

# A Ritual Embodied in Architectural Space: The *Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī* and Yingxian Timber Pagoda from the Liao Empire

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## Abstract

*Previous scholarship has generally focused on dhāraṇī practices of two types: first, enacting the believed power of dhāraṇīs through recitation; and second, using inscribed or stamped dhāraṇīs as talismans. Through an examination of Yingxian Timber Pagoda (ca. 1056) from the Liao Dynasty, however, this paper reveals a third type of dhāraṇī practice in north China that broke from those of the Tang period in that it required no written or recited form of dhāraṇī; instead, it materialized the ritual process in physical form—from invocation of the Buddhas to ritual enactment of the wish-fulfilling jewel and the mandala—by means of an architectural space. The pagoda's five stories and the Buddhist statues enshrined therein, as this paper shows, were designed not only to embody the chanting ritual of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī (Foding zunsheng tuoluoni 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼) but also to visualize the philosophical contents of the dhāraṇī in material form. The pagoda's architectural space was planned in such a way as to generate the efficacy of the dhāraṇī through the material agency of the pagoda and its statues with their intricate iconography. In the ritual imagination of medieval Buddhists, the pagoda was believed to be an architectural device that, once erected, would incessantly enact the dhāraṇī ritual with little to no human intervention. Yingxian Timber Pagoda aptly exhibits the ways in which Liao Buddhism innovated and developed complex dhāraṇī practices that had been inherited from previous dynasties, expanding the tradition of “material dhāraṇī” practices in the cultural landscape of East Asia.*

**Key words:** *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī, Liao dynasty, Yingxian Timber Pagoda, ritual, mandala, trikāya, śūnyatā, material agency*

## Introduction

Focusing on a monumental timber pagoda from the Liao Dynasty (907–1125), this paper explores a hitherto unnoticed way of enacting the believed power of *dhāraṇīs*—through an architectural device that materializes the ritual process. Previous scholarship has focused primarily on two types of *dhāraṇī* practices. The foremost involved chanting *dhāraṇīs* with their proper Sanskrit pronunciation. More recently, though, it has been shown that *dhāraṇīs* were also often inscribed and stamped as talismans (Copp 2014; 2005). In other words, the two means of enacting *dhāraṇīs* can generally be categorized as uttering sound or inscribing/stamping text.

A careful examination of Yingxian Timber Pagoda 應縣木塔 (Figure 1), however, suggests that a new way of enacting *dhāraṇīs* emerged in Liao Buddhism, enlarging the tradition of “material *dhāraṇī*”<sup>1</sup> practices inherited from previous dynasties. The pagoda’s five stories and the Buddhist statues enshrined therein were designed to coherently embody the chanting ritual of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (*Foḍīng zunsheng tuoluoni* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼) and to visualize the philosophical contents of the *dhāraṇī* in material form. The pagoda’s architectural space was planned in such a way as to generate the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* through the “material agency”<sup>2</sup> of the pagoda and its statues with their intricate iconography. The stairs and aisles inside the pagoda induce bodily movements of the venerators, who would ascend to each floor and circumambulate the statues, transforming their movement into physical participation—either consciously or unconsciously—with the enactment of the *dhāraṇī*. This Liao *dhāraṇī* practice exhibits a radical departure from the “material efficacy” observed in Copp’s study of *dhāraṇī* practices of the Tang period (618–907),<sup>3</sup> in that this practice did not require written forms of *dhāraṇī*. Instead of inscribing or stamping *dhāraṇī* texts, the new practice materialized the *dhāraṇī ritual process* in a physical form inside an architectural space so as to enact the *dhāraṇī*.

By probing the Liao pagoda’s connection to the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, this paper aims to shed more light on the *dhāraṇī* practices of Liao Buddhism, which otherwise left scant records of its practices. In terms of the larger landscape of Buddhist practice in medieval China, it suggests that a third way of using *dhāraṇīs* had developed in northern China by the eleventh century—that of embodying the *dhāraṇī* ritual in visual and material forms in architectural space, rather than simply inscribing the *dhāraṇī* as text.



[Figure 1] Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

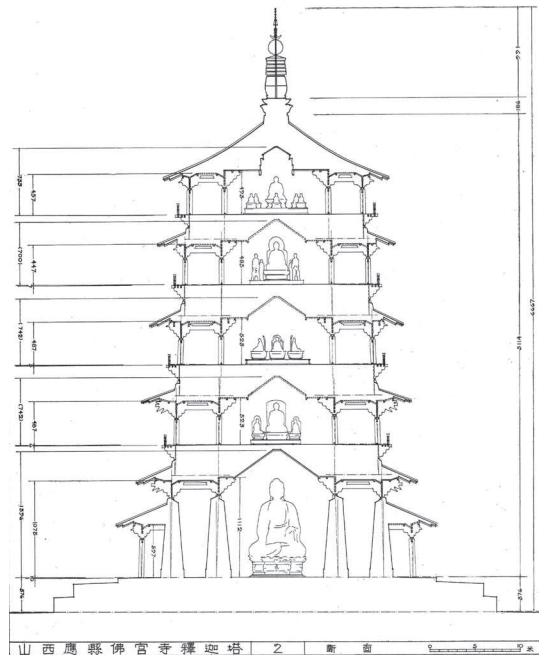


## Enigmatic Pagoda

The Yingxian Timber Pagoda is usually regarded as the most significant timber pagoda in Chinese architectural history. Erected about 1056, this five-story wooden pagoda, located in Ying County near Mount Wutai 五臺山 in Shanxi Province, has survived for almost a millennium. Boasting a height of 67.31 meters, it is the world's tallest wooden pagoda from premodern times. Considering that traditional timber buildings in East Asia were built purely through complex assemblages of wooden joinery, it is remarkable that the pagoda was sturdy enough to survive earthquakes and storms for nearly a millennium.

What makes this pagoda even more impressive are the various groups of Buddhist statues enshrined within it (Figure 2). Each of the pagoda's five stories features different groupings of statues, whose meanings have not been fully deciphered. Although the pagoda has received much scholarly attention since the early twentieth century,<sup>4</sup> many important questions remain unanswered. A key question is whether the pagoda possesses an overarching program that coherently interrelates its five stories. At a glance, the statues might appear to be a hodgepodge mixture without consistent function or religious meaning. As this paper reveals, however, the pagoda's five stories were seamlessly interwoven with a coherent ritual program that embodied and enacted the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual.

Since the mid-Tang period, the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā*



[Figure 2] Section diagram of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, figure 2]

*dhāraṇī* was one of the most important Buddhist spells in China. The *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* was believed to have various efficacies—from curing disease and prolonging one’s lifespan to ensuring rebirth in the Pure Land and expediting Buddhist awakening.<sup>5</sup> One of the factors that made this *dhāraṇī* so widespread was the seventh century preface to the Buddhapālita (Fotuoboli 佛陀波利, fl. late seventh century) version of the *Sūtra of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī*, which stated that a mysterious figure residing on Mount Wutai, widely understood to be Mañjuśrī bodhisattva, had asked Buddhapālita to bring this scripture from India so as to save beings in China (T no. 967, 19.349b–c).<sup>6</sup> In the subsequent century, Emperor Daizong’s 代宗 (r. 762–779) edict that



[Figure 3] *Dhāraṇī* pillar inscribed with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* at Foguangsi. Tang dynasty, 877. Wutai County, Shanxi Province, China. [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016]

monks and nuns recite the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* daily, further promoted its spread across the Tang empire (Chou 1945, 322). Since the early eighth century, the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* was often inscribed on *jingchuang* 經幢, or *dhāraṇī* pillars (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> The *dhāraṇī* inscribed on a *dhāraṇī* pillar then functioned as a “material incantation,” believed to transmit the power of the *dhāraṇī* without a human agent. Other transmission media such as shadows of the pillars, dust blown from the pillars, and wind blowing past the pillars, all carrying the power of the *dhāraṇī* were believed to save the sentient beings whose bodies were touched by them (Copp 2014, 141–180).

The popularity of the

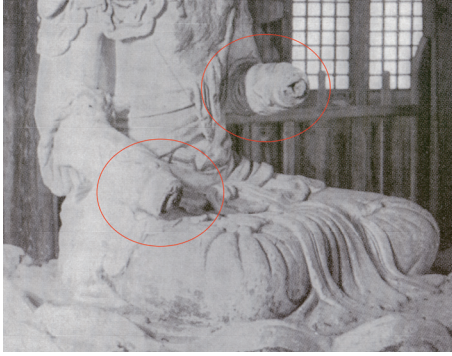
*dhāraṇī* continued in the Liao empire where a number of *dhāraṇī* pillars were erected (Zhang 2013). At the same time, as shown below, an innovative *dhāraṇī* practice emerged in Liao Buddhism, in which a “material ritual” enacted by the material agency of architectural space, without chanting or inscribing, transmitted the power of the *dhāraṇī*.

### Mandala and *Dhāraṇī*

We will begin our exploration of Yingxian Timber Pagoda at the uppermost story, as it shows the pagoda’s clearest connection with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. On the fifth story, we encounter a three-dimensional mandala consisting of nine statues: eight bodhisattvas surrounding a Buddha seated at the center (Figure 4). The central Buddha statue’s wisdom-fist *mudrā* (*zhiquanyin* 智拳印) in which he grips the index finger of his left hand with his right fist, is a distinctive iconography that informs us that the statue is Vairocana Buddha.



[Figure 4] Fifth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 130]



[Figure 5] Broken hands of the bodhisattva placed in the north. Fifth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Image adapted from plate 134 in Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*]



[Figure 6] Hands added to the bodhisattvas after modern restoration. Fifth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016]

Unlike the Buddha statue, the eight bodhisattvas surrounding him have lost their iconographic signs. As we can see in the black-and-white photographs taken by Peng Huashi 彭華士 in 1962,<sup>8</sup> the hands and attributes of the bodhisattvas had already been completely destroyed long ago (Figure 5) (Chen 1966; 1980). Modern restorers recently made new hands for the bodhisattva statues, but without realizing that the hands should be holding attributes (Figures 6).

