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**Abstract:** The monk Chōgen 重源 (1121-1206) is most famous for the rebuilding of Tōdaiji 東大寺. Less understood is the interest Chōgen developed in Chinese Buddhist relic worship during three trips to southern China. Worship of the cremated remains of the Buddha’s body, treated as corporeal relics, had been popular in Japan for centuries by the time of Chōgen, but he was particularly impressed with the form of relic worship he encountered at Ayuwangshan 阿育王山, a mountain temple complex near the Chinese port city of Ningbo. During the Heian Period (794-1185) in Japan, relics were inaccessible to the public, and used almost exclusively for rituals designed to bring benefits to the secular elite. At Ayuwangshan, in contrast, Chōgen witnessed throngs of common, lay devotees prostrating in a slow ascent to the mountain temple, where they could worship the temples’ relic in person. This article examines how Chōgen’s experiences at Ayuwangshan motivated him to fashion mobile reliquaries that could be installed at provincial temples he built across Japan in order to popularize relic worship among common devotees, a novel development in Japanese Buddhist practice.

# The Monk Chōgen's Expansion of Buddhist Relic Circulation to the Common Classes of Medieval Japan Based on His Experience at Ayuwangshan

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## Introduction

Nara and early-Heian society owed much to the importation of Chinese cultural constructs: training in the Confucian classics was compulsory for government officials, literary production was dominated by the Chinese language, and the very organization of the state was borrowed from Tang administrative and legal codes (*J. ritsuryō* 律令). Buddhism was kept at bay after the capital moved to Heiankyō 平安京, present-day Kyōto, as initially few temples were permitted in the environs of the new political center. Confucians turned a suspect eye toward the spread of Buddhist ideas, and even Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701-756), who constructed Tōdaiji 東大寺 as the center of his effort to develop a network of state monasteries and nunneries (*kokubunji* 国分寺, *kokubun'ni* 国分尼寺), found it difficult to promote Buddhism while satisfying the Confucian agendas of his literati-officials.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid-Heian period, however, the Japanese state's official posture towards Buddhism had begun to thaw, with the hegemonic Confucian discourse about government slowly replaced by the concept of the "oneness of the king's dharma and the Buddhist dharma" (*ōbōbuppō* 王法仏法). During the same period, trade with China expanded due to the political stability brought by the Song 宋 unification. Japanese Buddhist monks, who had not been able to travel to China since the severance of relations between the two countries in 838 during the Tang 唐, were now able to embark on pilgrimages to the famous sites of Buddhist devotion recorded by their predecessors more than one hundred fifty years before.<sup>2</sup> These "Buddhist monks in search of the law" returned with knowledge of developments in

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<sup>1</sup> Abé (1999), p. 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> Wang (1994), p. 63.

continental Buddhist culture during the 9th and 10th centuries, including scripture translations, new commentaries, and material objects of worship.

One such monk was Chōgen 重源 (1121-1206), famous for the rebuilding of Tōdaiji after Taira 平 troops burned it to the ground in 1181 during the Gempei Civil War 源平合戦 (Gempei kassen). The destruction of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha and Great Buddha Hall were unprecedented in the historical annals of Japan, underscoring not only the destabilization of the political sphere, but also the destruction of Buddhist authority during this period. Preparations to reconstruct Tōdaiji began almost immediately. Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河 (1127-1192) took a leadership role, and funding for the reconstruction was organized through a *kanjin* 勧進 “temple solicitation” campaign, the sort of which was typically headed by a charismatic monk who could solicit donations from aristocratic families, warrior clans, and common households. In the case of the Tōdaiji *kanjin* campaign, a suitable candidate for the *kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖<sup>3</sup> – the “chief solicitor” of the campaign – was not only responsible for raising funds, but also overseeing the acquisition and transport logistics of building materials, as well as supervising the architects, casters, carvers, masons, and builders who would construct the temple.

What past experiences qualified Chōgen as the chief solicitor for rebuilding Tōdaiji? By the time Tōdaiji was destroyed, Chōgen had already distinguished himself as the most well-travelled Japanese Buddhist monk of his time, having made three trips abroad to China.<sup>4</sup> Chōgen's experiences on the continent served his candidacy in a number of practical ways. First, Chōgen's technical knowledge of Song temple architecture appealed to Go-Shirakawa and leaders of the Taira clan, two of Tōdaiji's most important sponsors. Go-Shirakawa had

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<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, “*kanjin*” referred to the proselytization of Buddhism by a monk among the secular populace. As part of this practice, the *kanjin hijiri*, or “saint” who endeavored to spread the Buddhist faith, would accept donations of cash or rice from supporters and use the income to finance dharma assemblies or temple construction projects. From the Nara Period, monks and nuns organized *kanjin* campaigns for small temples that had minimal access to other forms of public or private financial support. As part of these campaigns, they also contributed to the welfare of local populations by organizing good works projects, encouraging the adoption of the bodhisattva precepts, and lecturing on Buddhist themes in simple terms that locals could understand.

<sup>4</sup> While the dates for Chōgen's first and last voyages to China are unknown, the inscription on a bell dated to 1176 and installed at Kōyasan 高野山 mentions Chōgen's “three visits to China,” providing a *terminus ante quem* for his travels. Moreover, in 1155 Chōgen assisted with the rebuilding of Daigoji's 醍醐寺 Kayanomori Hall 栢杜堂, whose construction was based on Song precedents Chōgen likely observed in China. This makes it likely that he returned from his first trip to China at minimum by the previous year, or 1154. Combining this information, we hypothesize that Chōgen made all three trips to China during the roughly twenty-five years between the early 1150's and 1176.

previously favored contemporary continental building styles for the temples he underwrote, and the Taira were famously fond of items imported from China. Second, during his trips to China, Chōgen forged personal relationships with Chinese technicians who ultimately would supervise the recasting of the Great Buddha and reconstruction of the temple's halls.<sup>5</sup>

Less understood is the interest Chōgen developed in Chinese Buddhist relic worship while on the continent. Worship of the cremated remains of the Buddha's body, treated as corporeal relics (*Sk. śarīra*, *C. sheli*, *J. shari* 舍利), was a prominent feature of Buddhist practice from the dawn of the religion. Typically bodily relics consisted of granulated ashes, though other human remains such as teeth, bones, and hair have also been recognized.<sup>6</sup> In theory, Buddhist relics could be traced to the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni (*J. Shaka* 釈迦), but practically speaking, the provenance of many or most relics in Japan is doubtful. According to officials at Tōji 東寺, the country's largest relic repository, the temple's inventory of relics was said to vary (typically in a positive direction) based on the decline or prosperity of the country.<sup>7</sup> In any case, throughout East Asian history, relics were considered at the popular level to have magical powers that rewarded worshippers. Such powers mirrored the salvific efficacy of the holy grail as portrayed by Chrétien de Troyes in *The Story of the Grail* (ca. 1190), in which it serves as both a "thing" and the "body" of the religion's founder.<sup>8</sup> Typically, Buddhist monasteries in Theravāda countries include a *stūpa* under which purported Buddhist relics are buried. In China, the *stūpa* was architecturally adapted into the pagoda (*C. ta*, *J. tō* 塔), though its primary function as a storehouse of Buddhist relics remained. The pagoda later became common to the design of monasteries across East Asia.

