Introduction

The history of cultic images—that is, images designed for religious worship—in Asia, especially in China, remains to be written.[1] This history should seek to respond to several questions: In what period did objects of worship appear in China, and based on what sorts of underlying assumptions and criteria might we call them cultic objects at all? Could there be a possible convergence between written testimonies and archaeological remains? How was the production of icons understood, especially in light of its eventual condemnation in iconoclastic discourse? Though we cannot, of course, aspire to comprehensively answer all these questions here; we nevertheless hope to sketch an outline of the beginnings of this history.

In contrast to the peremptory assumption that cultic images have existed since the dawn of time, we find that evidence for such images in Chinese antiquity is rather tenuous to say the least. That is, neither the evidence of objects and representations of divinities found in tombs, nor written accounts mentioning the creation of such images, are sufficient to prove that worship dedicated to these images actually existed "on the ground." Nor does it establish that the aforementioned images did not serve commemorative, liturgical, narrative, or even decorative functions.[2]

There is no question about the existence of animistic veneration of trees, rocks, or animals; however, it seems that the type of worship at issue here forms itself primarily con-

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1 In the Christian world, this history has been brilliantly set forth by Hans Belting in *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschite des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1990), trans. Edmund Jephcott as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

2 Regarding this issue, see Alain Arrault and Wang Yucheng, "L'émergence de l'icône taoïste: Essai d'histoire de l'image cultuelle," in *La voie du Tao: Un autre chemin de l'être,* ed. Réunion des Musées Nationaux (Paris: RMN, 2010), 37–40.

cerns anthropomorphic representation. Consequently, it is related to the advent and dissemination of the art of portraiture.[3] The ability to create portraits of gods presupposed the popular acceptance and development of an accurate art of portraiture of the self.

In the interest of narrowing our focus, we are essentially interested in statuary, which we believe is the most significant and emblematic example of the cultic image, even if it is not its only form. Concrete evidence, dated to around the turn of the Common Era (the Eastern Han), has come down to us today, primarily in two forms. The first consists of rock engravings on the side of a long rocky hill, the Kongwang shan 孔望山, in Shandong province. Despite the difficulties of dating it—not to mention that it was carved over a period of one or two centuries and that the identities of the persons depicted therein remain highly contested—there is nevertheless little doubt that some of its anthropomorphic petroglyphs were the object of worship. The second example is a visual depiction of a cult, carved in the 2nd century CE on the wall of Wu Liang's 武梁 tomb. The image depicts Ding Lan 丁蘭, who would become a quintessential embodiment of filial piety, paying homage to his prematurely deceased parents, represented by statues placed on an altar.[4]

These early, yet tenuous, two-dimensional Chinese sources were taken up by the arrival of Buddhism in China, which occurred practically in the same period. Despite Buddhism's early aniconic tendencies—in which the Buddha, as one who had departed, could not be iconically depicted but was instead represented by his marks—when Buddhism first entered and began to spread in China, from the 2nd century to the 4th century, it brought with it imposing, rich, and sometimes monumental statuary. It also brought a tradition of ritual consecration, which was a rite of establishment (*pratiṣṭhā*) whose most essential component was the rite of bestowing breath (*prana pratiṣṭhā*), that became known in China as the "installation of the deities" (*anshen* 安神) and the "opening of the light" (*kaiguang* 開光) of the divine statues.[5] These consecrations would make the statues come alive: able to see and hear.[6] An unconsecrated statue, in contrast, would remain a mere insentient piece of wood or rock.

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3 On the topic of portraiture in China, see Dietrich Seckel, "The Rise of Portraiture in Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 53.1–2 (1993): 7–26. According to the author, personal portraiture and "authentic" portraiture (i.e. mimetic representation of the portrait subject), did not appear in China until around the Common Era.

4 See Arrault and Wang, "L'émergence de l'icône taoïste," 42–43. On the topic of the petroglyphs of Kongwang shan and the debates they raise, see Li Song 李淞, *Zhongguo daojiao meishu shi* 中國道教美術史 (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2012), 116–31.

5 The term "*an*" in "*anshen*" can mean "to install" or "to pacify." In other contexts, "*an*" has the derived meanings of "calmness" and "peace."