Careful comparison of this three-dimensional mandala with relevant Buddhist scriptures and comparable mandalas from the Liao period suggest that the bodhisattvas are the Eight Great Bodhisattvas (*bada pusa* 八大菩薩). As I have delineated the lost iconography of these bodhisattvas in a recent article (Kim 2020), the explanation here will be brief. Several Liao pagodas from the eleventh century, found in the region spanning from Inner Mongolia to Liaoning Province, feature the *Mandala of Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* in various forms, from engravings on a gold plate to reliefs on the pagoda's exterior (Kim 2020; Söng 2017). The same





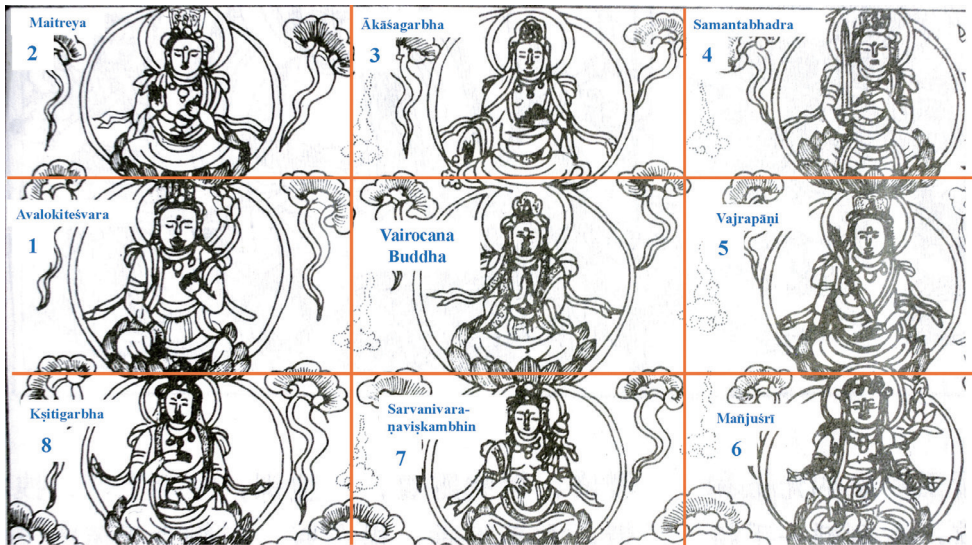
[Figure 7] Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1043–1044. Chaoyang City, Liaoning Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2008]

kind of Liao mandalas are found in the relic depository of Chaoyang North Pagoda (1043–1044) in Liaoning Province (Figure 7), and on the exterior of Daming Pagoda (1098 or earlier) in Ningcheng County, Inner Mongolia. Chaoyang North Pagoda’s mandalas were engraved on an inner layer of





[Figure 8] Sūtra-pagoda, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda. Gold and silver. Liao dynasty 1043  
[Source: Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Chaoyang shi Beita bowuguan, eds., *Chaoyang Beita*, color plate 41–1]



[Figure 9] Drawing of the mandala, Third layer of the sutra-pagoda, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda [Image adapted from figure 24–1 in Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Chaoyang shi Beita bowuguan, eds., *Chaoyang Beita*]

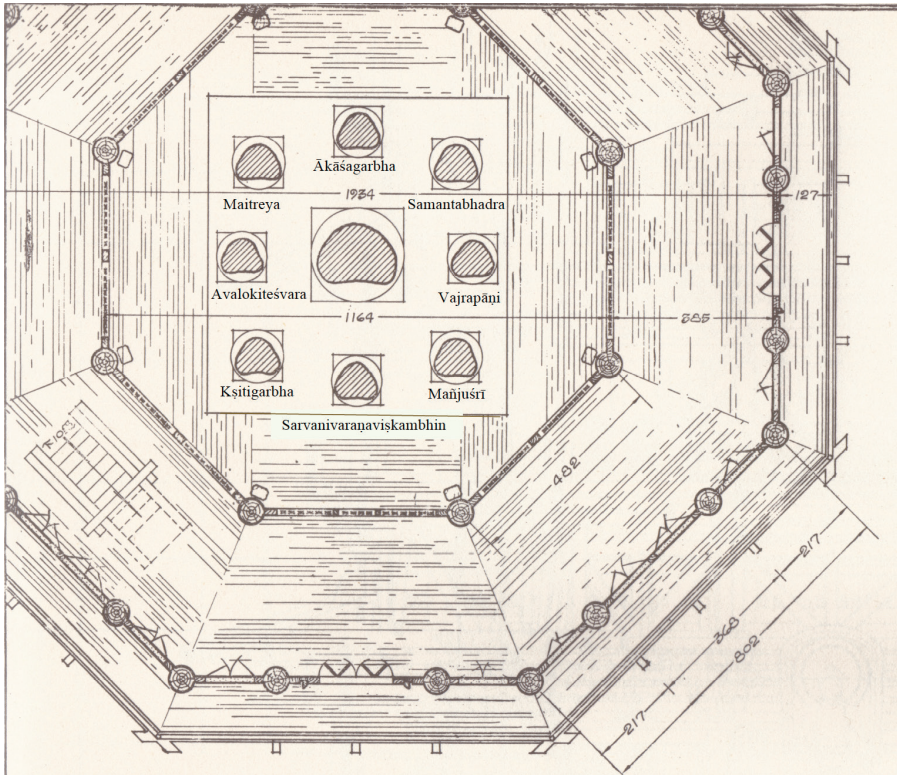
miniature metal “sūtra-pagoda” (*jingta* 經塔) (Figures 8 and 9), as well as on the depository’s main wall (Figure 17); whereas Daming Pagoda’s mandala was rendered as relief sculptures attached to the pagoda’s exterior walls.

The textual sources of these mandalas are *Sūtra of the Mandala of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* (T no. 1167) and *Ritual Manual for Chanting the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī* (T no. 972), both translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774). The attributes in the hands of the Liao Eight Great Bodhisattvas exactly conform to the explanations in the *Sūtra of the Mandala of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas*. Before the Liao period, such conformity between image and text did not appear in the images of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas from both India and East Asia (Kim 2010, 117–124). Among the seven Buddhist scriptures that mention the same group of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas (T nos. 486, 297, 972, 965, 490, 1168A, and 889), the *Ritual Manual for Chanting the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī* is the only scripture that states that Vairocana Buddha should be seated in the center of the eight bodhisattvas inside a mandala (Kim, 2010, 130–135; Kim 2013, 127–129).

The textual sources offer clues to identify each bodhisattva at Yingxian Timber Pagoda, because they specify the location of each bodhisattva in the mandala (T no. 1167, 20.675b–c; T no. 972, 19.364b–c). The *Ritual Manual*, instructs that Avalokiteśvara should be situated to the right of the central Buddha. Applying this to Yingxian Timber Pagoda, the bodhisattva statue situated in the west would be Avalokiteśvara, since the central Buddha is seated facing south and his right side is west. Following the texts, each bodhisattva at Yingxian Timber Pagoda can be identified as below (Figure 10):

- 1) bodhisattva placed in the west: Avalokiteśvara
- 2) bodhisattva placed in the northwest: Maitreya
- 3) bodhisattva placed in the north: Ākāśagarbha
- 4) bodhisattva placed in the northeast: Samantabhadra
- 5) bodhisattva placed in the east: Vajrapāṇi
- 6) bodhisattva placed in the southeast: Mañjuśrī
- 7) bodhisattva placed in the south: Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin
- 8) bodhisattva placed in the southwest: Kṣitigarbha

Although the attributes originally in the hands of the statues were lost, the statues still keep other details confirming to the textual sources. One such



[Figure 10] Names of the bodhisattvas inferred based on the *Ritual Manual for Chanting the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī*. Fifth Story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Image adapted from figure 15 in Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*]

important detail is the hairstyle of the Mañjuśrī bodhisattva placed in the southeast, which suggests that it was made in “the shape of a boy,” as described in the *Sūtra of the Mandala of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* (T no. 1167, 20.675c). Unlike the other bodhisattvas on the fifth story of the pagoda, this bodhisattva does not have a high crown on its head (Figure 11). The remaining head part of the statue suggests that it had several topknots just as the Mañjuśrī in the mandalas from Chaoyang North Pagoda (Figure 9). It was a common hairstyle for young boys.

In addition, the bodily poses of the arms offer further clues to confirm that these are the Eight Great Bodhisattvas. Although the hands of the bodhisattvas at Yingxian Timber Pagoda have been lost, the remnants of





[Figure 11] Bodhisattva placed in the southeast. Fifth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 135]

their arms in the aforementioned photographs from 1962 inform us about the original poses. The arm poses are important because they correspond with particular *mudrās*, or attributes held in the hands. For example, the arm should be rendered in an upward position to form the fear-not *mudrā*, in which the bodhisattva shows an open palm before the chest, and a downward position to form the wish-granting *mudrā*, in which the bodhisattvas shows the palm with the fingers downward. The high degree of conformity between the arm poses of the bodhisattvas at Yingxian Timber Pagoda, Chaoyang North Pagoda, and Daming Pagoda suggest that a shared visual model of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas was widely circulated in Liao (Kim 2020).

Now that it has been clarified that the Yingxian Timber Pagoda's mandala consists of the Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, we can

discuss its ritual function and its relationship with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. This three-dimensional mandala occupies the entire space of the pagoda's uppermost floor, suggesting its religious importance. It is well-known that the mandala is a ritual apparatus commonly used in esoteric Buddhist rituals since the eighth century, if not earlier. What is the specific ritual function of the Liao mandala installed at Yingxian Timber Pagoda? According to its textual source, the *Ritual Manual for Chanting the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī*, one should prepare a mandala consisting of Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas in order to activate the power of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. After making such a mandala, one should chant the *dhāraṇī* one thousand times to remove bad karma and extend one's lifespan (T no. 972, 19.364b–365a). In other words, the mandala at the top of Yingxian Timber Pagoda was very likely a device for enacting the power of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*.

## Jewel and Ritual

As we have examined the relationship between Yingxian Timber Pagoda's uppermost story and the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, we can move down to the pagoda's other floors. On the fourth floor, we encounter a Buddha that originally had four attending statues (Figure 12). The photographs from 1962 show two bodhisattvas, each on an animal mount. The bodhisattva to the Buddha's left rides an elephant, an iconographic sign of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Although its trunk and tusks have been lost, its large ears and wrinkled legs are still recognizable (Figure 13). As for the animal of the other bodhisattva, its wavy mane and clawed feet make clear that this heavily damaged statue is a lion (Figure 14). This, in turn, indicates that the bodhisattva must be Mañjuśrī. As Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra are the two attending bodhisattvas of Śākyamuni, we can infer that the central Buddha on this floor is Śākyamuni. The young monk behind the Mañjuśrī statue represents Ānanda, one of Śākyamuni's two most important disciples. (The statue of the other disciple, Kāśyapa, had already been lost when Chen Mingda photographed the pagoda in 1962.) In short, the remaining statues all indicate that the fourth floor's central Buddha is Śākyamuni.

This Śākyamuni statue became famous across the country in 1974 when numerous Buddhist scriptures and sacred objects, including a tooth relic of





[Figure 12] Fourth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 113]



[Figure 13] Samantabhadra bodhisattva. Fourth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 118]



[Figure 14] Mañjuśrī bodhisattva. Fourth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 116]

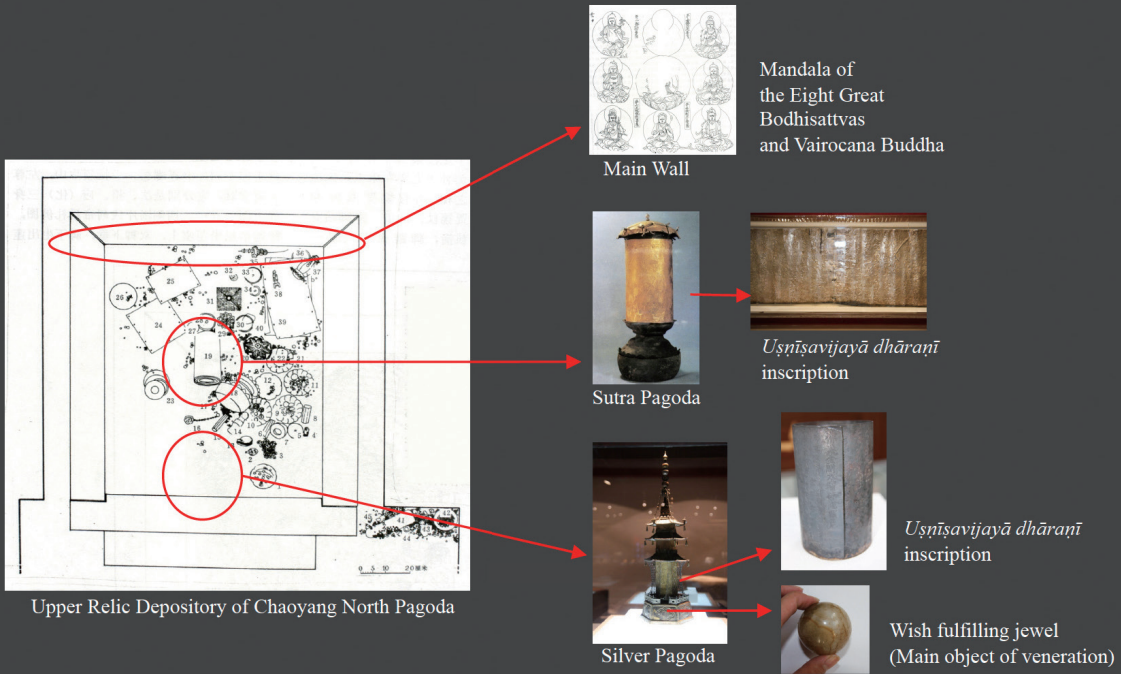


[Figure 15] Gemstone ball discovered from inside the Buddha statue on the fourth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Image adapted from plate 19 in Shanxi sheng wenwuju and Zhongguo lishi bowuguan, *Yingxian muta Liao dai micang*]



