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THE RITUAL OF ARHAT INVITATION  
DURING THE SONG DYNASTY:

WHY DID MAHĀYĀNISTS VENERATE THE ARHAT?<sup>1</sup>

RYAN BONGSEOK JOO

## Introduction

At first glance, it seems odd that Chinese Buddhists have venerated arhats. Given that the Mahāyāna doctrine vehemently rejects the arhat ideal in favor of the bodhisattva path, it appears contradictory that Chinese who follow the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism have worshipped arhats.<sup>2</sup> The painting<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 1] shows an

<sup>1</sup> An early version of this essay was presented at the Five College Buddhist Studies Faculty Seminar in Smith College, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008. I would like to thank Peter Gregory, Jamie Hubbard, Jay Garfield, Marilyn Rhie, Young Rhie, Susanne Mrozik and Maria Heim for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the *Lotus Sūtra*, one of the best-known Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures in China, claims that the arhat is no longer an arhat unless he heeds to the teaching that the arhat is on his way to becoming the bodhisattva. Chapter two of the *Lotus Sūtra* states, “Śāriputra, if any of my disciples should claim to be an arhat or a pratyekabuddha and yet does not heed or understand that the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the bodhisattvas, then he is no disciple of mine, he is no arhat or pratyekabuddha. Again, Śāriputra, if there should be monks or nuns who claim that they have already attained the status of arhat, that this is their last incarnation, that they have reached the final *nirvāṇa*, and that therefore they have no further intention of seeking *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, then you should understand that such these are all persons of overbearing arrogance.” See Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sūtra* (New York: Columbia University Press 1993), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Gregory P.A. Levine and University of Washington Press for granting me permission to use this image.

example for such arhat worship, portraying what appears to be a scene of what I will refer to as, in a generic term, “the ritual of arhat invitation.”<sup>4</sup>

The painting depicts a Buddhist monk standing in front of an altar with a portable incense burner in his hands and gazing at the descent of arhats in clouds. Two literati, probably brothers and the sponsors of the ritual, are bowing down behind the monk while their wives are folding their hands respectfully, joining the rite of veneration.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, four servants in the back are busy setting up food offerings in front of arhat portraits hung on the wall. This scene of arhat invitation appears to be a private family function carried out inside the pavilion of a donor’s home adjacent to his garden. The painting is part of the Five Hundred Arhat paintings from Daitokuji 大徳寺 in Kyoto, which were originally produced in China during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279).<sup>6</sup>

Readers familiar with early Indian Buddhist doctrine may be perplexed at seeing that people have ritually invited arhats for worship, who, by definition, have attained *nirvāṇa* and, therefore, would not return to the world of *saṃsāra*. However, this practice has a canonical basis, offering a rather reasonable explanation for engaging in such a seemingly counter-intuitive practice. According to *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma, Narrated by the Great Arhat Nandimitra*, the Buddha, upon entering *parinirvāṇa*, entrusted his Dharma to the Sixteen Great Arhat disciples and their

See Gregory P.A. Levine, *Daitokuji: the Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery* (Seattle: University of Washington 2005), p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> The ritual was known by several Chinese names, including *Luohan qing* 羅漢請 (Invitation of Arhats), *Luohan zhai* 羅漢齋 (Feast of Arhats) and *Luohan gong* 羅漢供 (Offering to Arhats). For my purposes, I will refer to all these forms with the generic term, “ritual of arhat invitation.”

<sup>5</sup> The lady on the right is looking at her baby held by her baby-sitter.

<sup>6</sup> For the study of the Daitokuji set from an art historian’s perspective, see Wen Fong, *Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji* (Princeton University, Ph.D. diss. 1956).



[Fig. 1] Zhou Jichang, Li Tinggui. One scroll from the *Five Hundred Arhats*, Southern Song Dynasty, ca. 1178. Hanging scroll. Ink and color on silk. Daitokuji.



retinues and ordered them to prolong their lifespan and stay in the world of *samsāra* through their supramundane power.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the Sixteen Arhats and their retinues became deputies during the Buddha's absence, undertaking the duties of protecting the Dharma and becoming the field of merit for a donor.<sup>8</sup>

This legend of the living Sixteen Arhats and their retinues was transmitted to China in the seventh century when the famous pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664) translated this scripture in the capital, Chang'an 長安.<sup>9</sup> However, the actual cultic movement based on the Sixteen Arhats started much later, in the tenth century, when

<sup>7</sup> See *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma, Narrated by the Great Arhat Nandimitra* (Skt. *Nandimitrāvadāna*; Ch. *Da aluohan Nantimiduoluo suoshuo fazhu ji*, 大阿羅漢 難提蜜多羅所說法住記), trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664), *T. no. 2030*, 49: 12c–14c.

<sup>8</sup> For the study of *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma*, see Jen Lang Shih, *The Perpetuity of the Dharma* (University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. diss. 2002); Sylvain Lévi, and Édouard Chavannes. “Les seize arhat protecteurs de la Loi,” *Journal Asiatique* 8 (1916) 206–224; John Strong “The Legend of the Lion-Roarer: A Study of the Buddhist Arhat Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja,” *Numen* 26 (1979), pp. 51–55; Bong Seok Joo, *The Arhat Cult in China from the Seventh through Thirteenth Centuries: Narrative, Art, Space and Ritual* (Princeton University, Princeton, Ph.D. diss. 2007), pp. 49–63.

<sup>9</sup> Some doubts have arisen as to whether *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma* was actually translated by Xuanzang since there is no extant Sanskrit original text. However, Xuanzang is consistently listed as the author of *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma* in early Chinese catalogs of the Buddhist canon such as *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 and *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄. Given that *Da Tang neidian lu* was compiled in 664 by Xuanzang's contemporary Daoxuan, and the alleged year of translation of the text was only ten years earlier than the compilation of *Da Tang neidian lu*, I think this is strong evidence that it was most likely translated by Xuanzang. In addition, there are also Tibetan and Khotanese versions of the *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma*, which suggest that the text was probably authored outside China. See *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄, Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), *T. no. 2149*, 55: 325c; *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, Zhisheng 智昇 (fl. 730), *T. no. 2154*, 55: 557b. John Strong also discusses this issue in his article. See Strong, “The Legend of the Lion-Roarer” (cf. n. 8), p. 53.



the arhat motif image and arhat hall were established and widely accepted as independent genres in Chinese Buddhist art and temple architecture.<sup>10</sup> As for the ritual of arhat invitation, it was only in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) that the ritual became known throughout China and gained popularity among lay followers.<sup>11</sup>

In this essay, I am interested in exploring the following questions regarding the ritual of arhat invitation and veneration practices in China. First, how were the Song Dynasty Chinese able to overcome, reconcile or ignore the negative portrayal of the arhat depicted in Mahāyāna polemical texts while venerating the arhat in the ritual? In other words, who was the arhat for Chinese Buddhists *vis-à-vis* the canonical definitions of the arhat? Second, how was the ritual of arhat invitation carried out? Who participated in the ritual, and how long did it last? What kind of images, material offerings and ritual instruments were involved? What was the atmosphere like? Third, which individuals and groups sponsored the ritual, and why? Did Chinese Buddhist ever imagine that the arhat

<sup>10</sup> See Bong Seok Joo, *The Arhat Cult* (cf. n. 8), pp. 67–110, 231–290.

<sup>11</sup> There is one exception to this claim. Although it was limited mostly to the monastic community in China, the cult of Piṇḍola as an independent tradition was already developed as early as the fourth century. According to the hagiography of Dao'an 道安 (312–385), the ritual of inviting the holy monks to bathe was taught to Dao'an by a strange-looking monastic guest who visited Dao'an's monastery in the year 385. After finding that this monk had the supramundane ability to pass in and out of the hall through a small hole in a window, Dao'an asked why he came to see him. The monk's answer was that he came to accompany Dao'an to Tuṣita Heaven where Maitreya Bodhisattva resides. However, in order to be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven, the monk mentioned one condition: Dao'an must invite the holy monks to bathe. Following the guest monk's instruction, Dao'an performed this ritual of inviting the holy monks and saw the appearance of an unusual child (*feichang xiao'er* 非常小兒) and his company entering into the bath. In the same hagiography, there is also an episode about the appearance of Piṇḍola in Dao'an's dream. Dao'an saw Piṇḍola in his dream, who asked Dao'an to offer foods for him. In exchange, Piṇḍola promised to help Dao'an spread the Dharma. See *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554), *T.* no. 2059, 50: 353b17–c9.

is specialized in solving certain kinds of human predicament or suffering? Fourth, in light of recent scholarship on Buddhist ritual by Robert Sharf – particularly his idea of ritual as “adult play” and “Buddhist *darśan*” – what does the ritual of arhat invitation tell us about Mahāyāna Buddhist ritual in general?<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the visual material, there are largely three types of literary sources available for the study of the arhat invitation ritual in China: an indigenous liturgical text by a scholar-officer, Huang Shang 黃裳 (1044–1130), an eye-witnessed account of the ritual performance recorded in the diary of Japanese monastic pilgrim Jōjin 成尋 (1011–1081), and several short Song Dynasty literati writings on the ritual of arhat invitation including a letter of a famous scholar-officer and writer, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101). I will examine these sources one by one while providing a translation of these texts.

