirty women living in Kung-sun Ts'un 公孫村, while the second was erected by seventy-five women of Ta-chiao ts'un 大交村 (the exact location of both villages today is unknown).⁵⁶ According to the *Yen-shih chia-hsun* 顏氏家訓 by Yen Chih-t'ui 顏之推 (531-591), the women of north China played a bigger role in family affairs than those of south China. In the Northern Ch'i (550-578) capital of Yeh, women managed household affairs and often left the home to improve the family's situation.⁵⁷ It seems that because northern women made great efforts to engage in handicrafts and make other contributions to a family's finances, they enjoyed a somewhat elevated status in the family. The status of women in north China might well explain why so many participated in religious associations, and even organized some on their own.

In addition to erecting statuary stelae, villagers who were members of *i-i* would frequently perform public works for the benefit of the entire community. For example, they would build bridges at key river crossings, known as "charitable bridges" (*i-ch'iao* 義橋), or dig wells along well-travelled routes, known as "charitable wells" (*i-ching* 義井). One Buddhist association including Lien T'ien-chang and 30 other parishioners made a vow (*fa-yuan* 發願) to build two thousand Buddhist images and erect these statues next to the bridges and wells they donated.⁵⁸ In addition, during

⁵⁶ "Kung-sun Ts'un mu-jen san-shih jen tsao-hsiang chi" 公孫村母人三十人造像記, in *Ts'u-chai ts'ang-shu chi*, 11:11; see *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 1, volume 11. "Ta-chiao Ts'un i-i mu-jen ch'i-shih-wu jen tsao-hsiang chi" 大交村義邑母人七十五人造像記, in Omura, volume 1, pp. 327-328.

⁵⁷ Yen Chih-t'ui, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan: Yen-shih chia-hsun*, trans. Teng Ssu-yü (Leiden: Brill, 1966), pp. 19-22.

⁵⁸ "Lien T'ien-chang teng tsao-hsiang chi" 廉天長等造像記 (550), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 2, p. 484.

the waning years of the sixth century, Sun Po-lung erected a stele at a crossroads and dug a well, even planting trees nearby to provide travellers with a shady place to rest.³⁹ These sources indicate that many Buddhist stelae in rural areas were usually erected along the economic lifelines to a village, particularly the main road leading to a village or at a key crossroads. People who sponsored the erection of such stelae probably chose such sites because they hoped their location would allow more people would see the stelae and worship the images on them, thereby gaining the protection of the Buddhist deities whose images were carved thereon. At the same time, however, the practice of building bridges or planting trees for travellers helped facilitate communication between villagers and the outside world.

Perhaps the most detailed account of Buddhist charitable activities in rural north China was carved on a towering stone pillar (over seven meters in height) erected near Fan-yang 范陽 (Hopeh) during the Northern Ch'i dynasty entitled "A Stone Pillar Specially Lauding the Charitable and Compassionate Activities of the Local Charitable Association" (Piao-i hsiang-i tz'u-hui shih-chu sung 標異鄉義慈惠石柱頌).⁴⁰ The text carved on this pillar, which exceeds three thousand characters, documents how the members of the local Buddhist charitable organization (*i* 義), led by the Buddhist monk T'an-tsun 曇遵, donated land for burying the dead in "charitable cemeteries" (*i-chiung* 義塚), provided free meals to the hungry (*i-shih* 義食), and offered medicines to the sick. This organization was founded during the Eastern Wei dynasty (534-550) solely to provide proper burials for abandoned corpses, but by the Northern Ch'i its size, and the range of charitable activities it managed, had greatly increased. In its early years, the organization had survived based on donations from members, but by the Northern Ch'i it had acquired land of its own and used the income from this land to finance its activities. Members of some of the area's leading families participated in this organization, but the vast majority

of members were commoners. This inscription also includes the names of thirteen Hsien-pei believers who lived in the area.⁴¹

RITUALS PERFORMED AT BUDDHIST STATUARY STELAE

In rural areas of north China, Buddhist statuary stelae not only served as sacred sites and foci of socioreligious Buddhist organizations but were also locations for and even the objects of numerous ritual activities. The fact that many of these stelae were erected on Buddhist holy days, including the eighth day of the second lunar month (commemoration of the Buddha's achieving Nirvāṇa), the eighth day of the fourth lunar month (the anniversary of the Buddha's birth), and the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month (the date of the Ghost Festival), further indicates their links to Buddhist liturgical activities.

