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Guanyin and Dizang: The Creation of a Chinese Buddhist Pantheon

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Abstract: Although Buddhist art and Buddhist scripture have a close relationship, the Buddhist pantheon is not always based on scriptures. The authors came to this realization through their separate researches. Both Yu and Yao were impressed by the pairing of Guanyin and Dizang among the cliff sculptures in Sichuan. The two bodhisattvas often share the same niche or their individual niches are placed side by side. Moreover, although the pair is most often presented alone, we also find interesting new triads of Amitābha, Medicine Buddha, the historical Buddha or Maitreya attended by the pair. Both the paired worship of Guanyin and Dizang and the new triads cannot be attributed to any scriptural sources. This article provides some examples of this artistic innovation and offers some hypotheses for its creation.

Keywords: Guanyin and Dizang, new Buddhist Triads, creation of Buddhist pantheon in China

Image worship is central to Buddhism. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism into China during the early years of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), Chinese deities were not represented by images. Large Buddhist statues are enshrined in all Buddhist temples, while smaller icons for private devotion are often found in people's homes. In the main Buddha hall, we see three images with Śākyamuni in the center and two other buddhas on either side, representing the buddhas of the past and future. Other arrangements may have Amitābha Buddha flanked by two bodhisattvas, Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) and Dashizhi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta), or Vairocana Buddha flanked by Mañjuśrī and Samathabhadra. The former is called the “Three Holy Ones of the West” (Xifang sansheng) 西方三聖 and the latter, the “Three Holy Ones of Huayan” (Huayan sansheng 華嚴三聖). Such arrangements are based on scriptural authority.

But as scholars have shown in recent scholarship, the Buddhist pantheon is not always based on scriptures. The authors came to this realization through

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their separate researches. When Yü did research on the cult of Guanyin some years ago, she found that in the paintings and sculptures of Guanyin starting in the thirteenth century, after Guanyin became feminized, she came to be attended by a boy and a girl and sometimes a white parrot (Figures 1, 2). The boy is Shancai or Sudhana and the girl is Longnü or the Dragon Princess. In Buddhist scriptures, Guanyin has a relationship with either Sudhana or the Dragon Princess but not simultaneously with both. Sudhana is the young pilgrim who visits fifty-three teachers in order to learn the Buddha Dharma in the *Flower*



Figure 1: Nanhai Guanyin by Zhao Yi dated 1313. Taiwan Palace Museum.



Figure 2: Composite (Nanhai, White Robe and Fish-basket), seventeenth century, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo by Chün-fang Yü.

Garland Sūtra and Guanyin is the twenty-eighth holy teacher who instructs him. The canonical sources for the Dragon Princess, on the other hand, may be traced to the esoteric sūtras glorifying the Thousand-handed and Amoghapāśa forms of Guanyin, which relate that the bodhisattva goes to the Dragon King's palace to reveal the dhāranī. In gratitude, the Dragon King's daughter presents Guanyin with a precious jewel of unparalleled worth. Moreover, because of the great popularity of the *Lotus sūtra*, she may also be traced to this scripture, although she does not have anything directly to do with Guanyin in the sūtra itself. But

there is no scriptural basis for both Sudhana and the Dragon Princess to appear together with Guanyin, nor is there any reason why a white parrot should be present. This iconography was clearly an indigenous creation. Yü concluded that the creation of this group was inspired by religious beliefs reflected in miracle stories, indigenous scriptures, popular tales, and precious scrolls. In due time, not only Shancai and Longnü, but the white parrot were all provided with a precious scroll which explained how they came to be Guanyin's attendants.

The pairing of Guanyin and Dizang is another example of the Chinese Buddhist pantheon not based on scriptures. While this pair is also found in Japan and Korea¹, they are found primarily in China, particularly in Sichuan. The new iconography has attracted the attention of scholars both in China and in the States. Zhang Zong surveyed most of the extant Dizang images in sculptures and paintings.² Thomas Suchan³ and Zhiru⁴ focused their study on the sculptures in Sichuan. During her several field trips to Sichuan in the 2000s, Yü was similarly struck by the paired statues of Guanyin and Dizang who often share the same niche or their individual niches are placed side by side. In the meantime, Yao found the same phenomena among cave sculptures of Guanyin and Dizang in northern Sichuan⁵. The pair most often are presented alone. However, there are also interesting new triads of Amitābha, Medicine Buddha, the historical Buddha or Maitreya attended by the pair which are equally not attested by any scripture.

The pairing of Guanyin and Dizang images as well as the new triads attended by the pair are found extensively in Sichuan (Guanyuan, Bazhong and particularly Dazu Beishan). But they are also found in Longmen, South Xiangtangshan and Dunhuang. These sculptures date as early as the mid seventh to early eighth centuries, the reigns of Emperor Gaozong (649–683) and Empress Wu Zetian (684–704). The triads first appeared in Longmen during their reigns when the capital was Luoyang. This new iconography was soon regarded as the model to be disseminated to regions beyond the capital. All the triads in Xiangtangshan, Dunhuang and Sichuan can be considered as the result of the Tang capital's influence. The construction of Buddhist grotto caves in the central plains and northern China declined beginning with the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (713–755), while the construction of grotto caves in southwest China continued to flourish without interruption. A shift of gravity occurred in the

1 Pak 1995.

2 Zhang 2002: 173, 236.

3 Suchan 2003, 2005.

4 Zhiru 2001-2, 2007a, 2007b.

5 Yao 2011.

construction of grotto caves and this is why there are more examples of these new images in Sichuan than elsewhere.⁶

Several scholars provided statistics about the dates the Guanyin/Dizang pair found in these places. According to Zhuang Mingxing, of the 69 pairs, 39 dated to the Tang (618–907), 20 to the Five Dynasties (907–960) and 18 to the Song (960–1279). Of these, 9 are from Longmen (one with an inscription dated 675),⁷ 7 from Southern Xiangtangshan (the earliest dated to 699,⁸ 20 from Dunhuang and 34 from Sichuan.⁹ Another scholar, Chen Peiwen, made a more detailed record of the pair as well as triads with buddhas attended by the pair in various sites dated from the Tang to the Song.¹⁰ Her figures do not always conform to those of Zhuang. She noted the dates of the images when they were given. While some works do not have dates, the ones which do are ascribed to the early Tang or the seventh century. The following is a breakdown:

Longmen: Guanyin and Dizang, 10; Eleven-headed Guanyin and Dizang, 2; Amitābha attended by the pair, 5 (dated 675, 693, 711); Buddha attended by the pair, 4.

South Xiangtangshan: Guanyin and Dizang, 8 (dated 701–4, 705, 712); Maitreya attended by the pair, 2 (dated 699, 681); Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Amitābha attended by the pair, 1 each.

Dunhuang: Guanyin and Dizang, 8; Dizang and Eleven-headed Guanyin, 3; Dizang and Thousand-handed Guanyin, 2 (981); Dizang and Water-Moon Guanyin 1 (Five Dynasties); Medicine Buddha attended by the pair, 1.

Guangyuan, Sichuan: Guanyin and Dizang, 8 (756); Amitābha attended by the pair, 8 (833); Medicine Buddha attended by the pair, 4; The Buddha attended by the pair, 2; Buddhas of the Three Ages attended by the pair, 1.

Bazhong, Sichuan: Guanyin and Dizang, 2 (759); Amitābha attended by the pair, 4 (887); Medicine Buddha attended by the pair, 2.

Dazu, Sichuan: Guanyin and Dizang, 16 (896, Five Dynasties, Song); Amitābha attended by the pair 5 (915); Medicine Buddha attended by the pair, 2.

Zizhong, Sichuan: Guanyin and Dizang, 14; Amitābha attend by the pair, 17; Medicine Buddha attended by the pair, 1.

6 Yao 2011: 163.

7 According to Chang Qing, “At least eleven Dizang-Guanyin pairs are identified by inscription at Longmen, with many more produced that were not inscribed”. Cited by McNair 2007: 209, n. 49. For the bibliographical details see Bibliography.

8 Zhuang 1999: 180.

9 Zhuang 1999: 179–198.

10 Chen 2006.

Other sites in Sichuan (Anyue, Jiajiang, Danling): Guanyin and Dizang, 7; Amitābha attended by the pair, 5 (712); Seven Buddhas attended by the pair, 2.

Suchan's meticulous study of sculptures at Fowan and other sites in Beishan, Dazu provided impressive evidence of the prevalence of these new pairs and triads dated to the late Tang and the Five Dynasties (2003). In Xiangtangshan (Figure 3) and Sichuan, the two bodhisattvas share the same niche (Figures 4, 8, 11, 12, 13), or their individual niches are placed side by side (Figure 7), indicating clearly that they are worshiped as a pair. The Dunhuang banners, dated to the tenth century, depict the two sitting side by side (Figures 14, 15), or Dizang on the lower right corner in a Guanyin painting (Figure 18). Interestingly, in these paintings, Guanyin is depicted in his esoteric form: either the Eleven-headed or the Thousand-armed. This interpretation is not limited to the Dunhuang banners, but it is also applied to sculptures. According to an inscription, the Eleven-headed Guanyin, for instance, accompanied by Dizang was originally planned for the Yang Sixu's Grotto in Longmen.¹¹



Figure 3: Cave 1. Guanyin and Dizang. Lower layer of southern pillar, South Xiangtangshan. Handan. Early Tang. Photo by Tang Zhongming.

