Whole-body relics in Chinese Buddhism – Previous Research and Historical Overview

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1. Previous Research on Whole-body Relics

Within the last few years four books[1] on Buddhist relics have been published and relics feature prominently in a number of other monographs and articles.[2] Clearly the topic is popular these days.[3] The aim of this article is to give an overview of the scholarship that has been done on a special type of relic, the whole-body relic, and the development of this type in China. Whole-body relics are the mummified remains of a religious practitioner. Although whole-body relics are relatively uncommon, they are a pan-Buddhist phenomenon and, with the possible exception of Sri Lanka, Buddhist whole-body relics exist and are venerated in all Buddhist cultures.

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1 Trainor (1997), Ruppert (2000), Germano and Tainor (2004), Strong (2004a).

2 Skilling (2004), Swearer (2004) and others.

3 This is partly the result of one general trend within the field of Buddhist studies to explore topics that do not feature prominently in the Buddhist texts itself. This again is in line with the development of Western humanities in general, which during the last 30 years, inspired by the writings of structuralist and post-structuralist authors, have taken aim to unearth truths that were consciously or unconsciously obscured, and hidden in the narrative movements of a tradition. Imagined in the metaphor of an "archeology of knowledge" this movement has led critical scholarship to be more and more aware of hidden agendas both within the fields they were studying as well as within themselves. For other reasons for the "Allure of Relics," see Sharf (1999).

Terminology

In this article we argue that a distinction should be made between mummification as a form of burial and mummification as a mode of the relic cult. Mummification as a form of burial seeks to preserve the body in the context of its disposal. There were at least two cases, in Egypt and in pre-Columbian South America, where mummification as burial was the rule rather than the exception for a long period. While in the latter case evidence about the underlying belief system is scarce, in Egypt mummification was prescribed by a thanatology that valued the preservation of the body as a condition for a happy afterlife. Mummification was therefore, at least in theory, done for the sake of the deceased.

Although from a paleo-pathological point of view "all well-preserved dead bodies"[4] are mummies, we believe that in the context of Buddhist and Christian mummification, it is better to conceptualize these mummies as whole-body relics. In Buddhism (and Christianity, though that is beyond the scope of the present article) the mummies of saints are cultural products intimately related to both the relic and the image cult. In contrast to the buried mummies of South America and Egypt, Buddhist whole-body relics are generally openly displayed.[5] In Buddhism, Christianity (and perhaps Taoism) mummification is generally seen as evidence of spiritual attainment. The body is left behind for the sake of the living.

Previous Research

Some dozen articles in at least half a dozen languages have been written on Chinese Buddhist mummification.

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[4] Cockburn and Cockburn 1998, 1. Cf. the definition for *miira* given by Sakurai Kiyohiko in Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu (1993, 3).

[5] This is true for Southeast Asian, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism where the whole-body relics are fused with images in sacred space. Tibetan Buddhist whole-body relics are usually interred in stupas, after having been dried and displayed for a certain period.

Although a number of studies have appeared for certain areas, whole-body relics have not yet been comprehensively treated as a pan-Buddhist phenomenon and only Japanese whole-body relics can be considered well-researched. A number of monographs in Japanese and one in Italian describe the Japanese mummies in depth.[6]

Though some of these publications include important research about China we know much less about the practice in China. The three famous mummies in the Nanhua Temple 南華寺 in Guangdong have attracted some attention, but there seems to be nearly nothing on the large (and growing) numbers of whole-body relics on Mount Jiuhua 九華山. Also, regarding the whole-body relics in Tibet, Vietnam, Mongolia and Thailand nothing, as far as we know, has been published in Western languages.

The general problematic of Chinese Buddhist whole-body relics is connected to several larger issues: the cult(s) around relics and images in Buddhist art and ritual; Chinese funeral rites; Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist thanatology; Indian and Central Asian influences on China etc. each of these are complex topics in their own right. Here we aim to provide a review of previous research on the topic in light of the distinction made above, before presenting the historical development of Chinese Buddhist mummification in detail.

The first attempt to describe and understand Chinese Buddhist mummification was made by Perceval Yetts, the great porcelain connoisseur and China hand in 1911.[7] After a number of general remarks on Buddhist funeral practices, Yetts lists five examples of "dried monks,"[8] as well as a wooden

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6 Andō (1961), Matsumoto (1985), Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu (1963) and (1993), Naitō (1999), Raveri (1992).

7 "Notes on the Disposal of Buddhist Dead in China." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 699-725.

8 According to Yetts, whole-body relics were called *gan heshang* 乾和尚 , *ren g*an 人乾, *roushen x*ian 肉身仙 or simple *xian* 仙.

image that one temple tried to pass off as a mummified abbot from the Tang dynasty. Of the five individuals one died between 1870 and 1880, the others in 1876, 1895, 1896, and 1900. All were temporarily buried in a pair of *kan* 龕 or *gang* 缸, two large earthenware tubs that were sealed at the rim. After a number of years the body is taken out and the remains are gilded and enshrined. The process that Yetts describes in detail on the basis of his observations is exactly the tradition we find in the latter half of the 20th century in the creation of some of the Taiwanese whole-body relics.[9] Yetts also mentions another "less common" method, where the monk slowly starved himself to death and his emaciated body smoked and varnished. This again is the model prevailing in Japan for the 19th century.[10] Unfortunately later research has done little to elucidate the relationship between these two types.

As to the reason for the mummification Yetts reports two kinds of answers: According to the first the body defies corruption because of the saintly qualities of the dead monk, while the second frankly admits the measures taken to create the mummy. Both of these explanations – religious and pragmatic – have resurfaced in the discourse on Buddhist whole-body relics in Taiwan (Gildow & Bingenheimer, 2005: 100-102). Yetts also mentions the existence of Taoist whole-body relics and Buddhist whole-body relics in Tibet, where salt was used for the dehydration of the bodies.

Another record of whole-body relics in the early 20th century can be found in the writings of Reginald F. Johnston, the British diplomat, who later became tutor of the last emperor Puyi. Johnston remarks on the custom of Buddhist mummification in the Jiuhua Shan chapter of his Buddhist China: "There was nothing very exceptional in the enshrining of the preserved body of the old abbot Long-shan, for this

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Today in Taiwan and on the mainland the term *roushen p*usa 肉身菩薩 is used.

9 Gildow and Bingenheimer (2005, 92).

10 Sakurai et al. 1998. In Cockburn & Cockburn (ed.), 319-321.

procedure has been adopted in the case of ancient and revered monks in many parts of China" (Johnston, 1913 [1976]: 231). Johnston also mentions Tibetan whole-body relics and reports that after a certain time on public display, these were enclosed in a stupa out of view. Both the use of salt and the final entombment differ from the Chinese method.

In 1937 Kosugi Kazuo 小杉 一雄 published a seminal article that for the first time linked the mummy cult with the cult of image and relics. In "Nikushinzō oyobi yuikaizō no kenkyū 肉身像及遺灰像の研究"[11] he addresses a number of important issues concerning Buddhist whole-body relics in China and Japan and tries to explain how the mummy-image came to be worshiped. Kosugi proposes three stages according to the location where the relics were enshrined. In a first phase naturally mummified corpses were venerated where they were found, mainly in mountain caves. Secondly, from the 5th to the 7th century, the whole-body relics were enshrined in locations that could accommodate worshipers more easily. From the 7th century, in a third phase, Chinese whole-body relics were gilded and placed on a dais or into a stūpa. In the historical overview below we will refine this model.

Kosugi pays special attention to a tradition in which the ashes of a cremated monk were, in various ways, included in an ash-relic image (*yuikaizō* 遺灰像). He suggests line of a development that leads from early natural mummification via the lacquering of the corpses since the Tang to the use of ash-relic images. Although the teleological argument does not seem to have been substantiated in later scholarship, Kosugi was the first to assert a relationship between portrait sculpture in China and Japan and the whole-body image; he also was the first to perceive a connection between the relic cult and mummification. In an appendix Kosugi discusses the portrait sculpture of Jianzhen 鑑真 (687-763) (a topic later taken up again by Croissant (1990) and Sharf (1992)) and the relic

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[11] *Tōyō gakuhō* 東洋学報 24/3 (1937), 93-124. Conveniently reprinted in: Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu (1993a, 277-310).

image of Enchin 円珍 (814-891).

In "Das Chinesische Wort für Mumie" the eminent Sinologist Herbert Franke (1957) argues that the Chinese word for mummy *munaiyi* 木乃伊 is derived not, as often stated, from the Arabic *mūmiyā* (Persian *mūmiyā'ī*), but rather from the plural of the Persian word for "heretic" i.e. *mulāḥida* (arab. *Mulāḥid*, pl. *malāḥida*). According to Franke the term was introduced in the Mongol era and appears first in the *Zhuogeng lu* by Tao Zongyi of 1366. That the term *munaiyi* for a preserved corpse, though available since the 14th century, was not used in the Sino-Buddhist discourse on whole-body relics, strengthens our suggestion that "whole-body relic" is indeed the better term.[12]

The first monograph on Buddhist mummification, *Nihon no miira* 日本のミイラ [*Japanese mummies*] (1961) by Andō Kosei 安藤更生, does include a chapter on *miira* in China.[13] Andō had visited (and photographed) Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist whole-body-relics during the war, and was later instrumental in the establishment of the Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu, the Japanese Mummies Study Group. He even managed to purchase a Buddhist whole-body relic and examine it in his office.[14]

Andō addresses two important questions that have been further discussed in later scholarship: the origin of the practice and its connection with Taoism. He holds that mummification did not enter China from outside, but was rather an indigenous development. He sees evidence for a Taoist connection of Chinese mummification in the dietary practices that the monks

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[12] Cf. the attempt to differentiate between mummy and *roushen pusa* by the monk Guangyuan translated in Gildow and Bingenheimer (2005).

[13] Andō (1961, 156-222) ("China is the Mummy-Mecca"). There is also another chapter on mummies outside of Asia.

[14] The story of the relic of Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 and it's journey to Japan is a fascinating example of colonial archeology in the Far East. See the excellent study by James Robson (2003).

used to prepare themselves for mummification, and the use of the phrase *chantui* 蟬蛻 (cicada husk). He also reports that Taoist mummies are mentioned in gazetteers as far back as the Song and Yuan.[15] We will return to this question later.

Apart from this Andō gives a valuable historical overview and provides something of a guide to most famous existing mummies as they were displayed in the 40's and 50's, he is well aware that unlike in Japan Buddhist mummification in China does continue and he describes Cihang's mummification (1954-1959) in detail.[16] In "La mummia in Estremo Oriente" (1963)[17], Andō summarizes parts of his monograph for the western reader and outlines the points of contact and the discrepancies between Japanese and Chinese Buddhist mummies.

In the first account of Japanese whole-body relics in English Hori Ichirō (1962) reported the "discovery" of six "self-mummified Buddhas in Japan." At around the same time the "Japanese Mummy Study Group" (Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu) was formed under the leadership of Andō Kosei. The two volumes published by the group[18] (1969 and 1993) deal mainly with Japanese mummies, but also include essays on mummies in China and Asia. The more recent volume offers several studies on Huineng's relic, the oldest "surviving" mummy-image, as well as a discussion of old and new ideas

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15 Andō (1961, 162-167). Unfortunately without reference. For an extensive discussion of the Taoist connection, cf. Matsumoto (1993a) and below.

16 Andō (1961, 204-208). According to our research on Taiwan, by now there are six Buddhist and two non-Buddhist mummies in Taiwan. One more is in the making. On the Chinese mainland too new mummies are produced from time to time.

