

Article

Mapping the Sacred Landscape: Spatial Representation and Narrative in Panoramic Maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo

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Abstract: In late imperial China, a type of painting known as “panoramic maps” (*shengjing tu* 聖境圖, literally “sacred realm maps”) depicted Buddhist sacred sites. Often surviving as woodblock prints, examples from Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo are particularly representative. Previous research has often viewed these images as pilgrimage guides or focused on the relationship between pictorial perspectives and actual geography. This study centers on panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo, examining both vertical and horizontal layouts, to offer a preliminary understanding of this genre. This study argues that: (1) Unlike urban maps, panoramic maps emphasize significant monasteries and landscape features, incorporating local legends and historical narratives, thus possessing strong narrative qualities. (2) These images likely functioned as pilgrimage souvenirs. Diverging from practical roadmaps, their primary goal was not strict realism but rather to convey the site’s sacredness and associated information through landscape painting conventions, allowing viewers to perceive its sacredness. (3) The woodblock print medium facilitated affordable reproduction, accelerating the circulation of the sacred site’s significance among the populace and aiding in its promotion. This research contends that the panoramic maps primarily function as folk landscape paintings reflecting the sacred site, capable only of approximating the relative positions of features. The widespread adoption of late-period woodblock printing enabled the low-cost reproduction and dissemination of the sacredness inherent in these Buddhist landscapes, constructing idealized spatial representations shaped by religious belief and geomantic principles.

Keywords: panoramic maps; Buddhist sacred sites; Mount Wutai; Mount Putuo; spatial representation



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1. Introduction

Landscape imagery of Buddhist sacred sites in China, from the early medieval period through the late imperial era, has long drawn the attention of scholars in both art history and religious studies, with particular and enduring interest in the Mural of Mount Wutai in Mogao Cave 61, Dunhuang. Beyond mural paintings, there exists a folk form of panoramic depiction of sacred sites, which are commonly titled “panoramic maps” (*shengjing tu* 聖境圖). The extant panoramic maps of Buddhist sacred sites can be tracked back to the Yuan dynasty, with the majority appearing during the Qing dynasty. Such maps survive for all four famous Buddhist mountains (*sida mingshan* 四大名山)—Mount Wutai 五臺山, Mount Emei 峨眉山, Mount Putuo 普陀山, and Mount Jiuhua 九華山—as well as Mount Tiantai 天臺山. These maps mostly preserved as woodblock prints. They are not only visual representations of sacred geography, but also provide us with a visual window into Buddhist sacred sites in pre-modern China, guiding us to consider how sacred sites were perceived, interpreted, and recreated.

In historical geography discussions about Chinese traditional maps, there is a consensus to categorize Buddhist panoramic maps as a type of cartographic representation. However, there has not been extensive research on these panoramic maps as a distinctive typology. In recent years, research on sacred site panoramic maps of China has accumulated in art history and religious studies. Ide (1996, pp. 39–49) and Bingenheimer (2016, pp. 57–60) have respectively studied and dated the painting entitled *Budaluojia shan guanyin xian shengjing* 補怛洛迦山觀音現神聖境 (*Panoramic Map of the Sacred Site Mount Putuo Where Avalokiteśvara Manifests*) preserved at Jōshōji Monastery 定勝寺 in Nagano, Japan. Chou (2011, pp. 372–88; 2018, pp. 121–64) and Charleux (2015, pp. 170–81) have respectively examined versions, colors, and content of the *Wutaishan shengjing quantu* 五臺山聖境全圖 (*Panoramic Map of the Sacred Site Mount Wutai*) whose woodblock was carved in 1846. Lin (2019, pp. 88–99) discussed the depiction of Manjushri riding a lion in the *Chijian Wutaishan Wenshu pusa qingliang shengjing tu* 敕建五臺山文殊菩薩清涼勝境圖 (*Panoramic Map of Imperially Established Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva's Clear and Cool Sacred Site of Mount Wutai*). Liu and Wang (2021, pp. 108–17) raised questions about the viewpoint employed in the 1846 woodblock-carved *Panoramic Map of Mount Wutai*. Meanwhile, Saren Gaowa and Qian (2021, pp. 87–107) conducted a detailed comparative study of the Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan textual information in the same 1846 woodblock-carved map, and examined its engraving details. Current scholarships primarily focus on individual images, and these detailed analyses have offered multi-dimensional perspectives for understanding the meanings of these maps. Moreover, Wu (2020, pp. 180–91) provided a comprehensive discussion of this type of panoramic maps, arguing that such maps serve both as pilgrimage guides and as objects for Buddhist worship. Her discourse provides a perspective for comparative analysis across different sites.

This paper primarily focuses on the design layout, content conception, and spatial representation of panoramic maps, concentrating on three main questions. (1) As visual representations of landscapes, architecture, and sacred relics, how do figures and supplementary elements contribute to conveying the meaning of the images? (2) As representations of the overall space of famous mountains, how do vertical and horizontal formats of panoramic maps conceptualize and adjust spatial relationships? (3) How did these panoramic maps, which widely spread in woodblock prints during later periods, promote the dissemination of sacred meanings?

Among the extant Buddhist panoramic maps of China, those of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo survive in greater numbers and feature both vertical and horizontal layouts, making them especially representative. Therefore, this paper centers on the panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo, attempting to propose the logic of representing sacred time-space and replication circulation. This study argues that the panoramic maps, through their complex visual narratives, effectively shaped and disseminated the sacred significance of Buddhist sacred sites. Sen (2003, pp. 77–82) has pointed out that by the seventh century, Mount Wutai had already replaced India as a pilgrimage destination, thereby transforming China from a peripheral region to a central area within Buddhist civilization. This paper extends this perspective to more recent periods, exploring popular Chinese understanding of Buddhist sacred sites through visual materials: after Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo became recognized Buddhist sacred sites, their sacred maps not only reproduced and circulated these sites through idealized geographical structures, but in some cases may also have served as substitutes for physical pilgrimage.

2. Panoramic Maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo

The terms *shengjing* 聖境 (sacred site) and *shengjing* 勝境 (scenic site) both appear in titles of panoramic maps of famous landscapes in late imperial China, but the term “sa-

cred site” 聖境 is more commonly found in panoramic maps of Buddhist landscapes.¹ Gu Jiegang examined the character *sheng* 聖 (sacred), pointing out that it originally meant simply an intelligent person, but gradually became elevated and mystified after the late Spring and Autumn period (Gu 1979, pp. 80–96). After Buddhism was introduced into China, it borrowed the pre-existing indigenous concept of sacredness, using *sheng* 聖 as an alternative term for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Prior to the Song dynasty (960–1276), literature often used *shengdi* 聖地 (sacred stage) or *shengjing* 聖境 (sacred visaya) to refer to states of spiritual cultivation, in contrast to the *fanfu di* 凡夫地 (worldling stage), rather than corresponding to physical spaces. Only after the Song dynasty did *shengjing* 聖境 come to refer to physical sites with sacred symbolic significance, appearing in mountain gazetteers and note-form literatures. The other character *sheng* 勝, by contrast, conveys the meaning of surpassing or excellence, used in reference to both literary achievement and environmental beauty. The term *shengjing* 勝境 refers to landscapes or scenes with distinguished aesthetic or cultural value that transcend the ordinary. The character *sheng* 勝 is often found alongside *ming* 名 (renowned), suggesting that a place gains recognition through dissemination and maintains vitality through repeated mentions in texts and images.

In order to address questions of spatial structure and compositional intent, this paper primarily analyzes 12 different versions (or original printing blocks) of panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo, with limited discussion of different replicas of one same woodblock.

2.1. Panoramic Maps of Mount Wutai

Panoramic maps of Mount Wutai survive in relatively greater numbers. Among them, the *Wutaishan shengjing quantu* based on the 1846-carved woodblock by Gelong Longzhu 格隆龍住 (Mongolian: gelüng Lhünzüb ᠭᠡᠯᠦᠩᠯᠦᠩᠵᠦᠪᠤ) is the most widely collected, with at least 18 copies known according to Chou (2018, p. 201). In addition to this woodblock print version, other visual representations include both paintings and woodblock prints such as *Wutaishan shengjing quantu* (sharing the same title), *Wutaishan qingliang shengjing zhu cha zhi tu* 五臺山清涼聖境諸刹之圖 (*Map of Various Monasteries of the Clear and Cool Sacred Site of Mount Wutai*), and *Chijian Wutaishan Wenshu pusa qingliang shengjing tu*. Based on the content and title inscriptions, the woodblock for *Wutaishan qingliang shengjing zhu cha zhi tu* was likely carved between the late Ming and early Qing periods (late 16th to mid-17th century), while the others were all painted or printed during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) (Table 1).

Table 1. Information on panoramic maps of Mount Wutai.

Map Title	Type	Medium	Format	Dimension (cm)
<i>Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map</i>	Block print Monochrome or hand-colored	Paper/Fabric	Horizontal	163 × 114
<i>NLC Colored Wutai Map</i>	Painting Colored	Paper	Horizontal	168 × 84
<i>Chijian Wutai Map</i> (collected in NLC)	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	50 × 91
<i>Chijian Wutai Map</i> (private collection)	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	63 × 110
<i>Wutai Zhucha Map</i>	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	55 × 100

The *Wutaishan shengjing quantu* carved by Gelong Longzhu (hereafter “*Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*”) is in horizontal-format woodblock print. Extant maps based on this template can be found as monochrome line prints on paper, hand-colored paper prints, and hand-colored thangkas. Different versions feature different coloring, making this the most widely circulated panoramic map of Mount Wutai.² This block itself is exquisitely detailed, containing dense information with text in Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian. In the upper right corner is the inscription “Carved on an auspicious day, the fifteenth day of the fourth month in the twenty-sixth year of the Daoguang 道光 reign, preserved at Cifu Monastery” (道光二十六年四月十五日吉 造板存慈福寺), indicating it was printed in 1846.

The *Wutaishan shengjing quantu* held in the National Library of China (hereafter “*NLC Colored Wutai Map*”) is a horizontal-format colored painting on paper.³ The original image bears no title. The entire map has a spatial layout similar to *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, but adopts the form of landscape ruler-lined painting (*jiehua* 界畫) with light colors. The label inscriptions are only in Chinese, with some architectural orientations differ slightly from the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*. It features particularly delicate depictions of landscape textures and plants.

The *Chijian Wutaishan Wenshu pusa qingliang shengjing tu* (hereafter “*Chijian Wutai Map*”) survives in two versions. Both are vertical-format, monochrome block prints with similar content and structure. One version, collected in the National Library of China (NLC), has a seal at the top reading “Da Wutaishan Wenshu shili fawang baoyin” 大五臺山文殊師利法王寶印 (Treasure Seal of the Dharma King Mañjuśrī of Great Mount Wutai).⁴ The other version, in a private collection, has an inscription on the lower left reading “Donated and carved by virtuous people from Jingzhou 景州 (modern Jing County 景县, Hengshui, Hebei). Zhao Qingrong 趙慶榮 donated one thousand” (景州眾善人捐刻 趙慶榮捐錢一千), and a seal at the top reading “Wutaishan Guangzong si Wenshu lisheng baoyin” 五臺山廣宗寺文殊利生寶印 (Treasure Seal for Benefiting Beings of Mañjuśrī at Guangzong Monastery, Mount Wutai).⁵

The *Wutaishan qingliang shengjing zhu cha zhi tu* (hereafter “*Wutai Zhucha Map*”) is a vertical-format, monochrome block print on paper, which is in a private collection.⁶ The main buildings are represented in the style of elevation-plan drawing (*diantu* 殿圖), with the entire map characterized by a flattened visual style with weak spatial depth. Its layout structure is similar to the *Chijian Wutai Map*.

The five versions of the sacred site panoramic maps can be categorized into horizontal and vertical formats. It can be observed that different images within the same format share similar overall conceptual designs, but differ in their expressions of supplementary elements, perspective representation, and subsequent coloring.

2.2. Panoramic Maps of Mount Putuo

Versions of panoramic maps of Mount Putuo likewise survive in both painting and block print forms. The *Budaluoja shan guanyin xian shenjing* map preserved at Jōshōji Monastery in Nagano Prefecture, Japan is the earliest known existing panoramic map, reflecting the landscape of Mount Putuo from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) to early Ming dynasty (14th–15th century). From the late Qing period (mid-19th to early 20th century), there are also multiple block prints including *Nanhai mingshan Putuo shengjing* 南海名山普陀勝境 (*Secnic Site of the Famous Mountain Putuo in the South Sea*), *Chijian Nanhai Putuo shanjing quantu* 敕建南海普陀山境全圖 (*Panoramic Map of Imperially Established Mount Putuo in the South Sea*), and *Jingyuanji ti Putuoshan tu* 竟源記題普陀山圖 (*Panoramic Map of Mount Putuo with Inscription by Jingyuanji*), among others (Table 2).