Clear evidence that Guanyin and Dizang were worshiped together is also provided by miracle stories. The earliest collection of such stories, entitled *A Record of Numinous Verifications of the Images of Dizang Bodhisattva* (Dizang pusa xiang lingyan ji 地藏菩薩像靈驗記), was compiled by the monk

¹¹ McNair 2007: 149.



Figure 4: Niche 576. Guanyin and Dizang. Thousand Buddha Cliff, Guangyuan. High Tang. Photo by Yao Chongxin.

Changjin 常謹 in 989 (*Wanzi xuzang jing*, Vol 149: 352–368). We know little about his life, except that according to the *Record of the Lineage of Buddhas and Patriarchs* (Fozu tongji 佛祖統記) he was affiliated in 982 with an imperially supported translation bureau in Kaifeng. In the preface, he identifies himself as a devotee of Dizang and attributes his decision to collect the miracle tales to the influence of *Scripture on Dizang's Past Vows* (Dizang benyuan jing 地藏本願經). Echoing the claim set forth in this indigenous sūtra, he emphasizes Dizang's special affinity with the beings in the Sahā world during the interval between Śākyamuni and Maitreya. The sūtra puts special emphasis on the merit of making images of the bodhisattra (T412:13.782c, 788a), and this is the reason



Figure 5: Niche 229. Guanyin, Dizang and Amitābha Triad. Thousand Buddha Cliff, Guangyuan. High Tang. Photo by Wang Jianping.

why the collection of miracle stories is so titled because they all deal with miracles performed by the images of Dizang.

There are thirty-two tales in the collection: Dizang appears together with Guanyin in three. When we analyze these tales, we notice immediately the similarity of their themes with the those of Guanyin's miracle tales, the earliest of which dated to the fourth and fifth centuries. Worshiping of the bodhisattva's image, chanting of the sūtra dedicated to the bodhisattva and calling on the bodhisattva's name are usually the mechanisms which trigger the bodhisattva's salvific act, resulting in escape from life threatening danger, recovery from illness, or extension of life.

Since the pairing of Dizang and Guanyin has no scriptural basis, how can we explain their appearance? Thomas Suchan and Zhiru who have studied the examples in Sichuan offer some explanations. Suchan provides a historical perspective. The duplication of a single bodhisattva, usually Guanyin, might have served as one inspiration. Yü has written about this. "The earliest evidence for this new trend is a dated (548) stele recovered from the former site of the Ten-thousand Buddha Monastery (Wanfo Si 萬佛寺) in Chengdu and kept in the Provincial Sichuan Museum. It was modeled after an earlier stele (523) that shows Śākyamuni Buddha being attended by four bodhisattvas, with four monks and



Figure 6: Niche 116. Guanyin, Dizang and Medicine Buddha Triad. Thousand Buddha Cliff. Guangyuan. High Tang. Photo by Yao Chongxin.

two heavenly kings by his two sides, and a group of lively entertainers, musicians, and dancers under him. The Guanyin stele, donated by a monk, has the same format, except the four attending bodhisattvas are manifestations of Guanyin as well”.¹² According to Suchan, paired images of Guanyin constituted a favorite theme in the Tang and Song. Many niches have two duplicate or near-duplicate images of Guanyin.¹³ Katherine Tsiang has also studied the images of paired Buddhas and bodhisattvas created in north China in the sixth century.¹⁴

Suchan calls our attention to the pairing of similar “dynamic duos” appearing during the same periods in addition to Guanyin and Dizang. The pairing of Candraprabha (Yueguang 月光) with Sūryagarbha (Riguang 日光) and that of Mañjuśrī (Wenshu 文殊) and Samanthabhadra (Puxian 普賢) as well as that of Guanyin and Mahāsthāmaprpta (Dashizhi 大勢至) are some examples.¹⁵ Seen in this light, the innovation of new duos was a further development of the duplication of the same bodhisattva, for instance Guanyin, seen as early as the sixth

¹² Yü 2001: 77.

¹³ Suchan 2005: 5.

¹⁴ Tsiang 2008: 126–130.

¹⁵ Suchan 2005: 7–8.

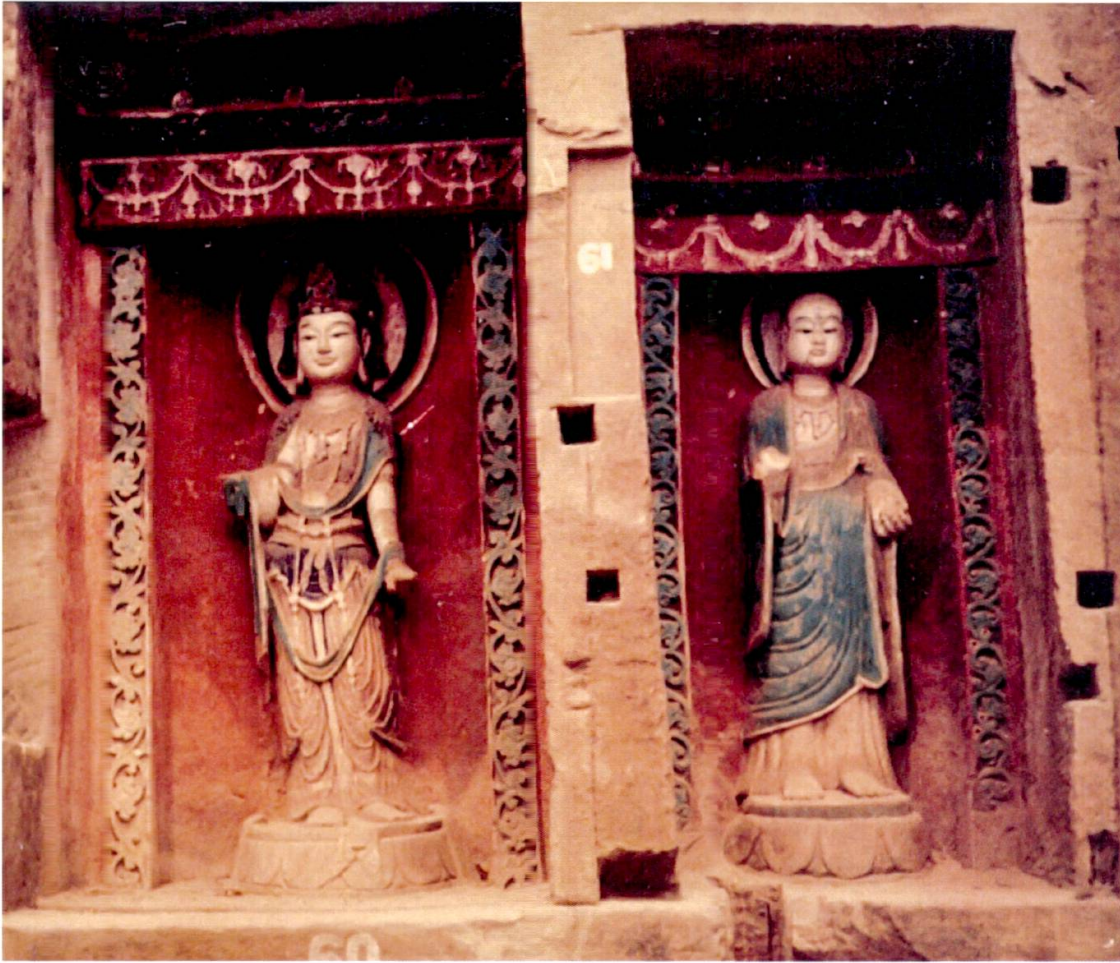


Figure 7: Niches 60 and 61. Guanyin and Dizang. South Niches, Bazhong. Mid-Tang. Photo by Yao Chongxin.

century. Suchan also connects the new duos with the creation of new Buddha triads. Thus Amitābha is attended by Guanyin and Dizang who replaces the “more inconspicuous” Mahāsthāmaprāpta who never enjoyed a separate cult”.¹⁶

Studying the same paired Guanyin and Dizang, Zhiru offers three hypotheses. “First, its connection with Pure Land worship; second, its broader connection with the cult of the multiple buddhas; and finally, its association with the Ten Kings”.¹⁷ In her view, because both Bodhisattvas have connection with the Pure Land on one hand and with the Ten Kings of hell on the other hand, they work together to enable people to achieve a blissful rebirth in the Pure Land and save them from the torments of hell. Additionally, the paired worship of the two should be examined in the context of the cult of multiple buddhas. Of the three

¹⁶ Suchan 2005: 10.

¹⁷ Zhiru 2007a: 130–31.



Figure 8: Niche 80. Guanyin and Dizang. South Niches, Bazhong. Mid-Tang. Photo by Yao Chongxin.

explanations, we concur with the second one, but think more refinements are needed with regard to the first and third hypotheses.

We think it makes good sense to consider the pairing in light of the creation of new Buddha triads. Most commonly, the pair either flanks Amitābha (Figures 5, 9, 10) or the Medicine Buddha (Figure 6). Extant sculptures provide the evidence. Literary evidence is also found in Tale 24 which describes such an arrangement in the tenth century. Instead of the traditional triad of Amitābha attended by Guanyin and Dashizhi (Mahāsthāmapraptā), Dizang replaces the latter as attested by extant sculptures.