17 Il Giappone 3, 135-140. We thank Stefania Travagnin for this information.

18 The first volume appeared 1969. Andō's death in 1970 led to a hiatus, however, the group regathered and published a second volume 1993.

on Buddhist mummification in China and elsewhere. Members of the study group have also contributed an overview article on mummies in Japan to an important work on the paleo-pathological aspects of mummification: Thomas Cockburn's Mummies, Disease, and Ancient Cultures (1998).[19]

In 1965 Paul Demiéville, the eminent French sinologist, discusses Buddhist mummification in various cultures in "Momies d'Extrême-Orient" (*Journal des Savants*, 144-170). His essay addresses many relevant elements of the phenomenon and later research could often only confirm what he intuited early on. After remarking on the absence of mummification in India he cites Xuanzang, who in the 7th century reported several Buddhist mummies in Central Asia, where the dry climate is obviously conductive to natural mummification. Concerning China, Demiéville maintains that the Taoist quest for immortality should not be regarded as a major influence on the development of Buddhist mummification. According to Demiéville "les techniques utilisées par les taoïstes pour «nourrir le principe vital» et immortaliser le corps en le transformant de son vivant sont sans rapports avec celles de la momification" (Demiéville, 1965: 149).

Joseph Needham discusses mummification in the volume on Chemistry and Chemical Technology of Science and Civilisation in China. Generally sympathetic to Taoism because of its role in the development of science in China, Needham follows Andō against Demiéville and asserts a Taoist origin of Buddhist mummification, because the dietary regime that some of the monks followed before their mummification was Taoist.[20]

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[19] The essays in Cockburn & Cockburn discuss mummies and mummification in different cultures. The focus is however clearly on paleo-pathological or archeological problems, not on the religious dimension.

[20] Needham (1974, 300). Actually Needham cites Hōri Ichirō. In the passage in question Hori however merely says that the

Doris Croissant in "Der Unsterbliche Leib: Ahneneffigies und Reliquienporträt in der Porträtplastik Chinas und Japans"[21] also argues for a strong Taoist or rather indigenous connection and denies that the "Mumienporträt" is an extension of the Indian relic cult. For her the term *zhenshen* 真身 "true body" is "der Schlüssel zur religiösen Bedeutung des Mumienporträts" (Croissant, 1990: 254). In Buddhism *zhenshen* is one of the Chinese synonyms for *dharmakāya*, the most transcendental, comprehensive of the three bodies of a Buddha. The term *zhenshen* is also used in Taoism for which Croissant cites one example. According to her interpretation of this passage, in the mummy cult the Buddhist meaning of *zhenshen* was conflated with the Taoist usage. The *trikāya* theory, however, was already well known and explained when the cited Taoist text was created and, significantly, she found the passage in an article by Eric Zürcher, where he tries to show a Buddhist influence on Taoism not vice versa.[22] Apart from the fact that in this case evidence from one passage is not enough, the cited text itself and its commentary does, to our mind, not at all prove that the Taoist idea of physical immortality contributed

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abstinence from cereals (*mokujiki-gyō*) "seems to have been influenced either by Hindu asceticism (Yoga) or by the training of wizards in Taoism". Nowehere does Hōri suggest a Taoist origin or formative influence for the "self-mummified Buddhas" and although he defines Shugendō as "a compound of ancient shamanistic magic and Mantrayāna Buddhism, Yin-yang magic, and Taoism" the six whole-body relics, according to his description, clearly understood themselves as Buddhists. Honmyō-kai who became the earliest whole-body relic of that group had decided "to become a Buddha in his very own body" and directed his prayers to Amitābha (Hori 1962, 224). To assert Taoist over a Buddhist influence seems going against all evidence presented by Hori.

21 In Martin Kraatz, Jürg Meyer zur Capellen and Dietrich Seckel, 1990. *Das Bildnis in der Kunst des Orients*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990.

22 "Buddhist influence on Early Taoism." *T'oung Pao* 66 (1980), 84-147.

to the idea of Buddhist mummification.[23]

Though we disagree on this particular issue, Croissant has made significant contributions in her article. By describing Buddhist mummies as a type of portrait in the context of art history she opens up a number of important new perspectives on the topic. Categorized as a type of portrait the whole-body relics are connected to other forms of portrait sculpture and painting, as well as to the little known tomb effigies that can be found in some Chinese tombs. Following the leads given by Kosugi she identifies an important iconological link between whole-body relics and sculptures, namely the sculpture as reliquary as found in both China and Japan. These sculpture reliquaries contained the remains of the portrayed in form of ashes, bones or replicas of the viscera.

Her main point is utterly convincing: effigies existed in Chinese thanatology and could have accommodated the evolution of Buddhist mummification, especially in connection with the relic cult that "depicts the dead not only in effigie but also in corpore" (Croissant, 1990: 256).

In another essay[24] that starts to elucidate the relationship between relic and image cult Robert Sharf uses a textual approach that relies on biographies and monastic codes. His work is complementary to that of Croissant, who had assembled evidence from art history and of whose work he was unaware. One of Sharf's main points is that "Ch'an

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[23] Demiéville, who was well acquainted with both Buddhist and Taoist vocabulary, does take *zhenshen* to mean simply "real body." "C'est sans doute pour les distinguer de ces effigies artificielles que les momies recevaient des noms tels que 'corps vrai' (*zhenshen*), 'corps de chair' (*roushen*), etc." (Demiéville 1965, 152). Demiéville also mentions Franke's article that explains the etymology of *munaiyi*, which Croissant got wrong (n101).

[24] Sharf (1992, 1-31). In another essay "The Allure of Buddhist Relics," Sharf (1999) deals with the semiotic dimension of relics and of the reasons of their newly found prominence in Buddhist studies.

materials provide us with clear evidence that the portrait of the deceased abbot indeed functions as a dwelling place for his soul or ling" (Sharf, 1992, 18). The whole-body relic as spirit-seat and material evidence of spiritual success are important features of the contemporary practice on Taiwan (Gildow & Bingenheimer, 2006). The question of how the whole-body relics functioned as images is clearly central to their use in worship and sacred space.

In an appendix Sharf shows that the famous dry-lacquer portrait sculpture of Jianzhen [Ganjin] (688-763) was probably a substitute for a failed mummification. The connection between Jianzhen's portrait and Huineng's mummy has been noted before by Kosugi and Croissant, who see the portrait inspired by Huineng's mummy. [25] Sharf explains the similarities between whole-body relic and dry-lacquer sculpture in a plausible way, thereby resolving a puzzling contradiction in the textual evidence. It seems that whole-body relic and portrait were interchangeable, with the portrait sculpture being the second best solution to a whole-body relic.

Slightly problematic in our view is Sharf's decision to conceptualize mummification as Chan practice. As he himself admits, one cannot speak of the early mummies as Chan monks. But even Cihang in the 20th century cannot be easily classified as Chan master. [26] The evidence of Buddhist mummification outside China too shows that the phenomenon cannot be framed as specifically Chan. It is not exclusively linked to any school or doctrine in particular.

Bernard Faure has published extensively on relics in China and Japan. His research concerning whole-body relics is found especially in chapter eight of *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*

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[25] Indeed Jianzhen had visited Huineng's mummy in 750, four years before his arrival in Japan. (Bingenheimer 2004, 152).

[26] Matsumoto (1985 [1993]) also includes him in a chapter called "The Chan mummies of China". The Chan label makes little sense for 19th-20th century Chinese monastics; it should be used only for those who in their writings or practice clearly define themselves as members of Chan.

(1991) ("Metamorphoses of the Double II") and the 1992 article "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites."[27] Faure (1991) sees the connection between whole-body relics and the small grain-sized relics (*śarīra* or *dhātu*) of Buddhist monks. He gives a first overview emphasizing the use of relics in the Chan school and how whole-body relics were turned into icons Like Sharf, Faure also turns his attention to the pragmatic dimensions of whole-body relics and discusses the connection between relics and charismatic power, especially in the case of Huineng. He concludes with explaining the relationship between the "realistic" portrait tradition in Chan/Zen master and the iconography of the whole-body relic. Faure also mentions that there seems to be very little connection between the Maitreya cult and Buddhist mummification in China.[28]

In his second study Faure analyses the interdependence between the charisma of the flesh-bodies and the places where they were kept, using as example two Chan pilgrimage sites, Sung Shan and Caoxi. He draws attention to how the whole-body relics invested a site with sacredness, and how vice versa the specific historical and geographical conditions of the site determined the fame of the hosted mummies.

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[27] In Susan Naquin and Yü Chün-fang (Eds.), 1992, 156-189. Faure (1994) also addresses the subject for a wider audience in his *La Mort dans les Religions d'Asie*. Flammarion.

[28] Faure (1991, 155-156) cites Yunmen Wenyan and the monk Budai as two possible examples. Adding Huisi (see below) would make it three out of some 50 known cases. Faure however does believe Andō's claim that almost all Japanese whole-body relics were connected to Maitreya via a legend that formed around Kūkai in the 11th century. For this legend see Matsumoto (1985 [1993], 78-99). Interestingly, as we will see below, Matsumoto argues the opposite. In Matsumoto (1985 [1993], 78), he concedes that Andō and himself were mistaken in assuming that all Japanese mummies were results of the Maitreya cult and in Matsumoto (1993a) presents a more sophisticated analysis. Matsumoto does, however, maintain that the whole-body relics in China appeared in connection with the Maitreya cult. We try to refute this below.

Pilgrims, by providing donations, and rulers, who afforded security and political support, played a key role in this process. He discusses the differences between Sung Shan and Caoxi in the context of the relics these centers held. Sung Shan's Shaolin Monastery, where according to tradition Bodhidharma once meditated, is a place of stupas, inscriptions and the center of a cult of relics of a more conventional, crematory type. Caoxi, the place of Huineng, is famous for the presence of several whole-body relics. Faure describes several phenomena linked with the cult like "folk idolatry", sacred theft, "lust for relics" and the "translation of relics", i.e. their elevation and enshrinement. The whole-body relics Faure describes were objects of rivalry, poems and dreams. In all these aspects, we can find similarities with the contemporary whole-body relics in Taiwan as well as in medieval Christianity.[29] The use of whole-body relics by the local communities, the way they were and are worshiped certainly deserves further attention.[30]

In 1993 the Japanese Mummy Research Group that had been founded by Andō in the 60's published a second volume on whole-body relics.[31] It contains two extensive articles by Matsumoto Akira 松本昭 on mummification in Japan and China. The essay on Chinese Buddhist whole-body relics is the most comprehensive recent work on the topic.[32] In it Matsumoto tries hard to show that the Maitreya cult was one of the main factors in the formation of the whole-body relic

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[29] Geary (1978) describes in detail how relics in medieval Europe were coveted, traded and stolen.

[30] Relics played an important role in medieval Japanese politics. On this see especially Ruppert (2000) and Faure (2004).

[31] See Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu, 1993. The first had appeared in 1969 and dealt mainly with Japanese whole-body relics. It contained one article of Matsumoto on China however.

[32] Matsumoto (1993b, 17-99 and 1993a, 147-216). Matsumoto started to develop his ideas in an essay in the first volume of the Nihon Miira Kenkyū Gurūpu (1969). He also discusses Chinese whole-body relics in a monograph dealing mainly with Japanese *miira* (Matsumoto 1985 [1993], 217-249).

cult in China until the ninth century. He starts out with a detailed discussion of the allegedly Taoist elements in the textual evidence on mummification, which, as we have seen, appear in the literature since Andō (1961). These can be summarized as:

1. The dietary practices of Buddhist preparing for their own mummification.

2. The use of the metaphor *chantui* 蟬蛻 "cicada shell" in the description of one or two early whole-body relics.

3. The applicability of the concept of Taoist immortals in connection with mummification.

With regard to the dietary practices, the abstention from cereals and the ingestion of unlikely vegetable and mineral substances, it should be remembered that for China these practices are mentioned only in the case of Shan Daokai (see below), who has explicitly denied the aspiration to become an immortal. This is hardly enough evidence for a "Taoist" influence.

