

## **The Donation of Ashoka Pagodas by King Qian Hongchu of the Wuyue**

Wang Chung-cheng  
Department of Registration and Conservation  
National Palace Museum

### **Abstract**

The legend and belief behind the donation of pagodas by the Mauryan king Ashoka in India inspired King Qian Hongchu of the Wuyue in China to order two projects for the casting of “84,000 pagodas,” one in 955 and the other in 965. In the Buddhist kingdom of Wuyue, the legend of 84,000 stupas from India had strong mythical overtones, leading to the spread of a cult surrounding the Ashokan pagoda in China. The Ashoka Pagoda at Maoxian was one of nineteen Ashokan pagodas that appeared in China. Qian Hongchu’s donation of pagodas not only followed the Indian king Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty in spreading relics of the Buddha throughout the land, it even led to the imitation of the Ashoka Pagoda at Maoxian. The spirituality and legend associated with the pagoda make it peerless in terms of importance and reverence, its significance already clearly manifested in documentary evidence starting from the middle of the seventh century. Both Buddhist clergy and laymen made prostrations there, and even royal families were no exception, the degree of their fervent devotion readily seen in historical sources. This study is an attempt to explain a segment of tenth-century China to express the belief surrounding Ashoka pagodas, which not only had spread throughout Wuyue but also to Japan and even continues down to the present day. First in the study is an investigation into surviving pagodas donated by Qian Hongchu to serve as a foundation, including a search for possible origins so as to understand how they actually have solid and substantial historical and cultural underpinnings. Although the prototype of the pagodas might trace back to lands west of China, both typologically and iconographically, many forerunners also appeared in China as well. What follows in the study is an exploration of the motivational factors behind the pagodas, including such elements as local convenience, clan traditions in Buddhist beliefs, and expressions of filial piety, all of which perhaps served as causes for the king’s vow and order to donate pagodas. In addition, the printing of sutras to be stored inside also increases the religious significance of these pagodas.

**Keywords:** Five Dynasties, Kingdom of Wuyue, Qian Hongchu, Maoxian, Ashoka pagoda, Liu Sahe, gilt pagoda, treasure chest seal pagoda