In a village in Liao, more than one thousand families of the past [and up to] two thousand families of the present generation had always served the Great Dharma. Also they always had faith in Guanyin and Dizang. They took refuge under the monks and nuns and were strongly predisposed to the *Guanyin Scripture* and the *Scripture on the Ten Wheels*. There



Figure 9: Niche 154. Guanyin, Dizang and Amitābha Triad. Thousand Buddha Cliff, Jiajiang. Mid-Tang. Courtesy of The Thousand Buddha Cliff of Jiajiang.

was an ancient *sanghārāma* with three bays and four sides. In the renovated green-tiled hall, two statues of Guanyin and Dizang, their bodies seven feet five inches high were placed on the left and right, and an image of Amitābha stood in the middle, one *zhang* and six feet tall. All [three] were divinely auspicious images.¹⁸

This is Dizang's "Pure Land connection", as Zhiru calls it.¹⁹ Suchan agrees with this hypothesis. "The high percentage of images of Amitābha at the Fowan

¹⁸ Zhiru 2007: 179.

¹⁹ Zhiru 2001–2.



Figure 10: Niche 52. Guanyin, Dizang and Amitābha Triad. Beishan Fowan, Dazu. Late Tang, dated 897. Courtesy of Chengdu, Sichuan, Dazu Shike Yanjiusuo.

which include Kṣitigarbha as one of his primary attendants replacing the more inconspicuous Mahāsthāmaprāpta, suggest that Kṣitigarbha was viewed on a popular level integral to the cult of Amitābha”.²⁰ Indeed, according to Zhiru, Dizang has connection not only with the Pure Land of Amitābha but also with other paradises such as that of Maitreya.²¹ As we will discuss later, this is explicitly stated in some indigenous sutras. Copies of a Dunhuang manuscript entitled the *Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on the Bodhisattva Dizang* (Foshuo

²⁰ Suchan 2003: 514.

²¹ Zhiru 2005.



Figure 11: Niche 249. Guanyin and Dizang. Beishan Fowan, Dazu. Late Tang. Courtesy of Chengdu, Sichuan, Dazu Shike Yanjiusuo.

Dizang Pusa jing (佛說地藏菩薩經) connects the worship of Dizang with rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land. According to this text, "a person who makes an image of Dizang, writes out the Scripture of the Bodhisattva Dizang, or recites Dizang's name will in all certainty obtain rebirth in the western realm of Sukhāvati".²² Since Guanyin was already firmly anchored in the cult of the Pure Land, it makes sense that Dizang became paired with Guanyin once he also attained this pedigree. The devotee thus gains double protection.

²² Whitfield 1982: vol. 1: 332.



Figure 12: Niche 241. Guanyin and Dizang. Beishan Fowan, Dazu. Late Tang. Courtesy of Chengdu, Sichuan, Dazu Shike Yanjiusuo.

It is difficult to speculate whether the duos appeared prior or after the triads. But it is necessary to examine the new developments together. While we concur with other scholars that one way to explain the creation of the paired worship of Guanyin and Dizang is to view it together with the creation of new triads and duos, we would like to offer two other hypotheses. The first one is to view the two bodhisattvas working together to bestow the same benefits and the second is to view them as working separately to satisfy the different needs of the faithful.

1 Guanyin and Dizang as Collaborators

Let us go back to the miracle story cited before.

The villagers not only had faith in Guanyin and Dizang, but also knew the importance of *Guanyin Sūtra* and the *Scripture on the Ten Wheels*. *Guanyin Sūtra* refers to the “Universal Gateway” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* which



Figure 13: Niche 253. Guanyin and Dizang. Beishan Fowan, Dazu. Northern Song. Courtesy of Chengdu, Sichuan. Dazu Shike Yanjiusuo.

started to be circulated independently since the early fifth century. In it Guanyin appears as a universal savior by assuming thirty-three manifestations. He saves people from eight perils when they invoke his name. The *Scripture on the Ten Wheels* exists in two versions. *The Great Extended Scripture on the Ten Wheels* (Da fangguang shilun jing 大方廣十輪經) is an anonymous translation known in north China no later than the sixth century. *The Scripture on Dizang and the Ten Wheels in the Great Mahāyāna Compendium* (Dasheng daji Dizang shilun jing 大乘大集地藏十輪經) is a revised translation made in 651 and attributed to the famous monk Xuanzang (600–664). The retranslation was most likely connected to the prevailing belief in the Age of Degenerate Law (*mofa* 末法). The preface to the scripture reads:

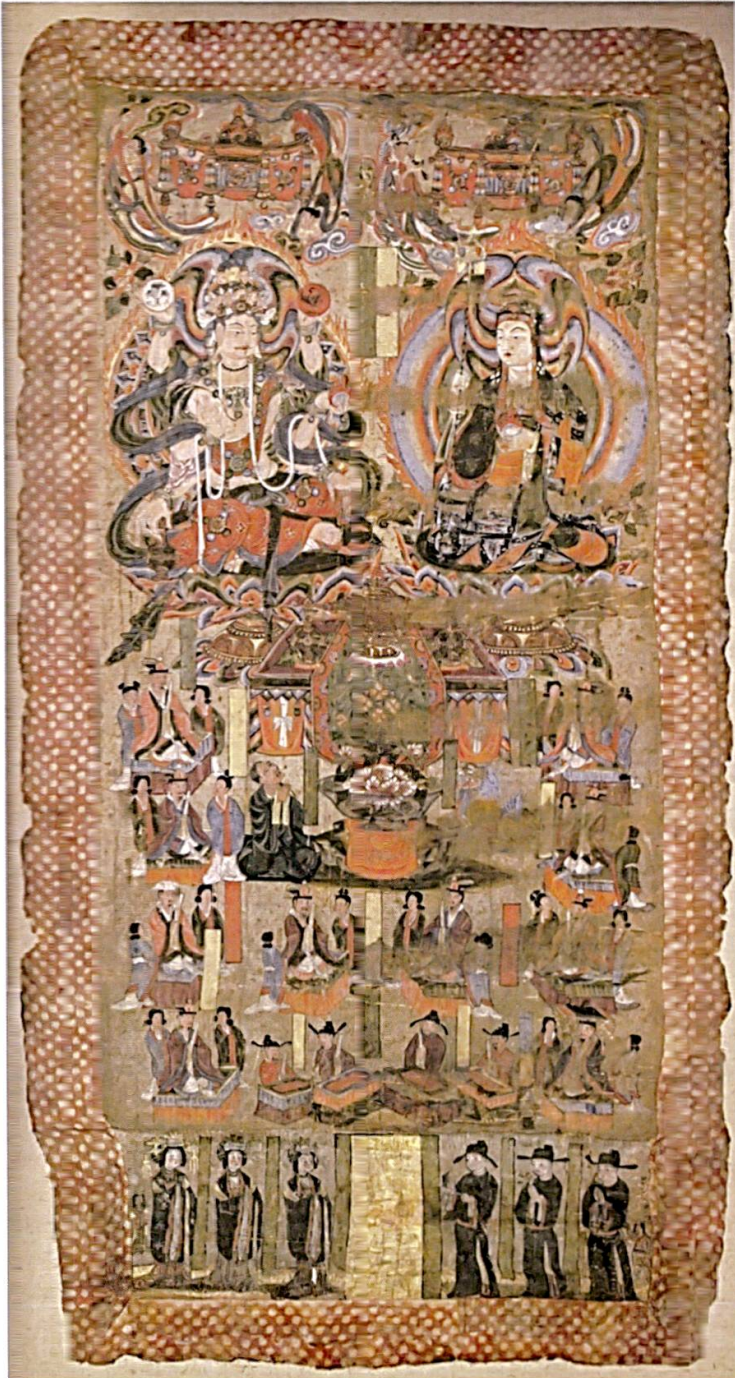


Figure 14: Eleven-headed Guanyin, Dizang and Ten Kings. Five Dynasties, 10th Century. Musée Guimet, E03644.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Wheels* is the teaching for the Age of Degenerate Law in this land. How do we know this is so? During this Age of Degenerate Law we are far from the time of the Sage. The Buddha compares the decayed roots to broken vessels and wrong views to being born blind. Drunken with the five desires is like a rocky field not yielding any sprouts. Indulging in the ten evil deeds is like smearing the body with dirt. This sūtra can cleanse the body of dirt, make the



Figure 15: Close up of Figure 14, upper part.

blind see, mend the broken vessel and fertilize the rocky field. Thus Dizang Bodhisattva shows himself in the form of a voice-hearer (T411:13.739c).

Dizang is presented in the *Da fangguang shilun jing* as an all powerful savior:

He is like a wish-fulfilling pearl that satisfies all one's desires.... The great earth that can produce good roots.... He is the sun or the moon that illuminates the path.... He is the source of the field of great merits.... He cures all maladies like a wondrous medicine king.... For the fearful he is the great relative or friend, warding off all foes and enemies like a solid city moat. He is able to quench one's thirst like purified water, relieve all hunger and starvation like sweet fruits, and is also the best garment for the naked (T410:13.681c-682a, transl. Zhiru 2007a: 31.).

The way to be saved by Dizang is to call his name. This is the same as the way to beseech Guanyin as recommended by the “Universal Gateway” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. By calling the name of Dizang with utmost sincerity, one can be saved from all dangers and live in peace and safety.

