

On the Veneration of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains in China

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Questions to be Raised

JAMES ROBSON WRITES, “When Buddhism made its way into China from India, it did not bring along a systematically organized set of Buddhist sacred mountains. Buddhist sacred geography in India was primarily keyed to sites associated with the life story of the Buddha or the distribution of his relics, as well as some sites connected with particular bodhisattvas.”¹ In China, however, Buddhist sacred sites came into being through the long-term accretion of Buddhist beliefs and traditions. They took shape in a variety of ways, such as travels in pursuit of religious instruction, the building of monasteries, and going on pilgrimages.

Travelling in search of instruction from masters was a traditional means of learning for followers of Buddhism. In this way, some famous mountains and large monasteries gradually established themselves as centers for devotees in quest of learning. The “five mountains and ten monasteries” (*wushan shisha* 五山十刹) of the Song dynasty, a general term for Chan monasteries in the Jiangnan region, was based upon that Buddhist system; hence, it was distinctly different from the “Sacred Buddhist Mountains” (*fojiao mingshan* 佛教名山) which is essentially faith-based.² During the Ming and Qing

¹ Robson 2009, p. 52.

² This paper uses “sacred Buddhist mountain” to refer to *fojiao mingshan* 佛教名山, but for convenience it makes an exception by using the term “marchmount veneration” to indicate

periods, as Chan monasteries declined, clerics and laypeople gradually used traditional famous mountains like Wutai 五台, E'mei 峨嵋, Putuo 普陀, and Jiuhua 九華 as major destinations for visits and pilgrimages. Due to this, the social influence of sacred mountains expanded and finally formed the basic framework for the concept of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains.

Recent scholarship has mainly focused on case studies of Putuo Island and Mount Wutai,³ but has paid little attention to the reasons for the formation of the Four Sacred Mountains concept and to the exact time period during which it took shape. In fact, although each of the Four Sacred Mountains witnessed a flourishing of faith at different times, the joint appellation, the “Four Sacred Mountains,” appeared only when Mount Jiuhua rose in status. Historically, regarding the formation of the sacred Buddhist mountains, Chinese Buddhism and Chinese society have had differing opinions that have changed and developed over time. In spite of these varying understandings, famous mountains like Lushan 廬山 and Tiantai 天臺 have never been included among the ranks of sacred Buddhist mountains. This suggests that the concept of a sacred Buddhist mountain must have some special connotation. So far, scholarship has revealed very little about what the veneration of “Buddhist mountains as sacred sites” implies.⁴ Clarifying this will thus help us to understand the rationale behind the Sinicization of Buddhist belief and the historical causes for its formation.

The Time Frame in Which the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains Concept Appeared

Historically, the joint appellation “Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains” for Mount Wutai, E'mei, Putuo, and Jiuhua evolved over time. Many famous mountain monasteries were built by Buddhist monks, and were often centers for Chinese Buddhism. In spite of this, the Sacred Mountain concept has

the belief that has been formed centering on these sacred Buddhist mountains. Marchmount, originally, is a translation of the Chinese term *yue* 嶽 and refers to what has become established in China as the Five Marchmounts, *wuyue* 五嶽. Edward Schafer was probably the one who came up with the translation, and James Robson has a detailed discussion on it in his *Power of Place*. My borrowing of this term is partly justifiable given that there were Buddhist complexes on some of the *yue*, specifically Mount Song 嵩 and Mount Heng 衡.

³ For studies on Mount Putuo, see Ishino 2010, pp. 143–59. For studies on Mount Wutai, see Cui 2000; Choe 2003, pp. 192–94; Choe 2005, pp. 15–29.

⁴ Sheng 2011, pp. 80–82. Building on this article, the present study further explores the formation of marchmount veneration.

varied with time. For example, in the essay, “Gu Hengyue lü dashi Xiangtang Tangxingsi Yangong bei” 故衡岳律大師湘潭唐興寺儼公碑 (Commemorative Stele Engraving for the Monk Yan[zhi] of the [Southern] Peak Vinaya Tradition, [Resident of] the Tangxing Monastery at Xiangtan City), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) made a survey of the Buddhism of his time:

Within the Nine Divisions (i.e., China), Buddhism varies according to locality. [People] in central China are preoccupied with [personal] reputation and interest. Since nothing is more effective than marvelous enlightenment in breaking [the illusion of] reputation, those who practice meditative stillness admire Mount Songshan. Northern folk are eager to exert martial force. Nothing is better than the myriad physical manifestations of the Buddha for deterring people from the use of martial force, so those who pursue the way of holiness venerate Mount Qingliang. People of the South are imprudent and frivolous. Nothing counteracts such behavior better than the cultivation of a dignified manner, so people practicing the *Vinaya-piṭaka* admire Mount Hengshan. These three famous mountains constitute the sublime realm.⁵

Liu Yuxi pointed out that among the renowned Chinese Buddhist mountains of his time, Mount Songshan was the center for Chan Buddhism, Wutai was the center for mysterious inspiration, while Hengshan was the center for those who practiced the precepts and cultivated a dignified manner.

According to the research of Daoyu 道昱, a Taiwanese scholar, Mount Wutai is known as the “Qingliang” 清涼 mountain because it has a year-round accumulation of snow and the weather there is never hot. This characteristic matches the account of Mount Qingliang given in the *Pusa zhuchu pin* 菩薩住處品 chapter of the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經, wherein Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī takes up residence on this mountain, thereby generating divine inspiration and mass fervor. As early as the fifth century, the legend that Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was manifest at Mount Wutai was already in circulation. As for Mount E’mei, it was merely a famous mountain for tourism during the Six Dynasties (220–589). It was reported that while out harvesting medicinal herbs, old Mr. Pu 蒲 encountered the bodhisattva Samantabhadra

⁵ 佛法在九州間，隨其方而化。中夏之人汨于榮利，破榮莫若妙覺，故言禪寂者宗嵩山。北方之人銳以武力，攝武莫若示現，故言神道者宗清涼山。南方之人剽而輕，制輕莫若威儀故言律藏者，宗衡山。是三名山為莊嚴國 (from fascicle 610 of *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文). Dong 1990, vol. 3, pp. 2730–31.

