

Article

# Virtual Pilgrimage and Virtual Geography: Power of Liao Miniature Pagodas (907–1125)

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of the miniature in Buddhist ritual, through analyses of miniature pagodas from middle-period China. Due to the otherworldly sensations they evoked and their theatrical nature, miniatures were often endowed with magical and performative power in funerary and religious contexts. The miniature pagodas from the Liao empire (907–1125) were replicas of the stupa monuments (the prototype of the pagoda) at the Eight Great Sacred Places in India. Adopting ritual theories and a comparative approach, this paper illuminates how the Liao miniature pagodas were devised to symbolically transfer the sacred places to the Liao empire in northeast China, allowing Liao Buddhists to make a virtual pilgrimage to the Buddha’s homeland by circumambulating the pagoda. The ways in which they functioned in the Buddhist ritual were similar to the small-scale copies of the Holy Sepulcher in medieval Europe. Their power—contrary to common sense—originated from their miniature size and intentional rejection of their sacred prototype. Through these miniatures, the banal ritual of pagoda circumambulation was transformed into an imaginary journey to the distant holy land, which was believed to be more efficacious and meritorious than an actual pilgrimage, and the prairie of northeast China was turned into the most sacred place in the Buddhist world.

**Keywords:** Buddhism; virtual pilgrimage; sacred place; ritual; miniature; pagoda; stupa; Liao empire; Holy Sepulcher

## 1. Introduction

A miniature is a strange thing. Through a distortion of scale, miniatures elicit otherworldly feelings that everyday objects cannot.<sup>1</sup> Due to their distinctive phenomenological and visual effects, miniatures were often endowed with magical and performative power in funerary and religious contexts. While Jonathan Z. Smith’s influential theory has illuminated the role of the miniature in the West, the miniature in Buddhist ritual practice has received little scholarly attention. It is my conviction, however, that close study of the miniature in Buddhist practice can also deepen our understanding of the nature of the miniature in religious practice more generally.

The Liao empire (907–1125), founded by the nomadic people known as the Kitans in today’s northeast China and Mongolia, erected numerous pagodas adorned with miniature pagodas. As towering architectural monuments that enshrined the Buddha’s relics in their inner deposit, pagodas had become the most sacred and highly venerated architectural monuments in East Asia since Buddhism was first transmitted from India around the start of the Common Era. The Liao empire’s

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<sup>1</sup> For theoretical studies of the miniature, see (Stewart 1993; Lévi-Strauss 1966). For studies of miniatures in the material culture of the Mediterranean, see articles included in (Smith and Bergeron 2011).

brick pagodas (Figure 1) were peculiar in that reliefs of miniature pagodas (Figure 2) were displayed on the outer walls of their ground story.<sup>2</sup>

The ritual function of these miniatures has yet to be illuminated. Through an investigation into their ritual function, this paper hopes to offer an opportunity to rethink the power and function of miniatures in religious practice. This paper brings to light the ways in which these miniatures effectively offered a ‘virtual pilgrimage,’<sup>3</sup> and powerfully shifted the land of Liao from the periphery to the center of the Buddhist sacred geography. Through the power of the miniatures, the banal ritual of pagoda circumambulation was transformed into an imaginary journey to the distant holy land of the Buddha, thereby enabling an imagined pilgrimage for Liao Buddhists, most of whom could not afford such travel to India. Moreover, the miniatures helped conceptually reshape the prairie of northeast China into the most sacred place in the Buddhist world, creating a virtual sacred geography. The logic of the Liao miniatures in religious practice often defied common sense. Their power originated from their miniature size and intentional rejection of their Indian prototype. Observations in this paper complicate and supplement Jonathan Z. Smith’s theory’s influential theory on the tendency towards miniaturization in ritual. While Smith’s theory throws much light on the workings of the Liao miniature pagodas, the miniatures and related Buddhist practices reveal that the virtual pilgrimage and virtual geography enabled by them were, counter to Smith’s theory, more than mere “displacements” or replacements—they were regarded as even more powerful and efficacious than their real counterparts. In other words, the miniatures brought into existence a virtual ritual that was more meritorious than the real pilgrimage, and a virtual holy land more sacred than the real one.

## 2. Pagodas on the Pagoda

Before we begin to explore the complex ritual functions of miniature pagodas from the Liao empire, a brief introduction is in order. The Liao empire generously patronized Buddhism, resulting in the development of new types of Buddhist architecture that profoundly impacted the ritual and visual culture of Chinese Buddhism in the subsequent centuries.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, northeast China and Inner Mongolia are still dotted with high-rise brick pagodas from the Liao. No other dynasties have left so many pagodas in these regions. As evidenced by the Liao brick pagodas that still remain, the practice of decorating the exterior walls with miniature pagodas was widespread throughout the Liao territory—from Hebei Province to Beijing and Inner Mongolia. Even after the fall of the Liao empire in 1125, miniature pagodas continuously appeared on the pagodas of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234).<sup>5</sup>

The miniature pagodas with the most detailed iconography are those on Chaoyang North Pagoda’s exterior walls (Figures 1 and 2). Eight miniature pagodas—two on each side—surround the ground story.<sup>6</sup> These are also the oldest surviving examples of the eight miniature pagodas. Thanks to the dated inscriptions excavated from the pagoda’s relic deposits, we know that the imageries on the ground story were created before 1044.<sup>7</sup> This practice of adorning a pagoda’s outer walls with eight miniatures seems to have originated in the Chaoyang region.<sup>8</sup> Miniature pagodas appear on the

<sup>2</sup> The Liao had a keen interest in miniature architecture. For miniature buildings that were used as containers in Liao, such as coffins and reliquaries made in the shapes of architecture, see (Chen 2011).

<sup>3</sup> As will be explained later, virtual pilgrimage was practiced by divergent religious traditions across the globe. I am grateful to Professor Jeffrey Hamburger for bringing my attention to the studies of virtual pilgrimage in the West. For a good monograph on virtual pilgrimage in medieval Europe, see (Rudy 2011).

<sup>4</sup> For the Liao empire, see (Di Cosimo 2006; Wittfogel and Fêng 1949).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Yinshan Pagoda Forest (銀山塔林) in Pingchang昌平 district in the northeast of downtown Beijing has several Jin-dynasty pagodas adorned with miniature pagodas.

<sup>6</sup> The number of miniature pagodas placed on a Liao pagoda was typically eight. Some later Liao pagodas show modifications. One such example is Balengguan Pagoda 八棱觀塔, which has as many as 48 miniature pagoda reliefs attached to its pedestal and ground story walls.

<sup>7</sup> The archaeological excavation was conducted from 1984 to 1996. For the most extensive report on this excavation, see (Liaoning-sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Chaoyang is one of fourteen *shi* 市 (prefectural-level cities) that comprise Liaoning Province. A prefectural-level city is an administrative division of the People’s Republic of China that ranks below a province and above a county.

exterior of as many as seven pagodas in this region, four of which have a square plan.<sup>9</sup> These square pagodas show that the practice of attaching eight miniature pagodas to an actual pagoda body was first developed in the Chaoyang region.<sup>10</sup> As pointed out by Nancy Steinhart and Chinese scholar Li Yufeng, the square pagodas exhibit a transitional architectural style that signals the inception of the early Liao pagoda style, as their square ground plan comes from the previous Tang dynasty (618–907) (Steinhardt 1997; Li 1997). Square Liao pagodas were unique to Chaoyang, as the typical form of pagoda throughout the Liao territory soon became the octagonal multi-eaved pagoda. Therefore, one can infer that the miniature pagodas on these square Liao pagodas in Chaoyang predate those on the octagonal Liao pagodas. Among these square pagodas whose ground-story imagery has survived,<sup>11</sup> Chaoyang North Pagoda seems to have served as the model for the other square pagodas. Iconographic details and stylistic features of the imagery—such as realistic rendering of spatial depth using low relief, suggest that they predate those on other pagodas. As similar iconographic repertoires frequently appear on later octagonal Liao pagodas, the imagery on Chaoyang North Pagoda is particularly important as a prototype for many Liao pagodas.

Through several visual devices, the imagery of Chaoyang North Pagoda indicates that the miniature pagodas are one of the principal elements of its iconography. At first glance, the miniature pagodas, placed on the far left and right of each ground story wall, might seem rather insignificant compared to the central Buddha (Figure 3). The seated Buddha immediately draws the viewer's attention due to his central position and relatively large size, as well as rich detailing. Three layers of concentric halos encircle his body, marking his sacred status. A robe elegantly covers his shoulders and body but exposes part of his chest. The partially exposed chest is adorned with an exquisite necklace, and the head is crowned with a high ornate crown featuring small images of five Buddhas; both are iconic characteristics of Buddhas in Esoteric Buddhism, which was widely practiced in Liao.<sup>12</sup> The Buddha is supported by a lotus pedestal, under which are animals representing the *vāhana* (animal mount) typical of Esoteric Buddhas. Besides his central position and exquisite details, the visual device signifying the Buddha's importance is the splendid canopy that hovers above him. Representation of a canopy, something that had actually been used in ancient India to protect aristocrats and royalty from the sun, was introduced to serve as a visual marker of sacred figures in the Buddhist visual tradition.<sup>13</sup> On either side of the canopy emanates a celestial dancer standing inside a trailing cloud. The Buddha under the canopy is flanked by two bodhisattvas kneeling on lotus pedestals atop a Mount-Sumeru pedestal; they each face the Buddha piously, with an offering in their hands. The bodhisattvas are much smaller than the Buddhas, they sit on lower pedestals, they have only two halos around their heads, and no canopy is positioned above them. Collectively, these visual cues work together to imply that the bodhisattvas are of lesser importance than the Buddha they venerate.

<sup>9</sup> Two are located in the downtown area (Chaoyang North Pagoda and Chaoyang South Pagoda 朝陽南塔); two are on Mount Fenghuang 鳳凰 near the downtown area (Yunjiesi Pagoda 雲接寺塔 [also known as Moyun Pagoda 摩雲塔] and Dabao Pagoda 大寶塔); and three are in suburban areas (Qingfeng Pagoda 峰塔 [also known as the Pagoda at Wushijiazai Village 五十家子塔], Balenguan Pagoda 八棱觀塔, and the southern pagoda of Shuangtasi 雙塔寺). Except for the latter two, all have a square plan.

