The Daitokuji Five Hundred Arhats Paintings and Their Beholders

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Abstract

The history of Buddhism cannot be understood solely in terms of theological or philosophical development; one must also attend to the social, cultural, and political changes that inevitably shaped and re-shaped the religion, its adherents, and its practices as it journeyed throughout Asia and beyond. Buddhist objects—such as the Daitokuji set of arhat paintings that are the focus of this study—are no exception. Once these objects found themselves in new religious, social, and political contexts, as a survival and adaption strategy they had to allow themselves to become gradually intertwined with local system of religious belief and cultural praxis. Similarly, the "social life" of the Daitokuji set demonstrates its constantly changing meanings and values through its contact with different beholders from China, Japan, and the West. This thesis respectively examines the interactions between the Daitokuji set and its beholders in an extremely long life history—from the viewing of the set by female beholders in the Confucian society of the Song period (960-1279), to Japanese patrons of Muromachi Japan (1338-1573) under great Chinese influence, and finally to modern viewers within the new context of Buddhist modernism and the political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Introduction

The set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* paintings (Ch. *Wubai luohantu*, Jp. *Gohyaku rakanzu* 五百羅漢図）in Daitokuji 大徳寺 in Kyoto presents itself as an intriguing Buddhist object that crosses culture, space, and time. It was first made in twelfth-century, Song China with the financial support of many female worshippers and then taken to Japan, where it circulated through several Japanese temples, before finally residing in the Daitokuji temple. The collection would remain there until the late nineteenth century, when it found its way to American museums. The collection's journey westward resulted in the separation of twelve scrolls from the original set—ten are now housed in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston (MFA) and the other two, in the Freer Gallery of Art.[1] During this centuries-long transcultural voyage, the set inevitably came into contact with a variety of beholders from different socio-historical contexts. How did these beholders see, understand, interact with, and respond to the Daitokuji set? Did the meaning and significance of the Daitokuji set remain the same or change constantly over time with each new setting? This thesis proposes to answer these questions by examining the "biography" of the Daitokuji set from a historical perspective. In particular, it focuses on the interactions between the set and its beholders, by looking at how the religious, social, and political stance of its beholders influenced their viewings of the *arhat* paintings.

Buddhism had an immediate influence on local culture upon its initial transmission to China in the first century of the common era. This was also the case when Buddhism first arrived

1 Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919), the founder of Freer Art Gallery, bought one scroll in Tokyo. I will discuss this point further in Chapter Two.

in Japan, and even local intellectual circles were deeply influenced by Buddhism when it finally reached the West. When Buddhism was first introduced to China, it was accompanied by a vast range of ideas, objects, and scriptures. As scholar of Chinese Buddhism John Kieschnick states, "Objects, ideas about objects, and behaviors associated with objects came with Buddhism to China, where they continued to change and evolve in response to new environments and the demands of a dynamic society with an immense capacity to manufacture, employ, and discard material things."[2] Once these objects found themselves in new religious, social, and political contexts, as a survival and adaption strategy they had to allow themselves to become gradually intertwined with local system of religious belief and cultural praxis. Similarly, the "social life" of the Daitokuji set demonstrates its constantly changing meanings and values through its contact with different beholders from China, Japan, and the West. This thesis respectively examines the interactions between the Daitokuji set and its beholders in an extremely long life history—from the viewings of the set by female beholders in the Confucian society of China in the Song period (960-1279), to Japanese patrons of Muromachi Japan (1338-1573) under great Chinese influence, and finally to modern viewers within the new context of Buddhist modernism and the political landscape of Japan-U.S. relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Methodology

In this study, I will employ the theory of object biography to examine the fluid religious meanings of the arhat set in cross-cultural contexts. This approach goes back to the ground-breaking article "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" by cultural

2 John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

anthropologist, Igor Kopytoff.[3] In this article, he put forward a biographical approach that interpreted an object as "a culturally constructed entity" through the process of circulation and exchange.[4] Put differently, this theory asserts that objects, like humans, are involved in various forms of social relationships or contexts that embed specific meanings in them. These meanings have been constantly changed and transformed through the life histories of objects in different times, spaces, and cultural contexts. This approach has been widely applied in many academic disciplines and has inspired sophisticated analyses of objects. In his study of religious objects, Richard Davis applies this biographical approach together with the reader-response literary theory in his study of the history of a group of Indian images.[5] He argues that these Indian images are "social beings whose identities are not fixed once and for all at the moment of fabrication, but they were repeatedly remade through the interaction with humans."[6] Such ideas have also been applied in Louise Tythacott's monograph *The Lives of Chinese Objects: Buddhism, Imperialism and Display*.[7] She reconstructs the social lives of five Chinese Buddhist images from the sacred island of Mount Putuo (Putuoshan 普陀山) over six centuries through an analysis of how their significance shifted according to the contexts in which they were displayed. Similarly, Chari Pradel has taken this approach in her 2016 monograph *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō*

3 Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 64-91.

4 Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography," 68.

5 Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

6 Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 7-8.

7 Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects: Buddhism, Imperialism and Display* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

Mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives, in which she traces the biography of the fragments of the *Tenjukoku Shūchō Mandara* 天寿国繡帳 from the late seventh century up to the eighteenth century by placing them in their respective historical contexts of East Asian funerary traditions and the cult of Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574-621 or 622) over time.[8] Indeed, prior scholarship demonstrates that Buddhist objects do not have fixed identities, and their meanings are highly contextual and culturally constructed in relation to interpretative frameworks. Following this biographical approach and interpretative paradigm, my thesis argues that the Daitokuji set of arhat paintings, as a culturally reconstructed entity, fluctuated in cultural status, social value, and religious significance through interactions with people from different historical contexts. I will examine two main types of primary sources: inscriptions and iconographies of the Daitokuji set and beholders' writings on the set and Buddhism including correspondence, notes, diaries, articles, and monographs. I will conduct iconographical, textual, and contextual analysis to investigate the interactions between the object and the beholders. On the one hand, the analysis of visual images allows me to explore the appeal and signals that the paintings presented to their beholders; on the other hand, the textual and contextual analysis of the beholders' writings enables me to probe how the beholders recoded these visual messages in line with the religious, social, or political needs of their own time.

State of the Field

8 I am grateful that Professor David Quinter mentioned this source to me. Chari Pradel, *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō Mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016).

In an attempt to address the social life of the Daitokuji set from the premodern to modern period, this project benefits greatly from a wide range of primary and secondary sources on Chinese and Japanese Buddhism in the premodern period and modern forms of Buddhism. Particularly, this study builds upon a diverse body of studies on the history of the Five Hundred Arhat cult in premodern China, Buddhist women in the Song period, the premodern reception of Chinese Buddhism in Japan, and the modern history of the cultural interaction between Japan and Boston elites.

Aiming to understand the female patrons' perception and expectation of these arhat paintings that they funded, my project will build upon scholarship on the role of female devotees in Song society. The Song Dynasty has been widely regarded as a high-water mark of cultural cultivation in art, literature, and religion. Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism competed and intertwined with each other, creating a period of vibrant religious life.[9] Traditional thought had long focused on the dominant role of men in this vibrant milieu, likely resulting from the impact of the mainstream of the patriarchal Confucian norms of gender and sexuality. In Confucian thought, generally women had always been portrayed as inferior, lower, impure, polluted, and irresponsible compared to men. This view also heavily influenced decades of scholarship on East Asian religion, which tended to focus on the contributions made by men. However, recent studies have shifted scholarly attention to the overlooked role of women in both Daoism and Buddhism during the premodern period.[10] In fact, in the case of premodern China, social and religious

9 For studies on Song Buddhism, see Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, eds., *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

10 Thomas Cleary, trans, *Immortal Sisters: Secret of Taoist Women* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1989); Kathryn Ann Tsai, trans*, Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Ding-Hwa E. Hsieh, "Buddhist Nuns in Sung China," in *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 30 (2000): 63-97; Miriam L. Levering, "Miao-tao and Her teacher Ta-hui,"

attitudes towards women were much more complex and diverse than the prevailing Confucian interpretation of womanhood. Particularly, the Song period witnessed the active participation of women in religious activities.[11] Since the second half of the last century, a series of scholarly works that address the relatively neglected place of women in Buddhism through textual analysis, particularly, the investigation of Buddhist doctrine, have begun to appear.[12] Janice D. Willis points out the importance of textual evidence in presenting the social history of women in Buddhism, as she states:

> It is now time, in my opinion, to attempt to go beyond reliance solely upon the sacred scriptures of Buddhism; to attempt to fill out, if possible, the contours of what may be called an actual social history of Buddhism, using the issue of women as a base. For such as social history, two pools of information have to be used together: 1) the Buddhist scriptures which address the issue of women, and 2) secular histories of the periods relevant to the composition and dissemination of those scriptures.[13]

Indeed, textual studies provides firsthand evidence to delve into the impact of women upon Buddhism. For example, Ding-Hwa E. Hsieh conducts a close examination of Chan literature of the Song period and indicates the importance of female patronage as well as the recognition of

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in *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 30 (2000): 188-219; Beata Grant, "Female Holder of the Lineage: Linji Chan Master Zhiyuan Xinggang (1597-1654)," in *Late Imperial China*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Dec, 1996): 51-76.

11 Ding-Hwa E. Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999): 148-87.

12 See Nancy Falk, "An Image of Woman in Old Buddhist Literature: the Daughters of Mara," in *Women and Religion*, Judith Plaskow and Joan Arnold, eds. (Chico, CA: AAR/Scholars Press, 1974), 105-12; Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979); Nancy Schuster, "Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Some Maharatnakutasutras," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 4, no.1 (1981): 24-69; Yuichi Kajiyama, "Women in Buddhism," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Autumn 1982): 53-70.

13 Janice D. Willis, "Nuns and Benefactresses: The Role of women in the Development of Buddhism," in *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, ed., Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Ellison Banks Findly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 60.

their spiritual achievements in Chan Buddhism.[14] Hsieh suggests that the positive image of women, especially nuns and "humble old women," presented in Chan literature attempted to not only satisfy their religious need but also illuminate the superiority of Chan Buddhism over other Buddhist traditions.[15] Besides textual material, Buddhist visual representations and objects are also effective evidence to directly demonstrate religious activities of women in Buddhism. For example, Chün-Fang Yü provides a ground-breaking and comprehensive study of the feminine transformation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (Ch. Guanyin 觀音) from the Song period by employing not merely textual materials including Buddhist scriptures, miracle tales, myths, and legends of monks, but also visual evidence like visions and iconography.[16] The former probably offered the initial impetus, while the latter promoted the popularity of the feminine forms of Guanyin. Generally, these studies show the indispensable presence of women in the shaping of Buddhism during the Song period. My project attempts to explore the role of laywomen in Buddhist practice through the lens of the social life of the Daitokuji set of the *Five Hundred Arhats*.

This project also benefits profoundly from scholarship on modern Buddhism, which provides important information for looking into how modern intellectuals re-interpreted Buddhist objects. Prominent Buddhist scholar Donald S. Lopez, Jr. treats modern Buddhism as "a universal religion" that "transcends cultural and national boundaries, creating in the following generation a

14 Hsieh, "Images of Women," 148.

15 Hsieh, "Images of Women," 149. This trend of the recognition of the achievement of monastic women continued afterwards. For the research on Chan women in later period, see Beata Grant, *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

16 Yü, *Kuan-yin*.

cosmopolitan network of intellectuals, writing most often in English."[17] He also points out that "like other Buddhist sects, modern Buddhism has its own lineage, its own doctrines, its own practices," and "its own canon of sacred scriptures"—the works that were written by both Euro-American Orientalists and sympathizers as well as Western-trained, reform-minded Asian intellectuals at the formative age of Buddhist modernism in the nineteenth century.[18] These intellectuals created a hybrid of Buddhism that emphasize rationality and texts and deemphasized ritual, dogma, clerical hierarchy, and icon veneration. In 2008 one of the leading scholars of modern Buddhism, David L. McMahan, authored a book-length work on the historical and thematic treatment of modern Buddhism, demonstrating its interaction with key values of Western modernity, namely, scientific rationalism, romanticism, Protestantism, and psychology.[19] As these scholars have argued, this new concept of Buddhism significantly differs from premodern Asian Buddhist traditions. More importantly, it had a great impact on intellectuals' attitudes towards Buddhist objects during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In order to create a better understanding of the context of the journey of the Daitokuji set from a Japanese temple to an American museum, this thesis builds upon scholarship on the modern history of the cultural interaction between Japan and America. Particularly, it draws from studies of two transnational figures— Ernest F. Fenollosa (1853-1908) and Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873-1949). The former has been widely regarded as a "father of Japanese art history," and the latter, as the founder of the discipline of religious studies in Japan. The extant scholarship on

17 Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), xxxix.

18 Lopez, *A Modern Buddhist Bible*, xxxix.

19 David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Fenollosa presents him as an art historian, collector, curator, educator, or art dealer. These identities have, in return, shaped a preconceived interpretation of Fenollosa's writings on art from a purely art-historical perspective. Recently, scholars have begun to draw attention to Fenollosa's identity as a Buddhist. Literature scholar Jonathan Stalling offers an innovative approach by looking into Fenollosa's writings on Chinese poetry under the influence of a cultural hybrid form of Buddhism— "New Buddhism," a sort of modern Buddhism in Japanese context.[20] His Buddhist identity, to some extent, also provides us a new angle to look at his understanding of Buddhist objects. In regard to Anesaki, Japanese religion scholar Isomae Jun'ichi critically analyzed Anesaki and his writings with a special focus on his conception of religion and his contribution to the formulation of the academic discipline of Japanese religion during the modern period.[21] Another important scholar of Anesaki's thought is Susanna Fessler, a Japanese literature scholar, who focuses on Anesaki's travelogues and his experiences in Europe, particularly Italy.[22] Their scholarship has helped me unravel how Anesaki shaped his idea of the parallelism between Christianity and Buddhism as well as the connection between religion and art.

Lastly, this project also draws from various extant scholarship on the Daitokuji set from different perspectives. The art historian Wen Fong was the first scholar who extensively examined

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20 Jonathan Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 10-59.

21 Isomae Jun'ichi, *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2002); Jun'ichi Isaomae, "Deconstructing 'Japanese religion': A Historical Survey," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2005): 235-248; Jun'ichi Isomae, "The Discursive Position of Religious Studies in Japan: Masaharu Anesaki and the Origins of Religious Studies," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2002): 21-46; Jun'ichi Isomae, *Religious Discourse in Modern Japan: Religion, State, and Shintō* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

22 Susanna Fessler, "姉崎とイタリ Anesaki and Italy," *East Asian Studies Faculty Scholarship*, 1 (2007). https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eas_fac_scholar/1; Susana Fessler, "The Pure Land of Assisi: Anesaki Masaharu in Italy," *East Asian Studies Faculty Scholarship*, 15. https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eas_fac_scholar/15.

the set, in his 1956 doctoral dissertation with a focus on its style, iconography, and historical context.[23] It was not until recent years that the set began to attract more scholarly attentions. In 2009, color images of the entirety of the set were first published in the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition *Sacred Ningbo.*[24] In addition, an independent catalogue of the set along with several essays was published in 2014.[25] These catalogues provide the full content of the painting's inscriptions and high-resolution photography that allow scholars to make a better analysis of the set. Meanwhile, Ide Seinosuke, who is an expert on Chinese Buddhist art, and a group of other scholars have conducted intensive research on the set to demonstrate a complex sociohistorical context of the production of the set and have directed our attention to the economic and religious dimensions of the painting industry in Mingzhou area generally.[26]

Contribution to the Field

My thesis takes on the challenging task of tracing the long life history of the Daitokuji set from premodern to modern times with a special attention to its encounters with different patrons, an aspect generally overlooked by existing scholarship. First, by directing attention to the female patrons of the set, this study adds a new dimension to our understanding the cultural and social

23 Wen Fong, "Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1958; He also conducted a critical analysis of the scroll titled *The Luhans and A Bridge to Heaven* collected in the Freer gallery, see Wen Fong, "The Luhans and A Bridge to Heaven," in *Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1958): 1-59; In 2014, by incorporating some new evidence and references from recent Japanese scholarship, Fong revised his earlier work, see "Scared and Humanistic: Five Hundred Luohans at Daitokuji," *Art as History: Calligraphy and Painting as One* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 215-70

24 Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan*, Seichi Ninpō: Nihon bukkyō 1300 nen no genryū* (Nara: Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, 2009).

25 Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan and Tōkyō bunkazai kenkyūjo, eds., *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2014).

26 Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan and Tōkyō bunkazai kenkyūjo, eds., *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu*.

context of the production of the set. Meanwhile, it also provides new visual evidence that testifies to the presence of women in shaping Buddhism during the Song period. Second, regarding studies of the Daitokuji set, most scholars have focused on the production context of the Song Buddhism; however, the set in the landscape of modern Buddhism has been rarely discussed. My thesis fills this gap and examines some important modern beholders and their respective viewings of these arhat paintings under the influence of modern Buddhism. Moreover, the investigation of their viewings of these paintings also challenges the conventional identities of these figures and offers a new reading of them.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter is devoted to the analysis of the meanings and values attributed to the Daitokuji set of the arhat paintings in the eyes of beholders in different historical, social, and political contexts. Following a chronological order, this thesis opens with a chapter tracing the premodern transformation of the set from objects of arhat veneration in its original production context in China to temple treasure that was used to signify the cultural prestige of the Daitokuji. The analysis continues with an examination of the new historical circumstances under which Buddhism was given new social and political functions during the modern period. Being situated in such context, the Daitokuji set encountered new beholders who respectively generated new meaning and significance for these arhat paintings to fulfill the social and political needs of their own time. Chapter Two elaborates upon a transition of the set from a sacred Daitokuji to secular American museums, namely the MFA and the Freer Gallery of Art, by focusing on two main figures—Fenollosa and Freer and their viewings of the arhat paintings. Despite being placed in museum settings and being treated as museum objects,

the arhat paintings continued to be highly mobile and in flux, as they were beheld by audiences from different social and political backgrounds. In order to expound on this point, Chapter Three investigates Anesaki's academic and political stance and its impact on his peculiar perception of the arhat paintings collected in the MFA as transcendental "Zen art" to beguile his Boston audiences within the context of Japan-U.S. relations after the Russo-Japanese War.

Chapter One. Premodern Beholders: from Ritual Icon to Temple Treasure

Introduction

Along with the popularity of worship of the Five Hundred Arhats, particularly during the Song period, when the emperor Taizong 太宗 (939-997) began to sponsor the cult, the images of the Five Hundred Arhats, as the devotional icon of the cult, became popular. More importantly, the Song period witnessed the active participation of women in Buddhist activities. Responding to the religious needs of women, not only Buddhist texts but also images began to frequently address the presence of women in Buddhism. Situated in such historical and social context, the Daitokuji set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* was produced to satisfy the needs of the religio-cultural milieu of Song China. However, the religious and aesthetic significance of this set underwent further change when it arrived in Japan in the Muromachi period.

This chapter examines how the religious significance of the Daitokuji set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* changed based on the differing expectations of different groups of premodern patrons. The chapter starts with a brief introduction of how the concept of the Five Hundred Arhats was localized in China, and then moves to a discussion of the production context of the Daitokuji set with a specific focus on the female patrons who funded the creation of most of the paintings. This introductory overview is followed by an examination of the significance of patronage in shaping and re-shaping the meaning of the Daitokuji set, as it moved from China to Japan. Unlike in China, where attention focused on the visual content of the set, Japanese patrons seemed more interested in the fame and authority of the painter.

The Birth and Development of the Cult of the Five Hundred Arhats

Scholarly consensus is that the veneration of the Five Hundred Arhats was "a uniquely Chinese phenomenon having little to do with Buddhist scriptural tradition," and its origin is attributed to the local legend of the Five Hundred Arhats at the Stone Bridge of Mount Tiantai (Tiantaishan 天台山) in the ninth century.[27] However, the legend did not form in a vacuum but resulted from the gradual localization of devotion to the Five Hundred Arhats from legendary stories in Buddhist scriptures. Not only did the meaning of tangible Buddhist objects constantly change over time, but an intangible Buddhist concept or idea was also gradually transformed along with its interaction with Buddhists in different contexts.

Ideas of the Arhat in Buddhist Traditions

In the early Buddhist scriptural tradition, "arhat" refers to Buddhist saints who have attained the highest level of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth otherwise known as *samsara* (Ch. *Lunhui*, Jp. *Rinne* 輪廻). Based on an examination of Buddhist canonical sources, religion scholar Bong Seok Joo summarizes the early definition of the arhat as follows:

> According to the *Pāli Sutta Pitaka*, the word [arhat] designates a person who has completed the path of spiritual cultivation by destroying the four kinds of āsavās [karmic propensities for sensual pleasure, karmic propensities for existence, karmic propensities for ignorance, karmic propensities for a perspective] and attaining the perfect insight called aññā. This marks the arhat's complete liberation from "the fetters of becoming." As the Buddhist scriptural tradition became more systematized and developed, the arhat's definition also became more elaborated. It began to include new requirements such as the attainment of the three perfections, which are the perfections of morality, concentration and wisdom, and

27 Bong Seok Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China from the Seventh through Thirteenth Centuries: Narrative, Art, Space and Ritual," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2007, 111. His statement has been widely quoted by other scholars. For a more general discussion of the cult of arhats in China and Japan, please refer to M.W de Visser, *The Arhats in China and Japan* (Berlin: Oesterheld, 1923).