A Buddhist image or stele was essential for the ritual of "Bathing the Buddha" (*yü-fo* 浴佛) on the Buddha's birthday. The *yü-fo* ritual had been practiced in north China temples since the end of the second century (around 193 to 195 AD), yet the details of how it had been performed during this period are unknown.⁴² Three sūtras describing the *yü-fo* ritual and the merits one could obtain from performing it were translated into Chinese in third and fourth centuries.⁴³ All three sūtras state that Buddhists should bath the Buddha images with flowers and fragrant water and sprinkle [or cover] them with flowers. The description in the *Fo-shuo mo-ho ch'a-t'ou ching* provides more details in a paragraph entitled "Ssu-yueh pa-jih yü-fo fa" 四月八日浴佛法 (The ritual of bathing the Buddha on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month), including instructions on how to make the fragrant water for bathing the Buddha, and how to bathe the Buddha. According to this sūtra, Buddhists should use white silk or white cotton to

³⁹ See "Sun Po-lung tsao t'ien-kung-hsiang chi" 孫伯龍造天宮像記 (585), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 5, p. 1047. The practice of building temples along key travel routes presisted in late imperial times and continues to the present day. See Barend ter Haar, "The Genesis and Spread of Temple Cults in Fukien," in E. B. Vermeer, ed., *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 349-96. Many of the temples studied by ter Haar were built next to bridges.

⁴⁰ See *Ting-hsing hsien-chih* 定興縣志 (1890), *chüan* 16. See also *Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien*, series 3, volume 23.

⁴¹ See Liu Shufen, "Pei-ch'i piao-i hsiang-i tz'u-hui shih-chu - Chung-ku fo-chiao she-hui chiu-chi te ko-an yen-chiu" 北齊標異鄉義慈惠石柱中古佛教社會救濟的個案研究, *Hsin shih-hsueh* 新史學 5.4 (Dec. 1994):1-50.

⁴² Tang Yung-t'ung 湯用彤, *Han Wei Liang-Chin Nan-pei ch'ao fo-chiao shih* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史, rpt. edn. (Taipei: Ting-wen shu-chü, 1976), pp. 72-73.

⁴³ These are the *Scripture on Anointing [the Buddha Image] with Wax after Parinirvāṇa* (*Fo-ni-huan-hou kuan-la ching* 般泥洹後灌臘經, T. no. 391); the *Scripture of the Buddha's Sermon on Anointing and Bathing the Buddha Image* (*Fo-shuo kuan-hsi fo-hsing-hsiang ching* 佛說灌洗佛形像經, T. no. 695); and the *Scripture of the Buddha's Sermon on the Mahasattva* (*Fo-shuo mo-ho ch'a-t'ou ching* 佛說摩訶剎頭經, T. no. 696).

wipe dry the images after the bathing ritual.⁶⁴

One clue indicating that statuary stelae may also have been objects of the *yü-fo* ritual may be found in an inscription on a stele dated 527, which states: "In bathing the celestial palace (*t'ien-kung* 天宮), one hundred and fifty bolts of raw silk were used."⁶⁵ This may allude to the practice of making multi-sided stelae or stupas, and performing the bathing ritual for them. Such sacred objects were called *t'a, fu-t'u* 浮圖, or *t'ien-kung*.⁶⁶ Inasmuch as silk is cited as an item used in Buddhist bathing rituals, and because silk does not appear to have been widely used as currency in medieval north China, the one hundred and fifty bolts of raw silk referred to were probably used to dry off the image and did not constitute the price of the donation for this ritual.

Statuary stelae were also extremely important in the performance of Buddhist visualization rites (*kuan-fo* 觀佛) and recitation rituals (*nien-fo* 念佛). Buddhists who used stelae for visualization rituals may well have found inspiration for their acts in the *Scripture of Contemplating the Buddha and the Samadhi Sea* (*Kuan-fo san-mei-hai ching* 觀佛三昧海經; T. no. 643), which states that the Buddha instructed the faithful to meditate upon his image after his death.⁶⁷ The importance of Buddhist stelae in such rituals is revealed in the following inscription on a stele erected by the lay Buddhist Ch'ang Yüeh 常岳 and his fellow believers:

[The images on the stele] seemed to descend from the heavens, and to spring out from the earth. Travellers viewed it with joy, and forgot to go home. They stared at it and sang its praises, without noticing that the sun had already set. It is difficult to perform visualizations using such a masterpiece, nor can one thoroughly grasp its shape.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ T. no. 696, p. 798b.