<sup>10</sup> Although the sculptures attached to Chaoyang South Pagoda's ground story have not survived, the eight cartouches remaining on the ground story indicate the original presence of eight miniature pagodas.

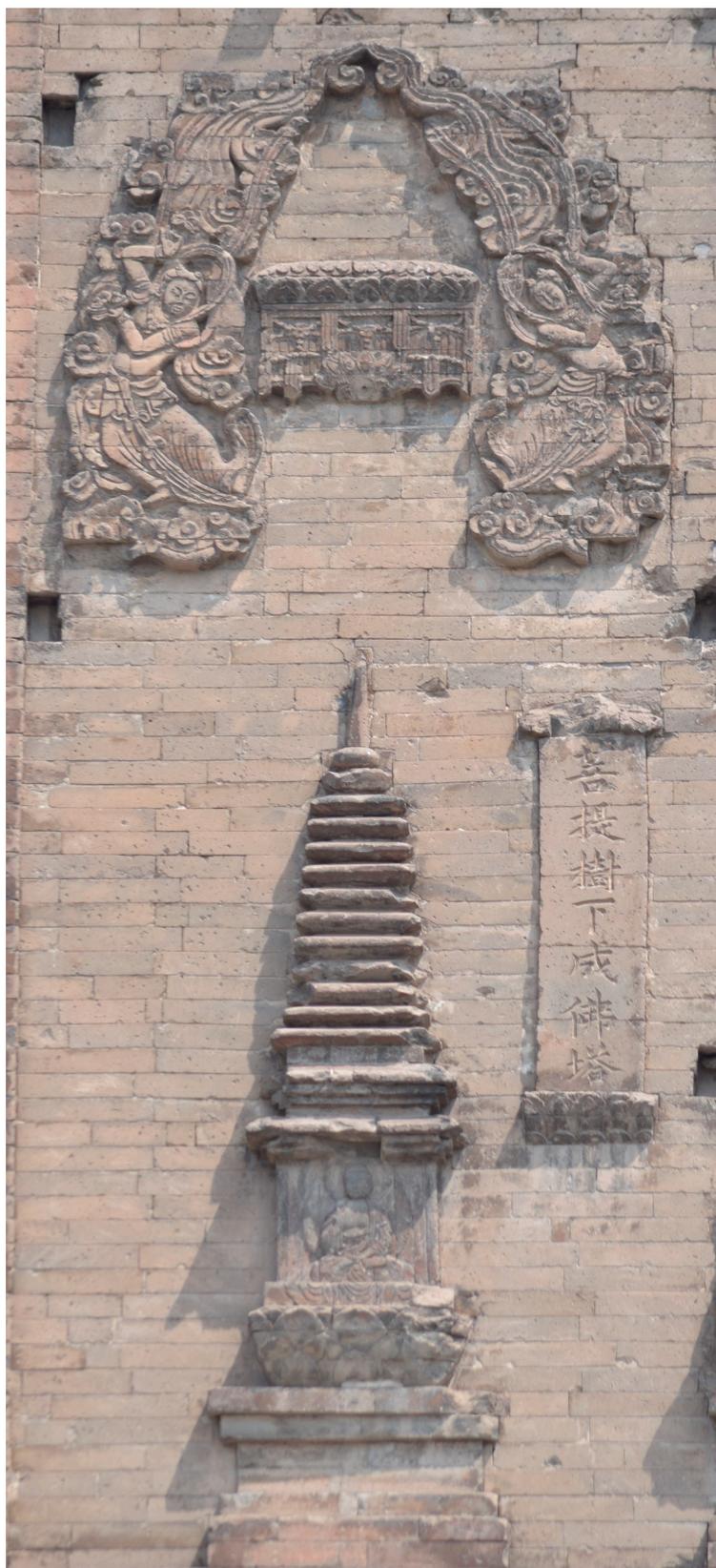
<sup>11</sup> The imagery on Chaoyang South Pagoda's ground story did not survive, and this pagoda is difficult to date. Some scholars have suggested that Chaoyang South Pagoda may predate Chaoyang North Pagoda, because a stone stele that dates to 984 (the second year of the Tonghe 統和 reign period) was discovered in 2004 from a nearby underground relic depository. It is, however, unclear whether this relic depository was related to Chaoyang South Pagoda because the depository was located roughly fifty meters to the north of this pagoda. A relic depository is usually found below or inside a pagoda. A complete excavation report regarding this relic depository, which was referred to as a 'stone palace' (*shigong* 石宮) in the stele inscription found in the depository, has yet to be published. A rubbing of the excavated stone stele was published in a pamphlet from the North Pagoda Museum, entitled *Chaoyang fosheli* 朝陽佛舍利.

<sup>12</sup> For Liao Buddhism, see (Wakiya 1912, 1913; Sørensen 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Early examples are seen in the canopies (large umbrellas) in the narrative panels (1st century BCE–1st century CE) from the Great Stupa at Sanci in India.



**Figure 1.** Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1043–1044. Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, China [©Youn-mi Kim Photograph, 2007].



**Figure 2.** Miniature pagoda, west side of the south wall of Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynast, 1043–1044. Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, China [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].



**Figure 3.** The central Buddha and attending bodhisattvas, east wall of Chaoyang North Pagoda, Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, China. Liao dynasty, 1043–1044 [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].

Miniature pagodas, on the other hand, were given as much visual emphasis as the central Buddha. Each is surmounted by a canopy just like the Buddha (Figure 2). From either side of the canopy, a celestial deity (*feitian* 飛天) flies down, trailed by numinous cloud that further emphasizes the significance of the miniature pagodas. The flying celestial deities piously hold offerings. In other words, the three canopies in the imagery are used to clearly highlight the main iconographies—the central Buddha and miniature pagodas. Given that a canopy in Buddhist art usually appears above an important Buddhist deity, typically a Buddha, it is significant that these miniature pagodas are also marked by canopies, as if the miniatures are animate holy beings. Moreover, among these reliefs, only these pagodas have cartouches (located between the pagodas and the kneeling bodhisattvas), the contents of which will be discussed in the following section.

### 3. Miniaturizing Pilgrimage through Miniatures

The miniature pagodas, which were visually emphasized in the design of Liao brick pagodas, played a significant role in reshaping and innovating the ritual practices pertaining to pagoda veneration in East Asian Buddhism. For the pagoda’s venerators, they enabled virtual pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy land. As will be explained below, the virtual pilgrimage reflects the tendency towards *miniaturization* that was observed by Jonathan Z. Smith to create a “ritual of ritual.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, such a virtual pilgrimage was not merely a “displacement”<sup>15</sup> of a real pilgrimage, but enabled a more idealized, distilled and efficacious form of pilgrimage.

Cartouches inscribed with the names of the eight miniature pagodas provide a good starting point for our exploration of the multifaceted nature of the Liao miniature pagodas (Figures 3 and 12). Almost identical cartouche inscriptions appear on five Liao pagodas: three in the Chaoyang region (Chaoyang North Pagoda; South Chaoyang Pagoda; Yunjiesi Pagoda), one in Ningcheng 寧城, Inner Mongolia (Daming Pagoda 大名塔) (Figures 4 and 5),<sup>16</sup> and one in Xingcheng 興城, Liaoning Province (Baitayu Pagoda 白塔峪塔) (Figures 6 and 7).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For the notion of “ritual of a ritual,” see (Smith 1980, p. 29).

<sup>15</sup> Displacement is a key concept in Jonathan Z. Smith’s theory on the miniaturization of ritual.

<sup>16</sup> This pagoda is also known as the Great Pagoda of the Middle Capital (中京大塔).

<sup>17</sup> For a chart listing the cartouche inscriptions from these Liao pagodas, see Table 3 in Joo Kyeongmi’s paper (Chu 2009).



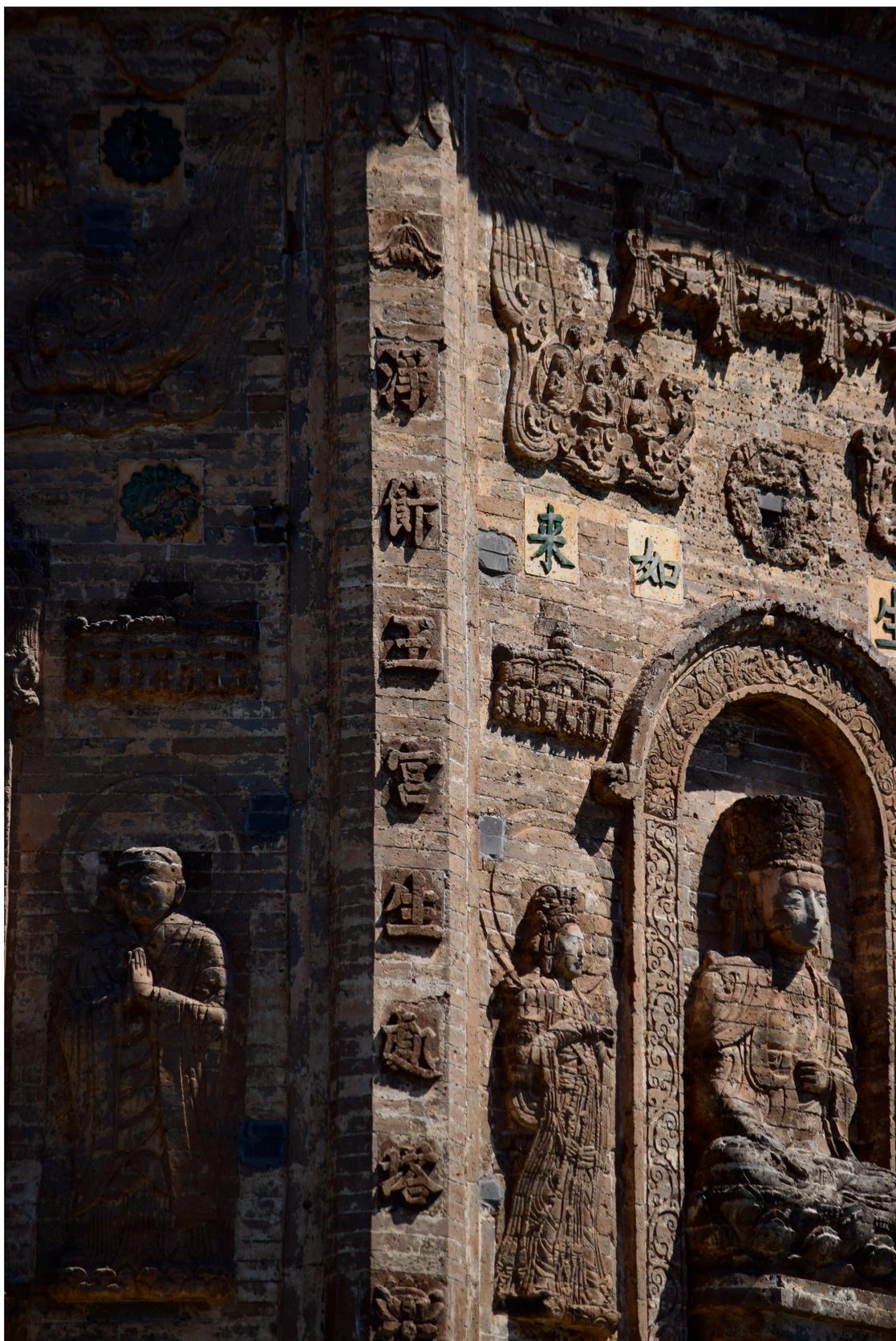
**Figure 4.** Daming Pagoda, Ningcheng County, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia. Liao dynasty, latter half of the 11th to the early 12th century [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2009].