### The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats

*The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* (*Qing Luohan zanwen* 請羅漢讚文) is a rare extra-canonical liturgical text composed specifically for the ritual of arhat invitation in China. The text is valuable since it is the earliest extant liturgical text of its kind.<sup>13</sup> The author of *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* was Huang Shang 黃裳 (1044–1130), a high-ranking official from the present-day city of Nanping 南平 in Fujian 福建 province.<sup>14</sup> After passing the highest imperial exami-

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Sharf, “Ritual” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005), pp. 245–270.

<sup>13</sup> There is a fifth century canonical text called *The Method of Inviting Piṇḍola* (Ch. *Qing Bintoulu fa*, 請賓頭盧法), translated by Huijian 慧簡 (fl. 457). However, this text concerns only Piṇḍola and not the entire Sixteen Arhats and their retinues. In addition, the language in the text is narrative, not liturgical. For the translation of *The Method of Inviting Piṇḍola*, see Bong Seok Joo, *The Arhat Cult* (cf. n. 8), pp. 294–300.

<sup>14</sup> In the biography of Huang Shang, his place of origin is listed as Yanping 延平, which is the old name of the city of Nanping. It also says that Huang

nation (*jinsshi* 進士) in the year 1082, Huang Shang served for much of his career in the Department of Rites (*Libu* 禮部). His work at the court was later recognized by the emperor, who granted Huang Shang the honorable title of *Shaofu* 少傅 upon his death.<sup>15</sup> He also left many poems and essays, which were compiled together in sixty volumes titled *The Collection of Yanshan* (Ch. *Yanshan ji* 演山集).<sup>16</sup> The subject of our study, *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats*, is also included in this book.

Given that the eulogy is too lengthy to include the entire text here, I will limit my translation to the parts that are most relevant to the discussion that follows. The text states:

Kings, ministers, elders and lay Buddhists should set up a joyful ritual offering and arouse their utmost sincere heart. Then, the honorable ones along with their retinues will take part in the seats of the five offerings (*wushi* 五施).<sup>17</sup> This [holy] crowd will surreptitiously exercise the virtue of the six supramundane powers (*liutong* 六通) simultaneously,<sup>18</sup> receive offerings from all fields and reveal their

Shang liked Daoist (Ch. *Daojia* 道家) and mysterious (Ch. *Xuanmi* 玄秘) books. See Bide Chang 昌彼得 *et al.*, ed., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 宋人傳記資料索引 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju 1974–6), vol. 4, pp. 2866–2867.

<sup>15</sup> The title *Shaofu* 少傅 is one of the *Sangu* 三孤 titles, which include *Shaoshi* 少師 and *Shaobao* 少保. The *Sangu* titles were considered one step below the *Sangong* 三公 titles consisting of *Taishi* 太師, *Taifu* 太傅 and *Taibao* 太保.

<sup>16</sup> See Huang Shang 黃裳 (1044–1130), *Yanshan ji* 演山集券, j. 1–60, *Siku quanshu*, Wenyuange *Sikuquanshu dianziban* (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998). For the collection of Huang Shang's writings in modern editions, see Chen Huifen 陈惠芬, ed., *Huang Shang sanwen xuanji* 黃裳散文選集 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe 1997); Jiang Deming 姜德明, ed., *Huang Shang shu hua* 黃裳書話 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 1996).

<sup>17</sup> The five offerings consist of unguent, chaplet, incense, food, and lamp.

<sup>18</sup> The six supramundane powers (*liutong* 六通) refer to the powers of divine vision, divine hearing, knowing people's mind, remembering people's previous lives, unimpeded bodily action and the extinction of all defilements. See Mochizuki Shinkō, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten*, (Tokyo: Sekai Seiten

form again and again. How could such results not be obtained [if there is] utmost sincerity?

Therefore, the magnificent offerings [for arhats] were prepared in the Jambūdvīpa, the great Song (宋), the great China (*mohezhinaguo* 摩訶支那國)<sup>19</sup> in such and such (*mou* 某)<sup>20</sup> province (*zhou* 州) of such and such (*mou* 某) village (*fang* 坊) [by] such and such (*mou* 某) disciple. Arhats enter into *samsāra* and work inside the burning house. It is never the case that their power of liberation (*jietuoli* 解脫力) is insufficient in aiding sentient beings in the ocean of suffering. Nor is it the case that arhats are deficient in benevolence to guide sentient beings away from the path of confusion. [Therefore,] I now set up the seat of the bountiful Dharma assembly and respectfully uphold the order of the Buddha. For the last forty-nine years, the *samādhi* was difficult to pursue. [However,] the Sixteen Arhats have constantly existed. Great sincerity will surely bring a response (*zhicheng kegan* 至誠可感), just like the sound of an echo within a deep valley. The response of the virtuous one is like having the image of the moon on a clear river. [We] wish that [the arhats] have pity on us and hope to have their honorable visitation. [Now,] the great assembly chants in one voice and respectfully carries out the rite of invitation.

With one heart (*yixin* 一心), [we] reverently invite (*fengqing* 奉請) the first great arhat, Piṇḍolabhāradvāja, from the Aparagodānīya continent in the west, and his one thousand arhat retinues. [We] wholeheartedly wish to receive their boundless [holy] assembly. Have pity on sentient beings and come to this Dharma hall. In the Aparagodānīya continent in the west, the self-awakened ones already set themselves free from all outflows (*wulou* 無漏). In the Central Land (*zhongtu* 中土),<sup>21</sup> even more karmic affinity (with the arhats) has been established as we welcome them. Who gets to be the foremost in spiritual cultivation and

Kankō Kyōkai 1955–63), p. 5060.

<sup>19</sup> *Zhina* 支那 was the ancient name of China used by people in India and Central Asia.

<sup>20</sup> On the meaning of the character 某, see below p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> The Central Land (*zhongtu* 中土) refers to China.

benefit this world? Among the sixteen of honorary rank, [Piṅḍola] should be the first.

...With one heart, [we] reverently invite the fourth great arhat, Subinda, from the Uttarkuru continent in the north, and his one thousand arhat retainers. [We] wholeheartedly wish to receive their boundless [holy] assembly. Have pity on sentient beings and come to this Dharma hall. In a trance-like state, [Subinda] suddenly hears the sound of calling from the Central Land. Being leisurely and carefree, [Subinda] peacefully stays in the cloud of the northern continent. Flowers and flags are waving inside the spacious Dharma hall. [One] should believe that in the midst of ordinary people, there are holy ones.

The honorable ones rest their bodies in the tenth *bhūmi* (*shidi* 十地)<sup>22</sup> and their virtue appears in three luminous lights. Some [of them] hide their light when encountering sentient beings. Some reveal their form in empty space. Some breathe wind and cloud in and out [while] some ride on dragons and tigers. [As they] respond with the eight methods of liberation (*bajie* 八解),<sup>23</sup> ten thousand spirits (*wanling* 萬靈) look at them with awe.

<sup>22</sup> The tenth *bhūmi* (*shiti* 十地) refers to the last stage in the development of a bodhisattva into a Buddha. There are several ways to define the ten stages including the ten stages of Mahāyāna bodhisattva development (*Dasheng pusa shidi* 大乘菩薩十地), the ten *śrāvaka* stages (*Shengwensheng shidi* 聲聞乘十地) and the ten stages of the pratyekabuddha (*Yuanjuesheng shidi* 緣覺乘十地). The most well-known ten stages development in China was that of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva, originating from the *Flower Garland Sūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經, Skt. *Avataṃsakasūtra*). The tenth *bhūmi* in the development of a bodhisattva into a Buddha is named “the stage of Dharma Cloud” (Skt. *Dharmamegha*, Ch. *fayun di* 法雲地). The person in this last stage is equipped with countless merits and wisdom and can “rain” the Buddha’s Dharma to all sentient beings. For more information on the tenth *bhūmi*, see Mochizuki Shinkō, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten* (cf. n. 18), pp. 2297–2303.

<sup>23</sup> The eight methods of liberation (*bajie* 八解) consist of (1) liberation through the realization of filthiness in objects as desire arises within, (2) liberation through meditating on filthiness in objects when no desire arises, (3) liberation through the realization of a permanent state of freedom from all desire, (4) liberation through the realization of the infinity of space, (5) liberation through the realization of infinite knowledge, (6) liberation through

...With one heart, [we] reverently invite the seventh great arhat, Kālīka, from the Saṃghaṭadvīpa continent, and his one thousand arhat retinues. [We] wholeheartedly wish to receive their boundless [holy] assembly. Have pity on sentient beings and come to this Dharma hall. Would the arhat respond only to affairs leading up to the achievement of Buddhahood? [He] still composes poetry together with [Daoist] immortals and has patience not to pass into *nirvāṇa*. [Kālīka] rushes into the ocean of suffering only because of sentient beings.