⁶⁵ "Liu P'ing-chou tsao-hsiang chi" 劉平周造像記, in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 1, pp. 149-53.

⁶⁶ See Satō, pp. 1437-38. See also "Tu Wen-ch'ing teng tsao t'ien-kung hsiang chi" 杜文慶等造天宮象記 (524), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 1, p. 131; and, *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 5, p. 1047 (Sun Po-lung statuary inscription; see note 56).

⁶⁷ T. no. 643, 690c. See also the *Scripture for Contemplating the Buddha of Limitless Longevity* (*Kuan wu-liang shou-fo ching* 觀無量壽佛經; T. no. 365). For more on the importance of these texts, see Kuo Li-ying, *Confession et contrition dans le bouddhisme chinois du v au x siècle* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1994); and Alexander C. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959).

⁶⁸ "Ch'ang Yüeh pai-yü-jen tsao-hsiang chi" 常岳百餘人造像記, in *Pu-ch'üang-shih chin-shih pu-cheng*, 16: 18.

One of the most common rituals associated with Buddhist statuary stelae was that of circumambulation (*hsing-tao*), walking around a Buddhist image with one's right shoulder facing it. The origins of the circumambulation ritual can be traced back to early Hindu and Buddhist practice in India,⁶⁹ and the monks who travelled vast distances to transmit Buddhism to China brought these traditions with them. It appears that the practice of building a statue and circumambulating it (*she-hsiang hsing-tao* 設像行道) flourished in China from the third century onwards, one of its first manifestations occurring when K'ang Seng-hui 康僧會 arrived in Chien-yeh 建業 (modern-day Nanking) in the year 247. Shortly after reaching Nanking, he built a Buddhist statue and performed the rite of circumambulation, much to the amazement of onlookers who had no clue as to what he was doing.⁷⁰

Some scholars, based solely on the spatial design of some cave-temples at Yun-kang and Tun-huang, have speculated that circumambulation was also performed around four-sided pagoda structures at the center of these sites,⁷¹ and observations made during my own visits to these sites does indicate that the layout of certain cave-temples may have allowed performance of such rites. However, no documentary evidence exists which would indicate that circumambulation had been performed in these cave-temples, and inscriptions preserved at these sites do not mention such a rite. On the other hand, there is convincing evidence to demonstrate that villagers in north China did practice circumambulation. The titles *hsing-tao chu* 行道主 (Sponsor of Circumambulation Rites) and *hsing-tao ssu-mien hsiang chu* 行道四面像主 (Sponsor of Circumambulation Rites to be Performed around a Four-sided Stele) inscribed on numerous stelae clearly

⁶⁹ For records of circumambulation in India, see Charles D. Collins, *The Iconography and Ritual of Siva at Elephanta* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), pp. 135-54.

⁷⁰ See K'ang's biography in *chüan* 1 of the *Kao-seng chuan*, (T. 2059, p. 325). Whalen Lai's partial translation of the *Ti-wei po-li ching* 提謂波利經, a text compiled in the second half of the fifth century, contains the subtitle "New Rites: First Mantra and Circumambulation." In fact, circumambulation was not a new ritual at the time of the *Ti-wei po-li ching*; the text merely stressed its importance and advocated its performance. See Whalen W. Lai, "The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China: *Ti-wei po-li ching* and Its Historical Significance," in David W. Chappell, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, Buddhist and Taoist Studies 2 (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1987), pp. 25-26.

⁷¹ See James O. Caswell, *Written and Unwritten: A New History of the Buddhist Caves at Yungang* (Vancouver: U. of British Columbia P., 1988), pp. 65-66, 70, 74, 85-86. See also Stanley K. Abe, "Art and Practice in a Fifth Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple," *Art Orientalis*, 20 (1991): 1-31.

indicate the popularity of this rite in rural areas of north China during the fifth and sixth centuries.⁷² Most individuals listed under the title *hsing-tao chu* appear to have been lay Buddhists who sponsored such rites. In order to perform a circumambulation ritual, it was necessary to invite monks to perform it or lead others in performing it, with those attending or taking part in the rites making a donation to the monks.⁷³