Also the rare use of the term *chantui*, that Andō took as evidence for a connection with the Taoist conception of "corpse deliverance" 尸解 does on closer examination not deliver. In "Corpse Deliverance, Substitute Bodies, Name Change, and Feigned Death" [33] Ursula-Angelika Cedzich elucidates the complex variations on the idea that the Taoist adept was somehow able to cheat death. According to Cedzich the idea behind Buddhist whole-body relics is incompatible with the Taoist conception of "corpse deliverance." [34] Cedzich's explanations agree with that of Matsumoto (1993b: 152-157), who also concludes that the Taoist concept of the immortal who escapes from the body cannot be seen as an antecedent for Buddhist mummification. According to him Taoist notions were merely used in the description, but did not

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[33] *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29, 2001.

[34] Cedzich (2001, 18): "Daoist immortalists [...] never focused on the corporeal remains of adepts as objects of worship."

constitute a formative influence. He found one text,[35] however, that does establish a link between the Taoist quest for longevity though dietary practices and the Buddhist idea of waiting for the advent of Maitreya (some 56 billion years from now). This he takes as starting point for his thesis that the early Buddhist whole-body relics were connected to Maitreya beliefs.

Making use of Xuanzang's travelogue, Matsumoto summarizes a number of mummification stories of Indian and Central Asian monks, who were said to be waiting for Maitreya in some form or other. He then outlines the development of the Maitreya cult in China, drawing on the findings of Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆. Tsukamoto's findings that Maitreya and his paradise in Tuṣita Heaven remained popular among the Saṅgha even after the rise of Amidism is doubtless correct, however, Matsumoto does not really succeed in making a connection. Of those monks that are somehow linked to Maitreya beliefs hardly any were mummified.[36] According to Matsumoto this might have been because of the lack of preservation techniques (Matsumoto, 1993b: 191), but this is not probable. Pre-Tang mummies, which were not lacquered, were recorded although their naturally mummified bodies turned to dust over the centuries. Although it is difficult to argue from silence, the fact that Maitreya is not mentioned in the earliest cases (e.g. Heloujie, Zhu Tanyou etc.) casts grave doubt on the idea that such a connection existed or that it was relevant. We believe that Matsumoto overstates the role of Maitreya beliefs for the early

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[35] The *Lishiyuanwen* 立誓願文 (T1933, 46, 786b) by Huisi 慧思 (515-577). The passage cited by Matsumoto is found in 789b. Huisi was later mummified and indeed this text is one of the few that show a connection between mummification and the Maitreya belief in China. For an evaluation of this source see below in the historical overview.

[36] Even for Zhijie and Zhixi, who Matsumoto mentions as examples for mummification, the passages he cites are ambiguous.

development of mummification as happened earlier with regard to Japanese mummification.[37] The textual evidence he cites is relatively weak and does not evince a strong connection between the Maitreya complex and mummification in China. The material does not prove that Chinese Buddhists of any period have conceived of mummification as a way to await the coming of Maitreya, not even for pre-Tang times when the belief in Maitreya was at its peak.

As for the 20th century, Matsumoto (1993b: 212) uses Cihang's mummification as sign that the "belief in Maitreya has splendidly survived." However, as the reports by Yetts and others show, mummification was well established in late Qing Buddhism without any reference to Maitreya and although there was a certain connection between Cihang and Maitreya, this connection, should rather be understood in the context of a renaissance of the Maitreya cult among the educated members of the Saṅgha.[38] The Maitreya cult is not in any way emphasized at the site were Cihang's relics are on display today. Indeed none of the six Buddhist and two non-Buddhist whole-body relics that were produced in Taiwan in the last fifty years have any connection to the Maitreya cult.

Summary

There is much we do not know about the relationship between the main religious discourses in China. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Folk-Religion have influenced each other and overlap in complicated patterns. Trying to ascertain the place of Buddhist whole-body relics in the field of Chinese

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[37] As Matsumoto admits, his teacher Andō's (and his own) views on the influence of the Maitreya cult on mummification in Japan had to be revised drastically. While Andō once claimed that "In all of Japan there are 20 *nyūjō* mummies connected to the Maitreya cult" in fact such a connection can be shown for only one, that of Kōchi 弘智 (enshrined 1363) (Matsumoto 1985 [1993], 78).

[38] For various reasons both Taixu and Yinshun, the two leading exegetes of Chinese Buddhism in the 20th century, favored Maitreya over Amitabha. Ritzinger is currently working on this.

religion, however, we believe that a Taoist influence, though often asserted, is little more than a mirage. Since Andō first proposed a connection, very little new evidence has been found that supports his thesis and some of his assumptions have been disproved. Today it seems unlikely that Taoist practices had a significant influence on the development of Buddhist whole-body relics. Neither the use of the term *chantui* nor the dietary practices can be firmly tied to Taoism. Next to that, though mentioned by Andō, Demiéville and others, so far no Taoist mummy or whole-body relic in China has been subjected to research. The only Taoist mummy we can be sure of is the very recent one of Dexiu Chanshi that was enshrined in 1999 in Jilong, Taiwan. Though research on this is still in progress[39] one thing can be said for sure: At least in Taiwan during the last 50 years it was clearly Buddhist mummification that influenced Taoism and Chinese popular religion, not vice versa. This of course might have been different 1500 years ago, but a development of Buddhist whole-body relics from Taoist practices or ideas is unlikely for other reasons as well.

Buddhist mummification is a pan-Buddhist phenomenon that exists in cultures where Taoism and Confucianism were marginal. The existence of Buddhist whole-body relics is attested to in Thailand, Burma, Tibet, Vietnam, Japan and Inner Mongolia. Although it may be justly asserted that our knowledge of Taoist influence in a number of these cultures is woefully understood, such a wide distribution of the cult of mummified monks strongly suggests roots in Buddhist ideas and practices rather than Taoist. This in turn reinforces the idea that Taoist ideas were not necessary to the development of the phenomena in China. [40] The Song-Yuan dynasty Taoist

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[39] Bingenheimer is currently working on this and another recent non-Buddhist mummy in Taiwan.

[40] The same is probably true for the autochthonous traditions in Japan, where Buddhist mummification existed in spite of Shintō, where decay and death generally compromise the ritual purity of a sacred site. It is of course true that Taoism and general Chinese folk-religious influences have exerted a certain

mummies mentioned by Andō (1961: 162-167) might as well be seen as a Buddhist influence on Taoism.

The reason why there is not much evidence for widespread mummification in Taoism seems to be simply that Taoism in general has no relic cult. Because Andō did not distinguish between mummies and whole-body relics, for him the Tarim mummies, natural mummification in pre-Han dynasty graves, as well as Taoist and Buddhist whole-body relics were all specimens of the same phenomenon. Only when one understands Buddhist mummies as whole-body relics they make sense within Buddhism and it is not really necessary to assume an outside influence for their appearance.

Still another reason to believe that Buddhist mummification should be addressed as part of the relic and image cult rather than merely as an example for mummification in China is the Christian parallel. Apart from Buddhism, Christianity is the only world-religion where a pervasive relic cult was condoned by the scholastic tradition and contributed to its transmission between cultures. [41] Comparison rarely offers proofs; however, the many parallels with the Christian relic cult, where whole-body relics were treated in a surprisingly similar fashion, do support the conceptualization of Buddhist mummies as relics (Bingenheimer, 2006).

We therefore propose the following summary: Whole-body relics of Buddhist recluses were first found and venerated in the dry climates of Central Asia where natural

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influence in a number of cultures, especially Japan and Vietnam. It is, however, one thing to say we do not yet know enough about Taoist influence in non-Chinese settings and something else to assert that Taoist influence is responsible for the Buddhist whole-body relics in Mongolia, Tibet, Thailand and Vietnam and Japan.

[41] More than in Buddhism the spread of Christianity depended on the distribution and re-distribution of relics. In the fifth Council of Carthage (401) it was decreed that all altars had to include relics of martyrs. The canon was reinvoked in 801 and 813. (Geary 1978, 19+37).

mummification is relatively common. As the earliest whole-body relics on record were of monks of Central Asian origin, we may assume that the practice entered China along the general route transmission via the silk-road. In China proper the results of natural mummification were more difficult to preserve and by the time of the Tang dynasty whole-body relics were coated and gilded thanks to the advanced skills of using lacquer. This resulted in a mixture of relic, reliquary, and portrait sculpture, which easily found its place among other images in Chinese Buddhist sacred space. Buddhist scholastic discourse in China does not offer any sustained discussion of how whole-body relics were supposed to work on the level of doctrine and practices, but clearly the relics were believed to be magically efficient and able to grant boons to the worshipers. They were important spiritual and economic assets for any temple, attracting ardent pilgrims and casual visitors alike.

Individual cases might have been influenced by Taoism or the Maitreya cult, but we lack evidence to believe that either of these had a strong formative influence on the practice of creating and venerating whole-body relics. It is more plausible that whole-body relics were accepted in Buddhism because both the relic and the image cult were already in place and could easily accommodate the phenomenon that recluses were sometimes found mummified in their caves or hermitages. As the research by Kosugi, Croissant, Sharf and Matsumoto have shown, there are several iconographic links between Buddha/Bodhisattva images, portrait art, grave effigies and the whole-body relic. These topics, as well as the question of the relationship between the general relic cult, centered on the *shelizi* of the Buddha or eminent monks, and the whole-body relics, still await further research.

2. Historical Overview of Chinese Buddhist Whole-body Relics

What follows is intended as an overview of the development of practices and conceptions surrounding mummified monks in China prior to 1949. It relies primarily on the canonical histories as well as reports from Western

observers and a handful of gazetteers. Some of the mummies discussed have already been dealt with elsewhere. Our intention is to consolidate the progress made thus far, offer a revisionist account of the origins of the cult, and to flesh out the history of later dynasties somewhat by drawing on the *Xuzangjing*, which has heretofore been neglected. The whole body relics of monks have been an important, constant, and widespread part of Chinese Buddhism for many centuries. Below we trace their origins and development over sixteen centuries in order to sketch out the broad historical sweep and provide a reference for future studies.

The Early Mummies

The earliest cases of mummification in China are those of four mountain ascetics —Heluojie 訶羅竭 (d. 298), Shan Daokai 單道開 (d. c. 360), Bo Sengguang 帛僧光 (d. 385) and Zhu Tanyou 竺曇猷 (d. 390's)— of the Eastern and Western Jin Dynasties. Though there is relatively little that can be said about them based on their brief biographies in the *Gaoseng Zhuan* 高僧傳, they have nevertheless been the subject of much speculation.

Heluojie was a man of uncertain origins[42] whose fame rested largely on his practice of dhuta in the mountains and instances of miraculous healing and finding water. In 291 he went off to practice in a cave near Mountain Louzhi 婁至山 where he died seven years later. After his death his disciples tried to cremate the body "according to the custom of Western countries" but Heluojie's body refused to cooperate, remaining unburned. His disciples then placed the body in a cave, where it was seen "sitting solemnly" by an Indian called Anshi thirty years later (T 50, 2059: 389a3-16).

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[42] The *Gaoseng Zhuan* claims that he is a native Chinese from Fanyang 樊陽, however, Liu Shufen 劉淑芬 says that there was no such place in China at that time. The *Fayuan Zhu Lin* 法苑朱林 records his place of origin as Xiangyang 襄陽 in what is now Hubei. Liu (1999).