There are striking similarities in the depiction of Guanyin and Dizanz in the *Lotus sūtra* and the *Sūtra on the Ten Wheels*. Dizang can assume forty-two forms, beginning with gods, buddha, bodhisattva, pratyekka buddha, śrāvaka, cakravartin to demigods or demons, and even animals, underworld jailors and beings in hell. Like Guanyin, Dizang saves people from perils (painful illnesses, imprisonment with shackles, attacks by venomous snakes or insects, spirit

possessions, etc.), or calamities (burned by fire, drowned by flood, swept away by wind, falling from cliffs and trees, etc.) when his name is invoked (T411:13.724–72). The similarity made Soper hypothesize that Dizang was a later addition to the *Scripture on the Ten Wheels* and was modelled after Guanyin in the “Universal Gateway” chapter of the *Lotus sūtra*.²³

Among the thirty-two miracle stories performed by the images of Dizang compiled in the tenth century, while most concern how the bodhisattva saves people in hell, several relate to worldly benefits, resembling again to Guanyin’s salvafic acts in the “Universal Gateway” chapter. The first tale gives us a general sense of the wide range of Dizang’s salvafic activities which echo that of Guanyin.

During the Liang (503–549) Zhang Sengyao painted Dizang and Guanyin on the wall of the easter corridor of Shanjisi in Deyang, Hangzhou. Dizang looks like a monk. The image shines with strange light and many people come to worship. In Lingde first year (664) monks of the temple made rubbings of the painting and distributed them to the people so that they can make offerings. Many people copied and circulated it. In Lingde 3rd a man by the name of Wang Ji was on his way to take up the post as governor of Zizhou. Wang often made copies of the painting and was very devout. There were ten boats travelling together. Suddenly a storm rose and nine boats sank. Wang’s boat alone was unharmed. He realized that such great power was surely due to the bodhisattva’s compassion. When Empress Wu learned about this in 687, she ordered painters to copy the painting which shone as bright as before. Offerings were offered to the painting at court. In 766 monks of Baoshou Temple witnessed the wondrous light and presented a memorial to the Emperor (Daizong) who worshipped the painting with sincerity. When the painting shone, the state would enjoy peace and prosperity. Moreover, there was the wife of a merchant who had been pregnant for twenty-eight months without giving birth. One day she saw a shining light and she copied the painting and made a vow in front of the Bodhisattva. That very night she gave birth to a handsome boy and all those who saw this were full of joy. The painting was known as “Light Sending Bodhisattva” (Fanguang Pusa 放光菩薩) (XZJ 149.354a–b).

We cannot be sure if this very early tale is historically reliable. To start with, there is no Lingde 3rd year. The reference to Empress Wu and Emperor Daizong also cannot be independently verified. Still, the separate miraculous events recorded in this tale spanning a hundred years from the seventh to the eighth centuries are very informative about what contemporary devotees believed what Dizang could do: saving people from drowning, defending the country, and helping pregnant women who suffered from difficulties in childbirth. The other tales provide additional facets to Dizang. The images of Dizang created by his devotees are said to have saved a person from a tiger (Tale 11), losing one’s way

²³ Soper 1959: 210–211.

²⁴ The Lingde era ends with the second year and there is no third year.

(Tale 14), harassment by soldiers (Tale 15), early death (Tale 22), pestilence (Tale 24), and making a toothless person grow teeth (Tale 25). Tale 4 is especially striking because it is almost a replica of the miracle story about the image of Guanyin receiving cuts of an executioner's knife in place of the devotee, thus giving rise to the indigenous *King Gao's Guanshiyin Sūtra* (Gao wang Guanshiyin jing 高王觀世音經). The story is the following:

Mr. Zu was the governor of Wuzhou during the Tang dynasty. His faith was true and firm, but his parents were non-believers. He spent money and had a golden hued statue of Dizang made on behalf of his parents. The statue was three *zhi* high and very shiny. He worshipped it with sincerity.... One day his father encountered an enemy while traveling. Just when the enemy was going to kill him with a sharp knife, a monk whose body was golden grabbed the knife, and with his own head received the blow. The monk fell to the ground. Thinking that the monk was dead, the enemy went away. The father was greatly astonished, marvelling the way he had been saved. When he arrived at Zu's home, the father told the event to his son. When they went to worship the Dizang statue, they saw the traces of three cuts on its head. The golden color changed somewhat and appeared to have flows of blood. They then realized that the statue of Dizang took the cut on behalf of the father. The father developed deep faith in the Bodhisattva. Zu then welcomed his mother to move in and the three of them worshiped Dizang day and night. The father died at the age of seventy-nine. Thirty-five days later Zu dreamed of the father whose body was filled with light and floated in the sky leisurely. Zu marvelled and bowed to his father from afar. When asked where the father had achieved rebirth, the latter said that he was led by Dizang and reborn in the fourth heaven of the World of Desire (XZJ 149.355a–b).

The similarity between some of the miracle stories about Dizang and those of Guanyin cannot be coincidental. Since miracle stories about Guanyin began to be compiled as early as the fourth century and were already well-known by the Tang, it is very likely that the miracle tales of Dizang might be influenced by the former. Latecomers often claim superiority. It is no wonder that the *Sūtra on the Ten Wheels* presents Dizang “as the paradigmatic savior” and claims that “the merit of making offerings to him far exceeds that of making offerings to other great bodhisattvas like Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra” (T410:13.685a, transl. Zhiru 2007a: 31).

Since Guanyin and Dizang appear as saviors in scriptures and miracle tales and share common characteristics, it is conceivable that they were worshiped together by people who hoped to receive double protection. There is an interesting Dunhuang banner dated 963 kept in the British Museum (*The Arts of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum II*, Figure 8) which has Dizang seated in the center on a lotus (Figure 16). The six paths of rebirth are depicted on his two sides, represented by six small figures, separated by striped bands. Two small bodhisattvas figures with cartouches identifying them as “Pumen Pusa” 普門菩薩 (Bodhisattva of the Universal Gateway) (Figure 17).



Figure 16: Dizang as the Lord of the Six Ways flanked by Pumen Pusa, dated 963 (Northern Song Jianlong 4). Courtesy of the British Museum.

Might they be the hypostases of the “Universal Gateway” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*? The inscription is quite long and detailed. The entire inscription reads:

The maker of this painting is the disciple of pure faith Kang Qingnu. His body lodges in the House of Fire and he fears to fall in the Five Evil Ways. Now he is again attacked by sickness and pain, he cannot obtain relief. He desires that his small afflictions should rapidly retreat from his body and all misery from his constitution. May his merit cause Dizang’s staff to shake so that lotus buds will grow in Hell, and may his radiant gem shine forth in the Dark Ways, till they be turned into the semblance of the Pure Land. Furthermore, he also desires that his parents and relations by marriage and all his connections may abide in health and security and that his brothers, cousins, and all the collateral branches of his family may be moistened with the dew of a prosperous portion.²⁵

²⁵ British Museum 1982: 318, plate 22.



Figure 17: Close up of Pumen Pusa on the lower right of Figure 16.

Although in this inscription he is appealing to Dizang to help him to attain his goals, it is interesting that the banner also includes Guanyin represented by the hypostasized Pumen chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Inscriptions attached to the images of Guanyin and Dizang (sometimes also Maitreya or Amitābha) in South Xiangtangshan and Longmen dated to the seventh and early eighth centuries often express a similar wish that the donor himself, his parents and teachers, his ancestors of seven generations back to achieve enlightenment or to be reborn in the Pure Land. This wish is also found in Tale 26 of *A Record of Numinous Verifications of the Images of Dizang Bodhisattva*:

Nun Zhizang of Taiyuan served Dizang Bodhisattva with devotion and wished to go to the Western Pure Land. She spent 200 wen and had someone painted Amitābha attended by Dizang and Guanyin on the left and right. She enshrined this painting in her room and worshiped it with deep faith. In Taiping xingguo 5 (980) a great storm destroyed her house and when she looked for the painting the next day, it was gone. She was greatly distressed and



Figure 18: Thousand-handed Guanyin with Dizang on the lower right corner. Northern Song, dated 981. Musée Guimet. MG 17659.

called on Dizang. When she looked up, she saw something flying far away in the sky flashing like a lightning. Presently it fell to the ground and it was no other than the painting she was praying for. After she enshrined the painting for seven years, on the twenty-third day of the second month, she told friends that Dizang Bodhisattva would come to lead her to the Pure Land and that she would definitely die the next day. She offered incense and scattered flowers and invoked the names of the three Holy Ones one hundred and eight times each. With folded palms she passed away facing west (XZJ 149.367a).