**Figure 5.** One of the inscriptions of Daming Pagoda, Ningcheng County, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia. Liao dynasty, latter half of the 11th to the early 12th century [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2009].



**Figure 6.** Baitayu Pagoda, Xingcheng, Liaoning Province. Liao dynasty, 1092 [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].



**Figure 7.** The name of the eighth pagoda inscribed on the pillar between the south wall and southwestern wall, Baitayu Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1092. Xingcheng, Liaoning Province. [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].

These cartouche inscriptions connect the eight miniature pagodas with specific localities that served as the backdrop for major events in the life of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, who was born in the area of today's Nepal and active in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India sometime between the 6th and the 4th centuries BCE.<sup>18</sup> The progression of the Buddha's eight life events, as described in the cartouches, informs us that the miniature pagodas are physically arranged to reflect the sequence of events from the Buddha's birth to his death. Beginning with the one placed on the right side of the south wall, they are arranged in a clockwise fashion. Each cartouche inscription is composed of seven Chinese characters and ends with the same *ta* 塔 (pagoda), thus forming a verse through rhyme. The inscriptions read as follows:<sup>19</sup>

#### South Wall

- 1 The pagoda at the palace of King Śuddhodana, where [the Buddha] was born<sup>20</sup>
- 2 The pagoda [at the place where the Buddha] gained awakening under the Wisdom Tree<sup>21</sup>

#### West Wall

- 3 The pagoda at Deer Garden, where [the Buddha first turned] the Wheel of the Law<sup>22</sup>
- 4 The pagoda at the Jetavana Garden, [where the Buddha gained] fame<sup>23</sup>

#### North Wall

- 5 The pagoda at the outer edge of Kanyākubja, [where the Buddha descended from] the treasury stairs<sup>24</sup>
- 6 The pagoda at Vulture Peak, [where the Buddha expounded] prajñā wisdom<sup>25</sup>

#### East Wall

- 7 The pagoda at the Mango Grove Garden, where Vimalakīrti [had a debate with Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva]<sup>26</sup>
- 8 The pagoda at the Grove of Śāla Trees, [where the Buddha] entered the great extinction (parinirvāṇa)<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I first presented on the relationship between Chaoyang North Pagoda's eight miniature pagodas and the Eight Great Sacred Places, and the virtual pilgrimage offered by miniature pagodas, in my paper "Buddhist Cosmology, Rituals and Mingling of the Buddha Bodies: Chaoyang North Pagoda" in *The First International Heidelberg Colloquy on East Asian Art History* held at University of Heidelberg in September 2006. The colloquy paper was based on my term paper for Eugene Wang's graduate seminar "Sketch Conceptualism" in 2005. The papers I presented at *The Map and the World: Representing Realms of Buddhist Thought* conference at University of California (2007) and *China's Northern Frontier: Onsite Seminar*, hosted by the Silk Road Foundation in July 2009, also discussed this topic.

<sup>19</sup> The following cartouche inscriptions are from Chaoyang North Pagoda. The transcription of these inscriptions was first published in (Takeshima 1944). These cartouche are identical—differing only by a few sinographs—to cartouches found in the other four Liao pagodas.

<sup>20</sup> 淨飯王宮生處塔。

<sup>21</sup> 菩提樹下成佛塔。

<sup>22</sup> 鹿野苑中法輪塔。

<sup>23</sup> 給孤獨園名稱塔。

<sup>24</sup> 曲女城邊寶塔。

<sup>25</sup> 耆闍崛山般若塔。

<sup>26</sup> 菴羅衛林維摩塔。Vimalakīrti, a wise Buddhist layman mentioned in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* who had become an especially admired figure in the Chinese tradition, does not really mark an event in the life of the Buddha. As will be explained later, the Liao miniature pagodas' cartouche inscriptions are citations from *Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing* 大乘本生心地觀經 (T. 3, no. 159). This is a Buddhist sutra composed, partly or entirely, in China. Because this apocryphal sutra reflected Chinese modification of the events related to the Eight Great Sacred Places where the major life events of the Buddha took place, the Liao miniature pagodas that followed this apocryphal sutra came to mention this figure. For more on this, see (Chu 2009, pp. 146–51; Kim 2010, pp. 32–33).

<sup>27</sup> 娑羅林中圓寂塔。The term *yuanji* 圓寂 in this inscription, literally meaning 'perfect extinction,' denotes the Buddha's demise, which was the moment he entered *parinirvāṇa* (great *nirvāṇa*).

The eight places mentioned in these inscriptions were not randomly chosen. They closely match the localities of the Eight Great Sacred Places (*bada shengdi* 八大聖地, Sk. *aṣṭamahāsthāna*) located in present-day India and Nepal (Figure 8). The palace of King Śuddhodana, who was the father of Śākyamuni Buddha mentioned in the first cartouche, is located near Lumbinī in Nepal, where the Buddha was born.<sup>28</sup> The place where the Buddha gained awakening under the Wisdom Tree, mentioned in the second cartouche, is Bodhgayā in Bihar, India. It is revered as the most important sacred place in Buddhism. Deer Garden in the third cartouche, located in Sārnāth, is the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon. The phrase “turned the Wheel of the Law” in this cartouche is a metaphor often used in Buddhism for the preaching of Buddhist law. As shown in the list below, each of the places mentioned in the subsequent five cartouches is also faithfully matched with one of the Eight Great Sacred Places:

#### South Wall

1. Lumbinī (near the palace of King Śuddhodana)
2. Bodhgayā (where the Buddha gained awakening)

#### West Wall

3. Sārnāth (where Deer Garden is located)
4. Śrāvastī (where Jetavana Garden is located)

#### North Wall

5. Sānkāśya (where the Buddha descended the treasury stairs after giving a sermon to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven)
6. Rājgir (where Vulture Peak is located)

#### East Wall

7. Vaiśālī (where Mango Grove Garden is located)
8. Kuśnagara (where the Grove of Śāla Trees is located)

These Liao cartouches are in fact a direct citation of eight lines of verse (Sk. *gāthā*) from the scripture entitled *Mahāyāna Sutra of Contemplation on the Mind Ground and the Buddha's Previous Lives* (hereafter, *Mind Ground Sutra*).<sup>29</sup> This scripture mentions the eight pagodas twice: first, in the prose section of its first fascicle, where the eight pagodas appear in the golden light emitted from the body of Śākyamuni Buddha as he preaches; and second, in the subsequent verse section that summarizes the fascicle's contents.<sup>30</sup> The verse includes eight lines enumerating the names of the eight pagodas. Each Liao cartouche borrows one line from this section of the verse,<sup>31</sup> hence deconstructing and then

<sup>28</sup> King Śuddhodana's palace was located in Kapilavastu, and his wife, Queen Māyā, gave birth to Śākyamuni in Lumbini on her way from this palace to her hometown. At present, the location of Kapilavastu is inferred to be either present-day Piprahwa or Tilaura-kot, both located in the border area between Nepal and India. Tilaura-kot is approximately 23 km to the northwest of Lumbinī and Piprahwa is to the southwest of Lumbinī. (Yi 2009, pp. 314–18).

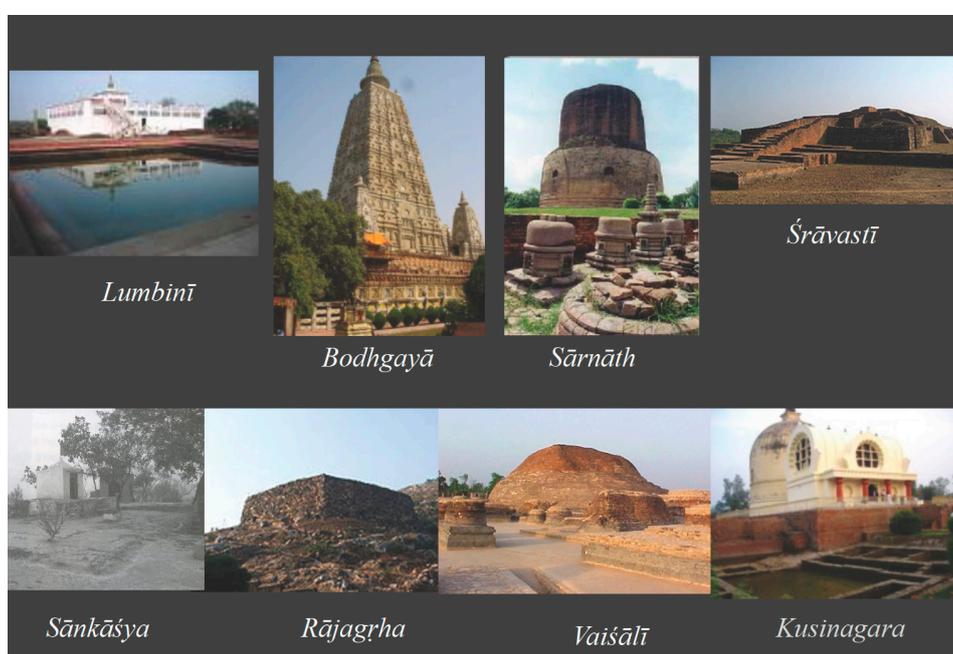
<sup>29</sup> *Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, T. 3, no. 159. The first group of scholars who studied the Liao pagodas was Japanese archaeologists who explored historical monuments in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation of northeast China. In the 1930s, Torii Ryūzō, a Japanese archaeologist, anthropologist and folklorist, first found this textual source for the Liao miniature pagoda cartouches. For example, in his 1937 monograph that summarizes his two field trips to Northeast China and Mongolia, he briefly mentioned that the names of the Liao miniature pagodas came from the *Mind Ground Sutra*. See (Torii 1937). This textual source was also mentioned in more recently publications, including (Shen 2001; Sōng 2012; Chu 2009, pp. 141–67).