Table 2. Information on panoramic maps of Mount Putuo.

Map Title	Type	Medium	Format	Dimension (cm)
<i>Jōshōji Putuo Map</i>	Painting Colored	Silk	Vertical	56.9 × 113.1
<i>Nanhai Putuo shengjing</i>	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	46 × 86
<i>Chijian Putuo Map</i> (collected in NLC)	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	56 × 109
<i>Chijian Putuo Map</i> (private collection)	Block print Monochrome	Paper	Vertical	56 × 109
<i>Chijian Putuo Map</i> (private collection)	Block print Hand-colored	Paper	Vertical	62.5 × 106
<i>Puyin Putuo Map</i>	Block print Hand-colored	Paper	Horizontal	105.5 × 62.5
<i>Jingyuanji Putuo Map</i>	Block print Hand-colored	Paper	Horizontal	95.5 × 58.5

The *Budaluojia shan guanyin xian shenjing* map at Jōshōji Monastery (hereafter “*Jōshōji Putuo Map*”) is in vertical format, painted on silk. The central architecture employs the style of elevation-plan drawing, while the remaining buildings largely show only their front elevations. The map depicts supplementary elements such as figures and sailboats. The main architectures and sacred sites are annotated with title inscriptions.

The *Nanhai mingshan Putuo shengjing* map (hereafter “*Nanhai Putuo shengjing*”) is held in the National Library of France (Bibliothèque nationale de France, BnF), is a vertical monochrome block print.⁷ It uses large flat color blocks to depict mountains and features a flattened pictorial style. The two main monasteries are depicted with exaggerated scale.

The *Chijian Nanhai Putuo shanjing quantu* (hereafter “*Chijian Putuo Map*”) exists in three different versions under the same title, mostly in private collections, and all in vertical format. One is held in the National Library of China.⁸ The entire map is a monochrome line drawing and is delicately and detailed carved. The lower right corner bears an inscription: “Carved during the lotus month of the guimao 癸卯 year, permanently preserved at Yuantong Monastery”, (癸卯荷月刻板永存圓通常住置) indicating the block was carved in 1903. A seal marked “Jade Seal” (玉印) appears at the top. A second version is in a private collection, highly similar to the above version, only lacking the carving information in the lower right corner.⁹ Three seals can be seen at the top: “Gold Seal” (金印), “Jade Seal”, and “Dragon Seal” (龍印).¹⁰ A third version is also in a private collection, which appears less refined in both carving and color. The lower left corner is inscribed “Printed by Renhe Tang” (仁和堂印造). Its overall structure is similar to the previous version.

The *Nanhai Putuo shanjing* 南海普陀山境 (*Mount Putuo in the South Sea*) map published by Puyin 普音 (hereafter “*Puyin Putuo Map*”) is a horizontal block print with hand coloring, in a private collection.¹¹ The printing information on the left side reads “Published by Puyin, abbot of Zizhulin Monastery” (紫竹林住持納普音刊).

The *Jingyuanji ti Putuoshan tu* (hereafter “*Jingyuanji Putuo Map*”) is a horizontal hand-colored woodblock print, with no original title.¹² There are two copies in the BnF, and others in private collections, with slight variations in coloring between different copies. This map has an inscription in the upper left corner reading “Inscribed by Jingyuanji” (竟源記題).¹³ The overall conception is similar to the *Puyin Putuo Map*, but differs in its methods of depicting landscapes and monastery scales.

Among the six types of panoramic maps of Mount Putuo described above, the *Jōshōji Putuo Map* was created earlier and reflects the spatial configuration of the mountain in its early period. The other five panoramic maps all reflect the layout after the Qing dynasty. While the horizontal and vertical formats each share similar compositional schemes, they differ in some detailed information and landscape representation.

3. Multiple Layers and Narratives in Panoramic Maps

In the panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo, information beyond geographical features frequently appears, such as images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, human figures, sun, moon, auspicious clouds. These elements are positioned at specific sacred locations and scenes in the maps. When considered alongside historical stories and miracle legends, it becomes apparent that they do not merely function as supplementary elements but possess narrative qualities. It is precisely these elements beyond geographical features that directly enhance the sacred significance of these sites, extending the panoramic maps from spatial representations into the temporal and mythic dimensions of religious history.

3.1. Sacred Figures: The Scenographic Presentation of Bodhisattvas' Sacred Sites

The *Jōshōji Putuo Map* is the earliest known panoramic map of a Chinese Buddhist sacred site. Based on its visual content and title inscriptions, Ide (1996, pp. 39–49) identified that this map depicts the landscape of Mount Putuo between 1278 and 1369 by correlating the words “Qingyuan lu Changguo zhou” 慶元路昌國州 and other landscape names in the map with gazetteers. Bingenheimer (2016, pp. 58–59) further narrowed the dating to 1334–1369 based on the Fenfeng Stupa mentioned in the map and textual references in the *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* 補陀洛迦山傳 (*Gazetteer of Mount Potalaka*) by Sheng Ximing 盛熙明.¹⁴ Unlike conventional maps, the most distinctive feature of this map is that the depiction of a seated Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in a radiating halo, occupying the upper third of the image, with the Elder Somachattrā (*Yuegai zhangzhe* 月蓋長者) and the Child Sudhana (*Shancai tongzi* 善財童子) drawn on either side, all positioned above auspicious clouds that float above the entire mountain (Figure 1). The clouds signify the separation between earthly and heavenly spaces; the Bodhisattva and holy attendants are not within the actual geographical space of Mount Putuo but in a celestial realm inaccessible to ordinary people. Regarding this group of sacred figures, Yoshihara (2018, pp. 19–34) examined their connection with the circulation of the *Invocation of Avalokiteśvara Sutra* (*Qing Guanyin jing* 請觀音經) and the historical figure Shi Hao 史浩 (1106–1194).

The earliest simultaneous appearance of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the Elder Somachattrā and the Child Sudhana in Mount Putuo literature is found in Sheng Ximing's the *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* (1361):

In the tenth month of the gengyin 庚寅 year of the Shaoding 紹定 era (1230), Hu Wei 胡煒, the Supervisor of Changguo 昌國, Qingyuan 慶元 (modern Zhoushan 舟山, Zhejiang), ascended the Dashi Bridge and paid homage at the Tidal-sound Cave (*chaoyin dong* 潮音洞). Suddenly a radiant light appeared. To the left stood the Elder Somachattrā and the Child Sudhana on the other side. (...) The monks said: “We have gathered here for years without witnessing this. Now, through your gracious power, we have all seen the manifestation”. Subsequently, they carved a mountain map on stone to show for eternity.

紹定庚寅十月，慶元昌國監胡煒，登大士橋，禮潮音洞，倏現光明，左則月蓋長者，與童子並立。(...) 眾僧曰：“我等雲集，歷年未睹，今承恩力，共覲色相。”遂刻山圖于石，以示悠久。(T 51, no. 2101, p. 1137)

This story is the only record of the Elder Somachattra in the miracle accounts recorded in gazetteers of Mount Putuo. In subsequent miracle stories, Avalokiteśvara most often appears with the Child Sudhana alone. The protagonist, Hu Wei, is not found in any sources beyond this account, and there are no further records survives of this “mountain map” mentioned. We cannot confirm whether the *Jōshōji Putuo Map* was influenced by this earlier mountain map, but visual grouping of Avalokiteśvara, the Elder Somachattra, and the Child Sudhana together clearly echoes the key narrative from the mountain gazetteer. The triadic structure of “one Bodhisattva with two attendants” also ensures compositional symmetry and Avalokiteśvara’s central sacred role in this painting.



Figure 1. *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. Image from Ide (1996, p. 42).

The lower right corner of this painting depicts the Tidal-sound Cave 潮音洞 and Sudhana Cave 善財洞, with statues of Avalokiteśvara and the Child Sudhana drawn inside the two caves respectively, with worshippers at the caves’ entrances. Here, the two sacred figures are depicted within the geographical space rather than outside it. The sacred figures and pilgrims reflect the status of these two caves as miraculous centers of Mount Putuo during the period. Sheng Ximing’s gazetteer was created around the same time as this map, and most of the place names labeled on the map match those found in his work. The second chapter “Caves and territories” (*dongyu fengjiang pin* 洞宇封域品) in Sheng’s gazetteer states:

The Tidal-sound Cave, the place where the Bodhisattva manifests. It is three *li* 里 from the monastery, with yellow sand all the way to the cave. The stone cave is craggy, overlooking the boundless sea, unreachable by human. Above

the cave is an opening like a skylight. At the front of the cave, there used to be a stone bridge spanning across for worship, but it has now collapsed. The Sudhana Cave is to the right of the Tidal-sound Cave, also known for auspicious manifestations. The rocks are cracked, forming a precipitous and narrow crevice, which is unfathomably deep. Outside, stone cliffs stand vertically, with spring water trickling like pearls without drying up, called the “Bodhisattva Spring”. People fill bottles and containers with the spring water to treat eye diseases.

潮音洞，菩薩示現之所。去寺三里，至洞皆黃砂。石洞巉巖，瞰海回顧無畔岸，人跡不及。洞上有穴如天窓，下屬洞前，舊有石橋橫亘，可以瞻禮，今崩廢。善財洞，在潮音洞右，亦祥異顯現。巖石有罅，峭峻蹙逼中，窅叵測。其外則石崖壁立，泉溜如珠不涸，謂之“菩薩泉”。瓶罌盛貯，以洗目疾。（T 51, no. 2101, p. 1136）

This quotation indicates the relative positions of the Tidal-sound Cave and the Sudhana Cave and their associated features. In the following chapter “Miracle and auspice” (*ganying xiangrui pin* 應感祥瑞品), Sheng documents 14 miracle stories at Mount Putuo from the Tang Dynasty’s Dazhong 大中 period (847–860) to the first year of Yuan dynasty’s Zhihe 致和 period (1328). Among these, 12 occurred at the Tidal-sound Cave, and 4 of them also involved the Sudhana Cave and Child Sudhana’s manifestations. This confirms the status of these two caves as focal points of sacred activity of Mount Putuo during and before the Yuan Dynasty. The *Jōshōji Putuo Map* not only accurately places these two caves and labels associated features, but also vividly depicts the moment of manifesting of Avalokiteśvara and Sudhana. This suggests that the purpose of this map extends beyond geographic documentation. Rather, it integrates physical space with legendary narrative in visual form, constructing scenes with sacred narrative significance.

This compositional strategy of placing the Bodhisattva images in the upper central position can also be seen in the panoramic maps of Mount Wutai. Both versions of the *Chijian Wutai Map* as well as the *Wutai Zhucha Map* feature Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva images along the central vertical axis in the upper section of the picture (Figure 2), with structural concept parallels that of the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. In the *Chijian Wutai Map*, the image of Mañjuśrī is seated above a patch of auspicious clouds, while in the *Wutai Zhucha Map*, the Bodhisattva is shown within a radiant halo, both visually suggesting a separation between Mañjuśrī’s realm and the geographic space of Mount Wutai, as well as his religious protection. The Bodhisattva in the *Chijian Wutai Map* has small auspicious clouds drawn beneath his seat, while the *Wutai Zhucha Map* depicts the Bodhisattva within a halo. These also suggest the separation between Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva’s presence and Mount Wutai’s geographical space, as well as religious protection. Regarding the Mañjuśrī image in the *Chijian Wutai Map*, Lin (2019, pp. 88–89) points out the stillness of the Bodhisattva’s lion mount, viewing the iconographic Mañjuśrī as an invisible sixth terrace that pilgrims yearn to perceive.

In the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, more sacred figures of Bodhisattvas can be seen, presented in a different approach. The *thangka* version of the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* held in the Rubin Museum of Art expresses these figures most clearly with its vibrant colors. Auspicious clouds rise above many monasteries across the mountain, with one or more sacred figures painted on each cloud (Figure 3). According to the directions from the cloud tails, these figures all emerge from monasteries or stupas—they are either Bodhisattvas and saints enshrined in the monasteries, or venerable monks commemorated by the stupas. These religious elements added above the geographical space provide multiple layers of information to the map, while also highlighting important monasteries and sacred sites across the mountain for the readers.



Figure 2. (a) *Chijian Wutai Map* (collected in NLC) © The National Library of China. Catalog no. 214.253/074.2/1870; (b) *Chijian Wutai Map* (private collection. Image from the Sungari 2022 Spring Auction); (c) *Wutai Zhucha Map*. Image from Rongbao (Beijing) 2018 Autumn Art Auction.