[Figure 16] Gemstone ball discovered from inside the silver miniature pagoda, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

the Buddha, were discovered inside the statue.<sup>9</sup> Among these objects, a round gemstone ball is important for our discussion (Figure 15). A similar gemstone ball was found in the silver miniature pagoda from the relic depository of Chaoyang North Pagoda's twelfth eave (Figures 8 and 16), which, as I have argued elsewhere, was designed as a ritual altar for chanting the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (Kim 2013). The pagoda's relic depository—with the *Mandala of Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* engraved on the main wall, the two miniature pagodas enshrined with inscriptions of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* along the central axis, equipped with relevant ritual objects—served as a ritual altar for enacting the power of the *dhāraṇī* (Figure 17). Its most important object, which played the role of the main object of veneration (*benzun* 本尊), was the gemstone ball that was regarded as the “wish-fulfilling jewel.” Enshrined in the silver miniature pagoda on the relic depository's central axis, the “wish-fulfilling jewel” was treated as a symbolic form of Vairocana Buddha (Kim 2013).



[Figure 17] Chaoyang North Pagoda’s upper relic depository designed as a ritual altar for the chanting ritual of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* [Diagram by Youn-mi Kim]

The practice of using a “wish-fulfilling jewel” as the main object of veneration in a *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual, not found in the Tang Buddhist tradition, was a shared feature of Liao esoteric Buddhism and Heian Japanese Shingon Buddhism 眞言宗 (Kim 2013).

The enshrinement of a similar gemstone ball in the Yingxian Timber Pagoda’s fourth floor—where, again, it probably served as the main object of veneration—further suggests a *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual. Among the many Buddhist statues installed in Yingxian Timber Pagoda, the Śākyamuni statue was chosen to enshrine the gemstone ball, probably because Śākyamuni is the Buddha who expounded the efficacy and usage of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* in the *Sūtra of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī*. According to this *sūtra*, Śākyamuni Buddha offers Shanzhu 善住, a minor god in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three,

the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* as an effective way to avoid a series of dreadful rebirths. As the story goes, a voice from heaven prophesied one night that Shanzhu would die in seven days to be reborn seven times as animals in Jambudvīpa and then be reborn as a being in hell and finally as a blind man. Despondent and terrified, Shanzhu sought help from Indra, the highest god of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, who then visited Śākyamuni as he was preaching at the Garden of Anāthapiṇḍada in Śrāvastī. Śākyamuni taught him about the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, which indeed saved Shanzhu from this series of horrific incarnations and later helped him to achieve awakening (T no. 967, 19.349c–352c). The gemstone ball and mandala suggests, given their combination elsewhere, that the pagoda's fourth and fifth floors are tightly interrelated with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual.

### Empty Space and the Truth-body

The remaining three floors of the Yingxian Timber Pagoda, as this paper explains below, form an ingenious embodiment of theories on the buddha-body (*foṣhen* 佛身, Skt. *buddhakāya*) and emptiness (*kong* 空, Skt. *sūnyatā*), which were important concepts in the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. At the same time, these three floors, as will be shown later, are also an essential part of the architectural embodiment of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual.

Let us first explore the pagoda's third story. This floor's idiosyncratic spatiality distinguishes it from the others: it is the only floor whose center was left empty (Figure 18); it has no central Buddha image. Instead, four statues of equal size face outwards. By contrast, the pagoda's other stories each feature a central Buddha image with its attendants all facing one direction (Figure 2). This empty space might seem meaningless, but is actually the most important space on this floor as explained below. The four statues, as clearly indicated by their *mudrās* and mounts, represent the Four Directional Buddhas of the Diamond Realm (金剛界四方佛) in esoteric Buddhism. Among the many kinds of Four Directional Buddhas described in scriptures, this one has been the most frequently represented in visual form since the eighth century.<sup>10</sup> In the Yingxian Timber Pagoda, however, the statues were just a device used to figure the complex embodiment of a more profound and fundamental Buddha body.

In order to understand the meaning of the empty space at the center of this





[Figure 18] Third story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 96]



[Figure 19] Ratnasambhava Buddha. Third story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 98]

floor, we should first briefly examine the basic iconography of these statues. The one in the south sits on a pedestal supported by figurines of kneeling horses (Figure 19). Although their faces are partly broken, their flowing manes help viewers recognize them as horses. Horses as a mount constitute the typical iconography of Ratnasambhava, the Buddha of the South, among the Four Directional Buddhas. The other iconographic sign of Ratnasambhava is the wish-granting *mudrā*, and the surviving parts of the statue's right hand show that it originally formed this *mudrā* with its right hand. The other three statues on the third floor also have animal mounts and *mudrās* conforming to the iconography of the Four Directional Buddhas of the Diamond Realm: the statue to the west is Amitābha Buddha seated on peacocks and displaying the meditation *mudrā* (Figure 20); the statue to the north represents





[Figure 20] Amitābha Buddha. Third story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016]

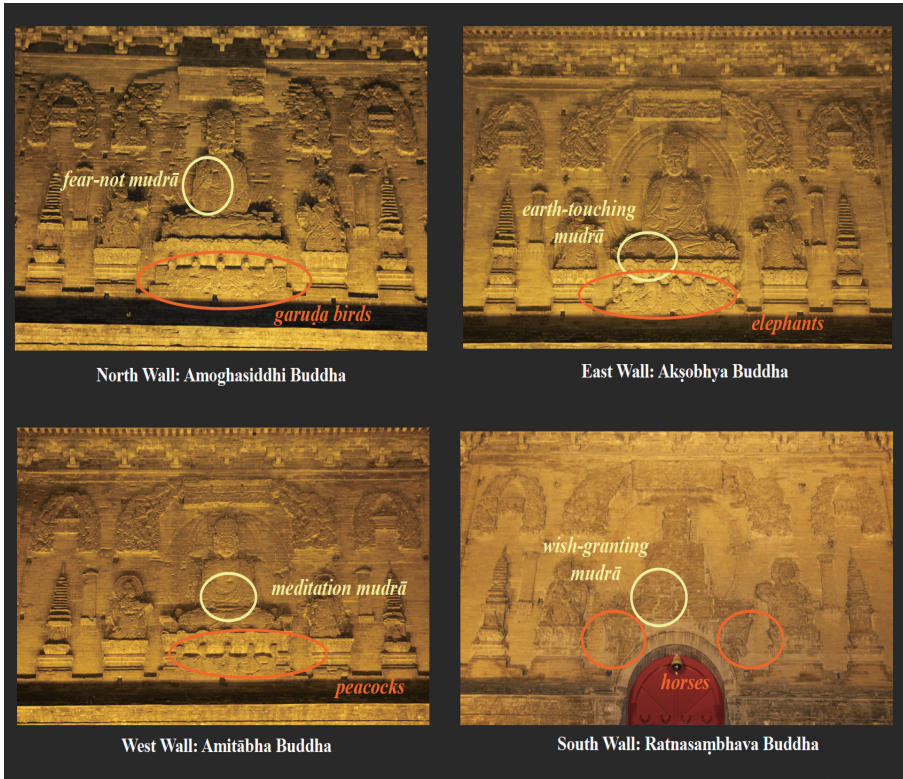


[Figure 21] Amoghasiddhi Buddha. Third story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Source: Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*, plate 99]



[Figure 22] Akṣobhya Buddha. Third story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016]

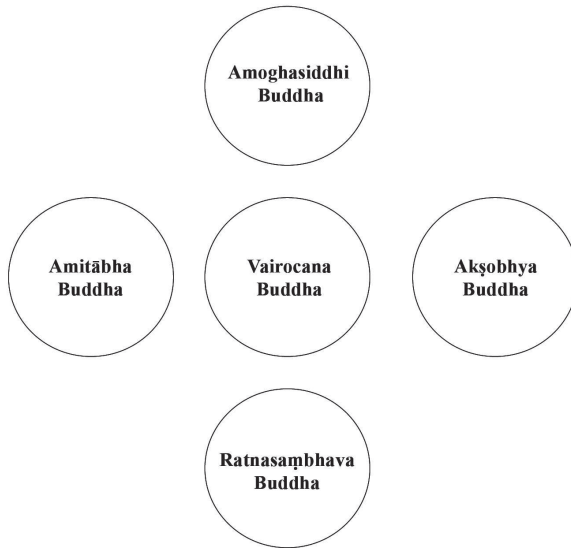
Amoghasiddhi Buddha on mythical birds known as *garuḍa*, and his raised right forearm indicates that he originally displayed the fear-not *mudrā* (Figure 21); and the statue to the east is Akṣobhya Buddha seated on elephants and forming the earth-touching *mudrā* (Figure 22). Furthering the connection with the Chaoyang North Pagoda, these Four Directional Buddhas also appear there, rendered as relief sculptures—as, indeed, they do on the exteriors of many Liao brick pagodas (Figures 7 and 23). The animal mounts and the



[Figure 23] Four Directional Buddhas of the Diamond Realm, exterior walls of Chaoyang North Pagoda [Photographs taken at night by Youn-mi Kim, 2008]

*mudrā* of the Buddhas on the four walls of this pagoda exactly match those of the Yingxian Timber Pagoda statues.

Now that it is clear that these are the Four Directional Buddhas, the empty space in the center raises an even more vexing question, because the center, according to the iconography of esoteric Buddhism, should be the place of the Buddha Vairocana—the most important figure in the tradition (Figure 24).<sup>11</sup> Together with Vairocana in the center, they typically form the Five Directional Buddhas of the Diamond Realm. As the Buddha who has the Wisdom of Dharma-realm Essence (*fajie tixing zhi* 法界體性智), or the wisdom to understand the essence of the entire universe, Vairocana was thought to be the principal Buddha from whose body the Four Directional Buddhas emanate.