> the conquering of more desires such as the desires for material existence, immaterial existence, conceit, restless, and ignorance.[28]

However, Joo also observes that the definition was fluid and unstable and sometimes even conflicted with early versions.[29] For example, legends have described arhats as possessing a variety of supernatural powers and remaining in the world of *samsara* as guardians of Buddhist teachings until the arrival of Maitreya (Ch. Mile, Jp. Miroku 弥勒), the future Buddha during the final age of the Dharma.[30] The conceptualization of the arhat underwent further transformation in China after its initial introduction in the first century via scriptural translation. In the Pali canon, the arhats were viewed as mortals who were disciples of the historical Buddha and had attained enlightenment. After being introduced to China, however, emphasis was placed on the arhats' supernatural qualities after being merged with indigenous beliefs and legends. Chinese Buddhists creatively transformed the idea of the arhats by making them the protagonists of legends and objects of veneration. Monks and lay followers alike began making offerings to the arhats as a means of acquiring merit that would provide protection for themselves, their households, and even the imperial court.[31]

Basically, arhats have been worshiped in three groups of sixteen, eighteen, and five hundred in China. Unlike the grouping of the Sixteen Arhats that was based on Buddhist

28 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 63-4.

29 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 14-26.

30 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 31-41.

31 For the discussion of the intentions of worshipping the arhats, see Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 291-338; Joo, "The Ritual of Arhat Invitation during the Song Dynasty: Why Did Mahāyānists Venerate the Arhat*?" Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1-2 (2007 [2009]): 81-116.

scripture,[32] the concept of the Five Hundred Arhats is largely believed to be a uniquely Chinese creation, as it had no direct connection to Buddhist scripture.[33] Scholars like Joo believe that the cultic tradition of the Five Hundred Arhats originated from a Chinese legend from the Tiantai Mountains in the ninth century.[34] However, by tracing the early history of the ideas of the Five Hundred Arhats recorded in Buddhist scripture, I suggest that the cultic tradition of the Five Hundred Arhats was not purely a product of the Chinese religio-cultural imagination in the ninth century but a development of early ideas from the Chinese Buddhist texts, gradually absorbing local religious thoughts and finally being stabilized in the Tiantai Mountains area.

The Emergence of the Idea of the Five Hundred Arhats

There is a story about a water deity dragon Nāga and the Five Hundred Arhats recorded in the *Fo wubai dizi zishuo benqijing* 佛五百弟子自説本起經 translated by the monk Dharmaraksa (fl. Ca 265-308) (Ch. Zhu Fahu 竺法護).[35] In this story, the dragon king Nāga hosted grand feasts

32 The scriptural basis for the cult of the Sixteen Arhats first was the Buddhist text named the *Da aluohan Nandimiduoluo suo shuo fazhuji* 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所説法住記, translated into Chinese by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) in 654.

33 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 111-6.

34 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 113.

35 Recent scholarship has pointed out the issue of the translator attributions in the *Taishō* Sino-Japanese canon and Chinese Buddhist "apocryphal" scriptures. For more discussion of Chinese "apocryphal" scriptures, please refer to The Michael Radich-initiated CBC database https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/; David Quinter, "Visualizing the *Mañjuśrī Parinirvāṇa Sutra* as a Contemplation Sutra." *Asia Major,* 3d series, 23, no. 2 (2010): 97-128;" Michael Radich, "Fei Changfang's Treatment of Sengyou's Anonymous Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 4 (2019): 819-41. Regarding this text, scholars generally agree that it was a Dharmaraksa translation. The monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) dated it to 303 in *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (*A Compilation of Notices on the Translation of the Tripitaka*); *T* 2145. For more information, please refer to the entry "T0199" in The Michael Radich-initiated CBC database, retrieved from https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/2127/; Quinter, "Visualizing the *Mañjuśrī Parinirvāṇa Sutra*," 115-17.

at Anavatapta Lake[36] (Ch. *Anouchi* 阿耨池 or *Anoudaquan* 阿耨大泉) so that the historical Buddha and his five hundred disciples would tell their stories of each reincarnation including merits and sins.[37] Another early Chinese Buddhist text that mentioned the Five Hundred Arhats as a group is the *Fuoshuo xingqi xingjing* 佛說興起行經, a text about the Buddha's lectures on the spiritual principle of cause and effect, or the principle of karma, to the Five Hundred Arhats at Anavatapta Lake.[38] The Five Hundred Arhats was described in the following manner:

> The mountain known as Kunlun is at the center of the continent Jambudvīpa. The mountains consist entirely of precious gems. The mountains are surrounded by five hundred caves that shine with golden brilliance. The Five Hundred Arhats continually resided in these caves. The outer edges of the Anavatapta Lake are surrounded by mountains, and the lake exists in a basin within these mountains. The shores of the lake shine with the brilliance of gold, and water comes forth from the heads of four beasts. Each beast's head sprays water in a circle, and the waters further flows into the Four Seas. The waters emanating from the head of the elephant flow into the Yellow River. The lake has an area of twenty-five *youyan*[39] square, and a depth of three *juelie*. One *juelie* is equal to seven *li* [one *li* is about five hundred meters]. In the center of the lake was a golden dais measuring one *youyan* square. Atop the dais is a golden lotus blossom, and the Seven Treasures forms its stem. On that dais, the Thus Come One [Sk. Tathāgata, Ch. Rulai, Jp. Nyorai 如来] preached the precepts to the Five Hundred Arhats, on the fifteenth of every

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[36] For more discussion of the reception of Anavatapta Lake in China, please refer to Yang Gao, "The Idea of the Anavatapta Lake in India and Its Adoption in East Asia," *Religions,* vol. 11, no. 3 (2020): 134. https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/3/134/htm

37 T.0199.04.0190a06-11.

[38] The *Taishō* apparatus attributes it to the translation of the monk Kang Mengxiang 康孟祥 (fl. Ca. 190?). However, scholars do not regard the traditional ascription to Kang Mengxiang as reliable, as it is first mentioned in the earliest extant catalogue of Buddhist sutras in Chinese, *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, written by Sengyou and dated to about 515. Sengyou regarded it as an anonymous translation. Moreover, this text does not appear in the sections of *Chu sanzang ji ji* that reproduced entries from Daoan's 道安 (312-385) *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理衆經目錄 of 374. Based on this information, it is likely that this text was translated between 374 and 515. For more discussion of this topic, please refer to the entry "T0197," in The Michael Radich-initiated CBC database, retrieved from https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/2115/; Quinter, "Visualizing the *Mañjuśrī Parinirvāṇa Sutra*," 115-17.

[39] The Chinese "*youyan*" is equivalent to the Indian *yojana*, a measurement of distance that was used in ancient India. For more information, please refer to Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (London: Trübner and Co., Paternoster, 1871), 571-72.

month, and because Śāriputra [Ch. Shelifu, Jp. Sharihotsu 舍利弗] asked Sakyamuni about the ten wholesome actions and karma, in fifteen days they became Sakyamuni's disciples and he [Sakyamuni] spoke no more.

所謂崑崙山者。則閻浮利地之中心也。山皆寶石。周匝有五百窟。窟皆黃金。常五百羅漢居之。阿耨大泉。外周圍山。山內平地。泉處其中。泉岸皆黃金。以四獸頭。出水其口。各遶一匝已。還復其方。出投四海。象口所出者。則黃河是也。其泉方各二十五由延。深三厥劣。一厥劣者七里也。泉中有金臺。臺方一由延。臺上有金蓮華。以七寶爲莖。如來將五百羅漢。 常以月十五日。於中說戒。因舍利弗。問佛十事宿緣。後以十五日時。將本弟子。說訖乃止。[40]

This source makes clear that the Five Hundred Arhats as a group live in the golden caves of Mount Kunlun (Kunlunshan 崑崙山), the center of the continent Jambudvīpa, the mountain full of precious stones. In Buddhist cosmology, the center of the continent of Jambudvīpa is Mount Sumeru (Xumishan 須彌山). Thus, Mount Kunlun, a mountain in Chinese mythology, refers to Mount Sumeru here. It seems that the anonymous translator or writer attempted to transpose Buddhist mythic geography onto its Chinese counterpart in order to appeal to the sensibilities of Chinese readers. Noteworthy is that the Sanskrit term *arhat* was first translated into *zhenren* 真人 (perfected man) or *yingzhen* 應真 (one who responds to the true), which referred to immortals from Daoist ideology.[41] Clearly, Buddhism began to be intertwined with Chinese local culture at the very beginning by the efforts of the earliest translators. Moreover, in Buddhist cosmology, in

40 T. 0197.04. 0163c13-22.

41 Richard K. Kent, "Depictions of the Guardians of the Law: Lohan Painting in China," in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850-1850*, edited by Patricia Ann Berger and Helen Foresman Spencer (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 186.

the south of Mount Sumeru is located a large lake called the Anavatapta Lake where, in this story, Sakyamuni lectured about his karma to the Five Hundred Arhats in the fifteenth day of each month. This story resembles the first one. The two are both about the historical Buddha and the Five Hundred Arhats telling their karma in the Anavatapta Lake. Most importantly, these stories establish the Five Hundred Arhats' earliest residence as the Anavatapta Lake of Mount Kunlun.

Moreover, according to his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*The Biography of Eminent Monks*) written by the monk Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554), the Chinese monk Zhimeng 智猛 (d. 453) traveled to India to learn the Buddhist teachings. During his trip, he encountered the Five Hundred Arhats who were en route to Anavatapta Lake from Jibin 罽賓, the name of an ancient state in Central Asia of indeterminate location but hypothesized to be around modern-day Kashmir.[42] That is to say, there were two groups of the Five Hundred Arhats: one from the Anavatapta Lake and one from Jibin. It is also evidenced by the biography of a nun named Jingxiu 淨秀 (ca. fifth century) recorded in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (*The Biography of Nuns*) by the monk Baochang 寶唱 (495-528). It is the earliest source about the worship of the Five Hundred Arhats in China. The biography shows that the nun Jingxiu conducted devotional practices to first invite the Five Hundred Arhats from the Anavatapta Lake and then the Five Hundred Arhats from Jibin. During the ritual practice, a foreign monk from Jibin appeared and secretly disappeared soon.[43] This story demonstrates two crucial facts: first, the Chinese understood the identity of the

42 The original text is "國有五百羅漢。常往返阿耨達池。" T.2059.50.0343b14-15.

43 T.2063.50.0945b21-26.

Five Hundred Arhats as a group of entirely foreign monks at the time; second, the invitation cult of the Five Hundred Arhats appeared in China much earlier than the emergence of the images of the Five Hundred Arhats at Mount Tiantai during the ninth century. In other words, the early form of the cultic practice did not require pictorial icons as the later ritual did. Extant textual evidence suggests that it was not until the ninth century that arhat paintings came to be enshrined in Five Hundred Arhats halls and used in the Five Hundred Arhats cult.

In short, the aforementioned Chinese Buddhist texts show the much earlier origin of the idea of the Five Hundred Arhats prior to the ninth-century Tiantai legend. First, the early legends of the Five Hundred Arhats emerged in early Chinese translations of Buddhist texts or Chinese Buddhist "apocryphal" scriptures.[44] As I mentioned earlier, it was firstly tied to the Anavatapta Lake in Mount Kunlun (or Mount Sumeru). Second, the legend had been repeatedly recorded in Chinese Buddhist texts, indicating the widespread reception of the early legends of the Five Hundred Arhats. As the early legends were in a somewhat fluid state, Chinese writers were able to adapt them to a Chinese context. As the time went by, the perception of the Five Hundred Arhats became localized within the milieu of Chinese religious thought. Specifically, during the ninth century, Mount Tiantai, the residence of Daoist immortals, had replaced Mount Kunlun as the abode of the Five Hundred Arhats in China. Additionally, the members of the Five Hundred Arhats also included Chinese eminent monks based on the list of the names of each arhat made by medieval Chinese.[45]

[44] I would like to point out that these is a possibility that these Chinese Buddhist texts are "apocrphal" scriptures, as there is no solid evidence that can testify that these texts were originally translated from Indian canons.

45 For discussion of the names of the Five Hundred Arhats, see Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 116-20.

The Localization of the Five Hundred Arhats in Mount Tiantai

During the Tang and Song periods, the rising popularity of the arhat cult generated the creation of vast numbers of images and halls dedicated to arhats. According to the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳) composed by the monk Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), the monk Pu'an 普岸 (d. 843) built the first recorded Five Hundred Arhat hall in the Pingtian Temple (Pingtiansi 平田寺) of Mount Tiantai. The hall enshrined individual images of the entire Five Hundred Arhats painted by Quan Yi 全億 (dates unknown). The source of this fact also happens to be the earliest record of the Five Hundred Arhats paintings.[46] This source also shows that Pu'an performed a dedicatory ritual for the consecration of each image at the Stone Bridge 石橋 (Ch. Shijiao) of Mount Tiantai to invite the arhats to the hall. The Stone Bridge was originally regarded as the residence of Daoist immortals but later became the abode of the Five Hundred Arhats by the ninth century because of a series of Buddhist miraculous stories set there.[47] Subsequently, the legend of the Five Hundred Arhats on Mount Tiantai spread beyond the locality to other regions of China. From the tenth century onward, the state began to sponsor the worship of the Five Hundred Arhats on Mount Tiantai for requesting the arhats' protection for the nation.[48] To a large extent, official recognition provided the arhat cult a relatively stable platform from which it spread to other regions of China. Meanwhile, the creation of images and halls of the Five

46 T.2061.50.0880b21-24. Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 113.

47 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 115.

48 Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 210-18.

Hundred Arhats in different regions of China also contributed to the popularity of the worship. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the veneration of the Five Hundred Arhats was well established during the Song period.

The Production Context of the Daitokuji Set and Female Patrons

An Object of Worship

Among the extant Song Dynasty arhat paintings, all known examples have been preserved in Japanese Buddhist temples. One of the most celebrated sets is *The Five Hundred Arhat Paintings* preserved by Daitokuji. The Daitokuji set originally consisted of one hundred scrolls depicting five arhats each. Forty-eight paintings of the set bear dedicatory inscriptions that give important information about its sponsorship and production. Based on the inscriptions, the Daitokuji set was made by two professional artists, Lin Tinggui 林廷珪 (fl. 1174-1189) and Zhou Jichang 周季常 (fl. 1178) between 1178 to 1188, at the command of the monk Yishao 義紹 of the Huianyuan temple 惠安院 in Mingzhou 明州 (present-day Ningbo 寧波). Many local lay disciples donated funds for the creation of these scrolls in order to obtain karmic merit and protection for their families and pray for the rebirth of their deceased family members in the Pure Land Paradise.[49] The Huianyuan was built in 938 and is also known as "the Temple of Arhats" (Lohanyuan 羅漢

49 Kent, "Depictions of the Guardians of the Law," 192.

院) because of the legend that a group of arhats appeared in the temple area.[50] Thus, the making of the Five Hundred Arhats paintings that were dedicated to the temple seems to be quite appropriate.

Concerning its liturgical function, Japanese art historian Ide Seinosuke argues that the set might have been commissioned for the Water-Land Retreat (*Shuiluhui* 水陸会), one of the most elaborate Buddhist rituals around Dongqianhu 東銭 Lake (also in Mingzhou); however, he does not provide direct evidence for this claim.[51] Building upon Fong's historical and iconographical analysis of the Five Hundred Arhats in 1958,[52] Ide has provided new insights into the religious and economic dimensions of these paintings by situating them within the local religious and economic landscape of the Mingzhou area. He conducts a social-historical study of the production context of the set by associating it with the social strata of the Mingzhou area, local religious rituals, and social activities. Consequently, he associates the production of the set with the Water-Land ritual performance and the maintenance of nearby Dongqian Lake. However, he does not present concrete evidence to support this assertion, likely due to the limited nature of the information that the inscriptions and extant historical records provide.

Other contextual analysis of the arhat cult during the Song period has shown that the set is more likely to have been made as devotional icons in the arhats offering cult (*Luohan gong* 羅漢

50 Fong, "Five Hundred Lohans," 132.

51 Ide Seinosuke, "Daitokuji denrai gohyaku rakan zu shiron," in *Seichi Ninpo: Nihon bukkyo sensanbyakunen no genryū* (Nara: Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, 2009), 256-257.

52 As an art historian, Wen Fong mainly focuses on the style, iconography, and historical context of these paintings.

供).[53] In this liturgy, practitioners made a variety of food offerings in front of hanging scrolls of the arhats and summoned the arhats to receive offering in a ritual arena (*Daochang* 道場) and bring benefits to their mundane worshippers. The most convincing evidence is the visual content of the scroll *Luohan Assembly* (Figure. 1) from the Daitokuji set that depicts the descent of the arhats to the ritual arena.[54] First, we need to closely examine the scroll. The composition of the scroll gives a clear division between humans and deities, the mundane and the supramundane. The lower part of the composition depicts the ritual performance of the arhat invitation cult. The cult altar is set up outside a pavilion surrounded by a lotus pond. On the top of the altar are a white porcelain and lion-shaped censer in the middle and two white porcelain vessels with blooming pink peonies on each side. Standing in front of the altar, a monk is performing the ritual with two hands holding a censer from which thin wisps of smoke rises. Behind the monk are two scholar-officials and their wives praying for the manifestation of the arhats, along with a female servant holding a baby in the back. Notably, the depiction of female figures in this composition clearly shows the presence of female practitioner in this arhat invitation ritual. In other words, it visually testifies the active participation of lay women in Buddhist activities during the Song period. Moving back to the image, responding to their invitation, five polychromed arhats are descending on monochrome clouds from the heavens toward the ritual arena. Between the upper and lower parts, the middle section lays out the scene of making a variety of food offerings to the arhats, yet

53 On the arhat cult in China, see Liu Shufen, "Songdai de luohan xinyang ji qi yishi: cong Dadesi Songben 'Wubai luohan tu'," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 86.4 (2015), 726-46; Joo, "Arhat Cult in China," 291-342; Phillip E. Bloom, "Visualizing Ritual in Southern Song Buddhist Painting," in *Visual and Material Cultures in Middle Period China*, edited by Patricia Ebrey and Susan Shih-Shan Huang (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 85.

54 Based on the visual analysis of its line, color, and inkwork, it is agreed that this unsigned painting was made by Zhou Jichang.

it is partially blocked by the clouds. If we look at it closely, we can find there are two arhat paintings hanging on the wall. Due to the small size, there was not much space for Zhou Jichang to render more details in these intrapictorial paintings. However, from what we can observe, their compositions closely resemble that of the Daitokuji set as they are also presented as narrative scenes of several arhats in each setting. Suffice it to say, not only does the scroll *Luohan Assembly* visualize the scene of the cult, but it also implies the Daitokuji set and images like it being venerated as the icons in the ritual performance of inviting the arhats.

The Female Patrons

The aforementioned description of the production context of the Daitokuji set has been repeatedly used by scholars in their discussion of the scrolls. However, none of them have paid attention to the gender issue of the lay patrons. In fact, according to the inscriptions, the majority of lay patrons of the set were the local laywomen. In order to understand why laywomen actively participated into this Buddhist project, we need to first look at the social history of laywomen at the time. For the studies of women in earlier periods of China, noteworthy is the fact that most available textual sources about women were written by men. In other words, they were male representations of women. Although the Song period witnessed the emergence of some female literati, such as Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-1155), Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑貞 (1135-1180), and Zhang Yuniang 張玉娘 (1250-1277), most of them were born in privileged families who were able to hire private tutors to teach their daughters at home.[55] For most women from common families, they

55 Despite the literary talent of Li QingZhao, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) did not admit Li's high intellect but attributed it to her emotional response to Confucian principles. Generally speaking, Zhu Xi, among other Confucian scholars, did not believe that "women had the same intellectual capabilities as men." See Bettine Birge, "Chu His and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, edited by William T. De Bary, John W Chaffee, and Bettine Birge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 331.

did not have the right to receive education in official schools as men did, due to the patriarchal nature of Confucianism in the Song period. Therefore, on the one hand, common women did not have access to Buddhist texts; on the other hand, there were rare sources written by women presenting female views towards Buddhism.

Nevertheless, the narrative scrolls of the Five Hundred Arhats were largely made under the financial support of local laywomen. Consequently, the visuality of these paintings, to a large extent, reflected their religious needs and expectations from a female view. Moreover, despite the brevity of the inscriptions, these paintings also provide us with a significantly visual lens with which to examine common laywomen's domestic roles within the social foundation of Confucianism. First, compared with texts that were limited to literate people, predominantly men, images could reach out to a majority of commoners who did not have a chance to receive education during the Song period, particularly, common women. However, the Daitokuji set could offer an alternative medium for these women to learn the legends associated with the arhats. Second, the relationship between artwork and patron reveals the fact that the production of artwork, to some extent, needs to meet a patron's expectations. Likewise, the visual contents of these arhat paintings were probably designed for the satisfaction of their patrons' needs. Building upon studies of women in the Song period, this section attempts to examine the significance of the Daitokuji from the female patrons' views through visual analysis of the paintings.

As Patricia Ebrey argues, women in the Song managed to exert their power and authority in patrilineal and patriarchal family life through marriage and acquiring property rights owing to the historical changes in the socioeconomic context stemming from high levels of urbanization

and commercialization.[56] In regards to Buddhist activities by women, Ebrey examines the biographies of Song upper-class women written by male authors, which show us that their Buddhist piety made them better wives or mother-in-law in the eyes of Confucian writers, yet not solely for their personal enlightenment or spiritual pursuit.[57] In her study of common women in Song dynasty Fujian, Man Xu also points out that laywomen's religious pursuits were closely related to their familial responsibilities, namely, their capabilities of managing domestic affairs.[58] Such a claim is also evident in the Daitokuji set, a point we will return to later. Concerning research that focuses upon the religious activities of the laywomen in the Song, Xu recounts:

> Although laywomen did not claim celibacy like the Buddhist nuns and Daoist priestesses, their commitment to religion was expressed in complex and diverse ways as well. They conducted religious rituals at home and also participated in religious performances at local temples; they had intellectual exchanges with male elites in the family and occasionally visited Buddhist and Daoist masters at pilgrimage sites; they created objects and works of art related to religious beliefs in the boudoir, and they also donated wealth to sponsor local temples and priests.[59]

Xu employs the studies of gender and local history to argue for the prevalence of laywomen's involvement in Buddhism in Fujian. Nevertheless, this phenomenon of the participation of laywomen in Buddhist affairs was not limited to Fujian but also prevalent in other areas like Mingzhou.