there, but this legend lacks the confirmation of textual evidence.⁶ During the mid-Tang era (618–907), Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839) made a pilgrimage, first going to Wutai and then to E'mei, hoping to encounter Samantabhadra. When annotating the *Huayan jing*, he praised Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra as two of the three saints of Huayan, which led to Mount E'mei being known as the “Silver Realm” during the Five Dynasties period (907–960). For Mount Putuo, it was during the early Tang dynasty that accounts of the efficacious response of Guanyin 觀音 (i.e., Avalokiteśvara) at Mount Butanluojia 布呬洛迦 (i.e., Potalaka) was introduced into China. With the construction of the Guanyin chapel 觀音院 by the Japanese monk Hui'e 慧鏗 (Jp. Egaku; fl. 863) for the statue of Guanyin that was unwilling to leave (and be ferried eastward to its former country), the legend that Guanyin had taken up residence on Mount Putuo started. During the Song dynasty (960–1279), people on ships imperiled in the nearby seas prayed to be rescued by the Putuo Guanyin; during the Southern Song (1127–1279), the mountain's reputation was established due to the reappearance of Guanyin's inspiring, efficacious responses at Chaoyin 潮音 cave and the Chan Buddhist cultivation of Chan Master Zhenxie Qingliao 真歇清了 (1088–1151) and others. During the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), stories about Guanyin's instant assistance on Mount Putuo grew more diverse, and the mountain repeatedly received imperially-bestowed titles and money. Due to a combination of Putuo's Chan tradition and Guanyin's efficacious responses, Mount Putuo evolved into a sacred site for Guanyin. The story of Mount Jihua began with the cultivation practice of the Sillan master Kim Chijang 金地藏 (Ch. Jin Dizang; 705–803) on that peak. Because of a paucity of capable monks to continue his tradition, as well as a lack of incidents demonstrating the inspirational, efficacious responses of the bodhisattva Dizang 地藏 (Skt. Kṣitigarbha), this tradition came to be overshadowed by a group of literati know as the “Jihua Poetry Society” (*jiuhua shishe* 九華詩社) during the Song and Yuan periods; hence, the mountain was the last one to be listed as a sacred peak.⁷

So, when did the joint appellation “the Four Great Sacred Peaks” actually appear? That is a difficult question.⁸ By the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the

⁶ 峨眉志云：昔有蒲翁，因採藥入山，望峯頂五色雲放白光，忽一鹿前導至巖上，見普賢大士真相，自茲顯迹 (from fascicle 43 of *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 by Zhipan 志盤 [n.d.]). T no. 2035, 49: 395b.

⁷ Daoyu 2008, pp. 58–106.

⁸ In the article referenced above, Daoyu cited the *Baizhang qinggui zhengyi ji* 百丈清規證義記 as evidence and claimed that the “Four Sacred Mountains” appeared only after 1878.

title “Three Great Sacred Peaks” had appeared. In Wanli 萬曆 17 (1589), in his “Butuoshan zhi xu” 補陀山志序 (Preface to the Mount Butuo Gazetteer), Tu Long 屠隆 (1543–1605) wrote:

Of the three major [Buddhist] sites in China, [Mount] E’mei in the west is the seat of Samantabhadra, Wutai in the north is the seat of Mañjuśrī, while Butuo in the East Sea is the seat of Guanshiyin 觀世音. Since the north and west are not far from the Buddhist country [i.e., India], they have enjoyed close, easy contact and have been gradually influenced by the Way of the Dharma. The East Sea is a deeply isolated location. This remote wasteland is far removed from contact with Buddhism; hence, people there have been submerged [in the sea of *samsāra*] for a long time and are tainted by the five kinds of impurity. Through the Buddha’s deep compassion, Guanshiyin has bestowed cultivation and salvation on Butuo [Island] and [in her manifestation as the rain-bestowing Dragon King] Sagara-nāgarāja, is an efficacious and helpful guide. Deep, steep, and magnificent, both E’mei and Wutai are the most gorgeous holy sites in China, while Butuo, in a remote location in the vast sea, is especially extraordinary.⁹

Unambiguously, this preface establishes Mount Putuo as Guanshiyin’s sacred seat, E’mei as Samantabhadra’s, and Wutai as Mañjuśrī’s.

In Wanli 33 (1605), Li Changchun 李長春 (n.d.–1607), the Minister of Rites, also mentioned the “three great sacred peaks” in his essay, “E’mei Dafosi luocheng song bin xu” 峨眉大佛寺落成頌並序 (Extolling and Introducing the Construction of the Giant Buddha Temple on [Mount] E’mei), saying, “I have heard that there are three Buddhist sites in China: namely, E’mei, Wutai, and Putuo. They stand firmly as the three legs of a cauldron within the universe, serving as guides for humans and gods.”¹⁰ But a piece by Chaoyong 超永 (n.d.–after 1693) records that after Chan Master Tianyin Yuanxiu 天隱圓修 (1575–1635) left home at the age of twenty-four in Wanli 27 (1599) to become a monk, a fellow monk told him, “I have heard that bodhisattvas manifest themselves on the ‘Four Great Sacred Peaks’; their

⁹ 震旦國中，三大道場，西峨眉以普賢，北五台以文殊，而東海補陀以觀世音。西北距佛國不遠，道法漸摩，近而且易。東海僻在深阻，聲跡荒遐，眾生久苦沉淪，薰染五濁，如來重潛之。茲觀世音之開化補陀，津梁娑竭，良有以也。峨眉、五台深峭雄拔，秀甲神州。而補陀獨立大瀛海中孤絕處，尤為奇特 (from fascicle 6). Wang 1993, pp. 595–96.

¹⁰ 蓋聞震旦國中有道場三：曰峨眉，曰五台，曰普陀。鼎立宇內，為天津梁。Wang 1993, p. 286.

supernatural power is vast.”¹¹ Judging from this, it can be seen that the designation of either three or four great sacred peaks appeared gradually during the Wanli period (1573–1620).

The biography of Yetai 夜臺 (n.d.–1610) in the *Buxu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳 records his experiences of divine responses during a pilgrimage to Wutai, E’mei, Putuo, and Jiuhua. Not only does it clearly mention that “the master has recently visited ‘the Four Great Sacred Peaks,’” but it also ends with the statement, “Yetai visited the ‘Four Sacred Mountains’ and left his footprints everywhere in the imperium.”¹² The *Buxu gaoseng zhuan* was compiled by Minghe 明河 (1588–1640) who, right before his death in Chongzheng 崇禎 13 (1640), asked his disciple Daokai Zhijong 道開自扁 (1601–1652) to continue the project. It was in Shunzhi 順治 4 (1647) of the Qing dynasty that Daokai did the final editing of the book, and declared that the project was more or less completed, but the commentary attached to Yetai’s biography was written by Minghe himself.

In fascicle seventeen of *Yunxi Liangting [Jing]ting chanshi yulu* 雲溪儂亭 [淨]挺禪師語錄 (The Recorded Sayings of Liangting [Jing]ting of the Yunxi Monastery), there is a petition essay (*shu* 疏) eliciting support for the building of a stupa entitled “Yunxiu jianta shu” 雲岫建塔疏 (Petition to Erect a Pagoda in the Misty Peaks). Here, the monk Jingting 淨挺 (1615–1684) of the monastery Yunxisi 雲溪寺 relates: “at the top of it are the ‘Four Sacred Mountains’ dedicated to the worship of the four bodhisattvas.”¹³ Jingting was a native of Renhe 仁和, Huangzhou. His secular name was Xu Ji’en 徐繼恩, his courtesy names were Liangting 儂亭 and Shichen 世臣, and his literary name was Yiting 逸亭. In Shunzhi 18 (1661) when he was forty-seven years old, he received the full precepts from Chan Master Sanyi Mingyu 三宜明孟 (1599–1665) and served as the abbot of the temple Yunxi Jingshe 雲溪精舍. This proposal to erect a pagoda must have been written while he was in charge of this monastery. Here, Yunxi expressly mentions the Four Sacred Mountains.