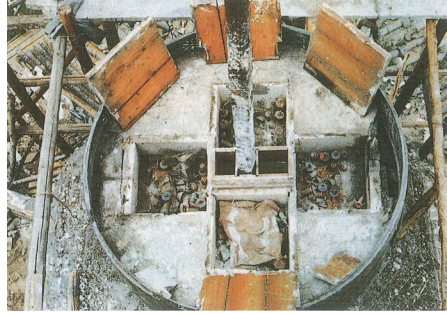
[Figure 24] Five Directional Buddhas of the Diamond Realm [Diagram by Youn-mi Kim]

Why was the place of Vairocana—the crucial central Buddha—left empty in the Yingxian Timber Pagoda’s visual program? The size of the empty space and the pristine status of the wooden floor suggest that the center was designed to remain empty (Figure 18). Was this empty space itself meant as a kind of “image” of Vairocana? And if it was, what logic did this visual program follow? A clue to help answer these questions can be found in the *dhāraṇī* scrolls excavated from Qingzhou White Pagoda (1047–1049) in Inner Mongolia, a Liao pagoda built with the imperial patronage of Empress Dowager Qin’*ai* 欽哀 (d. 1058) (Figure 25).<sup>12</sup> During this pagoda’s restoration from 1988 to 1992, a five-chambered relic depository was discovered inside the pagoda’s pinnacle (Figure 26). Enshrined in the five chambers were more than a hundred miniature wooden pagodas, each encasing a woodblock-printed scroll of various *dhāraṇīs* (Figure 27). According to my research, most, if not all, of the scrolls that were encased in miniature pagodas were made by mixing parts of two different *dhāraṇī* prints, which I call “type-A” and “type-B” for ease of reference.<sup>13</sup> Type-A scrolls include four kinds of *dhāraṇīs* from the *Pure Light Sūtra*,<sup>14</sup> and type-B scrolls include about 18 kinds of *dhāraṇīs* embedded with brief instructions on how to chant them.<sup>15</sup>





[Figure 25] Qingzhou White Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1047–1049. Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

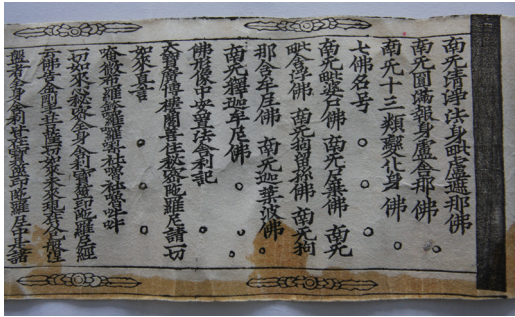


[Figure 26] Five-chambered relic depository, discovered in the pinnacle of Qingzhou White Pagoda [Source: De Xin and at al., “Nei Menggu Balinyouqi Qingzhou Baita faxian Liao dai fojiao wenwu”]



[Figure 27] Woodblock-printed scroll taken out of a miniature wooden pagoda, excavated from Qingzhou White Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1047–1049. Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

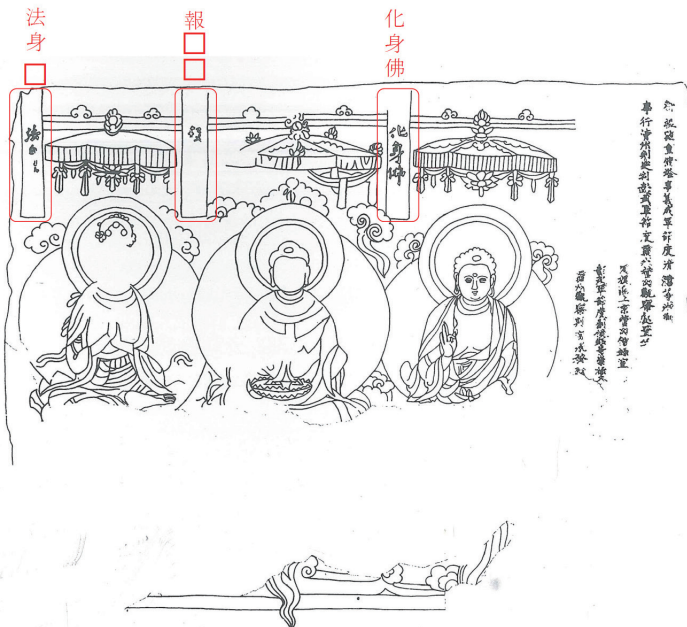
A phrase included in type-B scrolls offers a clue to our question. It reads, “I take refuge in the pristine truth-body, who is the Buddha Vairocana” (Figure 28).<sup>16</sup> As this phrase informs us, the Buddha Vairocana was regarded as *fashen* 法身, or the truth-body (Skt. *dharmakāya*). The truth-body is one of the *trikāya*, or the Three Bodies of the Buddha (*sanshen* 三身). Since the fourth century, various schools in Mahāyāna Buddhism developed theories expounding the Buddha as having three kinds of bodies—the truth-body, the reward-body (*baoshen* 報身, Skt. *saṃbhogakāya*), and the transformation-body (*huashen* 化身, *yingshen* 應身, *yinghuashen* 化應身, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*).<sup>17</sup>



[Figure 28] Type-B scroll from a miniature wooden pagoda, excavated from Qingzhou White Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1047–1049. Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

Not only text but also images from Liao Buddhism portrayed Vairocana Buddha as the truth-body in the *trikāya*. An engraved image of the *trikāya* is found on the east wall of, once again, the Chaoyang North Pagoda’s relic depository. The partially remaining inscriptions on the wall record that the three Buddhas engraved there represent the *trikāya*

(Figure 29) (Kim 2010, 83–86). The same three Buddhas also appear on the silver reliquary box excavated from the relic depository (Figure 30). From left to right,



[Figure 29] Inscriptions and the engraving on the east wall. Upper relic depository of Chaoyang North Pagoda [Image adapted from figure 21–1 in Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Chaoyang shi Beita bowuguan, eds., *Chaoyang Beita*]

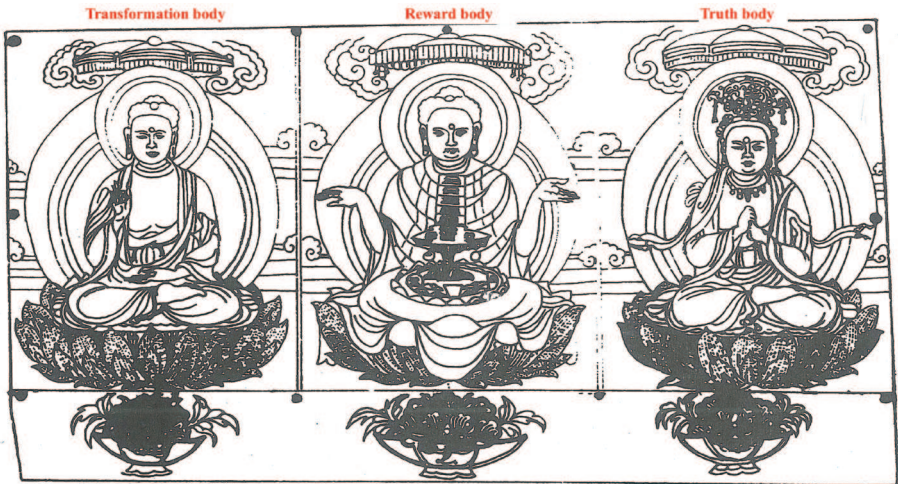


the reliquary's engraving depicts the transformation-body, the reward-body, and the truth-body (Figure 31).<sup>18</sup> The truth-body in the engraving, adorned with a sumptuous crown and necklace, forms the wisdom-fist *mudrā*—the gesture reserved only for Vairocana; no other Buddha can be described with this specific hand gesture. The engraving therefore further suggests that the Buddha's truth-body was thought to be Vairocana in Liao Buddhism.<sup>19</sup>



[Figure 30] Silver reliquary box, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

Thus, we can see that Vairocana, the figure seemingly absent from the center of the Yingxian pagoda's tableau, represented the doctrine of the truth-body. This fact, it turns out, is crucial for understanding the empty space framed by the four statues. The *trikāya* theory that continued from ancient India to



[Figure 31] Engraving on a long panel of the silver reliquary box, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda [Image adapted from figure 25 in Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Chaoyang shi Beita bowuguan, eds., *Chaoyang Beita*]

Liao helps explain why the truth-body was not represented as a material statue. Mahāyāna Buddhists in fourth-century India, complicating and supplementing the previous Buddha's two-body theory, developed the *trikāya* theory.<sup>20</sup> The earliest systematic explanation of the *trikāya* theory appears in *Treatise on the Scripture of Adorning the Great Vehicle* (Skt. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*) (T no. 1604, 31.589b–661c) (Makransky 1997, 54; Habito 1978, 11).<sup>21</sup> Chinese monks, as will be explained in due course, continued to develop and comment on this theory, which was later accepted in Liao Buddhism. What deserves our attention here is the frequent comparison of the truth-body to *xukong* 虛空, or empty space. In the *trikāya* theory, *empty space* developed into an important concept for explaining the nature of the Buddha's truth-body. The scripture that provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of the *trikāya* is the *Golden Light Sūtra*, translated multiple times into Chinese between the fifth and eighth centuries.<sup>22</sup> According to its “Chapter on Distinguishing the *Trikāya* (分別三身品)” in the translated version of the *Golden Light Sūtra* compiled in 597 by Baogui 寶貴, the truth-body “is without differentiation and it is the origin of itself. For this reason, [it is] just like empty space, and for this reason it is said to be eternal” (T no. 664, 16.363c12–13).<sup>23</sup> An almost identical passage is also found in the scripture's translation in 703 by Yijing 義淨 (635–713) (T no. 665, 16.409b11–12).

The *Flower Garland Sūtra*, a scripture important in Liao Buddhism,<sup>24</sup> also frequently compares the nature of the truth-body to empty space, especially in the “Chapter on the Treasury King Buddha's Arising of the Original Nature” (寶王如來性起品) (T no. 278, 9.614b–631b). According to this text, the truth-body, “just like empty space,” pervades every place and every sentient being without actually reaching them,<sup>25</sup> and its pure body is identical with the infinite cosmos (T no. 278, 9.629b). The truth-body, according to the text, is “formless, shapeless, and imageless” (T no. 279, 10.37c7). As the *Flower Garland Sūtra* was one of the most important scriptures in Liao due to the dominance of Huayan doctrine, it is hardly possible that this identification of the truth-body with empty space went unnoticed.

A Liao stone stele (1098) from Xingguosi 興國寺 in Hebei province provides further evidence that this understanding of the nature of the truth-body was shared by contemporaries in the Liao empire. The inscription states,

The truth-body is originally formless and nameless. Therefore, there is no shape

it cannot manifest in response to [different] matters. Therefore, Śākyamuni [as a transformation body emanated from the truth-body] descended to our human world...<sup>26</sup>

The exact same lines appear on another Liao stele—the Huifengsi Pagoda stele (1091) discovered in present-day Gu'an County, Hebei Province—demonstrating that this understanding of the formless nature of the Buddha's truth-body was widespread in Liao.<sup>27</sup>

All of these details indicate that the four Buddha statues on the third floor of the Yingxian Timber Pagoda were not, in themselves, icons for worship, but were instead ingenious devices to transform the empty space at their center into a *formless* icon (Figure 18). In other words, the empty space was intended to figure the undifferentiated truth-body of the Buddha whose nature was often compared to empty space in scriptures. The pagoda's empty space thus serves as an *incorporeal icon* that figures the invisible truth-body. On the third floor of Yingxian Timber Pagoda, what we have to *see*, therefore, is not the four Buddha statues but the invisible body of the Buddha manifested by the empty space.

## The Buddha Bodies

The conceptual embodiment of the Buddha's truth-body on the pagoda's third floor was seamlessly interwoven with the *dhāraṇī* ritual that was figured throughout the pagoda from the ground to the top floor. The pagoda's first three stories, as this section will make clear below, embody the *trikāya* (Buddha's Three Bodies), which was an irreducible part of the *Uṣṇīṣarvijayā dhāraṇī* and its ritual in Liao Buddhism. We will first examine how the three stories present the *trikāya*, and then examine their relationship to Liao *dhāraṇī* practice.