Figure 3. *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*. © Rubin Museum. Object number: C2004.29.1. <https://rubinmuseum.org/collection/c2004-29-1> (accessed on 23 May 2025).

Different structural presentations of Bodhisattvas in panoramic maps have early precedents in mural paintings related to Mount Wutai from the Mogao Caves, Dunhuang. Caves 159 and 361 contain pictures of Mount Wutai from the mid-Tang period (mid-8th to mid-9th century), each composed of two screened panels (Figure 4). On each panel, approximately the upper third depicts Bodhisattva figures on auspicious clouds within radiant halos, while the lower portion shows the landscapes and buildings of Mount Wutai. This structure resembles that of the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, the *Chijian Wutai Map*, and the *Wutai Zhucha Map*. The picture of Mount Wutai in Cave 159 is composed as two independent

paintings.¹⁵ From the sacred figures at the top to the arrangement of mountains, monasteries, stupas, bridges, and other features below, the composition is highly symmetrical, emphasizing the Bodhisattva's overarching dominion over the mountain.



Figure 4. (a) Picture of Mount Wutai in Mogao Cave 159. Image from [Dunhuang yanjiuyuan and Zhao \(2018, p. 50\)](#); (b) Picture of Mount Wutai in Mogao Cave 361. Image from [Dunhuang yanjiuyuan and Zhao \(2018, pp. 52–53\)](#).

By contrast, the map of Mount Wutai in Mogao Cave 61 (dated to 947–951) employs a horizontal layout and contains multiple auspicious clouds and sacred figures (Figure 5). In the sky of the upper part of the painting are Bodhisattvas, Arhats, dragon kings, and poisonous dragons in auspicious clouds. The lower section depicting Mount Wutai's landscape also contains numerous non-realistic elements such as Buddha heads, hands, feet, luminous bodies, flying Apsaras, and *qilin*, each accompanied by inscriptions like “Manifestation of the Sacred Buddha's Foot” (*sheng fozu xian* 聖佛足現) or “Manifestation of the Luminous Body” (*tong guang shen xian* 通身光現). The character *xian* 現 (manifestation) implies the miraculous nature of these appearances. The representation of sacred figures in the Cave 61 map of Mount Wutai bears similarities to the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, but in the former, the tails of auspicious clouds all point upward toward the sky rather than to specific locations on the mountain. Therefore, the sacred figures in the Cave 61 map may have little relation to positions on the map but rather represent pervasive manifestations in the entire sacred domain of Mount Wutai.

We can observe that sacred figures of Bodhisattvas display two distinct patterns in vertical and horizontal maps and murals, which may relate to how these two formats are appreciated. In traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, vertical works are mounted as hanging scrolls (*lizhou* 立軸), typically displayed for overall viewing, creating distance between the viewers and the image. Horizontal works are mounted as handscrolls (*shoujuan* 手卷), usually unfolded gradually in hand, allowing viewers to see continuous partial views that emphasize the narrative. Although it remains uncertain whether folk images like panoramic maps were viewed in ways similar to literati paintings, their basic compositional approaches were likely influenced by the literati painting traditions. The holistic viewing of vertical maps more readily displays the central axis. Leaving blank space at the top of mountains as sky, it enhances the mountains' towering appearance. This blank space provides room for depicting sacred figures as focal points at the upper portion of the composition. In contrast, horizontal maps intentionally present sacred figures in different local sections, integrating them into the narrative content of the picture.



Figure 5. Detail of the map of Mount Wutai in Mogao Cave 61. Image from [Dunhuang yanjiuyuan and Zhao \(2018, pp. 64–64\)](#).

3.2. Human Representations and Detailed Elements: The Synchronic Visual Presentation

In panoramic maps, Bodhisattva figures often appear as a separate “layer” beyond geographical features, portrayed in a relatively prominent and readable manner. In contrast, human figures, the sun and moon, and other minor narrative details are often less conspicuous and only discoverable when readers examine carefully. However, these elements often appear not merely decorative, but also serve to guide the readers, evoke stories and legends, and create imaginative narrative space.

Before discussing human representations in panoramic maps, it is necessary to trace back to earlier visual traditions of Buddhist sacred sites. In mural paintings of Mount Wutai dating from the mid-Tang to Five Dynasties period (907–979), such as those in Mogao Caves 361, Cave 61, and Yulin Cave 32, numerous monks and pilgrims are depicted. Among them, the Mogao Cave 61 mural is particularly valuable due to its clear inscriptions, which helps us identify some of these figures. Most people in the painting are relatively small in scale and embedded within the mountainous landscape. Between West Terrace and Central Terrace, however, two larger-scale figures stand atop a small hill: one is a black-robed itinerant monk, the other is a white-robed elder. The inscription reads from left to right: “Buddhapāli came from Jibin 罽賓 (Kashmir) to seek the Terraces, then saw Mañjuśrī manifest as an old man, and asked about the way” (弗施波利從罽賓國來尋臺峰，遂見文殊，化老人身，路問其由) (Figure 5). This scene recreates the story of Buddhapāli encountering Mañjuśrī manifested as an old man at Mount Wutai in the first year of Yifeng 儀鳳 (676). Following the old man’s instructions, Buddhapāli returned to the Western Regions to retrieve the *Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經) and had it translated into Chinese. Later he entered Mount Wutai and never left.¹⁶

Close to the left side of the West Terrace, the map shows a monastery labeled “Daoyi Aranya” (*Daoyi lanruo* 道義蘭若). In its courtyard, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is shown seated on a sumeru throne, engaged in discussion with a white-robed layman who sits on a meditation stool. Judging by his clothing and seating, the layman should be Vimalakīrti. This scene reflects the episode of “Mañjuśrī Inquiring about the illness” from the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, which also resonates thematically with the monastery’s name “Daoyi” (dialogues on Buddhist truth). In the lower part of the painting, groups of tribute envoys (*songgongshi* 送供使) can be seen, such as “Silla tribute envoys”, “Hunan tribute envoys”, and

“deva tribute envoys”. These groups are shown riding horses, leading camels, or walking toward Mount Wutai. According to Li Xin, the dress and titles of the envoys from Silla and Goryeo suggest that this scene may depict conditions shortly before 936 (Li 2013, pp. 31–33). Furthermore, the painting features several thatched hermitages named after monks, some depicting monks inside. These monks are among the few named individuals in the map and likely represent contemporary practitioners on the mountain during the painter’s time.

From the above, we can see that this map of Mount Wutai in Cave 61 built in the mid-10th century includes figures from multiple historical layers: Vimalakīrti from the Buddha’s time, Buddhapāli from the 7th century in legends, tribute envoys from the first half of the 10th century, and monks contemporary with the mural’s creation. The landscape of Mount Wutai depicted in this map thus becomes a container of layered time, allowing stories from different eras to be presented synchronically. Besides these figures, this map also includes a large number of anonymous figures, including pilgrims and monks. While these figures may not be as closely associated with legends or historical figures as those mentioned above, their positions and movement directions suggest destinations and accessible places for mountain pilgrimage.

The depiction of human representations in panoramic maps of later periods maintains certain compositional conventions inherited from the mural tradition, most clearly in the *Gelung Longzhu Wutai Map*. The most prominent gathering of people in this map appears on the road from Luohou Monastery 羅睺寺 (Rāhula Monastery) to the side gate of Pusa Peak 菩薩頂 (Bodhisattva Peak). They descend from Pusa Peak and stop outside Luohou Monastery. At the front of the procession is a group of officials wearing cool hats (*liangmao* 涼帽) and beating gongs to clear the way, followed by a team of lamas holding musical instruments and a team of underworld spirits. Behind them is a sedan chair carried by four people, with officials standing at the roadside facing the chair. Further back, separated by another team of officials, is a grand palanquin carried by eight people, with a Tibetan monk wearing a pandit hat seated inside, covered by a canopy and followed by ceremonial umbrellas. This scene likely depicts a Qing emperor making a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai accompanied by a high lama.¹⁷ The block print clearly emphasizes the high lama’s important status over the emperor’s (Figure 6a).

In front of Tayuan Monastery 塔院寺 (Stupa Complex Monastery), the map shows a woman leading and carrying two children descending stairs. In the center before the monastery’s gate sits one person with a desk in front, with an armed guard standing on the left and a male figure either squatting or kneeling on the right. This woman has a halo behind her head, suggesting she is a Bodhisattva manifestation, with auspicious clouds above containing an image of lion-riding Mañjuśrī (Figure 6b). This scene likely depicts the story of “Bodhisattva manifesting as a poor woman”. According to the gazetteer *Guang qingliang zhuan* 廣清涼傳, the Dafu Lingjiu Monastery 大孚靈鷲寺 held a feast every first month of the year. A poor woman attended the feast, carrying two children, with a dog following her, having nothing else of value, she cut her hair as an offering. She repeatedly requested food portions first to her two children, then to the dog, and finally to the unborn child. The monks considered her greedy and scolded her to leave. The poor woman instantly rose from the ground, revealed herself as Mañjuśrī, the dog became a lion, and the children became Sudhana and the king of Khotan (*T* 51, no. 2099, p. 1109).

In the lower right part of the map near Tailu Monastery 臺麓寺 (Terrace-Foot Monastery), three people on horseback are depicted, with the leftmost person dressed differently, holding a bow and arrow, shooting at a large tiger in the mountain. This scene corresponds to the story of Shehuchuan 射虎川 (Shooting Tiger Valley). The archer is likely to be the Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722), further evidenced by auspicious

clouds appearing above him with a dragon head drawn within (Figure 6c). According to the gazetteer *Qingliangshan xin zhi* 清涼山新志, the imperial stele at Tailu Monastery records: in spring of the second month of 1683, Kangxi shot and killed a tiger that had been causing harm for a long time, after which the site was renamed Shehuchuan and the monastery was constructed (Laozang and Chang 2015, pp. 8–9). Besides these, in the lower part of this block print, we can also see pilgrims prostrating, children playing in trees near village houses, an elderly man herding cattle, and other figures (Figure 6d). These figures are integrated into the spatial narrative and contribute to the living landscape.

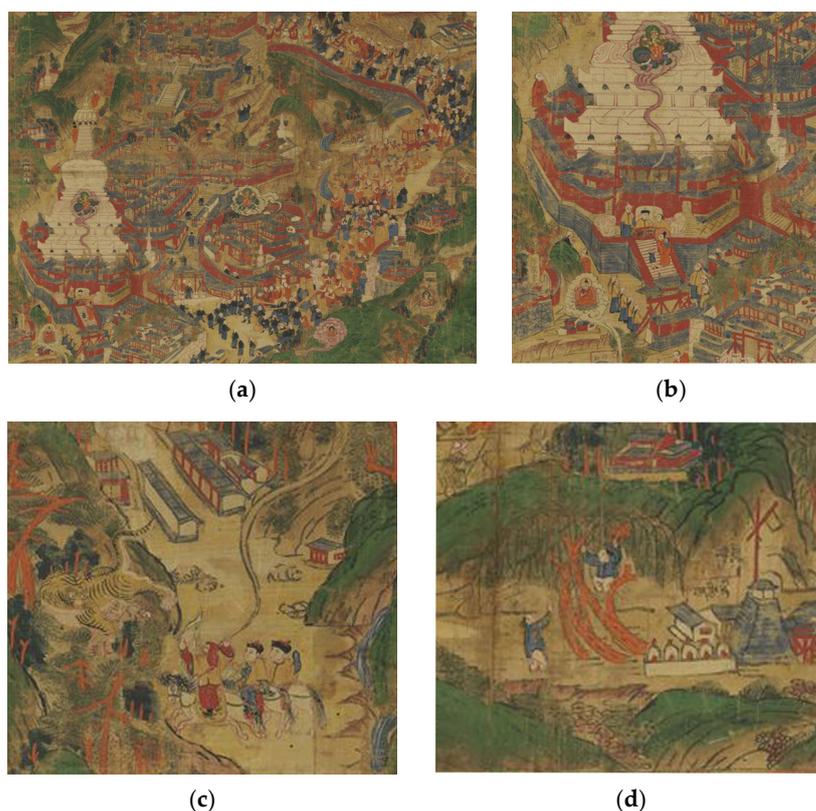


Figure 6. Details of the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*. (a) Procession descending from Bodhisattva Peak to Rāhula Monastery; (b) Bodhisattva manifesting as a poor woman at Tayuan Monastery; (c) Emperor Kangxi shooting a tiger near Tailu Monastery; (d) Daily life scenes. © National Palace Museum (Taipei). Catalog no. 故購-畫-000135-00000. Used under academic fair use.