In the Jiaxing 嘉興 canon, the *Tiantong Hongjue [Dao]min chanshi beiyou ji* 天童弘覺 [道]忞禪師北游集 (Collected Essays of the Northern Travel

¹¹ 聞四大名山，菩薩出現，神通廣大 (from fascicle 64 of *Wudeng chuanshu* 五燈全書 by Chaoyong). *Shinsan dainippon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經 (cited as X hereafter), no. 1571, 82: 293b.

¹² Minghe, fascicle 10 of *Buxu gaoseng zhuan*, X no. 1524, 77: 209a–b.

¹³ From fascicle 17 of *Yunxi Liangting Ting chanshi yulu* by Yunxi Jingting. *Ming ban jiaxing da zangjing* 明版嘉興大藏經 (cited as JXZ hereafter; the number for texts in the continued JXZ [*Xu jiaxingzang* 續嘉興藏] begins with B), no. B294, 33: 797a.

of Chan Master Hongjue [Dao]min of Tiantong [temple]) by Hongjue Daomin 弘覺道忞 (1594–1674) records that “Chan Master Xingxu 行虛 [n.d.] of Haiyu 海虞 drew [his own] blood to copy the Lotus Sutra for the Four Sacred Mountains.”¹⁴ In *Zizhulin Zhuanyu Heng heshang yulu* 紫竹林巖愚衡和尚語錄 (The Recorded Sayings of Monk Zhuanyu [Guan]heng of the Purple Bamboo Forest Temple), Zhuanyu Guanheng 巖愚觀衡 (1579–1646) mentions “visiting the four great sacred peaks and travelling all over the four quarters of the world.”¹⁵ In fascicle five of *Pinji [Zhi]xiang chanshi yulu* 頻吉 [智] 祥禪師語錄 (The Recorded Sayings of Pinji [Zhi]xiang), “Shi Quezhi [Quan]sui chanren” 示闕止 [全] 遂禪人 (Showing How the Chan Monk [Quan]sui Followed his Master’s Teachings), Pinji Zhixiang 頻吉智祥 (1637–1709) mentions the “four bodhisattvas” —Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Guanshiyin, and Dizang¹⁶—as corresponding to the “Four Sacred Mountains.” In the *Konggu Daocheng chanshi yulu* 空谷道澄禪師語錄 (Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Konggu Daocheng), Konggu Daocheng 空谷道澄 (1616–after 1683) wrote of the Four Sacred Mountains in Kangxi 康熙 19 (1680).¹⁷

Given that the carving of woodblocks for the Jiaxing canon was begun during the Wanli period and mostly concluded during the Kangxi period (1662–1722), the term “Four Sacred Mountains” must have been very popular during the Kangxi period. For example, in Kangxi 26 (1687), Cao Suzhi 曹素徵 (n.d.), then the Surveillance Commissioner (*ancha shi* 按察使), claimed, “The ‘three Es’ [i.e., Mount E’mei] are higher than the Five Peaks. It is the most beautiful peak in the Nine Divisions [i.e., China], the foremost mountain in China. It is not included among the Five Peaks, but is instead listed as one of the Four Great Sacred Peaks.”¹⁸ In Kangxi 37 (1698), in the *Nanhai Putuoshan zhi* 南海普陀山志 (Mount Putuo of the Southern Seas Gazetteer), Qiu Lian 裘璉 (1644–1729) recounts:

Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Guanyin, and Kṣitigarbha are all bodhisattvas who have attained the realization of *dharmakāya*. But due to their eagerness to save sentient beings, they are present everywhere. Additionally, they want sentient beings to have proper

¹⁴ Hongjue Daomin, *Tiantong Hongjue Min chanshi beiyou ji*, fasc. 5, JXZ B180, 26: 303a.

¹⁵ From fascicle 3 of *Zizhulin Zhuanyu Heng heshang yulu* by Zhuanyu Guanheng, JXZ B219, 28: 671c.

¹⁶ From fascicle 5 of *Pinjixiang chanshi yulu* by Pinjie Zhixiang, JXZ B454, 39: 622c.

¹⁷ From fascicle 8 of *Konggu Daocheng chanshi yulu* by Konggu Daocheng, JXZ B471, 39: 963a.

¹⁸ 三峨高出五嶽，秀甲九州，震旦第一山也。顧其山不入五嶽，而列於四大名山之一 (from a preface to *E’mei shan zhi*). Jiang 1980, p. 7.

places in which to render respect. Therefore, Mañjuśrī manifests his response bodies [Skt. *nirmāṇa-kāya*] at Mount Wutai, Samantabhadra at Mount E'mei, and Guanyin and Kṣitigarbha at Mount Putuo and Jiuhua [respectively]. Some people think that earth, water, fire, and wind correspond with the Four Sacred Mountains. The mundane world believes that each peak is respectively governed by one of the fundamental elements—earth, water, fire, and wind [Skt. *mahā-bhūta*]; however, in my opinion, that idea is false and unfounded.¹⁹

During the Kangxi period, not only did the “Four Great Sacred Peaks” appellation appear, but the four fundamental elements of earth, water, fire, and wind were also utilized to characterize them. Thus, the concept of the Four Great Sacred Peaks must already have reached widespread popularity before this period.

Therefore, the concept of the Four Great Sacred Peaks probably appeared during the Wanli period and attained a general consensus among Chinese Buddhists and Chinese society by the Kangxi period. This was due to the Wanli emperor (r. 1573–1620), who esteemed the Buddhist presence on Mount Jiuhua, and to the writing and compilation of gazetteers regarding Mount Jiuhua which occurred shortly before or during the Wanli period. These include:

1. *Jiuhua shanzhi* 九華山志 (Gazetteer of Mount Jiuhua), six fascicles, compiled by Wang Yihuai 王一槐 (n.d.) during the Jiajing period
2. *Jiuhua shanzhi* 九華山志 (Gazetteer of Mount Jiuhua), six fascicles, re-edited by Su Wanmin 蘇萬民 (n.d.) and compiled by Sun Sui 孫榘 (n.d.), finished in Wanli 7 (1579)
3. *Jiuhua shanzhi* 九華山志 (Gazetteer of Mount Jiuhua), eight fascicles, re-edited by Cai Lishen 蔡立身, finished in Wanli 21 (1593)

The listing of Mount Jiuhua among the Four Great Sacred Peaks must have occurred during the Wanli period, during which the overall faith-based framework for the concept of the Four Sacred Mountains took its final shape. The formation of the “Four Great Sacred Peaks” was a landmark in the history of Chinese Buddhist belief and the most representative product of

¹⁹ 文殊、普賢、觀音、地藏，皆久成佛道之法身大士。以度生心切，遍界現身，又欲眾生投誠有地，故文殊示應跡於五台，普賢示應跡於峨眉，觀音、地藏示應跡於普陀、九華也。世有以地、水、火、風分配四大名山者，乃知地、水、火、風為四大之義，而以己見妄會之，不可為據 (from fascicle 6 of *Putuo shanzhi*). Wang 1993, p. 558.

the Sinicization of Buddhism. Their veneration was an expression of popular faith. These places were where devout people, men and women alike, could go on pilgrimage to express their religious feelings; thus, they are a vivid representation of Buddhist culture.