By the time of Chōgen, relic worship had been popular in Japan for centuries, but he was particularly impressed with the form of relic worship he encountered at Ayuwangshan 阿

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<sup>5</sup> Chōgen's claim to have made three trips to China has been challenged by Japanese scholars, most notably Yamamoto Eigo 山本栄吾, (See "Chōgen nyūsōden shiken" 重源入宋伝私見), who pointed out that there are no detailed accounts of his voyages either by his hand or those of his contemporaries. However, Chōgen maintained a singular disinterest in writing accounts of his life and accomplishments, whether in China or Japan. Most of his deeds are known from the *Sazenshū* 作善宗, a text of less than two hundred lines written on the back of a report about the 1202 grain harvest in Bizen 備前 Province. The *Sazenshū* appears to be the beginnings of a draft of his autobiography undertaken only after his strength had begun to fail, and interrupted by his passing. In this context, the lack of self-documentation by Chōgen of his trips to China was consistent with Chōgen's general disdain for writing.

<sup>6</sup> Ruppert (2000), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 270.

育王山, a mountain temple complex near the Chinese port city of Ningbo 寧波. Relic worship there differed from Chōgen's experience with relics as a novice monk at his Japanese ordination temple, Daigoji 醍醐寺. During the Heian 平安 Period (794-1185) in Japan, relics were used almost exclusively for rituals designed to bring benefits to the secular elite — often the imperial family or the emperor himself. At Ayuwangshan, on the other hand, Chōgen witnessed throngs of common, lay devotees prostrating every three steps in a slow ascent to the mountain temple's reliquary, where they hoped to view one of China's most well-known Buddhist treasures. The significance of Buddhist relics for the common castes was like nothing Chōgen had ever seen, and he vowed to encourage a similar regard for relics among the general populace in Japan.

This article examines Chōgen's experiences with relic veneration early in his life, at Ayuwangshan, and upon his return to his home country. While throughout his life Chōgen continued to use relics in rituals that benefited the elite of Japanese society, his experience at Ayuwangshan also motivated him to fashion mobile reliquaries that could be installed at provincial temples he built across the country in order to popularize relic worship among common devotees. This practice deviated from centuries of relic worship in Japan, which had been monopolized by just three groups of actors: monks at select temples, the imperial throne, and powerful aristocrats. Taking the lessons of Ayuwangshan by heart, Chōgen hoped to spread the Buddhist faith by bringing the remains of the Buddha's body to the common classes in outlying regions of Japan for the first time, so that relics could inspire high and low alike.

### **Relic Worship in Japan prior to Chōgen's Time**

As the Heian Period progressed, Buddhism was increasingly dominated by aristocratic families that placed their offspring in the highest positions of elite temples. However, there is evidence of popular Buddhist worship as early as the Hakuho 白鳳 Period at the end of the 7th c., when the monk Hōrin 宝林 taught the practice of copying sutras in the immediate region outside the capital.<sup>9</sup> Later, Gyōki 行基 (668-749) won support among common classes for his social work building bridges and dredging reservoirs. The *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記, written from 787-824, contains stories of fisherman lost at sea and miners trapped underground who chanted the Buddha's name seeking his intervention. Buddhist memorial

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<sup>9</sup> Yoshida (2003), p. 5.

services also appear to have been widespread among common devotees by the 8th c.<sup>10</sup>

What was relic worship like prior to the latter part of the Heian Period, when Chōgen lived? The subject of early Japanese relic worship touches upon the legendary accounts of Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (572-622),<sup>11</sup> and the historical voyage of the Chinese Buddhist monk Ganjin 鑑真 (C. Jianzhen, 688-763), who brought the relics stored at Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺.<sup>12</sup> However, the understanding of relic worship that predominated in the Heian Period was elaborated by Chōgen's Shingon 真言 School, which treated relics as ritual implements to be handled by a select group of monks and used to bestow spiritual and material benefits upon the elite.

The founder of the Shingon School, Kūkai 空海 (774-835), returned from Tang China with eighteen relic grains supposedly inherited from the South Indian monk, Vajrabodhi (C. *Jingangzhi*, J. Kongōchi 金剛智), and passed through the hands of the School's patriarchs, Amoghavajra (C. Bukong, J. Fukū) and Huiguo 惠果 (J. Keika), to Kūkai. Following Kūkai's return to Japan, the relics were stored at Tōji in Kyōto. Kūkai created special rites incorporating the relics at the imperial palace, and they were always held in safekeeping at one or the other location. According to a legendary account, Kūkai also returned with a "wish-fulfilling jewel" (Sk. *cintāmaṇi*, J. *nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠) known as the Nōsashōhōju 能作性宝珠 fashioned by his Chinese master, Huiguo, which Kūkai buried at Muroji 室生寺 in Nara.<sup>13</sup> In Kūkai's teachings, all relics should be understood as wish-fulfilling jewels,<sup>14</sup> an identification that equates the transformative power of Buddhist teachings with the compassionate benevolence of the *cakravartin* (J. *tenrin jō'ō* 轉輪聖王), the ideal secular monarch who honors Buddhism and brings virtue and peace to the world through his exemplary conduct.

In the ninth century, Kūkai imported texts from China that depicted the "Wish-fulfilling [Jewel and Dharma-] Wheel Avalokiteśvara (Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音), and by the tenth

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<sup>10</sup> Yoshida (2003), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Prince Shōtoku was the alleged "founder" of Japanese Buddhism, said to have written the first Japanese Buddhist commentaries and constructed Shitennōji 四天王寺, Japan's first Buddhist temple.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed examination of Buddhist relics in Japanese history, see Brian Rupert's *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan*.

