

Article

Imperial Identity and Religious Reformation: The Buddhist Urban Landscape in Northern Wei Luoyang

Chao Ling 

Department of Chinese and History, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China;
chaoling@cityu.edu.hk

Abstract: Based on Yang Xuanzhi's account of the burned-down Luoyang city during the Northern Wei dynasty and contemporary archeological discoveries, this paper tries to decipher the pre-Luoyang memory and imperial identity of the Northern Wei royal family that are embedded in the urban planning of Luoyang city by understanding the reformation of Buddhist politico-religious policy through both a historical approach and literary analysis. Buddhism played a crucial role in the Northern Wei's campaign of establishing their rulership as a legitimate one from the Chinese perspective. Buddhist temples became structures where commoners interacted on a daily basis, and, in these interactions, the Xianbei rulers managed to bring multiple factors into balance: Northern Wei imperial and Chinese identities and the tension between preserving the ancestral memory and merging the Northern Wei regime into a Chinese political context.

Keywords: Northern Wei Luoyang; Yang Xuanzhi; Yongning Temple; urban design; Buddhist agency

1. Introduction

代人傷往二
庾信

雜樹本惟金谷苑，
諸花舊滿洛陽城。
正是古來歌舞處，
今日看時無地行。

Lamenting the Past, On Behalf of Others: No. 2
Yu Xin

The jumbled trees were once Golden Millet Garden,
Various flowers used to blossom all over Luoyang city.
This was the site of singing and dancing in ancient times,
When you gaze at it today, there is no path for access.

Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), an iconic poet of the Southern Liang Dynasty, is famous for his lament on the devastation of the South, but the nostalgic depiction of his southern homeland is not the only topic of his profound writings. As a well-received poet who had held high-ranking official posts on both sides of the Yangtze River, Yu Xin's poetry narrates his deep sorrow and a larger concern with history that exceeds geographical boundaries. In the year 575, Yu Xin was assigned as the Military Governor of Luoyang. This poem was likely based on personal experience during his office in Luoyang.

Luoyang was the former capital city during the Wei 曹魏 (220–266 CE), Western Jin 西晉 (266–317 CE), and Northern Wei 北魏 (386–535 CE) dynasties. In Chinese history, the city of Luoyang both enjoyed glorious moments and suffered devastating warfare. To Yu Xin, the most memorable disastrous moment for Luoyang would be the Hou Jing 侯景's (503–552 CE) attack, even though Luoyang had already been sacked by Gao Huan 高歡 (496–547 CE) shortly before Hou's invasion. In the year 538, Hou Jing invaded Luoyang and set a ravaging fire. The splendid architecture in Luoyang burned to ash, and few buildings survived. It would not have been hard for Yu Xin to recollect Hou Jing, as in 548, Hou Jing's rebellion tore up his home state, Liang. In the poem, the poet juxtaposes the prosperous old city with its current scene of desolation to visualize the dramatic change in Luoyang. The Golden Millet Garden 金谷苑 is a villa of Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300 CE), a man of incredible wealth who lived in Western Jin. This allusion implicitly indicates the continuous warfare and dynastic transition in the past centuries, with which Yu Xin and his contemporaries could easily sympathize.



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However, Yu Xin was not the first poet to witness the ruined city of Luoyang in that era, nor did he provide us with the most powerful account. It is Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之, a writer not recorded in any official history, who compiled a detailed and unparalleled description of this Northern Wei capital, recording the flourishing urban life of Luoyang residents and rationalizing the collapse of the Northern Wei. This book is *The Record of Monasteries of Luoyang* (Luoyang Qielan Ji 洛陽伽藍記).

In the preface, after a vivid depiction of the flourishing of Luoyang under the Northern Wei governance, Yang Xuanzhi writes with great passion about the city ruined in the war, just as Yu Xin writes in the poem, as follows:

至武定五年，歲在丁卯，余因行役，重覽洛陽。城郭崩毀，宮室傾覆，寺觀灰燼，廟塔丘墟，牆被蒿艾，巷羅荊棘。... 始知麥秀之感，非獨殷墟，黍離之悲，信哉周室！ (Zhou 2010, Preface, pp. 24, 25)

In the fifth year of Wuding reign (547 CE), the year of Dingmao, I traveled and visited Luoyang again due to some official affairs. The city walls were destroyed, the palaces were torn down, the monasteries were burnt to ash, the pagodas were ruined, the walls were covered with weeds, and the lanes were overgrown with brambles. ... I then realized that the sigh of Wheat is not only related to the devastation of Yin; the sorrow of Millet, is truth for the Zhou. (In this paper, I made minor modifications to Yi-t'ung Wang's translation of *Luoyang qielan ji* and tried to be more literal; I changed Wade-Giles spellings in Wang's translation to *pingyin*. I added the page numbers of Yi-t'ung Wang's version for reference. (Yang 1984, pp. 6, 7.)

The Tender Wheat 麥秀 and *The Wine-Millet Bends* 黍離 were two canonical poems written by two officials after the downfall of their homelands that every educated man in ancient China could memorize. These two poems lament the decline of two legendary dynasties of ancient China, Shang (1600 BCE–1046 BCE) and Western Zhou (1046 BCE–771 BCE), which were also iconic models for any succeeding orthodox Chinese regimes. By referring to them, Yang Xuanzhi implicitly attempts to legitimize the Northern Wei as an orthodox government, despite the rulers' "barbarian" blood. Luoyang, geographically close to the Shang and Zhou capitals, has significant cultural and political importance in ancient China. Luoyang was referred to by historians as the "center of everything below heaven" (tianxia zhi zhong 天下之中). It obtained this appellation due to its strategic location and natural geographical advantages. Just like Yu Xin, Yang Xuanzhi successfully connected the fate of the Northern Wei to the grander motif of dynastic transition in Chinese history. Unlike Yu Xin, though, Yang Xuanzhi's Luoyang is not only a place for luxurious entertainment but also a place of rich Buddhist culture. For Yang Xuanzhi, the temples in Luoyang, especially those built under the imperial command, embodied the political ideology, cultural identity, and religious policy of the Northern Wei. By studying the city of Luoyang, reconstructed with the help of *Luoyang qielan ji*, we can better understand how a "barbarian" government ruled the central area of China and established its legitimacy.

In this paper, I intend to rely principally on Yang Xuanzhi's *Luoyang qielan ji*, with the help of contemporary archeological discoveries, to elaborate how Northern Wei rulers dealt with political and cultural challenges after they moved to Luoyang, by representing their imperial legitimacy and religious efficacy in the urban landscape highlighted by numerous Buddhist temples. The city of Luoyang in early medieval China can be approached in the following different ways: representations of Northern Wei imperial and non-Chinese identity in the landscape of Luoyang city and the reformation of Buddhist teaching in response to the tension between preserving the ancestral memory and merging the Northern Wei regime into a Chinese political context.

2. Representation of Northern Wei Imperial Identity

In 495, Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei 北魏孝文帝 (r. 471–499 CE) moved the capital city from Pingcheng 平城 (present Datong 大同) to Luoyang and implemented a

series of regulations to transform the “barbarian” regime into an orthodox Chinese empire. He forced the Xianbei elites to dress in Han costumes, to speak the Han language, and even to use Han family names. His reformation marked the second milestone of Northern Wei history, the first being Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪 moving to Pingcheng. Though Emperor Xiaowen Yuan Hong 元宏 harshly promoted the Chinese transformation of the Xianbei tribe, he never intended to deny his original cultural identity. On the contrary, Northern Wei elites deliberately embodied their pre-Luoyang history and cultural memory in the urban design and temples of Luoyang, intertwining their collective identity with the Han culture to establish their political legitimacy.