<sup>30</sup> *Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, T. 3, no. 159:294a24-b7, 296a15-18.

<sup>31</sup> The verse lines from the *Mind Ground Sutra* reads: 淨飯王宮生處塔 菩提樹下成佛塔 鹿野園中法輪塔 給孤獨園名稱塔 曲女城邊寶階塔 耆闍崛山般若塔 菴羅衛林維摩塔 娑羅林中圓寂塔。T. 3, no. 159:294a-b, 296a15-18. The Liao cartouche inscriptions exactly match these verse lines, except for a few sinographs. For example, Chaoyang North Pagoda's cartouches use  *yuan* 苑 instead of  *yuan* 園 in its third cartouche, and  *jie* instead of  *jie* 階 in its fifth cartouche. In both cases, the substituted sinograph

re-materializing the verse in the three-dimensional architectural space. A rubbing from a Liao stone stele inscription of 1044, entitled *Record of the Eight Great Spiritual Pagodas at Arhat Monastery*,<sup>32</sup> cites the *Mind Ground Sutra*, showing that the relationship between the eight pagodas and the sutra was widely known in Liao. This rubbing informs us that the eight pagodas were known as the Eight Great Spiritual Pagodas (Bada lingta 八大靈塔) in Liao. This name, which does not appear in the *Mind Ground Sutra*, probably came from two short scriptures, entitled *Sutra on the Names of the Eight Great Spiritual Pagodas Preached by the Buddha* and *Hymn for the Eight Great Spiritual Pagodas*,<sup>33</sup> both translated in Northern Song by the Indian monk Dharmabhadra (Faxian 法賢, ?–1001).

Notably, the above textual sources offer no indication of miniature models of eight pagodas or instructions for attaching such models to a larger pagoda. In other words, making miniatures of eight pagodas and attaching them to an actual pagoda was clearly a creative act and artistic decision made by Liao Buddhist practitioners. The practice of placing these eight pagodas on an actual pagoda structure was unprecedented until the Liao time. What motivated such architectural innovation in this land of nomads?



**Figure 8.** Eight Great Sacred Places (Sk. *aṣṭamahāsthāna*) in present-day India and Nepal.

Part of the motivation pertains to the long tradition of Buddhist pilgrimage in East Asia. These eight Indian sacred places were highly desirable pilgrimage destinations for East Asian Buddhists. Although Toni Huber has recently argued that the rise of the Eight Great Sacred Places as popular pilgrimage destinations is largely a modern phenomenon,<sup>34</sup> travelogues and biographies by Chinese

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has a meaning that is basically interchangeable with the original sinograph in the sutra, and therefore does not produce any difference in terms of meaning. Only the fourth and fifth cartouche inscriptions on Daming Pagoda in Ningcheng show minor but recognizable deviation from the original sutra verse.

<sup>32</sup> *Luohanyuan Bada lingta ji* 羅漢院八大靈塔記。For the original text of this inscription, see (Chen 1982). The actual stele does not survive, but its rubbing preserves its entire inscription. Hsueh-man Shen suggests that the Liao eight pagodas are “a sign of the Buddha preaching the Law, thus a sign of the presence of the Buddhist Law,” because this inscription explains that these pagodas appeared when the Buddha’s preaching. Shen, “Realizing the Buddha’s Dharma Body,” 291.

<sup>33</sup> *Foshuo Bada lingta minghu jing* 佛說八大靈塔名號經, T. 32, no. 1685:773a1–773b13; and *Bada lingta fan zan* 八大靈塔梵讚, T. 32, no. 1684:772b6–772c22.

<sup>34</sup> Toni Huber has argued that these eight places and their stupas were not treated as a set of pilgrimage sites before the twentieth century. According to him, the concept of the eight great places as a distinctive group of pilgrimage destinations

and Korean monks show that these sites had been recognized as East Asian pilgrimage destinations since the eighth century.<sup>35</sup> Because these are not *prescriptive* but *descriptive* texts, they affirm that the pilgrimage to the Eight Great Sacred Places was practiced in premodern East Asia.

For our discussion, what's even more noteworthy is that Chinese and Korean monks, from the eighth century onward, specified that the *eight pagodas*, rather than the Eight Great Sacred Places *per se*, were their pilgrimage destinations.<sup>36</sup> These eight Indian sacred places had *stupas* (Figure 9), known as *ta* 塔 (pagoda) in middle-period China, which were recognized as pilgrimage goals among East Asian monks.<sup>37</sup> According to the biography of Muru 無漏 (?–758), which was included in the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* compiled in 988,<sup>38</sup> he longed to visit and venerate the eight pagodas. Muru was born as a prince of the Silla kingdom and travelled to China during the Tang dynasty to study Buddhism. While staying in China, he planned to travel further west because he “wanted to travel to the Five Indian Kingdoms in order to venerate the Buddha’s *eight pagodas* (*bata* 八塔).”<sup>39</sup> After leaving Tang China, he crossed the Taklamakan Desert and the Khotan kingdom (56–1006) in the present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. When he arrived at the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia, however, local monks recommended that he return to China, probably because political tension in the region made it difficult to cross the Pamir Mountains at that time.<sup>40</sup> After staying in the Pamir Mountains for several months, Muru finally decided to follow the monks’ advice. His incomplete pilgrimage seems to have taken place sometime before 755, as his biography records that the An Lushan Rebellion (755) broke out after his return to China. This shows that the eight pagodas as a group had become revered pilgrimage destinations by the eighth century, or, if we take extreme caution in using the textual record, between Muru’s lifetime and the compilation date of the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks*. While Muru failed to make a pilgrimage to the eight pagodas, there were monks who visited and venerated them all, such as the Tang-dynasty monk Wukong 悟空 (732–?) and the famous pilgrim Hyech’o 慧超/惠超 (ca. 704–787).<sup>41</sup>

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was gradually invented by archaeologists and art historians beginning in the early twentieth century, primarily based on an incorrect interpretation of Pala period stone steles that represented the eight major events of the Buddha’s life. He maintains that these places and pagodas were never recommended as destinations for actual pilgrimage or objects for direct encounter in surviving Chinese and Tibetan texts, which were probably translations of Indian texts written during the Pāla period. These texts instead describe these eight places and pagodas as objects of commemoration or general worship (*pūjā*). See (Huber 2008). Huber correctly argues that the importance of the Eight Great Sacred Places as pilgrimage sites has been overemphasized in modern times, and that they were not as prominent a pilgrimage destination in premodern times as today. Travelogues of East Asian monks, however, suggest that a complete negation of the concept of the Eight Great Sacred Places as a pilgrimage destination in pre-modern times would be too extreme a view.

<sup>35</sup> For a comprehensive and thorough study of East Asian monks who made a pilgrimage to India from the third to eleventh centuries, see (Yi 2009).

<sup>36</sup> For a good study on the development of the eight pagodas as pilgrimage destinations in East Asia, see (Chu 2009, pp. 144–51).

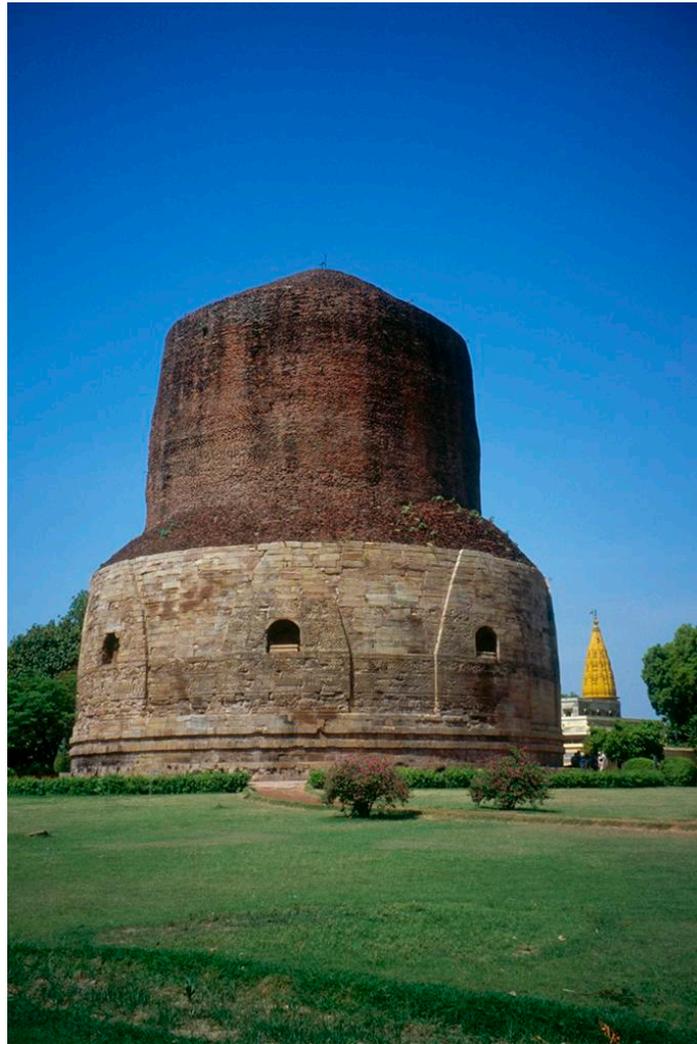
<sup>37</sup> In addition to these three East Asian monks, the famous Indian monk Vajrabodhi (*Jingangzhi* 金剛智, 671–741), who transmitted Esoteric Buddhism to Tang China, was also recorded to have “visited and venerated the pagodas of the Buddha’s eight phases of life.” 遂辭師龍智卻還中天 尋禮如來八相靈塔。 *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄, T. 55, no. 2157:875b14.