<sup>13</sup> Naitō (2006), p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Naitō (2012), p. 158.

century the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Kannon 観音) was worshipped in the imperial palace, where monthly rituals were performed using statues of the deity.<sup>15</sup> Nyoirin Kannon was eventually recognized as the deity that guarded the life of the emperor, bolstering the relationship between wish-fulfilling jewels and imperial authority. For secular rulers, wish-fulfilling jewels could serve the most pressing needs of the country and benefit the ruler's own person and relations, for example by bringing fruitful harvests of the five grains, guarding the health of the imperial family, and prompting the birth of imperial princes. The Latter Seven Day Rite (*Goshichinichi no mishuhō* 後七日の御修法) incorporated the wish-fulfilling jewel and was performed yearly in the palace to pray for these objectives.<sup>16</sup> This ritual, instituted by Kūkai, reinterpreted the imperial palace as a ceremonial space sanctioned and controlled by the Shingon School.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of the Latter Seven Day Rite, relics functioned in an apotropaic and regenerative role for the emperor and imperial family.<sup>18</sup> Relics were donated by monks from one of the religious centers (in this case, Tōji) to the political center (the imperial palace). As previous scholars have noted, Buddha relic worship in early medieval Japan also functioned in two other ways. The first was embodied by the Buddha Relics Offering (*ichidai ichido busshari hōken* 一代一度大神宝奉幣), a rite in which the emperor made offerings of relics to shrines with historical linkages to the imperial family, such as Usa Hachimangū 宇佐八幡宮 and Iwashimizu Hachimangū 石清水八幡宮.<sup>19</sup> In a geographical sense, this rite marked the distribution of relics from the political center to peripheral regions of Japan – Iwashimizu is located just to the southeast of Kyōto, but Usa is located in Kyūshū, and other shrines that received relics as part of this rite were also far from the capital. However, from a political perspective, each of these shrines was chosen because they were believed to house the spirits of previous Japanese sovereigns. In effect, this form of relic dispensation amounted to imperial ancestor worship on the part of living emperors. Yet another function of relics involved powerful aristocrats who hoarded them as familial treasures. One of the most well-known examples is Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966-1028), who was known on occasion to donate his own relics in return for political favors. By the 13th c., the Kujō 九

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<sup>15</sup> Rupert (2000), p. 145-156.

<sup>16</sup> Naitō (2006), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Abé (1999), p. 354.

<sup>18</sup> Rupert (2000), p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

条 lineage of Fujiwaras had collected thousands of relic grains as personal possessions.<sup>20</sup> As Brian Ruppert points out, each of the three functions of relics served a ritual economy in early medieval Japan involving three main actors: the monks of select temples and shrines, the imperial throne, and wealthy aristocrats, particularly in the Fujiwara line. These groups monopolized the exchange of relics, ensuring their circulation was limited to the elite, and mostly to the capital region with the exception of the Buddha Relics Offering, discussed above. In sum, relics were never distributed among the lower classes, nor to temples that served those classes in the provincial regions of Japan. For the common classes, relics would have been largely an unknown commodity until Chōgen's time.

Chōgen was introduced to relic worship long before his trips to China, when he was still a novice monk at Daigoji 醍醐寺. In his youth, Chōgen performed relic ceremonies for members of the imperial family, with ceremonies for the wish-fulfilling jewel designed by Kūkai included in his repertoire. According to the fifth fascicle of *The Record of Assorted Affairs of Daigoji* (醍醐雜事記 *Daigoji zatsuji ki*), on multiple occasions Chōgen performed the *Rishu zanmai* 理趣三昧,<sup>21</sup> a yearly memorial service involving a reliquary and dedicated to the enlightenment of Shirakawa's empress, Fujiwara no Kenshi 藤原賢子 (994-1027).<sup>22</sup> Like his contemporaries, Chōgen's knowledge of relic worship was limited to the performance of rituals for his temple's elite patrons. However, Chōgen's trips to China would change his perspective on relic worship forever.

### Ayuwangshan Relic Worship

During his trips to China, Chōgen made multiple trips to one of the most renowned sites of Chinese Buddhist relic worship, Ayuwangshan. Though Chōgen was educated in the particulars of Shingon relic worship from his early days at Daigoji, the relic practices he later instituted at Tōdaiji as part of his efforts to rebuild the temple were inspired by his experiences at Ayuwangshan.

This mountain temple complex, located near Ningbo, is named for King Aśoka (C. *Ayuwang* 阿育王, 304-232 BCE), the first ruler to unite India under a single banner after a

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>21</sup> A Shingon rite with several parts including a *homa* (J. *goma* 護摩) fire ritual, and which centers upon the reading of the *Prajñāpāramitānaya-śatapañcaśatikā* (*Hannyaharamitta rishu hyakugojūju* 般若波羅蜜多理趣百五十頌), also known as the *Rishu kyō* 理趣經.

<sup>22</sup> Naitō (2006), p. 32-33.



series of bloody campaigns against neighboring monarchs. Aśoka patronized Buddhism and used it to consolidate his power by proclaiming himself to be a *cakravartin*,<sup>23</sup> the Buddhist ideal of a wise, benevolent, and just king. According to the *Chronicles of Aśoka* (*C. Ayuwangzhuan* 阿育王傳), translated into Chinese in 306 during the Western Jin 西晉 Dynasty, Aśoka opened seven of the eight original stupas containing Śākyamuni's relics, divided them into smaller fragments, and reburied them in 84,000 stupas across India as a symbol of his power and good will so that all of his people could benefit from worship of the Buddha.<sup>24</sup> The origin of relic worship in China can be traced to the third century, which is around the time the Aśoka legend was propagated.

From that time, the remains of Ayuwangshan towers<sup>25</sup> were “discovered” across China, in line with the belief that Aśoka had distributed the Buddha's relics across the known human world in his role as a *cakravartin*. The *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林<sup>26</sup> reports that twenty-one Ayuwang towers were discovered in China, conforming to places where Śākyamuni had wandered as a beggar in one of his previous lives. These places include the Kuaijishan Maoxian Tower 會稽山鄞縣塔 at Ayuwangshan.<sup>27</sup>

The pseudo-historical account of the origin of the Ayuwangshan temple complex was recorded by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) in his *Jishenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄, in which he tells of a hunter named Liu Sahe 劉薩何 who lived during the Western Jin. In order to escape the punishments of hell he believed awaited hunters in the next life, Liu sought the remains of King Aśoka stupas. After locating one, he performed repentance rites to atone for his crimes and eventually took the tonsure, becoming the monk Huida 慧達. At the stupa ruins, one day he heard the sound of a bell, and suddenly a treasure tower<sup>28</sup> with a relic emerged from the ground. The treasure tower was blue, about forty-five centimeters

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<sup>23</sup> Aśoka was cast as an Iron Wheel-turning Monarch (鐵輪王), the ruler of the Southern continent of Jambudvīpa inhabited by human beings in Buddhist cosmology.