6 Arrault and Wang, "L'émergence de l'icône taoïste," 47.

Buddhism concomitantly sanctioned the worship of images, albeit through some theologically sophisticated detours (e.g. though the Buddha's Truth Body is everywhere, it can manifest in the place where a devotee comes forward with a sincere and pure heart).[7] Ultimately, Buddhism asserted that the Buddha himself could be reached not only through revealed texts, but also by way of icons. This was all the more true given that Buddha statues were said not to be mere replicas but originals imported from India. Referencing the myth of the statue of Śākyamuni commissioned by King Udayana in India—to which the Buddha himself paid homage and prophesized its future role in the propagation of the Buddhist teachings—Buddha images necessarily became originals, seen to have traveled from India to Khotan, China, and Japan.[8] As part of this same movement from the aniconicism of the first few centuries CE to the creation of statues, Daoism also began during the 6th and 7th centuries to legitimize the use of cultic images. However, all the while Daoism differentiated its meditative approach—whereby one had to visualize within oneself the body of the Dao—from a cultic practice, both approaches being nevertheless considered legitimate for attaining the Dao.[9]

Once dead, the mummified bodies of Buddhist patriarchs and saintly persons became a foundation of cultic worship. It is quite remarkable to note that it was probably mummification itself that prompted the use of statues. This was either because the process required sometimes that the body be covered in strips of cloth soaked in lacquer, upon which clay was sometimes added, thus transforming the mummy into a statue, or else because of the ultimately corruptible nature of mummified bodies. In contrast to this, statues presented the advantage that, even if they were not indestructible, they could at least be used to easily replace tarnished mummies as needed.[10] Statues of Masters—supposedly produced by taking a mold of the body, bust or the face—thus became, at least theoretically, accurate portraits of their likenesses. Techniques such as the lacquering used for mummification

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7 Bernard Frank, "Vacuité et corps actualisé: le problème de la présence des Personnages Vénérés dans leurs images selon la tradition du bouddhisme japonais," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11.2 (1988): 53–86.

8 Cf. Robert H. Sharf and Elisabeth Horton Sharf, *Living Images: Buddhist Icons in Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 2–15; Helmut Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred: Empowering Buddhist Images in Clear, in Code and in Cache* (Lawrence, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas with Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2011), 11–33. For a more general overview of the "bibliography" of certain Japanese Buddhist statues, see Sarah J. Horton, *Living Buddhist Statues in Early Medieval and Modern Japan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

9 Arrault and Wang, "L'émergence de l'icône taoïste," 45–47. See also below in this Introduction.

10 Paul Demiéville, "Momies d'Extrême-Orient," *Journal des savants* 1 (1965): 144–70; T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1993–1994): 166–68. See also below in this Introduction.

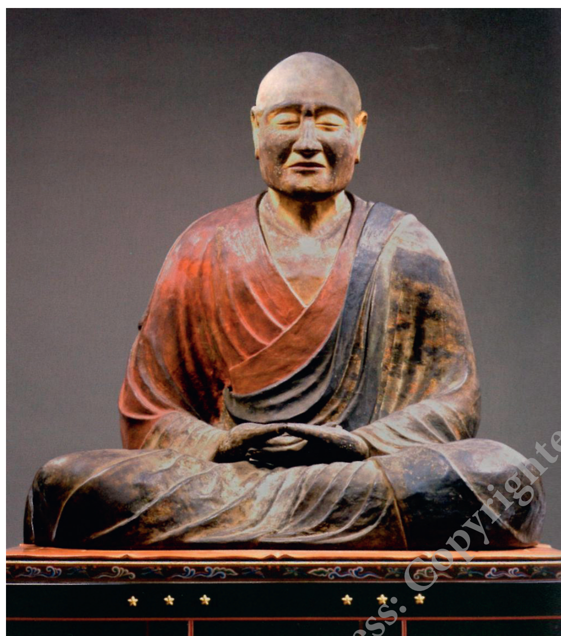

Figure 0.1 A statue of the monk Ganjin 鑑真, Tōshōdai ji 唐招提寺, Nara, *ca.* 763.

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began to be used on such statues in order to guarantee their "long life" (see, for example, Figure 0.1). The connection between saintliness, the body, mummification, and statuary was thus decisively established.