If one asks any Chinese why the two bodhisattvas are worshiped together, she would answer it is because while Guanyin takes care of people when they are alive, Dizang takes care of them after they die. They play different roles in the work of salvation and the dual worship is the result of a division of labor. Indeed,

if we analyze the votive inscriptions on Guanyin images dated to the Tang, we can classify them into five types: (1) praying for blessing, avoidance of disasters and long life for the living; (2) praying for the safety of the living; (3) praying for recovery from illness; (4) praying for blessings for the dead; (5) praying for blessings for both the living and the dead. While category 1 to 3 as well as half of category 5 are devoted to the benefits of the living, category 4 and half of category 5 are prayers on behalf of the dead. However, since most votive inscriptions on other Buddhist images aside from that of Guanyin were also made on behalf of the dead, we cannot put special emphasis on Guanyin as the savior of the dead solely on the basis of these inscriptions. According to the study of Yao, the predominant title of Guanyin in the inscriptions is “Savior from Suffering (*jiu ku* 救苦)” which refers to his/her great ability of rescuing sentient beings from pain and granting blessings. This appellation, Jiu Ku Guanyin, is found in numerous extant inscriptions on images in Sichuan dated to the Tang and Song. But as we have seen, Dizang, like Guanyin, is also very much concerned with saving people from all kinds of problems in life and also, like Guanyin, is connected with the Pure Land. If this is the case, instead of a division of labor, the two actually work jointly on behalf of beings and enable them to achieve these same goals.

2 The Parting of the Way?

Our second hypothesis concerning the joint worship of the pair is that the two bodhisattvas assumed different roles in their salvific activities at least since the tenth century. Instead of collaborating in helping people both in life and after death, Guanyin began to be worshiped primarily as the bodhisattva who would bring blessings to the faithful in life, while Dizang was exclusively identified as the savior of beings in hell. This happened when the *Scripture of Dizang’s Original Vow* (*Dizang benyuan jing* 地藏本願經) which promoted Dizang as savior of beings in hell, superseded the *Scripture on Ten Wheels* in popularity. The same role played by Guanyin in esoteric sutras was thus overshadowed and pushed aside by the *Scripture of Dizang’s Original Vow* and other indigenous sūtras. The translation of the *Scripture of Dizang’s Original Vow* has traditionally been attributed to the seventh century Khotanese monk Śiksanānda, but it was most likely originally written in either Khotan or China. Although it was not introduced into the canon until the Ming, it was definitely already in circulation by the tenth century, for the compiler of *A Record of Numinous Verifications*, as we read earlier, was a faithful believer in the sūtra. The sūtra claims that Dizang is a tenth stage bodhisattva and describes four of Dizang’s past lives, in two of which he was born as a woman. In the second life, “Dizang is reborn as a young Brahman woman

who, with the help of one of the past buddhas, descends into hell to relieve the sufferings of her deceased mother and subsequently vows to liberate beings undergoing suffering for their wicked deeds. ...In the fourth life, Dizang is another filial daughter named Luminous Eyes (Guangmu 光目); with an arhat's help, she saves her deceased mother from the sufferings of hell and subsequently aspires to relieve all beings in the unfortunate realms".²⁶

It is perhaps not without reason why this indigenous sutra celebrating Dizang as a filial daughter and the savior of beings in hell made its appearance during this time. The genre of "transformation text" (bianwen 變文), like the indigenous sūtras, is a powerful medium in disseminating Buddhist beliefs and practices among the people. Victor Mair studied the legend of Mulian who saves his mother from hell in *The Transformation Text on Mulian Saving His Mother from the Dark Regions*.²⁷ The story was widely circulated in the Tang (618–907), although the transformation text is dated to about 800.²⁸ The popularity of the story of Mulian in medieval China was connected with the increasing anxiety about hell and post mortem suffering. The depictions of hells and the gruesome punishments meted out in Sichuan testify contemporary mentality.²⁹ The ritual of ghost festival which uses the story as its foundation myth is the way to assuage it. By identifying Dizang's previous births as a filial daughter, the author of the *Scripture of Dizang's Original Vow* cleverly turned her into Mulian's counterpart and coopted his established fame.

The *Scripture of Past Vows* calls upon its reader to recite it for the dying to relieve their suffering and secure a better rebirth:

If, in the future, men and women are bedridden with a long illness and despite their wishes are unable either to get well or to die... one should recite the scripture in a loud voice before the images of all buddhas and bodhisattvas and take the possessions loved by the sick one, such as clothing, jewels... saying in a loud voice in front of the sick one, "On behalf of this sick one, I so-and-so present all such items before the images and scriptures."... One should speak in this manner three times, so that the sick person hears and understands. If his or her consciousness are separated and departed and his breath exhausted, then for one, two, three, four, and on through seven days, one should only recite aloud in a clear voice this scripture. After that person's life ends, he/she eternally attains liberation from the retributions of past lives and from serious sins, even the five uninterrupted sins.³⁰

Descendants are urged to recite this scripture to relieve the sufferings of ancestors who are reborn in the evil paths. Since the efficacy of reciting this sūtra

²⁶ Zhiru 2007a: 108–109.

²⁷ Mair 1983, 1989.

²⁸ Teiser 1988: 87.

²⁹ Hu 1989; Kuchera 1995.

³⁰ Zhiru 2007a: 111–112.

helps both the dying family members and the dead ancestors, it is not surprising that eight of the thirty-two miracle stories in Changjin's collection are about chanting this scripture.

Another indigenous sūtra, the *Scripture on the Bodhisattva Dizang Spoken by the Buddha* 佛說地藏菩薩經, further secured Dizang's role as the savior of beings in hell. The text was written about the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century, about the same time when another famous indigenous sūtra, the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*, appeared. Thirty-two manuscript copies of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*, some booklets and some scrolls, have been recovered from Dunhuang and are held in various library collections in the world.³¹ According to Teiser, the text was put together sometime between 720 and 908 and it was copied by hand from at least the tenth century.³²

The *Scripture on the Bodhisattva Dizang Spoken by the Buddha* describes how Dizang comes to share the rule of the underworld, a role traditionally assigned to King Yama alone. The scripture says that Dizang cannot bear to see the sufferings of beings in hell and decides to leave the Southern Lapis Lazuli World and come to hell to sit on a seat opposite Yama. It further gives four reasons for Dizang's work in hell:

First, he feared that King Yama's judgment of crimes would be unreliable; second, he feared that the written documents could have been confused; third, he was concerned for those who had died in an untimely fashion; fourth, he [desired that] those who had received their punishments would be able to leave the riverbanks of hell (T85:2909.1455c, transl. Zhiru 2007a: 102).

These scriptures link Dizang with rebirth and the Ten Kings. Art reflects this new belief. In the sculptures found in Longmen and Xi'an dated to the tenth century, some depict the six paths of rebirth issuing from the hands of Dizang. Composite images of Dizang and the Ten Kings are painted on Dunhuang banners as well as sculpted in Sichuan cliff caves dated from the ninth to the eleventh centuries.

But does Guanyin really have no power to render aid to people after they die? A number of esoteric sūtras introduced into China several centuries earlier already attribute the power to cure illnesses, to enable a person die a good death and to save beings from hell to Guanyin when one recites the dhāranī revealed by him. One of the earliest such scriptures centering Guanyin as the universal savior is the *Dhāranī Sūtra of Invoking Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to Dissipate Poison and Harm* (Qing Guanshiyin Pusa xiaofu duhai toloni jing, 請觀音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼經,

³¹ Teiser 1994: 239.

³² Teiser 1994: 9.

Qing Guanyin jing for short) translated during 317–420, which underscores the importance of chanting a set of dhāranī consisting of fifteen phrases, referred to as “the divine dhāranī of six-character phrases”. The Tiantai school has always put special emphasis on this sūtra ever since the Tiantai master Zhiyi (538–597) used it as one of the sources for the last of the four forms of samādhis: neither walking nor sitting samādhi.³³ The *Sūtra of the Divine Dhāranī on the Eleven-headed Guanyin Spoken by the Buddha* (Foshuo Shiyimian Guanyin shenzhou jing 佛說十一面觀音神咒經), translated in the latter half of the sixth century is another important scripture. The sūtra calls for a daily routine of bathing in the morning, followed by reciting the dhāranī 108 times. The result is the gaining of ten rewards in one’s present life, including not suffering from any disease and not suffering a sudden death. Moreover, the following four compensations will become one’s own: (1) seeing innumerable buddhas before one dies; (2) never falling into hell; (3) not being harmed by any animal; and (4) being reborn in the land of the Buddha Amitāyus. Another group of esoteric scriptures glorifying the Thousand-handed Guanyin present the bodhisattva as the savior of beings in the six paths including hell. When one recites the dhāranī consisting of 84 phrases known as the Great Compassion Dhāranī (*Dabeizhou* 大悲咒), one will obtain even more extensive worldly and spiritual benefits than those described above. The culmination of this group of esoteric sūtras is the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Dasheng zhuangyan baowang jing 大乘莊嚴寶王經) translated by Tianxichai in 1000 from a Tibetan version. The Eleven-headed and Thousand-handed Guanyin is presented as a savior of beings in hell and hungry ghosts. He first enters Avīci Hell which is encircled by rings of iron walls that are constantly heated by a blazing fire and transforms it into a realm of coolness and clarity. There is also a hell which consists of an enormous cauldron in which sinners constantly bob up and down in the scalding water in the manner of boiled beans. But when Guanyin enters, the fire is immediately extinguished and the cauldron is smashed to pieces. The fire pit is also changed into a precious pond filled with large lotus flowers as big as cartwheels. Guanyin then enters the Great Citadel of the Hungry Ghosts and saves them as well. He issues forth streams of pure water from his fingertips, toenails, and every pore of his body. When the hungry ghosts drink the water, their throats, which formerly were constricted like needles, become enlarged and their bodies, which formerly were disfigured by protruding bellies, also become perfect. Satisfied with delicious food of different flavors, their defilements become cleansed and they achieve rebirth in the Pure Land (T20:1050, 48b–c). In this sūtra, Guanyin reveals the six-character dhāranī *Om mani padme hum* which the Buddha declares to be “the subtle and wonderous original mind” of the

³³ Stevenson 1987: 50; Donner/Stevenson 1993: 28; 275–80.

bodhisattva and a wish-fulfilling jewel. Chanting the dhāranī will enable not only oneself but ancestors of seven generations back to achieve salvation. The benefit of the dhāranī extends even to strangers who come into contact with the dhāranī keeper or the tape worms living inside his body (T20:1050, 59b–c).