The Significance of the Veneration of the Four Great Sacred Peaks

The veneration of these four mountains was the result of a long-term accretion of Buddhist belief centered around them and others like them. Historians studying Buddhist history have explored their geographic and demographic environments, as well as ancient historical sites, and their efforts have shaped a unique genre of “mountain gazetteers,” which constitutes a significant component of local Buddhist gazetteers.²⁰ In compiling a mountain gazetteer, writers must address a core question: Why did this particular mountain become a famous Buddhist peak? Thus, the components of these sacred peak gazetteers furnish us with an important foundation for understanding the significance of this sort of mountain veneration.

The *Gu Qingliang zhuan* 古清涼傳, compiled by the monk Huixiang 慧祥 (n.d.) of the Lan’gusi 藍谷寺 during the reign of the Tang emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–683), is the first gazetteer to be exclusively focused on Mount Wutai.²¹ This two-fascicle book, which is structurally patterned after the *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志 (Śākyamuni Local Gazetteer),²² recounts the evolution of Mount Wutai as a Buddhist sacred peak from five angles: (1) “Becoming a Standard Sacred Site” gives reasons why “Qingliang” mountain became renowned as a standard sacred site for manifestations of Mañjuśrī; (2) “The Territory’s Mystical Beauty” covers the peak’s geography and its favorable topology; (3) “Famous Ancient and Modern Historical Sites” provides a study of the peak’s monasteries and famous sites; (4) “Mystical Rapture Experienced by Pilgrims” is a collection of miracle tales associated with Mañjuśrī. (5) “Minor Miscellaneous Writings” explains the mountain’s flowers, grasses, medical herbs, trees, and so on.²³ The preface to this book states:

²⁰ Cao (2011, p. 2) summarized the characteristics of Buddhist gazetteers as religious, historical, textual, and regional, pointing out that “Buddhist gazetteers are historical accounts that record the development of geographical and human environments of Buddhism. They are compendiums of works and materials of Buddhist historical geography in a given region.”

²¹ *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (hereafter cited as T), no. 2098, 51: 1092c–1100c.

²² T no. 2088, 51: 948a–975a.

²³ The titles of these five chapters in Chinese are: “Liming biaohua” 立名標化, “Fengyu lishu” 封域里數, “Gujin shengji” 古今勝跡, “Youli gantong” 遊禮感通, “Zhiliu zashu” 支流雜述.

This famous Daoist mountain dedicated to Mañjuśrī, the teacher of seven Buddhas, is where practitioners cultivate their original vitality (*zhenyuan* 真元), while the divine realm of [Mount] Qingliang is where ten thousand bodhisattvas hide their traces. [The fame of the mountain] has spanned from ancient times to the present, and has been well recorded in maps and books. Rare flowers and spiritual grasses are fragrant, and quiet stones and cool springs are sparkling and pure. Auspicious air is emitted from its forests, and propitious clouds lie across its ridges. At night, on dark crags, [Buddha's] lamps and candles always shine brightly. In the morning, in green caves, the sounds of drums and bells constantly reverberate. Old men walk leisurely in valleys, while children play games amidst misty clouds. Buildings and pavilions are splendid, and temple halls are magnificent. Eminent monks come from afar, and the noble visit it personally. [People] lay the foundation for achieving the Way by observing the Buddhist teachings, and make the most sincere vows after witnessing the magnificent marks of the Buddha. From that very day, [they begin] to cultivate special merit, and will realize the wonderful fruits of [enlightenment] in future lifetimes.²⁴

According to this preface, geography and environment, large-scale stupas and monasteries, as well as pilgrimages all made significant contributions to Mount Wutai becoming known as the locus where Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva manifests his transformation body. Zhang Gong points out that around the Northern Wei period (386–557), Buddhist circles started viewing Mount Wutai as Mount Qingliang, the sacred site for Mañjuśrī, alluding to the *Huayan jing*'s chapter "Pusa zhuchu pin" 菩薩住處品 (Residing Places of the Bodhisattvas). And it was during the Sui-Tang transition that the culture of Mount Wutai as a sacred Buddhist site took shape. It took as its basic contents the history of local Buddhism, scenic spots, Buddhist monasteries, divine traces, and miracle tales.²⁵

²⁴ 紫府名山，七佛師棲真之處；清涼聖境，萬菩薩晦跡之方。互於古今，備於圖籍。芬馥之異華靈草，瑩潔之幽石寒泉，瑞氣吐於林中，祥雲橫於嶺上。蒼岩入夜，烟烟而燈燭常明；碧洞侵晨，殷殷而鼓鐘恒響。老人蕭散於溪谷，童子遊戲於煙霞；燦燦之樓閣莊嚴，巍巍之殿堂崇麗。或則高僧遠訪，或則貴族親臨，觀化儀結得道之緣，瞻相好發至誠之願，修殊因於此日，證妙果於他生 (from fascicle 1 of *Gu Qingliang zhuan*, by Huixiang). T no. 2098, 51: 1092c.

²⁵ Zhang 1997, vol. 2, p. 716.

Concerning veneration of sacred Buddhist mountains in medieval China, the value of the *Gu Qingliang zhuan* lies in the fact that it is the first source to associate Mount Wutai with this sort of veneration, and has since established a new model for works focusing on such sacred mountains. Thereafter, the Song-dynasty *Guang Qingliang zhuan* 廣清涼傳 by Yanyi 延一 (fl. 1060) and the *Xu Qingliang zhuan* 續清涼傳 by Zhang Shangyin 張商英 (1043–1121) were both modeled after the *Gu Qingliang zhuan* and enhanced Mount Wutai's significance as a sacred mountain. In particular, the author of the *Guang Qingliang zhuan* divides his information into categories that are supplemented by chronicles of events. The book comprises twenty-three distinct sections dealing with questions like the bodhisattva's location, information on him, his merits and virtues, accounts of the bodhisattva's divine efficacy, when he arrived on the mountain, reasons for the name "Mount Qingliang," traces of divine actions and divinity, scenic monasteries, as well as descriptions of temple structures and dwellings.

The earliest surviving gazetteer of Mount Putuo is the Yuan-dynasty *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* 補陀洛迦山傳.²⁶ Its author divided the contents into four chapters (*pin* 品) and three appendices. These are entitled "The Virtues of Guanyin," "The Geography of the Island and Temples," "Guanyin's Auspicious Responses," and "The History of Building Construction," "Appendix," "Encomium for Guanyin Mahāsattva," and "Poems by Renowned Worthies."²⁷ During the Ming Wanli period (1573–1620), Zhou Yingbin 周應賓 (n.d.), a disciple of Master Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1532–1612), feeling that the mountain had received more attention than the temples, revised the mountain gazetteer, calling it the *Chongxiu Putuo shanzhi* 重修普陀山志.²⁸ This six-fascicle gazetteer is divided into fourteen sections: "Imperial Writings," "Maps and Paintings," "Landscapes," "Buildings and Temples," "Building Specifications," "Histories of Buildings," "Supernatural Events," "Imperial Gifts," "Envoys," "Buddhist Monks," "Products," "Art and Literature," "Events," and "Poetry."²⁹ In the *Putuoluojia*

²⁶ T no. 2101, 51: 1135a–1140b.