2.1. Cultural Memory of Pre-Luoyang Northern Wei

It was a very noteworthy phenomenon in Chinese history that each time a non-Chinese regime overtook the central Chinese kingdom, usually through overwhelming military might, they then merged their culture, administrative organization, and economic structure into Chinese ones. The Northern Wei was one such example. The most effective method of the Northern Wei’s sinification was the urban planning of their capital city. (In Zhou Zumo’s edition of *Luoyang qielan ji*, a map was drawn based on Yang Xuanzhi’s account. It gives a direct idea of the city planning of Luoyang in the Northern Wei dynasty.) Northern Wei rulers employed architecture as a major vehicle for the manifestation of their orthodox imperial identity. They not only inscribed their pre-Luoyang history and cultural memory in the urban design of Luoyang but also legitimized their regime by adopting many architectural elements of previous Chinese dynasties.

First of all, the urban design of Luoyang resembles the planning of Pingcheng. The development of the lane and ward system 里坊制 served as an important example to demonstrate the continuity of the ruling ideology of the Tuoba imperial family. The “Lane and Ward” system was not only a way to design cities but also a bureaucratic system to help with the security of urban life in Northern Wei-era Luoyang (L. Li 2022, pp. 56–57). In this paper, I focus on the former point. When Tuoba Gui settled in Pingcheng, he immediately launched a construction plan. It is hard to determine exactly how the emperor envisioned his capital city, but the annals do tell us that the emperor was personally involved in designing the basic plan of the imperial city, the suburbs of the capital, and the lanes and wards. In the same year, he finished building the fundamental architecture for an empire: palaces, ancestral temples, and ceremonial altars. The official history of the Northern Wei states the following:

太祖欲廣宮室，規度平城四方數十里，將模鄴、洛、長安之列。

The Great Emperor wanted to enlarge the palace and halls, and he ordered Pingcheng to be 10 *li* on each of the four sides to resemble Ye, Luoyang (of Wei and Jin time), and Chang’an. (Wei 1974, p. 604)

Modeling his city after several ancient Chinese capitals in previous dynasties explicitly shows the emperor’s strong inclination towards sinification. However, in many rituals of religiosity, we can still see many habits from the grasslands. In the *Book of Southern Qi* 南齊書, historians record the unique ritual practices of Northern Wei people as follows:

城西有天壇，立四十九木人，長丈許，白幘、練裙、馬尾被，立壇上，常以四月四日殺牛馬祭祀，盛陳鹵簿，邊壇奔馳奏伎為樂。

There was a Heaven Altar in the west of the city. Forty-nine wood men have been erected, each about one *zhang* high. They wore white headdress, silk skirt and horsetail quilt, standing on the altar. [Northern Wei people] always kill cows and horses on the fourth day of the fourth month to sacrifice. Grand chariots and guard of honor were displayed, and on the side altars, there were horse running, and music playing for entertainment. (Xiao 1972, p. 985)

Having horses running around the altar, for the Xianbei clan, was reminiscent of their grassland rituals. However, such a scenario had seldom been witnessed before in Luoyang,

a Chinese city. These unusual religious practices demonstrate that Tuoba Gui's sinification had not yet touched upon the core religious rituals, a task thus left for his descendants. His Pingcheng leaves us with "the impression of an uneasy compromise between Xianbei and Han cultures" (Jenner 1981, p. 21). Such uneasiness marks the first phase of Xianbei's sinification.

Another trace of the sinification lies in the lane and ward system of Pingcheng. Arguably, lane and ward systems were well established in cities by the beginning of the Han dynasty: "The lane before Han is often considered similar to natural villages. But it was actually a district of a city, just like a ward in a Tang city. A lane was surrounded by walls and the residents can only enter or exit the lane through one designated door" (Miyazaki 1960, p. 570). When Tuoba Gui moved a large nomadic population to the city, he modified his old policy of "dividing the land and settling down" 分土定居, which he originally implemented to control a nomadic tribe of great mobility, and established the basic lane and ward system of the Northern Wei. *The Book of Southern Qi* tells us about the basic structure and function of this system, as follows:

其郭城繞宮城南，悉築為坊，坊開巷。坊大者容四五百家，小者六七十家。每南坊搜檢，以備奸巧。

To the south of the palace, there was a walled district. It was filled with residential wards and the wards were connected with the lanes. The bigger wards could accommodate four to five hundred households, the smaller ones could accommodate sixty to seventy households. In the south house of each ward, there were inspecting corps to prevent the fraudulent and deceitful. (Xiao 1972, p. 985)

Though Tuoba Gui was the first Northern Wei emperor to intentionally make use of this system, he generally followed the Wei and Jin styles. Emperor Xiaowen, therefore, was actually the first Northern Wei emperor to immaculately design the lane and ward system in a large metropolitan city to fulfill important political and social functions. Furthermore, his planning started in 493, two years before he officially moved the capital.

Luoyang, at the turn of the fifth century and in the sixth century, was arguably the largest city in the entire world. The scale of Luoyang city, after the Xianbei people took it from the hands of the Chinese people, had never been seen before. Many scholars have conducted in-depth observations of the size of Luoyang, based on both textual records and archeological discoveries. Northern Wei-era Luoyang was divided into inner and outer cities. The imperial urban planning included the inner city alone; the outer city developed spontaneously over the years. The inner city measured 6 *li* east to west and 9 *li* south to north, while the outer city occupied an area of 20 *li* by 25 *li*. Within this vast area, the emperor followed some of his strategists' ideas and initiated the construction of the Luoyang lane and ward system. The 18th chapter of the *Book of Wei*, the biography of Lord Yuan Jia 元嘉, records the following:

(元)嘉表請於京四面，築坊三百二十，各周一千二百步，乞發三正復丁，以充茲役，雖有暫勞，姦盜永止。詔從之。

Lord Yuan Jia presented a memorial to suggest the construction of 320 wards around the imperial city, each of 1200 steps in circumference. He also asked for three governors and numerous laborers to serve for this construction. [He thought] this might be temporarily labor consuming but would stop the fraudulent and thieving forever. The emperor permitted. (Wei 1974, pp. 428–29)

This formulaic, even clichéd narration immediately directs us to the previous record about the migration to Pingcheng under Tuoba Gui's governance, which explicitly informs us that Luoyang was modeled after Pingcheng. In addition, this short excerpt demonstrates the significant innovation of Northern Wei political bureaucracy, the three governors system 三長制. The three governors were the neighborhood governor 鄰長, the lane governor 里長, and the village governor 黨長. These three layers of local officials were crucial for strengthening political control and inter-community bonds on a secular level. The

three governors were called *sanzhang* 三長 outside the capital and *sanzheng* 三正 in Luoyang. The demographical design of the lane and ward system helped to better construct the clearly divided hierarchy of the local power system. However, this grand plan was not completely executed. Due to natural barriers and government uses, such as rivers and offices, only 220 residential and commercial lanes and wards were finally constructed. Yang Xuanzhi reports the following:

廟社宮室府曹以外，方三百步為一里，里開四門，門置里正二人，吏四人，門士八人，合有二百二十里。(Zhou 2010, p. 212)

Excluding monasteries, shrines, palaces, and such government buildings as ministries and bureaus, each ward was the equivalent of three hundred square paces. It also had four gates. For each gate, there were two ward superintendents, under which were four assistants and eight wardens. There were altogether two hundred and twenty wards. (Yang 1984, p. 246)

The primary purpose of Yuan Jia's proposal was to accommodate the immense population that emigrated from Pingcheng, but later, the system helped to differentiate people of diverse heritages, professions, wealth, and social classes. It was this new development that revived this old system. Socio-economic situations were clearly manifested in this system. For instance, Yang Xuanzhi's vivid depiction of "business districts" in Luoyang gives us the ability to grasp a perspicuous idea of the Luoyang market and demonstrates how the lane and ward system worked, as follows:

市東有通商達貨二里。里內之人，盡皆工巧。屠販為生資財巨萬。

市南有調音樂律二里。里內之人，絲竹謳歌，天下妙伎出焉。

市西有延酤治觴二里，里內之人多釀酒為業。

市北慈孝奉終二里，里內之人以賣棺槨為業，賃輻車為事。(Zhou 2010, pp. 141–44)

To the east of the marketplace were the two wards, Ward of Conducting Trade and Ward of Shipping Merchandise. All residents of these wards were shrewd, making living as butchers or tradesmen. They were wealthy, owning thousands of coins.