The extant inscriptions of the Daitokuji set indicate the presence of local women in this project. When these female patrons funded the production of the arhats paintings, they did have a

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56 Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

57 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 124-30.

58 Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate: Everyday Lives of Women in Song Fujian (960-1279)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016),

59 Xu, *Crossing the Gate,* 163.

certain expectation from this project. On the one hand, women, as the patrons, donated wealth to sponsor the creation of these paintings to obtain merit for their families; on the other hand, the deceased female family members, were remembered and given merit through the production of the paintings. Notably, their engagement in Buddhist affairs was still largely situated in a broader context of Confucian discourse, specifically, the household (Jia 家) system. In Confucian ideology, women were required to be "the obedient daughter, the faithful wife, and the sacrificing mother"[60] to enhance family harmony. Following this Confucian gender paradigm, the inscriptions of the Daitokuji set clearly show these local women's social identities as wife, daughter, and mother. Their names always followed their family role or identity, such as, "A Recluse's Wife Ms. Cai Hundred-two (Yiqi Caierbainiang 逸妻蔡百二娘)," "Daughter Ms. Pan Ninety-one (Nü Panjiuyiniang 女潘九一娘)," "The Deceased Grandmother Ms. Xu (Wangzumu Xushi 亡祖母許氏)," and etc. Unmarried female lay followers were designated "Female Disciple (Nüdizi 女弟子)." In spite of religious activity, the secular familial commitments of these women still remained visible and important.

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, the pursuit of family harmony was women's familial priority, which was also revealed in their Buddhist activities, such as, their sponsorship of the production of the Daitokuji set. Generally, the inscriptions of the paintings tend to be quite formulaic, telling the patrons' name, residential place, their intentions in funding this project, and the completion dates. For their intentions, basically, none of inscriptions diverges from a general

60 Priscilla Ching Chung, "Power and Prestige: Palace Women in the Northern Sung (960-1126)," *Historical Reflections*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 1981), 101.

formula: “Presented [the painting] to Huianyuan in permanent offering, [which generates] merit as you wished (Ru huianyuan changzhu gongyang, gongde suixin yuanman 入惠安院常住供養, 功德隨心圓滿).” The merit that they accumulated through the sponsorship of this project would give the patrons this-worldly and other-worldly benefits. For the former, it always related to family affairs, such as, the well-being and security of the donor’s family and giving birth to a son, while the latter concentrated on the rebirth of their deceased family members in the Buddhist Pure Land. Apparently, these female patrons prioritized their familial responsibilities—enhancing the harmony and prosperity of the house over their own spiritual pursuit in Buddhist activities. Male elites saw such attitudes as emblems of female virtue and memorialized them in the form of epitaphs.[61] In their discussion of women’s religious inspiration and practices, male authors praised laywomen’s Buddhist devotions, as they believed that women’s involvement in Buddhism made them dutiful wives and mothers, which was in conformity with the expectation of women in the Confucian society. From the inscriptions of the Daitokuji set, it seems that these laywomen, in order to fulfill the social expectation for them, consciously or unconsciously intended to highlight their domestic role as daughters and wives to ensure the pace and harmony of their family rather than their personal benefits. In other words, the female patrons viewed these arhat paintings not merely as a medium for acquiring merit, but also as a window to express their own positive attitude towards their ideal role given by dominant Confucian ideology.

61 For the examination of women’s epitaphs in the Song period, see Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 124-30; Xu, *Crossing the Gate*, 163-212.

Visual Response to Women's Religious Needs

Throughout the set, the Five Hundred Arhats are divided into one hundred groups with five in each setting. They are situated in a variety of narrative themes, both this-worldly and other-worldly. On the one hand, the arhats were depicted as normal monks engaging in the daily activities, such as: venerating Buddhist images; transcribing, translating, lecturing, chanting and storing sutras; sewing and ironing clothes, shaving hair, washing feet, bathing, consuming and preparing food and tea; burning incense, picking flowers, feeding animals, meditating, resting, and assembling in a hall among other such activities. On the other hand, some scrolls portray the arhats flying on clouds, manifesting mysterious powers, or taming furious animals, while others depict supernatural scenes such as mysterious lights, demons, ghosts, and deities. Besides, the painters also present some arhats as being worshipped by all beings of the cosmos, such as animals, ghosts, human beings, demons, and deities.

The Narrative Theme of the Daitokuji Set[62]

This-worldly themes	Daily life of monks	venerating Buddhist images	Figure. 35, 36
		transcribing, translating, inscribing, lecturing, reading and storing sutras	Figure. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42,
		picking flowers, feeding animals	Figure. 43, 44
		performing rituals	Figure 2, 17, 18
		Sewing and ironing clothes; shaving hair, grooming face, washing feet, bathing; eating and preparing food; drinking tea; burning incense; assembling in a hall; resting and meditating	Figure. 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 3, 16, F1, 寬 2, 寬 5, 寬 6
Other-worldly themes	Being worshipped	Revered by animals, human beings, demons, immortals	Figure. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 22, 25, 26, 33, 34, 71, B1, B4, 寬 1

[62] All paintings are numbered and titled in the catalogue of the Daitokuji set published in 2014. See *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu*. In this chart, I use the same numbers and titles as in this catalogue.

	Travelling on clouds		Figure. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 21, 23, 24, 62, 72, 73, 75, B3, B6, F2
	Supernatural scenes		Figure. 19, 20, 22, 59, 74, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, B2, B5, B7, B8, B9, B10, 寬 3
	Taming mysterious and furious animals		Figure. 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 60, 76, 寬 4

Scholars have performed a thorough iconographic and stylistic analysis of the Daitokuji set. They have noticed that these narrative scenes were not all products of the painters' creative imagination, as some of them resemble the earlier works of the Five Hundred Arhats by the monk Faneng 法能 (fl. eleventh century).[63] That is to say, there was a set paradigm depicting the grouping of the Five Hundred Arhats during the Song period. Essentially, this paradigm includes the illustrations of a large range of Buddhist ideas and legends concerning the arhats. Despite the fact that Faneng's painting is no longer extant, literatus Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049-1100) wrote an essay to describe the details of this painting. According to this essay, no female figures appeared in Faneng's painting. In contrast, the Daitokuji set depicts a variety of females figures in multiple narrative scenes, most likely, in response to its female patrons' expectations. However, these images of female figures have been largely overlooked in scholarly works.

In fact, the Daitokuji set not merely served as the physical embodiment of the arhats but also depicted the visual forms of female worshipping the arhats in different settings. Throughout

63 For the comparative analysis of the Daitokuji set and Faneng's work, see Fong, "Five Hundred Lohans," 153-60. Ide, "Daitokuji," 275-7.

the entire set, there are thirteen scrolls explicitly depicting female figures with different identities: wives of scholar-officials (Figure 1), female attendants (Figures 2 and 3), aristocratic woman (Figure 4), female ghost (Figure 5), apsara (female spirits of the clouds and water) (Figures 6 and 7), female immortals (Figures 8, 9, and 10), palace ladies (Figure 11), common elderly women (Figure 12), and female infant (Figure 13). The artisan's articulation of these female figures reflects their different ages and social statues, ranging from elderly to infant, from palace ladies of the upper-class to common women from lower social strata. Apart from human beings, the painter also elaborately presented supramundane female figures as ghosts and immortals. The depiction of female immortals, most likely, was intended to satisfy female viewer-worshippers' religious imagination for their afterlives—being reborn as ethereal beings living in the paradise. Additionally, they appear to convey the message to female audiences that regardless of gender and category of being, they and their family members could receive salvation if they committed to the faith of arhats. For example, the scroll *Offering on Behalf of an Infant* (Figure 13) shows that the parents' pious prayer to the arhats led to the rebirth of an infant girl in the Pure Land. The inscription recounts that the patrons lost their daughter, an infant girl who had died from illness within a year of her birth; in order to help her deceased spirit be reborn in the Pure Land, they donated the production of an arhat painting and presented it to Huianyuan in permanent offering. In responding to their religious need, the painter Zhou created a sophisticated narrative scene to visualize the rebirth of their daughter in the Pure Land by the salvific power of the arhats. Notably, most of the space in the scroll is the depiction of the cloud and the deities it bears. Five arhats accompanied by two demon attendants are descending from the upper section toward the parents placed in the lower right corner of the composition. Treated in the comparatively smaller size, the parents are standing with their hands forming the anjali mudrā, sincerely greeting the coming of

the arhats and probably expressing their prayers to these saintly arhats for the rebirth of their daughter. Meanwhile, they are staring at their infant daughter siting on a Buddhist plate held by a female servant. She presents it in front of the leading arhat who is holding a white jar containing pure water and a willow branch in his left hand while performing a karana mudrā in his right hand to banish and expel negative energy. Glancing down to the infant gracefully, he is probably doing a kind of salvific ritual to guide the rebirth of the infant girl in the Pure Land. Thanks to the arhat's supernatural power, the infant girl is surrounded by a holy halo, the iconic symbol showing the sacredness of the infant, probably implying her rebirth in the Pure Land as her parents prayed for. For the patrons, not merely was this painting the agency of their merit-accumulation, but it was also the visual testimony of the rebirth of their daughter in the Pure Land. That is to say, the painter rendered the unseen supramundane vision from the patrons, the rebirth of their daughter in the paradise, into a visible scene. Indeed, the visual treatment of this painting empowered the patrons or other viewer-worshippers to experience the supramundane in a directly physical manner. Moreover, this painting along with some other paintings with the depiction of female immortals conveyed a message to female viewer-worshippers that females could also be reborn in the Pure Land if they venerated the arhats with sincere hearts.

Admittedly, these paintings created elaborate pictorial narratives to address women's unignorable position in both Buddhist belief and practice. Similar to the function of Buddhist texts that could canonize Buddhist deities and eminent monks, paintings also had the power to legitimize a certain idea or a Buddhist figure, such as the portraits of Chan patriarchs. The portrayal of female worshippers in the arhat paintings also legitimate their equal role and satisfy their religious demand as the same as the one males had in Buddhist practices. In short, as the Daitokuji set shows, the

faith of the Five Hundred Arhats in the Mingzhou area intended to embrace female worshippers, responding to their religious needs, and highlighting their existence in the veneration of the arhats.

Japanese Beholders: Temple Treasure in Japan

Huianyuan temple was located to the southeast of the port city of Ningbo in Zhejiang province. From the Song period onwards, Ningbo began to flourish as a port and a gateway for trade with Korea and Japan throughout the premodern period. In the meantime, the Buddhist local culture in this area truly prospered since a large corpus of Buddhist paintings was produced by the local professional ateliers for the multiple ritual and institutional purposes. Consequently, many of these Song Dynasty Buddhist paintings were brought to Japan through the hands of monks, envoys, and merchants. Japanese scholars have categorized them as "Ningbo Buddhist painting" in the late 1960s.[64] Among the extant Song Dynasty arhat paintings, all known examples have been preserved in Japanese Buddhist temples. The Daitokuji set of the *Five Hundred Arhat Paintings* is one of them.

Scholars generally believe that the set was probably brought to Japan by either a Japanese pilgrim-monk or a Chinese monk who went to Japan to spread Buddhist teachings during the thirteenth century.[65] Concerning the history of the transmission of the set in Japan, the temple record of the Daitokuji provides the following information:

> There are one hundred scrolls of the *Five Hundred Arhats* (painted by Chanyue [Guanxiu] and others/the treasure of Sōken-in). The one hundred scrolls of the *Five Hundred Arhats* were formerly the treasures of Jufukuji in Kamakura. Later, [they] went to the hands of the

64 For an overview of recent Japanese scholarship on Ningbo Buddhist painting, see Yukio Lippit, "Ningbo Buddhist Painting: A Reassessment," *Orientations*, vol. 40, no. 5 (June 2009): 54-62.

65 Taniguchi Kōsei, "Kimura Tokuō hitsu Gohyaku rakan zu: Ushinawareta Daitokuji bon roppuku o megutte," in *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu*, 290-95. Phillip E. Bloom, "Ghosts in the Mists: The Visual and the Visualized in Chinese Buddhist Art, ca. 1178," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 98, no. 3 (September 2016): 300.

> Hōjō clan of Odawara[66] and were relocated in Suikeiji of this region. After the decline of the Hōjō clan, the retired regent Hideyoshi obtained them and [assigned them] as the temple treasure of the Buddha Hall of [Hōkōji] in Kyoto. The Buddha Hall was established by the monk Kokei [Sōchin] (1532-1597). Therefore, they were also the treasure of the Sōkenin.[67] Now they are lent to keep in the Hōjō [of the Daitokuji].
> 五百羅漢像（禪月等所畫/總見院什物）百幅。五百羅漢像百幅旧是鎌倉壽福寺什物也。後入小田原北條氏手而安本縣瑞溪寺。北條亡後太閣秀吉公取之為京師大佛殿寺宝。大佛殿乃古溪禾上所創。故為總見院什物也。今存方丈者以借券。[68]

Apart from the transmission of the Daitokuji set among several temples, this record also provides significant information about its new identity—"*jūmotsu* 什物" [secret treasure] or "*jihō* 寺宝" [temple treasure] in these Japanese temples. Essentially, the Daitokuji set assumed a new identity as a "temple treasure" after relocating to Japan. In fact, it was common for Japanese to treat imported Chinese Buddhist objects as representations of legitimacy and authority. Throughout most of premodern Japanese history, Chinese Buddhism was viewed as authoritative. In order to promote the development of Buddhism in Japan, Japanese either invited Chinese monks to spread their teachings in Japan or sent Japanese monks to China to learn what they considered to be "authentic" Buddhism. Concerning the transmission of Buddhism from China to Japan, the historian of Buddhist art Cynthea Bogel points out that Buddhist art also played a significant role

66 Hōjō clan of Odawara is also known as the Later Hōjō clan, who held the castle of Odawara in Sagami Province. They were defeated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and banished to Mount Kōya 高野山.

67 Sōkenin is the sub-temple of the Daitokuji, and it was established by Kokei Sōchin in 1583. Probably Kokei moved the Daitokuji set from the Hōkōji to the Sōkenin.

68 It is recorded in the *Ryūhōzan daitokuzenji shi* 龍宝山大德禅寺志 (1706), this original entry is reprinted in Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan, *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu,* 295.

as a powerful legitimating and proselytizing agency.[69] She defines "Buddhist art" as "a treasured icon or object, a major or inclusive ritual form, a topography of conceptual modes of thought, the sources of prestige and legitimacy, a form of religious inheritance, a cultural sign, or the basis for artistic innovation and copies."[70] Within this interpretative framework, the imported Chinese Buddhist objects were not only vital elements in ritual practices but also considered as rare and precious Chinese artifacts that could legitimize individual or institutional authority in Buddhist teaching.[71] Therefore, for Japanese pilgrim-monks who went to China, not only did they learn Buddhist teachings, but they also copied Chinese Buddhist sculptures and paintings or brought them back to Japan for transmitting the Dharma and claiming authority. For example, Japanese monks like Saichō 最澄 (767-822), Kūkai 空海 (774-835), and Ennin 円仁 (794-864) spent years studying Buddhism in Tang China and they all returned to Japan with a collections of Buddhist paintings that demonstrated the authority of their teachings. In the case of the Daitokuji set, it was also given new identity and significance when imported to Japan with Chinese origin. Indeed, these pictures held the power to enhance ritual efficacy as they were still used in ritual or memorial ceremonies.[72] However, more importantly, they were treated as proof of legitimacy that confirmed the temple's authority of the Dharma transmission.

69 Cynthea J. Bogel, "Situating Moving Objects: A Sino-Japanese Catalogue of Imported Items, 800 CE to the Present," in *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, edited by John Mrazek and Morgan Pitelka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 143.

70 Bogel, "Situating Moving Objects," 144.

71 Bogel, "Situating Moving Objects," 143.

72 The use of the Daitokuji set in religious ceremonies can be found in Fenollosa's description. See Ernest Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Buddhist Paintings, Lent by The Temple Daitokuji, of Kioto, Japan* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1894), 8.

Another important piece of information gleaned from this record is that the Daitokuji set was designated as the work of the monk Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912), who was also called by his honorific title Great Master of the Chan Moon (Ch. Chanyue dashi 禪月大師; Jp. Zengetsu daishi). However, as mentioned earlier, the inscriptions show clearly that the set was made by Zhou Jichang and Lin Tinggui. Despite the fact that the name of Guanxiu never appeared in the inscriptions, Japanese monks still accredited him as the creator. Why did Japanese monks do that? What was the importance of Guanxiu to them? In order to answer these questions, we need to look at Guanxiu first. Guanxiu was a Buddhist monk as well as one of the most famous arhat painters during the premodern period. In *The Song Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Guanxiu was recorded as a poet, calligraphy, and a master painter. Particularly, it described a miraculous story about how Guanxiu was able to see the arhats in his dream and portrayed them afterward. The following is an example of a medieval Chinese reaction to Guanxiu's arhat paintings:

> The Features of [Guanxiu's] luohans [arhats] are ancient and wild; they are utterly different from people seen normally in the world. They have full cheeks and sunken foreheads, deep eye-sockets and huge noses, or giant jaws and bald heads; and they are dark and ashy like barbarians and strange tribes. The beholder is startled at the sight of them. Guanxiu claimed that he had observed these images in his dreams. We suspect, however, that he used his story just to give a sense of mystery to his paintings, and that he simply wanted to make them appear unusual.[73]

Indeed, as medieval audiences stated, Guanxiu's claim of seeing arhats in his dream gave an aura of mystery to his arhat paintings. Moreover, the ugliness, abnormality, and foreignness of Guanxiu's arhats made them unusual and appealing to beholders, as such special appearance could rarely be seen at the time. More importantly, his depiction of arhats in different settings established

73 This passage is recorded in in *The Imperial Painting Catalogue of the Xuanhe Era* (Ch. *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜) and translated by Wen Fong. See Fong, "Sacred and Humanistic," 228.

a framework of illustrating arhats that was imitated by the later artists. In addition, his arhat paintings were also presented to the Song emperor Taizu 宋太祖 (r. 960-976), which further enhanced the fame of Guanxiu as a most celebrated arhat painter above others. Consequently, all these aspects contributed to the prominence of Guanxiu's arhat paintings, which probably led Chinese literati like Zhang Ge 張格 (?-927), Ouyang Jiong 欧陽炯 (896-971), Tian Xi 田錫 (940-1004), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and others to pursue his paintings and write eulogies to them. It is a prime premise that Buddhist imageries were sacred objects for their premodern creators and beholders. The key to arriving at this idea was the great attention to their ritual functions in the premodern period. However, their aesthetic value should not be overlooked. When Chinese literati eulogized Guanxiu's arhat paintings, they tended to focus on the form and style. One example is Ouyang Jiong's eulogy titled "A Song on Luohans Painted by Chanyue dashi after His Dreams."[74] In this eulogy, Ouyang highly appraised the vivid portrait of arhats by Guanxiu's "miraculous brush." He argued that no one could surpass Guanxiu's elegant art and his arhat painting was the finest among others. In this sense, Guanxiu's arhat painting was not just an "object of worship" used in the ritual context, but also an "object of art" that Chinese literati appreciated as they did for secular paintings in terms of form, style, and authorship.

When the Daitokuji monks made a biography of the set of the *Five Hundred Arhats*, they particularly highlighted the authorship of the set and attributed it to Guanxiu yet without any evidence. On the one hand, Japanese artists would copy it as an authentic paradigm of arhat painting because of its "man-made" prestigious authorship. Recent studies show that the set of *the*

74 For English translation, see Fong, "Sacred and Humanistic," 230-34.

Five Hundred Arhat paintings produced by the Zen painter Minchō 明兆 (1352-1431) for Tōfukuji 東福寺 in Kyoto was probably a copy of the Daitokuji set based on visual analysis.[75] It was not uncommon that Japanese artists modelled their works after Chinese masterpieces throughout the history of Japanese art. The term *kara-e* 唐絵 was traditionally and historically used in reference to Japanese paintings modelled after the Chinese paradigm of aesthetic composition. Particularly, recent studies of Muromachi artists suggest their strong tendency toward Chinese standards of subject, style, technique, composition, and elite patronage and connoisseurship.[76]

In fact, during the Muromachi period, the samurai elites attempted to establish their legitimacy through both the arts of war and the patronage of culture.[77] For the latter, they embraced the culture that deeply was associated with the avid collection of imported Chinese antiquities as "part of their own cultural heritage."[78] This aesthetic engagement with Chinese objects in the Daimyo culture led to the flow of the Daitokuji set to the Daimyo elites, first to the Hōjo clan 北条氏 and later to the hands of Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537-1598) who eventually placed it in the Daitokuji. For the Daitokuji monks, the attribution to Guanxiu, the master of arhat painting,

75 Taniguchi Kōsei, "Kimura Tokuō hitsu Gohyaku rakan zu: ushinawareta Daitokuji bon rokufuku o megutte," in *Daitokuji denrai gokyaku rakan zu*, edited by Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan and Tōkyō Bunkazai Kenkyūjō (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2014), 290-95.