There were also a number of rituals which had to be performed when a statuary stele had been completed, the most important of which involved imbuing the image or images on the stele with spiritual potency. This rite was known as the Vision Opening (*k'ai-kuang* 開光; *k'ai kuang-ming* 明; or *k'ai-yen* 開眼, literally "opening the eyes" [of the finished image]) ritual, and had to be performed before the images of the deities on the stele could be worshipped. Although the earliest Chinese sūtras to mention the *k'ai-kuang* rite date from the eighth century (see below), statuary inscriptions provide evidence that as early as the sixth century Buddhists in north China were performing the *k'ai-kuang* ritual as part of dedication ceremonies following the completion of a Buddhist image.⁷⁴

The data from statuary inscriptions reveals that that the *k'ai-kuang* ritual had to be performed for each image of a Buddha, bodhisattva or guardian spirit (*vajra*; *chin-kang* 金剛) carved on a stele. Sponsors of the *k'ai-kuang* ritual had their names inscribed upon stelae accompanied by the title "Sponsor for the Vision-Opening [Ceremony]" (*k'ai kuang-ming chu* 開光明主). There were also numerous variants of this title, including "Sponsor for Opening the Vision of [the Image of] the Buddha" (*k'ai Fo* 佛 *kuang-ming chu*),⁷⁵ "Sponsor for Opening the Vision of [the Image of] Ananda"

(*k'ai A-nan* 阿難 *kuang-ming chu*), "Sponsor for Opening the Vision of [the Image of] the Vajra [Guardian Deity]" (*k'ai chin-kang* 金剛 *kuang-ming chu*),⁷⁶ "Sponsor for Opening the Vision of the Seven Buddhas" (*k'ai ch'i-Fo* 七佛 *kuang-ming chu*),⁷⁷ etc. It is not certain whether those people who sponsored the *k'ai-kuang* ritual actually painted in the eyes of the image, but current Buddhist and Taoist practice suggests that this role remained in the hands of religious specialists. There were innovative ways of bringing donors into the ritual though, as may be seen below.

There is no direct evidence suggesting how the *k'ai-kuang* ritual would have been performed in north China during the sixth century. Although this ritual is mentioned in contemporary inscriptions, their contents provide no description of how fifth- and sixth-century Buddhists actually "opened the eyes" of a Buddhist image. One T'ang-dynasty sūtra, the *Ta wei-li wu-shu-se-mo ming-wang ching* 大威力烏嚩瑟摩明王經 (SkT: *Mahābalavajra krodhasūtra*) (T. no. 1227), describes the *k'ai-kuang* ritual as consisting of painting a red or yellow pigment in the middle of the image's forehead.⁷⁸ Another contemporary Tantric ritual manual simply mentions painting in the eyes of a Buddha image without detailing who performed this act and under what circumstances.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, statuary inscriptions do provide some evidence of the *k'ai-kuang* ritual's popularity. In describing the merits of this ritual, one such inscription states:

Opening the eyes of the marvellous image;
Who would say that this is not good?
Who would say that this is not efficacious?⁸⁰

An account of the *k'ai-kuang* ritual as performed during the eighth century for the giant statue of the Vairocana Buddha (Lu-she-na Fo 盧舍那佛) at the Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara on the ninth day of the fourth lunar

⁷² "Li-shih ho-i tsao-hsiang pei" 李氏台邑造像碑 (542), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 2, p. 319.

⁷³ The biography of Shih Te-mei 釋德美 in the *Hsü kao-seng chuan* (T. no. 2060, 697a.) describes a temple which invited one thousand monks to perform a circumambulation ritual. The temple manager made extremely generous offerings to the monks, presenting each with ten rolls (*chien* 織) of silk.

⁷⁴ According to Sinhalese Buddhist sources, the first vision-opening ritual (known as *netra pinkama* or "eye ceremony meritaction") was first performed in the fifth century AD, although some texts attribute its initial celebration to King Asoka. See Richard Gombrich, "The Consecration of a Buddhist Image," *JAS* 26.1 (Nov. 1966): 23-36. We do not know when this ritual was transmitted to China, or the ways in which it may have changed after its arrival. However, this ritual is still performed for images of Buddhist, Taoist and local deities in China, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. See Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Chūgokujin no shūkyō giri* 中國人の宗教儀禮 (Tokyo: Fukutate shoten, 1983), pp. 1075-83.