Because the esoteric Guanyin plays an almost identical role as Dizang, it stands to reason that it is either the Eleven-headed or the Thousand-handed Guanyin who appears together with Dizang in the Dunhuang banners. This is not a division of labor but rather, as mentioned above, they join forces in alleviating the sufferings of beings in hell and enabling them to be reborn in the Pure Land.

The pairing of the two not only appears in the illustrated copies of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* recovered from Dunhuang, but were evoked together in the dedicatory prayer at the end of one of the ten scriptures copied in 958 for the benefit of Mrs Ma, the deceased wife of Zhai Fengda (fl. 902–966), a local official in Dunhuang. It reads, “The merit from coping the scriptures itemized above is dedicated as a posthumous blessing to the deceased, Mrs. Ma. We respectfully invite dragons, gods, and the eight classes of beings; Kuan-shih-yin Bodhisattva, Ti-tsang Bodhisattva; the four great kings of heaven, and the Eight Chin-kang to authenticate it”.³⁴

3 The Ritual Angle

Another avenue to examine the relationship of the pair is offered by the Buddhist mortuary rituals for the benefit of the deceased ancestors. Texts for these ritual were created from the Song to the Ming, or from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. Three major Buddhist mortuary rituals are still performed today for the benefit of one’s relatives as well as all sentient beings: that of feeding hungry ghosts (*yankou* 焰口), the ghost festival (*yulanpen* 盂蘭盆) and plenary mass (*shuilu* 水陸). Of the three, the ritual of feeding hungry ghosts is performed most often and thus best known. This is because it can be performed anytime and is not limited to the lunar seventh month as it is the case with the ghost festival. It is also because it can be completed in a few hours instead of seven days as it is the case with the plenary mass.³⁵

As the study of Han³⁶ has shown, the ritual of feeding hungry ghosts is based on the *Sūtra on the Ritual Regulations in Accordance to the Essential Yoga Dhāranī for Saving Ananda from the Burning Mouth* (Yujia jiyao jiu Anan tuoluoni

³⁴ Teiser 1994: 106.

³⁵ Stevenson 2001.

³⁶ Lye 2003.

yankouguiyi jing 瑜伽集要救阿難陀羅尼焰口軌儀經 T 21:1318), an esoteric sūtra translated by Amoghavajra (705–774). Ānanda is visited by a hungry ghost named Burning Face (Mianjan 面燃), who tells Ānanda that three days hence he will die and be reborn as a hungry ghost. Greatly alarmed, Ānanda goes to the Buddha the next morning and is taught the method of feeding hungry ghosts. The food being thus ritually offered becomes a magical nectar which will transform the partakers into buddhas. Although the ritual claims this scriptural pedigree, the actual performance nowadays is based on the *Rite of Setting up the Yoga Essential Altar to Feed the Hungry Ghosts* (Xiushe yujia jiyao shishitan yi 修設瑜珈集要施食壇儀) written by the Ming monk Zhuhong 祿宏 (1535–1615) in 1606. This ritual manual is a redaction of an earlier text, *The Collected Essential of the Yoga of Burnin-Mouth Food Bestowal Rite* (Yujia jiyao yankou shishi yi 瑜伽集要焰口施食儀 T 21: 1320) which was created in the Yuan dynasty, no later than the fourteenth century.³⁷ The ritual is believed to be the most effective means of delivering one's dead relatives from hell. During the late imperial period, it enjoyed great popularity in Chinese society. The reason for Zhuhong to recodify the liturgical text is because he thought the performance was not uniform and too long as a result of later accretions in variant transmissions (XZJ 104.795a). Zhuhong's version which has become the standard is based on the earlier one but provides supplementary commentarial comments as well as detailed directions to the celebrant in carrying out the threefold ritual activities of visualizing, forming mūdras and chanting dhāraṇī.

Guanyin and Dizang both appear in the ritual. Han Lye observed some one hundred such rites performed in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia. The celebrant sits on a raised platform called Yujia (Yoga) Altar. He is distinguished from the other ritualists by wearing a five paneled "Vairochana crown" on his head. The crown has Vairochana Buddha on the central panel and four other buddhas on the other four panels. According to Han Lye, "In the eyes of spectators, the crown is Dizang's crown as most of the icons of Dizang starting from the Late Imperial period of Chinese history are depicted wearing this crown".³⁸ This iconography represents Dizang as the Sovereign King (Dizang Wang 地藏王) and is markedly different from the traditional iconography depicting Dizang as a monk carrying a staff and wearing a head covering seen in many cave and cliff sculptures. Zhiru suggests that the title "Sovereign King Dizang" appeared in the eighth to the ninth centuries and was connected with Dizang's association with the cult of the Ten Kings.³⁹ However, in his revised manual, Zhuhong refers to the same

³⁷ Zhou 1980: 327; Lye 2003: 344–347.

³⁸ Fun Lüe 2003: 87.

³⁹ Zhiru 2000: 204, 205.

crown as the “Five Buddha crown”, and highlights the central role of Guanyin. Zhuhong provides the reason: the celebrant wears this crown because he has to visualize himself as Guanyin. “Just as Guayin is able to enter the ocean of birth and death to teach and transform sentient beings due to the great and expansive spiritual powers that come from the constant empowerment received from the Five Buddhas on the ‘Five Buddha crown’ on top of Guanyin’s head, the celebrant will also be able to benefit all sentient beings when he also wears this crown” (XZJ 104.837a; trans. Yue 2003: 89). Since the celebrant nowadays embodies Guanyin while wearing the crown of Dizang, could the participants view the two bodhisattvas as efficacious partners, even if unconsciously? The symmetrical pairing of the two bodhisattvas is even more striking in the arrangement of the ritual arena. Opposite from and facing the Yujia Altar, there is the Mianran (Burning Face) Altar whose upper level enshrines the “Great Being of Burning Face” (面燃大士) sitting on “The Lotus-seat of the Great Being and Bodhisattva Mianran who Breaks Open the Iron Enclosure Mountain”. This is no other than the hungry ghost known as Burning Face whom Ānanda encounters, but is now transformed into the wrathful form of Guanyin.⁴⁰

To return to the rite. The high point of the rite is reached when the celebrant becomes identified with Guanyin through visualization.⁴¹ The celebrant is instructed to first enter the Samādhi of Guanyin by visualizing his own body as perfect and white as a pure moon. He visualizes from the red seed syllable HRIḤ a great bright light issue forth within the pure moon. It then becomes a lotus flower with eight petals and Guanyin, whose appearance is distinct and dignified, sits on each petal. As the bodhisattva, he contemplates thus: there is the flower of enlightenment found within all sentient beings. It is located in the pure dharma realm which is untainted by vexations. On each petal, facing Guanyin, a Buddha sits in meditative absorption. The eight-petaled lotus gradually spreads, expanding as limitless as the empty sky. Offering this flower of enlightenment to the oceanic assembly of Buddhas, his mind is firmly settled in concentration and gives rise to pity and compassion to the immeasurable sentient beings. He then visualizes that the lotus flower gradually diminishes and becomes his own body, thereupon he forms the Guanyin mudra and gains empowerment by touching the four places on his body: heart, forehead, throat and crown. With this he becomes identified with Guanyin (T21:1320:476b12–c5). As Guanyin, the celebrant forms the mudrā and utters the dhāranī of smashing open the gate of hell (c9–22). When it is broken open, he invites Dizang to attend the dharma assembly because the latter “has

⁴⁰ Lye 2003: 113–114.

⁴¹ Zhuhong explains the reason why the celebrant becomes identified with Guanyin is because the latter “universally benefits multitudes of beings in an instant” (XZJ 104.863a).

vowed that unless he completely delivers all sentient beings and empties the hell, he will not become buddha” (c24–26). With Dizang present, the celebrant as Guanyin visualizes the same red symbol within the orb of the moon of his heart issue bright light to shine on the sinners, enabling them to come forth. It is interesting that although Dizang is present, in this manual the work of feeding the hungry ghosts is done by Guanyin. Through successive visualizations, sometime as the four-faced and eight-armed green Guanyin, the celebrant utters various dhāranīs to open the throats of the hungry ghosts and satiate them with the dharma water of sweet dew (477a7–c25).

Perhaps reflecting the general perception of Dizang as the savior of beings in hell in the late imperial China, Dizang is invoked together with Guanyin as equal partners in Zhuhong’s manual. They are respectively addressed as “Great Compassionate (Dabei 大悲) Guanshiyin who saves beings in the five periods of turbidity⁴², King Dizang of Great Vow (hongyuan 弘願) at the time of the last kalpa” (XZJ 104.869a).