²⁷ In Chinese, the chapter titles are: "Zizai gongde" 自在功德, "Dongyu fengyu" 洞宇封域, "Yinggan xiangrui" 應感祥瑞, "Xingjian yan'ge" 興建沿革, "Fulu" 附錄, "Guanyin dashi zan" 觀音大士讚 and "Mingxian shiyong" 名賢詩詠, respectively.

²⁸ Zhou 1980.

²⁹ The Chinese titles of these sections are as follows: "Chenhan" 宸翰, "Tukao" 圖考, "Shanshui" 山水, "Dianyu" 殿宇, "Guizhi" 規制, "Jianzhi" 建置, "Lingyi" 靈異, "Banci" 頒賜, "Mingshi" 命使, "Shizi" 釋子, "Wuchan" 物產, "Yiwen" 藝文, "Shilüe" 事略, and "Shilei" 詩類.

xinzhì 普陀洛迦新志,³⁰ completed by Wang Xiangyan 王享彥 in 1931, there are twelve chapters entitled “Guanyin’s Miraculous Responses,” “Scenic Locales,” “Supernatural Events,” “Donors,” “Buddhist Temples,” “Chan Masters,” “Building Construction,” “Rules and Regulations,” “Travellers’ Refuges,” “Fine Arts,” “Supplementary Materials,” and “Postscript.”³¹

The format of the *Jiuhua shanzhi*,³² compiled by Desen 德森 in 1938, is the same as that of the *Putuoluojia xinzhì*. The *E’mei shanzhi* 峨嵋山志 compiled by Xu Zhijing 許止淨 of the Republic of China consists of eight fascicles.³³ Its contents are as follows: “Illustrated Geography,” “Divine Activities of Bodhisattvas,” “Scenic Spots [to Be Found] on the Entire Mountain,” “Outstanding Features of Buddhist Temples and Nunneries,” “Wonderful Responses and Supernatural Events,” “Eminent Monks Through the Ages,” “Patronage of Emperors and Officials,” “Immortals, Hermits, and Travellers’ Refuges,” “Ancient and Modern Fine Arts,” “Animals, Plants, and [Local] Products,” and “Supplementary Materials.”³⁴

Through an examination of the *Qingliang shanzhi*, *E’mei shanzhi*, *Putuo shanzhi*, and *Jiuhua shanzhi*, the important elements and significance of veneration of sacred Buddhist mountains can be deduced. In my opinion, one can view the evolution of this veneration as a historical process that has resulted from the following six elements: (1) records from classical texts; (2) geography and scenic spots; (3) miracle tales; (4) pilgrimages made by devotees; (5) pagodas, temples, and eminent monks; and (6) state support. It is the clearest indication of the Buddhist faith in China. These six facets are also the core contents of the sacred mountain gazetteers, which are analyzed in the following.

(1) Records from Classical Texts

Records contained in classical texts are the source texts for holy faith; they paved the way for the formulation of the “Four Great Sacred Mountains”

³⁰ Wang 1980.

³¹ The Chinese titles of these chapters are: “Benji” 本跡, “Xingsheng” 形勝, “Lingyi” 靈異, “Tanshi” 檀施, “Fansha” 梵刹, “Chande” 禪德, “Yingjian” 營建, “Guizhi” 規制, “Liuyu” 流寓, “Yiwen” 藝文, “Zhiyu” 志餘, and “Ba” 跋.

³² Desen 2006.

³³ Xu 2006.

³⁴ The Chinese titles of these fascicles are as follows: “Xingye tushuo” 星野圖說, “Pusa shengji” 菩薩聖迹, “Quanshan xingsheng” 全山形勝, “Sian shenggai” 寺庵勝概, “Ganying lingyi” 感應靈異, “Lidai gaoseng” 歷代高僧, “Wangchen waihu” 王臣外護, “Xianyin liuyu” 仙隱流寓, “Gujin yiwen” 古今藝文, “Dongzhi wuchan” 動植物產, and “Jiangbian zhiyu” 蔣編志余.

concept. Although other famous Chinese mountains fulfill these conditions, a lack of textual support prevented their acquiring the status of holy peaks among Buddhist circles. For example, Mount Tiantai, Lushan, and Hengshan 衡山 are all the foci of abundant long-term Buddhist traditions, but compared with the Four Great Sacred Peaks, they lack the textual evidence of sanctity recorded in sutras.

In the Jin translation of the *Huayan jing* completed by Buddhahadra (Fotuobatuoluo 佛馱跋陀羅 [359–430]), it is recorded that “in the Northeast, there is an abode of the bodhisattvas called Qingliang Mountain. In the past, many bodhisattvas resided there. Currently, a bodhisattva called Mañjuśrī lives there who has ten thousand fellow bodhisattvas, to whom he often preaches the Buddhist Dharma.”³⁵ In the Tang-dynasty *Wenshushili fabaozang tuoluoni jing* 文殊師利法寶藏陀羅尼經 translated by Bodhiruci (Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 [572?–727]), it is recorded, “After I enter nirvana, there will be a country called Da Zhen’na 大振那, located northeast of Jambūdvīpa (Ch. *Shanbu zhou* 瞻部洲). In that country, there is a mountain called Wuding 五頂 (literally Five Peaks), in which the child form of Mañjuśrī wanders, lives, and expounds the Buddhist Dharma to sentient beings.”³⁶ Based on these two scriptures, we can see that Mañjuśrī’s sacred site is located on Mount Wuding, also known as Qingliang, in the country of Da Zhen’na.

The Jin translation of the *Huayan jing* records: “In the Southwest, there is an abode of bodhisattvas called Mount Shuti Guangming 樹提光明. Previously, bodhisattvas frequently resided there. Currently, there is a bodhisattva named Xianshou 賢首 who has three thousand fellow bodhisattvas, to whom he often preaches the Buddhist Dharma.”³⁷ The *Huayan jing* translated by Śikṣānanda (Shicha’nantuo 實叉難陀 [652–710]) in the Tang dynasty, replaces “Xianshou” with “Xiansheng” 賢勝,³⁸ but the two editions both consider Mount Guangming to be a sacred site for bodhisattvas.

³⁵ 東北方有菩薩住處，名清涼山。過去諸菩薩常於中住，彼現有菩薩，名文殊師利，有一萬菩薩眷屬，常為說法 (from fascicle 29 of *Da fangguangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經). T no. 278, 9: 590a.

³⁶ 我滅度後，於此瞻部洲東北方，有國名大振那，其國中有山，號曰五頂。文殊師利童子遊行居住，為諸眾生於中說法 (from *Foshuo Wenshushili fabaozang tuoluoni jing* 佛說文殊師利法寶藏陀羅尼經). T no. 1185A, 20: 791c.

³⁷ 西南方有菩薩住處，名樹提光明山，過去諸菩薩常於中住，彼現有菩薩名賢首，有三千菩薩眷屬，常為說法 (from fascicle 29 of *Da fangguangfo huayan jing*). T 9: 590a.

³⁸ In fascicle 45 of *Da fangguangfo huayan jing*, T no. 279, 10: 241b.