The biographies of Zhu Tanyou and Bo Sengguang are similar. A man of Dunhuang, Tanyou was known as an ascetic and a meditator. He begged for his food and meditated in a cave on Mountain Chicheng 赤城山 near Mountain Tiantai. There he died sometime at the end of the Taiyuan period (376-397). His "body continued to sit upright and turned black all over" and was seen undecayed by a recluse at the end of the Yixi period (405-419) (T. 50, 2059: 395c26-396b16). Bo Sengguang was also a mountain dwelling hermit and ascetic of unknown origins. He died in 385 and remained so unchanged that a week had passed before his disciples figured out that the master had passed away. Yet his preservation was apparently limited, since when Guo Hong 郭鴻 came to make obeisance and struck the masters chest with his staff, the masters brittle clothing flew off leaving only white bones (T. 50, 2059: 395c5-25) (Sharf and Foulk, 1993-4: 166).

In Shan Daokai's biography asceticism takes a clearly Taoist cast. Daokai, a disciple of Fotudeng 佛圖燈 and man of Dunhuang, "cut off grains"[43] and dined instead on cypress seeds and pine resin. Eventually, he dispensed with such luxuries and ate only a few pebbles with the occasional peppers or bit of ginger. Because of these practices, he was no longer affected by heat and cold (T. 50, 2059: 387b3-5). All of these practices were to be found in the Taoist texts of the period. Pine resin, peppers and ginger were prescribed for would-be immortals in the *Taishang Lingbao Wufuxu* 太上靈寶五符序 (Kohn, 1993: 150-1) and eating rocks can be found in another fourth-century Taoist text, the *Shenxian Zhuan* 神仙傳 (Eskilsen, 1998: 17). Moreover, some recipes in the *Wufuxu* mention immunity to heat and cold as an effect of their dietary program.[44] Like the other three figures we have seen, Daokai later went to live in the mountains, specifically on Mountain

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[43] Eskilsen (1998, 43) suggests that this refers not to grains per se but to all ordinary food.

[44] Eskilsen (1998, 60 + 62). See also his discussion of the biography of Maonü from the Liexian Zhuan, p. 20.

Luofu 羅浮山, where he died in 298 at the age of hundred and was put in a cave by his disciples. In 363 the prefect of Nanhai visited the cave and compared the body to a "cicada husk" (*chantui* 蟬蛻) (T. 50, 2059: 387b1-c14).

Though we have noted that several scholars see this term as suggesting corpse deliverance (*shijie* 尸解)[45] and thus as evidence that these mummies were conceived of in Taoist terms, this seems to us a questionable conclusion. Even if we should grant that the term was intended here to refer to such deliverance, it is not legitimate to take one comment recorded in one biography as representative of "Buddhist attitudes." The eulogy of the prefect of Nanhai would not necessarily reflect the view of the broader Buddhist community. Indeed the whole anecdote is almost certainly included for reasons other than his interpretation of what he saw. First and foremost, they were likely included due to his position. As an official, he was more likely to leave some written record of his encounter for Huijiao to incorporate into the *Gaoseng Zhuan*. His inclusion would also have served the propaganda purposes of the text Kieschnick has pointed out (Kieshnick, 1997: 7). Anecdotes regarding the involvement of powerful persons with Buddhism were likely included in order to encourage further such involvement on the part of the elite readership who were the intended audience. It is not necessary, however, to assume that by comparing the body to a cicada husk the prefect meant to assert that Daokai had in fact attained corpse deliverance. It is possible that it was meant simply to describe the darkened and desiccated state of the body.

Matsumoto Akira concurs that references to cicada husks are not an indication that these early mummies were seen as cases of deliverance from the corpse, but simply a poetic description of a mummy. He makes the mistake of assuming that the prefect's comment was representative, however, and takes every instance in which this term is used as a description of a mummy. Thus he includes the Indian monk Huizhi 慧直

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[45] On the complex history of this escape from mortality, see Cedzich (2001).

among the early mummies (Matsumoto, 1993a: 153). Huizhi's exceedingly brief biography tells us only that he lived in the monastery founded by Huiyuan 慧元 where practiced rigorous asceticism. He stopped eating ordinary food and ate only pine seeds. "Thus," we are told, "he ascended the mountain and there molted like a cicada" (*yin deng shan chantui* 因登山蟬蛻) (T. 50, 2059: 410a14-16). No mention is made here of any body, let alone an incorruptible body seen years later. Taken on its own merit it seems at least equally possible that Huizhi had simply achieved deliverance from the corpse. Placed in context it seems very likely that this is exactly what it means. Huiyuan, to whose biography Huizhi's is appended and in whose community Huizhi lived, is clearly described as becoming an immortal. Although he appeared to die, he was later seen alive at Mountain Wudang whereupon he sent a message back to his monastery (T. 50, 2059: 410a8-13). Thus, it seems better here to view this episode not as one of mummification but as cicada molting in the classic Taoist sense.

As we have seen, Matsumoto goes on to argue that the evidence points not to a Taoist conception but to a Buddhist appropriation of Taoist techniques. He holds that Taoist dietary practices were used to intentionally self-mummify in order to wait for the coming of Maitreya. This too seems to us a dubious conclusion as all of his arguments are built on weak foundations. First, the idea that Buddhist monks were using Taoist methods to self mummify is unsupported by the evidence. Only one of the early mummies, Shan Daokai, is actually engaged in Taoist dietary practices and he explicitly denies that he is trying to become an immortal (T50, 2059: 387b21). Moreover, as Cedzich has shown, simple preservation of corpse was by no means seen as sufficient for immortality; to be trapped in a corpse is hardly a desirable goal (Cedzich, 2001).

Matsumoto's attempts to draw connections to Maitreya are likewise problematic. The biographies themselves give him nothing to work with because not only do they not state that any of the monks mummified themselves in order to wait for

Maitreya, none of them mention the future Buddha at all. They do not refer to any text, image, or practice that can be concretely linked to Maitreya. Thus he turns for his primary evidence to a text by Huisi 慧思, the *Nanyue Si Dashi Li Shiyuan Wen* 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文 (T.46, 1933; 786b24-792b06). This text contains many references to seeking immortality in the service of the Buddhist path and twice connects it explicitly to waiting for Maitreya (T.46, 1933: 789b2-8, and 791c18-19). While fascinating in its own right, the text does little to support Matsumoto's interpretation. Besides the fact that the *Li Shiyuan Wen* gives no indication that Huisi means to become an immortal by means of mummification and Huisi's biography in the *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* (T50, 2060: 562c06-564a17) gives no indication of an unusual diet, the text is simply several centuries later than the early mummies. It is too little, too late.

Matsumoto's other support is Xuanzang's *Datang Xiyu Ji* 大唐西域記 by which he attempts to show that there is some precedent for mummification in the "western regions." Xuanzang reports having seen two arhats sitting upright in samādhi in caves near Takṣaśilā. Their "forms were like those of one emaciated and their skin and bones were not decayed. [They had been thus] for seven hundred years already" (T. 51, 2087: 942a21-23). Later in the text Xuanzang tells an amusing story about another such arhat in Usa, in what is now Xinjiang, who had gone into deep samādhi and had essentially overslept. After a landslide opens his cave, he learns that not only his own teacher the Buddha Kāśyapa has passed away, but the next Buddha – Śākyamuni – as well. (T. 51, 2087: 942b11-c12) (Matsumoto, 1993a: 174-75). Another mummy in that region is explicitly said to be waiting for Maitreya (943c14-22). While this evidence is a bit more solid as far as it goes, again there is nothing to link the early mummies to this besides their origins in the Western regions.

Zhiyi's mummification, of course, can be taken as an indication that Huisi's vow created a connection even if there may not have been one before. But this is also problematic. While Zhiyi died in front of a Maitreya image, Koichi

Shinohara has shown that he was most likely hoping to be cured (Shinohara, 1991) and when it was clear these hopes would not be realized he spent his final hours not attempting to find a way to wait for Maitreya, but to secure rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land (Cole, 1996: 323-4). Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, a rather different set of ideas sprang up around him. Not until the Song Dynasty text do we find a mummy who is actually said to be waiting for Maitreya. Bernard Faure cites a text that says "when Maitreya comes" Yunmen, who had been mummified, "is likely to reappear to establish a place of practice on the Three Peaks [Jizu Shan 雞足山] and to depart again."[46] While this is certainly clear as can be, it is several centuries too late to be able to tell us much about the possible origins of this phenomenon. The author of the text was more likely making the connection himself rather than drawing on a 500 year old tradition that apparently left no trace of itself until that point.

Thus intriguing as the Maitreyan hypothesis may be, there seems to be insufficient evidence for it, at least in the texts readily available. One is tempted to conclude that the Japanese mummies, who do have an explicit Maitreyan connection, may have loomed overly large in Matsumoto's mind. While further research may yet vindicate Matsumoto's view, for now it seems doomed to remain merely a tantalizing theory.

Though it is a less exciting alternative, we should at least consider the possibility that these early mummies were simply accidents. Spontaneous natural mummification is not uncommon given the right conditions, and these were amply met in the case of our mountain dwelling ascetics. Emaciation, darkness and restricted air circulation provided by a cave and the relatively cool, dry mountain air would all help to promote preservation (Chamberlain and Pearson, 2001: 13-4). Indeed, given all the thin Buddhist ascetics living in caves up in the

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[46] Faure (1991, 155). Although he cites the *Yunmen Kuangzhen Chanhsi Guanglu* 雲門匡真禪師廣錄, we have been unable to locate the passage in that text.

mountains as well as the commonality of cave burial in the period[47] it would have been more surprising if there had not been at least a few of them who had become natural mummies. No elaborate theory is necessary to explain their presence. Thus these mummies may have been neither the shed skins of an immortal, nor proto-Shugendō ascetics waiting for Maitreya, nor even "object[s] of repulsion and awe [which were] for that reason abandoned in caves," (Faure, 1991: 158) but natural wonders, stories and sightings of which probably served as inspiration for later attempts at mummification.

The Sui and Early Tang: Laying the Foundations

In place of the more or less standard account of the origins of the tradition of mummification, we would like to propose a rather different account. In our view, the tradition begins with a bang, so to speak, leaping forth onto the stage almost fully formed, with most of the major pieces falling into place within a very short time. It is not a story of mountain ascetics devoted to Maitreya, but an exegete devoted to the Lotus. In the most important respects, the mummy tradition begins with Zhiyi 智顗 (538-579).

Three very early sources provide information about Zhiyi's post-mortem career: the *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan*, compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (569-667); the *Sui Tiantai Zhizhe Dashi Biezhuan* 隋天台智者大師別傳 by Zhiyi's disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561-632); and most importantly the *Guoqing Bailu* 國清百錄, a compilation of writings and inscriptions related to Zhiyi. According to the *Biezhuan*, when Zhiyi died his body was placed in a *dhyāna* coffin (*chankan* 禪龕) and after some difficulty taken to the place that Zhiyi had specified before he died (T50, 2050: 196c2-6). This was a spot on the southwest peak of Tiantai where he had instructed his disciples to pile up stones around his body, cover the tomb with pine and erect two white stupas so that people might see it and give rise to bodhi-mind (T50, 2050: 195c23-5). Do these instructions

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[47] Liu (1999). Liu Shufen also sees a continuity between cave burial and later mummies.

indicate that Zhiyi intended to be mummified? Sharf makes that case for Daoxin based on similar evidence but, while we shall agree with his conclusion in that case for somewhat different reasons, it seems impossible to conclude based on the evidence presented that Zhiyi intended that his body be preserved.