76 Regarding the reception of the Chinese painting tradition, refer to Tanaka Ichimatsu and Yonezawa Yoshiho ed., *Suiboku Bijutsu Taikei 1, Hyakubyoga Kara Suibokuga he no Tenkai* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1975); Shimao Arata, "Muromachi Suigokuga no Hyogen—so no Tokushitsu to Sesshu no Ichi," *Shubi* 2 (2012): 26-27.

77 Martin Collcutt, "Daimyo and Daimyo Culture," in *Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture, 1185-1868*, edited by Yoshiaki Shimizu (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 1-46.

78 Andrew M. Watsky, "Locating 'China' in the Arts of Sixteenth-Century Japan," *Art History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2006): 601-4.

enhanced the preciousness and rareness of the Daitokuji set and made it superior to others in the category of arhat paintings. In return, the "so-called" masterpiece from China promoted the cultural role of the Daitokuji as a prominent repository of Chinese treasures, more importantly, the center of Japanese cultural heritage. In short, the Daitokuji set was a tangible object that signified the intangible prestige of Daitokuji.

Conclusion

The examination of the premodern life of the Daitokuji set shows us that the meaning and value of Buddhist objects was dynamic. When they encountered different beholders in the transcultural contexts, their cultural and religious importance were viewed differently. In the southern Song period, female patrons in the Mingzhou area viewed the set as a medium for their this-worldly and other-worldly benefits to fulfill their familial duties, whereas the audiences in the Muromachi Japan regarded the set as a Chinese imported good to enhance their religious and cultural prestige. This phenomenon was not exclusive to the premodern period but extended into modern times when the set travelled from the Daitokuji temple to the MFA in Boston.

Chapter Two. Fenollosa and His Circle: An Aestheticized View Rooted in Mysticism

Introduction

Intercultural encounters between East Asia and North America during the late nineteenth century enabled Buddhism to open a new chapter in its already centuries-old tradition of transcultural diffusion across borders. In particular, with the emergence of scientific positivism and Darwinist evolutionism in the West, the perceived superstitious practices and beliefs of premodern Buddhism faced a severe challenge. As such, Buddhist art along with scriptural texts and ritual praxis, as the core of premodern Buddhist tradition, had to acculturate to dominant values of the West. Particularly, by giving "new" aesthetic value to replace the "old" ritual functions, Buddhist art found its way from old temples to the hands of connoisseurs and museums in the West through both legal and illegal methods. However, the transnational and transcultural flow of Buddhist art does not necessarily mean the loss of its religious significance.

A common assumption in our period is that connoisseurship is a purely secularized cultural practice. However, this secularized lens may misinform our understanding of how the New England of the late nineteenth century conceptualized art. As Kathleen Pyne suggests, the ideological agenda of late nineteenth-century America did not simply recognize connoisseurship as "a matter of the educated eye taking pleasure in the form and color of the aesthetic object."[79] In fact, these connoisseurs tended to view the experience of art as a sacred religious moment that

79 Kathleen Pyne, "Portrait of A Collector as An Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 1 (Mar., 1996): 75.

linked them to a higher mystical realm.[80] Modernization led to a crisis in faith for many American Christians during this period, sparking a renewed interest in the mysticism of premodern religious culture for the pursuit of spiritual comfort and physical restoration. Amidst this religio-cultural milieu, a segment of the New England intelligentsia took an interest in Buddhism, with some even going so far as to convert. This, in turn, led to greater interest in the material, i.e. visual and artistic, manifestations of their newly found faith. For these Buddhist connoisseurs, it raised questions of what it meant to be a "Buddhist" of their time and what the religious meaning of Buddhist art was in their eyes?

Being posited in this momentous development in the history of Buddhism, the Daitokuji set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* made its journey to the United States and came into contact with Buddhist connoisseurs in New England. Under the gaze of these beholders from a different social and cultural context, the religious significance of the Daitokuji set was reinterpreted in a manner suited to the artistic, religious, and cultural sensibilities of the New England intelligentsia, connoisseurs, and new Buddhist converts. This chapter focuses on the religious significance of the Daitokuji set through the lens of the "modern Buddhist" Fenollosa and his circles.

The Transmission of the Daitokuji Set to the MFA[81]

80 Pyne, "Portrait," 76.

[81] Gregory P.A Levine provides a detailed information about the transmission of the Daitokuji set to America. See Gregory P.A Levine, "Rakan in America: Travels of the Daitokuji 500 Luohan," in *Moving Objects: Time, Space, and Context* (Tokyo: National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, 2004), 96-109; Levine, "Epilogue: Repairing the Temple, Filling the Museum: Travels of the Daitokuji Five Hundred Luohan," in *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of A Zen Monastery* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 287-313.

In 1894, Kōshū Sōtaku 廣州宗澤 (1840-1907), the abbot of Daitokuji, decided to sell the set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* for funds to repair the temple complex's decaying buildings. His decision led to the flow of twelve scrolls to the American museums—ten in the MFA and two in the Freer gallery. The art historian Gregory Levine suggests viewing this decision as "a response to the conditions of Modernity, perhaps even a form of Buddhist revival."[82] During the Meiji period, the persecution and reformation of Buddhism led to serious financial crisis for Buddhist institutions. First of all, it led to the collapse of the *danka* 檀家 system, the temple registration system enacted in the 1630s that bounded households both ritually and economically to a specific temple. While the original intent of the *danka* system was ostensibly to prevent the spread of Christianity in Japan, requiring households to register with specific temples, which in turn were affiliated with specific sects, resulted in the Buddhist establishment of the period wielding economic clout. Secondly, the new government confiscated large tracts of lands that had been granted by the Tokugawa shogunate (*bakufu* 幕府) to Buddhist temples. Thirdly, it largely reduced subsidies given to temples. Moreover, the later "New Buddhism Movement" (*shinbukkyō undō* 新仏教運動) relocated the essence of Buddhism to spiritual experience instead of rituals, beliefs, and institutions, which further weakened the power of Buddhist institutions. As a result of these rapid changes, Buddhist temples lost the economic support that they previously enjoyed.[83] Under such financial austerity, many sub-temples of Daitokuji that had been established over previous centuries were dismantled, closed, or merged together;

82 Levine, *Daitokuji*, 308.

83 Hiroko T. McDermott, "The Hōryūji Treasures and Early Meiji Cultural Policy," *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 61, no. 3 (Autumn, 2006): 340-42.

numerous temple treasures were sold to raise funds for temple maintenance.[84] The set of the *Five Hundred Arhats* was one of them.

However, Kitagaki Kunimichi 北垣国道 (1836-1916), the governor of Kyoto Prefecture, strongly opposed Kōshū's decision to sell the Daitojuji set. Kitagaki attempted to intervene in the selling of the set by threatening to terminate his patronage of the temple should the set be sold, which turned out to be in vain. He blamed the prefectural government for failing to supervise this matter and to prevent the flood of treasures entering the market. He wrote in his diary that:

> If this is not stopped, the tens of thousands of treasures in Kyoto's shrines and temples will vanish over a period of years…I appointed managers to the Shrine-Temple Office, created a shrine-temple treasure register, and ordered annual inspections…The prefectural office must intervene in the flood of treasures entering the market and find some means to preserve them.[85]

As a governor, Kitagaki viewed the Daitokuji set as an object of cultural patrimony under the jurisdiction of the prefectural office. Contrary to Kitagaki's concern about the commercialization of temple treasures, the abbot Kōshū treated the set as a commodity that could be sold to protect Daitokuji as a religious institution following decades of economic deprivation. Concerning the sale of the set in America, in the eyes of the Japanese Fenollosa was seen as the ideal broker, as they believed that Fenollosa "would understand and facilitate the payment of a sum of money sufficient for Daitokuji's maintenance and the expenses of expanding its religious operations and appreciates the significance of individual scrolls within the set as a whole."[86] During his sojourn

84 Gregory P.A. Levine, "Jukōin: Art, Architecture, and Mortuary Culture at a Japanese Zen Buddhist Temple," Ph.D dissertation, Princeton University, 1997, 44.

85 Levine, *Daitokuji*, 305-6.

86 Levine, *Daitokuji*, 307.

to Japan from 1878 to 1890, Fenollosa witnessed the decline of Buddhist monasteries. Nevertheless, he managed to visit numerous ancient Buddhist temples, and worked to promote the preservation of Buddhist treasures. Perhaps most importantly, he converted to Tendai Buddhism. Indeed, no Westerner of the time knew more about Daitokuji's financial predicament and the cultural and religious importance of the set than Fenollosa did. Similar to the monk Yishao who commissioned the set to spread Buddhist faith of the arhats to lay patrons and collect financial funds from them, Fenollosa, as not merely a curator but also a pious Buddhist, held a special exhibition to display the holiness and mystical power of the arhats to Boston Brahmins who had fantasies of esoteric Buddhism and to reach out potential buyers to support Daitokuji's repairs and operation. In short, during the Meiji period of great social and political turmoil, the identity of the Daitokuji set was protean, as different audiences read and projected multiple readings and meanings in order to serve diverse purposes.

Fenollosa's Religious Position: A Modern Buddhist's Gaze

An Established Image

Fenollosa is well known as an important Western authority in the formation of the concept of Japanese art and the preservation of traditional Japanese antiquities during the Meiji period. He was a professor of philosophy, connoisseur, art dealer, art historian, and curator, yet his role as a Tendai Buddhist of the modern period has been largely overlooked. As a graduate of the Department of Philosophy at Harvard, he was hired to teach philosophy and economy at Tokyo Imperial University in 1878. During his residence in Japan, he played a significant role in promoting the prestige of traditional Japanese art over western art. At the same time, he was also actively involved in art revival activities that also served to consolidate the concept of art in

Japan. Such activities included the opening of an art school and museums as stand-alone institutions, the creation of art-related organizations to promote art appreciation, and publishing art journals and books that formed the academic foundations of art as a scholarly discipline. Meanwhile, as a connoisseur, he collected a large amount of traditional Japanese artworks.[87] In 1886, he sold his collection to Charles Goddard Weld (1857-1911) on the condition that it would become the permanent collection with his name at the MFA. His art collection along with those from Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925) and William Sturgis Bigelow (1850-1926) made the MFA the leading museum of Japanese art in the world. Some Meiji paintings from his collection also went to Philadelphia Museum of Art.[88] From 1890 to 1895, he served as curator of the Department of Oriental Art at the MFA; meanwhile, he lectured on the history of Japanese art to the public and created an art education system with Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922).[89] In short, prior studies on Fenollosa tend to emphasize his social role as a connoisseur, critic, and art historian without any ties to his Buddhist belief.

Contemporary scholarly opinion on Fenollosa is divided between those who view him as the savior of the arts in Japan and those who view him as complicit in exporting Japanese

87 For discussion of Fenollosa's life in Japan, see Van Wyck Brooks, "Ernest Fenollosa and Japan," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 106, no.2 (April. 30, 1962): 106-110; Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963); Karatani Kōjin, "Japan as Art Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Fenollosa," in *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, translated and edited by Michael F. Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 43-52. Kaneda Tamio, "Fenollosa and Tsubouchi Shōyō," in *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, translated and edited by Michael F. Marra (Honolulu: Unviersity of Hawai'i Press,), 53-67; José María Cabeza Lainez and José Manuel Almodóvar Melendo, "Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and The Quest for Japan: Findings of A Life Devoted to the Science of Art," *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies*, no. 9 (2004):75-99.

88 Felice Fischer, "Meiji Painting from the Fenollosa Collection," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 88, no. 375 (Autumn, 1992): 1-24.

89 Betty Lou Williams, "Japanese Aesthetic Influences on Early 20th-Century Art Education: Arthur Wesley Dow and Ernest Fenollosa," *Visual Arts Research*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 104-115.

artworks out of the country.[90] Concerning Fenollosa's academic study of Chinese and Japanese art, religious studies scholar Bernard Faure criticizes it as an invalid product of "secondary Orientalism," the action of reverting Orientalism, in which the East was created as a projected mirror image that surpassed the West.[91] Faure further points out that Fenollosa promoted the aestheticizing tendency of Buddhist imageries by focusing on the color and line from a universal point of view.[92] In other words, purely from an art historical point of view, Faure asserts that Fenollosa, as a secondary Orientalist of Asian art, encouraged the aestheticization of Buddhist imageries but failed to look at their cultic functions. However, this strong criticism of Fenollosa has ignored his role as a "modern Buddhist" and his understanding of the "religious significance" of Buddhism imageries of his own time period.

A Modern Buddhist's Gaze

Fenollosa was one of the first Americans to convert to Buddhism in Japan. According to his wife Mary Fenollosa's recollection, Fenollosa became quite interested in Buddhism during his visits to old Japanese temples in the early 1880s.[93] In 1885, he converted to Tendai Buddhism along with Bigelow under the direction of Sakurai Keitoku 桜井敬徳 (1834-1889), the abbot of Miidera 三井寺 (officially known as Onjōji 園城寺), which is located in present-day Ōtsu 大津

90 For the narrative depicting him as a savior of the arts of Japan, see Richard T. Arndt, "Saving Art: Some Early American Rescuers," *The Yale Review*, vol. 87, no. 3 (1999): 88-95; For discussion of hostility towards him, see Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, Freer: A Legacy of Art (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 131-32; Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 41-2.

91 Bernard Faure, "The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 770-74.

92 Faure, "The Buddhist Icon," 773.

93 Mary Fenollosa, "Preface," in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), xx.

city, Shiga 滋賀 prefecture. It is no exaggeration to say that Fenollosa's own fascination with the aesthetically rich forms of Buddhist art led to his devotion to the Tendai Buddhism of the time. However, unlike traditional Buddhists who devoted themselves to ritualistic and cultic practices through the worship of Buddhist objects and icons for this-worldly or other-worldly benefits, Fenollosa was a "modern Buddhist" who treated Buddhism, as Mary suggested, "as a religion and a constructive philosophy."[94] His interpretation of Buddhism was a product of his unique time when Buddhist faith in Japan went through a rapid process of modernization and Westernization. In order to understand Fenollosa's idea of "Buddhism as a religion," we need to look at a specific religious movement known as "New Buddhism"—the rationalization of Buddhism into a philosophy of religion that was deeply influenced by Social Darwinism and Hegelian philosophy.

During the early Meiji period, Buddhism came to be the target of harsh persecution through an anti-Buddhism campaign known as *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 (literally, "abolishing Buddhism and destroying Shākyamuni").[95] Consequently, Buddhism was identified as a corrupt, decadent, superstitious, degenerate, and parasitic creed, something that stood in stark opposition to Meiji Japan's pursuit of advanced Westernization and modernization. Backed by this logic, the Buddhist reformers aligned Buddhism with scientific rationalism, appropriating it in full accord with the Western idea of "religion." Moreover, in response to the demand of distinctive national identity, the defenders established the superiority of Buddhism in presenting indigenous

94 Fenollosa, "Preface," xx.

95 For discussion of the persecution of Buddhism, see James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

heritage in guise of Western philosophy, creating a new relationship between Buddhism and the nation.[96]

In distinguishing this "new" Buddhism in the modern period from the "old" Buddhism in the premodern period, Japanese religion scholar Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一 provides a fundamental conception of "religion as belief" to understand the core nature of the "New Buddhism."[97] Essentially, the "New Buddhism" was perceived as philosophical religion that one believed, not one centered on ritual praxis as in the premodern period. In other words, the essence of Buddhism was redefined as spiritual experience rather than ritual practice, as the latter — the centrality of the "old" Buddhism was labelled as a component of superstition — signs of irrationality, and thus, dismissed by Buddhist revivalists in Japan during the Meiji period. For example, for Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858-1919), a student of Fenollosa at the Tokyo Imperial University and one of the most prominent Buddhist reformers of the time, the elimination of superstition became the major goal in the process of the modernization of Japanese Buddhism.[98] As a result, these reformers purposely excluded Buddhist objects in the shape of the rationalized interpretation of Japanese Buddhism. However, it did not necessarily mean that Buddhist art in temples was thoroughly ignored during the Meiji period. Instead, Fenollosa, a Western authority

96 For discussion of the "New Buddhism" movement, see Kathleen M. Staggs, "'Defend the Nation and Love the Truth'. Inoue Enryō and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism," *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 38, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 251-81; Hayashi Makato, Ōtani Eiichi, and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Modern Buddhism in Japan* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2014).

97 Isomae Jun'ichi, *Kindai nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu: Shūkyō kokka, shintō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 36; Isomae Jun'ichi, "'Nihon shūkyōshi' o dakkyū saseru," *Shūkyō kenkyū*, no. 357 (2008): 69; quoted by Ōtani Eiichi, "The Movement Called 'New Buddhism' in Meiji Japan," in *Modern Buddhism in Japan*, edited by Makato, Ōtani, and Swanson (Nagaya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2014), 53-4; and Jason Ānanda Josephson, "When Buddhism Became a 'Religion': Religion and Superstition in the Writings of Inoue Enryō*," Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2006): 160.

98 Josephson, "When Buddhism Became a 'Religion'," 143-68.

in the eyes of Japanese, highly emphasized their religious significance in terms of aesthetic value.

If we merely view Fenollosa as an art critic, it is inevitable to interpret his "aesthetic mode" in a more secular way. In reality, as a modern Buddhist, Fenollosa frequently discussed his understanding of the relation between art and religion. For example, in "My Position in America," he wrote:

> I must demonstrate my right to be a power in the world of philosophical opinion. I must go back to my work on Hegel, I must inform myself on present psychologic progress, and I must bring them together on the basis of Buddhist mysticism. Here, having established intellectual foundations, I may afterward pass beyond this beginning, and fearlessly construct on the basis of the mystical view…I should find my theory of art in the very depths of mystical individual human faculty, and in the laws of the sociological development of history. "[99]

From this writing, we can see that Fenollosa attempted to lay the foundation of his philosophical thought on "Buddhist mysticism" that combined Hegelianism and "psychologic progress."[100] In the following passage, he further stated that the religious theory should be used to serve "artistic ideality."[101] Unfortunately, Fenollosa did not give the definition of "Buddhist mysticism" here. Most likely, it referred to esoteric Tendai Buddhism that Fenollosa actively engaged with. He wrote his understanding of Tendai Buddhism in his book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*:

> This great esoteric sect, which ascribes magical power and direct contact with spirit to the human soul, was called, from its central sect, the Tendai sect…But the mysticism of the Tendai sect went to a range of psychological analysis which dwarfs the neo-Platonist. It assumes the world to be real rather than illusory; striving, evolution: a salvation through process—a salvation to be achieved within the body of society and human law—a

99 Ernest Fenollosa, "My position in America," *Ernest Fenollosa Compositions*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1890, 2.

100 The idea of "psychologic progress" referred to William James's scientific study of *The Principle of Psychology*, in which he argued the flux and continuity of human consciousness. See Jonathan, Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 45, note 55.

101 Fenollosa, "My Position," 3.

> salvation of personal freedom and self-directed illumination—a salvation by renouncing salvation for loving work…It is this, however, which gives the accompanying art its vivid value and piercing imagination.[102]

According to this passage, Fenollosa's understanding of the Tendai sect or Buddhist mysticism centered on the spiritual that could be analysed through a range of rational and scientific method of psychology. The other key point to be taken here was that Fenollosa highlighted the secular or mundane sphere of Tendai, that is, people could receive salvation in a real and evolutionary world instead of the other-worldly realm. By doing this, Fenollosa successfully allied his rhetoric of Buddhism with the prevalent scientific positivism. He further explained how the value and imagination of Tendai visual art could be obtained through the viewing of "natural facts" and "spiritual presence."[103] Therefore, the inner eye could behold the presence of Buddhist deities, such as Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other heavenly beings. This idea of Buddhist art echoed his theory of art that, as he claimed earlier, was deeply embedded in "human faculty" and evolutionary society. Moreover, he even wrote an unpublished article expounding on "The Relation of Art to Religion," where he treated art, particularly in East Asia, as a part of people's spiritual life; accordingly, the religious significance permeated through the production of art.[104] In this sense, Fenollosa's aesthetic concern can also be understood as a religious one. Yet the religious significance of Buddhist art, from Fenollosa's perspective, was no longer associated with cultic or ritual functions, but directed to various aesthetic forms. On the one hand, these

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102 Fenollosa*, Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 121-2.

103 Fenollosa*, Epochs*, 122.

104 Ernest Fenollosa, "The Relation of Art to Religion," *Ernest Fenollosa Compositions*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., n.d. Unfortunately, I do not have access to this article. As cited in Monica Chiu, *Asian Americans in New England: Culture and Community* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2009), 108.

forms resulted from artists' spiritual power of visualizing Buddhist deities; on the other hand, they could, in return, provoke beholders' instinctive sensation to the holiness of Buddhist imageries. These ideas were also reflected in Fenollosa's articulation of the Daitokuji set, which I will come back to later.