<sup>38</sup> For the biography of the monk Muru, see *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, T. 50, no. 2061:846a24–c12. The *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* was compiled by the Song dynasty monk Zanning 贊寧 (919–1002). For more on this monk, see (Yi 2009, p. 145).

<sup>39</sup> 欲遊五竺禮佛八塔。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. 50, no. 2061:846a28.

<sup>40</sup> I am grateful to Jason Neelis for explaining to me the political situation of the Pamir Mountains in the mid-eighth century.

<sup>41</sup> Only fragments of the monk Wukong’s travelogue (*Wukong ru Zhu ji* 悟空入竺記) survive as quotations in the eighth-century monk Yuanzhao’s 圓照 prologue to *Scripture on the Ten Powers Preached by the Buddha* (*Foshuo shili jing* 佛說十力經) translated in 790 by the Kuchan monk Utpalavīrya. *Foshuo shili jing* T. 17, no. 780:715c–717c. For more on this travelogue, see (Yi 2009, pp. 15–41, passim; Chu 2009, p. 146; Kim 2010, pp. 41–42). Several scholars pointed out that the ultimate goal of Hyech’o’s pilgrimage, as implied in his travelogue *Wang o Ch’ōnch’ukkuk chon* 往五天竺國傳, was none other than the veneration of the eight pagodas. I am grateful to Professor Nam Dongsin for bringing Hyech’o’s case to my attention. (Nam 2010; Kim 2007).



**Figure 9.** Dhamekh Stupa at Sarnath, India. Ca. fifth century (restored and modified in the twentieth century). [©Rob Linrothe, Northwestern University].

As demonstrated by the failed pilgrimage attempt by the monk Muru, traveling to Buddhist pilgrimage sites was no easy task. As a matter of fact, the pilgrimage journey between China and India was extremely dangerous whether by land or sea. On the land route, supplicants encountered the sizzling Taklamakan Desert and the soaring Pamir Mountains. On the sea route, they encountered turbulent waves and unpredictable weather. Before the Liao dynasty, countless Chinese monks lost their lives on their pilgrimage.<sup>42</sup> The following passages from *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, the autobiographical travelogue by Faxian 法顯 (ca. 337–422), who traveled to India between 339 and 412, clearly describes the dangers of this pilgrimage:<sup>43</sup>

There are many evil and monstrous gusts of hot wind in this desert. Meeting [these gusts], all shall die and no one can survive. No birds flying above, and no animals running below.

<sup>42</sup> The Taishō Buddhist canon includes many biographies of Chinese monks who died on their way to India.

<sup>43</sup> *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo ji 佛國記) is also known as *Biography of the Eminent Monk Faxian* (*Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳). For the original text, see *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T. 51, no. 2085: 857a–866c.

Looking everywhere one's eyes can reach, searching for a route, one cannot know how to find a direction. Only old skeletons serve as signs of the route.<sup>44</sup>

The Pamir Mountains have snow both in winter and summer. Also, there are poisonous dragons. If one crosses their will, they gush out poisonous wind with rain or snow as well as flying sand and pebbles. Meeting this catastrophic situation, not even one person out of ten thousand can survive. Locals therefore call [this area] 'Snow Mountains'.<sup>45</sup>

For people living in eleventh-century Liao, the pilgrimage to India was even more arduous. Living in northeast China, which was geographically farther from the Buddha's homeland than previous Han Chinese dynasties had been, practitioners had to cross neighboring countries like Song and Xixia, whose relationship with Liao was complicated at best and often outright hostile.

Now let us return to the issue of the Liao miniature pagodas and examine in a step-by-step manner how they enabled a virtual pilgrimage. All miniatures are, as pointed out by literary critic Susan Stewart, essentially theatrical in nature due to their representational quality (as they can never be the original).<sup>46</sup> Miniatures, such as a map of the world, also transform a complex macrocosm into a seemingly manipulable microcosmic world. As microcosms of the macrocosm, miniatures were often believed to have magical power to manipulate the macrocosm they encapsulate.<sup>47</sup> Probably due to their performative and thaumaturgic nature, miniatures were frequently used for virtual pilgrimage in religious traditions across the globe. Various types of miniatures—including paintings, maps, and architectural copies—were used to perform virtual pilgrimages in medieval times across the globe. In East Asian religious traditions, representations of sacred places—such as maps of sacred mountains and paintings of important shrines (Chou 2007)—were adopted for virtual pilgrimages. In medieval Europe, such virtual pilgrimages were especially beneficial to nuns, for whom leaving the convent on a long journey was relatively more difficult.<sup>48</sup>

Although sometimes misguidedly termed a 'mental pilgrimage' in modern scholarship, most virtual religious pilgrimages were not simply mental activity. They involved bodily movement and corporeal action of the devotee, such as the folding and unfolding of a pilgrimage map (Connolly 1999), or weeks of intense walking inside a convent to simulate the arduous long journey to the Holy Land (Rudy 2011). As D. Max Moerman pointed out, from its early inception, Buddhist pilgrimage was an activity of both mind and body (Moerman 2010), thus making virtual pilgrimage, which required intense mental concentration, a natural part of Buddhist practice. Moerman offers a specific case of a virtual pilgrimage in East Asia, enacted by visual art and ritual action, which is well recorded in *Gyokuyō* 玉葉, the diary of Fujiwara no Kanezane 藤原兼実 (1149–1207), a powerful statesman of the late Heian and early Kamakura period in Japan. In 1184, after receiving from his brother a painting of Kasuga Shrine in Nara, which was an important pilgrimage place for his Fujiwara family, he practiced an elaborate virtual pilgrimage ritual to Kasuga Shrine for seven days. During this intensive period, he purified himself, recited the *Heart Sutra* as many as ten thousand times, and made offerings to each hall of the shrine depicted in the painting.<sup>49</sup>

Considering that virtual pilgrimages were often performed through a set of ritual or ritualistic bodily movements that interacted with artwork or architecture, let us begin by considering a simple ritual action most typically performed to venerate a pagoda. Pagodas were always a locus of ritual action—that is, circumambulation. From ancient times to the present, clockwise circumambulation of a pagoda, as with a stupa, has served as the most basic and common ritual worship of this sacred

<sup>44</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T. 51, no. 2085: 857a16–18.

<sup>45</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T. 51, no. 2085: 857c26–28.

<sup>46</sup> (Stewart 1993, p. 48).

<sup>47</sup> A good example is *dhāraṇī*, a shortened version of a Buddhist sutra. As a *dhāraṇī* is a miniature of a sacred text, they were later believed to be powerful incantation.

<sup>48</sup> For more on this, see (Rudy 2000).

<sup>49</sup> For more on Kanezane's virtual pilgrimage, see (Moerman 2005); and (Moerman 2010, p. 7).

monument and its relics across Asia (Figure 10). Because the eight pagodas were highly desired pilgrimage destinations, the circumambulation of the Liao pagodas and their eight miniature pagodas can easily, and naturally, be thought of as a virtual pilgrimage to the eight pagodas that mark the Eight Great Sacred Places. With the help of the eight miniature pagodas, the simple ritual action of pagoda circumambulation is transformed into a virtual pilgrimage that allows anyone to travel to faraway India and venerate the original eight sacred sites. We must not forget that, even without the geographic and political obstacles discussed above, years of travel abroad in medieval times were infeasible for the great majority of people. In Liao, pilgrimages to India were probably difficult for most women (although Kitan women were relatively powerful in society), slaves, as well as many ordinary men of humble means who had to take care of their families through farming or herding. People with both power and fortune, such as court officials, were also usually bound by administrative duties that prevented them from traveling abroad for personal and religious reasons.



**Figure 10.** People circumambulating Chaoyang North Pagoda at night [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].

On the theoretical level, the virtual pilgrimage enacted by ritual circumambulation of the Liao pagodas reflects a tendency towards *miniaturization* that is observed in various religious rituals. Jonathan Z. Smith observes this impulse towards miniaturization in the rituals of late antiquity recorded in the Greek magical papyri. As the records show, the act of *writing* about purification and sacrificial rituals gradually displaced the actual performance of those rituals, just as ritual speech displaced the act of sacrifice in early Christian traditions. In other words, ritual *practice* is displaced by the act of *writing*, which is believed to have efficacy itself.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, virtual pilgrimage involving the Liao pagodas, in which the ritual circumambulation of the pagoda displaces the ritual of actual pilgrimage, is also a miniaturized pilgrimage ritual. (As explained by Claude Lévi-Strauss, miniaturization does not simply mean a reduction of size. It can also entail reduction of other sensorial or temporal dimensions.)<sup>51</sup> The ritual circumambulation of Liao pagodas is likewise a miniaturized pilgrimage ritual and thus, in that sense, a “ritual of a ritual.”<sup>52</sup> The case of the Liao ritual is even more notable in

<sup>50</sup> For more on the displacement of ritual practice into writing as observed in the Greek Magical Papyri, see (Smith 1980, pp. 28–29).

<sup>51</sup> Even life-size sculpture, in this sense, can be understood as a miniature, since it has lost the sensory dimensions of the original, including smell, sound, texture, color, as well as the temporal dimension. See (Lévi-Strauss 1966, pp. 23–25).

<sup>52</sup> (Smith 1980, p. 29).

that its miniaturization was clearly mediated through an actual miniature device. In other words, the Liao virtual pilgrimage was a ritual miniaturized by miniatures.

The virtual pilgrimage practiced in the Buddhist tradition shows that the miniaturized ritual did not merely “displace” the original. Through a virtual pilgrimage, one can experience a more idealized and focused form of pilgrimage journey. In other words, a virtual ritual can offer the distilled essence of the pilgrimage experience. Circumambulation of the Liao miniature pagodas, for example, enables one to visit India’s Eight Great Sacred Places following the sequence of the Buddha’s life, starting from the place of his birth and ending at the place of his great extinction. In an actual pilgrimage, following this sequence would be infeasible since it would complicate the itinerary and require much more time. Moreover, the participant in a virtual ritual is freed from the distraction of activities not directly related to the spiritual journey, such as having meals and finding accommodations. In addition, due to the ease of repetition and multiplication, such a virtual pilgrimage could theoretically produce even more merit and generate even stronger soteriological and worldly benefits for practitioners than an actual pilgrimage. Ritual veneration of a pagoda usually involves more than one round of circumambulation. A practitioner usually circumambulates the pagoda as many times as she wants, chanting Buddhist sutras or praying silently. As one circumambulates the pagoda multiple times, one thereby completes multiple rounds of a complete pilgrimage to the Eight Great Sacred Places of India. The merit of making the pilgrimage accumulates accordingly, whereas in reality, one could rarely perform such an arduous pilgrimage more than once in a lifetime.