The first reference to this preservation comes from an unexpected source, the layman Zongchi 總持, more commonly known as Yang Guang 楊廣, the future emperor Sui Mingdi 隋明帝. In a 598 text collected in the *Guoqing Bailu*, he stated that the master's relic body (*sheli quanshen* 舍利全身) remained seated nineteen years after his passing. This he asserts is not the result of the minor attainment of a Śrāvaka but that of an advanced bodhisattva (T46, 1934: 811c29-a1). Here, already in the late sixth century, we see two of the key features of the mummy cult: the conceptualization of the entire preserved body as a relic and the ascription of preservation to advanced spiritual attainment. Neither of these ideas needed to be invented from whole cloth; the scriptures provide ample precedent for both. The idea that spiritual practice transforms the body is ubiquitous of course and references specifically to adamantine, indestructible bodies are also widespread. Moreover, support for the idea that the integral body might be a relic can also be found in certain passages that employ the phrase "*quanshen sheli*" 全身舍利. Often this is taken by Western scholars as "the relics of the entire body." While this may be accurate, there is clearly nothing to stop a Chinese interpreter from interpreting it otherwise. To take but one example from a text likely to have been known to a learned layman like Sui Mingdi, the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* contains the line "*huo xian quanshen sheli huo xian sanshen sheli"* 或現全身舍利或現散身舍利 (T15, 642: 640b22). In context (a discussion of the manifestation of a Buddha career), John McRae is clearly justified in taking this as "or I may manifest my entire body as relics, or I may manifest my physical relics as scattered" (McRae, 1998: 63). Abstracted from context, as scriptural passages often were, the line could easily be seen as

referring to two different types of relics "integral" (*quanshen* 全身) and "dispersed" (*sanshen* 散身).

Sui Mingdi does not refer explicitly to the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra*, however. Instead we find a reference to the *Lotus*, a choice which signals a much more particular conception of Zhiyi's post-mortem state. In a subsequent text in the collection, the then crown prince asks Guanding and Zhizao 智璪 about miracles that have occurred around Zhiyi's tomb and asks if there is canonical support for opening the tomb. After a moment's thought, Guanding replies "Śākyamuni Tathāgata with his right hand opened the stupa of Prabhūtaratna and the eight kinds of beings saw his whole body (*quanshen* 全身)" (T46, 1934: 813a17-18). This refers, of course, to an episode of the *Lotus Sūtra*, wherein the stūpa of Prabhūtaratna appears to praise Śākyamuni's preaching of the sūtra. This passage is alluded to in connection with Zhiyi's tomb in the Bailu several times explicitly and implicitly. The crown prince refers to the tomb in a 602 document as an auspicious multiplied body (*fenshen* 分身) of the Buddha Prabhūtaratna's stūpa (T46, 1934: 813b11-12). His descriptions of the whole body relic itself as when he stated that the body "over the succeeding years has been majestic as if in meditation" (*yujin shuzai yanran ruosi* 于今數載儼然若思) (T46, 1934: 813c23) employ language that suggests Prabhūtaratna whose "whole body had not dispersed, but sat as if in samādhi" (*quanshen bu san ruo ru chanding* 全身不散如入禪定) (T9, 262: 33b29). Zhiyi's remains then are not only the whole body relic of an advanced bodhisattva, but the body of ancient Buddha, dormant but responsive.

This is born out as well in the cult associated with Zhiyi's remains. The *Guoqing Bailu* and the *Biezhuan* attest to a broad cult of the departed master, but if we look specifically at those stories and practices associated with his entombed whole body relic we find that he is treated as a dormant, passive, but vaguely personified presence. A woodcutter who prostrated himself every day at the *kan* and prayed for a peaceful life (*ping'an* 平安) was visited in the night by a mysterious monk

who informed him that he will be so blessed if he continues in his efforts. Another local man burned incense and vowed to be liberated in a future life, whereupon he heard the sound of fingers snapping within the tomb. In order to verify this efficacious response, he made his vow again and again heard the sound emanating from within the tomb. Not only auditory, but visual responses were received. The monk Jiaosheng 皎生 heard of the efficacious wonders and came to repent before the *kan*. He circumambulated a thousand times and prostrated a thousand times, after which the doors of the tomb opened of themselves and light poured forth (T46, 1934: 812c25-813a15; T50, 2050: 197a10-197a25). Finally, a woman who had one leg that was shorter than the other discovered that it had lengthened after she sponsored a vegetarian feast at the tomb (T50, 2050: 197a29-b4). We see here then cultic practices consonant with relic: prostrations, circumambulation, offering incense, and repentance. The miracles are also consonant with relics in part. The emission of mysterious light is standard and healings, while unusual, are not unheard of (Kieschnick, 2003: 35). The other two miracles, the mysterious monk and the finger snaps, are more personified, but still somewhat opaque and reactive. Rather than an active personal agency, it suggests a responsive, but dormant presence. In this respect, it seems more akin to Prabhūtaratna than to relics or to the mummies of the high period to be discussed later.

Nevertheless several key elements of the later cult of whole body relics seem to be present from what we argue is the beginning. Moreover, Daoxuan's 道宣 (569-667) *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* 續高僧傳 suggests that they were taken up and added to elsewhere with a certain degree of rapidity. Within a century of Zhiyi's death and, perhaps more importantly, within just over fifty years of the imperial attention attested to in the documents examined above, there were five new cases of mummification, all of which have elements that suggest that Zhiyi's precedent may have been a factor.

The first case was that of Zhilin 智琳 (554-613) a vinaya specialist and member of the monastic bureaucracy who

served as Saṅgha Principal (*sengzheng* 僧正) at Qu'a 曲阿 and later as Prefect (*sengdu* 僧都) at Xuzhou 徐州. He was in short, like Zhiyi, a scholar and a member of the elite. Unlike the master of Mount Tiantai, however, Zhilin was likely a case of spontaneous mummification. Zhilin had requested that his body simply be left in the open, a common practice at the time. As in the case of Heluojie, despite the monk's best intentions, his body refused to cooperate. Some time later his disciples discovered his body intact, unharmed and unchanged. They took him to the eastern mountain and built a square tomb, placing his "whole body relic" (*quanshen sheli*) in a niche in the mountain (*shankan* 山龕) (T50, 2060: 503c18-504a29). Although Zhilin had no intention of mummifying, his disciples reaction to the preservation of his body —constructing a tomb and designating the remains a whole body relic— suggests they were likely aware of Zhiyi's case.

Dushun, 杜順 557-640, retrospectively designated the founder of the Huayan tradition, likewise seems to present a case of inadvertent mummification interpreted as a sign of spiritual accomplishment. Upon his death the thaumaturge was taken to the northern plain of Fanzhou 樊川 and a grave was dug for his remains. His body, however, remained fresh, uncorrupted, and even fragrant. In order to protect the body, learned monks sealed Dushun in a *kan*, as Zhiyi had been.[48] Most importantly, laity and monastics alike came to make offerings on auspicious days (T50, 2060: 654a07-10), signaling the development of an active cult as occurred in the case of Zhiyi.

Daoxuan relates a still more interesting case of an apparently natural mummy who became the focus of cultic devotion. In 627, Daoxiu 道修, an ascetic who shunned silk and lived in a valley near Mountain Li 驪山 in northeast Shaanxi, died and sat uncorrupted in his hut. When local villagers, who

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[48] Another monk of this period, Shiyu (d. 627), about whose mummification little else is reported, was also sealed in a kan (T. 50, 2060: 595a26-27).

were wondering why he had missed his usual begging rounds, discovered his body, they initially sealed up the hut to protect the body from insects and animals. The following year, when Daoxuan himself arrived they had built a hut for a mausoleum (*miaoshe* 廟舍) for him and brought him back to the village. Daoxuan described what he saw, saying, "although his skin had turned leathery and his bones had fused together, his facial expression had not changed, and he sat cross-legged as before." (T. 50, 2060: 684b16-17). The erection of a special structure to house the body seems to indicate that again a cult of some kind had developed.

Most importantly, though, these villagers added a new and important element to the practice, adding "lacquer-soaked cloth to the surface of his body" (T. 50. 2060: 684b18).[49] It is intriguing that this is said to take place in a nameless village "north of the mountain" to a monk of apparently only local significance (indeed his primary reason for inclusion in the *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* seems to be the opportunity he affords Daoxuan to append a discussion on wearing silk). As Sharf (1992: 15) has pointed out, the process of lacquering is "costly, time-consuming, and dangerous," thus it seems likely that the villagers had help. That such help was forthcoming was due in part no doubt to their fortuitous location. Besides Daoxiu's monastery, the area north of Mountain Li also included the hot springs where the emperor Xuanzong would build the Huaqing Palace a century later. Since these hot springs had been known as far back as the Zhou,[50] it seems likely that officials or members of the court passing to and from Xian (thirty kilometers away) might have heard of this local marvel and been involved in Daoxiu's lacquering. While these circumstances may explain why his lacquering was possible, it does not explain why it seemed worthwhile. It would seem that, in the four decades since the documents identifying Zhiyi's remains as a full body relic and comparing them to

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[49] Translation Benn (2000).

[50] Huaqing chi jianjie 華清池簡介. http://www.lintong.gov.cn/hqc/hqcjj.htm. Dec. 3, 2005.

Prabhūtaratna, these ideas had become sufficiently accepted for mummification to be sufficient to lift an unknown monk from obscurity and make him the center of high level patronage. Indeed, Daoxuan's personal visit to Daoxiu's mausoleum may be seen as further evidence of just this.

With Daoxin 道信 (d. 651), the fourth Chan patriarch and the final mummy in the *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan*, the shadow of Zhiyi's mummy looms particularly large. According to his biography, Daoxin orders Hongren to build a stupa for his remains. The following year Hongren and the other disciples open the stupa and see the master "sitting upright as of old" (T.50, 2060: 606b20-28).[51] The entire scene suggests a bit of theatre modeled on the Lotus and no doubt inspired by Zhiyi. Hongren in the role of Śākyamuni opens up the stupa to reveal the ancient Buddha Daoxin/Prabhūtaratna. This has a few interesting implications. First, it provides additional support for Sharf's conclusion that the mummification was intentional (Sharf, 1992: 9). This seems to be supported by the relatively short period of time that elapsed between Daoxin's death and Hongren's enactment. Although secondary burial might initially appear to be a possible motive to open the crypt, one year would be insufficient time for the state of decay required.

Thus it seems that we have clear indication of intent here. It is not so clear to us, however, that the intent was Daoxin's. Daoxin had refused to name anyone to succeed him (T. 50, 2060: 606b22) (McRae, 1986: 32). It seems possible that this event may have been a strategy on the part of Hongren to support Daoxin's claim to enlightenment and his own claim as successor by casting both his teacher and himself as Buddhas. Be that as it may, the clear adoption of the Lotus motif by the community of East Mountain suggests that they were taking a page from that of Mount Tiantai and using mummification as

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[51] Interestingly, although less prominent in later history, Daoxin's mummy as well as that of Hongren may have been exceptionally "long-lived." Taixu claims to have seen the fifth patriarch in 1923, though it was destroyed by the CCP in 1926. He had heard, however, that the fourth patriarch's mummy remained intact (*Taixu dashi quanshu* vol. 2, p. 158).

proof of attainment and thus as part of an attempt to attract the sort of high level patronage that Zhiyi had received from the Sui.

Thus in a relatively short period of time the motifs and conceptualizations found in the case of Zhiyi were taken up and elaborated. Already with the Tiantai master, we saw the idea of the whole body relic and the attendant miracles, comparisons to Prabhūtaratna, cultic activity, and patronage. These elements appeared again in subsequent occurrences and to them were added lacquering, intent, and political maneuvering. All of this continued to figure in accounts of mummies in the high period of the mid-Tang and Song dynasties and much of it continues to this day. If we are correct in thus placing Zhiyi at the center of the early history of the mummy cult, it suggests as well that, as fruitful as previous studies have been, framing the cult as a Chan phenomenon has obscured key factors of its development.

The Mid-Tang to the Song: Elaboration and Articulation

In the mid-Tang to Song dynasties, mummification and the cult of mummified masters enjoyed a high period. Mummification became fairly widespread and reasonably reliable. Mummies became valuable and occasionally contested sacred objects for their monasteries of residence. Moreover, in this period we find emerging a clear and explicit conception of what a mummy is in spiritual terms and a developed cult important to both the laity and the monasteries.