To the south of the marketplace were the two wards, Ward of Musical Tones and Ward of Musical Notes. All residents of these wards were musicians and singers. The most skillful performing artists of the empire came from here.

To the west of the marketplace were the two wards, Ward of Wine-buyer and Ward of Wine-server. Residents of these wards were mostly in the business of making wine.

To the north of the marketplace were the two wards, Ward of Motherly Love and Filial Piety, and Ward of Enshrining the Deceased. All residents of these wards were sellers of inner and outer coffins and handlers of hearse rentals. (Yang 1984, pp. 182–87)

The entire city of Luoyang was arranged in this manner, so that it was very easy for consumers to navigate among different sub-districts for the goods and services they were looking for. Such a business-oriented layout is now seen worldwide in metropolitan cities, but it was very innovative 15 centuries ago. The Tuoba ruling family was conscious of the importance of this system and recruited the best-established Confucian scholars to name all these lanes and wards, in order to manifest the intended imperial moral teachings to the citizens, as follows:

(常景)又共芳造洛陽宮殿門閭之名，經途里邑之號。(Zhou 2010, p. 10)

Chang Jing, in cooperation with Liu Fang, designated names for the palaces, halls, gateways and towers, as well as titles of roads, streets, lanes and districts. (Yang 1984, p. 19)

Chang Jing and Liu Fang were famously erudite Confucian scholars. Of the lane and ward names they named, we still know half of them, due to Yang Xuanzhi's records and unearthed epigraphs. By scrutinizing these names, we can see how the emperor propagated Confucian ideas and how spatial memory helped to link the Northern Wei's legitimacy to previous Chinese regimes. Many lane names included Confucian keywords, such as filial piety 孝, righteousness 義, benevolence 仁, and virtue 德. Given that the average commoner's education level was rather low in early medieval China, it was not easy for the emperor to clarify his ideas to the ruled. By intertwining these metaphysical concepts into local residents' everyday life, this purpose was fulfilled. Additionally, many of these names either derived from a Wei/Jin anecdote or simply kept the original name, such as the Ward of Forever Peace 永安里. Emperor Xiaowen intended to establish a centralized empire, similar to historical Chinese central states. He occupied Luoyang, the former capital, to legitimize the Northern Wei empire. The spatial memories of old Luoyang, represented in these lane names, were crucial for the construction of the cultural identity of Northern Wei aristocrats. By occupying the space, they identified themselves with previous Chinese rulers and obtained cultural confidence against the Liang elites, who insisted on their own literary privilege. The Northern Wei practice of the ward and lane system, therefore, was a big success, and this naming method, along with the ward and lane system, later informed the Tang rulers' plans when they were constructing the city of Chang'an.

A close reading of the urban planning of Luoyang reveals that Emperor Xiaowen, following Tuoba Gui, tried and, to a certain degree, managed to establish a regime that fused Chinese and non-Chinese cultures, customs, and memories, by interweaving pre-Luoyang Tuoba history and experience into the Wei/Jin elements preserved in the spatial memory and the political system inscribed in Luoyang city. Emperor Xiaowen's policy of sinification aimed to construct a stable socio-economy in a multi-cultural context, as well as holding a strong claim of political legitimacy, or in an archaic Chinese term, the Mandate of Heaven. In order to fulfill this ambition, Buddhism, a rather young, unfamiliar religion at that time, served a significant role in this process of transforming both the Tuoba regime and the city of Luoyang.

As the Buddhism boom in the Northern Wei dynasty started prior to the Luoyang era, when Emperor Xiaowen and his descending rulers ordered the construction of monasteries, many temple architects looked back to their Pingcheng counterparts. *Annals of Buddhism and Taoism* 釋老志 in the *Book of Wei* gives us a detailed chronological record of the major religious events of the Northern Wei. According to this resource, Emperor Xiaowen was born in the second year of the Tian'an 天安 reign (467 CE). In the same year, his father, Emperor Xianwen 獻文帝, ordered Yongning Temple built in Pingcheng. The pagoda was higher than 300 *chi*, with an extremely huge base, and this pagoda exceeded all others at that time. Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 notes in his *Commentary to the Classic of Water* 水經註 that Yongning Temple was located to the south of the imperial city and had a seven-layer pagoda.

Yongning Temple in Pingcheng is noteworthy in my discussion because it later contributed as an element of pre-Luoyang imperial memory for Emperor Xiaoming 孝明帝 and his mother, the Empress Dowager Hu 胡太后 (also known as Empress Ling 靈太后). Yang Xuanzhi's account of Luoyang monasteries begins with this most important and magnificent temple, Yongning Temple in Luoyang, which had the same name as the Pingcheng one and also stood to the south of the imperial city. Such imperial temples, as understood in a political sense, were powerful contributors to the construction of imperial identity.

2.2. Imperial Identity and Architectural Elements

Since the Zhou dynasties, the Mandate of Heaven was a politically powerful narrative device employed by Chinese rulers to legitimize their regimes, as the need to justify their throne was always urgent. The pursuit of recognition, from both contemporary people and later generations, was even more urgent and crucial for those emperors of non-Chinese blood. In response to this severe challenge, official historians have developed two narra-

tive formats to justify the imperial identity. One solution is geographical, and another is cultural. In order to identify itself as a legitimate Chinese empire, the empire had to either occupy the central states, which were basically the territory of the Zhou dynasty, or include most of the higher gentry, which inherited the orthodox Chinese literary, philosophical, and political culture. The Northerners and Southerners of early medieval China respectively adopted these two dominant narratives. However, the historical narrative of political orthodoxy is presented in history books only; in other words, it remains distant from commoners' perception of the imperial presence, which was usually based roughly on collective cultural memory preserved in daily life.

The Northern Wei rulers did not leave imperial power absent from the public domain. They fused imperial elements into architecture throughout Luoyang, whether the building primarily served the rulers' demands or secular needs. Among all these types of architecture, the Buddhist temple was the most powerful. The Northern Wei rulers seized the opportunity to build Buddhist structures, which were non-Chinese, just as they were, to facilitate their needs of acculturation with Chinese architects. The goals of this acculturation process were twofold: to recognize the important role of Buddhism that non-Han Chinese rulers believed and followed and to identify the mutual acculturation process that resulted in the designs of the new capital with many temples and stupas.

In the time of the Northern Wei, temples were important intermediate sites where commoners could encounter imperial presence. Visually magnificent buildings can perform monumental functions, even though some of them are not designed to do so. The nine-layered pagoda of Yongning Temple is an example. Being the highest structure in the capital, the pagoda also stood for the royal endorsement of Buddhism as a state religion at least equal to Confucianism (Z. Li 2020, p. 158). In Yang Xuanzhi's depiction, he intentionally emphasizes the verticality of this pagoda, as follows:

中有九層浮圖一所，架木為之，舉高九十丈。上有金剎，復高十丈，合去地一千尺。去京師百里，已遙見之。(Zhou 2010, p. 3)

Within the precincts [of the monastery] was a nine-storied stūpa, built of wood. It rose ninety *zhang* above the ground. There was one gold spire on the top of it, which was another ten *zhang*. The total height added up to one thousand *chi*. From hundreds *li* outside the capital city, people were able to see it. (Yang 1984, p. 15)

Yang Xuanzhi writes in great detail about the height of the pagoda and highlights its visibility by contrasting the vertical height against the horizontal distance. When local Luoyang residents saw the overwhelming pagoda of Yongning Temple, it inevitably reminded them of the superior imperial family who had built it. The display of imperial patronage through monumental architecture was just the first phase of exposure for commoners to the imperial presence. Deciphering the more delicate and less obvious methods require closer reading of the architectural language of imperial temples.

