RITUALS
BUDDHIST RITUALS

Sylvie Hureau

Buddhist rites were practiced in China as early as the 1st century AD. The first mention, in the *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書), states that a son of Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57), King Ying 英 of Chu (?–71), who was living in Pengcheng 彭城, had knowledge of the regulations of Buddhist fasts and offerings. He mixed this practice with that of Daoism, probably in order to attain immortality. He recited Huang-lao 黃老 writings and revered the “humane cult of the Buddha”. He observed three months’ fast and made an oath to the gods.¹ In the year 65, Emperor Ming (r. 57–75) offered pieces of silk for the community of laymen and monks who were under King Ying’s protection.² The *History of the Later Han* states also that during the following century, a certain Ze Rong 竇融 built a stūpa near Pengcheng in a temple which could contain three thousand persons. The temple housed a golden Buddha statue, and during the ceremony of the ablution of the statue, large amounts of food and drink were delivered to the spectators, who numbered more than ten thousand.³ Further, during the years 172–77,

¹ The sentence 與神為誓, obscure, is understood as meaning “he made an oath” to the gods (or “to his god”: Tsukamoto Zenryū, *A history of early Chinese Buddhism: from its introduction to the death of Hui-yüan*, translated from the Japanese by Leon Hurvitz, 2 vols [Tokyo, 1985], 1.60). In the context of “fasting sūtras”, it can be understood either as meaning “he made an oath to the gods [to remain pure]” or “he made a vow to [be reborn as a] deva [in his future life].” See further below.

² *Hou Hanshu* 42.1428. Henri Maspero, “Les origines de la communauté bouddhiste de Lo-yang,” *Journal Asiatique* 225 (1934), 87–107, p. 88. Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China: the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early medieval China*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1959), 1.26–27. The sentence “he purifies and fasts three months” 淨齋三月 is ambiguous as well. It was first interpreted by Tsukamoto Zenryū as meaning the three months of long fast (*Gisho Shakurô-shi no kenkyû*, Kyōto, 1961, p. 148, note 6), and later as maybe corresponding to the summer retreat (*Chūgoku bukkỳô tsûshi* [Tokyo, 1968], 67; translation in *A history of early Chinese Buddhism*, 1.61–62), meaning not that the prince himself observed the retreat but that he facilitated the summer retreat.