It seems safe to believe that mummification in this period was usually achieved by artificial or at least intentional means. We can see this from the sudden increase in the number of mummies recorded and also from the figures that were mummified. With the exception of a few eccentrics and ascetics,[52] most mummies of this period were people of importance —founders of new schools or new lineages. The

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[52] See for instance the biography of Wang Sheng王聖 (d. 1071) (X86, 1606: 563c7-12) and 姚聖 Yao Sheng (X86, 1606: 563c13-20), as well, of course, as Budai (T51, 2076: 434b26).

odds that such luminaries as Kuiji (T. 49, 2035: 385a23), Huineng, Shanwuwei (Śubhakarasiṁha 善無畏), and Yunmen would all just happen to spontaneously mummify are slight to say the least. Still, the precise process by which this was achieved is not attested to in the sources, though burial in stupas and in *kan* remained common.

Despite the silence of the sources, there have been some claims made regarding the precise methods used. Xu Hengbing reports that that two monks at Nanhua monastery, the abbot and an elder master, claim that Huineng's mummy was produced by the following process: The master first entered into a final samādhi in which he neither ate nor drank. After he passed away he was set on a wooden seat placed between two *gang* 缸, a type of earthenware jug, placed mouth to mouth and sealed shut. A hole in the seat allowed the fluids resulting from the body's putrefaction to drain out onto a mixture of quicklime and charcoal waiting below. The chemical reaction of the quicklime and the fluid released hot air while the charcoal absorbed moisture. In this way the body was dried out over a period of several years (Xu, 1987: 52).

While it is certainly possible that the method by which the Sixth Patriarch was mummified was passed down through the generations at Nanhua Monastery it seems more likely that this is a description of how these things were done in the Republic and are still done today. Nevertheless, while we might not want to accept this version *in toto*, something similar, probably something from which this method evolved, was likely being used. We know that *kan* were in use in the early Tang and we know that that the mummy of Faqin (法欽 714-792) was kept between two large jars (T 50, 2061: 765a10) (Matsumoto, 1993a: 149). It seems almost certain that they were in most cases putting some kind of desiccating agent inside, if not using precisely the process described above.

And of course lacquering became common and eventually almost the rule. The basic method was the same as

that used to produce a lacquer statue[53] and once completed it had similar advantages, being lightweight and very durable. Once sealed in a layer of lacquer the remains gained an important protective barrier. Unfortunately, while the barrier worked well against bumps and scrapes, time eventually worked its way within, at least in the case of the Sixth Patriarch. In 1966 a group of "students" (more likely Red Guards) put a hole in the back of Huineng's lacquer. Inside they saw a skeleton held together with iron. This is confirmed by Liang Yongjian, the curator of the Shaoguan City Museum in Guangdong and Xu Hengbing, a member of the Guangdong Provincial Committee for the Management of Cultural Artifacts, both of whom had the chance to look inside. The current and former abbots of Nanhua Monastery admitted as much, saying that over the years the bones had become disordered due to the wear and tear of occasional bumps and relocations. To repair the mummy, the lacquer was opened up to reassemble and reinforce the skeleton and then resealed (Xu, 1987: 50-1).

While time eventually hollowed out Huineng's flesh icon, others met with trouble much earlier. The mummy of Wang Luohan (王羅漢 d. 968), for instance, emitted a "shrieking sound from between his cheeks." Wang then sent a dream to many people, in which he said, "The lacquer is dark and stifling. Why don't you open it up?" When they did so "the color of his flesh was reddish white and round grains of *śarīra* fell down" (T. 50, 2061: 852b4-8). Although his mummy "survived" this incident, something had clearly gone wrong. Similarly, Xingxiu (行修 d. 950) had to send a dream to the local prefect to tell him that "the area beneath me is not finished" (T. 50, 2061: 899a2-6).[54] Xingxiu's mummy also

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[53] Indeed Xu (1987) argues that Fangbian 方辯 who made a small statue of the master that was placed with him in his pagoda also lacquered the patriarch's body 55.

[54] Sharf discusses both of these (1992, 23-4). The translations are his with minor changes.

made it, but others did not. Yuanzhao (圓紹 811-895) was exhumed after five years looking "as if alive" and was worshipped for seven days but then cremated (T. 50, 2061: 784c21-2).[55] Jianzhen's (鑑真 d. 763) mummy also apparently failed and had to be cremated.[56] Thus while mummification became more widespread in this period, it remained a risky business.

Even as methods of artificial mummification were being developed, explanations that erased the technical expertise in favor of proofs of attainment continued to be deployed and elaborated. As Sharf has said, though "there would seem to be a gap between the phenomenon of 'natural mummies' … and 'man-made mummies' … it appears that the latter process was originally conceived of as a mere extension of the former" (Sharf, 1992: 9). Thus at the same time that Chinese Buddhists were probably learning to seal a body in a coffin and pack it with charcoal in order to promote the preservation of the corpse, they continued to make implicit comparisons to Prabhūtaratna with allusions to the Lotus Sutra (and perhaps thus to Zhiyi as well). One of the most common set phrases employed to describe the preserved body of a monk is "his whole body had not dispersed" (*quanshen busan* 全身不散), which as we discussed above, is precisely the phrase used to describe the ancient Buddha. These four characters —along with the close variant "his whole body was uncorrupted" (*quanshen bu huai* 全身不壞)— occur in a number of biographies. It is particularly common in the *Song Gaoseng Zhuan*, where it appears in the biographies of Chu'nan 楚南 (T50, 2061: 817c29-30) Rumin 如敏 (849c26), Zhengshou 正壽 (855b28), Shanwuwei 善無畏傳 (716a07-8), and Yizhong 義

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[55] Faure (1991, 155). A similar story is told of Siming Zhili 四明知禮 (960-1028) (T46, 1937: 920a15-16) and a Chan Master Yun 蘊, of Changzhou who died in tenth century (X80, 1565: 280a6-14).

[56] See the appendix to Sharf (1992, 27-9).

忠 (730a04). Though not quite so ubiquitous elsewhere, it is also found in the *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* 景德傳燈錄 (T51, 2076: 424a05-6 and 292c17-18) and in the *Fozu Tongji* 佛祖統記 (T49, 2035: 376a10).

This was not the sole way to discuss the connection between mummification and the fruits of practice in this period though. Rather, modes of conceptualization and expression proliferate. It is described most poetically by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1002) in his Song *Gaoseng Zhuan*. In a commentary on the biography of Daoyin 道隱 (d. 778), he states that when one truly attains the Way, "the vessel" 器 does as well. It is like "an alchemist's pot, when the medicine is complete, the pot also turns to gold." Daoyin is like the bodhisattvas of the *Avataṁsakasūtra* who achieved "patience like emptiness" (*ru xukong ren* 如虛空忍), an attainment of an eighth bhūmi bodhisattva (T. 50, 2061: 891b11-19). As in cases previously examined, realization involves not only a transformation of the mind but also of the body. Zanning, however, feels free to express this in his own metaphor.

For the most part, the expressions used draw largely from scripture. This is true even in cases where the connection was made indirectly. For instance, in Fei Guanqing's 費冠卿 813 account of Jin Dizang, which Zanning used for his own biography of Jin Dizang. In it Fei, a contemporary of Jin Dizang and fellow resident of Jiuhua Shan, declares that when this ascetic was unsealed three years after his death, his joints were flexible and gave off the sound of clinking gold revealing the golden skeleton within. This, Fei tells us, is characteristic of a bodhisattva.[57] A golden linked skeleton is actually listed among the auspicious marks of the baby Śākyamuni by the sage Asita in the *Xiuxing Ben Qi Jing* 修行本起經 (Skt. *Caryānidāna* T3, 184: 464c20) and elsewhere a linked

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[57] *Jiuhua Shan Zhi* (1990, 231-4); also found in the *Quan Tang Wen*, and in a slightly abbreviated form in the Song *Gaoseng Zhuan* (T50, 2061: 838c16-839a19).

skeleton of unspecified material is mentioned as a trait of a bodhisattva in general (T16, 656: 115a16). Similarly, we see reference to Kuiji's forty teeth (*sishi chi* 四十齒), one of the traditional marks of a Buddha (T49, 2035: 385a23).

We also see the idea that mummified masters are relics elaborated and suggested in new ways. In the biography of the great Tantric master Shanwuwei (善無畏 Śubhakarasiṁha 637-735). There we read that "being imbued with meditation and wisdom, [his] whole body was uncorrupted" (T. 50, 2061: 716a8). [58] Being imbued with discipline, meditation, and wisdom has long been considered a characteristic of a *śarīra*, making it that his whole body is a *śarīra* (Schopen, 1997: 127). The idea of whole body relics is also dealt with by Kuiji, himself mummified, and in a most interesting context. While it appears to us unlikely that the early mummies were waiting for Maitreya, Kuiji seems to suggest that Maitreya himself left a mummy. One of the most important *Maitreya sutras*, the *Guan Mile Pusa Shangsheng Doushuaitian Jing* 觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經, which describes the bodhisattva's death during the lifetime of the Buddha and his rebirth in Tuṣita, states that upon his death "his bodily *śarīra* shall be as a cast gold image." In his gloss, Kuiji takes this to refer to a whole body relic. The unity of the relic indicates that he is in Tuṣita cultivating his Buddhahood, whereas the disintegrated state of Śākyamuni's relics indicates that he has dispersed himself to all quarters to guide beings (T38, 1772: 292a26-b1). While Kuiji doesn't explicitly state that the body remained unchanged, it can be safely inferred from the general conception of relics as exceedingly hard and unchanging.

Although a mummy was seen as a relic, it was nevertheless clearly more than just another relic. While both disintegrated body relics (*suishen sheli* 碎身舍利) and integral body relics (*quanshen sheli* 全身舍利) are seen as being

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[58] Translation from Chou (1944-45, 271 n.107). See also Sharf (1992, 8).

endowed with the living presence of the Buddha, saint, etc.[59] The integral body relics of mummified masters seem to have come to be viewed as being quite literally alive. Another of the common figures of speech found in the Song accounts of mummies is "his hair and nails [had grown] very long" (*zhua fa ju chang* 爪髮俱長) or some variant.[60] That their hair is growing while they sit in their *kan* indicates that not only the person but also in some sense his body is seen as alive. Even if alive, however, their bodies are distinctly inactive. Not so their minds. This is another factor that came to distinguish mummies from traditional *śarīra*: personalized agency. Whereas fragmentary *śarīra* are largely passive in the Chinese tradition, most often materializing out of nowhere or emitting light response to a devotee (*ganying* 感應), later mummified masters were seen as agents who could and occasionally did take an active hand in their post-mortem affairs in a manner more reminiscent of images (Kieschnick, 2003: 68-9). This was no doubt encouraged by the widespread adoption of lacquering, which in many ways turned mummies into a sort of image as has been often noted in scholarship.

It does not seem to have been limited to lacquered mummies though. The earliest figure for whom we have this kind of story is Sengqie 僧伽 (628-710), whose body does not appear to have been so treated. The *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記 (976-83) relates that when Sengqie died, the emperor intended to build a stupa for his interment at Jianfu Monastery in Chang'an where he died. Just then, however, the capital was filled with the stink of the corpse. An advisor to the emperor explained that it was a sign Sengqie "wanted" to return to

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[59] On the presence of the Buddha manifested in his relics in India, see Schopen (1997, 125-8).

[60] See the entries regarding Benru 本如, Faqin 法欽, and Zhiyuan 智圓 in the Fozutongji (T.49.2035: 214b14-17, 390a16-18, and 204c26-29, respectively). See also the biography of Wuzhu 無著 in the *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* (T51, 2076: 294a24), and that of Faqin in the Song Gaoseng Zhuan (T 50, 2061: 765a10).