Boston Beholders: A Mystic View

Boston Esoteric Buddhists

In Chapter One, we have discussed about how the visual content of the Daitokuji arhat set met the social and religious needs of female patrons. Likewise, Fenollosa also attempted to satisfy his Boston audiences' expectations of Buddhist art by exhibiting the arhat paintings. Unfortunately, we do not have direct evidence demonstrating their response to those arhat paintings. However, the examination of their religious need for Buddhism at large may provide some clues. In 1886, an article titled "Esoteric Buddhism in Boston" published in the *New York Times* discussed the popularity of esoteric Buddhism in Boston:

> At afternoon teas, even, it [Buddhism] is a frequent topic of conversation; Sinnett's books on the subject are everywhere read and commented upon, and such is the demand for them that the Archway bookstore (where they once gave china dogs or diamond rings to every purchaser) has a pile of Esoteric Buddhisms and Occult Worlds at least two, and more nearly three, feet high, and is selling them, to use the proprietor's own elegant expression, "like hot cakes."[105]

Four years later, Bostonian fantasies with Buddhist mysticism were satirized in an article in *The Washington Post*. It states:

> The truth is a Boston man wants something a good deal profounder than Christianity for his mighty intellect to wrestle with. Buddha can enmesh him in the web of intellectual ecstasy, can tell him weird, ghostly stories of a thousand reincarnations in the past and

105 "Esoteric Buddhism in Boston." *New York Times.* February 27, 1886. https://www.newspapers.com/image/20652050/?terms=Esoteric%20Buddhism%20in%20Boston&match=1 (accessed September 1, 2020)

> promise him a thousand more in the time to come. Therefore, Buddha is warmly welcomed. He is so full of mystery that if you attempt to understand him you totter on the delightful brink of insanity, and get so mixed up that you can't tell whether you are the wisest man that ever lived or a driveling idiot. For these reasons he is full of fascination—better than the dreams of opium or the hysterics of hashish, a perfect leg tangler, so to speak.[106]

To a large extent, this text resembled Buddhist rationalists' negative attitude towards Buddhist mysticism. This so-called rational interpretation of Buddhism in the West was led by the first generation of Buddhist scholars, such as Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852), T.W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), Caroline Rhys Davids (1857-1942), and Max Müller (1823-1900). They argued for the importance of the earliest Buddhist canon in understanding of the authentic Buddhism, as these texts presented a rational philosophy and ethics taught by the historical Buddha, which perfectly fit into the Protestant values of the time in the West. This textual-centered approach of Buddhist studies results from what Buddhist scholar Gregory Schopen has aruged to be "Protestant presuppositions" that have emphasized the value of religious scriptures and deemphasized popular religious practices.[107] In order to protect their authorities on the subject and Western cultural imperialism, these modern Buddhist scholars deemphasized Buddhist visual materials for their direct connection to what they claimed to be irrational, mysterious, and superstitious practices and beliefs of later, degenerate Mahāyāna Buddhism. Müller went on the offensive at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1880, claiming that Japanese Buddhism is "a corruption of the pure doctrine of the Royal Prince [Buddha]" and "the silly and mischievous stories of

106 "Buddhism in Boston." *The Wichita Eagle*. April 25, 1891. https://www.newspapers.com/image/80626966/?terms=a%20good%20deal%20profounder%20than%20Christianity%20for%20his%20mighty&match=1 (accessed September 1, 2020)

107 Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no.1 (August, 1991): 1-23.

Amitābha and his paradise."[108] Notably, this type of thought in the West exerted profound impact on Japanese Buddhist revivalists who made great effort to separate the "New Buddhism" from Buddhist visual culture in order to fit the Western standard. However, Fenollosa along with other Bostonian Japanophile connoisseurs such as William Sturgis Bigelow (1850-1926), Henry Adams (1838-1918), Edward Morse (1838-1925), and John La Farge (1835-1910), held a different perspective from those of Buddhist rationalists. Generally, Buddhist rationalists studied Buddhist scriptures for philosophical enlightenment, whereas these connoisseurs embraced the mystical nature of Buddhist art to satisfy their craving for religious truth.

In order to escape from the materialism, industrialism, and positivism that dominated the cultural climate of their time and place, these Boston elites were deeply involved in occultism, mysticism, psychic power, or esoterism through the visual medium of Buddhist imageries that Buddhist rationalists defined as superstitious idols.[109] Their ultimate goal of life, as Bigelow stated, was to "acquire freedom from the limitations of the material world by substituting volitional for sensory consciousness."[110] Therefore, they were often obsessed with "hidden sources of religious truth and meaning and by belief in a spiritual or nonmaterial realm," and they also showed great enthusiasm for exotic culture, particularly, "the aesthetically rich forms of Mahayana Buddhism found in East Asia."[111] In other words, as Christine Guth states, their

108 A quotation from Rainer Schulzer, *Inoue Enryo: A Philosophical Portrait* (New York: State University of New York Press), 232.

109 For more discussion of the spiritual crisis of Boston brahmins, see Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

110 William Sturgis Bigelow, *Buddhism and Immortality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 78.

111 Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and The Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 51, 70.

"receptivity to Buddhist art was informed by a heightened sensitivity to and often intensely personal involvement in Buddhism."[112] In short, their concern with Buddhism centered on an aesthetic approach to religious meaning. That is to say, the visual stimuli played a significant role in provoking their spiritual experience of universal truth.

The Religious Significance of the Daitokuji Set: A Visual Medium for Achieving Spiritual Mysteries

In premodern times, the lay patrons of the Daitokuji set viewed the paintings as a sacred agency for fulfilling their religious need—this-worldly achievements, safety, and happiness as well as a better rebirth in the afterlife. Moving to the modern period, the "old" religious significance of Buddhist art turned out to be invalid from the perspective of Buddhist rationalists. Nevertheless, New England of the 1890s witnessed the proliferation of a type of spiritualism that promoted "psychical mysteries as a means of personal salvation."[113] For Boston Buddhist beholders, they shared recognition of these premodern Buddhist paintings as a religious medium for achieving spiritual mysteries.

First of all, let us look at how Fenollosa presented this religious importance to his audiences in the catalogue of the 1894 exhibition of the forty-four arhat paintings from the Daitokuji in the MFA. The Introduction of the catalogue began with a discussion of Chinese art at large. Fenollosa promoted the prominence of the art of painting over sculpture, as the former was able to represent the harmony between man and nature as well as the transcendent aspects of this world and the otherworldly through the art of color and line. He also emphasized that the

112 Christine Guth, "The Cult of Kannon among Nineteenth Century American Japanophiles," *Orientations* (Dec. 1995): 28.

113 Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, 105.

importance of Chinese influence on Japanese art, especially, Buddhist art. Thus, he concluded that it was necessary to study Chinese art in order to obtain a full understanding of Japanese art.[114] This principle guided Fenollosa in his writing on Chinese and Japanese art in the book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. Notably, he placed the impact of Buddhism as central to the development of both Chinese and Japanese art:

> The introduction of Buddhism into China from India, and eventually through China to Corea, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Japan, was one of those stupendous revolutions, like the carrying of Christianity to the Gentiles, which well-nigh obliterate racial and national lines, and bring humanity to pay common tribute to spiritual forces. How profoundly Chinese and Japanese civilization in general, and art in particular, were gradually transformed by this quiet, pungent influence, has never been written by any native scholar, and hardly even conceived by any European…The truth is that a very large part of the finesse thought and standards of living that have gone into Chinese life, and the finest of what has issued therefrom in literature and art, have been strongly tinged with Buddhism. To write the history of the Chinese soul without seriously considering Buddhism, would be like writing the history of Europe under the hypothesis that Christianity was a foreign and alien faith whose re-rooting in Western soil had been sporadic, disturbing, and on the whole deleterious.[115]

Most scholars have discussed Fenollosa's understanding of Chinese and Japanese art in terms of his formalist approach of "line, spacing, and color." They have rarely noticed the essential role of Buddhism in Fenollosa's framing of the history of Chinese and Japanese art, regardless of the fact that Fenollosa affirmed it in many of his writings. For example, in the book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Fenollosa articulated the art of the Tang (618-907) and Fujiwara period (794-1185) as "mystical art" under the influence of Tiantai/Tendai Buddhism accordingly, while the art of the Song and Ashikaga period (1336-1573) as "idealist art" under Chan/Zen

114 Such perception was also reflected in his arrangement of the exhibitions of Japanese art in the Japanese room and the corridor adjoining of the MFA. The early collection of Chinese art in the MFA was not for the display of the history of Chinese art, but for demonstrating the continental origin of Japanese art in its history. See J.E. Cabot, "Report of the Committee on the Museum", in *Annal Report for the Year of 1890* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), 10.

115 Fenollosa, *Epochs*, 28-9.

Buddhism. It is not an exaggeration to say that the concepts of Buddhism penetrated his construction of the premodern history of East Asian art. Particularly, in the catalogue, Fenollosa proposed the Song dynasty as the great period of the highest positive stimulating potency of Buddhism and the culmination of Buddhist art.[116] Following this, Fenollosa attempted to show the legitimacy of the Mahayana Buddhism that was belittled by prominent Western Buddhist scholars of the time. He defined it as "the mystical evolutionary Church of the North," which was quite different from "the southern exoteric and agnostic Buddhism."[117] According to Fenollosa, the latter focused on man only, whereas the former dealt with man, society, nature, art, and worship. Meanwhile, similar to Christianity, Buddhism constantly adapted itself to the needs of humanity through its subsequent evolution. This evolutionary idea of Buddhism under the influence of Social Darwinism was also reiterated in *Epochs*:

> Northern Buddhism, they [Western Buddhist scholars] think, being derivative, revolutionary and corrupt, need be studied only as a perverse curiosity. The great truth that they forgot is that Buddhism, like Christianity—and unlike Mohammedanism—has been an evolutionary religion, never content with old formalisms, but, filled with spiritual ardor, continually re-adapting itself to the needs of the human nature with which it finds itself in contact…it became still more positive, social, and human with the great practical home-loving races of China and Japan.[118]

He further identified Mahayana Buddhism as "positive" and labeled those Western Buddhologists' negative ideas of Mahayana as "self-contradictory." He highlighted the evolutionary character of Buddhism that evolved from "old formalisms" to "spiritual ardor." Simply put, he relocated the essence of Buddhism from ritual practices to spiritual experience in order to "adapt itself to the needs of the human nature." From here, we can observe that

116 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 5-6.

117 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 6.

118 Fenollosa, *Epochs*, 38-9.

Fenollosa appeared to be fully aware of the ritual functions of Buddhist art in premodern times, however, he was probably also aware that these functions no longer demonstrated the efficacy of Buddhism to fulfill the expectations of modern audiences, particularly, Boston elites. Thus, when he introduced the Daitokuji set in the catalogue, he put emphasis upon pictorial form of the arhat paintings through the description of mystical elements rather than their original potency in the worship rituals. He elucidated the nature of arhats as "men who in the flesh by a life of this inner absorption have won power over nature, over the wills of men, and of the elemental world."[119] Clearly, he attempted to reshape the magic power of arhats as spiritual potency, in his own words, "an incident of the superior potency of thought."[120] This also reflected the aforementioned perception of Buddhist mysticism that, he argued, emphasized human's spirituality.

In terms of the visual contents of the arhat paintings that he picked for the exhibition, he highlighted those illustrated "the magical deeds of the great Rakan [Arhat], in contemplation, in transfiguration, in their power over nature, animals, and men, in their benevolence even to denizens of the lower world, in their communication with the powers of the spiritual spheres, especially with the great Bodhisattwa."[121] Apparently, he had great interest in the depiction of the arhats' mystical power rather than those rendering their mundane life as the common Buddhist monks during the Song period. His choice of the frontispiece of the catalogue further testified his fascination with supermundane scenes, particularly Bodhisattva. It was a reproduction of the well-known painting titled as *Luohan Manifesting Himself as an Eleven-Headed Guanyin*

119 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Buddhist Paintings, Lend by The Temple Daitokuji, of Kioto, Japan* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1894), 7.

120 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 7.

121 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 8.

(Figure. 14), which was one of the ten arhat paintings purchased by the MFA after the exhibition, most likely, under the guidance of Fenollosa.[122] This painting shows the magical power of the arhat in the process of transfiguration into an eleven-headed Guanyin or Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, a deity that was favored by the Bostonian Japanophile collectors mentioned earlier.[123]

Following the pattern of his Japanese predecessors, Fenollosa also placed the author of these paintings in the limelight under the impact of the traditional Japanese articulation of the importance of antiquities based on artists' lineage and authority. However, differing from Japanese promotion of Guanxiu as the author, Fenollosa instead attributed these paintings to Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106), another celebrated Chinese painter and his followers. He pointed out two reasons supporting his assertion: one, Guanxiu's style did not belong to, what he called the "ideal beauty" of the Song;[124] second, the depiction of figures against landscape background, in other words, the narrative style, emerged after Guanxiu's epoch.[125] Fenollosa highly appraised the aesthetic distinctiveness of Li's work as "perfection of style" based on his standard of line, spacing, and color.[126] More importantly, he argued that Li and his followers created a school of Buddhist painting that was the origin of the Takuma school 宅間派 during the Kamakura period

122 This painting has been widely discussed by scholars. It is generally thought that this painting depicts the monk Baozhi 寶志 (418-514) manifesting himself as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. See Fong, *Five Hundred Lohans*, 197-99; *Daitokuji denrai Gohyaku rakan zu*, 98.

123 For discussion of their allure of the Guanyin (Jp: Kannon), see Guth, "The Cult of Kannon," 28-34. The other nine paintings kept in the MFA also reflect this aesthetic taste for mystical and supermundane element, please refer to Figures 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23.

124 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 8.

125 Wen Fong and Richard Kent hold the same opinion. See Kent, "Depictions of the Guardian of the Law," 192.

126 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 10.

(1192-1333).[127] From what Fenollosa described, it is clear that he called great attention to the importance of the lineage of Buddhist paintings. For his Boston audiences, none of them were interested in the intension of the creation of these paintings, or they actually had no access to this information because of their lack of the capability of reading classic Chinese at the time. In the meantime, these Boston beholders including Fenollosa himself did not understand the traditional Chinese standard of the quality of paintings due to their limited knowledge of Chinese language and culture. Apart from his own criteria of line, spacing, and color, Fenollosa still needed historical endorsement, that is, the fame of the painter in both China and Japan, to reveal the significance of the Daitokuji set. In line with this goal, Fenollosa's designation of Li as the author of these paintings became more intelligible.

Pertaining to the religious importance, Fenollosa saw these paintings as visual stimuli that evoked "the neophyte's aspiration toward Rakanship," or enhanced "the potency of his contemplative prayer."[128] This idea may be influenced by the sensuous aspects of the Tiantai Buddhism that stressed the relation between inner mediation and external contemplation.[129] Here, the arhat paintings functioned as external visualization that helped viewers to magnify the potency of inner meditation to achieve universal truth. Fenollosa's statement with an emphasis on beholder's spiritual experience was echoed by the Boston elite Bernard Berenson's emotional response to the paintings. Berenson wrote about his experience of viewing these arhat paintings in a letter to his future wife, Mary Costelloe:

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127 The Takuma school is a school of Buddhist painting under the influence of Chinese style. It began with Takuma Shouga 宅磨勝賀 (fl. Ca. 1168-1209). For more information, see "Takumaha." *JAANUS*. Accessed April 4, 2021. http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/takumaha.htm; Fenollosa, *Epochs*, 203-4.

128 Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 8.

129 Fong, "Sacred and Humanistic," 254.

> Fenollosa…showed me a series of Chinese pictures from the twelfth century which revealed a new world to me. To begin with they had compositions of figures and groups as perfect and simple as the best that we Europeans have ever done. Then they had, what we never dream of in oriental art, powerful characterization, now surpassing Dürer, and now Gentile Bellini…I was prostrate. Fenollosa shivered as he looked, I thought I should die, and even Denman Ross who looked dumpy Anglo-Saxon, was jumping up and down. We had to poke and pinch each other's necks and wept. No, decidedly I never had such an art experience. I do not wonder Fenollosa has gone into esoteric Buddhism. What is so convincing as art! And where ever was religion so manifested as in these paintings.[130]

When Berenson beheld these paintings, as a "neophyte," he immediately realized the "powerful characterization" of Buddhist art in converting Fenollosa to esoteric Buddhism. Moreover, he viewed Buddhist art as the visual manifestation of Buddhist faith. That is to say, from Berenson's perspective, the experience of contemplating these arhat paintings was not a secularized cultural practice but a religious gaze of a connoisseur. This visual experience he later defined as a timeless "aesthetic moment", that is, "a moment of mystic vision."[131] Here, Berenson suggested that beholding art created a mystical moment of reaching a higher religious realm that transcended ordinary awareness.[132] Overall, similar to Fenollosa's view, Berenson also saw art and religion as an inseparable intertwinement.[133]

Freer and His Collection of Two Arhat Paintings

Along the lines of his contemporaries, such as Fenollosa, Bigelow, Adams, and La Farge, Freer also displayed his deep sympathy for Buddhism and Buddhist art in China and Japan. Religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed views him as "a romantic Buddhist sympathizer who

130 Bernard Berenson, *The Bernard Berenson treasury: a selection from the works, unpublished writings, letters, diaries, and journals of the most celebrated humanist and art historian of our times, 1887-1958* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 73-4.

131 Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), 93.

132 Pyne, "Portrait," 75.

133 Pyne, "Portrait," 94.

sought religious truth and aesthetic value in multiple traditions and cultures."[134] Freer turned his attention to Buddhist art to cultivate his both religious and aesthetic imagination that was based upon what he called "a mysterious something."[135] In this regard, Tweed defines Freer's collection as "an expression of the romantic interest in Buddhism and an affirmation of late-Victorian religious and aesthetic inclusivism."[136] In fact, Freer was the first American who devoted a large amount of time and effort to assemble a major collection of Chinese Buddhist art in the United States.[137] Daisy Yiyou Wang, a curator of Chinese and East Asian art, argues that the motivation behind Freer's fascination with Buddhist art was not merely aesthetic considerations, market conditions, or international relations, but was also related to his spiritual approach.[138] His substantial collection of scholarship in his personal library shows us his deep interest in Chinese Buddhism.[139] Besides, he was probably influenced by his art advisor Fenollosa who proposed the central role of Buddhism in the development of Chinese art, as I mentioned earlier. Beyond that, Freer personally embarked on a spiritual journey to the cave temples a Longmen and other Buddhist sites. In his dairy, he recorded his spiritual and mystical experience at the Longmen caves:

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134 Thomas A. Tweed, "The Spiritual Origins of the Freer Gallery of Art: Religious and Aesthetic Inclusivism and the First American Buddhist Vogue, 1879-1907," *Japanese Journal of American and Canadian Studies*, no. 24 (2006), 53.

135 Tweed, "The Spiritual Origins," 53.

136 Tweed, "The Spiritual Origins," 54.

138 For more discussion of this topic, see Daisy Yiyou Wang, "Charles Lang Freer and the Collecting of Chinese Buddhist Art in Early-Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2016): 401-416.

139 For example, he had Ernest J. Eitel's book named *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*. See Wang, "Charles Lang Freer," 410.

> Its grip upon me constantly increases, it makes me almost feverish an influence from the souls of these stone saints…Centuries of work of the great Chinese artistic periods are represented here—it cannot be appreciated in full by any one person during an average life time. Its beauty is varied and has something new to disclose each time it is seen. It's of a fascinating and illusive kind. Behind and deeper is its spiritual meaning which forces itself upon one constantly, and this side of the matter is entirely beyond my understanding. I should have lived many lives to grasp it.[140]

Apparently, Freer affirmed his belief in the Buddhist idea of incarnation despite the fact that he did not formally convert himself to Buddhism as Fenollosa and Bigelow did. Meanwhile, Freer attempted to describe his encounter with Buddhist art at the Longmen caves that provided access for him to interact with a higher realm beyond his understanding. From this description, it is clear that Freer did not merely view Buddhist art merely for the sake of its aesthetic value but also for its potency or power to create a spiritual communion between man and Buddhist mystical realm.

The story about the two arhat scrolls that were collected by Freer is well known. He bought the one now known as *Luohan Laundering* (Figure 24) from Fenollosa in 1902.[141] According to Fenollosa's letter to Freer, when Fenollosa returned the paintings to the Japanese agent after the exhibition, he found two misplaced scrolls that were never displayed in the exhibition and received one as a gift from the Japanese agent. However, due to the lack of the historical records that could testify to Fenollosa's statement, some scholars cast doubt upon this claim. For example, Warren Cohen threw out some critical questions about this story as follows:

> Should he purchase a piece for himself or for the museum? When his liaison with a woman other than his wife led to divorce, scandalous in Victorian Boston, and the loss of his job, might he be tempted to promote precisely those works he wanted to sell from his collection? Simply stated, the curator/collector/dealer/art historian roles are rife with the

140 Charles Lang Freer, Diary, November 11, 1910, CLFP. Quoted by Wang, "Charles Lang Freer," 412.

141 Freer paid $1,640 for this painting to Fenollosa. In fact, this painting was the first Chinese Buddhist art piece acquired by Freer. Wang, "Charles Lang Freer," 402-3.

> danger of conflict of interest. Fenollosa does not seem to have struggled very hard to suppress his entrepreneurial instincts.[142]

Apparently, Cohen questions the authenticity of Fenollosa's narrative about the painting and tends to depict him as a greedy art dealer who seemed to take advantage of his position to loot antiquities from Japan for his own benefit or for the sake of the MFA. However, the latest evidence from Fenollosa's letters collected in the Houghton Library of Harvard University indicates that Fenollosa was actually against the dispersal of the Daitokuji set.[143] In terms of the solution of the Daitukoji's financial need, he provided three options to the Japanese agent: 1) the most preferable option was to preserve the set in the Imperial Museum in Tokyo; 2) an alternative one was to offer the set to the MFA; 3) the last alernative was to divide the set up and sell scrolls individually. From the agent's perspective, neither giving it to the Imperial Museum nor selling the whole set to the MFA appeared to be the best way to acquire a considerable monetary sum. Therefore, the agent firmly preferred the last option, as he believed that it would be easier to find buyers for one or more scrolls rather than the whole set.[144] In other words, it was not Fenollosa who promoted the selling of these paintings but the Japanese side.