Honorable ones! Some [of you] have serene and exotic appearances while some have extraordinary and wonderful characters. Some [of you] enjoy drifting and floating in the air while some [of you] are wholly engrossed in [the act of] contemplation. Your mind (*xin* 心) has both fullness and emptiness, and your nature (*xing* 性) does not have inner and outer differentiation. [You] ride on clouds and cranes and leave the otherworldly home of tranquility. [You] cross over moon and cloud to receive the magnificent offerings from this world. Honorable ones, please let [your] vessel of Dharma (*faqi* 法器)<sup>24</sup> accept these offerings and let the light of [your] mind enlighten us. If there is sincerity, there must be resonance. If there was no seeking, neither would there be any response. Please withdraw from [your] *samādhi* temporarily and grant [us] swiftly the dignified vision [of yourself]! Please come to [this place of] twinkling lights soon and become the merit field of sentient beings. It is all because the arhats are compassionate and sympathetic. Indeed, it is because they are compassionate and sympathetic.

...[Our] admiration to the honorable Sixteen Ones, their retinues and others! Those [of you] who reside in different continents (*zhou* 州) have the view of water and moon. Those [of you] who are entrusted with mountains (*shan* 山) have the comfort of spring water and rock.

the realization of nothingness or nowhere-ness, (7) liberation through having neither thought nor absence of thought, (8) liberation through attaining the state of *nirvāṇa*. See Mochizuki Shinkō, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten* (cf. n. 18), pp. 4206–7; Charles Muller, ed., *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/> accessed April 28, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> In this context, I think the vessel of Dharma (*faqi* 法器) is a metaphoric way of denoting the arhat's body.

Those living in the country (*guo* 國) become fellow friends with human beings [while] those living in heaven (*tian* 天) become partners with the immortals (*xian* 仙). Although their names are different, they are equal in regards to [having] the [same] virtue (*de* 德). Although their abodes are varying, they are united with the [same] heart. Therefore, they abide by the Tathāgata's entrustment and disseminate [his Dharma] throughout the world. Their cultivation of the Way is all for the purpose of clarifying the view of the unborn (*wusheng* 無生), riding on the wheel of the non-returner (*butui* 不退), being awakened suddenly to the three levels of emptiness (*sankong* 三空),<sup>25</sup> quickly moving beyond the tenth *bhūmi* (*shidi* 十地), opening the latch of the door to emptiness and freeing the block on the road to awakening. Their acceptance of our offerings is all for the purpose of unlocking the door of expedient means (*fangbian* 方便), establishing the hall of compassion, providing the essence of one hundred Dharma (*baifa* 百法), guiding their sentient beings and creating the karmic affinity [lasting] three periods (*sanshi* 三世).<sup>26</sup> [We] beseech you to descend to this world. Today is even more special, [given that we have] prepared a dignified assembly and conveyed our reverent sincerity. The [ritual] implements and material [donations] compete in color while incense and flowers vie for their scent. We beseech the honorable ones along with all Buddhas, bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, and others in the universe to visit us. [Please] come neither too quickly nor too slowly. Regardless of distance or nearness, once the six bands of the staff have made their sound, [the arhats] leave the pavilions in the mountains and oceans. With one breath, [the arhats make] clouds and depart the grotto palaces (*dongfu* 洞府) under cliffs. [We] dutifully welcome you

<sup>25</sup> The three levels of emptiness (*sankong* 三空) imply emptiness of oneself (*wogong* 我空), emptiness of dharma (*fakong* 法空) and emptiness of emptiness (*kongkong* 空空). The last, emptiness of emptiness, is sometimes replaced by emptiness of all phenomena (*jukong* 俱空). See Mochizuki Shinkō, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten* (cf. n. 18), p. 1486.

<sup>26</sup> The three periods (*sanshi* 三世; Skt. *traiyadhvika*) refer to past, present and future. See Mochizuki Shinkō, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten* (cf. n. 18), pp. 1592–4.



all without making distinction. [Please] have pity on sentient beings, come to this Dharma hall and receive these offerings.<sup>27</sup>

*The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* reveals that the author, Huang Shang, was an erudite scholar-officer who had great interest in the Buddhist tradition. He had obviously read *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma*, having matched all Sixteen Arhats' names in Chinese characters and sharing a similar narrative about how the Sixteen Arhats became the field of merit during the Buddha's absence.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the text shows that Huang Shang understood much technical Buddhist terminology such as the tenth *bhūmi* (*shidi* 十地), the eight methods of liberation (*bajie* 八解), the six supramundane powers (*liutong* 六通) and the five offerings (*wushi* 五施). On the other hand, although it was not unusual for Buddhist clergy to ask prominent literati to write commemorative writings for Buddhist architecture during the Song Dynasty, it is noteworthy that the task of writing a liturgical text was also taken up by a literatus instead of a Buddhist priest.<sup>29</sup> I suspect that this might have had more to do with the fact that Huang Shang worked for the Department of Rites (*Libu* 禮部). Although the text does not mention why Huang Shang composed this eulogy, it nevertheless reveals that this text was not composed just for the ritual performance of his family. Instead, it was intended for much wider usage. For example, in the introduc-

<sup>27</sup> See Huang Shang 黃裳 (1044–1130), *Yanshan jijuan* 演山集券, j. 36, pp. 1a–8b, *Siku quanshu*, Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

<sup>28</sup> *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* also mentions the Chinese title of *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma* with a slight variation, as *The Sūtra of the Perpetuity of the Dharma* (*fazhu jing* 法住經). *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma* is the only Buddhist scripture in Chinese recording the names of the Sixteen Arhats and their residences.

<sup>29</sup> For an examination of the Song Dynasty literati's commemorative writings on Buddhist architectures, see Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006).

tory part, the character *mou* 某 meaning “such and such” appears three times.

...the magnificent offerings (for arhats) were set up in the Jambūdvīpa, the great Song (宋), the great China (*mohezhinaguo* 摩訶支那國) in such and such (*mou* 某) province (*zhou* 州) of such and such (*mou* 某) village (*fang* 坊) [by] such and such (*mou* 某) disciple.

The character *mou* 某 is supposed to be replaced by the names of the province, village and person specific to each ritual performance. This suggests that the author intended that this text be used by many different people carrying out the ritual of arhat invitation. Unfortunately, since there is no independent Song Dynasty record of this text, it is almost impossible to know how widely *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* was circulated and used for actual ritual service.

The language in this text is descriptive and beseeching, all at the same time. The descriptive part reveals that the identity and behavior patterns of the arhat are quite similar to those of the bodhisattva and the Daoist immortal (*xian* 仙). According to Huang Shang, the Sixteen Arhats and their retinues are “compassionate and sympathetic” beings who can unlock “the door of expedient means” to aid “sentient beings in the ocean of suffering.” Like the bodhisattvas, they respond to many people’s requests simultaneously while remaining in “the tenth *bhūmi*.” These descriptions suggest that Huang Shang saw virtually no difference between the arhat and the bodhisattva.

Similarly, arhats are also depicted not only as friends of Daoist immortals but also as sharing some of their characteristics. For instance, some arhats and their retinues are described as “partners with immortals” while engaging in leisurely activity of “composing poetry” together. Like Daoist immortals, arhats can ride on clouds and cranes and know how to control dragons. Some arhats live in “a grotto heaven,” which is also one of the places of residence for immortals.<sup>30</sup> Notably, many of these descriptions of the arhat are

<sup>30</sup> For a study of Daoist grotto heavens, see Franciscus Verellen, “The Be-

consistent with Song Dynasty arhat images.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that Huang Shang's vision of the arhats was not unique but shared by many of his contemporary Chinese.

Another characteristic of the language is its beseeching tone. Sometimes, the text is addressed directly to the arhats, proving for certain that the text was written for the ritual performance. For example, the following paragraph was quoted sixteen times whenever a new arhat was introduced and called upon.

With one heart (*yixin* 一心), [we] reverently invite (*fengqing* 奉請) the first great arhat, Piṅḍolabhāradvāja from the Aparagodānīya continent in west, and his one thousand arhat retinues. [We] wholeheartedly wish to receive their boundless [holy] assembly. Have pity on sentient beings and come to this Dharma hall.

What is interesting about this way of addressing the arhat is that behind the highly reverential language, the author is also asking the arhat to behave in a certain way. Another example is:

Honorable ones! Some [of you] have serene and exotic appearances while some have extraordinary and wonderful characters. Some [of you] enjoy drifting and floating in the air while some [of you] are wholly engrossed in observation; ... Please refrain from [your] *samādhi* temporarily and grant [us] swiftly the dignified appearance [of yourself]! Please come to [this place of] twinkling lights soon and become the merit field of sentient beings.