⁷⁵ "Yü Tzu-chien teng i-ch'iao shih-hsiang pei" 于子建等義橋石像碑 (549), in *Lu Hsun*,

case II, volume 2, p. 437.

⁷⁶ "Ho Ts'un chang-yu tsao-hsiang chi" 台村長幼造像記 (567), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 3, pp. 969-71.

⁷⁷ "Hsueh Feng-yen (kuei) teng tsao-hsiang pei" 薛鳳頌(規)等造像碑 (530), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 1, pp. 179-200. See also Chou Cheng, "Pei-Wei Hsueh Feng-kuei tsao-hsiang pei k'ao" 北魏薛鳳頌造像碑考 *WW* 8 (1990): 64-65.

⁷⁸ T. no. 1227, 148c.

⁷⁹ *She-ta Pi-lu she-na ch'eng-fo shen-pien chia ch'ih-ching ju lien-hua t'ai-tsang hai hui pei-sheng man-t'u-lo kuang-ta nien-sung i-kuei kung-yang fang-pien hui* 攝大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經入蓮華胎藏海會悲生憂荼羅廣念念佛儀軌供養方便會; T. no. 850, 65b.

⁸⁰ *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 1, p. 131 (Tu Wen-ch'ing statuary inscription; see note 63).

month in 752 AD is of great relevance for this study as it provides some clues as to how the sixth-century ritual in north China might have been performed. The Tōdaiji temple had direct links with the Chinese Flower Garland (Hua-yen; Jap.: Keigon) school of Buddhism, as many of this school's most important sūtras and commentaries had been transmitted to Japan via Korea through the Korean monk Sinhaeng 審祥 (704-779), a disciple of the prominent Hua-yen patriarch Fa-tsang 法藏. Sinhaeng travelled to Japan and gave numerous lectures in 736 at the Tōdaiji concerning the Hua-yen scriptures.⁸¹ From Sinhaeng's time on, the Tōdaiji became the main temple of the Kegon sect in Japan. Another important aspect linking the Chinese and Japanese sects was the role of Vairocana Buddha as a central figure in the Hua-yen pantheon.

The detailed description of the *k'ai-kuang* ritual as performed at the Tōdaiji indicates that four religious specialists played important roles in this ritual. First and foremost was an Indian monk named Bodhisenna 菩提憍那, who as the ritual master of the *k'ai-kuang* ceremony (*kaigenshi* 開眼師) actually painted in the eyes of Vairocana Buddha. Two monks, Vinaya Master Ruson 隆尊律師 and Dharma Master Enbuku 延福法師, were commissioned to preach on the *Hua-yen ching* (Skt.: *Avatamsakasūtra*), while a Chinese monk named Tao-hsüan 道璿, bearing the title "Master of Mantras" (*Shogunshi* 咒願師), recited spells during the ceremony.⁸²

There were some significant differences between the rituals as performed in China and Japan. In the case of the Tōdaiji ritual, the monk who presided at the ceremony used a brush to paint in the eyes of the Vairocana Buddha image. Along a rope extending from his hand hung a number of brushes which were held by the emperor and high officials who stood at the base of the statue, thus giving them an opportunity to participate in the ritual.⁸³ According to the *Tōdaiji yoroku*, the ritual master of the *k'ai-kuang* ceremony was given donations for performing his duties, and it is possible that Japanese lay Buddhists with titles similar to the Chinese *k'ai-kuang-ming-chu* had to contribute to the monks in charge of the ritual.⁸⁴ In the Chinese case, those who sponsored the *k'ai-kuang* ritual in rural areas were lay Buddhists, often commoners. Their sponsorship of this ritual probably

required them to contribute larger sums of money than those who simply made donations to erect a stele. Those donors bearing the title *k'ai-kuang-ming-chu* held high rank in the religious organizations which erected such stelae, as may be seen by the fact that their names appear in prominent positions on these sacred objects.

It is interesting to note that the title *k'ai-kuang-ming-chu* does not appear in inscriptions from the Lung-men and Yun-kang cave-temples. Does this mean that the *k'ai-kuang* rite was not part of the ceremonies performed at these sites? Might this indicate that the *k'ai-kuang* ritual was more prevalent in rural areas?