This circumambulation of the Liao miniature pagodas may have also served to re-enact the Buddha’s life in the mind of practitioners. As implied in their cartouches, which named each Indian location and the related event from the Buddha’s life, the miniature pagodas marked not only the places but also the major temporal events in the life of the Buddha. Thus, the eight miniature pagodas are not only a condensation of the Eight Great Sacred Places of Buddhism but also an encapsulation of the Buddha’s life from birth to his great extinction (*parinirvana*). Although it is difficult to know, due to the lack of textual records of Liao ritual practices, there is a good possibility that contemporaneous Buddhist practitioners interacted with the miniature pagodas while circumambulating the structure. Circumambulating in a clockwise direction, starting from the main southern façade of the monument, venerationers could view the eight miniature pagodas as narrative markers recounting the story of the historical Buddha’s life. As mentioned above, all miniatures are essentially theatrical due to their representative quality.<sup>53</sup> This is perhaps one of the reasons why miniature replicas of the Holy Sepulcher in medieval Europe served as appropriate settings for Christian rituals that theatrically re-enacted the burial and resurrection of Christ, sometimes even using puppets with joints operated by mechanical devices.<sup>54</sup> Given the theatrical nature of the miniature, the Liao miniature replicas, as opposed to large architectural replicas,<sup>55</sup> may have created a better setting for “a theatre of the mind”<sup>56</sup> in which the Buddha’s life stories were sequentially re-enacted in the imaginations of Buddhist practitioners.

#### 4. Virtual Geography

Allowing a virtual pilgrimage was just one layer of the Liao miniature pagodas’ function; as shown below, the miniatures served to transform the land of Kitan into the center of the Buddhist

<sup>53</sup> (Stewart 1993, p. 48).

<sup>54</sup> Miniature replicas of the Holy Sepulcher served as the setting for a complex new Christian ritual in Western Europe. The ritual was composed of four parts: the imitation and re-enactment of Christ’s Burial, the Easter Vigil, the Resurrection, and the Visit to the Tomb. Also, it involved the highly theatrical entombment and retrieval of symbols of Christ, such as the cross or the wafer, and then, at a later date, sometimes a statue of the dead Christ. For more on this ritual, see (Smith 1980, p. 23; Sheingorn 1987). For theater historians’ studies of the miniature replica of the Holy Sepulcher as the precursor to the European stage, see (Young 1933; Hardison 1965).

<sup>55</sup> Tibetan Buddhists constructed architectural replicas of the Indian eight stupas. (Bentor 1994).

<sup>56</sup> (Smith 1980, p. 24).

sacred geography. In other words, they had the power to symbolically transfer the Indian Eight Great Sacred Places to the local geography, and such symbolic transference was made more effective by their *miniaturized* scale. Through the power of the miniature copies, the site of the Liao pagoda was transformed into a virtual holy land that incorporates all Eight Great Sacred Places.

A good point of departure is a line from the diary of Fujiwara no Kanezane, who as described above performed a seven-day virtual pilgrimage using the painting of Kasuga Shrine. In his diary, we find an account from the emic perspective of the conceptual transference of a sacred place. As a matter of fact, Kanezane had been to the actual Kasuga Shrine many times; as the head of the influential Fujiwara clan, he could visit the shrine when he wanted. The fact that he performed a seven-day virtual pilgrimage in addition suggests that a virtual pilgrimage had certain spiritual function and benefits that could not be obtained through an actual pilgrimage. For Kanezane's virtual pilgrimage, one of the benefits was transforming his own residence into a sacred place. After performing his virtual pilgrimage, Kanezane and others had dreams which confirmed that the sacred Kasuga Shrine "had come to" his home, the locus of his virtual pilgrimage performance.<sup>57</sup>

While Kanezane made the shrine "come to" his home through the ritual of a virtual pilgrimage, a more common way of transferring a sacred place was by creating a material replica. The conceptual transposition of sacred sites through replication was one of the strategies adopted by Buddhist practitioners across Asia when they lacked privileged access to the actual sites.<sup>58</sup> The copy of the shadow cave created on Mount Lu in southeast China in 412 is one renowned case. The original cave, located in Nagarahara in present-day Afghanistan, was famous for the shadow on its wall left by the Buddha. Starting with the above-mentioned pilgrim Faxian, many Chinese pilgrims visited this cave to see the shadow that was believed to reflect the Buddha's true form. According to the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the erudite monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) of Mount Lu always wished to see this "shadow image of the Buddha (*foying* 佛影)" that had been left by the Buddha after edifying a poisonous dragon (Sk. *naga*).<sup>59</sup> Then one day, he had the opportunity to hear details about this shadow cave from a religious practitioner from the "western regions" (present-day India and Central Asia). Based on what he heard, Huiyuan created an imagined copy of this cave by building a stone chamber and hiring a painter to create the Buddha's shadow from diluted ink.<sup>60</sup>

Liao Buddhists, as seen in their creation of a new Mount Wutai, were familiar with symbolic transference of sacred place. Mount Wutai, perhaps the most important Buddhist pilgrimage destination on Chinese soil, had been believed to be the abode of Mañjuśrī bodhisattva since the Tang dynasty. During the tenth century, this sacred mountain in northeastern Shanxi Province was mostly under the control of the Kitan rulers. After losing this sacred mountain to the Song empire, the Liao Buddhists created their own Mount Wutai in present-day Yu County 蔚縣 in Hebei Province. In modern times, the mountain is known as Small Mount Wutai (Gimello 1994). However, for Liao Buddhists in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the one in their empire was counted as the "real" Mount Wutai. The famous Liao monk Daozhen 道殿 (also pronounced Daoshen, ca. 1056–1114), for example, called himself "monk of Wutai." As Robert Gimello pointed out, Wutai here meant the Liao Mount Wutai in Hebei Province. The Xixia Kingdom, Korea, Japan, and Tibet each had their own Mount Wutai as well.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> (Moerman 2010, p. 7).

<sup>58</sup> For an excellent study of this topic, see (Ibid., pp. 5–9).

<sup>59</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*. T. 50, no. 2059:358b.

<sup>60</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*. T2059, 50:358b8-14. Compilation of these biographies was completed in 519 by the monk Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554).

<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the Xixia kingdom, after losing their access to Mount Wutai in the 1040s due to their estranged political relationship with Song, had copies of Mount Wutai's famous Buddhist monasteries built on Mount Helan 賀蘭 in their kingdom so as to create a new sacred mountain. (Shi 1988), 156: requoted from Gimello, "Wu-tthai Shan 五臺山 during the Early Chin Dynasty," 507. And the sacred mountain was also recreated through cave temple murals and maps (Lin 2014).

Also notable in our discussion, although several centuries later than the Liao miniatures, are the Tibetan architectural reproductions of the eight stupas located at the Eight Great Sacred Places in India. As Yael Bentor pointed out, these replica pagodas transferred Indian sacred places to the Tibetan land and allowed Tibetan Buddhist practitioners to venerate them.<sup>62</sup>

If the Liao miniature pagodas also had a similar function—transposing the Indian sacred places and re-mapping them onto the Liao land—their modest physicality raises a question. Compared to the Liao Mount Wutai or the eight Tibetan stupas, the eight miniature pagodas are humble in size. Many Liao pagodas received patronage from the Kitan imperial family, members of which had the means to construct grandiose and monumental architectural copies of the eight pagodas, as did later Tibetan Buddhists.<sup>63</sup> But Liao patrons clearly opted for miniature copies. Moreover, the Liao miniature pagodas are not even freestanding models but modest two-dimensional sculptures.

Why did Kitan patrons make *miniature* copies, instead of more monumental architectural copies, if their choice was clearly not driven by financial concerns? Answering this question requires deeper understanding of the nature of the *miniature*. Furthermore, theoretical comparison of the Liao miniatures with medieval European replicas of the Holy Sepulcher,<sup>64</sup> the tomb of Christ, helps us answer this question in a stepwise manner. Just like the eight Indian stupas at the Buddhist sacred places, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Christian tradition was bound to a specific locus—the purported site of the death and resurrection of Christ. Since this sacred locus guaranteed its power and religious function, the Holy Sepulcher could not have been built anywhere else. Christians in Europe, however, had begun to build architectural copies of the Holy Sepulcher in the fifth century. The following passage from a medieval manuscript vividly demonstrates how such architectural copies of sacred monuments were understood by practitioners:

*Rub: You should know that not all people can visit the Holy Sepulcher of Our Dear Lord in Jerusalem, although many good people want to do that, and therefore many popes, cardinals, archbishops with the whole council have consented and confirmed that in churches and convents in all cities there shall be made a replica of the sepulcher of Our Lord. Good people should visit it daily in order to honor the Holy Sepulcher, as if they were in Jerusalem.*<sup>65</sup>

Besides building architectural copies of the Holy Sepulcher, Christians in Europe also created miniature replicas from the eleventh century onward.<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith's theoretical study of these small-scale copies of the Holy Sepulcher provides insights relevant to our discussion.<sup>67</sup> These miniatures challenged the normative ritual system and gave rise to new ritual activities and concepts.<sup>68</sup> Smith divides replicas of the Holy Sepulcher into five types: types I and II are large-scale replicas that served as tombs, chapels, or churches and were used to house the Christian dead or relics from pilgrimages to the Holy Land; types III to V are small-scale replicas that were not independent architectural structures but were incorporated into a church.<sup>69</sup> It is these small-scale replicas that represent "a major shift in ritual logic,"<sup>70</sup> something also seen in the Liao miniature pagodas. From types III to V, the size of the replicas diminishes and the degree of abstraction increases.

<sup>62</sup> (Bentor 1994, p. 24).

<sup>63</sup> For more on Liao imperial patronage of Buddhism, see (Wittfogel and Fêng 1949, pp. 291–306).

<sup>64</sup> Previous scholarship on replicas of the Holy Sepulcher by a number of scholars, including architectural historian Richard Krautheimer, have revealed the ways in which these replicas succeeded in transplanting and reproducing a holy place. For example, see (Krautheimer 1942; Crossley 1988). I am grateful to Professors Jeffrey Hamburger and Karl Whittington for introducing me to this scholarship.