Here, the author first praises the appearance and ability of the arhat. Then, the tone of its voice shifts and the author asks the arhats directly but politely to leave their meditation temporarily to act as the field of merit, as they have promised to the Buddha.

In his study of early Japanese death ritual poetry, Gary L. Ebersole also notices the power of ritual language and quotes a section from

yond Within: Grotto-heavens (dongtian 洞天) in Taoist Ritual and Cosmology," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995), pp. 265–290.

<sup>31</sup> The arhat images were represented to resemble Chan masters, immortals, literati and recluses. See Bong Seok Joo, *The Arhat Cult* (cf. n. 8), pp. 136–158.

the Japanese preface to the *Kokinshū*: “it is poetry which, without effort, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of the invisible gods and spirits, smoothes the relations of men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors.”<sup>32</sup> Ebersole then adds that the ritual poem frequently acts as “a linguistic means of manipulating religio-political power in the human sphere as well as of manipulating the spiritual powers including the *kami* and the spirits of the dead.”<sup>33</sup> In my analysis, the polite and reverential language in *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* ultimately serves similar functions. The language was meant to “stir the feelings of the invisible” arhats and to manipulate their “spiritual powers.” For example, by repeatedly calling them “compassionate” and “sympathetic,” Huang Shang, or anyone who recites this text aloud in a ritual setting, is, in a way, compelling arhats to show their compassion and sympathy. In other words, the ritual language in *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* is not merely describing who the arhats are. Rather, it is a tool used by the author to orchestrate the entire ritual process.

The text gives only a general description of the ritual performance. In its closing words, it briefly mentions the presence of ritual implements, incense and flowers inside the hall where the ritual is carried out. However, it repeatedly emphasizes one prerequisite for the ritual performance: in order to succeed in inviting the Sixteen Arhats, participants must be very sincere. Huang Shang wrote, “Great sincerity will surely bring a response (*zhicheng kegan* 至誠可感), just like the sound of an echo within a deep valley.” This belief about great sincerity bringing a response or resonance is a fundamental belief underlying *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats*. If the result of the ritual were successful, the author would say that it was because the arhats responded to people’s sincerity.

Interestingly, this particular language of sincerity and resonance originated from an indigenous tradition dating back to the time of

<sup>32</sup> See Gary Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the Han 漢 Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).<sup>34</sup> According to *The Book of Documents* (*Shu jing* 書經), “great sincerity [can] move gods” (*zhicheng ganshen* 至誠感神).<sup>35</sup> In the “Great Treatise” chapter of *The Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經), it also says, “when stimulated (*gan* 感) it penetrates (*tong* 通).”<sup>36</sup> However, this does not mean that Buddhist tradition did not value sincerity when evoking deity’s presence. In fact, according to *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma*, before setting up offerings for the monks of four directions, one’s “sincere and pure mind” has to be present first.<sup>37</sup> Another scriptural text called, *The Method of Inviting Piṇḍola* also mentions that if one wants to obtain the presence of Piṇḍola, one should prepare various offerings and “believe with great sincerity” that Piṇḍola will come to the offering.<sup>38</sup> What this exemplifies is a case of pre-Buddhist Chinese ideology conforming well to Indian inheritance, or vice versa.

<sup>34</sup> Another similar expression in Chinese is *ganyin* 感應, translated as “sympathetic resonance.” For a more extensive discussion of *ganyin*, see Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2002), pp. 82–88.

<sup>35</sup> See *Shu jing* 書經 in *Shisan jing zhusu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1979), vol. 4, p. 25b.

<sup>36</sup> For the complete translation and study of the Great Treatise chapter (*Da zhuan* or *Xi cizhuan*) see Gerald Swanson, “The Great Treatise: Commentary Tradition of the Book of Change” (University of Washington, Ph.D. diss. 1974). Also see John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 1997) p. 101; Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: the Chinese transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, (New York: Columbia University Press 2001) p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> See *A Record of the Perpetuity of the Dharma, Narrated by the Great Arhat Nandimitra* (Skt. *Nandimitrāvadāna*; Ch. *Da aluohan Nantimido Luo suoshuo fazhu ji*, 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記), trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664), *T.* no. 2030, 49:13b. Also see Jen Lang Shih’s translation *The Perpetuity of the Dharma* (cf. n. 8), p. 213.

<sup>38</sup> *Qing bintoulu fa*, 請賓頭盧法 trans. Huijian 慧簡 (fl.457), *T.* no. 1689, 32: 784c.

### The ritual of arhat invitation in the diary of Jōjin

After visiting the Tiantai Mountains (Tiantaishan 天台山), the Japanese monastic pilgrim Jōjin 成尋 (1011–1081) headed out to Kaifeng 開封, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, in the year 1072. According to his diary, Jōjin had an opportunity to witness the ritual of arhat invitation offering in one of the major temples in Kaifeng, *Dapingxingguo* monastery (Dapingxingguosi 大平興國寺). It is noteworthy that the ritual was performed in the capital city, evidence of the growing popularity of this ritual beyond Zhejiang and nearby provinces where the cult of arhats had been most popular in the previous century. The ritual service was performed at the beginning of winter, the thirtieth day of the tenth lunar month. Jōjin's diary record states:

On the thirtieth day, the weather was clear; ... Around noon (Jp. *umadoki*, Ch. *wushi* 午時), [the ritual of] arhat offering (Jp. *Rakan kyō*, Ch. *Luohan gong* 羅漢供) [began]. The lecture hall was decorated, with spread canopy and hanging needle-sewn images (Jp. *nuimono*, Ch. *fengwu* 縫物) of the Sixteen Arhats and one image of Sizhou 泗州 master.<sup>39</sup> Each one was about two *chi* 尺 wide and four *chi* tall.<sup>40</sup> In front of the seats [of the images], there were offerings made of gold and silver, flowers, etc. In front of those [offerings], the sweet body of golden dancing (Jp. *Gigaku*, Ch. *Jile* 伎樂) bodhisattvas stood.<sup>41</sup> Their height was about two *chi*. In front of those [bodhisattvas], there was the food offering of one hundred different flavors followed by the offering of burning incense. Cymbals (Jp. *batsu*, Ch. *bo* 鈸) were struck four

<sup>39</sup> Sizhou 泗州 master refers to the eminent Buddhist monk named Sengjia 僧伽 (fl. 1016) who was known as one of the Five Hundred Arhats. Sizhou refers to the area in Anhui 安徽 province where Sengjia master used to stay.

<sup>40</sup> One *chi* 尺 is about 33 centimeters. Thus, two *chi* is about 66 centimeters long while four *chi* is about 132 centimeters long.

<sup>41</sup> It is not clear what the sweet body of golden dancing (Jp. *Gigaku* Ch. *Jile* 伎樂) bodhisattvas is. Given that it is only 66 centimeters tall, it cannot be real people dressed like bodhisattvas. My educated guess would be that it is the image of a dancer or musician made of either gold-colored paper or sweet material such as sugar.

times, a small drum (Jp. *ko*, Ch. *gu* 鼓) once and a hand bell (Jp. *nyō*, Ch. *nao* 鐃) once and a wooden percussion (Jp. *hōtan*, Ch. *fadan* 法蛋) once. The sound of praise filled the entire room. Next, incense was lighted in all halls [within the monastery] and [people] chanted praise. Next, [the assembly of the ritual participants] moved toward the living quarters while holding the Buddha image (Jp. *jibutzu*, Ch. *chifo* 持佛). [The assembly] first went to the associate abbot's room (Jp. *Shōkei bō*, Ch. *Shaoqing fang* 少卿房). [He] donated one roll of silk to the Buddha. Next, from the [master] Tripiṭaka's (Jp. *sanzō*, Ch. *sanjang* 三藏) room, one string of coins was donated. Next, [the assembly] paid their respect to the Earth Guardian Protector of the Dharma (Jp. *Jishugohō*, Ch. *Tizhuhufa* 地主護法).<sup>42</sup> Next, [they] moved toward master Chongfan's 崇梵 room. [He] donated one roll of silk. Next was master Guangzhi's 廣智 room. [He] donated one roll of silk. Next was master Zhaoda's 照大 room. [He] donated one roll of silk. The next quarter was locked. [The assembly] pressed down the lock, shouted a number of times, and [then] moved on [to the next]. The next was Jōjin's room. [I] donated two rolls of silk. The associate abbot, Tripiṭaka [master], and others returned one roll [to me]. Next was master Wenhui's 文慧 room. [He] donated one roll of silk. Next was master Ciji's 慈濟 room. [He] donated one roll of silk. Next, [the assembly] returned to the original hall [where the ritual was performed]. Around two o'clock (Jp. *hitsujidoki*, Ch. *weishi* 未時), Tripiṭaka master sent three items: a head scarf (Jp. *zugin*, Ch. *toujin* 頭巾), four *liang* 兩<sup>43</sup> of Longnao 龍腦 incense, and *Rukou* 乳口 silk. Then Wenhui master came and brought one *jin* 斤<sup>44</sup> of tea. He wrote [his words] and said, "[this tea] is the finest tea of Lu Mountain 廬山. [Please] take this to Japan and offer it to eminent monks. The interpreter *bhikṣu* Zhipu 智普 sealed [the tea bag], which won the honor of being bound together with [the statue of]

<sup>42</sup> Earth Guardian, Protector of the Dharma (Jp. *jishugohō* Ch. *Tizhu hufa* 地主護法) was probably the local earth god who became incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. Another possibility is that this refers to a wealthy layman who supports the temple.