Linhuai where he came from. The moment the emperor agreed, a wondrous fragrance filled the air.[61] Another monk, Wuliao 無了 (787-869) also used an olfactory assault to secure his residence of choice. This Chan master was discovered uncorrupted in his stupa when it was damaged in a flood. The prince of Min ordered it taken to his palace for worship, but Wuliao "put up a stink" until he was returned, whereupon a fragrance filled the air (T. 49, 2035: 389a27-b4) (Faure, 1991: 161).

A more common, if less amusing, way that mummified masters made their wishes known or intervened in events was by appearing in dreams. We have already seen that Wang Luohan and Xingxiu used dreams to inform someone of problems with their mummification. It is noteworthy that in both cases the term used was *jimeng* 寄夢, "to send a dream," implying of course an active agent (T. 50, 2061: 852b06 and 899a5, respectively). Similarly, Yunmen's mummy was not so much discovered as announced through a dream. According to a stele dated 964 found in the *Guangdong Tongji* 廣東統記, in 963 Yunmen appeared to a man named Ruan Shaozhuang in a dream and requested that his stupa be opened up. When they did so, they found that his uncorrupted body appeared "as if alive" (Faure, 1991: 154). We must note that in the case of both the stinkers and the dream-senders the mummified master is taking the initiative rather than simply responding. Thus although both integral and disintegrated body relics are seen as endowed with presence, in the former case it seems to be of a more personal and concentrated form. It is also interesting to note that in all of these stories the dream or the stink is directed toward a layman, suggesting a strong lay role in the cult.

In fact the other available evidence generally bears this out. As relics, the mummified monks received some of the same types of veneration that other relics did. The *Song Shi* 宋

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[61] Yü (2001, 213). This story can also be found in the Fozu Tongji (T49, 2035: 372c16-18) and the *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* (T51, 2076: 433a18-20).

史 records a dramatic example of this from the reign of Taizong (960-976). According to this account, a light shone from Sengqie's stupa during the day inspiring several thousand people (who, it seems safe to assume given the numbers, were primarily lay) to burn off fingers, light incense on their heads and cut off arms in homage (Yü, 2001: 215). This event has obvious parallels to the famous scenes of pious bedlam that greeted the finger relic of the Buddha in Tang dynasty China and further reinforces the equivalence of the two types of relics at that time.

Even the biographies of less known mummies, such as the monk Huayan (T50, 2061: 868c4) and Wuliao (T49, 2035: 389b3-4), generally show some evidence of cultic activity and we have evidence of quite lively cults centered on more famous figures such as Huineng and Shanwuwei. Huineng's remains were apparently brought into the city during the Five Dynasties period in order to offer prayers for the people's prosperity (T50, 2061: 755c6) (Faure, 1991: 163) and Yunmen's body was likewise brought into Fanyu (modern Guangzhou), the capital of the Southern Han, for over a month each year from 949 to 963 and then returned again (X83, 1578: 626b10-15). Meanwhile, in Chang'an Shanwuwei received quite lavish attention into the Song. Zanning reports that the wealthy families of the capital competed with each other to provide the toiletries used in the mummy's occasional unguent baths. Even the emperor, "when propitiating or praying for something, usually [sent] messengers to present gifts" (T50, 2061: 716a17) (Chou, 1944-45: 272).

Amidst the more general worship, the cult came to have a special focus on rain, either its scarcity or over-abundance. Indeed Mochizuki contends that mummies in China became virtual agricultural gods (Mochizuki, 1954-58: 764). The earliest figure to be associated with a rain cult is Shanwuwei. His biography in the *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* states that "whenever a drought or flood has occurred in subsequent dynasties, people have gone to pray at the cave [where his mummy was interred] and have gotten results" (T50, 2061: 716a13-4) and the *Fozutongji* reports that he was called upon

to stop a deluge in the reign of Song Taizu (T49, 2035: 456a23) (For the translation, see Chou, 1944-45: 272). It is interesting, though perhaps not surprising, that Shanwuwei should be the first mummy to be prayed to for rain. As a thaumaturge, he was often called on to bring rain in life, so it probably seemed natural to continue making this request of him after his mummification. One might even speculate that this is the origin of this aspect of the mummy cult and that from here it was generalized to other figures who had no such connection in life such as the Sixth Patriarch. Ricci records that, during his stay in Caoxi, Huineng's mummy was paraded around and worshiped in the hope of ending a drought (Gallagher, 1953: 223). Rain was also important in the cult of his Dharma descendant Yunmen. A stele inscription included in the Yunmen Shanzhi 雲門山志 states that in the eight hundred years following his death, "the people, near and distant, officials and common folk, prayed to him for rain or for good weather" (Faure, 1991: 155).

Although there was a strong lay element involved, the cult was also important to monastics who were after all believers themselves as well as the keepers and descendants of the mummified master. There are records of monks undertaking dramatic acts of devotion, such as when Huaide cremated himself before Sengqie's stupa (T50, 2061: 860c29-861a12) (Benn, 2000). And although there is no mention of it in the biographies, it would be surprising indeed if they, as the mummies' keepers, weren't involved in day to day cultic activities. We might even suspect that as owners of agricultural land they had a personal interest in the rain cult.

Given the popularity of the mummy cult, a mummy was a material as well as spiritual asset for the monastery that hosted it. Faure has discussed the role that Huineng's mummy and later Hanshan Deqing's mummy played in the fortunes of Nanhua Monastery and has even suggested that the preservation of the patriarch's remains contributed to the victory of the Southern School (Faure, 1992: 168). Sharf has similarly argued that by mummifying a deceased abbot, monasteries could ameliorate the economic disruption that the death of a popular abbot might engender (Sharf, 1992: 25). In

addition, there are suggestions that mummies also brought protection from military disruption. A marauding military force sweeping into a monastery and opening up the *kan* of a master only to find "his hair and nails grown long" and then leaving peacefully out of apparent respect for the fruits of the master's attainments seems to be a common trope in the monastic histories. We find it in the case of the Chan master Chu'nan 楚南 (813-888), whose stupa was opened 891 by the soldiers of Sun Ru, who was invading Qiantang (in present day Zhejiang). Seeing the preserved body of the mast they repented their sin and left (T50, 2061: 817c28-a01). Similar stories are told of Faqin (T50, 2061: 765a08-10) and Wuzhuo Wenxi 無著文喜 (821-900) (X80, 1565: 193c2-6). These stories again make clear the important role mummified masters could play in the life of a community.

We can also see the importance attached to the possession of these numinous remains from the amount of contention they aroused. Following Huineng's death a dispute erupted between Caoxi and Guo'en Monastery over possession of the relic (T51, 2076: 236c7-9)[62] and later there was an attempt by a Korean monk to steal the mummy's head (T51, 2076: 236a15-21).[63] The stories of Sengqie's and Wuliao's offensive smell might be the echoes of similar disputes. Finally, there are indications that at least one monastery in the Tang was already lying about having or rather having had a mummy. Ennin visited a monastery in Shandong that claimed to have once been home to the mummy of Baozhi 寶誌 (418-514), a famous fifth century monk believed to have been a manifestation of Guanyin, though it had since disappeared. Yet since the earliest records state that Baozhi died in Nanjing and made no reference to a mummy, the monastery's claim was almost certainly false (Yü, 2001: 203). Apparently, even

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62 Translated in Yampolsky (1967, 86); and quoted in Faure (1992, 175). The dispute was resolved by lighting a stick of incense and see towards which monastery the smoke drifted.

63 Translated in Yampolsky (1967, 86-7).

having once been the abode of a mummified master was prestigious enough to fabricate.

But these monks were not only worshipers and keepers but also Dharma descendants. The Chinese Buddhist monastic system has long been deeply imprinted with the structures of the Chinese family. Monastics may have left home, but as good sons of the Buddha they still had obligations to their spiritual ancestors. After the decline of most other schools after the Tang, mummies became largely a Chan phenomenon and "with the ascendancy of Chan ideology and the growth of Chan monastic institutions in the Song, the Chan master-qua-abbot takes center stage in what is largely an ancestor cult" (Sharf, 1992: 6). Mummies came to be commonly enshrined in Patriarch's Halls or Portrait Halls (Sharf, 1992: 15) where they were most likely worshipped in a manner functionally equivalent to funerary portraits. And since these developments were not limited to Chan (Sharf and Foulk, 1993-4: 194), we would expect to find similar treatment of mummies in other schools.

Later Mummies: From the Yuan to the Republic

Such are the outlines of the mummy cult in the high period of the Tang and Song dynasties, and much of it continued to apply through the Republic. In the centuries between the end of the Song and the establishment of the PRC, the cult of mummified masters continued to be a prominent part of Chinese Buddhism and important masters continued to be mummified. In the Yuan, mummies included the Chan Master Juexue Shicheng 絕學世誠 (1270-1342), who in his own day was so well known that he attracted students from Japan, Korea, and the Western regions and so revered that his nail clippings were kept as relics (X83, 1574: 344b9-c1). And in the Ming, three of the "Four Great Masters" were mummified: Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603),[64] Hanshan Deqing (憨山德

[64] *Qingliang Shan Zhi* (1990, 138). Zibo was cremated after thirteen years, suggesting that his mummification was not entirely successful.

清 1546-1623) (Hsu, 1979: 98-101) and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655).[65] A great many lesser known figures were also mummified and a thorough examination of later Buddhist histories and gazetteers would certainly yield information about them. That task, however, is beyond the scope of this overview and must be left for another time. We shall content ourselves here with a rough sketch of the cult as it developed in the late dynastic China and the Republic as it is seen in canonical histories and a few other sources.

One important development in this period was the rise of Mountain Jiuhua 九華山. As we have seen, the Korean monk Jin Dizang was recognized as a bodhisattva almost immediately after his death. At some point, he came to be identified as an emanation of his namesake. By the late Ming this seems to have become the dominant view and Mountain Jiuhua came to be numbered among the "four great mountains" (*si da ming shan* 四大名山) (*Jiuhuashan Zhi,* 1990: 94). Over the centuries from the Ming to the Republic, Jiuhua became probably the most prolific single producer of mummies.[66] The first monk to be mummified since Jin Dizang was Haiyu 海玉, more commonly known as Wuxia 無瑕 (1513-1623). This ascetic lived at Zhaixing Cloister 摘星庵 past the age of a hundred before dying and being mummified. When the *gang* he was buried in were dug up, he was found to be "as if alive." Benefactors soon arrived and he was gilded and enshrined. Four years later the court awarded him the title of "Emanation-body Bodhisattva" (*yinghua pusa* 應化菩薩) (*Jiuhuashan Zhi,* 1990: 182). Later the cloister was renamed "Hundred Year Palace," (*Baisui Gong* 百歲宮) in honor of his longevity, whence it went on to become one of the most

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[65] *Jiuhua Shan Zhi* (1990, 188). Ouyi apparently had intended to be cremated but his disciples went against his wishes when they found him undecayed after being buried for three years.

[66] While Johnston and Pripp-Møller suggest that mummies were relatively common, it seems unlikely that any other single site amassed eight mummies.

prominent monasteries on the mountain. This started something of a trend. Between Wuxia's mummification and the establishment of the People's Republic Jiuhua Shan gained six more mummies: Duduo 杜多 (d. 1660),[67] Longshan 隆山 (1757-1841), Chang'en 常恩 (d. 1907), Falong 法龍 (1813-1909), Dinghui 定慧 (d. 1923)[68] and Huade 華德 (died sometime in the Republic)[69].