It was a prevailing tradition that the Chinese built up monasteries by modifying Chinese residential architectural styles rather than directly inheriting the Indian style. The primary purpose was to popularize this foreign religion in Chinese society, and this practice experienced great success. One noticeable characteristic during the Northern Wei was that architectural elements originally appearing in imperial palaces were often seen in some temples in Luoyang, especially those built by members of the royal family. In this section, I will focus on Yongning Temple to illustrate how this temple served as an imperial temple to deliberately celebrate the imperial identity of Xianbei rulers.

Before we proceed to the details of this architecture, I will introduce the basic layout of this temple. Yang Xuanzhi devotes a long chapter to reconstructing this temple, mainly because so many crucial historical events took place there, and his depiction leaves us an unparalleled documentation of this temple, which was later burned. Another important source to verify the validity of Yang's writing, as well as to reconstruct the temple, is contemporary archeological excavation. The first time Chinese archeologists attempted to

unearth the remaining site of Yongning Temple was in the spring of 1963, but the actual excavation work did not start until early 1979, a project that then came to a halt in 1982.

Excavation has confirmed that the temple was 500 m south of the imperial palace. It was a rectangle of 301 m by 212 m, with the longer axis being north–south. In the middle of this rectangle, the team found a square pagoda base measuring 100 m on each side, a discovery that supports the description of Yang Xuanzhi, cited previously.

The archeological team also found the debris of decoration statues. Interestingly, eleven pieces out of the total sixteen are parts of a dragon, clearly referencing the imperial. Moreover, only two pieces of elephant statues were discovered. Considering that the elephant is the beast Buddha rides on, the higher number of dragon statues is noteworthy.

While modern technology helps us determine the basic layout of the temple, we learn the most details from *Luoyang qielan ji*, as follows:

浮圖北有佛殿一所，形如太極殿。

寺院牆皆施短椽，以瓦覆之，若今宮牆也。四面各開一門。南門三重，通三閣道，去地二十丈，形製似今端門。(Zhou 2010, pp. 5–7)

North of the stūpa was a Buddhist hall, which was shaped like the Palace of the Great Ultimate.

The walls of the monastery were all covered with short rafters beneath the tiles in the same style as our contemporary palace walls. There were gates in each of the four directions. The south gate was three-storied, each connected with an archway, and rising twenty *zhang* above the ground. It was shaped like the present-day Gate Duan (meaning South Gate). (Yang 1984, pp. 16–17)

The Palace of the Great Ultimate was the main palace in the center of the imperial city, and it represented ultimate imperial might. After this name was first introduced in the Wei dynasty, it was kept in the following millennia until the Qing dynasty.

One important architectural element deserving further scrutiny is elevated walkways 閣道/浮道. Elevated walkways are archways connecting different halls of single or multiple stories. Historically, the appearance of elevated walkways was closely linked to the emperor. Some scholars argue that the First Emperor of Qin, Qinshihuang 秦始皇, inaugurated the construction of elevated walkways between palaces so that he could commute without being witnessed by officials, a practice influenced by Han Feizi's idea that an impartial and uninterested ruler should hide his intentions from the ruled. This reading emphasizes the political theory behind the daily scenario of an emperor's life, while the original record of the First Emperor's purpose of building elevated walkways shows a clear relation to religiosity, though not Buddhism. The great historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 tells this story in his *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, as follows:

盧生說始皇曰：臣等求芝奇藥仙者常弗遇，類物有害之者。方中，人主時為微行以辟惡鬼，惡鬼辟，真人至。人主所居而人臣知之，則害於神。真人者，入水不濡，入火不爇，陵雲氣，與天地久長。今上治天下，未能恬佚。願上所居宮毋令人知，然後不死之藥殆可得也。於是始皇曰：吾慕真人，自謂真人，不稱朕。乃令咸陽之旁二百里內宮觀二百七十復道甬道相連，帷帳鍾鼓美人充之，各案署不移徙。行所幸，有言其處者，罪死。(Sima 1959, p. 257)

Scholar Lu advised the First Emperor [to conceal his whereabouts]: “This vassal and others who look for magic mushroom and elixirs of long life and immortals regularly failed to find them. It seems that there were things impeding the effort. There is one method among many [to remedy this]. If a ruler from time to time disguises himself as a commoner and walks around to exorcise evil demons, then the evil demons will be expelled and the Perfected will come. If the place a Lord stays is known to his vassals, then it impedes the spirit. The Perfected can walk on water without getting wet, through fire without getting burned. They ride on the misty clouds and endure as long as the heavens and the earth. Now the way Your Highness is ruling the world, you will not be able to remain undisturbed.

I hope that Your Highness will not let anyone know of a residence wherein you stay; then the elixir of long life may be obtained.” Thus the First Emperor said: “I long to meet the Perfected. I will call myself the Perfected, no more chen 朕 when referring to myself!” He then ordered that all the 277 palaces and towers within the 200 li surrounding Xianyang be connected by elevated walkways and walled corridors. Curtains, bells and drums, and beautiful girls filled the palaces; each was registered and assigned to a place and never transferred. Wherever he went, those who spoke of his whereabouts were sentenced to death. (Nienhauser 1994, p. 149)

This architectural style allowed the emperor to keep a proper distance from his officials, which conveys his majestic power, and in this case, with capital punishment awaiting violators, his cruelty. This construction plan had its practical uses as well. For instance, such channels would allow the mobility of the emperor even in adverse weathers. Regardless, the appearance of elevated walkways in Chinese architectural history is linked to imperial identity. The Northern Wei emperors, who actively modeled themselves after Chinese rulers, must have known about this history.

In addition to Yongning Temple, many other temples also had elevated walkways installed, as follows:

平等寺，廣平武穆王懷捨宅所立也。在青陽門外二里御道北，所謂孝敬里也。堂宇宏美，林木蕭森，平臺複道，獨顯當世。(Zhou 2010, pp. 79–80)

The Pingdeng Monastery was established at the former residence of Yuan Huai, the Lord Wumu of Guangping. It was on the north side of the Imperial Drive, two li outside the Qingyang Gate, and within the so-called Ward Xiaojing. The halls and rooms were vast and beautiful, sheltered by stately trees that presented a solemn atmosphere. Its raised foundation and covered passageway (elevated walkways) were outstanding structures of the time. (Yang 1984, pp. 97–98)

This record informs us not only of the fact that elevated walkways were frequently seen in temples with imperial patronage but also how this element was interfused with the religious setting. Many temple sites in Luoyang during the Northern Wei regime were previously residences for imperial family members. This might be the primary reason for the appearance of imperial architectural styles in Buddhist temples, but this does not mean that the Northern Wei rulers were unconscious of the impact this hybrid style could have had on local visitors and the imperial family. Actually, the Northern Wei royal family deliberately and creatively took advantage of Buddhism as a strategic vehicle for ruling their multi-racial and trans-cultural society.

3. Reformation of Buddhism

As rulers of a non-Chinese heritage ruling the historically Chinese central states, Tuoba emperors had to accustom their people to Chinese cultural traditions and political conventions and at the same time prove to the Chinese citizens of their empire that they were as good as, if not better than, previous Chinese emperors. Buddhism provided them with a solution; as both the rulers and the religion were unfamiliar to the Chinese community, it was therefore easier for the emperors to reform the Buddhist teachings to suit their needs. In addition, indulgence in Buddhism and the modification of old Chinese Buddhist traditions had been a fashion in the Chinese political sphere on both sides of the Yangtze River since the Han dynasty.