The pagoda's first story has a walled inner sanctuary that enshrines a large Buddha, whose lotus pedestal features small Buddha images painted on its petals (Figures 32 and 33).<sup>28</sup> These small Buddha images indicate that the huge Buddha statue seated on the pedestal is Rocana Buddha 盧舍那佛, as described in the *Sūtra of Brahma's Net* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經) (Shen 2001, 270), an influential scripture in East Asian Buddhism.<sup>29</sup> The small Buddha images on the pedestal are visual devices that metaphorically capture the nature of Rocana as cosmological Buddha. In the *Sūtra of Brahma's Net*, Rocana Buddha



[Figure 32] Buddha statue in the first story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]



[Figure 33] Small Buddhas painted on the lotus pedestal of the Buddha statue. First story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]





[Figure 34] Rocana Buddha, Fengxiansi at the Longmen Grottoes. Tang dynasty, 675. Henan Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2018]



[Figure 35] Small Buddhas carved on the lotus pedestal of Rocana Buddha, Fengxiansi at the Longmen Grottoes. Tang dynasty, 675. Henan Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2018]

preaches that he is seated on a lotus pedestal with one thousand petals, each of which bears a Śākyamuni Buddha emanating from his body. Furthermore, according to the scripture, each petal encompasses one cosmos, which in turn encompasses one billion smaller cosmoses (T no. 1484, 24.997c4–14). This scripture served as a textual source for the colossal Rocana Buddha statues in Tang China and Nara Japan (710–794), such as the Rocana Buddha in Fengxiansi 奉先寺 at the Longmen Grottoes (Figures 34 and 35) and the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji 東大寺大佛 (ca. 752) in Japan. The engravings on their pedestals portray the nature of Rocana as an enormous cosmological Buddha.

Unlike the previous dynasties' colossal Rocana Buddhas, which were simply commissioned to represent a cosmological Buddha, the Liao example at Yingxian Timber Pagoda was distinctive in that it simultaneously formed a part of the *trikāya*. Thus, to examine its relationship with the *trikāya*, it is necessary to examine the Buddha enshrined on the pagoda's second floor (Figure 36). The lion and elephant on this floor, each supporting the lotus pedestal of a



[Figure 36] Second story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]



[Figure 37] Lion and elephant supporting the lotus pedestals of bodhisattvas. Second story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. Ying County, Shanxi Province, China [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

bodhisattva, inform us that the Buddha's attending bodhisattvas are Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra (Figure 37). Because these are the attending bodhisattvas of Śākyamuni, the Buddha in the center must be Śākyamuni.

In sum, the central Buddhas, from the first to the third story, are as follows (see Table 1):

[Table 1] Yingxian Timber Pagoda's Central Buddhas from the First to the Third Floors

Floor	Central Buddha
Third	Vairocana (i.e., Truth-body)
Second	Śākyamuni
First	Rocana

In China, these three Buddhas were connected with the *trikāya* due to the writings of the Tiantai-school monk Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) from the Sui dynasty (581–618), whose exposition on the *trikāya* was later widely circulated in East Asia. Before Zhiyi linked each Buddha body with a specific Buddha, the *trikāya* in Buddhist discourse was a general metaphysical concept and did not signify specific Buddhas. The reward-body, for example, was the pristine body given to a Buddha as a reward for the merit accumulated through his practice of compassion for an unimaginably long period of time before achieving awakening. Therefore, many Buddhas, including Amitābha, was thought to have gained a reward-body (Yi 1966; Nagao 1973; Guang 2005). As for the truth-body, as examined above, it was a philosophical concept of the true body of all Buddhas, which, as such, could not be represented by any particular Buddha. It was only in the sixth century that the truth body was associated with Vairocana in the exposition by the monk Zhiyi.

Zhiyi thereby transformed Chinese understandings of these abstract Buddha bodies by identifying each with a specific personified Buddha. His interpretation of the *trikāya* appears in the *Textual Explanation of the Lotus Sūtra*, a record of Zhiyi's lecture given in 587 (T no. 1718).<sup>30</sup> In it, he states:

The name of the truth-body Buddha is Vairocana, whose idiomatic translation is “omnipresence.” The name of the reward-body Buddha is Rocana, whose

idiomatic translation is “pure-and-complete.” The name of the response-body (transformation-body)<sup>31</sup> Buddha is Śākyamuni, whose idiomatic translation is “the savior from the burning rock.”<sup>32</sup>

法身如來名毘盧遮那 此翻遍一切處 報身如來名盧舍那 此翻淨滿 應身如來名釋迦  
文此翻度沃焦 (T no. 1718, 34.128a17–18)

Zhiyi’s exposition on the Three Bodies was accepted by monks of various schools, including Kuiji 窺基 (632–682) and Daoshi 道世 (ca. 596–683), during the Tang dynasty.<sup>33</sup> A similar exposition can be found reflected in the aforementioned reliquary from Chaoyang North Pagoda, revealing the circulation in Liao Buddhism of the *trikāya* theory originated by Zhiyi (Figures 30 and 31). Conforming to Zhiyi’s commentary, the truth-body appears as Vairocana Buddha with the wisdom-fist *mudrā*; the reward-body in the middle as Rocana Buddha, as indicated by the cosmos manifested on his body; and the transformation-body as Śākyamuni Buddha with the preaching *mudrā*. As for the Rocana Buddha in the middle, the so-called Rocana-Preaching *mudrā* formed by his hands—together with the image of the cosmos, where Mount Sumeru is surrounded by the Fragrant Ocean and four continents and topped by the layers of heaven, appearing on his body—indicates that this is the cosmological Buddha Rocana.

Returning to the Yingxian Timber Pagoda, it is now clear that the pagoda’s first three stories were intended to figure the Buddha’s Three Bodies. Based on the above observations regarding the Buddha-body doctrine and contemporary Liao engravings, it can be deduced that the first to third floors, respectively, embody the reward-, transformation-, and truth-body, as shown in Table 2.

[Table 2] Trikāya Embodied by Yingxian Timber Pagoda

Floor	Buddha	Embodied Buddha Body
Third	Vairocana	Truth-body
Second	Śākyamuni	Transformation-body
First	Rocana	Reward-body



### *Trikāya in the Dhāraṇī*

The *trikāya* conceptually embodied by the Yingxian Timber Pagoda was not only a visualization of the profound Buddhist theories of the Buddha bodies, it also had a special connection to the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. The Three Bodies had a twofold relationship with the *dhāraṇī*, both through the contents of the *dhāraṇī* and through its ritual enactments.

First, the Buddha's Three Bodies constitute the beginning contents of this incantation. Although Buddhist *dhāraṇīs*, usually composed of grammatically twisted Indic words, had often been regarded as linguistically meaningless formulae, more recent scholarship has found that many are quite legible in terms of word formulations (Copp 2012).<sup>34</sup> Learned medieval monks in East Asia had the ability to decipher them. Copp found that Fachong 法崇 (fl. 760s–770s), a monk in the circle of Amoghavajra's Esoteric Buddhism, conducted a deep analysis of the contents of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (Copp 2012; Copp 2014, 188–194). The analysis of the *dhāraṇī* was included in Fachong's *Recorded Meaning and Teaching of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī Sūtra*. Fachong divides the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* into ten sections, and offers glosses and commentaries on all 50 words and compounds that constitute the *dhāraṇī* (T no. 1803, 39.1028a15–1033c2). The “translation” of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, re-constructed from Fachong's analysis, reads, in part:

I take refuge in the World-honored Ones of the past, present, and future [or the Three Realms]! Most extraordinary and surpassing awakened ones: world-honored ones!

Thus it is said: **the Three Bodies of the Buddha** [or, the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*].

Pure universal radiance spreading everywhere, in the deeps, spontaneous and pure . . .

Clear and pure as **empty space!** *Uṣṇīṣa*, surpassingly clear and pure! A thousand beams of radiance startling awake . . .

All sentient beings attain clarity and purity! All paths clear and pure! All the Thus-come comfort and bestow and keep! . . .

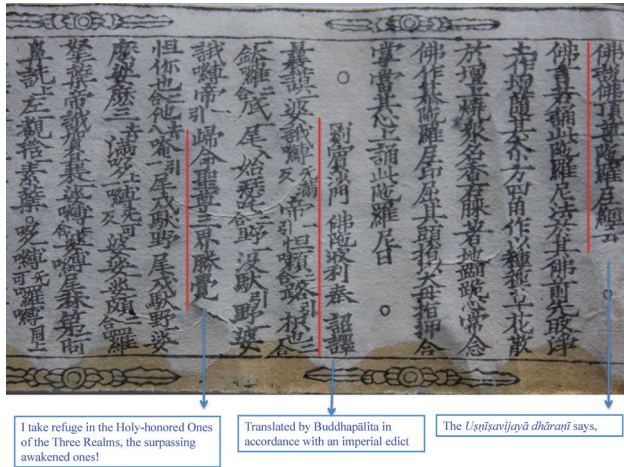
*Nirvāṇa!*<sup>35</sup>

Following the lines of the invocation that invite all the Buddhas (i.e. the World-honored Ones) across time and space, the main part of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* opens with the term “Three Bodies of the Buddha” (*sanshen* 三身) and ends with the term “*nirvāṇa*” (*niepan* 涅槃). Within the text of the *dhāraṇī*, there is the phrase “empty space” (*xukong* 虛空), to which we will later return.

The Sanskrit term that Fachong interprets as the “Three Bodies of the Buddha” is *om* (*an* 唵). Among the fifty words and compounds that constitute the *dhāraṇī*, Fachong gives the longest commentary to this opening term,<sup>36</sup> which suggests its significance in the *dhāraṇī*. In his gloss, Fachong first defines the term *om* as the Three Bodies of the Buddha, then adds that *om* also means “all phenomena are unarisen” (一切法不生), and “the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*” (無見頂相). Fachong then begins his rather lengthy commentary on the term *om*, the majority of which is occupied by his explanation of the Three Bodies of the Buddha. He clearly puts a great deal of effort into offering a theoretical analysis of the term’s principal meaning, citing scholastic theories on the Three Bodies from the *Golden Light Sūtra* (*Jin guangming jing* 金光明經), *Treatise on the Buddha-stage Sūtra* (*Fodi jing lun* 佛地經論) and *Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-only* (*Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論) (T no. 1803, 39.1029a7–21).<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, Fachong seamlessly weaves the term’s principal meaning (the Three Bodies of the Buddha) together with the two secondary meanings (“all phenomena are unarisen” and “the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*”) that he suggested in the term’s gloss. The term *om*, as he explains, means the Three Bodies because the sound *om* is comprised of the sounds *a*, *u*, and *m*, each of which represents one of the Three Bodies. In other words, the sound *a* means “all phenomena are unarisen,” which is originally the truth-body; the sound *u* means “ceaseless flow of good judgement (流注分別),” which is the reward-body; and the sound *m* means “transforming to compassion (慈化等義),” which is the transformation-body. When these three sounds are joined, Fachong argues, the meaning changes to emptiness, implying that the essence of the Three Bodies is emptiness (T no. 1803, 39.1029a).