Moreover, despite a lack of evidence, it was unlikely that Fenollosa would purchase this painting from the Japanese agent as Cohen implies if we look at the visual content of the painting. *Luohan Laundering* (Figure 24) portrays a mundane scene of the task of washing clothes by arhats. In this painting, there are five arhats and a servant painted in bright mineral color that strongly stands out in a monochromatic but animated landscape. They are divided into

142 Cohen, *East Asian Art and American,* 42.

143 Levine, *Daitokuji*, 307.

144 Levine*, Daitokuji*, 307.

three groups, two at the stream bank washing garments with their muscled arms; two on the right-side hanging robes on a distorting branch; behind them standing another arhat and a servant. Notable is the robe in deep blue and red colors that hang in branch of a gnarled, twisting, and dragon-shaped pine tree occupying the left side. The Southern Song painter Lin Tinggui presented these six figures including the robe in a circle at the center of the composition. Basically, it is a vivid picture of the daily life of the Buddhist monks during the Song period. Unlike the other scrolls with supermundane themes collected in the MFA, this painting is a purely mundane scene without any supernatural elements, such as, mystical clouds, supernatural beings, or furious animals. Based on his interest in Buddhist mysticism, most likely, Fenollosa would prefer supernatural themes to a mundane one. That is to say, he would not have chosen this painting if he had purchased one from the set. As I mentioned earlier, these American connoisseurs, like Fenollosa, Freer, Bernard, etc. treated the viewing of the arhat paintings as a religious moment rather than a purely aesthetic gaze. Suffice it to say, their fascination with Buddhist mysticism probably prompted their aesthetic preference for mysterious visual images.

Such view can be further enhanced by Freer's purchase of the other arhat painting now titled *the Rock Bridge at Mount Tiantai* (Figure 25), which had a supermundane scene. There is no record of how Freer acquired this painting. The only information we know is that Freer bought it in Tokyo in 1907. At the time, the Daitokuji set was still available in the market; thus, Freer probably had a chance to view the rest of the paintings or at least some of them, and chose the one he liked the most. Noteworthily, the selling of this painting to a foreigner may have provoked the Japanese government's alert on the Daitokuji set. This resulted in the government designating the remaining pictures of the set as a national treasure in the following year. Concerning the visual content of this painting, scholars generally agree that it is an illustration of

the legend of the monk Zhu Tanyou 竺曇猷 (fl. fourth century) encountering a group of holy monks at the Stone Bridge of the Mount Tiantai during the late fourth century.[145] With the emergence of a series of miraculous events, the Stone Bridge gradually became the holy residence of the Five Hundred Arhats. When English missionary Joseph Edkins (1823-1905) visited the bridge, he described it as follows:

> The loud roar of the waterfall, and the close-set woods on the hills around, the two mountain brooks uniting before they reach the cataract, then passing beneath the natural bridge down the fall, and thence pursuing their way to the north, united to give this spot an air of grandeur in the hermit's mind. It seemed a home for supernatural beings. It is they that cause the unusual appearance of nature. The luohans [arhat], those exalted disciples of Buddha, whose power and knowledge are so great, might reside here. In fact a legend on the subject soon grew into public belief, and the music of the luohans was said to be heard at times a little before dawn by priests lying awake in their cells. A choir of five hundred at that silent hour made the woods resound with harmony.[146]

His description shows us a sacred place with "an air of grandeur" that could be regarded as "a home for supernatural beings," namely, the Five hundred Arhats. Unlike Edkins, Freer did not have the opportunity to view this magnificent scenery in person. However, this painting gave him an opportunity to immerse himself into a mystical aura that he sought from a Buddhist painting. For Freer, perhaps the most attractive iconographic element of this painting is the two bands of mysterious clouds of the bottom and the upper portion. The strata of clouds in the foreground is supporting three arhats in the robes of full priesthood, which serves as the starting point of a viewer. Following their gentle gaze at the distance, we can find a tiny monk crossing the Stone Bridge. He slightly bends forward and devoutly looks up at another two arhats standing on the band of clouds in the upper portion. Incredibly, exquisite buildings appear through the

145 For discussion of this paining, see Fong, "The Lohans and A Bridge to Heaven," 1-59; Fong, "Sacred and Humanistic," 215-270.

146 Quoted by Fong, "The Lohans and A Bridge to Heaven," 16-7; Fong, "Sacred and Humanistic," 220.

lacuna of the clouds. In the further background of the left is a spectacular waterfall cascading down the mountainside, strengthening a feeling of motion. All these features constitute "the unusual appearance of nature," as Edkins suggests, and the mystical vision of beauty and sublimity that Freer, as a romantic Buddhist, was most likely attracted to.

Conclusion

Indeed, the concept of Buddhism has always fluctuated along with the changing historical context. More importantly, different individuals with different educational and social backgrounds have brought forth diverse interpretations of Buddhism. Buddhist rationalists in the West who had ability to read Pali and Sanskrit asserted the authority of Buddhist scriptural texts. Under the influence of this mainstream of the earliest Buddhist studies in the West, the "New Buddhism" reformers in Japan intended to separate Buddhist practices from beliefs, making Buddhism on par with scientific rationalism as a way of displaying the advancements made by Japanese civilization. Nevertheless, for Fenollosa and the New England elites, their understanding of Buddhism was intertwined with the predominant intellectual trends of the time, such as Hegelianism, Darwinism, mysticism, spiritualism, transcendentalism, among others. Thus, the interpretation of Buddhism that emerged in this heterodox intellectual milieu was indeed unique. Within this sophisticated interpretative framework of Buddhism, Fenollosa and his circles generated a mystic view of Buddhist art as a visual medium for entering a higher religious and spiritual realm. In this regard, they sought a sense of mystery through the picturesque illustration of the arhats' supernatural powers. Such powers included flying on clouds, taming wild animals, transfiguring into a Bodhisattva, and saving hungry ghosts, which, among others, inspired or enhanced their spiritual connection to the ideal of universal truth.

Chapter Three. Anesaki Masaharu: A Transcendental View of "Zen Art"

Introduction

As a member of the second generation of advocates for the modernization of Buddhism, especially Japanese Buddhism, Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949) is well known as the founding father of "religious studies" (*shūkyōgaku* 宗教学) in Japan.[147] Much has been written about Anesaki, his religious thought, and his contributions to the formation of the discipline of religious studies in Japan, however, comparatively little has been written about his book about Buddhist art collected by the MFA during his tenure at Harvard from 1913 to 1915. In 1913, Anesaki was the first visiting Japanese professor appointed to occupy the chair of Japanese Literature and Life at Harvard. The establishment of this chair at Harvard was the result of cultural diplomacy between Japan and the United States during the politically uneasy period after the Russo-Japanese war in 1905. Numerous events added to the anti-Japanese movement in the United States: namely, the widespread increase of the "yellow peril"[148] polemic, the Japanese immigration issues, the rumors of the war between two countries, among others. It was within this tense political and diplomatic atmosphere that the idea of inviting a Japanese professor to teach Japanese civilization at Harvard was born. Anesaki, a prominent religious scholar with well-established reputation in both Japan and abroad, was nominated to fulfill this task.

[147] For discussion of the establishment of the academic discourse of Religious Studies in Japan, see Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 55-67.

[148] In the summer of 1900, Kaiser Wilhelm II made a famous speech of "yellow peril" rhetoric in respond to the Boxer Rebellion. At the same year, Anesaki studied in Germany and experienced anti-Japanese sentiment around him. After the Russo-Japanese war, the "yellow peril" polemic spread widely in the West. See Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 164-66.

Noteworthy is that during his tenure at Harvard, Anesaki directed his efforts through research on Buddhist art to explain Japanese civilization to his American audiences. Intriguingly, in his treatment of Buddhist art collected in the MFA, Anesaki viewed the arhat paintings from the Daitokuji set as "Zen art." As a religious scholar who promoted the modern form of Buddhism, making it on par with Christianity, he formulated a peculiar reading of the arhats paintings as the manifestation of the nature in the arhats' mind, which was dramatically different from his contemporary Fenollosa. It is interesting to ask why Anesaki presented the arhats paintings in such an unexpected manner. In order to understand the motivation behind this view of the arhat paintings, this chapter will first examine his political and academic stance as a religious scholar and a visiting professor at Harvard by looking at the political context of Japan-U.S relations at the time. Then, we will closely examine his view of the arhat paintings in the framework of his concept of "Buddhist art," more particularly, "Zen art" under the influence of his academic and political stance.

Political Context: Japan-U.S. Estrangement after the Russo-Japanese War

From 1913 to 1915, on the recommendation of the Harvard Club of Japan, Anesaki, as the Chair of the Science of Religion at Tokyo Imperial University, was appointed the first Japanese professor of Japanese Literature and Life at Harvard University. The Japanese professorship was established at Harvard in 1912 with Japanese and American financial support. On June 27, 1913*, The Japan Times* published an article titled "Dr. Anesaki at Harvard," which gave some information about how the Chair at Harvard was established:

> The idea of establishing a professorship of Japanese at Harvard University germinated a few years ago in a conversation of certain Americans and Japanese in New York. The idea gradually assumed a more concrete form, and in course of time was suggested to Japan. It was taken up for discussion by the Harvard Club of Japan, which, with nearly

> fifty members who are prominent in official, literary, and business circles, is in constant and intimate communication with the mother university and its fraternal associations. The question was studied and was progressing, when the death of Marquis Komura, who was a Harvard graduate and was taking much interest in the matter, put a block in the way of progressing in 1911. The matter was left where it stood for some time. The visit of President-Emeritus Charles W. Eliot in the spring of 1912 gave it a fresh impetus. Immediately after his departure from Japan subscription was open for a fund to attain the end proposed.[149]

This entry makes clear that Harvard Club of Japan played a significant role in promoting the initiation of the Japanese professorship at Harvard.

The club was established in the year of 1898 by a group of prominent Harvard graduates in Tokyo and Yokohama.[150] Particularly noteworthy of mention are Kaneko Kentarō 金子堅太郎 (1854-1942), Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, Komura Jutarō 小村壽太郎 (1855-1911), Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kurino Shinichiro 栗野慎一郎 (1851-1937), the first Japanese ambassador to France, Megata Tanetaro 目賀田種太郎 (1853-1953), Director-General of the Taxation Bureau, and Kikkawa Chokichi 吉川重吉 (1860-1915), a member of the Japanese peerage. Kaneko was elected as the first president of the Club, followed by Komura from 1902 until his appointment as Japanese Ambassador in the Great Britain in 1906. His successor was Megata, and then Kikkawa in 1913. These Japanese graduates were the first-generation of Japanese students who were officially sent to study at Harvard during the 1870s

[149] "Dr. Anesaki at Harvard." *The Japan Times,* June 27, 1913. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

[150] "Harvard Club." *The Japan Times*, May 11, 1898. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

and 1880s. After their graduation, they were given high positions in the Meiji government, in particular, those actively involved with Japan-U.S. relations with the aim of improving ties.

At the very beginning, this social club was established for the purpose of fostering friendship between Japanese and American graduates in Tokyo.[151] However, because of their political background and their active participations in international affairs, the purpose of the Club shifted from that of a local alumni association to one of a national-level organization involved in promoting mutual understanding and friendship of Japan and America. For example, at a meeting in 1902, the Club discussed the possibility of including the United States in the Anglo-Japanese alliance.[152] In 1904, the Club held a special meeting in honor of Komura and Kurino for their efforts in the Russo-Japanese negotiations.[153] The purpose of this meeting was to address the American people's "extraordinary sympathy for Japan simply because she is fighting for justice and for the good of the word."[154] Seeking international sympathy, in particular, America's support, was one of the key goals of Japan's diplomatic relations during and after the war. In the same year, shortly after the declaration of war with Russia, the former president of the Harvard Club of Japan, Kaneko delivered a speech on the reasons behind the Russo-Japanese War at Harvard, showing the just cause of Japan in the war in an effort to promote the good

[151] "Harvard Club." *The Japan Times*, May 11, 1898. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

[152] "The Harvard Club of Japan," *The Japan Times*, March 15, 1902. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

[153] "The Harvard Club of Japan," *The Japan Times*, May 27, 1904. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

[154] "The Harvard Club of Japan," *The Japan Times*, May 27, 1904. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

feeling of the United States toward Japan's war cause. Notably, he touched upon the prevailing idea at the time that the Russo-Japanese War was a struggle between paganism (Buddhism) and Christianity. He stated that, "Such men argue that, as Russia is a Christian nation, while Japan is pagan, it is the duty of the Christian peoples—of all Christendom in fact—to aid Russia in her effort to crush Japan."[155] It seems that the Russian side attempted to put Japan in the position of fighting against the whole Christian-based Western civilization, portraying the war as the conflict between two different religions. For his American audiences, Kaneko had to clarify that Japan's intention was to fight for its national existence, for the peace of Asia, and for the promotion of peaceful commercial relations with Western countries, especially Great Britain and the United States. He also pointed out that Japanese citizens enjoyed the religious freedom that Americans did, attempting to present Japan as a civilized and liberal country and to eliminate the cultural differences between Japan and the West in religious terms. Suffice it to say, the war made Japanese leaders and intellectuals realize Japan's disadvantageous position in international relations due to the differing logic between the Eastern and Western civilizations. It also reminded them of the necessity of emphasizing the affinity of Christianity and Buddhism in order to promote mutual understanding and cultural interchange with its Western allies, particularly the United States. Anesaki, the leading scholar of religious studies, played a vital role in this political-oriented academic movement, which will be discussed later.

The Harvard Club regularly held social events for its members and some important American figures, including American politicians, visiting professors, and missionaries. They usually exchanged their ideas on the current relationship between Japan and the United States by

[155] Kentaro Kaneko, *The Situation in the Far East. An Address Delivered before Harvard University, under the Auspices of the Japan Club of Harvard, at Sanders Theatre, April 28, 1904* (Cambridge: The Japan Club of Harvard University, 1904), 17.

commonly addressing the importance of the promotion of a close friendship between two countries.[156] However, from the topics they talked about after the Russo-Japanese War, there is a detectable sense of tension between Japan and the States, such as the rumors of a potential war between the two countries and issues pertaining to Japanese immigration. These points of friction aside, the Club nevertheless steadfastly held to its position of promoting mutual understanding and friendly feelings between the two countries.

Indeed, the Russo-Japanese War became the starting point for Japanese-American estrangement. Before and during the war, American leaders and the public showed great sympathy toward Japan, largely due to their awareness of Japan's great indebtedness to America's help with their modernization and Japan's own diplomatic efforts.[157] Particularly, members of the Harvard Club of Japan such as Komura and Kaneko endeavored to present Japan as a civilized country in an effort to fight for its national existence and the peace of Asia.[158] After the war, Japan was recognized as the great power of Asia, at the same time that the fear of "yellow peril" expanded throughout the West. In many newspaper articles from the main Western countries, the image of Japan was created as a powerful and ambitious invader who would drive the Western power out of Asia and even attack America.[159] The circulation of this groundless rumor in the West aroused some American people's suspicion of Japanese military ambitions. Consequently, the anti-Japanese feeling began to rise in the United States.

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[156] "The Harvard Club," *The Japan Times*, December 1, 1907. http://ipm-archives.japantimes.co.jp.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/dpscripts/DpSearch.dll?DpAllSearch (accessed September 2, 2020)

[157] Hikomatsu Kamikawa, *Japan-American Diplomatic Relations in the Meiji-Taisho Era* (Tokyo: Pan-Pacific Press, 1958), 204-264.

[158] Kamikawa, *Japan-American*, 204-8; Kaneko, *The Situation.*

[159] Payson J. Treat, *Japan and the United States 1853-1921* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921): 184-5.

To the Japanese, the military successes of Japan may inspire some individual Japanese to dream of a great imperial expansion, like that of the European powers. However, the opinion-making elites in Japan of the time realized the costly price of their increased militarization. As a transnational intellectual, Anesaki insightfully observed the struggling of Japan as a nation after the Russo-Japanese War. At the time, an air of uneasiness prevailed in Japan. The enthusiasm of the victory of the war did not eclipse the resultant force of underlying social problems. As he suggests, the period was marked by serious consideration of moral and religious questions, readjustment of educational institutions, economic agitation, and political instability.[160] In spite of the increasing degree of self-confidence as a civilized power that resulted from its successful military expansion in the Asiatic continent, the war also put Japan in a bad position of pursuing its national existence abroad.[161] Moreover, by investigating the ideas expressed in Japanese newspapers and journals in the years before and after the war, it was clear that what Japan needed was peaceful development through economic and cultural activities rather than military ones.[162] Thus, keeping good relationship with its Western friends, particularly, the United States, was always the first priority of Japan's foreign policy. As I mentioned earlier, it was also frequently addressed by the members of the Harvard Club of Japan.

Despite Japan's pursuit of a peaceful approach, Americans seemed to believe in the possibility of war with Japan. Such American consciousness led to anti-Japanese attitudes in many aspects. Politically, Americans, particularly in California, were strongly opposed to

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[160] Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion, with Special Reference to the Social and Moral Life of the Nation* (Rutland, Vt: C.E. Tuttle, 1963): 385.

[161] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 386.

[162] Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 126-50.

Japanese immigration, which they viewed as Japanese military and territorial expansion in the United States. Racially, American leaders believed in the impossibility of the co-existence of Western and Asian civilization in the United States, a view clearly expressed by Theodore Roosevelt in his anti-Japanese immigration stance.[163] Overall, after the Russo-Japanese War, a considerable number of Americans, from governmental leaders, social elites, to the general public, held a new view of Japan as a potential enemy rather than a friendly ally as before.[164] Regardless of the misguided anti-Japanese movement in the United States, Japan still hoped to maintain the long-established friendship between the two countries from political, economic, and diplomatic considerations. To prevent these misunderstandings and increase American goodwill toward Japan, politically speaking, the Japanese government voluntarily limited emigration to the U.S. in 1907 and promoted the U.S.-Japanese Entente on the Pacific problem in 1908.[165]

The tense Japan-U.S. political relationship aside, Americans were still drawn to the perceived "exoticness" of Japanese culture. Overall, Japanese art and Buddhism still took an exceptionally strong hold within Boston and Harvard circles after the war.[166] Since the early days of the Meiji state, Japan had employed cultural diplomacy as a tool for improving international relations. These kinds of culture-centric strategies were also effectively used to strengthen its presence as a sovereign nation by promoting the value of Japanese culture and the equivalence between Eastern and Western civilizations. Evidence of this can be seen in the popularity and

[163] Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement,* 151.

[164] Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement,* 151-68.

[165] Kamikawa, *Japan-American,* 265-76.

[166] For example, in 1904, Bigelow arranged Okakura Kakuzō to work in the MFA to supervise Japanese art. Okakura cultivated a good relationship with Boston elites and promoted Japanese culture to them. He worked there until his death in 1913.

influence of "Japonisme" in the West during the 19th century. Before the Russo-Japanese war, Americans' favorable opinion to Japan was largely attributed to the dissemination of Japanese culture in the United States. A good example is President Roosevelt's pro-Japanese feelings before and during the Russo-Japanese war. Apart from his personal intimate friendship with Kaneko, his extraordinary goodwill toward Japan also came from his American friends' influence, as he said, chiefly from Fenollosa and Bigelow who profoundly shaped American tastes for Japanese art and Buddhism.[167] Moreover, Roosevelt's perception of Japanese civilization apparently derived from Nitobe Inazo's 新渡戸稲造 (1862-1933) book *Bushido* (1901), which had been recommended to him by Kaneko. Roosevelt expressed his impression of this book in an interview of 1905:

> *Bushido* describes exquisitely well the spirit of the Japanese. For the first time, I have come to know the virtues of the Japanese people. I ordered thirty copies of the book from a bookstore and presented my friends with them. I also gave each of my five children a copy, and told them to read it well, and to cultivate a noble and fine character, sincere and stouthearted in spirit like the Japanese.[168]

Undoubtedly, the promotion of Japanese culture by both Americans and Japanese played a significant role of presenting positive image of Japan to not merely the president but also the general public in the United States. American public opinion was favorable to Japanese culture, as it was reflected in the newspapers of the United States.[169]

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[167] Kamikawa, *Japan-American,* 205-7.

[168] Kamikawa, *Japan-American,* 207-8.

[169] According to the Newspaper database (www.newspaper.com), the key term "Japanese art" appeared 1,106, 456 times in American newspapers during the 1900s, which was two times more than that of the 1890s. It means that American public interest in Japanese art was dramatically increased in the 1900s regardless of the political conflict between two countries. For more information about articles on Japanese art published in American newspapers during the 1900s, please visit www.newspaper.com

Anesaki"s Political and Academic Stance

The First Japanese Visiting Professor at Harvard

The Harvard Club of Japan also deployed cultural strategies to actively promote cultural exchange between two countries in order to prevent misunderstandings caused by Japan's military victory and to increase American goodwill toward Japan. In 1912, the Club arranged Harvard president emeritus Charles W. Eliot's visit to Japan. His visit largely promoted the establishment of the Japanese Chair at Harvard in the same year. Immediately, the Club nominated Anesaki, a religious scholar, viewing him as the most suitable candidate for teaching Japanese civilization at Harvard. Anesaki recounted his nomination as follows:

> It has been a pious desire cherished long since among the Japanese graduates at Harvard to have a lectureship on Japanese civilization founded in their Alma Mater. And a movement to establish a professorship took definite shape among certain friends of Japan in America. The same wish met from the two sides and the negotiation proceeded among them; the Harvard Club of Japan succeeded in raising in Japan its part of the fund necessary for the foundation in the course of 1912 and 1913. It was then decided by the authorities of the university to call the chair the 'professorship' of Japanese literature and life and to appoint the incumbents on the recommendation of the Harvard Club of Japan. It was in May last that I was asked by Baron Kikkawa of the club to accept the nomination to the chair. Thinking that there are men better fitted than myself. I expressed to him my recommendation of those. But several circumstances caused the committee of the Harvard Club to nominate me, and finally, after hesitation I dared to accept the offer.[170]

Anesaki's narrative was quite similar to the aforementioned article published in *the Japan Times*. The idea of establishing a professorship was first brought up by some Americans and Japanese in New York and then was accepted and promoted by both sides, the Harvard Club of Japan and the Harvard University. Here both sources did not mention specific names from American side that related to the initiation of this movement. However, based on an interview with Anesaki by

[170] "Buddhist Priest on Harvard's Faculty," *The St. Louis Star and Times*, Jan 24, 1914. https://www.newspapers.com/image/204328797/?terms=Anesaki&match=1 (accessed September 2, 2020)

Noguchi Yonejirō 野口米次郎 (1875-1947) in *the Japan Weekly Mail* and Anesaki's autobiography, we learn that Professor James Haughton Woods (1864-1935), a scholar in Indian philosophy and professor in the Philosophy Department at Harvard, was a driving force for the establishment of the new Japanese chair.[171] As early as 1903 when both Woods and Anesaki were attending Queen's College in Benares, India, they talked about the importance of such a chair at Harvard.[172] The funding of the position was jointly raised by the Harvard Club of Japan and Woods.[173] The most important American benefactor was William Sturgis Bigelow who donated the largest endowment to support this visiting professorship.[174] Along with his friend Fenollosa, Bigelow also had a chance to learn Japanese culture in Japan and soon embraced Buddhist mysticism, becoming an esoteric Buddhist. During his sojourn to Japan, he collected a large quantity of Buddhist art, which he ultimately donated to the MFA. Undoubtedly, Bigelow's generous donation for the founding of this Chair reflected a Boston elite's enthusiasm for Japanese culture and his fascination with Japanese Buddhism.