<sup>65</sup> Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, II 6907, manuscript copied after 1503. Translation from (Rudy 2011, p. 229). Italics mine.

<sup>66</sup> On the development of the copies of the Holy Sepulcher, see (Sheingorn 1987, pp. 6–25).

<sup>67</sup> (Smith 1987; Smith 1980, pp. 18–31).

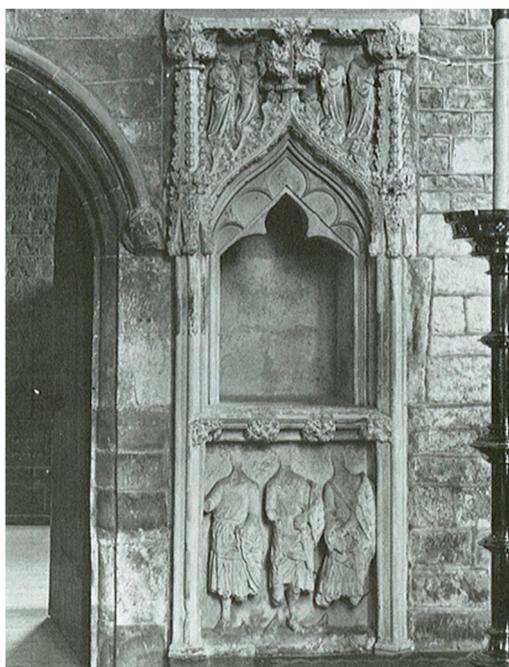
<sup>68</sup> (Smith 1980, pp. 23–24).

<sup>69</sup> For the five types of replicas of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, see (Smith 1980, pp. 20–24). For the small-scale replicas of the Holy Sepulcher, see (Sheingorn 1987, pp. 33–42).

<sup>70</sup> (Smith 1980, p. 19).

Due to their reduced size, type III miniature copies resemble a small playhouse inside a church building.<sup>71</sup> Thus, as Pamela Sheingorn has written, “its architectural form loses its functional meaning” and it “strikes the eye more like a large piece of sculpture than a small piece of architecture.”<sup>72</sup> The type IV replica was no longer a freestanding object but rather a niche, usually set into the north wall of the chancel near the high altar (Figure 11), but they still contained a selection of architectural details copying real elements of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. On the other hand, the type V miniatures—usually small temporary structures of wood and fabric placed on or in front of altars—exhibited little concern for verisimilitude. Types IV and V became very popular forms of replicas in European churches in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries.<sup>73</sup>

Similar to the type IV miniature replicas of the tomb of Christ in Europe, the Liao miniature copies of the eight pagodas (each a conceptual equivalent of a stupa, the Buddha’s tomb or a marker of one of his life events) are reduced to two-dimensional sculptural elements inextricably attached to an independent architectural structure. Also, like the type V replicas, the Liao miniature copies show little interest in directly emulating the shape of the Indian originals: these miniature pagodas lack the hemispherical shape of Indian stupas, taking instead the form of a Chinese pagoda with a four-sided plan and multiple eaves. Rather than exhibiting a formal likeness, they depend on the above-mentioned texts inscribed on their cartouches to proclaim their status as replicas of the eight stupas that mark the Eight Great Sacred Places. The shape of the cartouches also contributes to the overall sinicization of the original Indian monuments. The main body of the cartouches is topped by a lotus leaf and supported by a lotus flower (Figure 12). A typical form of Buddhist cartouche in East Asia, this appears not only in other Liao pagodas but also in Buddhist murals, and later spread to funerary art and commercial signs.<sup>74</sup>



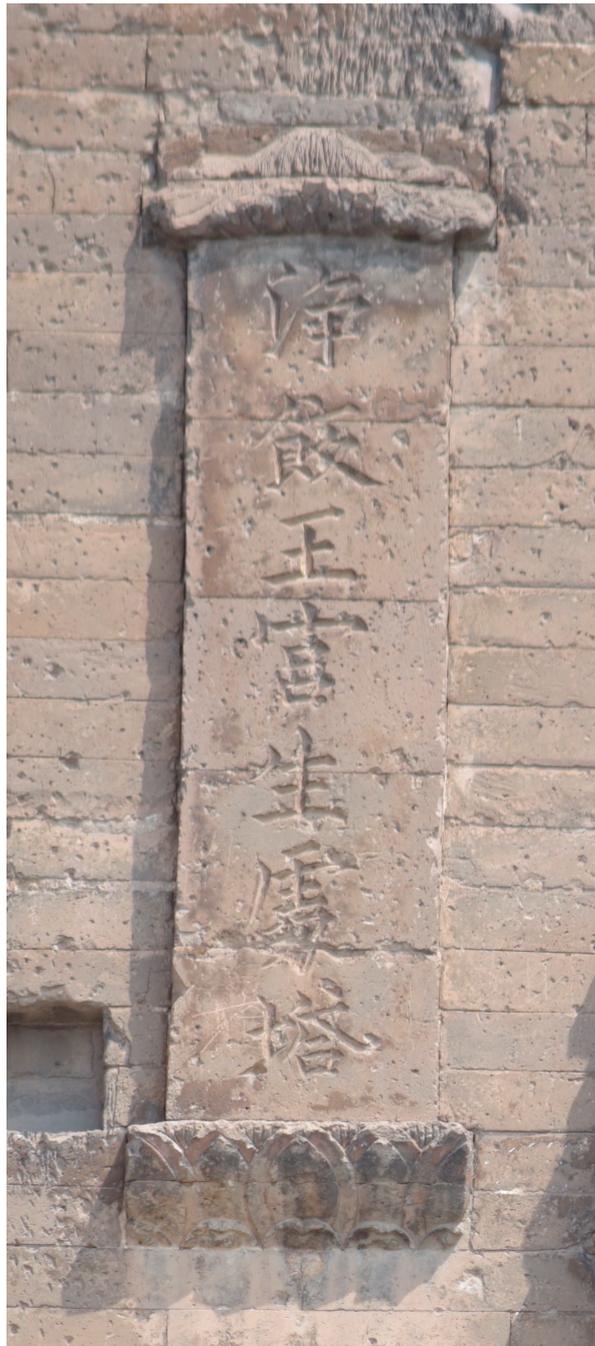
**Figure 11.** Easter Sepulchre, St. Peter, Navenby, Lincolnshire, England. Early 14th century [Source: Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre* (1987), Figure 36].

<sup>71</sup> (Smith 1980, p. 21).

<sup>72</sup> (Sheingorn 1987, p. 16).

<sup>73</sup> (Smith 1980, pp. 22–23).

<sup>74</sup> I thank Katherine Tsiang for pointing out that a similar shape was also used for commercial signboards in the Song dynasty. It seems this widespread motif in Buddhist art was transmitted to commercial signboards.



**Figure 12.** Cartouche of miniature pagoda, east side of the south wall of Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1043–1044. Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, China [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2014].

This disinterest in verisimilitude becomes even more conspicuous in the miniature pagodas that are affixed to later Liao pagodas. An extreme case is Baitayu Pagoda (1092) in Xingcheng, Liaoning Province (Figure 6).<sup>75</sup> On this pagoda, replicas of the eight Indian stupas have lost their physical form

<sup>75</sup> Baitayu Pagoda (also called 'Jiulongyan Pagoda' 九龍煙塔), simply meaning 'the pagoda of the white pagoda valley' is a modern name of this pagoda. An inscription found inside the pagoda's underground relic deposit in 1972 records that the pagoda was called the Pagoda at Wuji Temple on Mount Kongtong (空通山悟寂院舍利塔) and was built in 1092. For more on this inscription, see (Liu 1983).

and become pure text. Instead of miniature pagoda reliefs, just the names of the eight pagodas appear on the pillars of the eight corners of the ground story of this pagoda (Figure 7). On closer examination, we find that lotus flowers and leaves frame the inscribed names of pagodas on the pillars, just like the cartouches in the miniature pagodas of Chaoyang North Pagoda (Figure 12). These lotus flowers and leaves suggest that these pillars evolved from the earlier cartouches rather than from the miniature pagodas themselves. The textualized miniature pagodas of Baitayu Pagoda clearly indicate that it was not the forms of the miniatures but rather their conceptual identity as established through their textual inscription that guaranteed their connection to India. These *formless* miniature pagodas are a result of the continuation of the impulse toward abstraction already noted as shown in this paper's first section, in the Liao miniature pagodas from earlier times.

This Liao tendency towards miniaturization as well as the rejection of verisimilitude with regard to the Indian prototype seems to have served religious functions, too. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss's observation, miniature copies "compensates for the renunciation of *sensible* dimensions by the acquisition of *intelligible* dimensions."<sup>76</sup> Building on this observation, Smith points out that small-scale replicas which possess less verisimilitude actually "produce a kind of clarity missing from both the original and the large-scale copies":<sup>77</sup>

If the large-scale replicas relate the Christian mythos of death and resurrection, the small-scale miniatures, through their sharp focus, serve to make this mythos mimetically *present* in ritual activity. In such a project, verisimilitude would constitute a distraction, overemphasizing the "then" and "there" of Jerusalem at the expense of the European "now" and "here". . . . The more miniaturized and, ultimately, more stylized replicas of the Sepulchre (types III-V), along with their attendant ritual, sought to simulate the prototypical experience which lay behind the monument, thereby creating a utopia, a theatre of the mind and imagination, in which there was no distance because the specific locality in Jerusalem was, in the ritual process, erased.<sup>78</sup>

Like the miniature replicas of the Holy Sepulcher that are less interested in mimetic reproduction of their original, the sinicized miniature replicas of the eight Indian stupas can suppress—more effectively than monumental replicas would—the fixed locality and temporality of the Indian monuments. The reconfigured sinicized shape of these Chinese replicas more easily erases the spatial and temporal gap between them and the ancient Indian stupas, thereby transporting the sacred places more smoothly from India to the land of Kitans. Through the device of the eight miniature pagodas, a Liao pagoda is transformed into a virtual microcosm of the sacred geography that possesses all Eight Great Sacred Places of Buddhism. These miniature replicas thereby alleviated the anxiety of religious practitioners in Liao, who lived on the periphery of the Buddhist world.