<sup>24</sup> The term “84,000” derived from the number of minuscule parts that composed the Buddha's body as well as the divisions of the Buddha's teaching. It became a synonym for “infinity,” and in many cases did not refer to a real number. However, in China and Japan the term was at times taken literally.

<sup>25</sup> “Tower” is used as a general term to refer to structures built to mark a site for the burial of Buddhist relics, as well as the miniature portable reliquaries shaped like towers used to transport relics.

<sup>26</sup> The seventh century Buddhist encyclopedia compiled by Daoshi 道世 (?–683).

<sup>27</sup> T53, n. 2122, p. 604c5-6.

<sup>28</sup> The treasure tower of Prabhūtaratna (Duobao 多寶) emerges from the ground in Chapter Eleven of the *Lotus Sutra*, although in that case the tower functions to extol the merits of the *Lotus Sutra* itself, which appropriates the function of Buddhist relics according to the text.

high, with windows on four sides. On the exterior were images of many Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Vajra-wielding Guardians, and monks. Inside the tower was a copper chime stone (*qing* 磬). Owing to this account, Emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝 constructed a new, wooden pagoda on the same site in 522 to house both the jeweled tower and the relic associated with Huida.<sup>29</sup> The monastery constructed next to the pagoda became known as “Ayuwangsi.”<sup>30</sup>

The monastery on Ayuwangshan that housed the famous relic would become an important site for veneration by China’s emperors. As mentioned, Emperor Wudi of the Liang built the first wooden pagoda and temple on the Ayuwangshan site in order to house the relic in 522. Emperor Jianwen 簡文帝 (r. 549-555) later had the relics removed from the pagoda for his personal worship.<sup>31</sup> Emperor Xuandi 宣帝 (r. 569-582) of the Chen 陳 praised the pagoda, and approved the ordination of fourteen monks there. Tang emperors were especially effulgent in their eulogies; Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705-709), Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756-761), and Yizong 懿宗 (r. 860-871) all sent emissaries to participate in memorial services for the relic.<sup>32</sup> During the time of Emperor Wuzong’s 武宗 suppression of Buddhism, the relic was stored in Ningbo government warehouses for protection, an example of devotion to the Buddha exceeding allegiance to the Chinese emperor.<sup>33</sup>

The most active period of Ayuwangshan worship was from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (五代十國, 907-979) through the Yuan 元 (1271-1368). King Qian Liu 錢鏐 (r. 907-932) of the Wuyue 吳越 sent his own brother as an official emissary to worship at Ayuwangshan. Few could surpass the fanaticism of King Qian Hongchu 錢弘俶 (r. 948-978) a few years later, who commissioned 84,000 small reliquaries composed of gold, copper, and silver to be fashioned and distributed across his kingdom, emulating the original act of Aśoka as *cakravartin* monarch. Supposedly five hundred of these pagodas were even sent to Japan.<sup>34</sup> Many of the towers have been found in recesses (*digong* 地宮) under pagodas across Zhejiang 浙江 Province. They differ in size and composition, but many are

<sup>29</sup> T53, n. 2122, p. 586a19-23.

<sup>30</sup> Taniguchi (2009), p. 8; Naitō (2009), p. 245.

<sup>31</sup> T52, n. 2103, p. 203c12-204a09.

<sup>32</sup> T49, n. 2035, p. 461a22; 461a29; 461a24-25.

<sup>33</sup> Naitō (2009), p. 246.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246.

approximately forty centimeters high as in the legendary account of Huida. Inside are smaller, gold towers, matching Daoxuan's record of towers created in the fashion of a matryoshka doll. They feature windows on four sides in which Śākyamuni appears sermonizing and assuming other poses.<sup>35</sup>

The Song emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976-997) was fascinated with Ayuwangshan relic worship. According to the *Fozu tongji*, in 989 Taizong sponsored the construction of a pagoda to house an Ayuwangshan reliquary tower, and personally attended the pagoda's dedication:

A precious pagoda was constructed at Kaibaosi 開寶寺. It was octagonal, had eleven stories, and was thirty-six *zhang* 丈 in height. The emperor installed one thousand Buddha [statues] and ten thousand bodhisattva [statues]. Underneath the tower was built a recess for relics (lit. "heavenly palace," *tiangong* 天宮), for which an Ayuwangshan reliquary tower was offered. All of Hangzhou's pagodas were built by Yu Hao 喻浩 (?-989)<sup>36</sup> and usually took eight years to finish. The imperially designated name [for the temple associated with this pagoda] was Fushengtayuan 福勝塔院. On the day the reliquary was installed, the emperor came up the narrow path by sedan chair (*jianyu* 肩輿) holding [the reliquary tower] and presented it for burial [under the pagoda]. White light shone from the corner of the small [Ayuwangshan]

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<sup>35</sup> Taniguchi (2009), p. 9. Many of Qian Hongchu's extant pagodas contain a copy of the *Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī*, which was later used in Japan during Chōgen's time for rites for the repose of dead souls (see below). The sutra in which the *dhāraṇī* is explained, the *Dhāraṇī Sutra on the Treasure Chest Seal of the of the Whole Body Relics Concealed in the Minds of All the Tathāgatas*, claims that should this *dhāraṇī* be inserted into a pagoda, the pagoda will become the *vajra* store of all the Buddhas – containing wisdom so potent that it possesses the immutable quality of a diamond. Additionally, the sutra claims: "If a sentient being is able to plant virtuous roots at [the site of] this pagoda, he will certainly attain the stage of non-retrogression of supreme perfect enlightenment. Even for a person who should fall into the Avīci Hell, if he should make a single obeisance to the pagoda or circumambulate it one time, he will certainly be freed (T19, n. 1022A, p.711a27-b1)." Qian Hongchu, while often remembered as a wise and just ruler, in fact deposed the former Wuyue King and his half-brother, Qian Hongzong 錢弘俶, in a *coup d'état* before ascending to the throne. Thus, Qian Hongchu's hands were stained with blood, much like King Aśoka's before him. Consequently, he had good reason to follow King Aśoka's example by constructing 84,000 pagodas. The *Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī Sutra*'s promise that even those destined for the worst realm of hell could escape their fate by using the *dhāraṇī* must also have been appealing. A second translation of the same sutra has notable differences with the first. For instance, the second version claims that a person who repairs a pagoda will be reborn as a *cakravartin* king in the next life. This version of the *Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī Sutra* would have had obvious attractions for Qian Hongchu, too – elevating him to the status of King Aśoka himself – though based on the catalog history of the two versions of the sutra, it seems more likely that Qian Hongchu used the first version.