As part of the dedication ceremonies accompanying the completion of a Buddhist image, assemblies for worship and self-cultivation called *fa-hui* 法會 were held. These assemblies also featured maigre feasts (*chai-hui* 齋會), rituals where Buddhist monks and nuns chanted scriptures and received food offerings from the sponsors of the feast, known as *chai-chu* 齋主. The term *chai* (*uposadha* in Sanskrit) originally denoted an individual's act of self-purification by abstaining from meat. Later, its meaning changed with its use in monastic regulations to refer to the practice of not eating meat after mid-day. On occasions when Buddhist believers gathered together to perform *chai* rituals, food was usually provided for all of the participants, including lay people; in the case of monks and nuns, however, the food was presented to them as an offering.⁸⁵

There were usually several people listed as *chai-chu* on a given stele; sometimes there was even a *ta-chai-chu* 大齋主 (Chief Sponsor of the Maigre Fast). Because the cost of feeding such a large number of monks and nuns could be quite high, individuals could rarely afford to sponsor an entire feast. Therefore, three, four or as many as ten people shared the cost of the feast, with those who bore a larger share of the financial burden being awarded the title *ta-chai-chu*.

Those religious organizations which donated money to erect stelae also performed a Buddhist ritual known as the Feast of the Eight Prohibitions (*Pa-kuan-chai-hui* 八關齋會). These feasts, in what might be termed a "monk for a day" program, involved lay Buddhists adhering to the following eight prohibitions during a period covering one full day and night: not to kill; not to steal; not to engage in ignoble conduct; not to lie; not to

⁸¹ *Honchō kōsoden* 本朝高僧傳, *chūan* 1.1, p. 9. See *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書 (Tokyo: Yūseido shuppanbū, 1932) 102.

⁸² *Tōdaiji yoroku* 東大寺要錄 (Osaka: Zenkoku shobō, 1934) 3, pp. 46-48.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 3, p. 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 3, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁵ Yamazaki, pp. 733-34. See also Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels in Tang China* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1955), pp. 177-83.

drink alcohol; not to wear make-up or jewelry, nor engage in dance or musical performances; not to sleep on fine beds; and not to eat after mid-day. According to a passage in the *Ekottarāgama* (*Tseng-i a-han ching* 增一阿含經; *T.* no. 125), when lay Buddhists desired to perform a *Pa-kuan chai* they had to consult with monks or nuns ahead of time and declare their intention to obey the eight prohibitions, vowing not to be delinquent.⁴⁶ The *Scripture of the Feast of the Eight Prohibitions* (*Pa-kuan chai ching* 八關齋經; *T.* no. 89) traces the origins of this ritual back to the time of the Buddha, who is said to have taught monks and nuns how to perform the *Pa-kuan chai* for lay Buddhists.⁴⁷

The *Pa-kuan chai* ritual was meant to be held on the six monthly fast days (*liu chai-jih* 六齋日): the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-sixth and thirtieth of any given lunar month. Other texts like the *Chai-ching* claimed that it was only necessary to adhere to the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth.⁴⁸ Those lay Buddhists who gave money to sponsor a *Pa-kuan chai-hui* and have monks or nuns instruct them in the Eight Prohibitions had their names carved on statuary stelae accompanied by the title "Sponsor of the Eight Prohibitions Feast" (*Pa-kuan chai-chu* 八關齋主). The use of such titles may be seen on two of the three stelae from An-lu-chiao Ts'un dated 561 and 563. The 561 stele was erected on the twenty-fifth day of the fifth lunar month, while the 563 stele was erected on the seventeenth day of the second lunar month. Both dates are close to the prescribed times for performing the *Pa-kuan chai-hui*, but this ritual was *not* performed during the dedication ceremonies for the completion of the stele. This is important because it shows that some rituals associated with statuary stelae could be performed before or well after their completion.⁴⁹

Once a statuary stele had been erected, members of the socioreligious organizations which erected them had to make periodic offerings to the Buddhist images carved on them. One inscription on a statuary stele states that:

(This stele) has been erected at a crossroads, where the land is flat and wide. Religious organizations are asked to make offerings, which should not decrease over time.⁵⁰