From all these scenes described above, we can see that many human representations in the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* are related to documented legends or historical anecdotes from mountain gazetteers. They visually present memories of specific locations on the map, allowing stories from different texts and time periods to appear synchronically in the same image.

Human representations in panoramic maps can also mark and emphasize important locations and their accessibility. The *Jōshōji Putuo Map* depicts people in three locations: at the Koryo Pier (*Gaoli daotou* 高麗道頭) (the landing point of Mount Putuo), near the Tidal-sound Cave and the Sudhana Cave, and atop the Pantuo Rock 盤陀石 (Rugged Rock). Two versions of the *Chijian Putuo Map* also depict people near the landing point. These figures have no clearly defined identities. Marking human figures at the landing point likely aims to emphasize the beginning of the mountain pilgrimage journey, inviting readers to physically enter the image environment and scale. It represents both the objective spatial transition from sea voyage to landing on the island, and the experiential transition of readers entering the paper sacred site from outside the image. The path and a hall of the mountain

gate (*shanmen* 山門) behind the figures at the landing point, subtly conveying the notion of entry into sacred site (Figure 7).

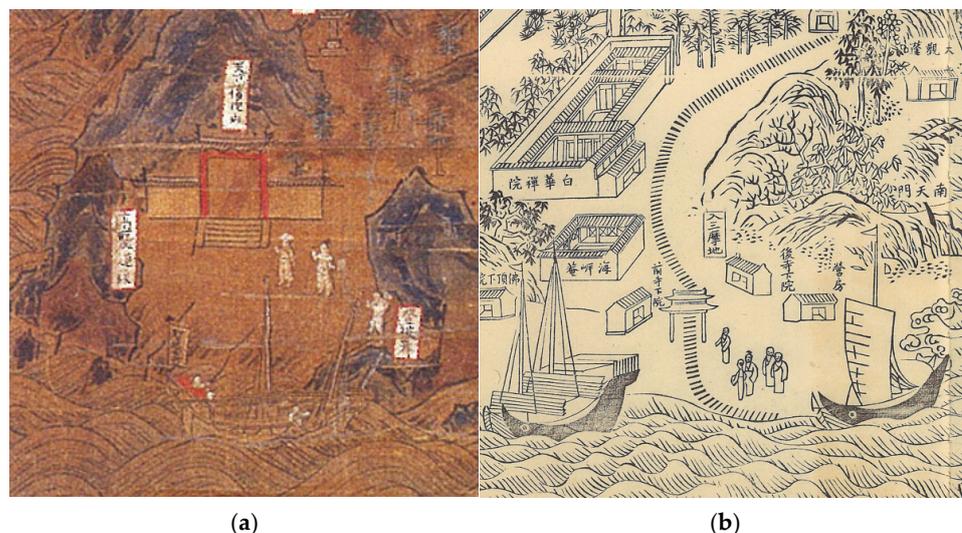


Figure 7. (a) Details of the landing point of Mount Putuo in the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. Image from Ide (1996, p. 42); (b) Details of the landing point of Mount Putuo in the *Chijian Putuo Map*. © National Library of China. Catalog no. 223.321/074.3/1903.

Monasteries and stupas in panoramic maps are relatively easy to recognize, while some sacred landscape spots (like caves or rocks with religious significance) embedded in the environment are sometimes difficult to identify. The Tidal-sound Cave and the Sudhana Cave, the most important landscape spots of Mount Putuo before the Qing dynasty, are depicted in the *Jōshōji Putuo Map* with worshippers around, emphasizing their sacred status. Elsewhere, figures bowing or kneeling toward the east appears on the Pantuo Rock, labeled “The great Pantuo Rock, site for viewing the sunrise” (盤陀大石，觀日出處). The *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* states: “Pantuo Rock, wide and flat, can seat over a hundred people overlooking the vast sea. In the early morning at the fifth watch (*wugeng* 五更), one can see Fusang 扶桑 in the distance, with five-colored light emerging. Shortly after, an extremely large orb rises from the sea, a truly marvelous sight” (盤陀石，平廣，上坐百餘人，下瞰大海，五更遠見扶桑，五色光發，頃有一輪極大，從海湧出，真奇觀也) (T 51, no. 2101, p. 1136). This is the only location recorded in this mountain gazetteer as accessible for distant viewing. The human figures emphasize Pantuo Rock’s accessibility and activity. However, the position of Pantuo Rock in the *Jōshōji Putuo Map* does not correspond with Qing-dynasty panoramic maps or the actual topography, which I will discuss in detail later.

Beyond these, some details outside of geographical information in panoramic maps are also worth noting. The *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, the *Puyin Putuo Map*, and the *Jingyuanji Putuo Map* all depict the sun in their images but in different locations. The *Jōshōji Putuo Map* places the sun in the upper right part of the entire image near Pantuo Rock (Figure 1), while the *Puyin Putuo Map* and *Jingyuanji Putuo Map* depict it in the sea below near Chaoyang Cave 朝陽洞 (Sun-Facing Cave) (Figure 8). This distinction reflects changes in sunrise viewing sites on Mount Putuo. *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* of the Yuan dynasty and *Chongxiu Putuoshan zhi* 重修普陀山志 of the Ming dynasty both identify Pantuo Rock as the place for viewing the sunrise. However, by the Qing dynasty gazetteers, Chaoyang Cave, located at the eastern end of Jibao Ridge 幾寶嶺, became the place for viewing the sunrise, while Pantuo Rock came to be a spot for “panoramic view of mountains and sea” (環眺山海) (Qiu 1996, p. 24). Changes in scenic spot functions are reflected in panoramic maps as how the

sun is placed, guiding viewers to imagine what could be seen from specific positions on the mountain.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8. (a) The *Puyin Putuo Map*. The Sotheby’s 2016 auction: China in print and on paper, including the library of Bernard Hanotiau and the Floyd Sully collection, Lot 217; (b) the *Jingyuanji Putuo Map*. © Bibliothèque nationale de France. Catalog no. ark:/12148/btv1b7200251c. Public domain.

The *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* depicts the moon and sun on the upper left and right sides of the image, though not symmetrically arranged. The sun appears east of Wanghai Monastery 望海寺 (Sea Viewing Monastery) on East Terrace, while the moon appears west of Guayue Peak 掛月峰 (Hanging Moon Peak) on West Terrace. As in the panoramic maps of Mount Putuo, the positions of the sun and moon reflect the viewing locations (Figure 3). Kangxi’s “Imperial Stele for Wanghai Monastery on East Terrace” (yuzhi Dongtai Wanghai si bei 御製東臺望海寺碑) and “Imperial Stele for Falei Monastery on West Peak” (yuzhi Dongtai Wanghai si bei 御製西臺法雷寺碑) describe the scenes of watching sunrise from East Terrace and viewing the moon from West Terrace. The *Qingliangshan xin zhi* also states: on East Peak, “clouds rise and bathe in sunlight; crisp air rinses autumn

clear” (蒸雲浴日，爽氣澄秋); on West Peak, “the moon falls on the peak, like a suspended mirror” (月墜峰巔，儼若懸鏡). The simultaneous appearance of sun and moon in a single panoramic map conveys a cyclical cosmology. When we consider that the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* was engraved and preserved at Cifu Monastery, a Tibetan Buddhist Mongolian monastery, the sun and moon pattern may reflect a maṇḍalization of Mount Wutai in Tibetan Buddhist cosmology.¹⁸

A careful reading of Bodhisattva figures, human representations and detailed elements like sun and moon in panoramic maps reveals that these maps can be viewed as composed of four overlapping “visual layers”: (1) Landscape layer. This layer reflects the sacred site’s geographical space and architectural structures of monasteries and stupas. It serves as the foundational layer constituting the panoramic map. (2) Scene layer. The second layer above the landscape layer includes people, sun, moon, trees, and other supplementary elements embedded in the landscape. It forms multiple scene puzzles related to legends or historical stories, placing the landscape within spatiotemporal framework with past experiences and specific plots, giving each location its distinct significance. (3) Transcendent layer. On the third layer, Bodhisattvas and saints manifest in auspicious clouds. These manifestations provide thematic narratives connecting the accessible physical world with the transcendent religious universe. (4) Text layer. This top layer consists of text as supplementary explanations in the image, serving as the footnotes to the image, yet essential for conveying map and figure information. These texts bridge the gap between panoramic maps as visual materials and sacred site gazetteers as textual materials. The four-layer structure of panoramic maps ensures both the the panoramic map’s sacred meaning and the comprehensive information transmission (Figure 9). If we include spread and reproduction in our discussion, we should also pay attention to the reinterpretation of images across versions. As Chou (2018, pp. 121–64) has reminded, different versions of the same woodblock print can form different interpretations through coloring differences.

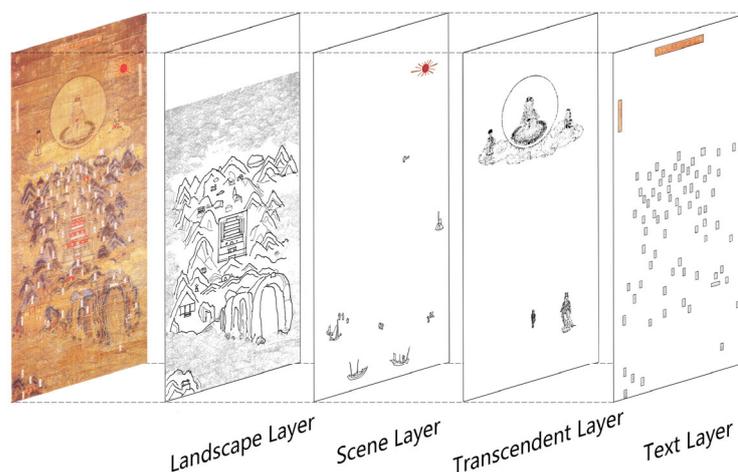


Figure 9. The four-layer structure of panoramic maps. Drawn by the author based on the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*.

4. Understanding and Representation of Sacred Site Landscape Structure

The focus on the scene layer and transcendent layer of panoramic maps has made us aware of how content beyond geographical information expands the meaning of these images. As a container holding numerous narrative elements, the landscape layer of panoramic maps is equally worthy of attention. Panoramic maps can be categorized within the realm of traditional territorial maps (*yutu* 輿圖). Scholars represented by Joseph Need-

ham have examined how traditional maps achieved relatively accurate measurement and representation of terrain and features through the grid mapping tradition as a form of scientific cartography (Needham 1959). Other scholars have further interpreted panoramic maps as pilgrimage guidemaps for incense offerings (Wu 2020). However, does the structural translation of real geography in panoramic maps truly aim at cartographic accuracy?

As images displaying geographical information, panoramic maps in the Ming and Qing periods exhibit similarities with urban maps of the same periods in that they depicted natural landscapes, buildings, and roads within a certain geographical area. However, distinct differences emerge. The urban maps mostly adopted combined plan-elevation drawing methods or bird's-eye axonometric drawing method,¹⁹ while the vast majority of known panoramic maps adopted bird's-eye view axonometric drawing method,²⁰ directly expressing the spatial depth and topography of mountains. Urban maps tend to selectively represent content closely related to their drawing purpose. As Cheng (2022, p. 211) points out, urban maps in local gazetteers and single-sheet urban maps during the Ming and Qing periods were primarily created to serve official government use. Therefore, they detailed government offices, schools affiliated to the Confucious temples, city walls, and other buildings related to local governance. In contrast, panoramic maps aim to comprehensively include sacred mountains, monasteries, and sacred landscape spots, with less emphasis on villages or residential areas in the sacred site. They highlight major monasteries imperially recognized and scenic spots with special religious significance. We can infer that panoramic maps primarily intend to convey the orthodoxy and sacredness of sacred sites.

Panoramic maps reflect the cognition, interpretation, and recreation of sacred site landscapes. The circulation of these images also influenced viewers' understanding and conceptualization of these sacred sites. However, there has been insufficient discussion regarding the spatial representation of Buddhist panoramic maps in both art history and historical geography. The following will examine how panoramic maps integrate, adjust, and imagine geographical information of sacred sites.

4.1. Spatial Cognition Reflected in Horizontal and Vertical Compositions

The panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo both appear in vertical and horizontal formats. Different versions of the same format often share similar compositional patterns for depicting the same sacred site, so this study first attempt to reclassify the panoramic maps of these two sacred sites by format and composition.