Moreover, in the same way that relics of all sizes were enshrined within stupas large and small, it was seemly to insert relics (or substitutes for them) inside statues.[11] This would explain why a multitude of objects—a tooth, a mirror, and pearls, as well as copies of sutras and, even more surprisingly, internal organs made of fabric—were found within the cache on the back of a statue of Śākyamuni from the 10th century (see Figure 0.2).[12]

11 Foulk and Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," 169.

12 This wooden statue is held in the Seiryōji monastery in Kyoto. It was fabricated in 985 in China—in what is currently Zhejiang province—for the Japanese monk Chōnen 奝然. For restoration purposes, several Buddhist statues in Japan were opened, clearly revealing that this "impregnation" was locally adopted beginning in the 11th century, at the end of the Hei'an period (794–1185). However, beginning in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), the "organs" seem to disappear and be replaced by small, five-storey pagodas (*wulun ta* 五輪塔) or reliquaries, but into which are still inserted copies of sutras, as well as lists of sponsors, which also began to increase considerably in length. There is a plethora of studies regarding these statues, especially in Japanese. For a nearly comprehensive bibliography and analysis of this statuary, see Wu Peirong 巫佩蓉, "Zhongguo yu Riben foxiang naru pin zhi bijiao: yi Seiryōji yu Saidai

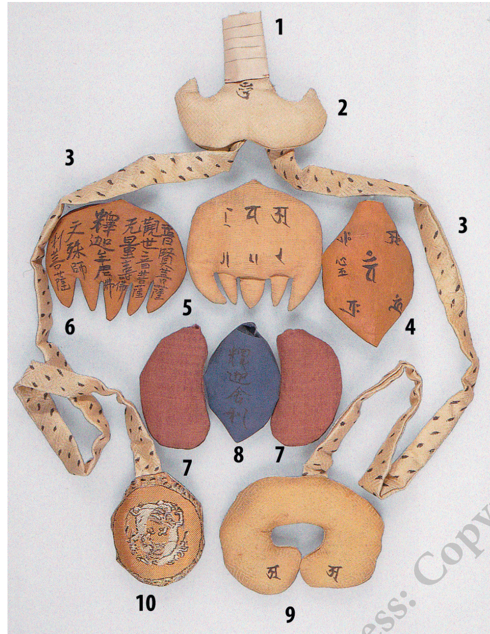

Figure 0.2 The fabric organs from the statue of Śākyamuni, Seiryōji 清涼寺, Kyoto, 985. Excerpted from *Seichi Ninpō: Nihon Bukkyō 1300-nen no genryū: subete wa koko kara yatte kita* 聖地寧波：日本仏教1300年の源流：すべてはここからやって来た (Nara, Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan 奈良國立博物館, 2009), 38. 1: Trachea; 2: Stomach; 3: Intestines; 4: Heart; 5: Lungs; 6: Liver; 7: Kidneys; 8: Gall bladder; 9: Bladder? 10: Spleen?[13]

ji Shijia xiang wei li" 中國與日本佛像納入品之比較：以清涼寺與西大寺釋迦像為例, *Nanyi xuebao* 南藝學報 2 (2011): 71–99. Many statues dated to approximately the same period as the Japanese examples were opened in Korea and were found to contain similar objects. A manual for the production of Buddhist statues (*Zaoxiang jing* 造像經) has been preserved in several editions in Korean libraries, see Hŏ Hŭng-sik 許興植, *Han'guk chungse Pulgyosa yŏn'gu* 韓國中世佛教史研究, chapter 5, 195–269; Lee Seonyong 이선용, "Pulbokchangmul kusŏnghyŏngsig-e kwanhan yŏn'gu" 佛腹藏物 구성형식에 관한 연구, *Misulsahak yŏn'gu* 美術史學研究 (*Korean Journal of Art History*) 261 (2009): 77–104. My thanks to Yannick Bruneton who helped me to find and understand Korean sources.