<sup>43</sup> One *liang* 兩 is about 37 grams. Thus, the four *liang* are about 148 grams.

<sup>44</sup> One *jin* 斤 is a little more than 500 grams.



Mañjuśrī bodhisattva. Around eight o'clock [at night] (Jp. *inudoki*, Ch. *xushi* 戌時), from the quarters of Tripiṭaka master, eight kinds of precious fruit and one bottle of wine were sent. This morning, all monks [in the monastery] received eight kinds of soups and precious foods. Tonight, it was to be repeated just as before. This [announcement] was repeated. In a couple of hours, the associate abbot and Tripiṭaka master invited [me] to come to the arhat offering and have tea, snacks and more. All day and night, the instrumental music and the songs of praise [were performed], and [the participants] ate porridge and fruits. Although there were frequent requests to come out and join [the ritual], I could not find free time and [thus could] not go. [It was] very regrettable. Around two o'clock [at night] (Jp. *ushidoki*, ch. *choushi* 丑時), [the monk,] Kedao 可道 [who is] the facilitator of the hall (Jp. *tenjo*, Ch. *dianzuo* 典座) came and brought nine hundred coins [that he] put aside. Two hundred coins were given to the old monk<sup>45</sup> and one hundred each were given to seven monks. [These were] the leftover offerings after the chanting (Jp. *nenbutsu*, Ch. *nianfo* 念佛). The old monk recited the blessing and accepted it. The Dharma activity was [finally] over at that time.<sup>46</sup>

The ritual of arhat invitation that Jōjin witnessed was a grand service involving virtually everyone and every hall in the monastery. The decorations and offerings prepared for the ritual were elaborate. Canopies were hung and the Sixteen Arhat images, which were not painted but sewn on fabric, were installed. In addition to

<sup>45</sup> I think the old monk refers to Jōjin himself.

<sup>46</sup> For the annotated reprint of Jōjin's *San Tendai Godaisan ki* 參天台五台山記, see Hirabayashi Fumio 平林文雄, *San Tendai Godaisanki Kōhon narabini Kenkyū* 參天台五台山記校本並に研究 (Tokyo: Kazamashobō 風間書房 1978) pp. 140–1. There are extensive scholarly works on Jōjin's text available. See Fujiyosi Masumi 藤善眞澄, *San Tendai Godaisanki no Kenkyū* 參天台五臺山記の研究 (Osaka: Kansai Daigaku Tōzai Gakujutsu Kenkyūjo 2006); Ō Reihei 王麗萍, *Sōdai no Chūnichī Kōryūshi Kenkyū* 宋代の中日交流史研究 (Tokyo: Benseisha 2002); Nakajima Ryōichi 中島亮一, "San Tendai Godaisanki no Mondaiten 「參天台五台山記」の問題点," *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 27 (December, 1978): 250–253. For more works on Jōjin's text, see Hirabayashi Fumio's book, pp. 441–3.

the Sixteen Arhats, the image of the eminent Chinese monk Sizhou 泗州, who was regarded as a reincarnated arhat, was added. Several rows of offerings were placed in front of the arhats, beginning with flowers and followed by images of dancing (Jp. *Gigaku*, Ch. *Jiyue* 伎樂) bodhisattvas. Most importantly, many different kinds of food offerings were prepared before the images.

The actual ritual procedure seems to have been relatively uncomplicated, but very long. Starting by burning incense and playing different instruments, the assembly inside the hall then chanted the hymn (*zan* 讚) of the Sixteen Arhats. Jōjin did not describe what exactly they were chanting. It is possible that they used a ritual text similar to *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats*.<sup>47</sup> Next, the assembly dispersed and went to different halls within the monastery. They burnt incense and chanted in all halls of the monastery at the same time. Since other deities were enshrined in other parts of the temple, this act probably signifies the invitation of all other Buddhist deities besides arhats. Then, the assembly joined again and held a procession to the living quarters of the monks, while holding the Buddha's image. When the assembly arrived, each monk had to donate either a roll of silk or a string of coins. Jōjin was also visited by the assembly. He donated two rolls of silk, but one roll was returned to him. It is not clear why this part was incorporated into the ritual of arhat invitation. It might have served as an occasion for monks to make merit or pay their respect to their arhat ancestors and other Buddhist deities. Afterward, the assembly returned to the ritual hall, and different offerings and foods were sent out to all monks in the living quarters.

Surprisingly, the ritual continued all night long. The assembly kept on chanting praise and playing instruments periodically. There was enough tea, snacks and food to go around for everyone. This suggests that the mood of the ritual was festive. It was time to share

<sup>47</sup> Since Huang Shang passed his imperial examination in the year 1082, it is most likely that *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats* was written after Jōjin's visit to the capital city.

foods, gifts and money among all monks. Jōjin was no exception to this rule. Although he was just a visiting monk from Japan and did not actively participate in the ritual, he and his entourage were given fruit, wine, food, tea, silk, headscarves and even money. Unfortunately, Jōjin did not record who sponsored this ritual and why s/he did it. Given the size of the ritual, the donor must have been quite wealthy. To find out the possibly diverse motivations behind sponsoring the rituals, we need to examine the Song Dynasty literati records on the ritual of arhat invitation.

### Literati writings on the ritual of arhat invitation

Compared to Jōjin's diary, many Song Dynasty records concerning the ritual of arhat invitation are less descriptive and more poetic, as they were written mostly by literati. They are usually brief and eulogistic, and the number of extant records is limited. Nonetheless, they survive in sufficient numbers to help us examine the reasons for sponsoring the arhat ritual. From these writings, we see not only why the medieval Chinese performed the ritual but also what sort of abilities they imagined the arhat to possess.

#### *In gratitude for passing the examinations*

The first record is written by a literatus named Shi Tianzhi 史天秩. We know almost nothing about the author other than that he was a Song Dynasty literatus.<sup>48</sup> However, from the record we can imagine what kind of life he led. The title reveals quite a bit about the content that follows; it is “The Memorial of Gratitude for Passing [the Imperial Examinations] and Setting Up of the Arhat Ritual (*Xiedengdi sheluohanzhai shu* 謝登第設羅漢齊疏).” The text states:

<sup>48</sup> Shi Tianzhi's name is not listed in the *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin*. However, the *Siku quanshu* (Wenyuange edition) contains eight essays by Shi Tianzhi. They are all within the book series titled *Wubaijia bofang daquan wencui*. See Wei Qixian 魏齊賢 ed., *Wubaijia bofang daquan wencui* 五百家播芳大全文粹, j. 14, 15, 17, 37, 79, 81, *Siku quanshu*, Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

Although the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道) is distant, it listens [even] to the lowly beings. Gods (*shen* 神) reside in all directions, and [thus] if there is a request, surely there will be a response. I often prepare offerings of fruits and vegetables and respectfully convey my sincere heart. [I] lay down and thought [to myself] that I was unfortunate, living alone even in these late years. Since I had to pass the imperial examinations at the county, regional and provincial levels, even more worries were added to [my] anxious mind. I was afraid of not having [my] name on the list [of those who had passed the examination]. Even in dreams, I saw the absence of my name. Suddenly, looking at the face of my [present] life, [I realize that] I made the poverty of earlier days disappear and attained the governmental position in the south which I had wanted earlier. As I have pursued prosperity and happiness, they [seem to] have come from the help of the unseen world. On the morning of Insect Awakening Day (*jingzhe* 驚蟄)<sup>49</sup> of the second spring month (*zhongchun* 仲春), it is also befitting for the day of the true governors (*zhenzai* 真宰)<sup>50</sup> descending. I eagerly spread out the pure offerings and welcome the wind of immortals (*xian* 仙). I humbly beseech the great gentlemen (*dashi* 大士) to examine [this place] and the true [governors] to bestow protection. [Please] remove the signs of a lifetime's bad luck and open up the road of ten thousand *li* ahead [of me]. [Please] make my vocational path smooth and let my life span be long.<sup>51</sup>

Shi Tianzhi's motivation for sponsoring the ritual of arhat invitation was very personal, originating in a specific situation in his life. As the title indicates, the author set up the ritual in gratitude for having passed the imperial examinations and obtaining the official position that he had previously wanted. Before taking the examinations, he often made offerings and prayed to the arhats and gods.

<sup>49</sup> Insect Awakening Day (*jingzhe* 驚蟄) is one of the 24 seasonal divisions based on the length of the day and the sun's shadow at noon. It is usually around March 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> on the solar calendar.