Less a hundred year after Zuhong, the Qing monk Iyu Ding’an 一雨定庵 of Mt. Baohua revised and wrote a more simplified version. It is this text, *Essentials for the Yoga of Bestowing food to Feed Hungry Ghosts* (Yujia yankou shishi yaoji 瑜伽焰口施食要集) which is being used by monks today. In this manual, the heightened role of Dizang is even more prominent. At the beginning of the ritual, a picture of the hungry ghost Burning Face, the putative originator of the ritual, is placed on the altar facing the assembled monks. When the ritual begins, the Great Compassion Dhāranī and a hymn praising Guanyin are chanted before the altar. After “fixing the area of the five directions,” accompanied by an invocation to five different Buddhas, Guanyin is invoked directly. The presiding monk makes a mudrā called “Guanyin meditation mudrā,” through which the celebrant enters into the Guanyin samādhi. Thus identified with Guanyin, the main action of the ritual is performed by Guanyin in the person of the celebrant. The highlight of the ritual coincides when the priest, as Guanyin himself, makes the mudrā of “opening up the gate of hell”. He visualizes three red rays emitting from his mouth, hands, and chest, which open up the gates of hell. The three rays represent three powers that can destroy the three categories of sins of the body, speech, and mind committed by beings in hell. At this point in the ritual, Dizang is invoked to lead

⁴² The five turbidities refer to (1) turbidity of kalpa (*jie* 劫): kalpa in decay, when it suffers from deterioration and gives rise to the ensuing form; (2) turbidity of views (*jian* 見): deterioration of view, egoism, etc., arising; (3) turbidity of vexations (*fanna* 煩惱): the passions and delusions of desire, anger, stupidity, pride and doubt prevail; (4) turbidity of sentient beings (*zhongsheng* 眾生): in consequence human desires increases and happiness decreases; (5) turbidity of life-time (*ming* 命): human lifetime gradually decreases to ten years. DDB.

and help the dead to come forth to accept the offerings. The chief celebrant calls forth the dead to come forward and receive offerings. This is accomplished by several mudrās. After the invited ghosts are helped to repent by the “mudrā of repentance,” the presiding monk transforms water into nectar by performing the “mudrā of sweet dew.” He then enables them to drink it by performing the “mudrā of opening up the throat.” He visualizes a green lotus held in his left hand, from which “sweet dew” flow out for the ghosts to drink, just as Guanyin is described of doing in the *Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra*.⁴³

The two bodhisattvas therefore collaborate in helping people in death, just as they do in life as described in the *Lotus sūtra* and the *Sūtra of Ten Wheels*. When and how did they become specialized in only one sphere? Unfortunately, there are neither inscriptions nor texts which tell us when this became the case or why this came to pass. But we can use images and temple architecture as indirect evidences.

4 Other Traces

Tom Suchan called our attention to an unusual pair in a small niche attached to the larger Number 1 located at Pantuo Temple in Qionglai, Sichuan.⁴⁴ Although there is no inscription, because the larger #1 niche which contains the Amitābha triad is dated 820, we may assume that it was carved sometime in the ninth century. Suchan explains, “In this niche the two bodhisattvas are seated side-by-side on separate lotus pedestals. On the outer part of the niche beneath them are two groups of smaller figures representing those caught in physical peril and seeking salvation through the graces of the two bodhisattvas. Beneath Kṣitigarbha there are four figures in a flaming rocky landscape, which is clearly meant to represent a vignette of a Buddhist hell. Opposite four figures are swept up in swirling forms meant to convey a rushing river or turbulent sea, which could also be a metaphoric allusion to the living of the realm of samara. Salvation from the suffering of hell and danger at sea were respectively associated with Kṣitigarbha and Avalokiteśvara in the popular imagination of Tang and Song Buddhist devotees”.⁴⁵ Zhiru discusses the same scenes depicted on the reliefs under the two bodhisattvas in some detail. On the right side under Dizang, there is “a vignette of hell retribution; wretched sinners are submerged in a boiling cauldron over which two wardens keep vigil and all are submerged in flames.” On the left side under Guanyin, “swirling tides well up to sweep away four figures (The scene points

⁴³ Yü 2001: 323–328.

⁴⁴ Suchan 2005: fig. 24.

⁴⁵ Suchan 2005: 9.

to the Lotus Scripture's injunction to incant Guanyin's name when facing danger at sea)".⁴⁶ Based on the scenes, Zhiru concludes that the "Dizang-Guanyin pairing spread in connection with their identities as this-worldly saviors".⁴⁷ We think Suchan's explanation is more plausible. Dizang is clearly the savior of those suffering men in hell, whereas Guanyin is clearly the savior who saves people from disasters encountered in life, which include being drowned in the sea.

A more explicit example of how believers assigned different functions to the two bodhisattvas can be seen in temple architecture. We believe a very fruitful but rarely utilized way to study the cultic history of Chinese Buddhism is through the architectural layout of Buddhist temples. However, it is not easy to carry out such studies. As observed by Charleux and Goossaert, although there are books devoted to the history of ancient architecture, unfortunately, "this type of research does not address religious architecture as such, but studies architectural techniques that happen to be found in religious settings. Even recent detailed monographs, usually published as a result of a restoration program are written in this perspective. In such circumstances, very few authors have addressed the monastic layout as a whole and the variations of the buildings's function in space and in time".⁴⁸ Based on surviving examples of floor plans of temples dated to the Liao and Jin (eleventh to twelfth centuries), separate halls dedicated to the four bodhisattvas (Wenshu, Puxian, Guanyin and Dizang) were built flanking the main buddha hall. The floor plan of Shanhua Temple 善化寺 in Datong, Shanxi shows Wenshu Hall faced Puxian Hall, while Dizang Hall faced Guanyin Hall.⁴⁹ But the Guangsheng Temple 廣勝寺, built in the sixteenth century, retained only the two halls dedicated to Dizang and Guanyin facing each other (Figure 20). In this instance, Puxian and Wenshu were no longer provided with their own independent halls.⁵⁰

There are also evidences found in contemporary temple structures. The Danish architect and scholar J. Prip-Moller visited a number of temples in the 1930s and recorded some temple architecture with drawings in great detail. He noted that in front of the temple, there were usually a drum tower on the left and a bell tower on the right. Describing a temple in the New Territories of Hong Kong, he observes, "Under the bell is often placed a small altar with an image of Ti Ts'ang [Dizang], the saving bodhisattva of the underworld. The location of a special minor hall for Ti Ts'ang outside the monastic premises and to the right, as e. g. at Ch'ing Shan in the New Territory of Hongkong, has in all probability been influenced by the customary

⁴⁶ Zhiru 2007a: 129.

⁴⁷ Zhiru 2007a: 130.

⁴⁸ Charleux/Goossaert 2003: 306–307.

⁴⁹ Liang/Liu 1933: Figure 19.

⁵⁰ Liu 1984: 212; plate 121, 1; Liu 1984: 366, plate I.

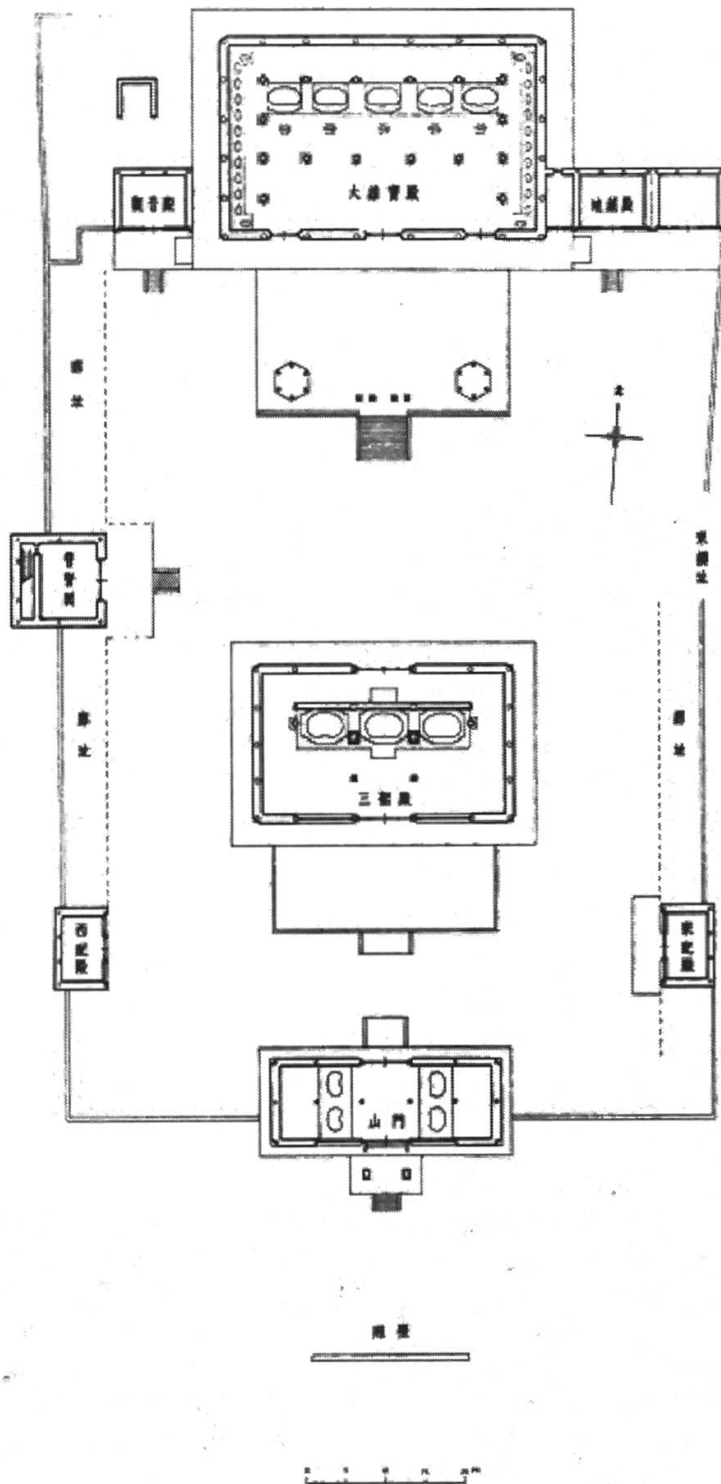


Figure 19: Shansi Datong Shanhua Temple floor plan. Jin (1126–1233). Hall of Dizang on right and Hall of Guanyin on left.