13 This identification of organs and viscera is based on a list of objects placed in the statue. At each end of the intestines are the *zhu* 賭 (9, basin) and the *du* 肚 (10, belly or stomach). This makes little sense, so specialists agree that these must, in fact, be the bladder and the spleen. Another piece of fabric—marked with the character *shang* 上 and not included in the illustration—corresponds in the list to *beipi* 背皮 (the skin of the back). Because of the *shang* for *shangjiao* 上焦, it likely represents the three cookers (*sanjiao* 三焦), one of the six viscera (*liufu* 六腑). See, among other sources, Ishihara Akira 石原明, "Gozō nittai no igi nitsu ite: Seiryōji Shaka-zō tainai gozō kenkyū" 五臟入胎の意義について：清涼寺釋迦像胎內五臟研究, *Nihon ishi gaku zasshi* 日本醫史學雜誌 7.1–3 (1956): 5–29, and, by the same author, "Seiryōji Shaka ryuzō nonyu no naizō mokei" 清涼寺釋迦立像納入の內臟模型, *Museum: Kokuritsu hakubutsu-*

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By the end of the first millennium, the discursive apparatus (i.e. the religious legitimation for the use of icons), ritual apparatus (i.e. the modalities of the consecration of icons), and material apparatus (i.e. the production of the bodies of the statues) were in place to enable the definitive advent of the cultic image, and—in its most exemplary sense—that of statuary. The latter's history—made up of repressions, gaps, and upheavals—is nevertheless far from linear.

Whether instantiations of important ahistorical beings or euhemeristic culminations of historical characters, statues of divinities only rarely descend from their pedestals, with the notable exception of only a few who fell victim to iconomachic movements (e.g. the God of the City at the beginning of the Ming) or to political campaigns against superstition, as in the beginning of the 20th century.

Buddhist masters and patriarchs, mummified and/or made into statues, displayed a remarkable continuity, as long as they were in an environment that included a sanctuary and religious devotees to maintain it. The situation became more tenuous in the case of Daoist Masters, given the scarcity of any written or archaeological traces of their statues, despite their theological legitimation of images, their adoption of consecration rituals, and the account we have of a 9th-century statue, with organs, of the Celestial Master Zhang.[14] From this perspective, it is remarkable that very few statues of Daoist saints and divinities have been opened, searched, and "anatomically" studied in the way that Buddhist statues—in particular those in Japan, Korea, and Western museums—have been and still are.

Certain so-called Confucian intellectuals had great difficulty accepting cultic images of their Master, Confucius, and his disciples. Based on prescriptions laid out in the Classics, they regularly argued that only votive tablets were legitimate, insisting that mimetic representation was necessarily inadequate. They thus asserted that writing held primacy over images for capturing the true spirit of the sages. They also employed these same views with respect to ancestors and, thus, argued the latter should not be rendered in images.

kan kenkyū shi 國立博物館研究誌 289 and 293 (1975): 15–20, 27–34. For a Western-language history of this icon, its contents, and its influence in Japan, see Gregory Henderson and Leon Hurvitz, "The Buddha of Seiryoji," *Artibus Asiae* 19 (1956): 5–44; Donald F. McCallum, "The Saidaiji Lineage of the Seiryōji Shaka Tradition," *Archives of Asian Art* 49 (1996): 51–67; Helmut Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred*, 33–42; and the excellent Master's thesis by Daniel Borengasser, "The Presence of the Buddha: Transmission of Sacred Authority and the Function of Ornament in Seiryōji's Living Icon" (University of Oregon, 2014). For an example of an open statue in Europe, see Roger Goepper, "An Early Work by Kōen in Cologne," *Asiatische Studien / Etudes asiatiques* 37.2 (1983): 67–103.

14 See Du Guangting 杜光庭, *Daojiao lingyan ji* 道教靈驗記, *juan* 8, 1a, *DZ* 590, no. 325. See also Alain Arrault, "Le corps et les entrailles des dieux," in *Le battement de la vie: le corps naturel et ses représentations en Chine,* ed. Brigitte Baptandier (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 2017), 129–30.