In 1999, the Taiwanese scholar Yan Shangwen 顏尚文 published a book, *Liang Wudi* 梁武帝, in which he discusses in great detail the “Emperor-Bodhisattva 皇帝菩薩” policy of Xiao Yan 蕭衍. He concluded his book thus:

Emperor Wu of Liang created a new idea or policy of “Emperor-Bodhisattva,” which carries both political and religious significance. As an idea, it consists of the Chinese kingship “emperor” and the Indian ideal kingship of “cakravartin 轉

輪聖王。” This kingship of Emperor Wu is a fusion of the Chinese ideal kingship of the sagely king and the Indian ideal kingship of “cakravartin”. It can be understood as a syncretism of three teachings in one, i.e., a combination of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism; or a politico-religious policy, or even a policy in which he ruled his state with the image of “Emperor-Bodhisattva”, hoping to establish a Buddhist empire, or to unite the North and the South after a long period of disunion. (Yan 1999, pp. 318–19)

Kathy Cheng-Mei Ku further historicizes this policy within the political context of the six dynasties, as follows:

The practice of self-fashioning into the image of Buddharāja Maitreya 彌勒佛王 did not begin with Emperor Wu himself. The Buddhist beliefs of the Liang were basically inherited from the Song (420–479) and Qi (479–502) dynasties that preceded it. (Ku 2010, p. 278)

Even though Emperor Wu’s self-identification as Buddharāja Maitreya was handed over from similar practices in the Song and Qi dynasties, the belief was propagated for religious and political purposes throughout his reign, with unprecedented effects. Identifying the rulers as Buddhist deities was common practice in the North and South throughout the medieval period. Such a strategy enabled rulers to strengthen their legitimacy with the help of religious agency. (Sun 2013).

3.1. Northern Wei Context of Politico-Religious Reformation

The debate between religion and politics was also extremely heated in the North. One extremely controversial topic for both the South and the North was whether a monk should perform genuflection to show respect to the emperor. In preceding dynasties, monks always enjoyed relatively loose governance under the imperial bureaucracy, and they did not kneel to the emperor at court. However, the Northern Wei Buddhist leader Monk Faguo 法果 encouraged monks to show respect to the emperor. *Annals of Buddhism and Taoism of Book of Wei* records Faguo’s rationalization of his suggestion, as follows:

初，法果每言，太祖明叡好道，即是當今如來，沙門宜應盡禮，遂常致拜。謂人曰：能弘道者人主也，我非拜天子，乃是禮佛耳。

Back then, Faguo always delivered such a talk that the Great Ancestral Emperor (Tuoba Gui) was wise and fond of the Way and he was the Tathāgata of today, therefore the monks should worship and respect him. So he always kneels to him. He tells other people that the man who can propagate the Way is the Master of people, and he is not worshipping the Son of Heaven, but the Buddha. (Wei 1974, p. 3031)

Faguo’s activity and the rulers’ regulations in the North later influenced Emperor Wu of Liang. The key word in his reasoning, as well as in the politico-religious narrative of that time, is “the Way” 道. Politicians, Buddhists, and Confucian scholars all referred to this ambiguous term to engage in a polyphonic conversation of the ultimate guiding rule of this world. Before Buddhism was introduced to China, the well-developed narrative of Dao, a key term for Daoists, also encompassed the Confucian teaching that the emperor possessing the Mandate of Heaven should act in accordance with the order of the universe, which subordinates to the pervasive Way. The Chinese transcribers of Buddhist sūtras borrowed this word to denote the Buddhist idea about universal rule. This word alone informs us of the synthesis of three teachings. This politico-religious reformation process took place in the form of both bureaucratic policies and manifestation in architecture. The *Annals of Buddhism and Taoism* give us a vivid example of how religious forces were engaged in the secular domain to retain order in the capital, as follows:

太宗踐位，遵太祖之業，亦好黃老，又崇佛法，京邑四方，建立圖像，仍令沙門敷導民俗。

The Great Emperor (Tuoba Si 拓跋嗣) ascended the throne, and followed the examples of the Great Ancestral Emperor. He also liked doctrines of Emperor Huang and Laozi, and admired Buddhist teachings. In the four directions of the capital city, he ordered the establishment of portraits and statues of Buddha, and ordered the monks to instruct the local residents of proper customs. (Wei 1974, p. 3030)

This policy not only united the suburban temples with those in the capital but also put all the monks and nuns under the control of the central government. Moreover, by attending Buddhist services, the local residences learned to follow imperial regulations. The mutual engagement between religion and politics is best embodied in the Hall of Brightness 明堂. Yang Xuanzhi mentions this hall in *Luoyang qielan ji*, as follows:

至我正光中，造明堂於壁雍之西南，上圓下方，八牕四闔。汝南王復造磚浮圖於靈臺之上。(Zhou 2010, p. 104)

During the Zhengguang period (520–524 CE) of our dynasty, the Hall of Illumination was built to the southwest of the Piyong Hall (Imperial Academy). It had a round top on a square base, with eight windows and four gates. The Prince of Runan added a brick stūpa atop the Imperial Observatory. (Yang 1984, pp. 133–34)

The Northern Wei rulers built many imperial halls, modeled on the style of the Han and Wei dynasties. The Hall of Brightness is one of them, and it has significant symbolic meaning. The Hall of Brightness was where imperial pronouncements were released to the public. The round top symbolized the heavens, while the square base represented the earth. This traditional architectural style was established no later than the Han dynasty. The Imperial Academy was another important institute, where scholars with state patronage gathered to study the Classics and to edit the standard edition of each Classic. The Imperial Observatory was where officials of astronomical observations traced the celestial movements. Astronomical observation had significant political functions in ancient China because it was important for agricultural production and was, historically, what a sage king was responsible for. Briefly speaking, these three architectures embodied the Confucian idea of a sage king's responsibility. By adding a pagoda atop, the Northern Wei rulers clearly manifested the political connotation of Buddhist activities, and vice versa.

We have discussed how imperial architectural elements were presented in temples, and here we have further noted that the local commoners encountered imperial teachings through the instruction of monks in the setting of Buddhist temples. Furthermore, in addition to Buddhist monks engaging in political activities, the royal family also actively participated in Buddhist worship and intentionally displayed their indulgence in the form of sculptural and pictorial representations.

3.2. Ancestral Memory in Sacred Space

Yang Xuanzhi constantly criticizes the Northern Wei royal family's indulgence in Buddhism, but his record suggests that the royal family may have encouraged the spread of Buddhism to better serve imperial cultural and political pursuits, which testifies to the previous discussion of the Northern Wei Buddhist reformation in the scope of political history. After taking over Luoyang, the Tuoba rulers were eager to adopt Chinese culture and establish their cultural identity, blending both their "barbarian" origin and Han orthodox ideology. Modifying Buddhist doctrines and constructing imperial Buddhist temples helped to satisfy this pursuit of the Northern Wei royal family. In the following section, I will further argue that with Buddhism as a vehicle, imperial temples also served as ancestral temples to commemorate their ancestors and thus reinforce their ruling legitimacy. I will mainly focus on Yongning Temple again, as this temple has the most abundant material available. The previous close reading of Yongning Temple mainly focused on its layout and exterior design, which is the first step to understanding the imperial identity interwo-

ven in it. The second step is to explore inside the temple, to examine who might have been worshipped in Yongning Temple, as well as in other imperial temples.