The vertical format panoramic maps covered in this study include: two versions of the *Chijian Wutai Map*, the *Wutai Zhucha Map*, the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, the *Nanhai Putuo shengjing*, and three versions of the *Chijian Putuo Map*. Among them, the two versions of the *Chijian Wutai Map* and the *Wutai Zhucha Map* share similar compositions, with an image of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva in the upper center of the image, the West Terrace and Central Terrace on the left side, and the North Terrace and East Terrace on the right side. The South Terrace is placed in the lower part of the image, slightly to the left. The entire map is surrounded by mountains enclosing the relatively flat Taihuai 臺懷 (the Embraced Basin) area in the center. With Taihuai as the reference point, the West, Central, North, and East Terraces are all located on the northern side, while the South Terrace is on the southern side. This overall structure is basically consistent with the representation in vertical format panoramic maps of Mount Wutai (Figure 10).

However, when we compare observations using various topographical landmarks, we can discover adjustments made to the landscape in the panoramic maps.

First, regarding the central Taihuai area, the structure is clearly delineated from south to north—from Fanxian Mountain 梵仙山 in the south to Shuxiang Monastery 殊像寺

(Mañjuśrī Image Monastery), then to Tayuan Monastery, Xiantong Monastery 顯通寺 (Manifest Wisdom Monastery) and Yuanzhao Monastery 圓照寺 (Perfect Illumination Monastery). To the east and west, the Dailuo Peak 黛螺頂 and Pusa Peak stand opposite each other. However, the distance between Taihuai and the five terraces is compressed, particularly in the lower section of the maps. The two versions of the *Chijian Wutai Map* depict Fanxian Mountain in southern Taihuai close to the South Terrace Peak, despite their actual distance exceeding 9 km. The *Wutai Zhucha Map* places the South Terrace near Nanshan Monastery 南山寺 (South Mountain Monastery), though they are actually about 7 km apart. This can perhaps be understood as an intentional compression of the area between the South Terrace and Taihuai on the map, as this section is visually obscured by the South Terrace and contains no monasteries, so the mapmaker deliberately compressed it. This compression of actual distances is a common representation method in cartography of pre-modern China. For example, Mao Yuanyi's 茅元儀 *Wubei Zhi* 武備志 (1621) includes *Zheng He hanghai tu* 鄭和航海圖 (*Zheng He Navigation Charts*), which depicted vast ocean areas within twenty pages, significantly compressing distances but noting sailing times along routes to provide distance references. Panoramic maps of sacred sites, however, often obscure the distance relationships between locations.

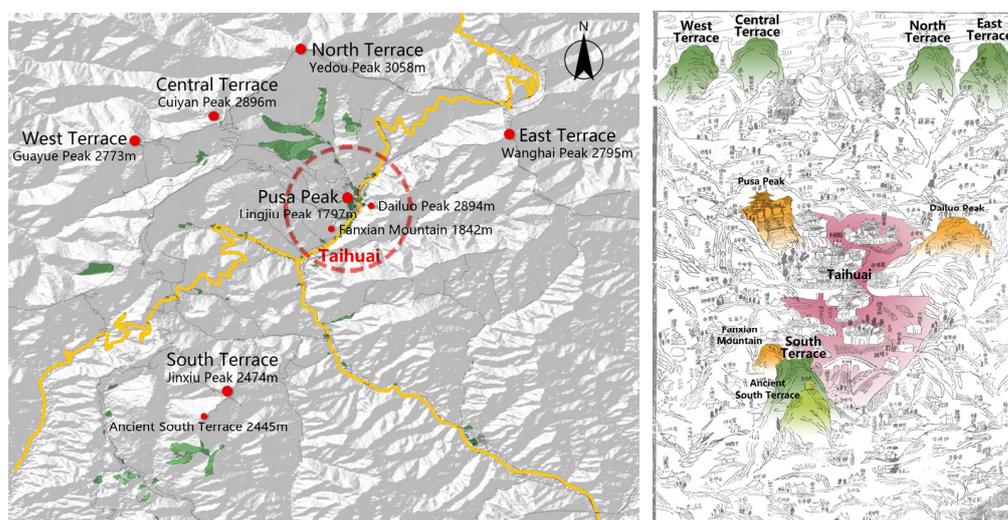


Figure 10. Comparison between the topographical map and the vertical panoramic map of Mount Wutai. Drawn by the author based on the *Chijian Wutai Map* (collected in NLC).

Second, the representation of terrain and monasteries outside the Taihuai area between the five terraces is rough. On one hand, the relative positions and distances between monasteries outside Taihuai are arbitrarily expressed. For example, the Central Terrace separates Qingliang Bridge 清涼橋 and Zaoyuchi Monastery 澡浴池寺 (Bathing Pond Monastery) in reality, but the *Chijian Wutai Map* places the bridge and the monastery adjacent to each other, depicting them west of the Central Terrace. Similarly, Foguang Monastery 佛光寺 (Buddha's Light Monastery) is "forty *li* southwest of the (South) Terrace" (Shi and Zhao 2015, p. 75), but the *Chijian Wutai Map* depicts it directly beside the Shiziwo 獅子窩 (Lion's Den, north of the South Terrace), while the *Wutai Zhucha Map* places it beneath the West Terrace. On the other hand, the monasteries outside Taihuai are all represented by simple sketches of single and identical buildings, making it nearly impossible to discern the scale and characteristics of different monasteries.

In the vertical maps of Mount Wutai, the five terraces and Taihuai are relatively clear positioning markers. The entire map can be viewed as a combination of these two parts. The relationships between monasteries in the Taihuai area are relatively clear, while ex-

pressions outside Taihuai between the five terraces are ambiguous. To include as many monasteries and landscape spots of Mount Wutai as possible within the limited map space, vertical panoramic maps of Mount Wutai depict a high density of monasteries outside the Taihuai area. We can roughly discern the positional relationships of monasteries on a same mountain, but the distances between mountains cannot be determined. It can therefore be inferred that the known vertical format Mount Wutai maps cannot provide accurate travel guidance for areas outside Taihuai, but rather serve more as an enumeration of location information in the sacred site.

Turning to the vertical format panoramic maps of Mount Putuo, we can also find similar modes of spatial representation. The *Jōshōji Putuo Map* depicts Mount Putuo as a landscape with the central Baotuo Guanyin Monastery 寶陀觀音寺 area surrounded by mountain ranges (Figure 1). The map shows a scene looking north from the southern side of the island. Except for the Tidal-sound Cave at the southern end, the main northern part of the map is roughly symmetrical. The place names and scenery in this map differ considerably from today's Mount Putuo, but from the overall form and identifiable locations, it's still clear that the mapmaker made some significant adjustments. According to mountain gazetteers, the Baotuo Guanyin Monastery in the center of the map corresponds to today's Puji Chan Monastery 普濟禪寺. Both this monastery and the Tidal-sound Cave are located on the southern side of Mount Putuo, within approximately one-fifth of the island's southern area in reality. However, in the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, these two sites occupying half of the picture, while heavily compressing the actual scale of the mountain ranges in the northern section. Furthermore, the paths in the lower half of the image are clearly depicted. Readers can follow the map from the Koryo Pier to the Tidal-sound Cave and the Baotuo Guanyin Monastery. In contrast, the mountain ranges on both sides of the Baotuo Guanyin Monastery and numbers of peaks in the northern half of the map only offer labels for landscape features, with little spatial clarity. The Pantuo Rock, which is located on the southwestern side of the island in reality, but is depicted on the northeastern side in this map (Figure 11). As a spot for viewing the sunrise, the Pantuo Rock is high and broad, with an unobstructed view to the east even though it is on the western side of the island. However, if placing it on the left side (west) of the Baotuo Guanyin Monastery in the map, viewers could not intuitively imagine this. By moving it to the upper right near the sun, the mapmaker creates a direct visual and imaginative experience for the readers. This adjustment further illustrates how elements outside the main area in the panoramic maps are flexibly relocated. The mapmaker prioritizes the reader's perceptual experience and understanding over topographical accuracy, while still ensuring that key information of the sacred site was preserved.

The *Nanghai Putuo shengjing* and the three versions of the *Chijian Putuo Map* (Figure 12) all reflect the dual-center space structure formed by Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery 法雨禪寺 and the rise of Huiji Chan Monastery 慧濟禪林 after the late Qianlong 乾隆 period of the Qing Dynasty (1736–1796). These four panoramic maps share a similar basic structure. The mountain terrain encloses two separate flat spaces that are not connected: Puji Chan Monastery at the bottom and Fayu Chan Monastery at the top. The distances between mountains and other monasteries are compressed and depicted in a simplified manner. In particular, the eastern extension of the island, the Feisha Col 飛沙壘 (Flying Sand Col) and the Qinggu Ridge 青鼓壘 (Azure Drum Ridge) west of the Foding Mountain 佛頂山 (Buddha's Summit Mountain) (between Fayu Chan Monastery and the Brahma-voice Cave [*fanyin dong* 梵音洞]), is greatly compressed, due to a low density of monasteries in this area. The upper section of the map depicts the Huiji Chan Monastery and the Celestial Beacon (*tiandeng* 天燈) crowning the Foding Mountain, Putuo's highest

peak. The areas north and west of the Foding Mountain, which have fewer monasteries, are largely omitted from the map.

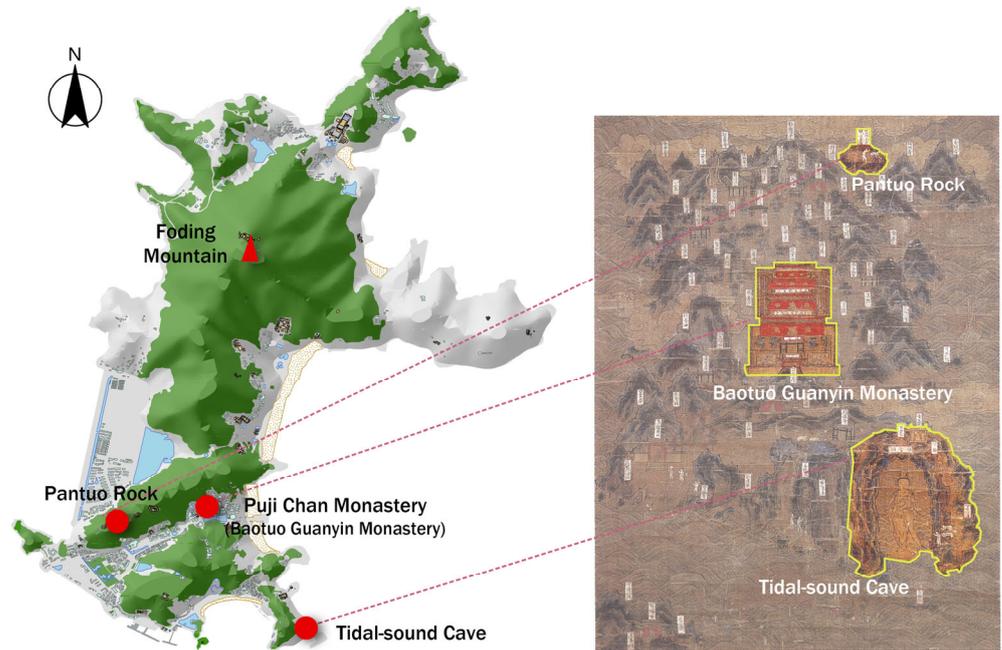


Figure 11. Comparison between the topographic map of Mount Putuo and a detail from the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. Drawn by the author based on the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*.

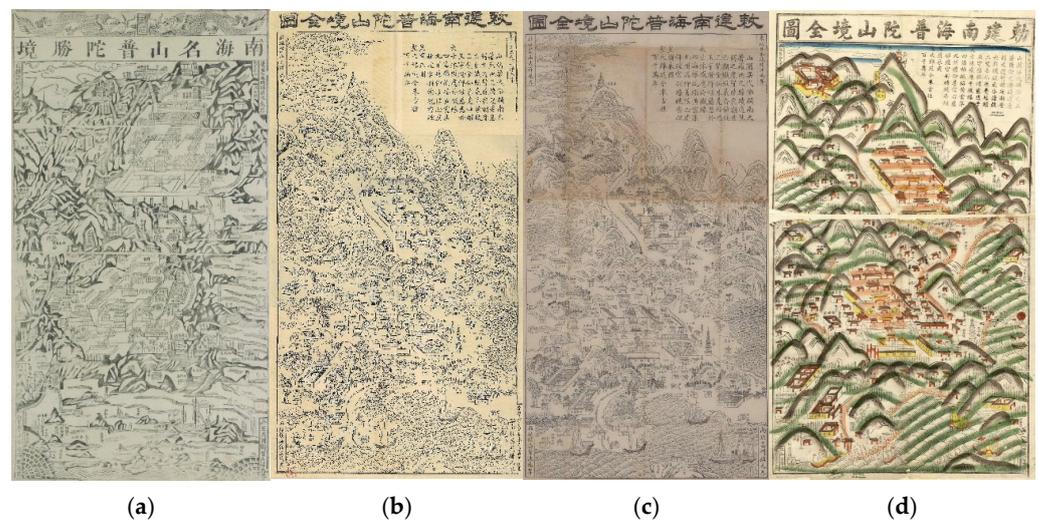


Figure 12. (a) *Nanhai Putuo shengjing*. © Bibliothèque nationale de France. Catalog no. ark:/12148/btv1b55000446j. Public domain; (b) *Chijian Putuo Map*. © National Library of China. Catalog no. 223.321/074.3/1903; (c) *Chijian Putuo Map* (private collection, version 1). Image from *Kongfuzi jiushu wang*. <https://book.kongfz.com> (accessed on 17 July 2020); (d) the *Chijian Putuo Map* (private collection, version 2). Image from *Kongfuzi jiushu wang*. <https://book.kongfz.com/394640/2106406205> (accessed on 23 May 2025).