The Tang translation of the *Huayan jing* relates, “To the south, there is a mountain called Butanluojia 補怛洛迦, where a bodhisattva called Guanzizai 觀自在 [resides].”³⁹ The *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 records, “To the east of Mount Molaye 秣剌耶 is Mount Butanluojia 布坦洛迦 . . . where Bodhisattva Guanzizai wanders.”⁴⁰ In the chapter entitled “Pumen” 普門, there is a description of Guanyin Bodhisattva heeding the sounds of sufferers and coming to their rescue. Although there is actually a Mount Butanluojia in India, Guanshiyin is venerated due to her compassionate vitality and her role as a tutelary god/goddess of seafarers.

Mount Jiuhua became known as Kṣitigarbha’s seat largely due to the association of this bodhisattva with the Sillan monk Jin Dizang/Kim Chijang. This combination does not seem to have happened until the Ming, but miraculous stories related to the monk had already appeared on that peak as early as the ninth century.

(2) Geography and Scenic Spots

In order to be designated as a sacred mountain, a peak must fulfill two geographic conditions: (1) its topographical features must tally with those described in classical texts; (2) it must be sufficiently spacious to accommodate the building of a large number of monasteries, thereby providing a clean and pure site for spiritual cultivation.

For example, Chengguan personally investigated Mount Wutai for ten years. Noting the severely cold weather on northeast India’s Wutai Mountain, as well as its five peaks, he suggested, “Mount Qingliang is actually Mount Wutai in Yanmen prefecture of Daizhou; there is a temple named Qingliangsi 清涼寺 there. It is called Qingliang because solid ice remains there all year round; even in the summertime, it snows there and the weather is never hot. Its five barren peaks tower loftily and resemble earthen terraces, from whence comes the name *wutai* 五臺 (literally, five terraces).”⁴¹ No trees grow on its peaks; seen from afar, they look like earthen terraces, which is the source of the name “Wutai.” The mountain towers high and is always wrapped in mist and fog. Hidden behind a misty screen, its shape is obscured; it only appears during clear weather when the clouds disperse.

³⁹ 於此南方，有山名補怛洛迦，彼有菩薩名觀自在 (from fascicle 68 of *Da fangguangfo huayan jing*). T 10: 366c.

⁴⁰ 秣剌耶山東有布坦洛迦山 . . . 觀自在菩薩往來游舍 (from fascicle 10 of *Da Tang xiyue ji* by Xuanzang 玄奘 [602–664]). T no. 2087, 51: 932a.

⁴¹ 清涼山，即代州雁門郡五臺山也，於中現有清涼寺。以歲積堅冰，夏仍飛雪，曾無炎暑，故曰清涼。五峯聳出，頂無林木，有如壘土之臺，故曰五臺 (from fascicle 47 of *Da fangguangfo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, by Chengguan). T no. 1735, 35: 859c.

Huixiang, the author of the *Gu qingdong zhuan*, marveled at the similarities in locality and weather between Mount Wutai and Mount Qingliang, which the *Huayan jing* claims as the abode of Mañjuśrī. For such a pure realm, the *Kuodi zhi* 括地志 says, “The mountain’s . . . divine peaks and holy crevices are not suitable as the dwellings of vulgar, mundane folk. Its residents are all people practicing meditation and dwelling on profound thoughts. [Therefore,] when the dharma thunder sounds and fragrant smoke converges from the four directions, the heart of compassion and enlightenment will naturally be spread abroad.”⁴² It is clear that not only does Mount Wutai possess a mysterious and divine atmosphere, but it is also a good place to cultivate the Way and practice meditation.

Mount E’mei, located in southwest China, tallies with the prescribed characteristics of a “luminous mountain” (*guangmingshan* 光明山) because it has “Buddha light” (*foguang* 佛光) in the daytime and “holy lamps” (*shengdeng* 聖燈) at night. When it comes to Mount Putuo, the preface to its gazetteer reads:

Starting with the Tang dynasty, when foreign monks came to witness [Guanyin’s] miraculous transformation, the fame of Butuoluojia began to spread. [The mountain] stands imposingly in the eastern Yue region, gleaming from afar amid great waters [i.e., the East Sea]. Stone caves are embedded in cliffs, and the forested ridges there are pure and deep. Followers of the Way reside there, and countless Buddhist monasteries have been constructed there. Those who are not curious about exploring remote regions and travelling by boat are seldom able to reach the mountain.⁴³

Undoubtedly, the name Putuoluojia 普陀洛迦 originated due to its island landscape and special geographical features. Mount Jiuhua is also strikingly beautiful; it protrudes through clouds with row upon row of peaks and ridges. Its nine peaks rise like lotus blossoms; hence, it is called Mount Jiuhua, or “Nine-Blossom Mountain.”

(3) Miracle Tales and (4) Pilgrimages of the Faithful

With the introduction of sutras associated with the four bodhisattvas, all kinds of bodhisattva legends were disseminated throughout China.

⁴² 其山 . . . 靈嶽神巖，非薄俗可棲。止者，悉是棲禪之士，思玄之流。及夫法雷震音，芳煙四合，慈覺之心，邈然自遠 (from fascicle 1 of *Gu Qingliang zhuan*). T 51: 1093a.

⁴³ 始自唐朝梵僧來觀神變，而補陀洛迦山之名，遂傳焉。盤礴於東越之境，窅芒乎巨浸之中，石洞嵌巖，林鬱清邃，有道者居之，而阿蘭若兆興焉。自非好奇探幽，乘桴汎槎者，罕能至也 (from fascicle 1 of *Butuoluojia shan zhuan*, by Sheng Ximing 盛熙明 [fl. 1344]). T 51: 1135b.

Meanwhile, the various religious experiences obtained on the sacred peaks as reported by monks and adherents were taken as evidence of the bodhisattvas' presence. Such tales unceasingly aroused religious fervor and encouraged others to make pilgrimages. Therefore, legends of miraculous responses were a driving force for the growth of veneration of these sites.

Both Mañjuśrī's transformation body at Mount Wutai and that of Guanyin in the Cave of Tidal Sounds (*chao[fan]yin dong* 潮[梵]音洞) at Mount Putuo are very charismatic, and have thus attracted countless pious believers to make pilgrimages to these places. During the Tang dynasty, when the Japanese monk Ennin 圓仁 (793–864) made a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai, he described his feelings in this way:

In May, the nights are extremely cold on Mount Qingliang [Wutai], and people usually wear padded jackets. Trees on the ridges and in the valleys stand upright and tall—not a single one is crooked. After entering the realm of the Great Sage [i.e., Mañjuśrī], [I] dare not despise even the basest of people. When encountering donkeys or other animals, [I] also suspect them to be transformation bodies of Mañjuśrī. Whatever I see, I always suspect them of being Mañjuśrī's transformation bodies. In the realm of the holy spirits, the scenery naturally inspires awe in the hearts of people.⁴⁴

Ennin's veneration of "the transformation body of Mañjuśrī" is representative of the psychological state of all pilgrims to Mount Wutai.