As Yongning Temple is a Buddhist temple, it is not surprising to see Buddha statues. Numerous magnificent statues were presented in Yongning Temple, according to Yang Xuanzhi's record, as follows:

（太極殿）中有丈八金像一軀，中長金像十軀，繡珠像三軀，金織成像五軀，玉像二軀。作工奇巧，冠於當世。（Zhou 2010, p. 5)

In the Palace [of the Great Ultimate] was a golden statue of the Buddha one *zhang* and eight *chi* high, along with ten medium-sized images—three of sewn pearls, five of woven golden threads, and two of jade. The superb artistry was matchless, unparalleled in its day. (Yang 1984, p. 16)

Unfortunately, Yongning Temple was burned due to continuous warfare in the North, and all these statues were destroyed. We were only able to unearth approximately 2000 shattered pieces, which were beyond archeologists' ability to restore. The largest piece is part of a statue head measuring 24.5 cm. We were able to estimate the size of the original statue to be between 2 and 3 m in height. In addition, the details of the face resemble Chinese people rather than genuine Indian-style Buddha statues, often seen in Gandhāra and other parts of Central Asia. Synchronically, such sinicized statues appeared in grottoes built by Northerners. The appearance of Buddhist grottoes is another milestone in Chinese, primarily in Tuoba, cultural and religious history. These mass grotto diggings first took place in the Pingcheng era. Thus, once again, the memories of the Northern Wei pre-Luoyang are represented in Luoyang itself through the reproduction of these grotto statues.

One noteworthy subgenre of statues in Yongning Temple, as well as in grottoes outside Pingcheng and Luoyang, is the portraits of emperors offering sacrifice to the Buddha. These images provided visual memories of the imperial indulgence in Buddhism and living testimony of imperial engagement in Buddhism.

Archeologist and art historian Qian Guoxiang 錢國祥 carefully compared the *Portrait of Emperor Worshipping Buddha* 皇帝禮佛圖 in Gong County Grotto 鞏縣石窟 and Binyang Grotto 賓陽石窟 to statues found in Yongning Temple and managed to identify images of the emperor and his courtiers and warriors in Yongning Temple clay statues.

For instance, there was one statue wearing an undulating and collared middle layer, a shawl-neck loose-sleeved outfit, and a wide pleated skirt. Qian states that “the dresses are splendid and the gesture is elegant, in a style of emperors. Especially, the undulating collar of the middle layer stands out clearly. This detail is identical to the dressing and gesture of the emperor in Portrait of Emperor Worshipping Buddha in Gong County Grotto.” (Qian 2006, p. 14).

In addition to statues of Buddha, another type of statue flourished in Yongning Temple: statues of the emperor and empress. Engraving statues for the parents of the emperor and his own statue was a general practice for almost every Northern Wei emperor. The practice started with Wencheng Emperor Tuoba Jun 拓跋濬, Emperor Xiaowen's grandfather. The *Annals of Buddhism and Taoism of Book of Wei* record this interesting scenario, as follows:

詔有司為石像，令如帝身。既成，顏上足下，各有黑石，冥同帝體上下黑子。論者以為純誠所感。

[Wencheng Emperor] ordered the administrative officers to engrave a stone statue in the emperor's image. Once it was finished, on the face and foot, each had a black stone, just subtly looked like the Emperor's moles up and down. Those who talked about it thought it is the resonance due to piousness. (Wei 1974, p. 3036)

The statue of Buddha represented every physical detail of the emperor, even the imperfect moles. This was difficult for devout Buddhists to rationalize, so they adopted a

supernatural theory of resonance to justify the imperfection and bind the Emperor to the Buddha. Based on the *Annals of Buddhism and Taoism*, the Wencheng Emperor not only made his own statues but also the statues of his ancestors:

興光元年秋，敕有司於五級大寺內，為太祖以下五帝，鑄釋迦立像五，各長一丈六尺，都用赤金二十五萬斤。

In the fall of the first year of the Xingguang Reign (454 CE), Emperor ordered the administrative officers to build five standing statues of Sakyamuni for five emperors, starting from the Great Ancestral Emperor, in a grand five-storied temple. Each of the statues was one *zhang* and six *chi*, costing 250,000 *jin* of gold. (Wei 1974, p. 3036)

There was a very clear political incentive behind this scenario of Buddhist reformation. The Northern emperors' promotion of Buddhism contributed to the context of Buddhist indulgence throughout China, while differing significantly from the South. Even though they both wanted to construct the image of a Buddha-like emperor to stabilize their regime, the Northerners also wanted to rely on Buddhist rituals to commemorate their ancestors and therefore to rewrite their pre-Luoyang imperial family history, in order to obtain the authority to rule China's central plain.

Ancestral memory had an unparalleled function for Chinese dynasties' rulers and elites. Familial lineage was the primary method to determine one's social status, vocation, and wealth. Not only did the emperor inherit his throne from his father, at least ideally, but the elites also took over their fathers' official posts. This phenomenon had its practical reason. Education, or in another word, knowledge, was very much restricted to a small group of people, and the circulation of knowledge was strictly confined to a small number of elites, specifically. They passed down their knowledge and specific techniques to their posterity. A larger group of educated men, as was seen in the Ming and Qing dynasties, was not available in early medieval China; therefore, the consumption of knowledge was not yet a large-scale business. This socio-cultural background determined the importance of genealogy. For instance, when Sima Qian wrote *The Record of Grand Historian*, he first traced his family history as historians all the way back to the time of Xia.

For the emperors, ancestral memory was even more important. The blood links with the previous emperor guaranteed their legitimacy in the first place. Yet every new emperor has had to face his predecessor's political legacy, either to inherit or abandon it. He will constantly refer to the founding emperor, usually a successful ruler, to justify his policies.

Ancestral temples were places where the imperial family commemorated their ancestors. This tradition had been established since the Zhou dynasty, and it reached its mature form, in both theory and practice, no later than the Han dynasty. K. E. Brashier reconstructed the basic structure of the Zhou dynasty ancestral hall, as follows:

According to the *Ritual records*, a Zhou dynasty king visiting his family shrine would initially pass between the tablets of his father and grandfather and then between the tablets of his great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather. These would be arranged with the even-numbered generations or *zhao* 昭 to the visitor's right and odd-numbered generations or *mu* 穆 to his left. After passing his four most recent forebears in their *zhaomu* positions, he then came to two collective altars where all the older *zhao*- and *mu*-tablets sat in order led by the Zhou dynastic founders, King Wen and Wu. Finally, he passed beyond his own dynastic history to confront the clan altar, that of the legendary Hou Ji 后稷. (Brashier 2011, pp. 61–62)

The Han emperors practiced this ideal in reality, although in most cases, some modifications were made. When the Han emperor, followed by other imperial members and courtiers, entered the ancestral shrine, he would go through the dynastic history of Han all the way back to the progenitor Liu Bang 劉邦. The political lineage and imperial identity were vividly presented through retrieving and reviving their ancestral memory, stimulated by those ancestral tablets.

However, the problem for Northern Wei rulers regarding properly preserving their ancestral memory was even more complicated than for Han or Wei emperors. They faced an inevitable dilemma caused by the differentiation between Chinese and non-Han Chinese races. They needed to accommodate themselves in the Chinese political tradition, as they now occupied the quintessential Chinese territory; however, they needed to remember their non-Chinese identity, as the majority of officials were still Xianbei elites.

We consider again the Buddhist conversation about monks kneeling to the emperor, in which many Buddhists and politicians engaged. A sage king in this world, in some sense, is the Buddha in another world. The statues of Buddhas, emperors, and their ancestors in the imperial temples were intermingled together and created a multi-faceted figure, encompassing political and religious bodies. Buddhism, an unfamiliar religion for the Chinese, enabled Northern Wei rulers to freely combine Confucian ideas and their non-Han Chinese identity with Buddhist practices, so that they could meet the contradicting needs of two different groups of people. Buddhist temples somehow transformed into ancestral temples, and the ruling family commemorated their ancestors in a manner closer to the Chinese tradition. The statues functioned in the same way as the tablets in Han ancestral temples. The ancestral memory was visualized in this sacred space and thereby gained power, transcending the secular domain to provide dynastic legitimacy. The idea of Buddha became an intermediary between ancestors and emperors, religion, and politics. The statues of emperors resembling Buddha conveyed the idea to local residents that they were sage rulers and recipients of the Mandate of Heaven. This seemingly archaic idea of the ruler as both a political and a religious leader (such as the Shang king) rewrites Tuoba history to solve the problem of how a non-Chinese family could take over the Chinese state. By entering the imperial ancestral Buddhist temple later on, the current emperor was able to grasp legitimacy and settle himself in this politico-religious group. The statues of emperor, ancestor, and Buddha were also better stimuli for ancestral memory retrieval than the tablets used in Han ancestral shrines. While Buddhism is radically different from the ancestral cult, its focus on meditation may have laid the groundwork for ancestor-focused remembrance. With the visualized and materialized ancestral memory embodied in statues and paintings, Northern Wei rulers finally came up with the solution to ease the tension of their pre-Luoyang identity and the legitimization of their state power.