<sup>36</sup> A Wuyue and Northern Song architect.

tower. The large pagoda [also] emitted light, thoroughly illuminating heaven and earth. The scholars and common people burned incense, and those who contributed filled the streets. The eunuchs and palace attendants, some tens of people, sought to take the tonsure and serve at the pagoda. The emperor told his close officials: “In my prior life, I was once close to the Buddha’s dais.”<sup>37</sup> However, I just had not remembered this previous existence.”<sup>38</sup>

Such tales of miracles surrounding the Ayuwangshan relic would be repeated by Chōgen when he described the power of the relics he later inserted into the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji.

### Chōgen’s Transformative Experience at Ayuwangshan

The earliest record concerning Ayuwang towers in Japan is from 631, when a Japanese emissary to the Tang (*kentōshi* 遣唐使) was asked by a Chinese monk if Ayuwang towers had been found in Japan. According to the *Fayuan zhulin*, the Japanese emissary reported that many such towers had been found.<sup>39</sup> As the legend of Aśoka’s distribution of the Buddha’s relics had by this time become a matter of historical record in China, the Chinese monk was really asking whether Japan was a recipient of King Aśoka’s original promulgation of Buddhism. The discovery of Aśoka towers was thus equivalent to asserting one’s country’s association with the early days of Buddhist history, and thus a way of ranking countries’ geographic and temporal proximity to the center.

The first monk to visit both Ayuwangshan and Japan was Tōdaiji’s Ganjin, who returned to the Ningbo area following his second failed crossing to Japan. He visited the temple and pagoda while awaiting another ship for the voyage.<sup>40</sup> Ganjin describes the Ayuwang towers he saw as the color of the Monkshood vine (*ziwu* 紫烏) and made from various materials, including gold, jewels, stone, clay, copper, and iron. Ganjin brought a gilded bronze Ayuwang tower to Japan when he finally made a successful crossing on his sixth attempt.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> In other words, one of the audience members closest to the Buddha when he spoke the sermons recorded in the sutras.

<sup>38</sup> T. 49, n. 2035, 400b4-b11.

<sup>39</sup> Naitō (2009), p. 246.

<sup>40</sup> As recorded in Ganjin’s biography, *Tōdaiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征傳.

<sup>41</sup> Naitō (2009), p. 246.

During Chōgen's three voyages to China, his most transformative experiences occurred at Ayuwangshan. In 1183, Chōgen described his encounter with the fervent relic worship of common people there to Fujiwara no Kanezane 藤原兼実 (1149-1207), who recorded the exchange in his diary:

[Chōgen] said, "Ayuwangshan is named after that king who has one of his 84,000 [reliquary] towers installed at the mountain. These towers are square [at the base] and all are engraved exquisitely. At the time [of the ceremony I watched], golden towers were dedicated. At the time [of Qian Honchu], it was this [golden tower] that was [actually] presented by the emperor. This original tower was one *shaku* 尺 and four-*sun* 寸 in height. When [I was at Ayuwangshan,] there were [also] silver towers and gilded bronze towers. As such, there were many types dedicated [for the ceremony]." The relic [inside the tower] had manifested all sorts of divine powers. Sometimes, [it] appeared in the form of a sixteen foot [Buddha statue]. Other times, it appeared as a small statue. [Yet] other times it emitted rays of light. This saint (i.e. Chōgen) twice [personally] witnessed the divine powers [of the relic]. One time [it emitted] light and the other time it [transformed] into a small statue [of the Buddha.] "However, in this Latter Period of the Law (*matsu dai* 末代), these [divine] events are rare," Chōgen said. "Nevertheless, in that country [of China], people put their faith [in Buddhism] foremost in their minds. The pilgrims [I saw who visited Ayuwangshan], some of whom were monks and others laymen, numbered five-hundred persons, or perhaps a thousand. They all begin the climb [to the temple] at the same time and display ardent, pure faith. They perform the ascent by prostrating after every three steps. Although the road [up to the temple] is not long, [this] can sometimes take three months or [even] half a year. Following their arrival at the temple, all [the pilgrims] chant the precious name of Śākyamuni. Altogether, they pray for [the manifestation of the relic's] divine powers. Whether the powers manifest themselves depends upon the seriousness of the sins [committed by the pilgrims]. Truly this is an amazing event. How can the people of my realm [of Japan] possibly compare? 'Tis a pity!" he said.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Gyokuyō*, 24th day of the first month of the second year of the Juei Era 寿永二年正月二十四日条;

It is easy to see why Chōgen was so surprised by the sight of laypeople's fervid religious devotion to the relics at Ayuwangshan when contrasted with his experiences using relics in memorial services for members of the Japanese imperial family. Relics were practically unknown to the common populace in Japan, where they were secreted in temples, the imperial palace, and aristocratic enclaves. Yet at Ayuwangshan, one of China's most famous Buddhist relics was on display for everyone, and proved popular enough to attract common devotees from far and wide. Lay Buddhists spent months to ascend the mountain while simultaneously prostrating every few steps in reverence to the Buddha's remains. Such devotees surely hoped that these acts of faith would be recompensed in dividends by the spiritual power of the relic once they reached the summit.

Relic worship at Ayuwangshan made such an impression on Chōgen that he maintained his relationship with the temple even after returning to Japan from his final journey. In Eisai's record of his own Chinese travels (*Eisai nittō engi* 栄西入唐縁起), he notes that local monks at Ayuwangshan implored Chōgen to help with ongoing reconstruction of the relic hall. Chōgen later sent timber otherwise destined for the reconstruction of Tōdaiji to China as building materials. Chinese records from the time confirm Chōgen's role in the Ayuwangshan renovation process.<sup>43</sup>

### Chōgen's Use of Relics for the Repose of Dead Souls after the Gempei War

Upon his return to Japan, Chōgen incorporated relic worship based on Ayuwang precedents into his Buddhist practice in two separate ways. The first was aimed primarily at an elite audience, and the second at a common one. The former were "rites for the repose of dead souls" (*chinkon* 鎮魂), modeled after Aśoka and the 84,000 miniature reliquary towers he distributed across his kingdom following his conquest of the Indian subcontinent. In the case of Chōgen and Tōdaiji, these rites aimed to save members of the Taira clan responsible