For example, the *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 says that in Qiande 乾德 4 (966), "Jiazhou 嘉州 [officials] frequently reported sightings of Samantabhadra at Baishuisi 白水寺."⁴⁵ In Taiping Xingguo 太平興國 7 (982), Wang Gun 王袞 (n.d.), a supervisory official from Jiazhou, submitted a memorial, stating: "When [I] recently went to Mount E'mei to supervise the building of Baishui Temple, [I] saw that the brick roofs had all become golden, and within this glow appeared the six yard (*zhang* 丈) tall golden body of Samantabhadra. At noon on the following day, [I] saw two arhats riding on purple clouds and walking in the sky."⁴⁶ These auspicious signs

⁴⁴ 此清涼山，五月之夜極寒，尋常著棉襖子。嶺上谷裏，樹木端長，無一曲戾之木。入大聖境地之時，見極賤之人，亦不敢作輕蔑之心；若逢驢畜，亦起疑心，恐是文殊化現歟。舉目所見，皆起文殊所化之想，聖靈之地，使人自然對境起崇重之心也 (from fascicle 2 of *Nittō guhō junrei gyōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記). Ennin 1986, p. 108.

⁴⁵ 嘉州屢奏白水寺普賢相見 (from fascicle 43 of *Fozu tongji* by Zhipan 志磐 [n.d.]). T no. 2035, 49: 395b.

⁴⁶ 近往峨眉提點白水寺修造，見瓦屋山皆變金色，中有丈六金身普賢，次日午中見羅漢二身乘紫雲行空中 (from fascicle 43 of *Fozu tongji*). T 49: 398a.

associated with Samantabhadra secured for Mount E'mei the direct support of Northern Song (960–1126) emperors. Such measures to profit by and protect the mountain's Buddhist presence undoubtedly played a crucial role in the final establishment of the mountain as a sacred site for the bodhisattva.

In discussing the transformation of Mount Putuo into a sacred site for Guanyin Bodhisattva, Chün-fang Yü states:

Miracles and pilgrimage sites played an important role in the Chinese cult of Kuan-yin. Both contributed to the domestication and sinicization of Kuan-yin. Miracle tales, local lore, literature, and art were the media through which information about pilgrimage sites was made known. They created certain expectations in the hearts of potential pilgrims, and probably shaped their experiences during the pilgrimage. Both monastic and lay pilgrims were the agents who transmitted local traditions to other parts of the country.⁴⁷

The compilers of mountain gazetteers carefully collected and preserved these traditions, as can be seen in the various *Putuo shanzhi* published through the years. Thus, miracle tales and pilgrimages were important formative factors in the veneration of these sacred Buddhist mountains, and both facilitated the domestication and Sinicization of Guanyin.

(5) Stupas, Temples, and Eminent Monks

In order to be recognized as a famous mountain, a peak must have the proper dimensions and effects. Only forests of stupas, temples, and statues and the presence of generations of eminent monks can spark belief and religious fervor. Buddhism was first disseminated on Mount Wutai in the Northern Wei dynasty. During the Qi dynasty (479–502), it was reported that “there are nearly forty thousand temples in the realm [i.e., China]; among these are more than two hundred monasteries [on the Wutai ranges]. Additionally, the land taxes of eight sub-prefectures are given [by the government] to pay for the clothing and medicine of the resident monks. With such privileges, this sacred site, an abode of the immortals endowed with spiritual and monetary gifts, has flourished.”⁴⁸ At the time, Master Lingbian 靈辯 (477–522) composed the *Huayan lun* 華嚴論 of one hundred fascicles, the first Chinese

⁴⁷ Yü 2001, p. 355.

⁴⁸ 宇內塔寺，將四十千；此中伽藍，數過二百。又割八州之稅，以供山眾衣藥之資焉。據此而詳，則仙居靈祀，故觸地而繁矣 (from fascicle 1 of *Gu Qingliang zhuan*). T 51: 1094a.

sutra commentary. From then on, Mount Wutai gradually became the Northern Chinese center for *Huayan jing* research and study. During the Sui-Tang era, Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649) built temples and ordained monks there, Emperor Gaozong (r. 649–683) exempted mountain-dwellers from paying taxes, and Empress Wu 武 (r. 690–705) constructed pagodas as a religious offering. In Longshuo 龍朔 2 (662), the empress ordered Huize 會曠 (n.d.), a monk of the Huichangsi 會昌寺 in the Western Capital [Luoyang 洛陽 or Xi'an 西安], to write the single-fascicle *Qingliang lüezhuan* 清涼山略傳, and also ordered State Preceptor Degan 德感 (659?–704?), who was then serving as Buddhist Supervisor (*sengtong* 僧統), to reside at the Qingliangsi 清涼寺 on Mount Wutai. During the Tang Kaiyuan 開元 period (713–741), the cult of Mañjuśrī centered on Mount Wutai reached its peak, causing the mountain to become the sacred seat of Mañjuśrī; concurrently, the scale of its temples and monastic compounds also reached an apex of expansion. In the Yuan and Qing dynasties, as a result of the promotion of esoteric Buddhism, there was a dramatic increase in tantric temples. During the Wanli period, more than three hundred temples and monasteries stood on Mount Wutai.

In the early fifth century, Huichi 慧持 (337–412) had the first temple on Mount E'mei constructed, the Puxiansi 普賢寺. From the Tang dynasty onward, the phenomenon of “Buddha light” appearing on the mountain was widely known. With people explaining this “Buddha light” as “Samantabhadra’s auspicious omens,” coupled with further support from the Northern Song emperors, Mount E'mei gradually became the sacred seat of Samantabhadra. Buddhism reached its peak on the mountain during the Ming dynasty; there were more than 170 monasteries there, housing over three thousand resident monks and countless adherents.

The history of Mount Putuo began in Dazhong 大中 1 (847) when an eminent Indian monk took up residence on the peak. In the Later Liang era’s Zhenming 貞明 2 (916), when the Japanese monk Hui’e (Jp. Egaku) built the cloister Bukenqu Guanyinyuan 不肯去觀音院 (the temple of “Guanyin-who-refused-to-leave”), the cult of Guanyin became increasingly popular and temple construction rapidly increased. By Daoguang 道光 12 (1832), according to *Chongxiu Nanhai Putuoshan zhi* 重修南海普陀山志序 (Introduction to the Newly-revised Southern Seas Mount Putuo Gazetteer) by Wang Dingxun 王鼎勳 (n.d.–after 1834), “There are no fewer than seventy temples in the mountains, with over a thousand resident and guest monks.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ 山中僧寮不下七十餘所，緇流及外方掛單約一千餘眾 (from fascicle 12 of *Putuo shanzhi*). Wang 1993, p. 625.

In the Tang Zhide 至德 era (756–758), a Jiuhua country squire named Zhuge Jie 諸葛節 (n.d.) and others built Huchengsi 化城寺 for Jin Qiaojue 金喬覺 (705–803), marking the start of Buddhism on Mount Jiuhua. Gradually, it was said that there were a thousand temples on that mountain, all scattered in clouds and fog. In the Qing-dynasty Mount Jiuhua gazetteer, “Huacheng si sengliao ji” 化城寺僧寮記 (Records of the Dormitory of Monks in Huacheng Temple), Zhou Wenbin 周文贊 (n.d.) claimed that at most, there were a thousand resident monks in each of China’s flourishing Buddhist temples.⁵⁰ Clearly, with monasteries scattered throughout the land as plentifully as stars in the sky, crowds of eminent monks, splendid Dharma assemblies, and frequent Buddhist ceremonies, these grand scale effects provided an atmosphere that was highly conducive to veneration of these mountains.