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[171] Yone Noguchi, "Dr. M. Anesaki," *The Japan Weekly Mail*, July 26th, 1913; Anesaki Masaharu, *Waga shogai*, Anesaki Masaharu Sensei Seitan Hyakunen Kinenkai, ed. (Tokyo: Anesaki Masaharu Sensei Seitan Hyakunen Kinenkai, 1974), 101.

[172] Noguchi, "Dr. M. Anesaki."

[173] The Harvard Club of Japan collected 20,000 dollar and gave it to Harvard to provide a professorship of Japanese. See "Japanese Give Harvard $20,000," *Quad-City Times*, Mar. 13th, 1913. https://www.newspapers.com/image/300529252/?terms=Japanese%20Harvard&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020); "Japanese Give $20,000," *The Boston Globe*, Mar. 13th, 1913, page 11, https://www.newspapers.com/image/430642184/?terms=Japanese%20Harvard&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020); "Japanese Establish Fund," The Birmingham News, Mar. 13th 1913, page 7, https://www.newspapers.com/image/606010638/?terms=Japanese%20Harvard&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020)

[174] "History of the Department: A Brief History of EALC and Asian Studies at Harvard." *Harvard University*. Accessed March 10, 2020. https://ealc.fas.harvard.edu/1870-1920

Regarding Anesaki's role in this position, an American newspaper report wrote, "Dr. Anesaki is fully cognizant of the role he will play in telling American students of Japanese civilization, and he intends to do his part in bringing the West and the East closer together—the great fundamental question enlivened recently by the California land bill."[175] Clearly, the newspaper critics interpreted this academic event from the political perspective. In 1913, the same year that Anesaki took up the position at Harvard, the growing anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States had peaked, leading to the enactment of the California Alien Land Law, which legally prohibited Japanese from owning agricultural land. In fact, two years prior, Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933), the aforementioned author of *Bushido*, also a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, became the first exchange professor to the United States under the support of the Carnegie Peace Foundation, lecturing at six American universities. His lecture circuit took him to three prestigious private universities—Johns Hopkins, Brown, and Columbia, along with the state universities in Virginia, Minnesota and Illinois for spreading universal peace between the two countries.[176] However, he performed more like a champion of the Japanese in the face of the American public. When he was invited to give a speech at Stanford University, he stated:

> I confess that the two great wars in which we came out triumphant, have turned the heads of some of my countrymen, who believe that our success was due expressly to the spirit of Bushido…we are highly amused at the strict surveillance of the American authorities over the Japanese in the Philippines…Japan is not stealing America's Manchurian trade.

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[175] "Japanese Lecturer Coming," *The Wilmington Morning Star*, August 10th, 1913, page 9, https://www.newspapers.com/image/55421265/?terms=Anesaki&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020)

[176] The goal of this education exchange activity was "to give to each people better knowledge of the other and to help countries that will resist all attempts to arouse antagonism." See "Japan and the U.S: Campaign of Popular Education to Establish Friendlier Relations between the Countries," *The Boston Globe*, July 14, 1911. https://www.newspapers.com/image/431195526/?terms=Nitobe%20Inazo&match=1 (accessed January 10, 2021); *The Morning News*, Sep. 18th, 1911, page 4. https://www.newspapers.com/image/154234595/?terms=Nitobe%20Inazo&match=1 (accessed January 10, 2021)

> It is not large enough to be worth our while…present war rumors are kept alive by business concerns and outside nations for their private gain.[177]

In terms of the Japan-U.S. conflicts over immigration issues, he argued that "California needs more labor." Insofar as the solution to these problems, he stated that "the whole situation depends upon the spirit of concession and magnanimity of Japanese."[178] His actual intentions notwithstanding, his audience viewed his attitude as quite arrogant, and American newspapers followed up with sharp criticism. Inevitably, he was labelled as "an insulting Jap," "the offender," and "an object of suspicion."[179] Nitobe's statement unfortunately caused mutual misunderstandings that even, to some extent, worsened Americans' attitudes towards Japan. Thus, to avoid such situations from recurring, Anesaki highlighted his role as an academic scholar who attempted to "work scientifically for the sake of truth" rather than "an apologist for Japan, or a champion of the Japanese." More importantly, he aimed to eliminate friction between the two countries by reinforcing the idea of the East-West harmony through the academic rhetoric of the universal nature of religion in his teachings and conference speeches to American audiences.[180]

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[177] This statement in his speech was widely quoted by American newspapers. See "Japanese Speaks for Universal Peace," *The Journal and Tribune*, September 19, 1911, page 12, https://www.newspapers.com/image/584396649/?terms=Nitobe%20Inazo&match=1 (accessed January 10, 2021)

[178] "Bases Pace on Magnanimity," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1911. https://www.newspapers.com/image/380156644/?terms=Nitobe%20Inazo&match=1 (accessed January 10, 2021)

[179] "An Insulting Jap," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, September 20, 1911. https://www.newspapers.com/image/89279995/?terms=Nitobe%20Inazo&match=1 (accessed January 10, 2021)

[180] "Japanese Lecturer Coming," *The Wilmington Morning Star*, August 10, 1913. https://www.newspapers.com/image/55421265/?terms=Anesaki&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020); "Buddhist Comes to Teach Theory. New Member of Harvard Faculty. No Apologist nor Propagandist," *Couriter-Post*, September 22, 1913. https://www.newspapers.com/image/478967032/?terms=Anesaki&match=1 (accessed September 15, 2020); "Dr. Masaharu Anesaki Comes from Orient to Bring Culture of His Land to Students at University Founded by Pilgrim Fathers," *The St. Louis and Times*, January 24, 1914. https://www.newspapers.com/image/204328797/?terms=Anesaki (accessed September 15, 2020)

A Religious Scholar

It is widely known that Anesaki was one of the most important figures in the foundation of the discipline of religious studies in Japan from the late Meiji up to early Showa period (1926-1989). Anesaki's affiliation with Buddhism can be traced back to his childhood. As he expresses in his autobiography, his family's association with Pure Land Buddhism inspired his study of religion at Tokyo Imperial University.[181] In 1873, he was born in a family that operated an *edokoro* 絵所 or an atelier providing Buddhist images to the Bukkōji temple 仏光寺 in Kyoto, a temple affiliated with Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, a Japanese Pure Land sect. His family lineage had enabled him to familiarize himself with the Buddhist visual culture of the old capital Kyoto since he was a child. Apparently, as a son of an atelier family, Anesaki was cognizant of the liturgical function of Buddhist art. Even though he did not fully understand the nature of Buddhism as a child, witnessing his grandmother's devout devotion to Buddhism may have had a great impact on his reception of Buddhism and Buddhist art. However, because of a separation in the modern concept of "religion" between belief and practice by Buddhist modernists, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Buddhism was purged of its ritual practices in order to show it universal ideal and rationality. As a result, the ritual functions of Buddhist art were generally left unspoken. Anesaki was one of these Buddhist revivalists when he grew up.

In 1893, Anesaki entered Tokyo Imperial University to study philosophy and religion under the guidance of Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855-1944),[182] who was in the first

[181] Anesaki, *Waga shōgai*, 3.

[182] Inoue had studied Western philosophy and Buddhism in Germany for seven years. When he came back in 1880, he was appointed the first Japanese professor in the philosophy department at Tokyo Imperial University, where he taught courses on German idealism and comparative religion. See Kathleen M. Staggs, "Defend the Nation and Love

generation of Buddhist modernists and the influential pioneer in the aforementioned "New Buddhism Movement." After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University, Anesaki began to teach "Theories of Religious Studies" in 1898 at his alma mater, which was the earliest manifestation of academic religious studies in Japan. From 1900 to 1903, he studied in Europe, particularly in Germany, where he encountered racial discrimination caused by the "yellow peril."[183] In 1905, when a professorship in religious studies was established at Tokyo Imperial University, Anesaki was appointed associate professor and took the leading role in transplanting the discipline of religious studies in Japan. Meanwhile, he actively strengthened his links with political groups from the time of the Russo-Japanese War by occupying prominent positions in political-related and international institutions such as the House of Peers (the upper house of the Japanese parliament), the Advisory Committee for Education in Korea, the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, the Institute of Pacific Relations, and the Association Concordia.[184] That is to say, as a religious scholar, his participation in these institutions enabled him to exert an impact on the formulation of Japan's political strategies and international relations in academic terms.

Academically speaking, he held a great interested in featuring the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity as way of furthering the East-West harmony, which yet differed from his predecessors' stance. At the early stage of the study of comparative religion during the 1880s and 1890s, there were a number of Japanese scholars engaging the topic of comparative religion

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the Truth: Inoue Enryō and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 258.

[183] Anesaki, *Waga shōgai*, 33-4; Isomae and Hidetaka, *Kindai*, 207-9; Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 164-66.

[184] Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 147.

in discussion of Buddhism and Christianity.[185] They attempted to highlight the rationalization of Buddhism and to promote the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity. Concerning the comparison between Buddhism and Christianity, Anesaki's advisor, Inoue Tetsujirō focused on the opposition between the two. He considered Buddhism an Eastern philosophy that aligned with scientific rationality, as he saw it as the manifestation of universal truth. Consequently, he held an anti-Christian stance, criticizing Christianity as an "unenlightened religion" that lacked rational philosophical elements.[186] Likewise, another important figure in the New Buddhism movement, Inoue Enryō also argued for the advancement of Buddhism and the interiority of Christianity. He labelled Buddhism as "a pure intellectual religion," in contrast to Christianity as "an entirely emotional" and "anti-intellectual" religion.[187] Their perspective largely revealed a strong sense of Japanese national identity in resistance to the hegemonic discourse of the Western Other. Such a radically nationalist stance was further enhanced by D.T Suzuki's creation of the modern form of Zen Buddhism in the late 1920s up to the post-war period. As Robert Sharf argues, D.T Suzuki's articulation of Zen Buddhism is an ahistorical tradition that constituted "the essence of Buddhism" and "the essence of the Japanese spirit," and this Zen nationalism intended to glorify the cultural and spiritual superiority of the Japanese over the Western race.[188]

However, during the 1900s and 1910s, with the widespread "yellow peril" polemic and anti-Japanese tendency, particularly, after the Russo-Japanese war, the academic rhetoric of the

[185] Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 57.

[186] Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 79.

[187] Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 46.

[188] Rober H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Aug., 1993): 1-43.

discrepancies of East and West did not fit Japan's political need for international sympathy. As a rare and transnational figure who could incisively observe Japan's situation from the perspective of the West, Anesaki, unlike his Japanese predecessors and peers, did not stand for the idea that one tradition was superior to any other; instead, he attempted to promote the harmonization of the Eastern and Western civilization, in which Japan functioned as a bridge that linked the two. In order to achieve this goal, he focused on the narrative of the parallel between Buddhism and Christianity on the basis of the universal nature of religion. In *Shūkyōgaku gairon* 宗教学概論 (Outline of Religious Studies), he defined the essence of religion as follows:

> The study of religion begins with the phenomenological fact of religion as a universal and fundamental impulse of the human mind; it studies its various manifestations in human life. In other words, religion, as it is studied by religious studies, does not merely mean particular traditions or their denominational branches. Since all religion are equally historical facts in human civilization and products of human spirituality, religious studies is a matter of a comprehensive conceptual grasping of the processes that produced religion.[189]

Anesaki's definition of religion reflected the emphasis on the universalism of religion that was based on human consciousness or spirituality. He regarded religion as a manifestation of human civilization and human spirituality within a historical process, that is, the theory of social evolution. In this manner, he attempted to address the affinity between Buddhism and Christianity in an effort to promote the equivalence between Japanese and Western civilization. In 1905, he wrote an article titled "How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist?" to express his positive stance to Christianity. In this article, he did admit the differences between the two religions that resulted from disparate historical circumstances and different needs from people. Nevertheless, he argued that they had same religious foundation—the universal ideal. He stated

[189] Quoted by Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 57.

that "If Christianity is an absolute religion, not in its actual visible condition, but owing to the universality of its Gospel, Buddhism may claim the same as possessing a similarly universal ideal."[190] Therefore, he concluded that "We Buddhists are ready to accept Christianity; nay, more, our faith in Buddha is faith in Christ. We see Christ because we see Buddha."[191] In short, as a scholar of comparative religion, Anesaki always tried to identify some universal ideas of religion that both Buddhism and Christianity could share. Essentially, the fundamental core for linking all humanity was human needs for spirituality, which was also reflected in his idea of religious art in his book *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals: With Special Reference to Buddhism in Japan*.

Anesaki's Viewing of Buddhist Art in the MFA

During Anesaki's tenure at the Harvard, the MFA invited him to give a series of lectures on its collection of Japanese Buddhist art. The MFA highly recognized the value of Anesaki's lectures in demonstrating "the history and development of Buddhist art."[192] The following year, with the support of the MFA, these lectures were adapted into a permanent book format entitled *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*. From the MFA's stance, the publication of this book served as "a valuable guide to an important part of the Museum's collections."[193] That is to say, it relied on a Japanese authority of Buddhism to promote the religious significance of its collections in the history of Japanese Buddhism.

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[190] Anesaki Masaharu, "How Christianity Appeals to A Japanese Buddhist?" Reprinted in Susanna Fessler, trans, *Hanatsumi Nikki: Flowers of Italy* (Kumamoto: Kurodahan Press, 2009), 238.

[191] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 243.

[192] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, "Buddhist Art in its Relation to Buddhist Ideals: A Volume of Lectures by Professor M. Anesaki," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 80 (Dec., 1915): 84.

[193] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, "Buddhist Art," 84.

The main theme of the book was how the Buddhist ideals and beliefs have found expression in Buddhist arts, particularly, Japanese art. The book was divided into four sections featuring the development of Buddhist art in a chronological order under the prevailing theory of Darwinian evolution at the time. It began with the beginning of the Buddhism as a religion and its art by tracing both back to the life of the historical Buddha. Then he moved to a discussion of the Buddhist art in Japan within a sectarian framework in historical terms. He opened with a discussion of the early history of Buddhism in Japan, starting with the accomplishments of the Prince Shōtoku of the Asuka 飛鳥 (592-710) era, before proceeding to the Tempyō 天平 (729-749) reign, an epoch generally considered to be the high-water mark of Nara period cultural achievement. It was followed by articulation of Buddhist images and icons in Pure Land, Shingon, and Zen Buddhism respectively. Intriguingly, he treated the Zen sect as the best manifestation of Buddhism that exceeded other sects. Meanwhile, he also designated the MFA's collection of the arhat paintings from the Daitokuji set as "Zen art." The motivation of this designation reflects his political and academic stance, which promoted the ideology of the East-West harmony in religious terms within the context of the Japan-United States relations after the Russo-Japanese war. In this book, he took a nationalist stance to elevate Japanese Buddhism above Indian and Chinese Buddhism, making a parallel between Japanese Buddhist figures and Western religious figures through the idea of the universalism of spirituality in religion and its art. Moreover, he took up transcendental thought in the articulation of Zen and its art as a means to further enhance his idea of the East-West harmony.

Juxtapositions of Japanese Buddhist Figures and Western Religious Figures

Juxtapositions of Western religious figures and Japanese Buddhist figures were not uncommon in Anesaki's narrative of Buddhist art. Most intriguingly, despite of the book

Buddhist Art and Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals having a focus on Buddhist art, Anesaki dedicated it to "the pious and beautiful soul of saint Francis of Assisi [1181-1226]."[194] In the preface of the book, he mentioned his travelling to Italy aroused his admiration of Japanese Buddhist art that, he believed, equated to the Italian Quattrocento art. Meanwhile, he also noted the connection between St. Francis and the Buddhist priest Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), the putative founder of an independent Pure Land school in Japan:

> My journeys in Italy, in 1902 and in 1908, especially the latter, had the effect of awakening my remembrance of Buddhist art, and thus a high admiration for Buddhist painting has become inseparably connected with a similar feeling for that of the Italian Quattrocentists, just as my devotion to Hōnen, the pietist saint of Japanese Buddhism, has been linked with my reverent attachment to the Christian saint [St. Francis of Assisi] who preached to birds and wrote the Canticle of the Sun.[195]

In order to understand his idea about the parallel between St. Francis and Hōnen, we need to look at some details about this trip**.** From 1907 to 1908, with the financial support of the Kahn Foundation, Anesaki travelled around the world for the purpose of furthering his knowledge of Western civilization and disseminating it in Japan. In particular, he made an art-focused journey to Florence, Assisi, as well as Rome, one of the centers of ancient Western civilization and Christian religious faith. His experience and inspiration from this trip were recorded in a travelogue titled *Hanatsumi Nikki* 花つみ日記 (A Journal of Gathering Flowers, 1909).[196] It is a

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[194] For more information about St. Francis, please refer to his biographies, *Fioretti di San Francesco* (Little Flowers of St. Francis) and *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (1893). The former one is the collection of popular legends of St. Francis's life composed anonymously at the end of the 14th century. The latter was written by French historian Paul Sabatier (1858-1928) in 1893. Anesaki personally met with Sabatier, when he took the pilgrimage to worship St. Francis in the rustic town of Assisi.

[195] Anesaki Masaharu, *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals: with Special Reference to Buddhism in Japan* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915).

[196] Anesaki Masaharu, *Hanatsumi Nikki*; It is translated into English by Susanna Fessler, *Hanatsumi Nikki: Flowers of Italy* (Kumamoto: Kurodahan Press, 2009).

memoir of Anesaki's spiritual and artistic pursuit of both Christianity and Buddhism. Unlike the European travellers of the time who focused more on the biographical information of artworks and architectures of locales, Anesaki sought to explore the connection between art and religion by looking at spiritual ideals in religious paintings. Apart from that, Anesaki also attempted to address the connection between St. Francis and Hōnen. Notably, he even brought a copy of the illustrated scroll of Hōnen's life—*Hōnen shōnin eden* 法然上人絵伝 (1307), an illustrated scroll of Hōnen's life, with him during the trip. Whenever had a chance, he would introduce Hōnen's life and faith to his Western friends, specifically addressing the similarities between St. Francis and Hōnen.[197] When he compared the two, he stated:

> Hōnen was able to gain the power to ferry sentient beings across the sea of reincarnation to the shore of nirvana from within a type of Zen reclusive *nenbutsu samadhi* akin to Hinayana practices. Likewise, Francis retreated to this rocky valley cave, prayed to God and then stored up the intrepid spirit that he gained from this state of meditation and went out into the world to engage in the salvation of the masses.[198]

From this entry, we learn that they both viewed their personal spirituality as a way of achieving enlightenment and then spread this method to the mass, rather than relying on the authoritative religious institutions of the time. Anesaki also noted their universal compassion toward not just human beings, but all sentient beings including animals, flowers, and plants.

Concerning religious art, Anesaki held the same universal view— "art is the universal language of the human heart, and through that channel the heart of religion may be communicated incomparably better than through that of dogmas of reason."[199] In his perception,

[197] He wrote it in his journal on April 26 and 28, 1907; See Fessler, *Hanatsumi Nikki,* 110-30.

[198] Fessler, *Hanatsumi Nikki,* 116-7.

[199] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 245.

regardless of whether art was Christian or Buddhist, art as a whole was "the most visible and tangible product" that manifested the religious faith of human beings from different cultural background.[200] Therefore, he highly appraised the art of the Quattrocento. He claimed that these artists knew how to express deep religious faith through their artworks to trigger viewers' inner emotion and connection to the figures they portrayed.[201] Meanwhile, he also attempted to draw parallels between Western religious art to Japanese Buddhist art. As he said, "what I wish to enforce is the wonderful similarity existing between the art of the Quattrocento and our old Buddhist painting."[202] He compared the similarity of Fra Angelico's (1395-1455) *Madonna* and the Buddhist paintings of the Takuma school, a school of Buddhist painting that, Fenollosa argued, was under the influence of the Chinese style promoted by Li Gonglin and his followers. Unlike Fenollosa, Anesaki did not mention any Chinese connection, but instead highlighted a Western counterpart. He briefly concluded both works reflected the artists' religious piety, despite being of different forms and materials.[203] He did not directly point out which painting of the Takuma school he referred to in this article, but most likely it was an image of Amida Buddha created by Genshin 源信 (942-1017), a Tendai monk who also took great interest in Pure Land teachings. As in the book *Buddhist Art and Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*, he reflected back on this topic and related Fra Angelico to Genshin, the painter of the Takuma school. He

[200] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 244.