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Despite these records, here and there we also find evidence to the contrary: as early as the Sui dynasty (581–618), there were painted portraits and statues of emperors and empresses made of clay, bronze, stone, and jade. Over the course of centuries, this brought about a two-sided, almost contradictory practice: on the one hand were "public" ceremonies in the temple, conducted before the ancestral tablets of the imperial ancestors and, on the other, "private" rituals conducted before ancestral icons. At least since the Song dynasty (960–1279), "images" of Confucian masters were erected in Confucian academies, and "ordinary people" clearly did not really abide by the interdiction. Even in museums and antique shops today, one can find painted portraits of ancestors dating from the end of the Ming (1368–1644)—frozen in their hieratic poses—that would have been originally installed in ancestral temples. Even more recently, an account emerged of a red guard who opened a statue of Confucius in Qufu, the temple dedicated to the latter, and found himself holding a handful of "fabric viscera"![15]

Depending on the framework we adopt (Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian), we find that the history of cultic images can be subject to varying speeds, divergent orientations, and different temporalities. We also discover contradictory facts within particular doctrines, as well as prohibitions that are often sidestepped. Nevertheless, what emerges from this fog is a general economy around the cultic image. Gods, ancestors, and masters *can* be represented; they participate in a shared ideology; their images are considered alive, meaning they do not incarnate supernatural powers but, rather, make them present. They follow similar manufacturing principles, combining a specific exterior appearance and an interior cache. They undergo similar ritual consecration procedures, which can be more or less sophisticated. But, distributed over centuries, these sparse and incomplete sources make it arduous to write a comprehensive history of the cultic image.

The statue collections we examine here give us the advantage of being able to trace the production of a statue over the course of several centuries (16th to 20th century) and within a clearly delineated territory (central Hunan in Southern China). Thanks to the documents (*yizhi* 意旨, consecration certificates) contained inside these effigies, as well as to the inscriptions found on the statues themselves, we have at our disposal first-hand information that has not been filtered down through theological or philosophical discourses. This information—which includes names, addresses, dates, and wishes—is quite unique in the history of Chinese art. This is all the more remarkable given that these are instances of domestic statuary, rather than vestiges linked to community sanctuaries and temples, such as the examples found in Dunhuang in Western China. These statues give us insight into

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15 See James Robson, "The Buddhist Image Inside-Out: On the Placing of Objects Inside Statues in East Asia," in *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, vol. 1, ed. Tansen Sen (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2014), 302.

a local artistic tradition—into "popular art," as we used to say! Moreover, this art—which is found far from palaces, large temples, monasteries, and painted or sculpted grottoes—is, indeed, still alive. The religion it reveals to us is not reducible to a particular religious institution, whether Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, or shamanic. It is multifarious, complex, and hybrid, and thus makes a case for multiplicity rather than unity. Though the picture it paints of religious practice is admittedly a motley one, it is probably closer to the realities of a world filled with gods, supernatural beings, ancestors, demons, and gremlins of all kinds.

In the following chapters, we attempt to present this information as concretely and completely as possible, in order to enable readers to draw their own conclusions. Chapter 1 discusses both our method of cataloguing and provides a quantitative analysis of the information gathered through that process, the latter enabling us to situate the statues in space and time. Chapter 2 discusses the different types of worship that are dedicated to various divinities who are known throughout China, from local divinities—whose zones of influence can include several regions, districts, or two or three villages, and who have never received proper or exhaustive study in local monographs—to familial ancestors—ranging from the most distant (great-ancestors) to those very near (parents)—and, finally, to masters, lineage heads or direct masters. This chapter ends on a question: Were statues also sometimes produced for oneself? The actors in our story—whether the figures represented by the statues, their sponsors, or their sculptors—indicate which religions or teachings they belong to. Naturally, the "institutional" religions (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) are featured, but in Chapter 3 we find that, first, these religions could be cumulatively held by a single officiant; second, they also incorporated teachings that were highly localized in nature, such as those of the Sovereign of the Origin (Yuanhuang jiao 元皇教) and of the Mount of Apricots (Meishan jiao 梅山教)—a composite ensemble of exorcistic techniques and magical medicine—and even that of the Authentic Teaching of the Garden of Pear Trees (Liyuan zhengjiao 梨園正教), a teaching specific to actors of the theater. Drawing on fieldwork, the last chapter examines the statues in their context, beginning with what is contained within them—most significantly consecration certificates and medicinal substances—thus establishing a link with the aforementioned brief history of the creation of statues. To complement this historical journey into the past, we also draw on modern-day observations of consecration rituals—which are most often conducted by sculptors—the typology of domestic altars, patterns of statue worship, and the ritual roles played by statues, in an attempt to begin to respond to the questions history has left unanswered.

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