Yang Xuanzhi's *Luoyang qielan ji* left us many traces of the popularity of these imperial Buddhist ancestral temples, as follows:

東有秦太上公二寺，在景明寺南一里。西寺，太后所立，東寺，皇姨所建。並為父追福，因以名之。(Zhou 2010, p. 103)

報德寺，高祖孝文皇帝所立也，為馮太后追福，在開陽門外三里。(Zhou 2010, p. 106)

To the east, one *li* south of the Jingming Monastery, there were two temples in honor of Father Qin of the Supreme Empress. The one on the west was established by the empress dowager, whereas the one on the east was founded by her younger sister. Both were dedicated to the posthumous happiness of their father and so were they named. (Yang 1984, p. 132)

The Baode Temple was established by Emperor Xiaowen, [otherwise known as] Gaozu, and dedicated to his grandmother Empress Feng for her posthumous happiness. It was located three *li* outside the Kaiyang Gate. (Yang 1984, p. 136)

Interestingly, these two records not only inform us of the number of imperial Buddhist ancestral temples but also imply the anxiety of female royal members. In the first case, the two sisters both built a temple to commemorate their father. In the second one, one temple was exclusively built for the Empress Dowager Feng. In a society of patrilineal imperial authority, women on or behind the throne were always unappreciated by historians, as was the non-Chinese Northern regime in orthodox Chinese history. The anxiety of the women regents reflected the anxiety of the Northern Wei, as they all needed to find their places in a history naturally inclined against them. The fact that women in the Northern Wei dynasty had relatively easier access to political power might be attributed to the

traditional social structure of nomadic tribes. Unlike a Confucian society, wherein ideal women were usually subordinate to the male members of the community, Xianbei female elite members enjoyed less social confinement and were capable of gaining the imperial power by controlling their sons, for example, the crown prince, more easily.

Such anxiety is also present in the case of Yongning Temple. When Emperor Xuanwu passed away in 515 and the young Emperor Xiaoming 孝明帝 (r. 516–528 CE) ascended the throne, his mother, Empress Hu 胡太后, soon controlled the entire court. The first thing she wanted to do was to build an imperial ancestral temple where she would be worshipped. Yang Xuanzhi tells us about her ordering the construction of Yongning Temple, as follows:

永寧寺，熙平元年靈太后胡氏所立也。(Zhou 2010, p. 1)

The Yongning Temple was constructed in the first year of the Xiping reign, (516 CE) by decree of Empress Dowager Ling (?–528 CE)), whose surname was Hu. (Yang 1984, p. 13)

She ordered the construction in the first year of Xiping, and in the second year, she personally paid a visit to the pagoda, the structure of which had just been finished, even though the supervisor of the construction project, Cui Guang 崔光 (449–523 CE), advised her not to, because the interior decoration and sculpture had not been finished yet. But the elderly Empress insisted and climbed up the nine-storied pagoda. It is not difficult to imagine how eager she was to see her commemorative temple.

Contemporary archeological discovery has confirmed the size and extravagance of this temple, revealing how the Empress accredited this architecture. In the remaining site of the Yongning Pagoda, archeological teams found three sets of five-niche caves in the east, south, and west walls inside the pagoda. It is highly possible that these three caves were reserved to mount statues of Emperor Xiaoming and his parents, Emperor Xuanwu and Empress Hu. The largest piece of clay face statue (Figure 1) excavated from inside the pagoda supports our hypothesis, as its appearance and facial expression resemble a non-Indian female face.

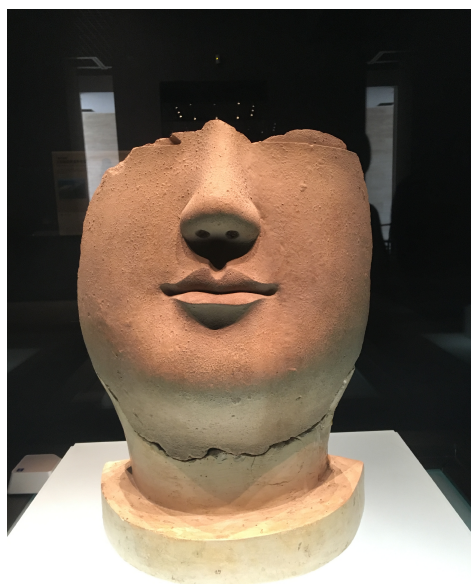


Figure 1. Clay face statue excavated from the site of Yongning Pagoda. Now in the Luoyang Museum. Photo taken by the author.

To briefly summarize, the Northern Wei rulers actively and innovatively responded to the cultural, religious, and political narratives regarding Buddhism on both sides of Yangtze River and modified the Buddhist temples to preserve, retrieve, and represent their ancestral memory in a sacred space, encompassing their pre-Luoyang history, non-Chinese

identity, and current political pursuits. The imperial Buddhist ancestral temples, as symbols inviting creative reading or as sites of remembrance playing an important political role, helped the Xianbei people to merge into the Chinese cultural tradition without completely excluding their non-Chinese heritage.

3.3. Buddhism in Public Space

After we have seen the significant function that the reformation of Buddhist practice played in legitimizing the Northern Wei imperial family, it is necessary to point out that this reformation was never exclusively for the imperial family alone. Sun Yinggang, in his research about Sui and Tang Chang'an city, pointed out that "before the introduction of Buddhism, commoners could not enter the ritual space of state rituals" while Buddhist space "offered a quasi-public space for both officials and commoners" (Sun 2017, p. 92). Buddhism's widespread and powerful influence reached the sphere of commoners by inviting visitors into Buddhist ritualistic spaces, both in the monasteries and on the streets.

One straightforward role that Buddhism played in the daily life of Northern Wei citizens was that Buddhist services provided an alternative way of remembering their ancestors, in addition to traditional Confucian rituals. Yan Zhitui 顏之推 was a Liang official, later captured by the Western Wei 西魏 troops when they attacked Jiangling. The Northerners admired his talent greatly, meaning he was not executed like many other fellow captives. He tried to flee back to the South but never succeeded and remained in the North. He thus had a front row seat to witness the cultural and political situation on this side of Yangtze River. In his book, *Family Instruction for Yan Clan* 顏氏家訓, he suggested that his offspring offer sacrifices only during the Buddhist Ghost Festival 盂蘭盆會, as follows:

四時祭祀，周孔所教，欲人勿死其親，不忘孝道也。求諸內典，則無益焉。殺生為之，翻增罪累。若報罔極之德，霜露之悲，有時齋供，及七月半盂蘭盆，望於汝也。

Offering sacrifices in each of the four seasons is the teaching of Zhougong and Kongzi. They want people not to forget their deceased parents and not to forget the filial piety. Continually referring to Daoist texts does not make any good. If you kill lives for sacrifice, you add to your evil. If you want to repay my ultimate kindness, and to relieve your sorrow in misty and dewy days, you can just sacrifice to me occasionally. And once it is the Buddhist Ghost Festival in the mid of seventh month, you could remember to offer sacrifices to me. (Wang 1993, p. 602)

The main focus of his suggestion here is to cut the family budget spent on burial and memorial services and to choose Buddhist rituals instead. This choice indicates the popularity of Buddhism among Northerners.