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Naitō (2012), p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> In 1188, the Southern Song poet, Lou Yao 樓鑰 (1137-1213), wrote a pagoda inscription for Ayuwangshan (*Ayuwangshan miaozhi chanshi taming* 阿育王山妙智禪師塔銘), saying: "the king of Japan. . . proclaimed that because his very modest country follows Śakyamuni, he [would send] disciples to respectfully donate funds for the repair. Also, they brought quality timbers for rebuilding [the relic hall]. The materials were exquisite, and the design without comparison." Based on the context, the "king of Japan" refers to Emperor Go-Shirakawa, who allowed Chōgen to send lumber from Suō 周防 Province to Ayuwangshan. Suō was previously under Go-Shirakawa's private management before it was bestowed upon Chōgen in order to finance and provide raw materials for the rebuilding of Tōdaiji, so Lou Yao's account fits the facts (Taniguchi, 2008, p. 51-52).

for the Gempei Civil War, who set fire to the temple and much of Nara in the process. Many of the Taira culprits were executed upon their capture, some by the hands of Tōdaiji monks. At the time, it was understood that crimes against the Buddhist community would warrant the torments of hell unless the living ritually intervened to change their fate. The desire to save the Taira from their sins in the war was not just a selfless act of compassion, however. The religious and political actors that sponsored Chōgen's activities hoped to reconcile the opposing factions of the war, whose mutual antipathy continued even after the end of active hostilities. The authorities also sought to ensure that the ghosts of the vanquished would not return to wreak vengeance upon the victors in the Minamoto 源 clan.<sup>44</sup>

Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147-1199), who reigned supreme after the defeat of the Taira, helped to organize a *kanjin* campaign among family members to raise money for an 84,000 Aśoka reliquary commemorative ritual on behalf of the war dead. As justification for that endeavor, Yoritomo wrote:

Following the chaos of the Hōgen 保元 [Rebellion in 1156], [members of] the Minamoto and Taira clans rebelled, and imperial rule was unsettled. Taira no Kiyomori upset imperial rule and destroyed the Buddhist law [by starting the Gempei War]. Following this, he incinerated the [Great Buddha statue of] Vairocana [at Tōdaiji] and imprisoned the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa. I rectified this, but as punishments were meted, those who lost their lives numbered in the tens of millions.<sup>45</sup> Because of this, are not grudges inherited across the divides between lifetimes, and does not bitterness grow among the travelers of hell? By all means, as victory is met with a mixture of contempt and satisfaction [by the defeated and victorious], [we] must impartially distribute [acts of] salvation [to both sides]. We have heard it said that if enmity is repaid by enmity, then [such] hostility will continue from life to life. If enmity is repaid with virtue, then it will be transformed into affection. From here, following in the footsteps of Aśoka, we have constructed these 84,000 jeweled towers. So that their merits will be ample, *Treasure Chest Seal*

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<sup>44</sup> The *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 echoes these anxieties by repeating an urban legend that Kiyomori returned from the grave in the form of a dragon and caused an earthquake that struck Kyoto in 1185. See Aoki (1999), p. 182-183.

<sup>45</sup> Probably an exaggeration as large numbers were rarely taken literally during this period.

*Dhāraṇī* have been respectfully copied. Thus, in all provinces of this miraculous land [of Japan], a performance of this commemorative rite will be deferentially completed. Based on the examples of [Emperor] Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618-626) and [Emperor] Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-649) of the Tang 唐, who invited the [spirits of] dead soldiers to the Hall of Purification, [as well as] Jōgū taishi 上宮太子 (aka Shōtoku taishi, 572-622) and Emperor Suzaku (朱雀天皇, 923-952), who saved [Mononobe no] Moriya 守屋 (?-587) and [Taira no] Masakado 將門 (?-940), we respectfully ask that these reliquary towers and *Treasure Chest [Seal] Dhāraṇī* save those executed and guide all beings from this dharma realm.”<sup>46</sup>

As part of Yoritomo's efforts, Chōgen served a central role in ceremonies performed on behalf of the war dead at Tōdaiji. While recasting the Great Buddha, Chōgen added some of the gilt bronze effects of Taira no Shigehira 平重衡 (1158-1185), who set fire to Tōdaiji, to the molten bronze alloy that would be cast into the statue. His notion was that Shigehira's sins would be cleansed by the connection formed between his effects and the Great Buddha. According to the *Tōdaiji zoku yōroku*:

[Shigehira's] wife was ordered to provide items he had personally carried fashioned from gilt bronze. Chōgen showed his compassion by wishing to use these silver and bronze items to cast the great statue. The furnace instantly destroyed [Shigehira's effects], but since they were made of gilt bronze, their essence was not altered. All [the molten material] streamed forth, as [Shigehira's] deep sins were permeated with the Tathāgata's mercy.<sup>47</sup>

Chōgen also inserted more than eighty Buddhist relics in his newly recast statue of the Tōdaiji Great Buddha, along with copies of the *Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī Sutra* and *Lotus Sutra* donated for this purpose by aristocrats and priests at the behest of the retired emperor. One of the purposes of installing these artifacts was the transformation of the Great Buddha from an inert statue into a living Buddha, capable of bestowing his compassion upon sentient beings,

<sup>46</sup> *Kamakura ibun*, no. 937, 10th month of Kenkyū 8 建久八年十月; Yokouchi, p. 566.

<sup>47</sup> Yokouchi, p. 568-569.



in particular those who died on battlefields or were executed during the war.<sup>48</sup>

Upon the installation of the relics, Fujiwara no Kanezane, a patron of the effort to reconstruct Tōdaiji, remarked in his diary that the relics had created a living Buddha of the unbounded benevolence the country sought.<sup>49</sup> Chōgen's vow (*ganmon* 願文) written for the occasion of the eye-opening ceremony of the Great Buddha also makes it clear that Chōgen intended to create a living Buddha who would bestow benevolence and compassion upon everyone. The vow states:

It has been said that when the relics of the living body [of the Buddha] are installed inside the Buddha's<sup>50</sup> womb, they can suddenly luminesce and repeatedly manifest miraculous signs (*reizui* or *ryōzui* 靈瑞).<sup>51</sup> When this [idea] was spread widely to monks and laymen [in Japan], they humbly offered their relics. The emperor, hearing that others [were donating], quickly chose the portion of relics that had been transmitted to the palace, Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺, and Tōji. Exhibiting particular sincerity for this effort, [he] ordered these relics to be donated, too. When the Daigoji abbot and vice-bishop saw these merit-making acts, he quickly decided to cooperate. For 100 days he prayed and made offerings. At that time, in the middle of autumn, on the twenty-third day of the eighth month, when daytime and nighttime are of equal lengths, and