<sup>50</sup> The "true governor" here implies the arhat.

<sup>51</sup> See Wei Qixian 魏齊賢 ed., *Wubaijia bofang daquan wencui* (cf. n. 48), j. 81, pp. 18a–18b.

He believed that the gods would listen and respond to his prayer even if he was just a “lowly being” without a wife or career. After successfully passing the examinations, he still remembered the help from the “unseen world” that he might have received. Thus, he sponsored the ritual in the early spring, on the morning of Insect Awakening Day (*jingzhe* 驚蟄). Formally inviting the arhats, he requested that they descend to the ritual space where he prepared “pure offerings.” This portion of the memorial sounds somewhat similar to Huang Shang’s *The Eulogy of Inviting Arhats*. This suggests that Shi Tianzhi’s memorial could have been recited at that time of ritual service.

Shi Tianzhi designated arhats with different names. Arhats were referred to with the titles of “the true governor” (*zhenzai* 真宰), “the immortal” (*xian* 仙) and “the great gentleman” (*dashi* 大士), as if they were local gods, immortals and bodhisattvas.<sup>52</sup> The last part of the memorial specifies the kind of help the author would like to receive from the arhats in the future. More than anything else, Shi Tianzhi desired the aid of the arhats in his burgeoning career. He believed that the arhats could help him clear away any unforeseen obstacles to the advancement of his career in office. In addition, he asked the arhats to help him live a long life.

*For my deceased mother*

In contrast to Shi Tianzhi, Li Qubing 李去病 sponsored the ritual of arhat invitation not for himself but for his deceased mother.<sup>53</sup> The text is short, providing only limited information about the author’s (and his mother’s) specific situation. However, the title is long and informative: “The Memorial on Setting Up the Arhat Ritual on

<sup>52</sup> Guanyin bodhisattva was often called “*dashi*.” See Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin* (cf. n. 36), p. 345, 357, 373 and 417.

<sup>53</sup> There is not much information on Li Qubing. *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* only mentions his style name, Zhonghuo 仲霍 and his place of origin, Mincheng 緡城. See Bide Chang 昌彼得 *et al.* ed., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (cf. n. 14), vol. 2, p. 964.

Behalf of [Deceased] Mother (*Jianmu sheluohanzhai shu* 薦母設羅漢齊疏).<sup>54</sup> Let us read the text and find out why he sponsored the ritual. It states:

[Since the arhats] have not forgotten the entrustment [of the Buddha], [the sentient beings can] have this wonderful karmic affinity [with them]. [As the arhats] possess the six supramundane powers (*liutongzhishen* 六通之神), [they] know everything and see everything. [Please] withdraw from the *samādhi*, come this way and arrive here! [Please] become my mother's spiritual guide (*daoshi* 導師), take the place of all Buddhas and send down [your blessing] to my family. That will correspond exactly to our sincere wishes.<sup>55</sup>

The overall structure of this text is similar to the previous one by Shi Tianzhi. The text has three parts. The first part gives a general background about arhats, such as the Buddha's entrusting of the Dharma to the arhats and a mention of their supramundane powers. The second part describes calling the arhats and inviting them to the ritual space. After extending the invitation, the author moves on to the third part, expressing his wishes to the arhats. From this last part, we can know more about Li Qubing's reasons for sponsoring the ritual. He first asks the arhats to become his mother's spiritual guide (*daoshi* 導師). Given that his mother has already passed away, the author is probably requesting that the arhats guide his mother to a better rebirth, perhaps in the Pure Land. The second wish concerns his living family. Li Qubing beseeches the arhats to

<sup>54</sup> The first character in the title, *jian* 薦, implies that the author's mother was deceased at the time this text was written. In classical Chinese, *jian* usually means, "to make an offering" (*jinxian* 進獻 or *xiangji* 享祭) in a ritual setting. In Buddhist context, *jian* is used together with the character *zhui* 追 in *zhuijian* 薦追. It means, "To make offerings on behalf of a deceased person and his or her well being." See Chen Fuhua 陈复华 *et al.* ed., *Gudai Hanyu cidian* 古代漢語詞典 (Nanjing: Shangwu yinshuguan 1998), p. 752; Charles Muller, ed., *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, (cf. n. 23, accessed July 1, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> See Wei Qixian 魏齊賢 ed., *Wubaijia bofang daquan wencui* (cf. n. 48), j. 82, p. 9b.

take the place of the Buddha, who is not present in this universe, and bless his family. All of his wishes are family-centered and, in contrast to the first text, not at all related to the author's career or long life.

*For the health and prosperity of my family*

A third account also concerns family, although, unlike the second one, here the ritual is not dedicated to a specific member of the author's family. The author is Han Ju 韓駒 (?–1135), a Song Dynasty literatus from Xianjing 仙井 in Sichuan 四川.<sup>56</sup> He was the student of Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), a younger brother of Su Shi and a well-known poet and scholar-official.<sup>57</sup> The title, “Setting Up the Arhat Offering and Praying for Well-Being (*Sheluohangong qi'an* 設羅漢供祈安)” reveals that Han Ju prays to the arhats for the general well-being of his family. The text states:

The bodhisattva responds to the calls of his karmic affinity and [thereby] has become the king of longevity. The *śrāvaka* (*shengwen* 聲聞)<sup>58</sup> benefits the world greatly and [thus has become] no different than the arhat. The assembly of *Chan* (*Chanzhong* 禪衆), which respectfully relies on [the arhats], venerates [them] and cultivates the truth. [I humbly] bow down and wish that my family be healthy and untroubled while my posterity (*zisun* 子孫) prosper. [May my family remain]

<sup>56</sup> Xianjing is modern day Jingyan 井研 city in Sichuan. For the biography of Han Ju, see Bide Chang 昌彼得 *et al.* ed., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (cf. n. 14), vol. 5, pp. 4151–2.

<sup>57</sup> The styled name (*zi* 字) of Han Ju 韓駒 was Han Zicang 韓子蒼, and sometimes his poems are under his styled name. His poems became well known because they resembled the poems of famous Tang Dynasty writer, Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 (fl. 706–763). His writings were compiled under the title *Linyang ji* 陵陽集, in four volumes. See Han Ju 韓駒, *Linyang ji* 陵陽集, j. 1–4, Siku quanshu, Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

<sup>58</sup> The *śrāvakas* (*shengwen* 聲聞) are personal disciples of the Buddha. They are also known as the “voice-hearers.” The term often designates the early arhat disciples.



pure and have few worries. [May we] always live in the village where there is fortune and virtue. [May I] live long in peace and joy. May I again see the world that gradually [becomes] more peaceful!<sup>59</sup>

The first half of the text eulogizes arhats while contrasting them with bodhisattvas and the assembly of Chan (*Chanzhong* 禪衆). The second half contains the author's prayer to the arhat. This includes petitions for the health and prosperity of Han Ju's family, as well as for peace and happiness in his life and in the village where he lived. The author also includes prayers for a worry-free life. The characteristics of these wishes are decisively worldly and yet very general. This suggests that the author might not have had any specific occasion in his life to perform the ritual, such as the death of his mother, or passing the imperial examination. Nevertheless, Han Ju may have still wanted to perform the ritual because it helped to reaffirm the peace and happiness of his family.

#### *Village people praying for rain*

I have so far discussed sources that indicate personal reasons for performing the arhat ritual. However, there were also rituals involving arhats carried out by the public. This arhat ritual was performed by a group of villagers who hoped for rainfall. The text is written as a poem by Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193). The author was a Southern Song Dynasty scholar-officer and poet from Wuxian 吳縣, Jiangsu 江蘇 province. After passing the highest imperial examination in the year 1154, Fan Chengda served initially at the Department of Rites (*Libu* 禮部) and then as the Great Scholar at Zizheng hall 資政殿.<sup>60</sup> Like the poems discussed above, this poem also bears a long and descriptive title: "In the Year of Draught, Villagers Prayed to the Fifth Arhat and Received Rain. [This Poem is]

<sup>59</sup> See Wei Qixian 魏齊賢 ed., *Wubaijia bofang daquan wencui* (cf. n. 48), j. 81, p. 17a.