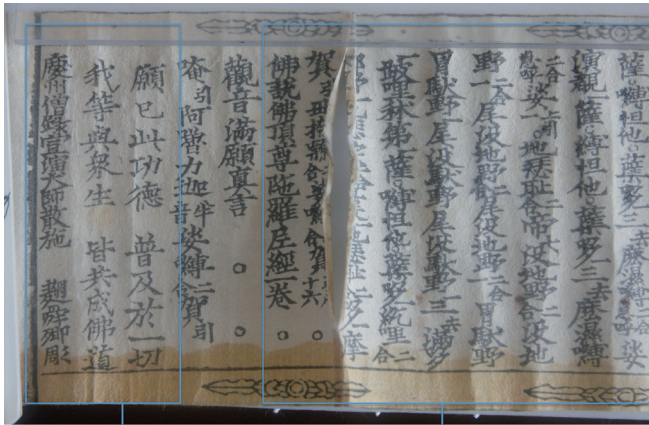
Following these elucidations, Fachong writes, “Therefore [the term *om*] signifies the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*” (故云無見頂相義也) (T no. 1803, 39.1029a7). In this way, the commentary links the three meanings of the term *om* as if they were seamlessly interconnected. Here, we can see that the concepts of the *trikāya* (Three Bodies), *śūnyatā* (emptiness), and *uṣṇīṣa* are all intermingled as if they were one. It is particularly notable that the Three Bodies are regarded as equivalent to the *uṣṇīṣa*,



[Figure 38] The *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* in the Type-B scroll from a miniature wooden pagoda, excavated from Qingzhou White Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1047–1049. Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia, China [Photograph and editing by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

which is the essence of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, as indicated by its title.<sup>38</sup> The *uṣṇīṣa* originally referred to the topknot hairstyle or protuberance on top of the Buddha’s head, which is one of the thirty-two sacred marks on his body (*lakṣaṇa*); however, in later texts it came to signify the Buddha’s unsurpassable wisdom and power, as in the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. In other words, Fachong thought that the essence of the *dhāraṇī*, that is, the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*, was interchangeable with the Buddha’s Three Bodies, whose essence was, in turn, emptiness.

We see something very similar in the iconographic program of the Yingxian pagoda—to the extent that it appears to be a visual manifestation of this understanding of the *dhāraṇī*. It might be too much to argue that Fachong’s analysis of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* was influential in Liao, but it seems clear that elite Liao monks had a very similar understanding of this Sanskrit *dhāraṇī*’s contents. The aforementioned type-B scrolls from Qingzhou White Pagoda (Figure 27) includes the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. The spell appears toward the end of the scroll as a Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit. The invocation lines of the *dhāraṇī* are followed by their Chinese translation, “I take refuge in the Holy-honored Ones of the Three Realms, the surpassing awakened ones” (歸命聖尊三界勝覺) (Figure 38). Even though it offers a translation of only one sentence, it is notable because no other *dhāraṇī*s in the scroll accompany such



The prayer and the official title of the monk who commissioned the scroll

Ending part of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*

[Figure 39] Ending part of the Type-B scroll from a miniature wooden pagoda, excavated from Qingzhou White Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1047–1049. Balin Right Banner, Inner Mongolia, China [Photograph and editing by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

a translation. Moreover, *dhāraṇīs* were rarely translated in premodern China, and were used in the transliterated form or in Siddham or Lantsa script when written down for its efficacy.<sup>39</sup>

The translated sentence in the Liao scroll uses slightly different Chinese characters and omits redundant words for brevity, but it shares an understanding of the opening lines that is basically identical with Fachong's.<sup>40</sup> It seems that the translation was added by the monk who commissioned the scrolls. The concluding passage of type-B scrolls records that it was commissioned by the Great Master Xuanyan 宣演大師 (also known as Monk Yungui 沙門蘊珪, fl. mid-eleventh century) (Figure 39), the monastic who supervised the construction of Qingzhou White Pagoda in which the scrolls were discovered.<sup>41</sup> Xuanyan was an elite monk who was serving as the Monks' Registrar of Qing Prefecture (慶州僧錄) during the construction of the pagoda between 1047 and 1049. He had also supervised the construction of Chaoyang North Pagoda a few years prior (Kim 2013, 154–160). This elite monk who commissioned the type-B *dhāraṇī* scrolls had the above-mentioned Chinese translation of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* inserted into it, as if to vaunt his knowledge of Sanskrit.

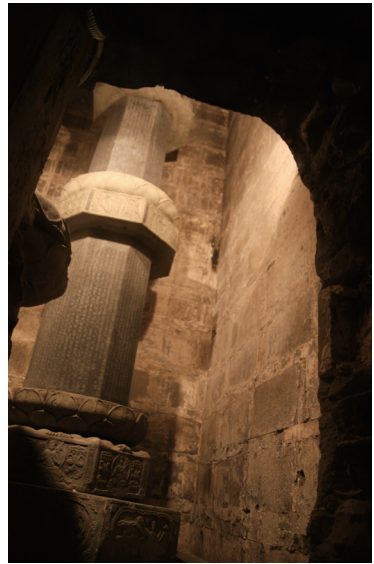
Some received texts and archaeological traces suggest that not only elite



monks but even some laypeople in Liao, including the emperor and local elites, had some knowledge of Sanskrit. For example, the tenth-century preface to the *Longkan shoujian* 龍龕手鑑 has been cited as evidence of the Liao's interest in Sanskrit, and at least two influential Indian and Central Asian monks are known to have translated Sanskrit *dhāraṇīs* and promoted the use of *dhāraṇī* in eleventh-century Liao (Sørensen 2011). Emperor Daozong 道宗 (1055–1101), known for his in-depth understanding of Buddhist scriptures, even studied Sanskrit (Nogami 1953, 21). Moreover, even some local laypeople in Liao could write Sanskrit letters, as proven by archaeological data. A long silver sheet engraved with two *dhāraṇīs* was found rolled up inside the aforementioned miniature silver pagoda from Chaoyang North Pagoda (Figures 17, 40). A copper plate discovered in the same silver pagoda records that the *dhāraṇīs* were written in Indic script by a person named Xuan Yuanheng 軒轅亨, who held the position of “acting revenue manager administrator” (Shou sihu canjun 守司戶參軍). The *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* and the *Vajra-obliteration dhāraṇī* were indeed engraved in Indic script on the silver sheet (Figure 40).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the *dhāraṇīs* engraved in Indic script on the four-story *dhāraṇī* pillar (Figure 41), excavated from the underground relic depository of Chaoyang North Pagoda, were proofread by the same person, Xuan



[Figure 40] *Dhāraṇīs* inscribed on the silver sheet from the miniature silver pagoda. Excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]



[Figure 41] Four-story *dhāraṇī* pillar in the underground relic depository of Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1044 [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]

Yuanheng, and then rewritten by a scholar-official named Zhang Ri 張日.<sup>43</sup> All of these facts suggest that people from diverse social groups in Liao shared the ability to understand and write *dhāraṇīs* in Indic script.

The above observations indicate that Yingxian Timber Pagoda's first three stories embodied the principal part of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*—the Buddha's Three Bodies, which was equivalent to the *uṣṇīṣa*. Also notable in the contents of the *dhāraṇī* is “empty space,” a key concept in the pagoda's iconographic program. The phrase “clear and pure as empty space,” as shown above, appears in Fachong's gloss of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*,<sup>44</sup> echoing the fact that empty space—as both ontological concept and spatial fact—played a significant role at the center of the Yingxian Timber Pagoda (Figure 18). As the empty space embodying the Buddha's truth-body was situated on the third floor—the pagoda's middle story—the empty space literally occupies the center of this five-storied pagoda. Commenting on the phrase, “clear and pure as empty space,” Fachong expounds that “Only the Buddha body is empty and pure like empty space,” (唯有佛身如虛空淨, T no. 1803, 39.1030b27–28), which resonates even more strongly with the Yingxian Timber Pagoda's visual device of embodying the Buddha's truth-body by means of empty space. Similar statements, such as “the extensiveness of empty space can be compared to the truth-body of the Buddha” (虛空寬廣體喻法身) and “the Buddha is empty space,” (佛即虛空) (T no. 1803, 39.1030c4–8), recur throughout Fachong's commentary on the *dhāraṇī*, where emptiness is the essence of dharma-nature (*faxing* 法性) and all dharmas (*yiqie zhufa* 一切諸法). Although Fachong commented on the Buddha body through textual exposition, the Liao pagoda reveals the true nature of the Buddha body through the use of a visual and architectural device.

### *Trikāya* Invoked for Ritual

In Liao Buddhist practice, the Buddha's Three Bodies were also tied to the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* through ritual performance. In eleventh-century Liao, the Three Bodies were invoked at the start of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual, as implied by the materials excavated from the Qingzhou White Pagoda and the Chaoyang North Pagoda. The type-B scrolls from the Qingzhou White Pagoda, indeed, seems to be a ritual manual rather than a simple collection of *dhāraṇīs*. The scroll begins with invocations inviting Buddhas to the ritual place,

followed by *dhāraṇīs* to be chanted at the ritual. Each *dhāraṇī* is accompanied by an explanation of its efficacy and usage. The scroll also instructs one to chant the names of Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara, three times each, in the middle of the ritual. The chanting ritual culminates with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, which is the most important *dhāraṇī* in the chanting ritual prescribed by the scroll (Figure 38).<sup>45</sup>

What is most relevant to our discussion is that this scroll opens with an *invocation* of none other than the Buddha's Three Bodies. The three lines at the start of the scroll invoke the truth-body, reward-body, and transformation-body (Figure 28),<sup>46</sup> respectively, suggesting that the *trikāya* was invoked for the *dhāraṇī* ritual that culminated in the chanting of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*.

The ritual altar for chanting the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* installed inside Chaoyang North Pagoda also suggests that the Buddha's Three Bodies were invoked for the ritual. An engraved image of the Three Bodies occupies the east wall of the pagoda's upper relic depository (Figure 29). Partially remaining inscriptions and iconographic signs inform us that, from left to right, the three Buddhas represent the truth-body, reward-body, and transformation-body, respectively. The south wall bears an image of a door and guardian deities, indicating that the north wall is the main wall. The main wall features the *Mandala of Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas*—a ritual apparatus exclusively used for chanting of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (Figure 17).<sup>47</sup> As mentioned above, this upper relic depository was designed as an altar for the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual (Kim 2013). Considering the invocation lines in the type-B scrolls from Qingzhou White Pagoda examined above, the Three Bodies were probably engraved at the ritual altar to represent the Buddhas invited to the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual.<sup>48</sup>

The relic depository's west wall seems to have a connection with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* as well. Natural elements had already effaced most of the engravings on the west wall when the archaeologists opened the depository in 1988. The inscription partially remaining on the wall, however, suggests that the lost image was a *nirvāṇa* scene portraying the Buddha on his deathbed (Kim 2010, 206–208). The remaining parts of the inscription read,

... said that all ... the Buddha extinguished. ... hundred-ninety-two years, the third ...

說都 ... 世尊滅 □□□□□百九十二年第三 ...

Due to erosion, we can only know that there were five characters between the letter *mie* 滅 and *bai* 百. We can infer these lost characters, based on how Liao Buddhists calculated the years after the great *nirvāṇa*, or the passing of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Liao people believed that the era of Final Dharma would begin in 1052, because they calculated that the Buddha had passed away in 949 BCE and the Final Dharma would start 2000 years later (Shen 2001, 267). Following this Liao calculation, the year 1043, when Chaoyang North Pagoda's relic depository was completed, was one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two years after Śākyamuni's entering of the great *nirvāṇa*. Part of the lost inscription therefore can be reconstructed as,

said that all . . . [It] is one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two years after the Buddha entered *nirvāṇa*, the third...

說都 ... 是世尊滅以後一千九百九十二年第三 ...