Lay Buddhists listed under the title "Sponsor of the Incense Fire" (*hsiang-huo chu* 香火主) or "Offerings Sponsor" (*kung-yang chu* 供養主) were primarily responsible for sponsoring and participating in these offering rituals.⁵¹ If the statuary stele was a four-sided one, offerings had to be made to the Buddhist images on each side, with different donors being responsible for the offerings made to each particular side of a stele. This fact can be seen through the presence on stelae of titles such as "Sponsor of the Incense Fire, South Side" (*nan-mien* 南面 *hsiang-huo chu*), "Sponsor of the Incense Fire, Left Side" (*tso-hsiang* 左廂 *hsiang-huo chu*), and "Sponsor of the Incense Fire, Right Side" (*yu-hsiang* 右廂 *hsiang-huo chu*).⁵²

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above indicates that the presence of Buddhism in rural areas of medieval north China did more than simply meet the many needs of pious villagers. Buddhism also served as a bridge which not only eased communication between urban and rural areas, but also provided a common cultural medium for certain forms of communication between the upper and lower classes of medieval China. Much has been made of the predominance of the aristocratic class in medieval Chinese society, yet the inscriptions described above reveal that on many occasions officials, members of the local elite, and their families joined the villagers in erecting Buddhist statuary stelae.⁵³ Sometimes local officials even took the

⁴⁶ "Ch'i Shuang-hu nien jen teng tsao-shih-hsiang chi" 錡雙胡廿人等造石象記 (520), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 1, p. 98.

⁴⁷ See "Wang Fa-hsien nien-ssu jen teng tsao shih-shih-hsiang chi 王法現廿四人等造石室像記" (547), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 2, pp. 411-15. See also "Hsüeh shan-chü erh-pai-t'a jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" 薛山俱二百他人等造象記 (535-57), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 3, p. 565.

⁴⁸ See "Tso-ho-pa-tsu teng i-pai-nien-pa jen teng tsao-hsiang chi" 昨和拔祖等一百廿八人等造像記 (556), in *Pa-ch'ung-shih chin-shih pu-cheng*, 23:14. See also "Sheng-mu Ssu mien-hsiang pei" 聖母寺四面像碑 (564), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 5, p. 952.

⁴⁹ "Seng-t'ung teng pa-shih jen tsao ssu-mien-hsiang chi" 僧通等八十人造四面象記 (550), in *Lu Hsun*, case II, volume 3, pp. 577-82. Of the 106 donors listed on the stele inscription, 18 were officials.

⁴⁶ *T.* no. 125, 756-57.

⁴⁷ *T.* no. 89, 193. There are two other sutra concerning the *Pa-kuan chai*: the *Sūtra on Fasts* (*Chai-ching* 齋經; *T.* no. 87), and the *Yu-p'o-i to-she-chia ching* 優婆塞舍迦經 (*T.* no. 88).

⁴⁸ *T.* no. 87, p. 911a.

⁴⁹ Yamazaki, pp. 746-48.

lead in organizing villagers to engage in such activities.⁷⁴

In the arena of political opportunity, there was a strict border between the aristocracy, lower-ranking officials and the common people. In the world of Buddhist ritual and society, however, some intercourse between people of different social classes occurred. Because members of the aristocracy, officialdom and common people all deeply believed in Buddhism, all were exposed to many of that religion's values. Therefore, when villagers donated money to erect a statuary stele and set up a *tao-ch'ang* for the performance of Buddhist rituals, aristocrats and officials would also attempt to earn merit by participating in such activities. At the same time, as in the construction of tombs, the erection of statuary stelae and the fanfare that accompanied their completion provided local elites with an opportunity to increase their supply of "symbolic capital," assert their authority in community affairs, and leave behind a lasting monument to their importance.

As for the villagers, they had an opportunity to experience the same forms of Buddhism available to urban residents of medieval north China. The monks and nuns travelling through the countryside not only converted villagers and led them in various forms of Buddhist ritual and practice, but, if the fifth century orders from the Northern Wei emperor were indeed implemented (see above), indoctrinated them in imperial dogma. Buddhist religious specialists brought with them ideas and beliefs contained in sūtras popular in cities like Loyang. Such texts included the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, illustrations from which figured so prominently on rural statuary stelae.