The horizontal format panoramic maps covered in this study include the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, the *NLC Colored Wutai Map*, the *Puyin Putuo Map*, and the *Jingyuanji Putuo Map*. Among these, the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* and the *NLC Colored Wutai Map* have similar layouts, both arranging the five terraces in sequence at the top, the South Terrace, West Terrace, Central Terrace, North Terrace, and East Terrace from left to right. The middle part of the image depicts Taihuai, flanked on either side by mountain ranges ex-

tending from the South and East Terraces. The landscape opens toward the viewer at the lower left of the image, clearly marking the entrance to Taihuai. The most obvious adjustment to the landscape in the maps is the repositioning of the South Terrace (originally on the southern side) and the distant Wutai County by pasting them to the left of the West Terrace, displaying the five terraces around Taihuai in an unfolded manner (Figure 13). As Liu and Wang (2021, pp. 108–17) point out, the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* employs two different positioning frameworks for Taihuai and the five terraces.

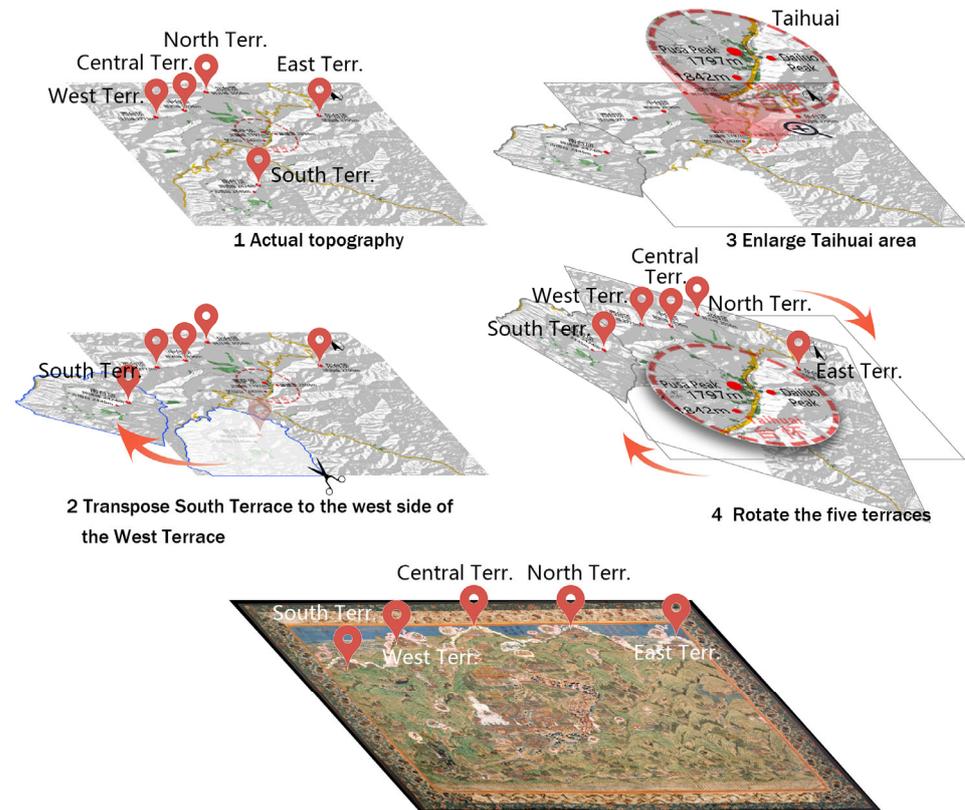


Figure 13. Landscape adjustments in horizontal format panoramic maps of Mount Wutai. Drawn by the author based on the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*.

The *Puyin Putuo Map* and the *Jingyuanji Putuo Map* both feature the sea in the foreground at the lower section of the image. The pier and the Hundred-step Beach (*baibu sha* 百步沙) which originally faces south, and the Thousand-step Beach (*qianbu sha* 千步沙) which is actually located on the east, are horizontally aligned across the image. The Guanyintiao 觀音跳 (Avalokiteśvara’s Leap) and the Tidal-sound Cave, which are actually located in the island’s southeastern corner, are rotated according to their relative orientation to the Puji Chan Monastery. Likewise, the direction of the Fayu Chan Monastery is adjusted based on its relationship to the Qinggu Ridge and the Tidal-sound Cave. These two maps use multiple directional adjustments to present an unfolded panoramic view of the entire mountain (Figure 14).

The analysis of both vertical and horizontal compositions in the panoramic maps reveal distinct spatial logics. In both two compositions, the highest points of the terrain are placed at the top of the image as distant views and markers, while the main monasteries occupy the middle of the image. Panoramic maps with vertical compositions all adopt an obvious enclosure structure. In order to fit sacred site information within the vertical scroll, these mapmakers compress and distort spatial distances in less significant areas by utilizing the overlapping and masking relationships between mountain, particularly

in those areas with fewer monasteries. The vertical scroll format is conducive to presenting the height and grandeur of mountains, giving readers a perspective of observing the sacred landscape from above and outside, as though approaching the mountain from a lofty vantage point. In contrast, panoramic maps with horizontal compositions, due to the expansive nature of horizontal scrolls, have more space for terrain representation. After ensuring that key areas are completely presented in the middle of the image, the mapmakers unfold the terrain and mountain ranges toward both sides, reducing visual obstruction in the foreground. It allows readers to feel as if they are in the sacred site surrounded by mountains, viewing the landscape from all directions. Therefore, panoramic maps in both vertical and horizontal formats adjust the landscape according to the characteristics of the format when representing space, prioritizing the readers' map-reading experience and imagination.

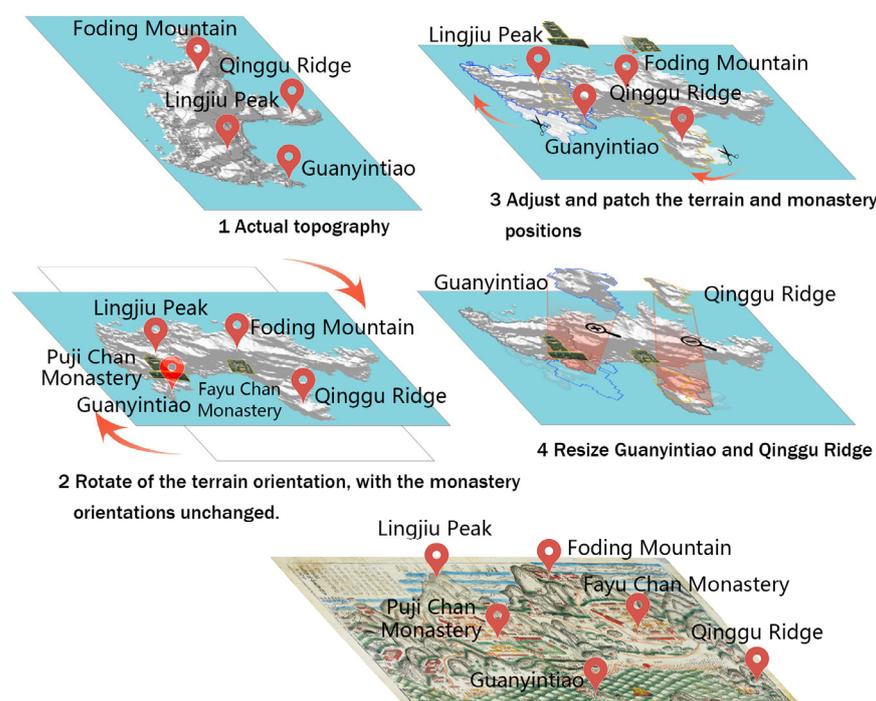


Figure 14. Landscape adjustments in horizontal format panoramic maps of Mount Putuo. Drawn by the author based on the *Puyin Putuo Map*.

4.2. Enlarged Representation and Creation of Visual Centers

Although most panoramic maps adopt a bird's-eye axonometric drawing method in their visual expression, almost all panoramic maps embed three distinct scales: (1) An enlarged scale is used for key areas of the entire mountain, displaying important monasteries and their detailed interiors, spatial environments, and surrounding elements; (2) A reduced scale is employed to mountains depictions, with foreground lower mountains appearing larger and more detailed, while distant higher mountains are smaller, reflecting layered relationships; (3) A simplified form is applied to monasteries and scenic spots embedded in the mountains, serving mostly as indicators without revealing their actual size. In traditional urban maps, the sizes of various features are generally balanced, with few sudden changes in the scale of specific features. However, in panoramic maps of sacred sites, some buildings or landscapes are deliberately drawn at noticeably enlarged scales to intentionally construct visual centers. Yee (1995, p. 144) points out that Chinese mapmakers continued to use pictorial scale until the Ming and Qing dynasties, where the size of an object depicted was determined by needs of design rather than rules of geometric

perspective. In panoramic maps, the enlarged elements reflect their central role in the understanding of the sacred site, and changes in visual centers across different periods of panoramic maps also reflect adjustments in the perceptions of sacred landscapes.

Notable enlarged depiction of scenic features in panoramic maps can be seen in the two horizontal format maps of Mount Wutai and the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. The *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* (Figure 3) and the *NLC Colored Wutai Map* (Figure 15) depict monasteries in Taihuai and those at the five terrace summits at an enlarged scale. They further enlarge the Śārīra Stupa (white stupa) of Tayuan Monastery and Pusa Peak slightly to the left of the center of the image, creating a visual center for the entire map. The scale differentials visibly signal the religious and symbolic importance of these features. The Śārīra Stupa of Tayuan Monastery is believed to be created by King Ashoka. According to the gazetteer *Qingliangshan zhi* 清凉山志, in the fifth year of Yongle 永樂 in the Ming Dynasty (1407), “the great stupa was renovated and the monastery was first built”, and during the Wanli 萬曆 era, it was rebuilt by imperial decree in the name of the empress dowager (Shi and Zhao 2015, p. 55). The 54.56-m-high Śārīra Stupa is both a visual focal point in the real space of Taihuai and a physical object related to the origin legend of Buddhism at Mount Wutai. Pusa Peak was the most politically symbolic monastery on Mount Wutai during the Qing Dynasty and the foremost Yellow Hat (The Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism) monastery of the entire mountain. Qing emperors frequently visited and stayed at Pusa Peak, repeatedly bestowing funds, Bodhisattva statues, and imperial titles upon its high lamas. The enlarged representation of the Śārīra Stupa and Pusa Peak in the two horizontal format Mount Wutai maps reflects both their visual dominance in real space and their centrality to the sacred meaning of Mount Wutai.

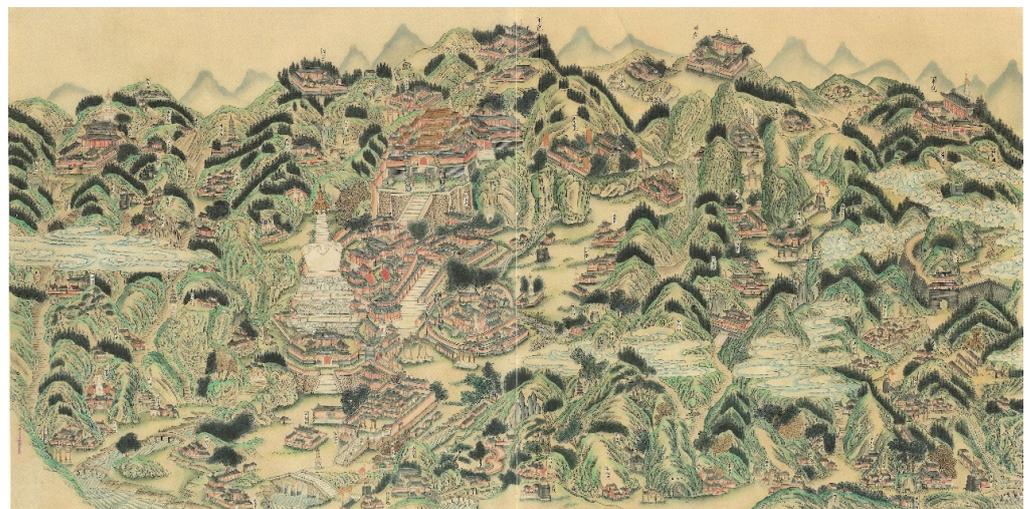


Figure 15. The *NLC Colored Wutai Map*. © The National Library of China. Catalog no. 214.253/074.2/1908.