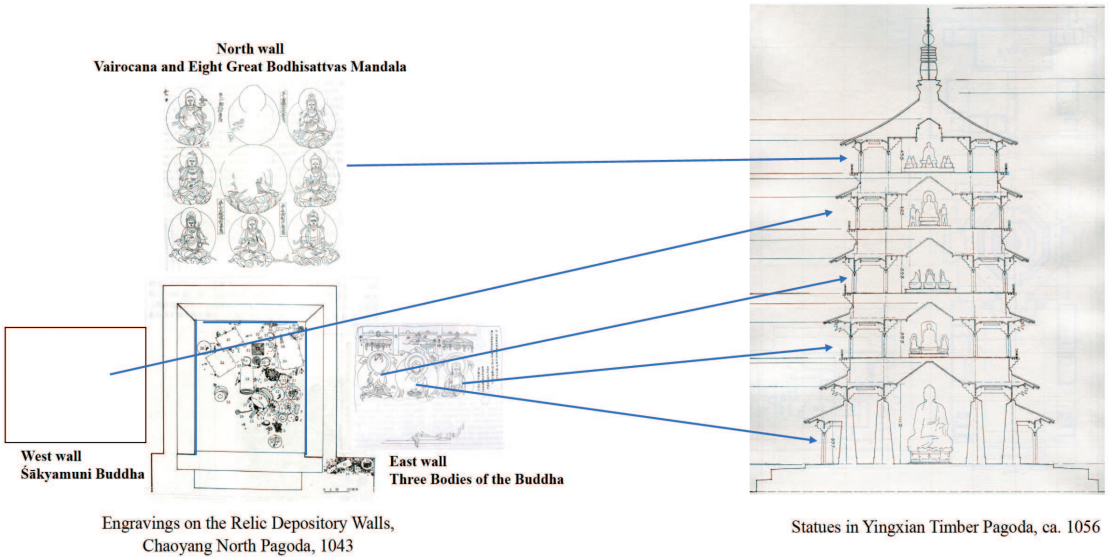
Was the lost image on this wall indeed a scene of the Buddha's great *nirvāṇa*? The aforementioned silver reliquary box excavated from the relic depository seems to give an affirmative answer. One of its longitudinal panels was engraved with the *nirvāṇa* scene that portrays Śākyamuni lying on his side, surrounded by grieving disciples and wailing animals (Figures 30 and 42). As the aforementioned Three Bodies on the other longitudinal panel of the same reliquary was a mirror image of the Three Bodies on the relic depository's east wall (Figures 29 and 31), it is very likely that the *nirvāṇa* scene on the reliquary was a mirror image of the lost *nirvāṇa* scene that originally occupied the west wall.

The *nirvāṇa* scene on the west wall reminds us of the last word of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. As examined above, the translation of the *dhāraṇī* ends with the term *nirvāṇa*. This is suggestive, given that the historical Buddha's *nirvāṇa* scene was engraved on the wall of Chaoyang North Pagoda's relic depository, which was a ritual altar for the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. Returning to the Yingxian Timber Pagoda, we find that its visual program exhibits great similarities with that of Chaoyang North Pagoda's walls: the Three Bodies of the Buddha invoked for the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual, the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, and the maṇḍala activating the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (Figure 43).





[Figure 42] *Nirvāṇa* scene engraved on the silver reliquary box, excavated from Chaoyang North Pagoda. Liao dynasty, 1043 [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2007]



[Figure 43] Comparison of Chaoyang North Pagoda and Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Diagram by Youn-mi Kim]

## Material Agency and Physical Movement

The Yingxian Timber Pagoda, as examined above, was an architectural monument that materializes the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual process and visualizes the *dhāraṇī*'s contents. In this section, I will attempt to explain how the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* was enacted by this architectural device. First, as explained below, in the ritual imagination of medieval Buddhists, the pagoda was believed to incessantly generate the power of the *dhāraṇī* through the material agency of the pagoda. Second, the pagoda was designed to induce particular bodily movements on the part of the people who visited it, so that they could, either consciously or unconsciously, follow the ritual process while climbing up the pagoda. The pagoda was a material device that enacted the *dhāraṇī* in itself, but humans could also participate in the enactment process. The primary actant was the pagoda; humans were secondary, and not strictly necessary.

Let us first explore how the pagoda was designed to enact the *dhāraṇī* in itself. In the ritual imagination of the commissioner and the designer of the pagoda, the Yingxian Timber Pagoda probably served as a material agent that functioned, with little human intervention, to benefit anyone, who climbed the pagoda, with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*'s salvific power. This was a new development in the history of spells. Previously, during the Tang dynasty, the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* was believed to have what has been characterized as “material efficacy.” That is, once a person's body was touched by the shadow of a stone pillar inscribed with the *dhāraṇī*, that person would benefit from the full efficacy of the *dhāraṇī*—the shadow would remove the person's bad karma and guarantee good rebirth, leading to Buddhist awakening. Dust blown from such a pillar onto the body, was thought to have the same effect. A *dhāraṇī* pillar erected at a crossroads or within a monastery courtyard, in this way, continuously transmitted the power of the *dhāraṇī* through the media of shadow and dust without being chanted by human practitioners (Copp 2014, 141–180).

In the Liao Dynasty, *dhāraṇī* pillars continued to proliferate, and numerous pillars from Liao still survive in north China. This examination of representative Liao pagodas, however, suggests that a new method of enacting the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* emerged in Liao alongside traditional *dhāraṇī* practices. Rather than simply inscribing the *dhāraṇī* in textual form,

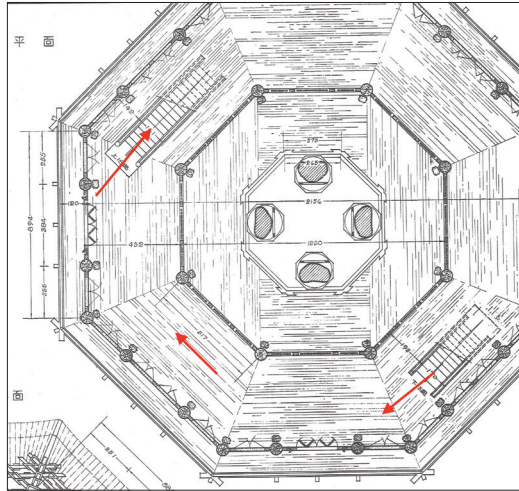
the new method made use of ritual materialized and visualized within, and as, architectural space. The Chaoyang North Pagoda, as mentioned above, had a ritual altar inside it—an element unprecedented in pagodas from previous dynasties (Figure 17). Installed for the dying brothers of Empress Dowager Qin'ai, the ritual altar was believed to endlessly generate the protective and salvific power of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* for her siblings (Kim 2013). Unlike an actual altar used for a normal *dhāraṇī* ritual, which was a temporary installation to be dismantled after the ritual performance, the simulacrum altar inside the pagoda—as it was made in miniature—was a permanent installation. Through the material agency of the key objects constituting the altar—relics of the Buddha, the mandala, and the *dhāraṇī* inscriptions, which were *living* beings and carriers of the *presence* of the Buddha and material efficacy in the Buddhist ontology—the ritual altar, once installed in the pagoda, was believed to infinitely generate the salvific and transformative power of the *dhāraṇī* (Kim 2017).

The method of enacting the *dhāraṇī* adopted at Yingxian Timber Pagoda was similar in that it also visualized and materialized the *dhāraṇī* ritual rather than simply inscribing the *dhāraṇī* in textual form. What primarily enacted the *dhāraṇī* was not a textual inscription but the material reconstruction of the ritual. Instead of straightforwardly installing a *dhāraṇī* ritual altar inside a concealed space, however, the Yingxian Timber Pagoda metaphorically lays out the procedure of the ritual in a half-open space. Visitors and practitioners can ascend the pagoda, physically participating in the ritual sequence and navigating the key contents of the *dhāraṇī*. At the same time, the act of writing/chanting the *dhāraṇī* is transposed with the act of climbing and circumambulating in the ritual space inside this pagoda. Just as a *dhāraṇī* pillar that continuously generates the power of the spell and saves the beings touched by its shadow and wind-blown dust, the monumental timber pagoda benefits and saves its visitors, whose bodies are enveloped by its ritual space, through the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* enacted by its architectural space.

Second, the pagoda, while functioning as an automatic device to enact the *dhāraṇī*, also encouraged human participation through its architectural structure. The structure of the pagoda predefines and guides the movement of the people inside the pagoda so that they, consciously or unconsciously, follow the sequence of the ritual laid out by the architectural space. Stairs leading to the upper floors invite visitors to climb higher, naturally following the process



[Figure 44] Staircase leading to the fifth story of Yingxian Timber Pagoda. Liao dynasty, ca. 1056. [Photograph by Youn-mi Kim, 2016]



[Figure 45] Stairways and walking directions on the third story. Yingxian Timber Pagoda [Image adapted from figure 11 in Chen Mingda, *Yingxian mu ta*]

of the *dhāraṇī* ritual, even if they do not know that the pagoda embodies the ritual process (Figure 44). Furthermore, the ways in which the stairs were installed on each floor gently prompts visitors to circumambulate the statues enshrined at the center of the floor. The direction of the stairs, when rising, were installed to encircle the pagoda in a clockwise fashion. Therefore, reaching an upper story by ascending the stairs, if one naturally proceeds along the aisle that encircles the statues in the center, the walking effortlessly continues into circumambulation of the statues (Figure 45). Circumambulation, from ancient India to modern China, has been the most common means of venerating sacred beings and monuments. As a result, prompted by the direction of the stairways and the aisle, one unconsciously makes a partial round of circumambulation, or can also circumambulate the statues as many times as desired before ascending to the next floor.

In this way, the Yingxian Timber Pagoda induces the physical movement of the visitor, and transforms the act of climbing the pagoda and circumambulating images into a bodily enactment of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual. A knowledgeable practitioner who climbs the pagoda would



first invoke the Three Bodies of the Buddha during circumambulation of the first three stories, and then venerate on the fourth floor the historical Buddha, the preacher of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, whose statue enshrines the ritual's main object of veneration—the wish-fulfilling jewel. On the top story, where the practitioner encounters the three-dimensional mandala for activating the *dhāraṇī*, the mandala can be circumambulated as many times as desired.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, we should keep in mind that not everyone who visited the Yingxian Timber Pagoda knew about the hidden ritual process it embodied. Although the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* was very popular and the *Mandala of Vairocana Buddha and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* was widespread in the Liao empire (Kim 2020), it is difficult to imagine that the pagoda's complex relationship with the *dhāraṇī* was perceptible to contemporaries from all strata of Liao society. However, the pagoda was, as explained above, designed to induce even ignorant visitors to join the ritual process figured in the pagoda and gain benefit from the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* enacted by the pagoda.

Deciphering the Yingxian Timber Pagoda's ritual program has revealed unexpected commonalities with the Chaoyang North Pagoda. The two Liao pagodas are architectural variations on the same theme—the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual—played, as it were, in different musical keys and using different instruments. Although the two pagodas had completely different designs and were built in regions far from each other, both monuments were intended to enact the same Buddhist *dhāraṇī*.<sup>50</sup>

## Concluding Reflections

This paper has examined how the ritual process of enacting the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*'s efficacy was embodied in material form by the architectural space of the Yingxian Timber Pagoda. With or without a practitioner's vocal chanting, the pagoda was able to incessantly transmit the power of the *dhāraṇī* in the ritual imagination of medieval Buddhism. This new mode of *dhāraṇī* enactment can be understood as a continuation and modification of the material *dhāraṇī* practice from Tang China. Just as the *dhāraṇī* pillar was believed to continuously induce the efficacy of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* inscribed upon it, the Liao pagoda functioned as a monument that endlessly generated the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* through its architectural space that laid

out the ritual process. At the same time, this new mode of material *dhāraṇī* practice required no inscribed text. Instead, the materialized form of the *dhāraṇī ritual* substituted for the textual form which had long served as the most important material agent in various forms of material *dhāraṇī* practice. The new mode of *dhāraṇī* practice was groundbreaking in that the *dhāraṇī* was not needed in sonic or textual form. In the enactment of *dhāraṇī* through the architectural monument, the role of spoken and written *dhāraṇī* was minimal to none, and the architectural space that eternalized the ritual process through material agency instead played the primarily role in inducing the *dhāraṇī*'s power.