<sup>60</sup> For the biography of Fan Chengda, see Bide Chang 昌彼得 *et al.* ed., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (cf. n. 14), vol. 2, pp. 1655–8.

in Response to the Poem of Mr. Le (*Suihan yiren dao diwu luohan deyu Le xiansheng youshi ciyun* 歲旱邑人禱第五羅漢得兩樂先生有詩次韻).” Fan Chengda wrote the poem to commemorate the successful outcome of the arhat offering and prayer. After receiving Mr. Le’s poetry, Fan Chengda composed the following poem:

In the pool of ocean and mountain is the palace of a dragon.  
 At the bottom of a splashing waterfall, a jade-striking sound resonates.  
 The great gentleman of azure colored eyes!<sup>61</sup> Whom do you reign over?  
 [Because you] love the silky waterfall, [you] fly up from the misty bottom.  
 You sit in meditation for a hundred thousand *kalpas* (*jie* 劫) by chance.  
 You are equipped with boundless supramundane power and compassionate vows.  
 Until now, blazing clouds have been holding the sun under their arm.  
 Sands are frying and the sun rots a thousand mountains after another.  
 Mingling with heat, the wind from *Luhun* 陸渾<sup>62</sup> blows high.  
 The lush grass of *Jingchuan* 涇川<sup>63</sup> waits for the work of rain.  
 The mouths of ten thousand [people] are crying out for the gentleman (*shi* 士)!  
 Even before the incense burner spits out, [our] sincerity has reached [him] first.  
 The dust of the sunset swirls around the land, making the sound of a whirlwind.  
 The morning glow hangs over the sky, reddening the [shape] of a fish-tail cloud.  
 The *shangyang* 商羊 bird<sup>64</sup> rubs the sky and a hawk flies up and dances.

<sup>61</sup> “The great gentleman of azure colored eyes” refers to the arhat who has the face (and thus the eyes) of a non-Chinese foreigner.

<sup>62</sup> *Luhun* 陸渾 is the name of a town in Henan 河南 province.

<sup>63</sup> *Jingchuan* 涇川 is in Gansu 甘肅 province.

<sup>64</sup> The *shangyang* 商羊 bird refers to a legendary bird that flies right before

Suddenly, timely rain falls and [people] sing [the song of] this year's good harvest.<sup>65</sup>

Fan Chengda's poem is rhythmic, picturesque and dramatic. His language invokes various moving images and sounds of rapidity. Unlike the previous texts, his poem does not directly address or make a request to the arhats. Instead, it describes the miraculous event from a third person perspective, starting from the time of drought to the moment of falling rain. This suggests that the author might not have personally attended the ritual. Nevertheless, the poem still describes a type of arhat-centered ritual practice at a local level, and shows how Fan Chengda perceives the arhat. He first presents the arhat as a king who reigns over the dragon and its palace underneath the waterfall. In medieval Chinese society, the dragon represents the divine animal responsible for rainmaking. Thus, reigning over the dragon implies having control over the weather. As the poem continues, the author further reveals his perception of the arhat's preternatural ability and character; the arhat can remain in meditation for a long time, and has boundless supramundane power and compassion. Next, the poem shifts to a scene of scorching weather before the rainfall, followed by the ritual scene in which people burn incense and pray for rain. The poem ends with the arhat's miraculous response to the people's sincerity (*cheng* 誠), showering timely rainfall.

*For the accumulation of merit*

The next record to examine is a letter penned by the famous scholar-officer Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101). While Su Shi was exiled in Hainan

the rain falls. See Chen Fuhua 陈复华 *et al.* ed., *Gudai Hanyu cidian* (cf. n. 54), p. 1368.

<sup>65</sup> See Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193), *Shihu shiji* 石湖詩集, j. 4, p. 1b–2a, Siku quanshu, Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

海南, he was able to acquire a set of the Eighteen Arhat paintings.<sup>66</sup> The following letter was enclosed together with the arhat paintings and sent to his younger brother, Ziyou 子由.<sup>67</sup> The letter states:

After the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*, the sentient beings in *Jambudvīpa* became rigid, hateful and self-centered. Faith did not easily enter [into their mind]. Therefore, all holy beings hide and do not manifest themselves. Only their images and transmitted words can lead the unenlightened. However, the magical transformations of light are still appearing in Emei 峨眉 [mountains], Wutai 五臺 [mountains], Lu 廬 [mountains]<sup>68</sup> and Tiantai 天台 [mountains]. [These phenomena] allow people to detect their presence and see them. My house had Sixteen Arhat images. Whenever a tea offering was made [to the arhats], a transformation occurred, which turned the tea into milky floats. Sometimes, [it] became congealed in [the shape of] white flower, peach, plum or herbaceous peony and so on. Some say that the compassion of arhats is profoundly deep, and they quickly help sentient beings. Therefore, many magical transformations were manifested. Is this not the case? Today, I obtained the Eighteen Arhat images in Hainan 海南, and I am sending [them] to Ziyou 子由, my younger brother. [People] should pay respect to [the arhat images] at the right time. If it happens to be the birthday of one of the members of the couple, then set up [food] offerings (*shégong* 設供) and pray for the accumulation of merit (*jifu* 集福) for that year. I am sending these images along with the poems that [I] have previously composed. Ziyou's birthday is the twentieth day of the second [lunar] month and his wife, the lady of the Deyangjun 德陽郡,

<sup>66</sup> For Su Shi's biography, see Bide Chang 昌彼得 *et al.* ed., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (cf. n. 14), vol. 5, pp. 4312–4324. For the study of Su Shi's life and writings, see Ronald C. Egan, *Word, image, and deed in the life of Su Shi* (Cambridge: Harvard University 1994). For Su Shi and Buddhism, see Beata Gran, *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii 1994); Ronald C. Egan, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Ziyou is a style name. He is better known as Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112).

<sup>68</sup> Mount Lu 廬山 is the place where later Buddhists believed that the famous monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) expounded the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism.

Ms. Shi's (*Shishi* 史氏), is the seventeenth day of the eleventh [lunar] month. On the day of Zhongyuan 中元,<sup>69</sup> [I have written] this.<sup>70</sup>

Su Shi's letter is elegant and easy to follow. He begins by explaining why the arhat was no longer seen in the world. It was because people had become hateful and self-centered after the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*. However, the arhat still manifests himself through the magical appearance of various lights in Chinese holy mountains. Su Shi then records the arhat's magical manifestation that he often witnessed while growing up. After making a tea offering to the Sixteen Arhat images at his home, he saw the appearance of milk-like liquid floats, which turned into different flower and fruit shapes. Su Shi interpreted these as the compassionate work of arhats, letting their worshippers know of their presence through signs.

Next, Su Shi mentions the Eighteen Arhat paintings that he acquired in Hainan and gives instructions on how to venerate the images at home. He first asks his brother's family to venerate them according to a time schedule. This probably meant that they should burn incense in front of the arhat images and pray on a regular basis. On a birthday, however, he instructed them to make special offerings to the Arhat images "for the accumulation of merit (*jifu* 集福) for that year." In other words, Su Shi's reason for setting up the arhat ritual was to accrue enough merit for the year to come, in order to prevent troubles and bring good luck.

### *Praying for having sons*

The last record describes the miraculous tale of Huang Kuo 黃廓. Unlike the previous five records, the story of Huang Kuo was written not by the subject himself but by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123 – 1203) in *The Record of the Listener* (*Yijianzhi* 夷堅志). Compared to the

<sup>69</sup> Zhongyuan is the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

<sup>70</sup> See Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), *Dongpu chuanji* 東坡全集, j. 98, p. 15a–15b, Siku quanshu, Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

previous five records, it is less poetic and more descriptive. The title is also informative: “Mr. Huang, the Story Teller, Prays for a Son (*Huang Jiangshu daozi* 黃講書禱子).” The text states:

Huang Kuo 黃廓, the story teller (*jiangshuzhe* 講書者) was originally from Xinghua 興化.<sup>71</sup> His home was in Xinzhou 信州<sup>72</sup> and he did not have any sons. Once he took his wife, Ms. Shi 施, and his concubine to a Buddhist temple in order to pray inside the arhat hall. That night, the wife and concubine both dreamed of several honorable arhats. The arhats looked at each other and laughed. [Then,] all of sudden, they looked at [the wife and concubine] and started to say “before and after three years each (*qianhou gesannian* 前後各三年).” When [they] awoke, they could remember the dream clearly. The wife and concubine had had the dream at the same time. However, no one knew what the phrase meant. [Later] they both got pregnant three years apart from each other. Afterward, they both had sons in the same year. After the death of Mr. Huang, Ms. Shi diligently taught [her son] how to read. The concubine’s son was named Tao 燾 and Ms. Shi’s son was named Jie 杰. In the Jiachen 甲辰 year of Chunxi 淳熙 reign era (1184), Jie passed [the imperial examination] and three years later (1187), Tao [also] passed it succeeding Jie. Now, [everyone] knows the meaning of “before and after three years each.” [Huang] Kuo also had four other sons and Tao was the oldest.<sup>73</sup>

Huang Kuo’s reason for going to the arhat hall with his wife and concubine was to pray for a son. At that time, Huang Kuo was without a son, and he thought that the arhat could help him. The record does not give any detailed information about what Huang Kuo did inside the arhat hall. It is likely that before praying to the arhat, he made some offerings to the arhats perhaps with the help of a Buddhist priest. The text explains how his wishes came true after praying inside the arhat hall. At night, a number of arhats appeared

<sup>71</sup> Xinghua 興化 is located in Jiangsu 江蘇 province.

<sup>72</sup> Xinzhou 信州 is located in Jiangxi 江西 province.