The *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, apart from making the Guanyin image at the top the absolute visual center, enlarges the Baotuo Guanyin Monastery located at the center of the map and the Tidal-sound Cave in the lower right corner (Figure 1). Baotuo Guanyin Monastery was the core monastery of early Mount Putuo. In the panoramic map, the monastery is depicted using an unfolded elevation-plan drawing method, similar to drawing style in traditional gazetteers, with labeled main gate and halls, and even showing plants in the courtyard. The Tidal-sound Cave was the early miracle center in Mount Putuo’s sacred narratives, with continuous records of spiritual manifestations (Pan and Yan 2021, p. 1050). The panoramic map not only presents this cave and the Guanyin manifesting in it at an extraordinary scale, but also depicts the skylight detail at the top (Figure 11).²¹

Panoramic maps of Mount Putuo after the Qing Dynasty present visual centers differently from the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, reflecting changes in Mount Putuo's landscape pattern. The vertical format *Nanghai Putuo shengjing*, the *Chijian Putuo Map*, and the horizontal format *Puyin Putuo Map* and *Jingyuanji Putuo Map* (Figure 8) all enlarge Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery and their surrounding landscapes. These maps provide detailed representations of the hall layouts of both monasteries, the bridges, surrounding stupas, stele pavilions, and other structures outside their main gates. This is because after the establishment of Zhenhai Chan Monastery 鎮海禪寺 in the late Ming Dynasty, it formed a dual-center monastery pattern with Putuo Chan Monastery 普陀禪寺 (the early Baotuo Guanyin Monastery). By the Qing Dynasty, the two monasteries, Putuo Chan Monastery and Zhenhai Chan Monastery were renamed Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery, with the status of Fayu Chan Monastery rose to equal that of Puji Chan Monastery. We can also observe that on Foding Mountain, several panoramic maps devote some attention to depicting Huiji Chan Monastery. Although not on the same scale as Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery and not yet a visual center in the map, it appears more important than other monasteries. Some images even mark the path from Fayu Chan Monastery to Huiji Chan Monastery, reflecting the rise of Huiji Chan Monastery in the mid-to-late Qing period.

Another change in late Qing Mount Putuo panoramic maps is that the Tidal-sound Cave is no longer depicted at an enlarged scale. Like the most ordinary spots, it is represented by a simple architectural icon. Similarly, the Brahma-voice Cave, another miracle center believed to be a site of Guanyin's manifestation that rose after the mid-Qing period, was also not emphasized in the panoramic maps. This perhaps reflects that as the status of the three major monasteries continuously rose and received official recognition during the Qing Dynasty, which reoriented the focus of the maps completely toward to the imperially sanctioned monasteries. We can see a similar situation in the Qing Dynasty *Chijian Wutai Maps*, where although the Taihuai area is still drawn at an enlarged scale and serves as the center of the image, the Śārīra Stupa of Tayuan Monastery is not particularly emphasized. This may be because of the maps' name *chijian* 敕建 (imperially constructed), which highlights the official development in Qing Dynasty, while no historical records attest to government-led renovation of the Śārīra Stupa during the same period.

From the creation of visual centers in panoramic maps, we can discover how images shape the significance of sacred sites. As Ge (2011, p. 104) insightfully notes, maps change in direction, position, proportion, and color with changes in conception. the depicted images relate not only to "it", the concrete spatial object before us, but also to "me", the mapmakers' position, distance, and orientation, and even to their historically conditioned mode of seeing.

4.3. Imagined Spatial Structures and Axial Relationships

We have already established that panoramic maps make directional and positional adjustments to landscapes and features during representation to foreground important areas and maintain good image organization within their pictorial frame. However, a further question must be raised: after a series of adjustments and reorganizations of the real landscape, do panoramic maps also construct a newly imagined ideal landscape structure and spatial pattern facing the reader?

Preliminary observation of the visual center areas represented in panoramic maps reveals that monasteries or monastery groups in these areas often exhibit a form of axial relationships, with the extension lines of these axes pointing toward distant mountain peaks. Yet, when compared with the actual geographical layout, there is not necessarily an obvious corresponding relationship between the monastery axes and mountain peaks.

In panoramic maps of Mount Wutai, most mapmakers depict Tayuan Monastery, Xiantong Monastery, and Pusa Peak in the Taihuai area along a rough axis. Most panoramic maps reflect the differences in the gate orientations of these three monasteries, but a fairly obvious sequential order can still be seen in their overall positional relationships. However, horizontal and vertical format Wutai maps differ in the mountain peaks corresponding to the extension line of this monastery axis. In the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* and the *NLC Colored Wutai Map*, both in horizontal format, the extended axis points toward the Central Terrace located in the middle of the five terraces of the background (Figure 16a,b). In the vertical format Wutai maps, the *Wutai Zhucha Map* employs an unfolded elevation-plan drawing method for all Taihuai monasteries and the North Terrace is placed below the Mañjuśrī image at the center top. The axis through Tayuan Monastery, Yongming Monastery (the precursor of Xiantong Monastery), and the Pusa Peak points toward the North Terrace and the Mañjuśrī image, which is also the central line of the entire map (Figure 16e). The privately collected *Chijian Wutai Map* depicts the orientations of the three monasteries in Taihuai as completely identical, with the axis pointing toward the West Terrace in the upper left corner (Figure 16c). The *Chijian Wutai Map* held by the National Library of China is the only known panoramic map where the three monasteries do not share a common axis: the Xiantong Monastery and the Tayuan Monastery have the same orientation, with their axes pointing toward the East Terrace, while Pusa Peak's axis is nearly perpendicular to them, pointing toward the West Terrace (Figure 16d). Furthermore, we can observe that the axes of the monasteries aligned not only with distant terraces but also with the foreground river and the Fengshui Bridge 風水橋.

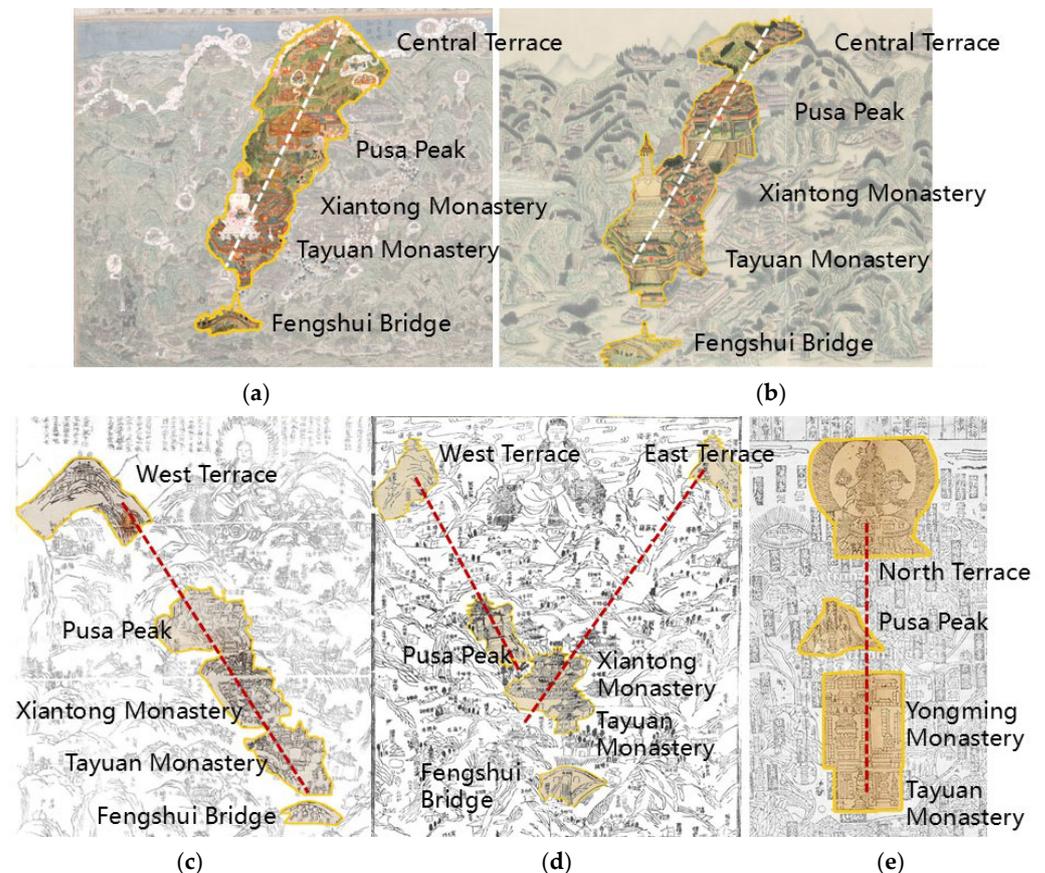


Figure 16. The axial relationships between the Tayuan Monastery, Xiantong Monastery, Pusa Peak, and the terraces in (a) the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*; (b) the *NLC Colored Wutai Map*; (c) the *Chijian Wutai Map* (private collection); (d) the *Chijian Wutai Map* (collected in NLC); (e) the *Wutai Zhucha Map*. Drawn by the author.

When we turn to the real topography, modern-day Mount Wutai still preserves the historical architecture of Tayuan Monastery, Xiantong Monastery, and Pusa Peak, allowing for comparative study with the panoramic maps. In physical layout, the Tayuan Monastery and the Xiantong Monastery both face south, while the Pusa Peak faces south with a slight eastward orientation, and the three monasteries do not share a common axis. If we extend these axes, the Pusa Peak's axis would point slightly east of the North Terrace, while Tayuan Monastery's and Xiantong Monastery's axes would point between the North Terrace and the East Terrace. From a visual perspective, looking from the locations of the three monasteries at human eye level, due to the obstructing relationship of mountain ranges, only the North Terrace can be seen from Pusa Peak. A viewshed analysis using ArcGIS confirms this observational conclusion (Figure 17). Therefore, the axial relationships in panoramic maps are inconsistent with the real landscape in both experiential and empirical terms.

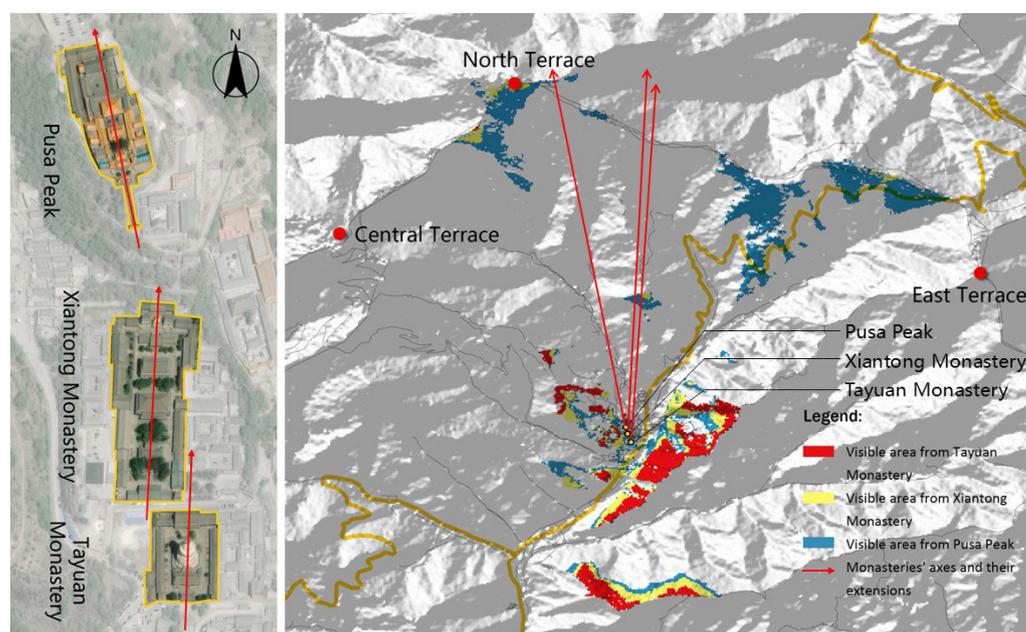


Figure 17. The axes and viewshed analysis of the Tayuan Monastery, Xiantong Monastery, Pusa Peak in reality. Drawn by the author.