## Notes

- 1 The term “material *dhāraṇī*” or “material incantation,” which means *dhāraṇī* “active in physical form as inscriptions,” is borrowed from Copp (2014, xvi, 29–31, 145).
- 2 For the concept of material agency, see Gell (1998).
- 3 For more on the concept of material efficacy, see Copp (2014, 154–157).
- 4 For a comprehensive introduction to this pagoda, see Chen (1966; 1980); Steinhardt (1997, 103–121); and Pak (1998).
- 5 For more on this *dhāraṇī*, see Liu (2008; 1996), Kuo (2007), Copp (2014, 141–196), and Hidas (2020, in this volume). The *Sūtra of the Uṣṇiṣavijayā Dhāraṇī* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經), which is the source of the *dhāraṇī*, was so popular that it was translated five times in China, once each by Buddhapālita (T no. 967), Du Xingyi (T no. 968), and Yijing (T no. 971), and twice by Divākara (T no. 969; T no. 970). These translations have similar but slightly different contents.
- 6 For the political implications of this preface and its relationship to Empress Wu 武則天 (624–705, r. 690–705), see Chen (2003) and T. H. Barrett (2001).
- 7 For more on *dhāraṇī* pillars, see Kuo (2014), Liu (2008; 1996).
- 8 The black-and-white photographs taken by Peng Huashi were used as illustrations in Chen Mingda’s book *Yingxian mu ta*, which was first published in 1966 and then again in 1980 in an expanded edition (Chen 1966; 1980).
- 9 For a description of these scriptures and objects, see Shanxi sheng wenwuju and Zhongguo lishi bowuguan (1991).
- 10 For more on the Four Directional Buddhas in the esoteric Buddhist tradition, see Yoritomi (1990).
- 11 The Buddha Vairocana, when appearing together with the Four Directional Buddhas, is also called Mahāvairocana (Dari lulai 大日如來).
- 12 For the report on this excavation, see De, Zhang, and Han (1994).
- 13 All the *dhāraṇī* scrolls I examined during my field research were of these two types; however, because I could not examine all of the scrolls in the miniature pagodas, of which there were more than one hundred, there is a possibility, although very slim, of a third type.
- 14 Among the six *dhāraṇīs* in the *Pure Light Sūtra*, these are the four that the *sūtra* recommends writing down and enshrining in a pagoda. This shows that the designers of Qingzhou White Pagoda carefully followed the instructions in the *sūtra*.
- 15 The number of *dhāraṇī* in the type-B scrolls can vary depending on whether the same *dhāraṇī* appearing twice in different sections is counted as one or two, and whether to count as *dhāraṇī* a certain deity’s names that the scroll instructs the practitioner to chant along with other *dhāraṇī*.
- 16 南無清淨法身毘盧遮那佛. Transcription and translation by author.
- 17 For a classic and succinct explanation of the Buddha-body doctrines, see Nagao (1971),

- Nagao (1973), Yi (1966), and Habito (1978). For more recent studies that trace the early historical developments of Buddha-body doctrines, see Guang (2005).
- 18 The *trikāya* images from Chaoyang North Pagoda are unique in that the reward-body is placed at the center. The reward-body, with an image of the cosmos on it, took the central place to visually indicate that Chaoyang North Pagoda was designed as architectural epitome of the Huayan Cosmos. For more on this, see Kim (2010, 53–76).
- 19 As this paper will explain in due course, the origin of this Liao understanding of the truth-body can be traced back to a commentary by Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597) from the Sui dynasty.
- 20 Yi Kiyōng, Nagao Gadjin, and Guang Xing all share the view that the concept of the reward-body emerged due to the imperfection of the two-body doctrine, although the details of their arguments differ. I generally agree with Yi's argument (Yi 1966, 32–39, esp. 37–38). Nagao suggested that the lack of a link between the truth-body and the physical body required the development of a third body, which incorporates characteristics of the other two, resulting in the creation of the reward-body (Nagao 1973). The unresolved and complex problems regarding the physical body of the Buddha, Guang suggests, necessitated a new concept of the body—namely, the reward-body (Guang 2005, 101–135).
- 21 This treatise was likely written around the fourth century. The composition of this treatise, an important text for the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, was traditionally attributed to the Indian monk Asaṅga (Wuzhao 無著, or Asengqie 阿僧伽, fl. 4th century). Some think its verses were written by Maitreyaṅgā (Mile 彌勒, ca. 270–350) and that Asaṅga's brother, Vasubandhu (Shiqin 世親), participated in the composition of the prose passages. This treatise was translated into Chinese by Prabhākaramitra (Boluopomiduoluo 波羅頗蜜多羅) between 630–633.
- 22 For an analysis of the *Golden Light Sūtra's* explanation of the Buddha's Three Bodies, see Yi (1966, 224–234).
- 23 無有異異 是自本故 猶如虛空 是故說常. I am grateful to Prof. Han Ja-Kyoung 韓慈卿 for helping me translate this phrase.
- 24 The most distinctive feature of Liao Buddhism has been described as Huayan Buddhism's synthesis with esoteric Buddhist practice. For more on this, see Kamio (1937), Nogami (1953) and Kamata (1965, 604–618). More diverse Buddhist traditions of Liao have been studied in recent years. See Yokōchi (2008) and Takato (2015).
- 25 Comparisons of the truth-body (*fashen*) with empty space in this scripture most frequently appear in “Chapter on the Treasury King Buddha's Arising of the Original Nature” (寶王如來性起品). See *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* (T no. 278, 9.616a17–26).
- 26 法身，本離名相，然其應物，無不現形。故我釋迦文為度娑婆界。 Translation and bold emphasis is by the current author. For a full transcription of the inscription, see Xiang ed. (1995, 486).
- 27 For a full transcription of the inscription, see Xiang ed., (1995, 433).



- 28 The fresh color of these paintings on the lotus pedestal suggests that they were restored at some point, but they, as Marilyn Gridley has suggested, still retain the original Liao design. While Chinese scholars usually treat the sculptures enshrined in Yingxian Timber Pagoda as authentic Liao works from 1056, Gridley has pointed out that many were restored in subsequent dynasties, which caused subtle stylistic, but not iconographic, changes to the sculptures (Gridley 1993).
- 29 Scholars have suggested that this is an apocryphal scripture that was composed in China; however, that would not diminish its importance in shaping the Huayan tradition in East Asia. On the significance of apocryphal scriptures in Chinese Buddhist history, see Buswell (1990).
- 30 This lecture was recorded by Zhiyi's disciple, Guanding 灌頂 (561–632). For the original text of this ten-fascicle commentary, see *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju* 妙法蓮華經文句 (T no. 1718, 34.1a–149a).
- 31 The *nirmāṇakāya* was translated into several different terms in China including *huashen* and *yingshen*. Archaeologically excavated Liao inscriptions (i.e. inscriptions on the east mural of Chaoyang North Pagoda's relic depository) and scrolls (i.e. the *dhāraṇī* scroll from Qingzhou White Pagoda) show that the term *nirmāṇakāya* was translated to *huashen* 化身 and *bianhuashen* 變化身 in Liao Buddhism. For the varied Chinese translations of the three Buddha bodies in the scriptures translated in China, see Kim (2009, 105).
- 32 *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju* (T no. 1718, 34.128a17–18). *Wojiao* 沃焦 is an abbreviated form of *wojiaoshi* 沃焦石, the rock above the hot purgatory in Buddhist cosmology. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are by the current author.
- 33 Almost identical explanations of the *trikāya* appear in the writings of these monks. 瓔珞經云 毘盧舍那佛是法身 盧舍那佛是受用身 釋迦牟尼佛是化身 (*Dasheng fayuan yilin zhang* 大乘法苑義林章 T no. 1861, 245.372b12–14); 今佛教中娑婆忍土 … 此猶據化佛釋迦如來所王之域 故華嚴經云 盧舍那佛報身如來所王之土復過是數 … 又如普賢觀經云 毘盧遮那法佛如來所王之土遍一切處 (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, T no. 2122, 53.431b16, 18–19, 27).
- 34 See also Hidas (2020, in current volume).
- 35 Translation adopted from Copp (2014, 189–190). Bold emphases are by the current author. For a translation of the entire *dhāraṇī*, see Copp (2014, 189–190).
- 36 For Fachong's commentary on the term *om*, see *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing jiaoji yiji* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經教跡義記 (T no. 1803, 39.1029a1–1029b28).
- 37 *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing jiaoji yiji* (T no. 1803, 39.1029a1–1029b28, esp. 1029a7–21).
- 38 Here, I follow Copp's opinion that *uṣṇīṣa* is the essence of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* (Copp 2012, 161).
- 39 For discourses among eminent monks on whether to translate the *dhāraṇī* in premodern China, see Overbey (2019).

- 40 The term *guiming* 歸命 in the print is the same as *guiming* 歸命 that Fachong used in his translation of the Sanskrit *namah*, or *nangmo* 曩謨. The commentary clearly explains that the term *dalailuzhiye* 怛囉路枳也 means both the Three Times (三世) and the Three Realms (三界). Compare this Liao translation with Fachong's translation and commentary of the same invocation in *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing jiaoji yiji* (T no.1803, 39.1028a20–c26).
- 41 As for the stele inscription recording this monk's role in building the pagoda, see De, Zhang, and Han (1994, 33).
- 42 Only the titles of the *dhāraṇī*, *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni* and *Fo shuo jingang da cuisui tuoluoni* 佛說金剛大摧碎陀羅尼, were inscribed in sinoscript.
- 43 The inscription on the *dhāraṇī* pillar reads, “守戶軒轅亨勘梵書 東班小底張日新書.” The transcription is from Liaoning-sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Chaoyang-shi Beita bowuguan eds., (2007, 85).
- 44 See the translation of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* cited earlier in this paper.
- 45 I will further discuss the relationship between this *dhāraṇī* scroll and the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī* ritual in Liao dynasty in a separate paper.
- 46 南無清淨法身毗盧遮那佛 南無圓滿報身盧遮那佛 南無十三類變化身佛。Transcription is by the current author.
- 47 For more on how the ritual altar in the relic depository enacted the power of the *dhāraṇī* without human intervention, see Kim (2017).
- 48 Until today, various Buddhist rituals in East Asia, especially in Korea, invoke the Three Bodies of the Buddha by chanting their names in the opening of rituals.
- 49 Repetition is an important way to activate the spell. Ritual manuals and scriptures of the *Sūtra of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, for example, require repeated chanting of the spell. The *Ritual Manual for Chanting the Uṣṇīṣavijayā Dhāraṇī* instructs that the *dhāraṇī* should be chanted as many as 1,000 times to achieve full efficacy. *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni niansong yigui fa* (T no. 972, 19.365a9).
- 50 The Yingxian Timber Pagoda's patron and the intended beneficiaries of the *dhāraṇī*'s efficacy will be discussed in a separate paper.

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