<sup>73</sup> See Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1203), *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志, j. 10, pp. 4b–5a, *Siku quanshu*, *Wenyuange Sikuquanshu dianziban* (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe Dizhi 1998).

magically in the dreams of Huang Kuo's wife and concubine. The arhats uttered the mysterious phrase, "before and after three years each," which became comprehensible only after the wife and concubine gave birth to two sons three years apart. Later the two boys passed the imperial examinations, again three years apart.

## Conclusion

In this part, let us revisit the four questions raised in the beginning. First, for the Song Dynasty Chinese, the arhat was essentially not different from the bodhisattva. The liturgical text written by Huang Shang states that, just like the bodhisattva, the Sixteen Arhats and their retinues willfully remain in the tenth *bhūmi* and extend their help to sentient beings out of their compassion. They often hide themselves in the midst of ordinary people and surreptitiously use their supramundane powers to grant people's wishes and protect the Dharma. Their powers include a variety of different preternatural abilities: granting a male child, bringing down rain, protecting the health and prosperity of a family, guiding a deceased parent to a better rebirth, and aiding in career advancement and long life. This shows that there was no set pattern to the arhat miracle tales – that the arhat was regarded as granting all and any kinds of wishes. This positive portrayal is obviously different from the image of "overbearing" or selfish arhats whose only concerns lay in the attainment of their own *nirvāṇa* in Mahāyāna polemical texts. This shows that for most Song Dynasty Chinese Buddhists – whether they were monastics or lay followers – the canonical definitions of the arhat were irrelevant. They neither stopped a highly educated scholar-officer like Huang Shang from creatively redefining the arhat's identity nor prevented village people from making offerings to the arhat and praying for rain. In other words, Chinese people venerated the arhat not because the arhat is on his way to becoming the bodhisattva on the path to Buddhahood, but because in their minds, arhats *are* disguised bodhisattvas.



Second, thanks to Jōjin's diary, we are able to reconstruct a scene of arhat invitation during the Northern Song Dynasty. The ritual was performed in *Dapingxingguo* monastery located in the capital city of Kaifeng. It was a long, elaborate and community-wide event, involving many priests in the monastery. The Sixteen Arhat images were made of needle-sewn fabrics while the offerings of "one hundred different flavors" of food, flowers and incense were presented in front of those images. When the assembly chanted the praise of arhats, cymbals, drums, bells and wooden percussion instruments were played repeatedly. Curiously, a part of the ritual procedure included solicitation of donations from monks. They used a roll of silk as their donation to the assembly. Other material objects were exchanged between Jōjin and other resident monks of the monastery including a head scarf, incense, tea and coins, as well as many different kinds of food and wine. The ritual lasted all day and night, and the atmosphere was highly festive.

Third, the Song Dynasty literary and visual sources attest that the Song literati played a significant role in the development and sustainment of the arhat cult. Huang Shang, a high ranking scholar-officer, composed a liturgical text for the ritual of arhat invitation for wide public usage. Other high-profile literati such as Su Shi, Han Ju and Fan Chengda participated in the arhat veneration practices by commissioning arhat paintings, sponsoring the ritual for family, and composing a commemorative poem about the miraculous rainfall after a performance of the ritual at the village. Lesser known literati Shi Tianzhi and Li Qubing also left a record of the ritual service, professing personal gratitude to the arhat and eulogizing the arhat's power and benevolence. Although the Song Dynasty literati engaged in the ritual for a variety of different reasons, the overall tone of their voices was uniform, displaying awe, reverence and devotion to the arhat. This devotion, however, is different from what Mark Halperin called "worldly devotion," denoting highly nuanced, multi-faceted and socially engaged views of Buddhism by the Song Dynasty literati. Rather, it is closer to the

language of less “savvy” and more pious laymen of Tang Dynasty.<sup>74</sup> In addition, this also stands in sharp contrast to Jacques Gernet’s claim about the literati and Buddhism. He states:

Those raised in the classical tradition could not be fervent Buddhists. Their rationalism restrained them from adopting common beliefs and superstitions. Noble women, by contrast, female members of the great families, self-made men, and commoners had no such protection against religious faith. There were more receptive to Buddhism. The literati, moreover, had an austerity of principle, an inclination to temperance and thrift, that disapproved of extravagant expenditures.<sup>75</sup>

All of the evidence in this study proves that it was not just women, commoners and self-made men who engaged in the “superstitious” practices of arhat veneration. Contrary to Gernet’s assertion, the literati group participated in the arhat cult just as much, if not more. The old and tired assumption that only the uneducated masses participated in “superstitious” cultic practices should finally be laid to rest.

Fourth, Robert Sharf recently published an excellent theoretical essay on ritual, proposing the idea of Buddhist ritual as “adult play” and “Buddhist *darśan*.” In his analysis, the performative approach to ritual advocated by contemporary scholars ended up reinforcing to the very dichotomies – thought and action, the subjective and the objective, inner and outer, etc. – that they have tried to avoid. To overcome this problem of “moieties,” he turns to the realm of “play” where children first learned to detach a signifier from the signified and place the signifier onto some other object. This “transfer of

<sup>74</sup> Mark Halperin’s recent work was very helpful for this article. I am not suggesting that Halperin’s analysis is incorrect. My point is that if we were to look outside the genre of commemorative writings on Buddhist temple, we can also discover more uniform and devotional voices of the Song literati. See Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister* (cf. n. 29), pp. 4, 27–61, 233–237.

<sup>75</sup> See Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Century*, trans., Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), p. 299.

meanings” implies that “For a child, the word ‘horse’ applied to the stick means ‘there is a horse,’ because mentally he sees the object standing behind the word.”<sup>76</sup> Like a child who uses a stick as the pivot of detaching meaning/signifier and yet still sees a horse in the new object of the stick, an adult participates in ritual in a similar manner, taking, for instance, “the wafer *as if* it were the flesh of Christ” and worshipping “the stone icon *as if* it were the body of a god.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, a ritual recreates an “*as-if* world” like that of young children, where a conceptual displacement is encouraged, and a signifier and a signified are fused.

Sharf also points out how the practice of Buddhist ritual resembles, more so than Buddhists often admit, those of Hindu *darśan* and Vedic sacrifice. The practice of *darśan* involves consecrated images which are treated “not merely as a representation of the deity but as its animate corporeal embodiment (*mūrti*).”<sup>78</sup> Suppliants in Vedic sacrifice invoke the deity’s presence and make offerings along with ritualized gestures and utterances in exchange for a preternatural boon. However, according to Sharf, Mahāyāna Buddhist rituals differ from Hindu sacrifice in that the Buddhist deity invoked is none other than the Mahāyānist truth of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and the ultimate purpose of any Mahāyāna Buddhist ritual is to “elicit precisely the understanding that all form is empty.” He further elaborates that “recognition of this ‘truth’ – namely, that all truth is relative – is precisely the boon bestowed by the buddhas” while “Mahāyāna rituals both affirm and confute ... the reality of the deities that take center stage in the practice.”<sup>79</sup>

Extending Sharf’s theory to the ritual of arhat invitation provides some new insights. Generally speaking, the ritual of arhat

<sup>76</sup> These are the words of Vygotsky that Sharf is quoting in his essay. See Sharf, “Ritual” (cf. n. 12), p. 255.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256–257.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

invitation fits quite well with the model of Buddhist *darśan* and sacrifice. According to Jōjin's diary, the needle-sewn images of the arhat take the center stage and are treated *as if* they were "real things" by adding metalinguistic cues such as chanting, bowing, playing instruments, and making offerings to the images. As the literati's writings reveal, those offerings were made with the expectation of receiving various preternatural boons from the arhat.

On the other hand, there is near silence on the subject of interpreting a preternatural boon as doctrinally sound epistemological knowledge. For the most Song Dynasty Chinese Buddhists, the boon that they sought in return for offerings to the arhat was ontological transformation in their everyday lives – becoming pregnant with a male child, bringing down rain, living a healthy and prosperous life, guiding a deceased parent to a better rebirth, etc. – and had little to do with knowledge. To borrow Sharf's own words in critiquing performative approach, this habit of reducing a "non-Western ontology to an epistemology" is one of the signature characteristics of "the modernist project" valorizing "the parochialisms and limitations of Western enlightenment."<sup>80</sup>

Lastly, let us revisit the Song Dynasty arhat painting [Fig. 1] that we viewed at the beginning of this essay. Interestingly, although there are arhat images hung in the back where food offerings are made, the main supplicants in this painting are not having eye-to-eye Buddhist *darśan* experience with the arhat images. Instead, they are facing the sky above the garden. This turning away from the image to face the "real things" descending from the sky suggests that adults do not always participate in children's "play." Ritual participants can and often do remain aware that a signifier is just a signifier, never a "real thing," in spite of what Catholic theologians or traditional Buddhist exegesis advocates. If Zhou Jichang and Li Tinggui, the artists of our painting [Fig. 1] were still alive today, they would proclaim that "map" is just "map" and "territory" is in the sky.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 252.