[201] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 245.

[202] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 245.

[203] Anesaki, "How Christianity Appeals," 245.

called Genshin as "the Fra Angelico of Japan" because of his treatment of rich colors, quiet tone, free composition, and soaring conception in his Buddhist paintings.[204]

In short, from the discussion of the similarities of either Genshin and Fra Angelico or Hōnen and Francis, what Anesaki aimed to emphasize was the importance of individual spirituality in the religions that transcended culture and border. Such rhetoric of parallels was the foundational principle in his articulation of Zen and Zen art.

Anesaki's Articulation of Zen and Zen Art

Although Anesaki had a strong tendency towards the universalism of religion, it was only limited to his comparison between Buddhism and Christianity. As far as Buddhism, like other Japanese liberal intellectuals of the time, he also took a nationalist stance to privilege Japanese over Chinese and Indian Buddhism. At the beginning of the book, Anesaki straightforwardly stated that "Japanese Buddhism is representative, more than Indian and Chinese, of a continuous development both in doctrine and in art."[205] Despite the fact that he strongly emphasized his role as a scholar rather than a Japanese apologist, this statement clearly reflected his political stance of putting Japan in a leading role in the East that equalled to the West. Moreover, concerning the different sects in Buddhism, Anesaki did not treat them all equally. Instead, he ranked them based on the theory of evolution, in which the "pure and independent" religion stood on the top the hierarchy, as he wrote:

> The moral order of the world is sustained by the morality of religion. The ideals of secular morality are subsumed in religious ideals. Acquiring and practicing morality based on awareness of the divine…should be the ultimate purpose of religion, that is, the ultimate morality [of society]. Therefore, a pure and independent religion does not necessarily require acts of ritual worship of gods . . . accordingly, no priests or other mediators between the human and the divine are needed…Since all goodness is

[204] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals,* 27-8.

[205] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, vii.

> considered coterminous with the divine, all persons of faith, nay all persons of spirituality, become priests.[206]

In this passage, we can see that Anesaki perceived the ideal of religion as purely secular morality that relied on individual's spirituality. Like Fenollosa and other Buddhist modernists, he also deemphasized "acts of ritual worship of gods" and paid attention to the personal spiritual connection to religious truth. The best exemplar that fitted into Anesaki's standard of ideal religion was Zen, or more accurately, the transcendental vision of Zen.

As early as 1893, Japanese delegations began to introduce Zen and its art to American audiences at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. On the religious side, the delegation appropriated the aforementioned "New Buddhism" as "Eastern Buddhism" with a universal nature that was compatible with Christianity. On the art side, Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覚三 (1863-1913), the director of the art exhibition, introduced Zen art through the construction of an authentic Japanese Buddhist pavilion—the Hō-ō-den, an impressive reproduction of the Phoenix Hall of Byōdōin temple 平等院, a temple with a strong Pure Land orientation established in Uji, Kyoto during the eleventh century. This reproduction was widely reported and highly appraised by a considerable number of American newspapers. More importantly, the Buddhist pavilion was regarded as the manifestation of the elevated quality of Japanese civilization, which was absolutely what Japan intended to present. As one article stated, "Japan and its people have won high places in the regard of the Americans…Japan has a chance to prove that her people are not only well bred and intelligent, but well leavened with the uplifting power genius, the outside

[206] Quoted by Isomae, *Religious Discourse*, 126.

world receives her message with gladness in the spirit in which it is given."[207] Notably, the south wing of the pavilion was constructed in the style of the Ashikaga period (1336-1573), a time that "began to a new art-life under the influence of Zen Buddhism," as Okakura described in the pamphlet of the Hōōden that was distributed at the fair. The interior was a reproduction of two rooms in the Ginkakuji 銀閣寺 in Kyoto, with one as a library where the master read, studied and meditated and the other as a tea room for "the simplicity of taste" that restored "the tranquil state of mind to the people."[208] Apparently, in this exhibition, Okakura attempted to convey a message that Zen Buddhism and its art were closely associated with individual's daily life rather than Buddhist dogma. Notably, Anesaki also reiterated this idea to American audiences in his discussion of the Japanese room in which "the cult of beauty" was preserved under the influence of Zen Buddhism that gave emphasis to "the serene and meditative enjoyment of nature's beauty."[209] The connection between Zen, artistic achievement, and secular culture were further elaborated for his western audiences in Okakura's later books, *The Ideals of the East* (1903) and *The Book of Tea* (1906). He defined Zen as an iconoclastic sect that ignored forms and rituals and placed emphasis on practitioner's inner spirituality.[210] This Buddhist teaching changed the forms of Japanese life and art, making them "pure, solemn, and full of simplicity."[211] As art

[207] "Japan's Graceful Gift: Ho-o-Den or Phoenix Hall on Wooded Isle," *The Inter Ocean,* September 27, 1893. *https://www.newspapers.com/image/33771303/?terms=Hooden&match=1* (accessed September 15, 2020). This article was also published in some other American newspapers. Based on the data from Newspaper online database, there were 228 reports on Hō-ō-Den published in American newspapers in 1893.

[208] Okakura Kakuzo, *Hō-ō-den: An Illustrated Description of the Buildings Erected by the Japanese Government at the World's Columbian Exposition, Jackson Park, Chicago* (Tokyo: K. Ogawa Publisher, 1893), 23.

[209] Anesaki Masaharu, *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1933), 37-8. This book is based on a series of lectures given at the Fogg Museum of Harvard University in 1914.
[210] Okakura Kakuzo, *The Ideal of the East* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1920), 161.

[211] Okakura Kakuzo, *The Ideal of the East*, 167.

historian Gergory Levine suggests, Okakura provided a valid vocabulary for describing the modern form of Zen and Zen art.[212]

Building upon Okakura's writings, Anesaki aimed to articulate the concept of Zen and Zen art in terms of individualism, naturalism, transcendentalism, and secularism to echo prevailing Victorian values in the United States at the time. For Anesaki, first of all, in spite of the fact, Zen was re-interpreted as a Buddhist teaching that focused on simple and pure meditation "without admixture of mysterious rituals and doctrinal analysis."[213] This sect of Buddhism showed a strong sense of individuality, as it directed practitioners to achieve enlightenment through their personal experience of spirituality.[214] Moreover, he proposed a transcendent view of the Zen enlightenment—"a highly refined abstraction" that, nonetheless, differed from "a teaching of nothingness" as Suzuki and his followers promoted during the post-war period.[215] As he further explained:

> Naturalism and intuitionism enabled the Zenist not only to absorb the serenely transient beauty of nature, but also to express it, distinct from human passions and interests, in placid dignity and pure simplicity; while individualism, a necessary consequence of Zen practice, found expression in a vigor and freshness of artistic treatment always implying a touch of original genius. Thus the aesthetic sense developed by the culture consisted essentially in disinterested observation and penetrating insight which produced a feeling of intimacy with the universe and caused man to mould his life and taste in accordance with the "air-rhythm" of nature.[216]

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[212] Gregory P. Levine, *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art, and Other Predicaments* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 35.

[213] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 48.

[214] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 49.

[215] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 52; For discussion on the topic of the "nothingness" of Zen, see Levine, *Long Strange Journey*, 25-6.

[216] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 52.

Clearly, Anesaki attempted to promote the connection between Zen, individual spirituality, and nature. Specifically, Zen practice or contemplation trained the Zen practitioner to create a personal "feeling of intimacy with the universe" that could be manifested in the aesthetic form of "the beauty of nature." Basically, this outlook guided Anesaki's viewing of the arhat paintings collected by the MFA under the guidance of Fenollosa in 1894.

Anesaki's Viewing of the Arhat Paintings as Transcendental "Zen Art"

Anesaki included two arhat paintings of the Daitokuji set in his discussion on Zen art, namely, *Luohan Feeding a Hungry Spirit* (Figure. B10) and *The Transfiguration of Luohan* (Figure. B2). One may wonder why Aneaski chose these two scrolls. Did he have a special aesthetic taste for the mystical vision of the arhat paintings as Fenollosa did? It is noteworthy that Anesaki mentioned these two paintings in his autobiography. According to his statement, surprisingly, he did not know that there were actually ten scrolls from the Daitokuji set that were kept in the MFA; instead, he thought the MFA had merely collected these two and returned the rest to Japan.[217] That is to say, these paintings were the only two available to Anesaki at the time. Thus, suffice it to say, the visual content was not the major consideration for Anesaki, In fact, the form of these arhat paintings went in opposition to Anesaki's criteria of Zen art, as Fenollosa described:

> Their general aesthetic characteristic are, first, a great variety and wealth in composition, each embodying an individual idea of line and mass unlike anything else in the realm of art; second, the more special line-beauty of drapery in the main groups which compose a subtle visual music; third, the fine oppositions of these to landscape backgrounds with their whirling, subordinate line-systems of tree and cloud; fourth, the richness and delicacy of their color-schemes cut by the cross-patches on the Buddhist gowns, and glowing from the low toned silks like flowers.[218]

[217] Anesaki, *Waga shōgai*, 104.

[218] Fenollosa, *A Special Exhibition*, 11-12.

Apparently, the depiction of these arhat paintings conveyed the air of sophistication, splendor, and richness, which dramatically conflicted with Anesaki's appropriation of Zen art that was "in placid dignity and pure simplicity." In this regard, Anesaki avoided discussion of the color, line, and space of the paintings. Instead, he briefly directed audiences' attention to the background landscape, which he interpreted, as the manifestation of "the spectacle of nature" in the arhats' illumined mind.[219] In this manner, the arhat paintings became the exemplar of Zen naturalism "which defies the lure of human activities and absorbs nature and life into the all-embracing tranquillity of the mind identified with the cosmos."[220] This idea resembled the transcendentalist view of the spirituality of "nature" proposed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). In his most prominent work *Nature*, Emerson stated that "The beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation…The creation of beauty is Art…A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, its miniature."[221] Anesaki literally expressed that the Emersonian view of nature was equivalent to "the ideal of Zen naturalism and intuition."[222] Moreover, unlike Fenollosa, who stressed the magical deeds of the arhats, Anesaki intended to demystify them as human beings, placing them on par with Daoist hermits who immersed themselves in "the calm enjoyment of nature" in remote mountain areas.[223] Instead of treating Zen as the uniqueness of Japanese culture, not only

[219] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 55.

[220] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 52.

[221] Raplph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (digital version), retrieved from https://archive.vcu.edu/english/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/nature.html

[222] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 56.

[223] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 55.

did Anesaki link the Zen idea of nature to American transcendentalism, but he also traced it back to a Daoist view of nature in ancient China. Daoist philosophy aimed to create orderly connection and a sense of harmony in nature, which was achieved by the harmonious balance among all beings in the world. A human being, in the eyes of a Daoist, was also a unit of nature, and responsible for performing suitable behaviors to keep the balance between nature and man. Notably, such notion was also presented in American transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau's (1817-1862) book *Walden*, which also emphasized individual's contemplation and closeness to nature as well as the idea of man as part of nature.[224]

By employing such Daoist and transcendental perception of the interrelation between art, mind, and nature, Anesaki formulated the meaning of the arhat painting as the physical embodiment of "the beauty of nature" in the arhats' mind. This idea also echoed the conception of Chinese landscape painting (*shanshui hua* 山水畫) as an artistic expression of a state of thought towards nature rather than an actual view of nature. The prominence of this landscape concept had endured and survived the long history of Chinese culture and also had inspired Zen artists who, as Anesaki suggested, "were extremely fond of painting landscape."[225] In the same vein, a Zen practitioner was able to see "the grandeur or tranquility of nature" through their spiritual mind purified by long training in Zen meditation.[226] Hence, from this point of view, Anesaki viewed the landscape in the arhat paintings as a reflection in the arhats' purified mind. As the result, the arhat paintings lost not merely their ritual function but also the mystical aura

[224] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

[225] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 56.

[226] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 57.

that favored by Fenollosa and his circles. In the eyes of Anesaki, the arhats were no longer supermundane Buddhist deities but human figures or Zen practitioners, as he clearly noted that "representations of the saints, hermits and deities may be regarded as mere human figures in interesting, if not weird, postures."[227] Such rhetoric certainly reflected Anesaki's strong motivation of the secularization of Zen art as whole including the arhat paintings. Likewise, Anesaki secularized Zen as "a religion of simple beauty—a cult of nature and of spiritual life" that penetrated into Japanese daily life with the devotion to the beauty of nature.[228]

Moreover, the Boston upper-class audiences of the time were extremely dissatisfied with modern civilized life corrupted by the burgeoning materialism and industrialization of the time. Therefore, they attempted to seek an exotic world untouched by industrialization to rediscover their lost values.[229] In order to meet their spiritual need, Anesaki even tailored his explanation of Japanese civilization on the basis of nature to beguile his Boston audiences as he asserted:

> There is no country where the life of the people is not conditioned by nature and their art to some extent connected with it; but in Japan perhaps more than anywhere else daily life has been in especially close touch with nature and moulded according to the artistic sense. The life of the Japanese may be said to be more primitive than that of many other civilized peoples, because it is more exposed to nature, or rather more intimate with nature; yet this primitiveness is refined and elaborated by the keen sense of the pure and simple beauty of nature.[230]

In doing so, Anesaki may have intended to re-direct Americans' attention to an exoticized image of Japan that they had been enchanted with since their first encounter with Japanese culture. Suffice to say, it was a smart rhetorical strategy to create a positive cultural image of Japan as a way of increasing American goodwill toward Japanese civilization and diminishing their anti-

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[227] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 59.

[228] Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, 62.

[229] For more discussion of this topic, please refer to Lears, *No Place of Grace.*

[230] Anesaki, "Art and Domestic Life in Japan," *The Open Court*, vol.9 (1916): 549.

Japanese sentiments provoked by the growing military power of Japan after the Russo-Japanese War.

Conclusion

After examining Anesaki's political and academic stance within the social and political context of the Japan-U.S. relations after the Russo-Japanese war, it is reasonable to conclude that Anesaki, as a visiting professor at Harvard and a transnational religious scholar, aimed to promote the idea of East-West harmony through his pronouncement of the universal spiritualty of religion to lessen the growing anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States. Such religious universalism, nevertheless, was exclusively applied to the apposition between Buddhism and Christianity. In his treatment of Buddhism in the book *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*, Anesaki did not see each sect as equally as viewing the relation between Buddhism and Christianity. Alternatively, he applied prevalent evolutionary theory of the time to represent different sects in the progressive format, in which Zen was "a religion of spirituality" with no ritual worship that seemed to be the best fit for Anesaki's definition of religion. Thus, he believed that Zen superseded other Buddhist teachings and penetrated into Japanese civilization. Obviously, Anesaki's articulation of Zen and Zen art with an emphasis on the interrelation of individual spirituality and nature resonated with both Daoist and transcendental view of the harmonious relation between human and nature. Anesaki's perception was a hybrid of Eastern Daoism and Western Transcendentalism, which, to some extent, demonstrated that the spirituality of nature was a unifying need for all humanity to further strengthened the rhetoric of East-West affinity.

Concerning Anesaki's viewing of the arhat paintings within such political context of this unique time period, they were no longer a Buddhist object of worship as they had been for the Chinese female patrons who viewed the works in their original context of Song China, due to the deemphasis of ritual practices in his modern form of Buddhism. Meanwhile, their religious significance differed from what Fenollosa presented to the Boston audiences twenty years before—creating a mystical moment through aesthetic appreciation, as the depiction of supernatural scenes in the sophisticated and rich fashion that Fenollosa appreciated strongly conflicted with Anesaki's presentation of Zen art in the manner of simplicity and spirituality. For Anesaki, the arhats pictures exemplified the essence of Zen art. It was not because of their previous identity as a "temple treasure" in the Zen temple Daitokuji, but it resulted from the secularization of Zen Buddhism with an emphasis on the meditative enjoyment of nature's beauty in Japanese daily life. Therefore, in Anesaki's eyes, the arhat pictures were supposed to give pleasure—the pleasure of the spiritual reflection of the beauty of nature and the harmony between human and nature—to those Boston elites who were preoccupied with the anxiety of living in the materialistic world.

Conclusion

The history of Buddhism cannot be understood solely in terms of theological or philosophical development; one must also attend to the social, cultural, and political changes that inevitably shaped and re-shaped the religion, its adherents, and its practices as it journeyed throughout Asia and beyond. Buddhist objects—such as the Daitokuji set of arhat paintings that are the focus of this study—are no exception. The seeming permanence of the objects may lead one to believe that their meanings and significance are also immutable. Yet, as this study has demonstrated, the meaning ascribed to the Daitokuji set changed according to the needs and expectations of its beholders.

In the premodern era, Buddhism was seen as a supernatural force capable of bringing forth mundane and supramundane benefits, whether for an individual, community, or nation. In this context, female patrons viewed the paintings as "an object of worship" to obtain merit for their families and fulfill their familial duties—the pursuit of family harmony valorized by Confucian society. As East Asian nations transitioned into modernity, Buddhism encountered Western ideologies of modernization, among which was scientific rationalism. Buddhist institutions had to engage Western values in order to remain relevant in the new intellectual and cultural landscape. One result of this engagement is that the liturgical function of Buddhist objects valued in premodern times was set aside in favor of an aestheticized view rooted in mysticism. For Fenollosa and the New England collectors who were fascinated with Buddhist objects, they had great interest in supernatural scenes from the Daitokuji set and viewed it as a visual medium for entering a higher religious and spiritual realm. Furthermore, the beholding of the Datokuji set was also greatly influenced by political factors. In the Muromachi period, Japan admired China as a political and cultural model. Thus, when the Daitokuji set was brought to

Japan, regional *daimyō* lords revered the set as a Chinese masterpiece saturated with a cultural legacy that bestowed the authority to demonstrate political power. When the set was finally bestowed on the Daitokuji by Hideyoshi, they paid more attention to the authorship of the paintings and purposely attributed it to the most famous Chinese arhat painter Guanxiu as a way to further amplify the importance of the set. In general, the Daitokuji monks regarded it as a temple treasure that enhanced their religious and cultural prestige. In contrast, the modern period witnessed the westernization of Japan. That is to say, Japan considered the West as its new political and cultural model and attempted to present itself as an Asian leader that was equal to its Western counterparts in both political and cultural terms. Within this new historical context, Japanese Buddhist reformers relocated Buddhism in the Western framework of "religion" and presented it as the representation of Japanese civilization parallel to Christianity in the West. As one of the most prominent Japanese religious scholars of the time, Anesaki was selected by Japanese political figures to teach Japanese civilization through the lens of Buddhism and Buddhist art in the United States to reduce Americans' misunderstanding of Japan and promote the idea of East-West harmony after the Russo-Japanese war. Therefore, unlike his contemporary Fenollosa who talked about it in more aesthetic terms, Anesaki's articulation of the arhat paintings was inevitably influenced by his political stance. As a result, he generated a peculiar viewing of the arhat paintings as the manifestation of the landscape in the arhats' mind. This interpretation exemplified his transcendentalist view of Zen that emphasized the connection among nature, spirituality, and art to beguile his Boston audiences and direct their attention back to the seemingly "exotic" culture of Japan.

The life story of the Daitokuji set continues as it has been interacting with more audiences in contemporary times. After the MFA exhibition of the Daitokuji set in 1894, those

eighty-eight paintings that went back to Japan have been stored in the Nara National Museum as a national treasure. In the summer of 2009, the entirety of the set preserved in Japan was displayed for the first time in the exhibition titled *Sacred Ningbo* held in Nara National Museum. In this context, the Daitokuji set has been viewed as a "masterpiece of Chinese religious art" to demonstrate the circumstances of local society and Buddhist worship in the Ningbo area. Since then, many Japanese scholars have conducted research on the set from a range of angles. In 2014, the Japanese government granted 23,270,000 yen to support the research on the project of the *Daitokuji Five Hundred Arhat paintings,* which was led by Ide Seinosuke, a historian of Chinese art and an expert of the Song Buddhist paintings at Kyushu University. By employing the viewpoint of the social life of an art object, Ide and other Japanese art historians situate the Daitokuji set in the academic field of art history and regard it as eloquent visual testimony to many art historical themes, such as the relationship of Buddhist painting production to local society in Ningbo area, the reception of Chinese artistic influence in Japan, and the role of the set in the academic field of Chinese art history in the modern era.[231] As the presentation of the research outcomes, an international symposium titled "A Comprehensive Look: The Cultural Biography of the Daitokuji Five Hundred Luohans from Local to Global Contexts" was held at Kyushu University in June of 2018. A group of prominent scholars from China, Japan, and the United States as well as more than 300 audiences participated in this conference.[232] Generally, their viewings of the Daitokuji set were closely related to their academic research fields.

[231] For more information about this research project, please refer to "The Five Hundred Lohan Painting of Daitokuji from the Viewpoint of Social Life of an Art Object," *Kakenin Project*, Accessed on May 18, 2021. https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/en/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-26244010/

[232] For more information about this symposium, please refer to the official site: "A comprehensive Look: The Cultural Biography of the Daitokuji Five Hundred Luohans from Local to Global Contexts," *Kyushu University*, Accessed May 18, 2021. https://www2.lit.kyushu-u.ac.jp/~aesthe/rakan2018/index2.html

However, not much attention has been paid to the premodern female patrons of the set and its modern beholders within the context of the development of modern Buddhism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As women's studies and gender studies in the field of Chinese Studies continue to develop, I hope more scholars will look into the female figures portrayed in the set and its female patrons in an attempt to probe the situation of women in the Song society. Moreover, with the development of the field of modern Buddhism, I hope more research will be done to explore the modern and contemporary understanding of these premodern Buddhist objects in the future.

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