Aristocrats or urban dwellers surely did not completely share the same worldviews as commoners or villagers, yet it is also clear that certain Buddhists beliefs and values were able to spread throughout medieval Chinese society. Through the process of ordering statuary stelae from urban workshops, isolated villages far from urban centers "bought into" the images and symbols of the stelae they ordered. Therefore, through the erecting of Buddhist stelae as well as the preaching of monks and nuns travelling throughout the countryside, villagers in north China during the fifth and sixth centuries were exposed to ideas which were also prevalent in urban

areas. In such ways Buddhism served as a vehicle for transmitting ideas and beliefs between urban and rural areas.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

T *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經

⁷⁴ "Ni-ch'an Ssu san-chi fu-t'u pei" 凝禪寺三級浮圖碑 (539), in *Lu Hsun*, case 1, volume 5, pp. 851-64. This stele recounts how an official led more than two thousand villagers, monks, and nuns in erecting a stele.



Figure 1. Statuary stele erected by Liu Hsiung-t'ou and 400 other villagers living in Tang-mo Ts'un in 503. The image at the top of the stele is a scene from the *Lotus Sūtra* featuring Sakyamuni Buddha and the Prabhūtaratna Buddha. The inscription describes the circumstances behind the stele's carving, and expresses the desire of the villagers to be reborn in the paradise of the Maitreya Buddha.

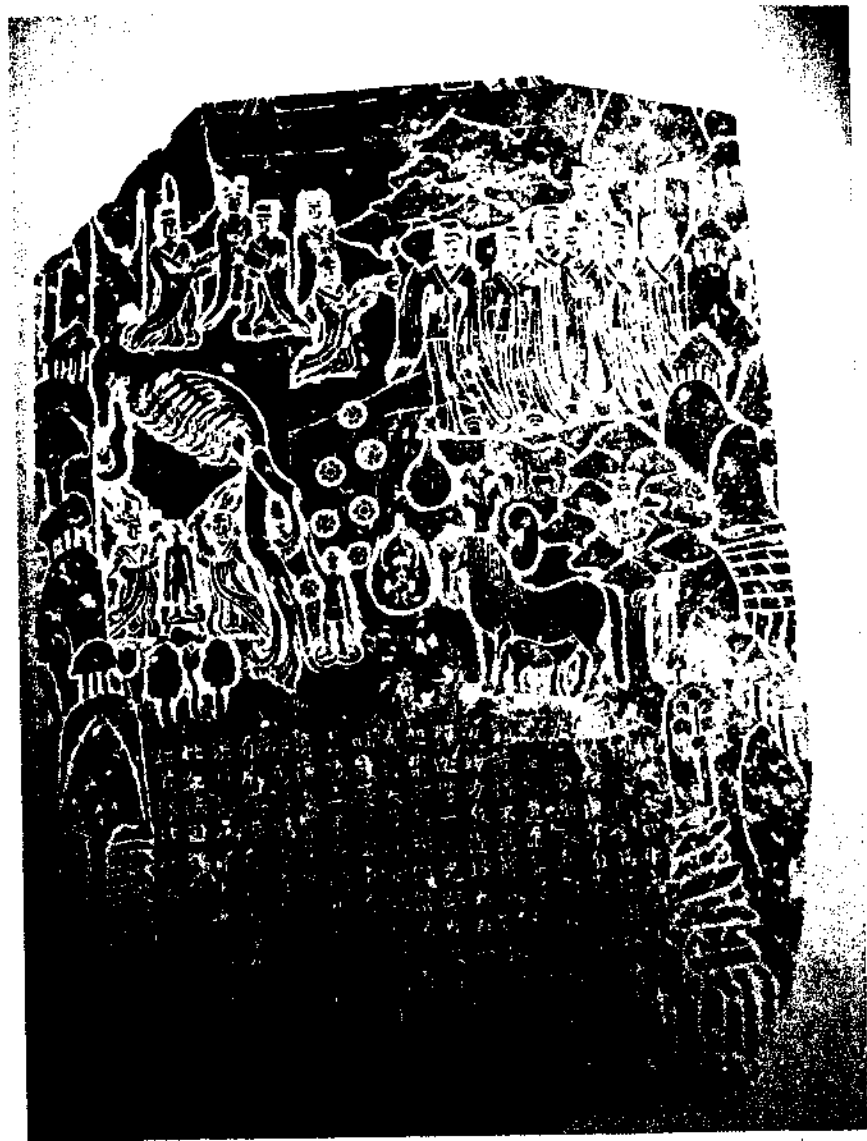


Figure 2. Statuary stele erected by the monk Tao-ying and others in 546. The image features a scene depicting various miraculous events accompanying the birth of the Buddha. The text lists the names of those individuals who donated money for the erection of the stele.