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<sup>48</sup> The practice of performing the 84,000 reliquary pagoda Aśoka ritual and other ceremonies on behalf of the war dead continued through the end of the war. In 1182 at Hosshōji 法勝寺, the Tendai monks Kenshin 顯真 (1131-1192), Tankyō 湛教, and Chikai 智海 performed repentance rituals designed to negate the pernicious effects of ghosts. Later, in 1185, after Taira no Shigehira publicly displayed the decapitated heads of enemy soldiers as a warning to Kyoto, the retired emperor sent a messenger to Kanezane to discuss the performance of an Aśoka pagoda ritual. A couple of weeks later, following the drowning of Emperor Antoku, the juvenile emperor backed by the Taira, Kanezane sent Go-Shirakawa a request to bestow a posthumous name upon Antoku, construct a Buddhist Hall on the Dan no ura 壇ノ浦 memorial ground, and hold a commemorative ceremony (*kuyō* 供養) for Antoku and those who died under his command. During the next month, Kanezane sponsored a commemorative ceremony at the Shōkōmyōin 勝光明院 treasure house of Emperor Toba 鳥羽天皇 (1103-1156), and provided gilded bronze containers, scrolls, and a written vow for use in a ceremonial copying of the *Lotus Sutra*. In addition, Kanezane sent two copies of the *Lotus Sutra* to Tōdaiji, one for a commemorative ceremony honoring his deceased wife, and the other to redeem the war dead (Yokouchi, p. 565-568).

<sup>49</sup> Nakao (2004), p. 54-55.

<sup>50</sup> This last reference to the Buddha refers to a Buddhist statue, but significantly Chōgen only uses the word "Buddha," showing the equivalency that existed between the actual, living Buddha and his reproductions in statuary and other types of images.

<sup>51</sup> This term can also refer to the *udumbara* flower, which only appears every 3,000 years, and symbolizes the Buddha. The flower is mentioned in the *Longer Pure Land Sutra* among other texts.

the earthly branches and heavenly stems are in agreement, we took these relics and secreted them inside the heart [of the Great Buddha]. . . . With our merits serving as our boat, we can sail across the great sea of life and death. Therefore, for the peace and tranquility of this world, so that later generations can reside in favorable conditions and gain the patient acceptance based on awareness of non-arising, [so that they will] abide in the state of non-retrogression, and progress from the conditioned to the non-conditioned, the universal embrace [of the Buddha] will deliver all to salvation. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Soon after installation of the relics, divine powers manifested by the newly reanimated Great Buddha were recorded. According to the *Gyokuyō*, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month of 1186, the year after the eye-opening ceremony, light shone forth from the center of the brows (*byakugō* 白毫) of the Great Buddha as if from a star.<sup>53</sup> On another occasion, the same sort of light was seen emanating in a moving pattern near a lantern in the hall, while on yet another evening light formed a halo about the Great Buddha's face. With these alleged first hand reports, belief in the divine efficacy of the Great Buddha no doubt grew.<sup>54</sup> These records of miraculous phenomenon parallel those witnessed by Chōgen at Ayuwangshan in China.

### Chōgen's Relic Worship for the Common People

In addition to the rites for the repose of dead souls intended for an audience of warrior clans, Chōgen also used reliquaries as a means to bring relic worship to a diverse network of provincial donors, estate managers, and laborers who facilitated the reconstruction of Tōdaiji. This audience formed a cross section of Japanese society ranging from the elite to common people. The names of many of the individuals who formed this network were recorded on lists inserted into statues installed at Tōdaiji subtemples in the provinces of Suō 周防, Settsu 摂津, Harima 播磨, Iga 伊賀, and Bichū 備中, where estates Chōgen managed produced income and materials used for the Tōdaiji reconstruction.

<sup>52</sup> *Sazenshū* (Kobayashi), p. 68-69.

<sup>53</sup> *Gyokuyō*, Vol. 3, p. 247. The white *ūrṇā* curl between the eyebrows of the Buddha is one of the Thirty-Two Marks of the Buddha (*sanjūni sō* 三十二相). In Mahāyāna sutras, light shines forth from the *ūrṇā* curl to illuminate all worlds.

<sup>54</sup> Naitō (2012), p. 159.

Many of the extant lists of these names have yet to be removed from consecrated statues, though a few lists have been studied, including an Amitābha statue sculpted by Kaikei and installed at Kengōin 遣仰院,<sup>55</sup> and a statue of Hachiman in the Guise of a Monk<sup>56</sup> carved by Kaikei in 1201. Such lists tend to privilege donors and high-ranking monks across the Japanese Buddhist community, but also include names that refer to members of the work force on the Tōdaiji estates. For example, documents inserted into an Amitābha statue installed at the Harima subtemple for Tōdaiji contain many names preceded by “Ōbe” 大部, referencing local monks and laymen who contributed to the building of the hall and management of the Ōbe estate in this province.<sup>57</sup>

The Tōdaiji subtemples Chōgen constructed on such estates were relatively large, with fewer pillars separating the bays compared to other temples of the period, affording more space within the structure for large congregations that included estate workers. These subtemples also included bathhouses for Buddhist cleansing rituals for use by common, lay disciples that were separate from those used by monks.<sup>58</sup> Such evidence bespeaks Chōgen’s intention to accommodate a lay audience at his provincial temples.

As discussed previously, Chōgen’s formative experiences using Buddhist relics as a novice monk at Daigoji reinforced the notion of relics as expressions of imperial and aristocratic power. When Chōgen visited Ayuwangshan and experienced both monks and laymen interacting together in ardent worship of the Ayuwang relic, the episode left a deep impression for all its contrast with his previous knowledge of relic worship. After returning to Japan, Chōgen envisioned the prospect for Tōdaiji’s Great Buddha as a national attraction, similar to the devotion accrued at Ayuwangshan. For the elite who resided in the capital region, visiting Tōdaiji to worship the Great Buddha exposed them to the power of the relics installed inside. But what of those in the outlying regions of Japan, who would never witness the completion of the statue in person? In order to instill faith in Tōdaiji’s Great Buddha in the provinces, Chōgen fashioned *gorintō* 五輪塔,<sup>59</sup> or “five-element towers,” that he used as

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<sup>55</sup> See Aoki (1999).

<sup>56</sup> See Chūō kōron bijutsu shuppan, ed. (2003), Vol. 1, p. 248-255.