(6) State Support

A sacred mountain would never be able to expand its influence without imperial support. The coinage, the “Four Great Sacred Mountains,” was authorized as a result of imperial and royal patronage. Northern Qi emperors channeled the taxes from eight prefectures into funds for the clothing and medicine of Mount Wutai’s monks. Tripiṭaka Master Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra; 705–774) vigorously spread the cult of Mañjuśrī with the support of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779). In Dali 大曆 4 (769), the emperor sanctioned Bukong’s memorial requesting that Mañjuśrī occupy the seat of honor (*shangzuo* 上座) in all temple refectories, with Samantabhadra and Guanyin acting as attendants. In this way, Mount Wutai became the foremost among all sacred mountains.⁵¹

Mount E’mei obtained various kinds of support from the Northern Song emperors. In Qiande 4 (966), Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 960–976) ordered the eunuch Zhang Zhong 張重 (n.d.) to travel to Puxiansi 普賢寺 to decorate Buddha statues. In the first month of Taiping Xingguo 5 (980), Emperor Taizong (r. 976–997) dispatched the eunuch Zhang Renzan 張仁贊 (n.d.) to oversee the casting of a bronze image of Samantabhadra. It was two yards (*zhang*) in height, and was erected in the Puxiansi at Baishui 白水 along with a large pavilion to cover it. In this way, five temples were also rebuilt, including Baishui Puxiansi 白水普賢寺, Huayansi 華嚴寺, Heishuisi 黑水寺, as well as Zhongfeng Qianmingsi 中峰乾明寺 and Guangxiangsi 光相寺. In

⁵⁰ 天下佛寺之盛，千僧極矣。Cited from Yang 2008.

⁵¹ Yuanzhao 圓照 (727–809), *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄, fasc. 16, T no. 2157, 55: 887c.

Yongxi 雍熙 4 (987), Emperor Taizong ordered eunuchs to deliver precious caps [to bedeck Buddhist images], jade decorations, and monk's cassocks to Puxiansi. In Duangong 端拱 2 (989), acting under imperial order, the eunuch Xie Baoyi 謝保意 (n.d.) brought craftsmen and three hundred taels of gold to the mountain to decorate Samantabhadra's statue and renovate the temple compound. In Dazhong Xianfu 大中祥符 4 (1011), Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997–1022) granted three thousand taels of gold to enlarge the mountain's Puxiansi and to fund vegetarian feasts for thirty thousand monks. He also ordered the ordination of four monks each year. With this imperial patronage, the Buddhist presence on Mount E'mei increased rapidly at the cost of Daoism. Due to imperial support, during the Song dynasty, the mountain became renowned throughout China and abroad as the sacred seat of Samantabhadra. During the Ming dynasty, Emperor Taizu (r. 1368–1398) honored Master Baotan 寶曇 (1335–1395) as the state Buddhist preceptor, and the Wanli emperor built a beamless brick hall to protect the statue of Samantabhadra riding on a white elephant. Meanwhile, he personally wrote a name tablet for the Shengshou Wanniansi 聖壽萬年寺; for the newly-built bronze hall, he bestowed the name tablet "Yongshi Huazangsi" 永時華藏寺 by imperial decree. The Qing Kangxi emperor (1654–1722) composed poems, couplets, and name tablets for temples there. With the direct support of Ming and Qing emperors, there were more and more temples built there, and the mountain's roads and environment were improved, making pilgrimages more convenient.

The development of Buddhism on Mount Putuo had much to do with emperors of these two dynasties, who esteemed it highly. Wanli donated several copies of the Buddhist canon to the mountain; Chongzhen 崇禎 (r. 1628–1644) ordered Tian Hongyu 田弘遇 (n.d.–1643?), a member of the royal family, to pray to Guanyin there and offer imperial incense. In Kangxi 28 (1689), the emperor ordered eunuchs to send a thousand taels of silver for mountain temple construction. Ten years later when the emperor visited Hangzhou, he ordered eunuchs to burn incense on Mount Putuo and deliver a thousand taels of gold as gifts for the front and the back temples. He also issued an edict claiming that "the mountain is an imperial temple." In Yongzhen 雍正 9 (1731), seventy thousand taels of gold were bestowed in order to rebuild the front and the back monasteries. Consequently, the rise of Buddhism at Mount Putuo was closely related to the political attentions of Ming and Qing emperors.

It was also during the Ming and Qing eras that Buddhism on Mount Jiuhua developed. The Wanli emperor donated the Buddhist canon to Huachengsi

twice. The Kangxi emperor dispatched eunuchs to burn incense there three times, and granted it the name tablet “Jiuhua Shengjing” 九華聖境. In Qianlong 乾隆 41 (1776), the emperor granted Huacheng Temple the name tablet “Fengtuo Pujiao” 芬陀普教. That Mount Jiuhua was able to take its place among the “Four Great Sacred Mountains” is closely related to the state support furnished by the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Conclusion: The Formation of Sacred Mountain Veneration and the Overcoming of the “Borderland Complex”

The appellation the “Four Great Sacred Mountains” likely appeared during the Wanli period; by the Kangxi period, it had already reached a consensus among Chinese Buddhist circles and within Chinese society. However, not only did the Chinese venerate Mount Wutai as a sacred Buddhist site, it was also venerated by eminent Indian monks. From the Song and Yuan dynasties on, the rise of Mounts E’mei and Putuo as sacred Buddhist sites was allied with the decline of Indian Buddhism and the “national centrality” of Chinese Buddhism. Chinese Buddhists had a “borderland complex” concerning some of the territories associated with Indian Buddhism. During the Tang-Song transition, the Sinicization of Chinese Buddhism was accomplished in a three-tiered process that entailed Buddhist beliefs, thought, and regulations; the Chinese formulated their own versions of these three components. With the decline of Indian Buddhism, the status of China as the center for Buddhism became even more evident, lending the “Four Great Sacred Mountains” a more dramatic importance.

Chinese Buddhist veneration of these mountains is not a replica of Indian Buddhist sacred sites. Instead, it is based upon “canonical records” conjoined with “geography and scenic locales,” the continuous presence of eminent monks practicing cultivation, and travelling students of Buddhism. State support for the construction of stupas, temples, and for the provision of monastic furnishings and supplies contributed to the formation of large-scale temples and monasteries, which were the material foundation for this phenomenon. Finally, miracle tales stimulated religious fervor, bringing in a continuous flow of pilgrims and thereby forming the psychological foundation for the veneration of these sites.

On the basis of these holy, material, and psychological factors, the four bodhisattvas—Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Guanyin, and Kṣitigarbha—were transported to China. In this way, China overcame its “borderland complex” and erected its own unique Buddhist beliefs, thus demonstrating its zeal to become the world center for Buddhism. In a broader view, High Tang

China was the cultural center of the entire world, and Chinese people from the Song dynasty onwards continued to harbor this dream. Against this background, we can better understand the emergence of the “Four Great Sacred Mountains.”

ABBREVIATIONS

- JXZ *Ming ban jiaxing da zangjing* 明版嘉興大藏經. 40 vols. Reprint. Taipei: Xing Wenfeng Chuban Gongsi. 1986–87.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.
- X *Shinsan dainippon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經. 88 vols. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照, et al. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai. 1975–89.

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