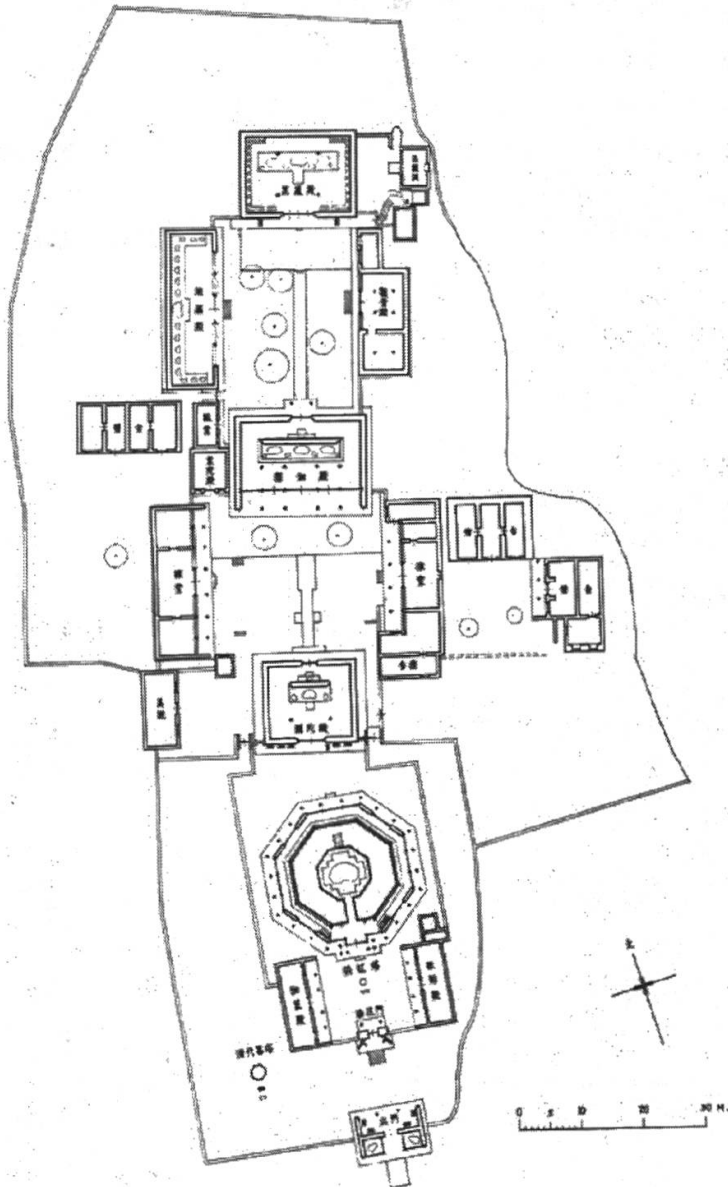


Figure 20: Shansi Hongzhao, Upper Guangsheng Temple, sixteenth century. Hall of Guanyin on right and Hall of Dizang on left.

placing of the bell tower on this side and by Ti Ts'ang in relation to the bell. The function of the bell and the drum as the inaugurators of day and night should be seen in the light of the belief that the deep reverberations heard when the monk pulls the rope and sends the ram forcefully against the edge of the bell will carry to the merciful Buddhas and bodhisattvas and especially to Ti Ts'ang the prayers which the monk murmur between the strokes".⁵¹ The connection of Dizang with the

⁵¹ Prip-Moller 1967: 15–16.

dead is also testified with another popular practice. Buddhist faithful's often leave the urns containing the ashes of the deceased in a structure called Putong ta (普同塔) or columbarium and have monks perform rituals on certain occasions such as the birthdays or deathdays of the dead. Dizang would be the guardian bodhisattva in such a building. They may also choose to have the soul tablets of their dead relatives written on yellow papers and have them enshrined in a hall with an image of Dizang, on the left side of the temple. For instance, this is what Holmes Welch learned from his informant about a small temple in Wuhan. "When relatives came to do reverence on the birthdays of the deceased,...the urn itself played the role of the tablet. The name would be pasted up on it and it would be placed on the altar of Ti Ts'ang inside the columbarium"⁵²

Sometimes the two bodhisattvas are found in the same building. We find an example in Prip-Moller's record. Based on a drawing made by E. Boerschmann, he provides the floor plan of Fayu Si of Putuo. There is a separate Guanyin Hall in front of the Great Hall, and additionally, five more Guanyin images (identified as White-robe, The Great Compassionate One, Child-Giving Guanyin, Guanyin Riding on a Fish and Guanyin Subduing the Ocean) are enshrined in the Great Hall. Since Putuo is the sacred site for Guanyin worship, we expect to find the many images of this bodhisattva enshrined there. However, perhaps because the pair has long been associated in the minds of worshippers, there is also a Dizang image in the back, on the left corner of the Great Hall, facing the Thousand-handed Guanyin on the right corner.⁵³

One can find in some temples today the Guanyin Hall facing the Dizang Hall. The Ten Kings and scenes of hellish punishments would be depicted in Dizang Hall, while we may find images of Niangniang (Ladies) in Guanyin Hall. With such a set up, it is clear that believers pray to Dizang as savior of hell and to Guanyin as granter of health, fertility and long life. As Dizang became the sole guardian of beings in hell, Guanyin gave up this part of his/her original functions and became the main protector of people in life.

5 Coda

As this brief survey shows, the relationship between the pair underwent changes through time. But perhaps the real situation is never so clear cut. The conventional view of seeing Guanyin as the savior of people while alive while Dizang the savior when they die may be too simplistic. The fact is that both of them have a connection

⁵² Welch 1967: 204.

⁵³ Welch 1967: 31.

with the cult of longevity as well as the wish for rebirth in the Pure Land. That is the real reason why the pair became attendants to Medicine Buddha and Amitābha. In the *Scripture on the Bodhisattva Dizang*, as we mentioned earlier, Dizang shows his “Pure Land connection”. By descending to hell, Dizang does not only intend to supervise Lord Yama but also assumes the role of guide to the Pure Land.

If there is a good man or woman who has carved images of the bodhisattva, copied the Scripture of the Bodhisattva Dizang, and recited the name of Bodhisattva Dizang, he or she will surely attain rebirth in the Land of Supreme Bliss in the West. ...On the day when this person dies, Bodhisattva Dizang himself will come to welcome him or her (T2909:85.145c, transl. Zhiru 2007a: 103–104.).

Since both Guanyin and Dizang lead beings to the Pure Land, the triad of Amitābha being attended by the pair is understandable in spite of the fact that it lacks scriptural basis. It now appears that in fact Guanyin and Dizang are saviors of beings both in life and after they die. This new understanding of Dizang is not based on Buddhist scriptures. However, it is backed up by the indigenous sūtra and art. There are two seated Dizang images in the number 1 niche located at Xinglongan, Dazu. The inscription on the left side of the niche reads, “Reveal the path to heaven, close the gate of hell”.⁵⁴

In recent decades, art historians and historians in Buddhist studies have come to the consensus that the rise of new cults or the creation of new pantheons cannot always be explained by referring to scriptures. The paired worship of Guanyin and Dizang is another case study. There are at least two reasons why there could not be an exact correspondence between scriptural stipulations and iconographic representations. First, scriptural knowledge was primarily reserved for the monastic elite and the literati in premodern times. It was not widely disseminated among the ordinary people. With the exception of some popular short texts, the majority of people in society would not know the intricacy of any Buddhist scripture. Second, monks who had scriptural knowledge did not always have control over the actual creation of Buddhist sculptures in accordance with orthodox iconographies. For this reason the images sponsored by a donor were most likely made by artisans who followed models currently in fashion but not based on any specific scripture.

Buddhism is a vast and all embracing religion, which has always adapted to different cultures. It is interesting to compare the different faces and functions Dizang assumed in East Asia. Why Dizang became a companion to Guanyin in China is perhaps as mysterious as why Jizō became a guardian of children who died young and, more recently, aborted fetuses in Japan.⁵⁵ Although there is no

⁵⁴ Dazu shike mingwen lu, 375.

⁵⁵ LaFleur 1992; Glassman 2012.

scriptural basis for worshiping Guanyin and Dizang together, there is, nevertheless, a logic grounded in the existential needs of the faithful.

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