In addition to providing another choice of burial rituals, Buddhist activities, such as the statue parade 行像, became important social activities, enabling the rulers to introduce secular entertainment into religious festivals and to thereby restore and maintain order in the capital. For example, secular entertainment, such as drama performances, was seen in temples during festivals. Yang Xuanzhi briefly introduces the statue parade in his chapter on Jingming Temple 景明寺, as follows:

四月七日京師諸像皆來此寺。尚書祠部曹錄影凡有一千餘軀，至八日節，以次入宣陽門，向闔闔宮前，受皇帝散華。於時金華映日，寶蓋浮雲，旛幢若林，香煙似霧，梵樂法音，聒動天地；百戲騰驤，所在駢比；名僧德眾，負錫為群，信徒法侶，持花成藪；車騎填咽，繁衍相傾。時有西域胡沙門見此，唱言佛國。(Zhou 2010, p. 99)

On the seventh day of the fourth month all images in the capital were assembled in this monastery, numbering more than one thousand, according to the records of the Office of Sacrifices, Department of State Affairs. On the eighth day, the images were carried one by one into the Xuanyang Gate, where the emperor would

scatter flowers in front of the Changhe Palace. At this moment, gold-colored flowers reflected the dazzling sunlight, and the bejeweled canopies for the images floated in the clouds. Banners were as numerous as trees in a forest, and incense smoke was as thick as a fog. Indian music and the din of chanted Buddhist scriptures moved heaven and earth alike. Wherever variety shows were performed, there was congestion. Renowned monks and virtuous masters, each carrying a staff, formed a throng. The Buddhist devotees and their companions holding flowers resembled a garden in bloom. Carriages and horses choked and jostled each other. A foreign monk from the Western Regions saw it, and chanted and said it was just the Buddha's land. (Yang 1984, pp. 126–27)

The grand setting of the statue parade enabled the entire city to participate, from the emperor to the commoners. Since there were more than one thousand temples in Luoyang, as well as a huge population, this parade turned out to be a spectacular event. Even though there were several injuries in the audience during the parade each year, it never failed to attract more viewers. Again, the imperial power was present in this religious festival. However, the visual presentation of Buddha in front of the public was the primary purpose of this parade. Yang Xuanchi, in his chapter on Zongsheng Temple 宗聖寺, focuses on the central position of Buddha statues in this parade, as follows:

有像一軀。舉高三丈八尺。端嚴殊特。相好畢備。士庶瞻仰。目不暫瞬。此像一出市井。皆空炎先。騰輝赫赫。獨絕世表。(Zhou 2010, p. 59)

In the Zongsheng Temple was a Buddha image that was three *zhang* and eight *chi*. Its countenance was unusually grave, and it had all [the thirty-two marks and eighty signs on the body]. People held the statue in high esteem and could not take their eyes of it. Whenever the statue was on parade, [they would leave their homes or the marketplace to see it, so that] all the homes and marketplaces were virtually empty. The aureole of this statue had no parallel in its time. (Yang 1984, pp. 72–73)

The Northern Wei rulers, as shown in the previous examination of Yongning Temple, intended and somehow managed to create a politico-religious image of Buddha–ancestor–emperor unity. The statues of Buddha that were sponsored by the royal family and represented imperial might stood for the revival of imperial ancestral memory and legitimized Northern Wei ruling identity. The parade, therefore, can be read as a showcase for the rulers to display their political control over the Chinese central states. The Buddha portraits cruising across the wards and lanes, on a metaphorical level, resembled the emperors, now and then, taking an imperial excursion. The entire parade basically had two starting points, one imperial and one religious. The imperial start was the emperor scattering the flowers, and the religious one was the portraits gathering in front of Jingming Temple. Later, these two starting points collectively initiated the parade, and the imperial presence and religious presence were celebrated by the local residents with secular forms of entertainment, i.e., drama performances. There is no direct record of performances during the statue parade, but *Luoyang qielan ji* reported that performances were regularly shown in temples. It would not be much of a stretch to presume that similar shows were performed in Luoyang's public space during the parade.

(景樂寺)有佛殿一所，像輦在焉，雕刻巧妙，冠絕一時。堂廡周環，曲房連接，輕條拂戶，花蕊被庭。至於大齋，常設女樂。歌聲繞樑，舞袖徐轉，絲管寥亮，諧妙入神。

(元悅)召諸音樂，逞伎寺內。奇禽怪獸，舞扑殿庭，飛空幻惑，世所未睹。異端奇術，總萃其中。剝驢投井，植棗種瓜，須臾之間皆得食。士女觀者，目亂睛迷。(Zhou 2010, pp. 42–43)

[In Jingyue Nunnery] there was a Hall of Buddha that housed a carriage for the sacred image. The deftness shown in carving had no parallel at the time. Halls and corridors encircled each other, while inner rooms followed one after another.

Soft branches brushed the windows; blooming flowers covered the courtyard. At the time of Great Fast *posadha*, music performed by female artists was often provided: the sound of singing enveloped the beams, while dancers' sleeves slowly whirled in enchanting harmony with the reverberating notes of stringed and pipe instruments. It was rhythmical and breathtaking.

(Yuan Yue) summoned a number of musicians to demonstrate their skills inside the nunnery. Strange birds and outlandish animals danced in the courtyards and flew into the sky, and changed into bewildering shapes. They presented a show never seen before in the world. Unusual games and spectacular skills were all performed here. Some magicians would dismember an ass and throw the cut-up parts into a well, only to have the mutilated animal quickly regenerate its maimed parts. Others would plant date trees and melon seeds that would in no time bear edible fruits. Women and men who watched the performance were dumbfounded. (Yang 1984, pp. 51–52)

The magic performances were not of Chinese origin. They were probably introduced to local residents by performers from the west region. Therefore, temples were also places where foreign culture met local culture. According to *Luoyang Qielan Ji*, foreigners were accommodated in the temples, and some were designated wards. In this sense, the temple itself was a form of public space, wherein the rulers managed to accommodate hetero-cultural visitors to Luoyang, which was an international metropolitan at that time. Such a phenomenon, once again, demonstrates how reformed Buddhist teachings, in the hands of the Northern Wei royal family, succeeded in localizing the non-Chinese population, including themselves, as the Xianbei non-Chinese race.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I endeavored to re-construct Luoyang city based mainly on Yang Xuanzhi's *A Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang* and today's archaeological findings. The combination of sources, textual and material, traditional and new, allowed us to better understand Luoyang, the Northern Wei capital, both as a city in which people lived and as a political symbol on which dynastic legitimacy was built. My major purpose was to decipher the pre-Luoyang memory and imperial identity of the Northern Wei royal family, as embodied in the urban planning of Luoyang city, by understanding the reformation of Buddhist politico-religious policy through both a historical approach and literary analysis. In other words, the visual effects that the Buddhist structures in the capital had on local residents and viewers became an effective device for presenting political discourse in public space.

At the same time, Buddhism played a crucial role in the Northern Wei's campaign of establishing their rulership as a legitimate one from the Chinese perspective. Buddhist temples became structures where commoners interacted on a daily basis. In these daily interactions, local residents of Luoyang accepted the new rulership through subordinating to religious agency and being immersed in the imperial Buddhist spectacles. The convergence of state rituals and more traditional Chinese ancestral worship with Buddhist worship enabled the Luoyang residents to collectively engage in the formation of a new dynastic identity. This identity desired by the Xianbei rulers was best conveyed to the Northern Wei people by seeing images of imperial families seated alongside Buddhas, huge temples sponsored by emperors, and the spatial planning of the city, which embodied Confucian ideas and Buddhist presence at the same time.

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