## 5. Bifold Replica

While the miniature pagodas intentionally rejected any physical resemblance to their Indian original, they carefully copied the shape of the Liao brick pagoda to which they were attached. This makes the Liao miniatures *bifold* replicas: while they are miniature copies of the eight Indian stupas, they are also miniatures of the Liao brick pagoda itself. In this complex interaction between the replica and the two originals, the replicas do not simply replicate but also redefine the original. As shown in this last of section of the paper, through such *bifold* replication, the Liao brick pagoda *per se* was transformed into a cosmic monument that aggregates all of the Indian stupas that marked the Eight Great Sacred Places. In other words, through the power of the miniature pagodas, the ontological meaning of the monumental brick pagoda was completely transformed.

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<sup>76</sup> (Lévi-Strauss 1966, pp. 23–24).

<sup>77</sup> (Smith 1980, pp. 20–21).

<sup>78</sup> (Smith 1980, pp. 22–24).

Let us first examine how the miniature pagodas copy the shape of the brick pagoda on which they were placed. Such physical resemblance is most clearly observed in the oldest extant miniature pagodas—those on the ground story of Chaoyang North Pagoda. What similarities can be observed between the miniatures and the actual pagoda? First, they have four-sided plans instead of eight. Second, they have exactly thirteen stacked eaves rising above their ground story (Figures 1 and 2). (The two lowest eaves of the miniature pagodas are more detailed, showing brick corbels under the eaves.) The finial above the thirteenth eave of these miniature pagodas is sharper and taller than that of Chaoyang North Pagoda; but the finial of the latter, which is made of glazed green tiles supporting a simple metal pole, is a modern reconstruction that was added during the pagoda's restoration from 1986 to 1996.<sup>79</sup> The finial part had already been lost when the Japanese archaeologist Sekino Tadashi examined the pagoda in the early twentieth century during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. It seems that the modern finial, which has a rather unusual shape, does not reflect the original form of the structure, since extant finials of Liao pagodas are usually taller and more ornate metal finials that follow the norms of East Asian pagoda design. Examples of this more typical design can be seen in the other Liao pagodas, such as Qingzhou White Pagoda in Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia.<sup>80</sup> The original top of Chaoyang North Pagoda probably looked more like the high metal finials atop other Liao pagodas, a factor that would make the resemblance to the eight miniature pagodas even more striking.

Third, each miniature pagoda has a central Buddha seated in its ground story, just as its mother pagoda does. Although the miniature pagodas' relatively small size does not allow them to fully duplicate the relief imagery of Chaoyang North Pagoda, the seated Buddha images—the most central iconographic motif—effectively shows that the miniature pagoda replicates their mother pagoda's overall shape.<sup>81</sup>

Lastly, the pedestals parts are also similar. Each miniature pagoda has a square base with a narrow waist known as a 'Mount Sumeru' pedestal due to its resemblance to the form of that legendary mountain. On the Mount Sumeru pedestal is a lotus pedestal that supports the ground story. Chaoyang North Pagoda also has a Mount Sumeru pedestal placed on a simple, high platform. The narrow band of the Mount Sumeru pedestal features reliefs of flowers and animals carrying offerings, as well as niches that contain minor deities. On the Mount Sumeru pedestal is a layer of three bands that widen as they rise. The pedestals of the nearby Chaoyang South Pagoda and other four-sided pagodas in the Chaoyang region confirm that this abstracted three-layered band is, in fact, a lotus pedestal (Figures 1 and 13).<sup>82</sup>

As a result, while their cartouches make them replicas of the eight Indian stupas, their visual features make them miniature replicas of Chaoyang North Pagoda. The interaction between text and image gives these miniature pagodas double implications. This bifold replication erases the boundary between the Liao pagoda and the Indian stupas: these miniature pagodas are the eight Indian stupas are Chaoyang North Pagoda (Figure 14). This makes Chaoyang North Pagoda itself equivalent to an aggregation of all eight Indian stupas. If one venerates Chaoyang North Pagoda, one can simultaneously venerate all of the Indian stupas erected at the Eight Great Sacred Places as well.

<sup>79</sup> Chaoyang North Pagoda's modern finial bit resembles the finial of the Liao pagoda in Tianningsi 天宁寺, Beijing. The latter, however, was the result of modern restoration as well. Tianningsi's pagoda itself was heavily restored during the Ming and Qing (1644–1912) periods.

<sup>80</sup> The original finial of this pagoda is at the Balin Right Banner Museum, and the current reproduction of the pagoda's finial followed its original form.

<sup>81</sup> The last two miniature pagodas, which mark Vaiśālī and Kuśinagara, have an image of Vimalakīrti and a reclining Buddha, respectively, emphasizing the narratives that each of the pagodas commemorate. These images do not appear on the eight miniature pagodas on the other Liao miniature pagodas in the Chaoyang area.

<sup>82</sup> Compared to those of the Yunjiesi Pagoda, the sculptures of Chaoyang North Pagoda are more elaborate but flatter, and the lotus pedestal of the pagoda is more abstract. The Yunjiesi Pagoda has not yet been excavated, and it is not yet known whether it pre- or postdates Chaoyang North Pagoda.

The formal similarity between a set of eight miniature pagodas and their mother pagoda is more clearly observed in early Liao pagodas, but gradually waned in later Liao pagodas, as this visual motif spread to other regions. Compared to early monuments, such as Chaoyang North Pagoda and Yunjiesi Pagoda (Figures 1, 2 and 13), later ones in Chaoyang demonstrate relatively less effort to replicate the shape of the pagoda to which they were attached. Eight miniature pagodas found outside of Chaoyang also show less resemblance to their mother pagoda. They often have only a few eaves, and their ground story features a simple door image instead of a seated Buddha. In some later pagodas, the shape of their miniature pagodas transforms into that of an incantation pillar (*jingchuang* 經幢).<sup>83</sup> A good example can be found in Daming Pagoda, in which the eight pillars of the pagoda's ground story take the form of two-storied incantation pillars inscribed with the names of the eight pagodas (Figures 4, 5 and 15). In these incantation pillars, the formal similarity to their mother pagoda is completely lost.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, however, some of the octagonal Liao pagodas outside of Chaoyang show that the original concept did not completely fade into oblivion. The stacked eaves of their miniature pagodas imply that they are octagonal pagodas like their mother pagoda, as seen in Tashan Pagoda 塔山塔 in Fuxin, Liaoning Province, and Nan'ansi Pagoda 南安寺塔 in Wei County, Hebei Province. This suggests that even in later Liao pagodas, the notion—however thin it may have been—still existed that miniature pagodas were replicas of the pagoda to which they were attached.



**Figure 13.** Yunjiesi Pagoda (also called the Moyun Pagoda), Mt. Fenghuang in Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, China. Liao dynasty [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007].

<sup>83</sup> The incantation pillars—stone pillar inscribed with *dhāraṇī*, or Buddhist “incantation”—began to gain popularity in the Tang dynasty and proliferated in Liao. These incantation pillars are normally octagonal and topped with a stone that imitates an East Asian tiled roof. In the medieval Chinese categories for Buddhist monuments, the distinction between the incantation pillar and the pagoda was often nebulous, and the former was often thought to be one type of pagoda. For more on the incantation pillar, see (Copp 2014; Liu 1997, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Although this unique case seems to reflect a drastic change for the eight pagodas, the eight pagodas were already represented as a single-story *dhāraṇī* pillar inside the Chaoyang North Pagoda as shown above.

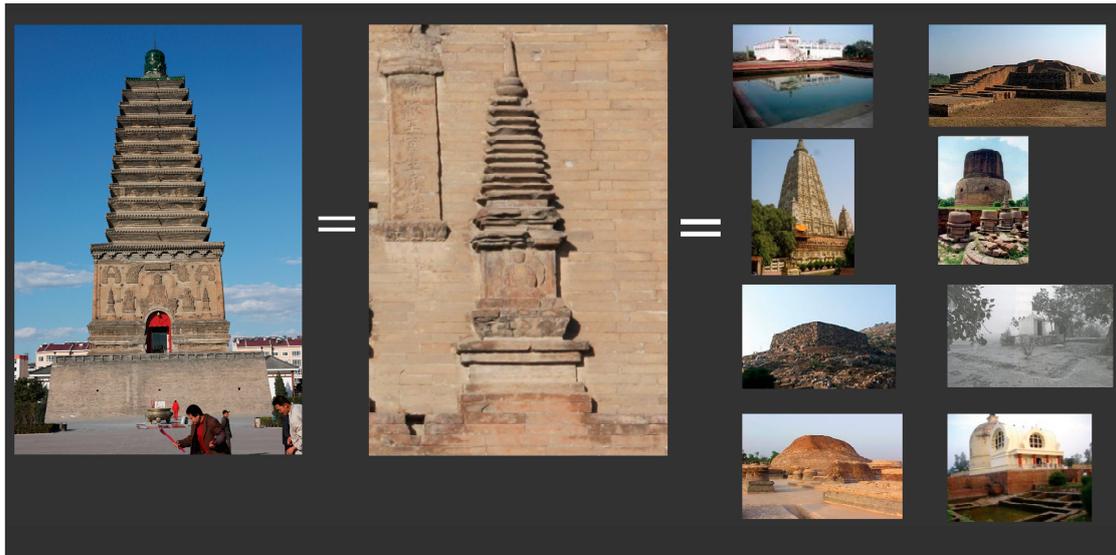


Figure 14. Diagram created by Youn-mi Kim©.



Figure 15. Two-storied incantation pillar at Foguang Monastery [©Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016].

## 6. Ending Remarks

This paper examined how the performative and thaumaturgic nature of the miniature was adopted to enact virtuality in ritual. As shown in this paper, the virtual pilgrimage—a ritual *miniaturized* by the miniatures—is not a mere “displacement” of an actual ritual, but offers a more refined and idealized form of the original. In addition, the virtual ritual, due to its miniaturization, was easy to repeat and facilitated the accumulation of merit through repetition. Moreover, the miniatures and virtual pilgrimages discussed in this paper transformed the locality into the center of the sacred geography. Even in India, the homeland of the Buddha, there is no single place that synthesizes all of the Eight Great Sacred Places. Through the power of miniatures, the Liao brick pagoda was transformed into an unparalleled sacred place where all of those Indian holy places were brought together and the events of Buddha’s life were endlessly reenacted in the minds and ritual actions of the locals.

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