<sup>57</sup> Rosenfield (2011), p. 228-229

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Chōgen’s affinity for *gorintō* towers was probably a tradition inherited through his lineage of masters at Daigoji and its subtemple, the Enkōin. The monk Gihan 義範 (1023-1088), who was also affiliated with the Enkōin, is known to have used another such *gorintō* tower at a different Daigoji subtemple, the Henchi’in 遍智院. Chōgen’s Daigoji lineage traces backward through Gen’un 源運, Shōken 勝賢

reliquaries to transport additional relics to subtemples of Tōdaiji he constructed across the country.

“Five elements” refers to the five divisions, or “wheels,” that compose the *gorintō*’s structure, and which in turn are indicative of the five elements (*godai* 五大) thought to form all matter in ancient Indian thought. The five elements were earth, water, fire, wind, and space (*kū* 空), each of which constituted a wheel by which the cosmological structure of the world was layered (the lowest being space and the highest, earth). The *gorintō* tower symbolizes these wheels of elements starting with earth as the square base, followed by water as a round sphere, fire as a triangular pyramid, wind as a half-sphere, and space as a “jewel-shaped” sphere on top.<sup>60</sup> Kūkai expanded upon five elements theory by relating each element to an aspect of emptiness: original non-arising (earth), transcending designations (water), freedom from taint (fire), being devoid of primary cause (wind), and formless as space (space). The five elements as aspects of emptiness were intended to portray the world from the perspective of the Buddha’s enlightenment, in which subject-object duality collapses, and all things become enlightened and thus coextensive with the body of the Buddha.<sup>61</sup> In terms of Buddhist statuary, the same idea was expressed through the body of Mahāvairocana (*J. Dai Biroshana* 大毘盧遮那), the deity worshipped as the Tōdaiji Great Buddha. Following this reasoning, Chōgen’s *gorintō* reliquary towers were in fact surrogates for the Great Buddha and its relics.

Chōgen created a number of *gorintō* towers to house relics taken to the provincial subtemples of Tōdaiji, where the relics were ceremonially dedicated. A number of these towers still exist today, including:

- (1) A gilt bronze triangular *gorintō* (now at Jōdoji 浄土寺)
- (2) An iron jeweled tower and crystal triangular *gorintō* (dated 1197, now at Amidaji 阿彌陀寺)
- (3) A gilt bronze triangular *gorintō* (dated 1198, now at Konomiya Shrine 胡宮神社)
- (4) A crystal triangular *gorintō*, now at Shindaibutsuji 新大仏寺)

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(1138-1196), Shōkaku 勝覺, and, finally, to Gihan, supporting the conclusion that Chōgen’s preference for *gorintō* originated with his predecessor (Naitō 2006, p. 33).

<sup>60</sup> Naitō (2006), p. 32. The *gorintō* design can also be seen in Japanese tombstones, though this is a modern development.

<sup>61</sup> Abé (1999), p. 281. For a more in-depth account of the function of the Five Elements within esoteric doctrine, see Abé, p. 281-288.

Chōgen's *gorintō* could either be inner or outer receptacles and were fashioned from a variety of materials. Outer receptacles were typically made of durable metal, while inner receptacles could be made of more fragile materials such as crystal. *Gorintō* (1) and (3) are outer receptacles that each contain crystal jewel-shaped inner receptacles that house relics. (2) is a crystal tower that houses relics and was itself contained within a larger, jeweled iron tower. (4) is also thought to have been placed within a larger outer receptacle, since the tower is similar to (2).<sup>62</sup>

In the *Sazenshū*, Chōgen also lists several other *gorintō* created for installation at his *bessho* and as recompense for important patrons. Unfortunately, none of these are extant:

- (5) A crystal *gorintō* for the Tōdaiji Sonshōin 尊勝院
- (6) A gilt bronze *gorintō* for Tōdaiji<sup>63</sup>
- (7) A bronze *gorintō* and crystal tower for the three-story pagoda at the Kōyasan subtemple
- (8) A bronze *gorintō* for the Watanabe subtemple
- (9) A stone *gorintō* presented to Fujiwara no Kanazane<sup>64</sup>

By installing the above *gorintō* at Tōdaiji provincial subtemples, Chōgen hoped to bring the power of the Great Buddha – symbolized through the five wheels of the *gorintō* and generated by the relics stored inside – to the mix of provincial donors, estate managers, and laborers who made the reconstruction of Tōdaiji possible. Particularly for workers who toiled on the estates, Buddhist relic worship would have seemed a foreign concept. Chōgen therefore used his mobile reliquaries to educate his provincial audience about the power of his relics. He was particularly sensitive that proper devotion be observed. In an accompanying donation letter for the reliquary dedicated to Konomiya Shrine, Chōgen writes:

These are actual relics of the Buddha, which cannot be doubted. If false rumors [about them] spread, there will certainly be those who succumb to the sin of speaking untruthfully (*mōgozai* 妄語罪). We should be observant beforehand. It is important that [if this situation arises, it] be understood

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<sup>62</sup> Naitō (2012), p. 159.

<sup>63</sup> This *gorintō* was destroyed by fire in 1567, but the relics were saved and placed in a newly fashioned gilt bronze lotus pedestal shaped reliquary. Later in 1586, a gilt bronze *gorintō* outer receptacle was created for the relic to match the original receptacle.

<sup>64</sup> Naitō (2012), p. 159-160.

quickly, because [in that case] an offering of reverence and worship should be performed. . . .<sup>65</sup>

Chōgen clearly expected that relic worship would take time for common devotees to comprehend, and prepared his assistants to deal with skepticism before the relics would be treated with the sort of popular adulation Chōgen witnessed at Ayuwangshan.

## Conclusion

Chōgen's formative experiences using Buddhist relics at Daigoji reinforced the link between relics and expressions of imperial and aristocratic power, but his voyage to Ayuwangshan in China, where he watched laypersons ardently worship the Ayuwang relic, made him aware of the potential of relic worship for the ordinary Buddhist faithful. Upon returning to Japan, though Chōgen presided over rites for the repose of dead souls of the Taira clan at Tōdaiji, rites based on the Aśoka precedent and intended for an elite audience, he also made special efforts to encourage relic worship at the popular level. Targeting provincials who would never worship his recast Great Buddha in person, Chōgen elected to bring Buddhist relics to them, installing multiple mobile reliquaries at Tōdaiji subtemples he built in the provinces, and demanding a strict code of veneration.

Heian Period relic worship was monopolized by the imperial family and aristocrats in Japan, forming a kind of religious currency inaccessible to the masses for centuries. Chōgen's experience in China motivated him to become perhaps the first Japanese monk to fulfill the legendary intentions of King Aśoka to distribute Buddhist relics for the benefit of all.

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.

## Bibliography

### Abbreviations

- T            *Taishō shinshu daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡邊海旭, et al. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1914-1922.

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