While Jiuhua had plenty to go around, mummies continued to be an important and contested monastery asset elsewhere. Hanshan Deqing's remains, like the Sixth Patriarch's before him, were the object of a dispute between two Buddhist centers, Caoxi and Lushan. Due to superior political maneuvering, Lushan was the initial victor, but in the twilight days of the Ming a Caoxi ally rose to prominence and used his office to dispatch soldiers to bring Hanshan to Caoxi (Hsu, 1979: 99). Although there were certainly spiritual and emotional issues involved, the possession of the popular Chan master's relics was expected to bring material gain as well. This expectation was borne out, for Hanshan's mummification probably contributed greatly to the revival of Caoxi as a pilgrimage center, helping to propel it to the prominence that it enjoyed in the Qing (Faure, 1992: 176). Likewise, two of the mummified masters of Mountain Jiuhua, Wuxia and Duduo, played an important role in the transformation of their small hermit cloisters into among the largest and most famous monasteries on the mountain.

Many small monasteries might have hoped to repeat that success. We see hints of this, for instance, by an account from the early Qing, the biography of the Hangzhou master Benchong Xingsheng 本充行盛 (d. 1671). The biography records that after his body was discovered to be preserved it

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[67] There is some discrepancy regarding this date. The gazetteer states that he died in the gengzi 庚子 year of the kangxi 康熙 reign period. The gengzi year, however, fell in 1660.

[68] *Jiuhua Shan Zhi* (1990: 190, 193, and 198 respectively).

[69] Jiuhua Shan Zhi (1990: 112 and 108 respectively).

was enshrined in the monastery in the manner of Caoxi (*ru Caoxi shi* 如曹溪式) (X82, 1571: 345a2-19), suggesting an attempt to follow a proven formula, or at least an illustrious precedent. Monasteries continued to seek financial benefit from whole body relics into the Republic. Perceval Yetts, who investigated Buddhist mummies in the field at the turn of the century, claimed that "the majority of 'dried priests' are specially prepared with the intent to provide popular relics—relics that will not only attract the public to the temples but also inspire generous contributions" (Yetts, 1911: 712). He provided a particularly direct example of this from Jueta Monastery 覺塔寺 in Wuhu 蕪湖. A mummified monk he saw enshrined there was accompanied by a sign explaining that the master had "vowed he would erect the main hall [of the monastery] but, as is generally known, died before his wish was fulfilled. (…) We are anxious to fulfill the desires of our preceptor and would appeal to the gentry, officials, elders, and almsgivers in general to give practical expression to their benevolent thoughts and generous hearts by opening their purses and presenting contributions."

For such donations the giver did not only receive merit, but "also their illustrious progeny [would] continue for countless ages to be distinguished scholars and enjoy glory and riches." Yetts also mentions a fraudulent mummy, which we might suspect the monastery tried to pass off for economic reasons (Yetts, 1911: 720-3).

No doubt it was in part the economic benefits that led mummies to become quite common by the Republic. Pripp-Møller said that they were "found frequently in Central China and could almost be said to abound in Sichuan" (Pripp-Møller, 1937: 179). On the other hand it may also have been due to technical advances. Lacquering may have become easier and there were probably improvements in mummification techniques over the centuries. The canonical histories of this period occasionally break their silence and divulge the practical techniques used to facilitate mummification. The biography of the Yuan master Juexue Shicheng mentioned above states that he was buried in sand

for three years (X83, 1574: 344b23). More explicit still, indeed shockingly so, is the biography of the Qing Dynasty master Tieguyin 鐵鼓音 (d. 1670) found in the 1697 history *Wu Deng Quanshu* 五燈全書. According to its account, Master Yin told his disciples that their monastery had no money saved up but relied on donations, whereupon he picked up a whole purging croton (*badouzi* 巴荳子) to cleanse his intestines, clear his stomach, and wash out the remaining saliva. Six years later he was disinterred and placed in a stupa (X82, 1571: 553, a15-b8). Here we find not only clear mention of a fatal purgative agent but also an economic motive. The fact that we find this where we might least expect it, in a canonical history, suggests that by the Qing at least the artificial component of mummification was becoming something of an open secret.

Westerners who spent time in China in the late Qing provide reports of additional methods. Of the five mummies from the late Qing Perceval Yetts discusses, all were sealed in *kan* or *gang*. And though some of his informants attributed preservation to spiritual attainment alone, others were willing to share with him some of the artificial means used to obtain the desired result.[70] Yetts' sources told him of a process much like that discussed in connection with Huineng's mummy. The mummies-to-be were washed and shaved (and sometimes eviscerated if insufficiently emaciated) before being seated on a bed of rice straw or incense sticks between two gang and packed with charcoal, wadding, and sometimes salt.[71] Another process involved a progressive fast to the death after which the body was smoked with sandalwood (which would have also kept away insects) (Yetts, 1911: 712-14). A brief account in the New China Review in 1920 described one method of fasting in detail involving dried out cakes of flaxseed and yellow beans. The ultimate result of this fasting process was

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[70] Both of these explanations have resurfaced in the discourse on Buddhist mummies in Taiwan.

[71] This process is exactly that which we find again in the procedures that were used for the creation of the mummies of Cihang and Qingyan on Taiwan.

said to be a "moribund state" lasting up to two years in which the skin became hard and leathery and the mind unresponsive (JCH, 1920: 313-4). As Pripp-Møller (1937: 181) suggested these processes may have been used in combination as well. Once the body was prepared it could be varnished and where necessary built up with clay or putty and sandalwood. Many were lacquered or gilded and marks of a Buddha such as the *ūrṇā* or long lobes were added (Yetts, 1911: 713-15; Welch, 1967: 343).

Gilded and posed like other Buddhist images, mummies of this era were generally enshrined in their own halls or in other halls of the monastery. Sometimes they were placed flanking the Buddha on the right or directly in front of the altar (Pripp-Møller, 1937: 179). Hanshan's mummy originally presided over Hanshan Temple although it was eventually brought to Caoxi where, together with the mummy of Dantian 丹田 (1535-1614), it flanks Huineng in the Sixth Patriarch's Hall (Faure, 1992: 172). Given that they were enshrined like images we might guess that they received the worship characteristically offered to images: incenses, offerings, prostrations, etc. We know that Hanshan's mummy was "fed" a soup each morning and was given a ritual bath once a year. Hanshan, together with Huineng, was the focus of a twice-yearly pilgrimage in Guangdong (Hsu, 1979: 101).

Obviously there are many parallels to images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas here: the gilding, the *ūrṇās*, the long ear-lobes, the enshrinement in special halls or placement vis-à-vis other images. This is not at all accidental. These figures were often believed to have achieved Buddhahood or some other lofty state, and whereas in the past such claims were often made obliquely in this period they were made in a more direct fashion. Hanshan was explicitly said to have become a Buddha (Hsu, 1979: 101) and the mummy of Wuji, the supposed Shitou Xiqian, was kept in a Living Buddha Hall (Robson, 2003: 168). Furthermore, posthumous titles were sometimes granted to mummified masters such as "the Buddha who gazes upon the river" (*wang jiang fo* 望江佛). Although in some cases these titles were sarcastic (e.g. "Yet Another

Buddha" you shi fo 又是佛) (Yetts, 1911: 716) indicating that these things were not always taken that seriously by the court, such a joke only reinforces the ubiquity of the attribution. In other cases, the placement of some mummies in a flanking position vis-à-vis Śākyamuni suggests bodhisattvahood and in one case only arhatship is claimed (Yetts, 1911: 718). While the status of mummies might seem to have gone up after the Song, this use of the term "Buddha" might actually be a sign that it had gone down in some ways. The relative commonness in later times suggested by "Yet Another Buddha" may indicate that a point of diminishing returns had been reached.

While there were some modifications in the conception of mummies' status, another aspect remained constant. Through the Republic, mummies were seen as active agents capable of asserting themselves in their own affairs or the affairs of others. Wuxia went so far as to raise his arm to put out a raging fire that threatened to consume Baisui Gong in the xianfeng 咸豐 period (1851-1861).[72] On his post-mortem trip from Lushan to Caoxi, Hanshan seemed to double in weight in his *kan*, which believers felt was a sign that Hanshan wished to become a mummy. A later, lesser-known figure similarly threw his weight around to make his wishes known. When the body of Huichao 慧超 (1804-1876) was to be exhumed so that his resting place of seventeen years could be used for other purposes, his *gang* could not be moved. In the course of the attempt, the *gang* came open revealing his undecayed remains. As soon as it was decided to enshrine the mummy, it became possible to lift the *gang* out (Yetts, 1911: 722). Older mummies also remained active. Huineng sent a dream to the Governor of the Commandry in 1477 to ask that he be moved from his reliquary tower to the Sixth Patriarch's Hall. And in the twentieth century he appeared to Xuyun during meditation and in several dreams telling him "it's time for you to go back," which Xuyun later saw to be an omen of his impending

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[72] *Jiuhua Shan Zhi* (1990, 209). In so doing he kindly provided the monastery with an explanation of the odd disposition of his arm, which is extended out from his body.

appointment as abbot of Nanhua Monastery (Faure, 1992: 173; Xu Yun, 1988: 115).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the first Chinese Buddhist mummies were a small, scattered group of mountain ascetics, who, despite the grand theories, probably mummified naturally and unintentionally. While they may likely have served as precedent and inspiration for later developments, the tradition that continued down to today probably began in the Sui and early Tang. Many of the important elements appear with Zhiyi. His preserved remains were seen as a special type of relic and understood through the lens of Prabhutaratna. Moreover, they were a source of miracles and the focus of cultic devotion and imperial attention. No doubt encouraged by that attention, the cult of mummies began to spread and be elaborated quite quickly. By the Song, the tradition was firmly established. Mummification and its connections with advanced attainments were conceived in a number of ways, largely informed by scripture and the mummy itself came to be attributed with agency and the capability of intervening in the affairs of the world at its own initiative. Lacquering became common, allowing mummies to move from stupas and pagodas to altars, thus effectively becoming images. Their cult grew and they became important spiritual, social, and economic assets to their monasteries.

In later dynasties, Jiuhua Shan emerged as an important site as did Sichuan. The artificial components of mummification became a bit more open while the practice itself seems to have become more widespread and perhaps even succumbed to some inflation, at least in the view of certain circles. Otherwise, there seems to be a high degree of continuity from at least the Song down to the Republic and even today. Though many of Mountain Jiuhua's mummies were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution (undoubtedly like those of many other sites), since the 1980's it has reemerged as an important site of the contemporary cult with four new

mummies having appeared there in recent years.[73] Taiwan has also emerged as an important center since retrocession.

The present historical overview relies heavily on the histories included in the *Taishō* and the *Xuzangjing* and on a few other works. As such it is subject to numerous limitations and calls out for further research on all sides. First of all, it must be noted that canonical histories are of course elite, normative texts. They provide not simply descriptions but representations that their authors and editors hoped would be adopted. How broadly accepted were these understandings of the spiritual significance of mummification outside of educated monastic circles? Ricci's report of Huineng being processed through the city sounds very much like a local deity cult. Investigation of local gazetteers, the miscellaneous writings of literati, and other non-Buddhist sources would provide a new angle of view on mummification in later dynasties. This would be worthwhile not only because it is an unexplored facet of Chinese popular religion, but also because it would help us to put Buddhism and its practices in clearer context. Placing mummification in Chinese Buddhism in pan-Buddhist context through an explicitly comparative study would also be enlightening. While our study suggests that the origins of mummification are to be sought in a Buddhist notion of the transformative effect of attainment on the body, which is common throughout the Buddhist world, there are important various in this conception. How do the cults of mummified masters differ in different cultures and how do these differences reflect the differences in local history, culture, and religion? Clearly, although the study of mummification in Buddhism has made much progress since Johnston declared the practice to be a "highly disagreeable one [that] will soon, it is hoped, become extinct," (Johnston, 1913: 231) very much remains to be explored.

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[73] www.jiuhuashan.com.cn/jhs99/jiuhuaroushen.htm. (2003/1/24).

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