Panoramic maps Mount Putuo present a similar situation. In the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, the axis of the central Baotuo Guanyin Monastery aligns with the central vertical axis of the map, extending southward toward the highest peak, Miaoying Peak 妙應峰 (Peak of Profound Response), and northward toward the Zhengqu Peak 正趣峰 (Peak of Rightful Path) in front of the monastery. The Qing Dynasty maps feature two centers, Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery. In vertical format panoramic maps, the two monasteries are arranged vertically, with the Puji Chan Monastery below and the Fayu Chan Monastery above. In horizontal format panoramic maps, they are arranged horizontally, with the Puji Chan Monastery on the left and the Fayu Chan Monastery on the right, both with the same orientation. The corresponding relationship between the monastery axes and mountain peaks is basically the same in Qing Dynasty panoramic maps: Puji Chan Monastery's central axis directly faces the Lingjiu Peak 靈鷲峰 (Vulture Peak), while Fayu Chan Monastery's central axis directly faces Jinping Mountain 錦屏山 (Brocade Screen Mountain) and further corresponds to Foding Mountain.²² Both monasteries are surrounded by mountain ranges on the left and right sides (Figure 18a–d). In the two horizontal format panoramic maps, the extension of the other end of Puji Chan

Monastery’s axis is shown stretching southward across the sea toward Guanyintiao, while the extension of the other end of Fayu Chan Monastery’s axis points toward Qinggu Ridge (Figure 18e,f).

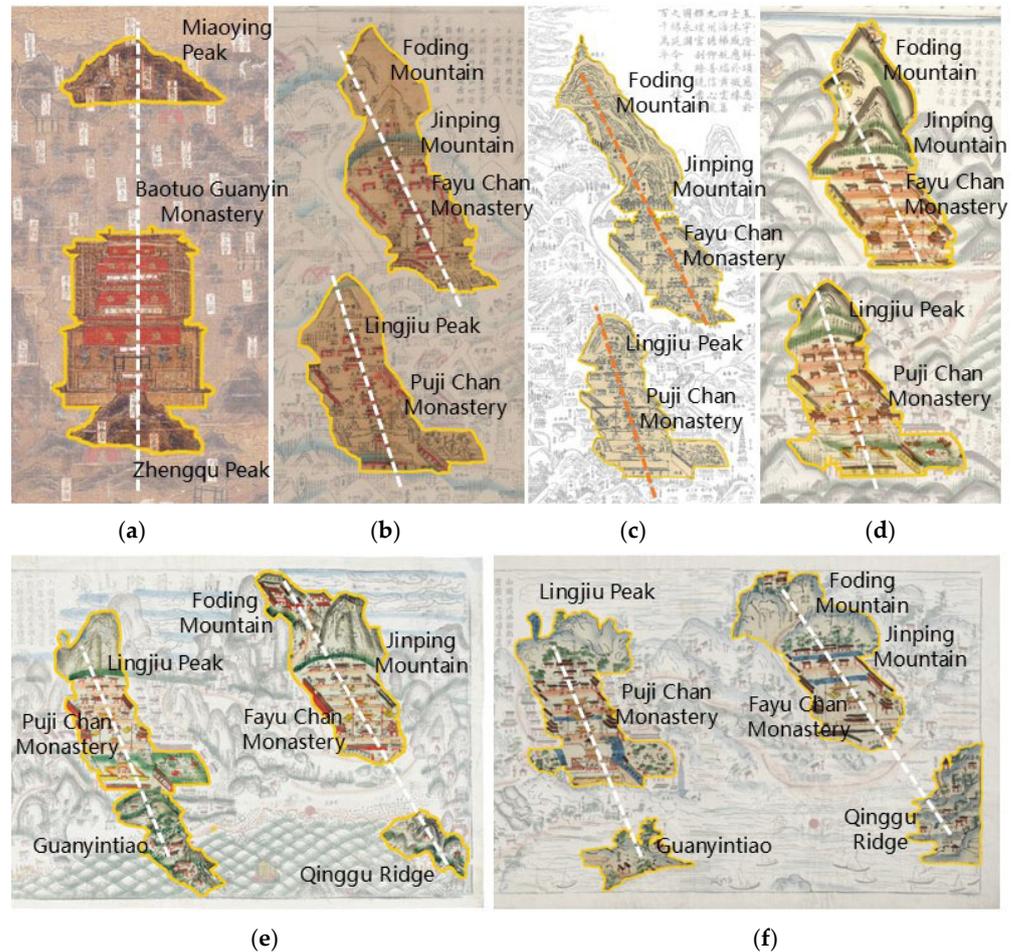


Figure 18. The axial relationships between the Puji Chan Monastery, Fayu Chan Monastery, and the terraces in (a) the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*; (b) the *Chijian Putuo Map* (private collection, version 1); (c) the *Chijian Putuo Map* (collected in NLC); (d) the *Chijian Putuo Map* (private collection, version 2); (e) the *Puyin Putuo Map*; (f) the *Jingyuanji Putuo Map*. Drawn by the author.

In the real landscape of Mount Putuo, Puji Chan Monastery faces slightly south-southwest, and Zhengqu Peak and Lingjiu Peak do lie along its axis, but Guanyintiao does not. Moreover, there are no mountain ranges on its eastern side all the way to the sea. Fayu Monastery faces south-southeast, and its axis points toward Jinping Mountain, but not to Foding Mountain or Qinggu Ridge (Figure 19).

Comparison between panoramic maps and the real landscape reveals that panoramic maps often show significant deviations from reality when depicting important areas. These deviations do not stem from errors in visual experience but reflect the mapmakers’ ideal expression and imaginative reconstruction of sacred site. Through visual design, these maps create ideal *fengshui* 風水 environments for the most important monasteries in sacred sites. In traditional Chinese site selection for human habitation, the ideal principle is embracing *yin* holding *yang* (*fuyin baoyang* 負陰抱陽), that is, backed by mountain and facing water. The selected site should have a main mountain (*zushan* 祖山) to the rear, ridges (*shashan* 砂山) on both sides, water flowing in front, and an opposing hill or mountain (*anshan* 案山) across the water as a protective screen. The optimal location, also called *xue* 穴, is a flat area with a slight slope in the middle of mountains embracing it. Addition-

ally, if there are layers of mountains forming rich scenic levels beyond this structure, it is even more ideal. Building a bridge (often called *feng shui* bridge) over the water is also a positive measure to improve the *feng shui* environment (Wang 2005, pp. 37, 42–43).

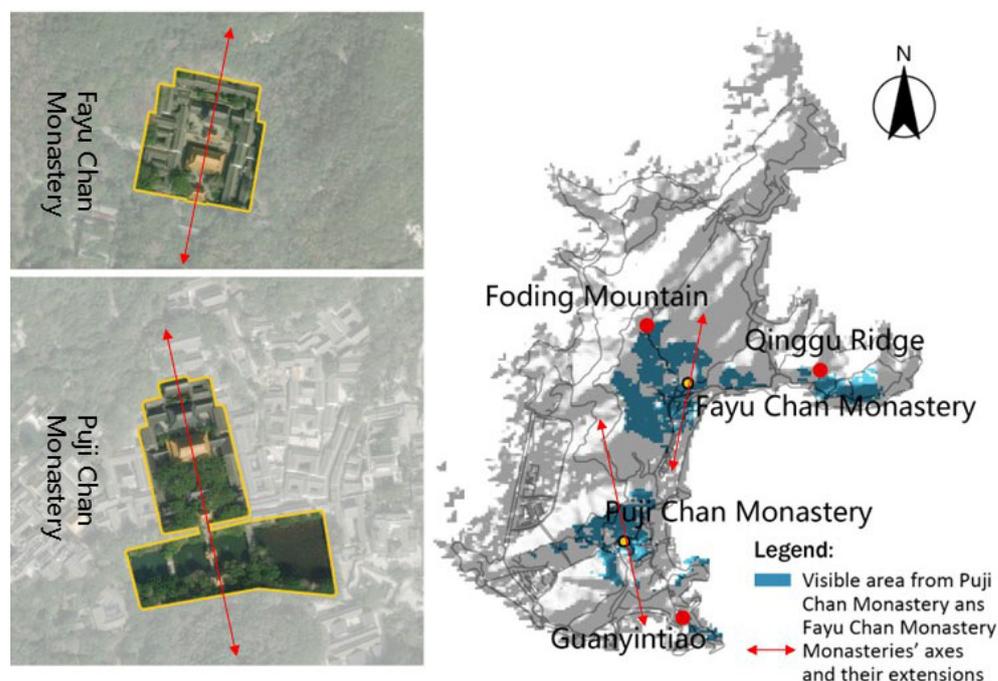


Figure 19. The axes and viewshed analysis of the Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery in reality. Drawn by the author.

Panoramic maps of Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo reflect this logic of *feng shui* principles. In Wutai maps, the mapmakers imagine the three main monasteries as forming a longitudinal axis with a sense of sequence, gradually rising from south to north, with streams and the Fengshui Bridges in front and the terrace as a main mountain behind, surrounded by layers of mountains on both sides forming the *shashan*. Puji Chan Monastery in Mount Putuo already had a good *feng shui* environment, with Lotus Pond in front and Zhengqu Peak across it as an opposing mountain, and Lingjiu Peak behind as the main mountain. However, its eastern flank mountain is insufficient. In response, the mapmakers supplemented it through their compositional design. For instance, the *Puyin Putuo Map* uses Jibao Ridge as a shared *shashan* on the eastern side of both Puji Chan Monastery and Fayu Chan Monastery through terrain adjustment. The Fayu Chan Monastery is naturally backed by Jinping Mountain. The mapmakers further create Foding Mountain directly behind it as a main mountain, while repositioning Qinggu Ridge in front as its opposing mountain. From this, we can discover that different versions of maps share an underlying compositional logic through landscape structure adjustments. They visually compensate for topographic shortcomings, ultimately constructing a perfectly balanced and symbolically powerful sacred geography on paper, shaping ideal residences for the Bodhisattvas in China’s local religious and geomantic context.

4.4. Inscriptions and Circulation of the Panoramic Maps

Among the 12 panoramic maps examined in this study, except for the *NLC Colored Wutai Map* and the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*, all are woodblock prints. This print format facilitated mass reproduction of the images, and indeed we can observe multiple surviving prints from the same woodblocks of panoramic maps of both Mount Wutai and Mount Putuo.

Most woodblock panoramic maps of the same sacred site share identical inscriptions, which seem to establish a textual prototype for the site and serve as a shared template for the circulation of these maps.

In woodblock panoramic maps of Mount Putuo, the inscription reads:

The mountain's sacred status began in the Liang dynasty, the Buddha manifested in the southern sky. It displays Potalaka's sacred traces and follows the legacy of virtuous monk Egaku 慧鑿. Day and night, the tidal sound resounds resonates with the Iron Hall of the Six Dynasties (502–557). At dawn and dusk, the tolling of bells and drums resonates from the two great monasteries, where the golden saints reside. Vermilion beams shine in splendor, while jade-like halls gleam with crystalline purity. Devotees extol the compassion of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and bathed in divine responses in the slightest of circumstances. Pilgrims journey from across the four seas; monastics and laypeople gather like clouds. People across the Nine Provinces gaze upward in reverence; faithful devotees offer pious minds. Magnificent monasteries surrounded by fragrant incense. May the imperial realm endure, and the sacred flame burn eternally. From ancient times to the present, for hundreds of thousands of years.

山開梁代，佛顯南天。著羅迦之勝跡，追慧鑿之遺賢。曉夜潮音，六朝鐵殿。晨昏鐘鼓，二梵金仙。朱甍炫耀，玉宇澄鮮。頌慈悲於大士，沐感應於微緣。四海梯航，緇黃雲集。九州瞻仰，善信心虔。輝煌宮刹，繚繞香煙。皇圖永固，聖火綿延。今來古往，百千萬年。

This text has no author information and is not found in literature related to Mount Putuo. The first sentence establishes an earlier historical origin for Mount Putuo than documented. According to historical records, there are two dates for when the Japanese monk Egaku founded the mountain: one in the twelfth year of the Dazhong era in the Tang Dynasty (858), as recorded in the Southern Song text *Fozu Tongji* 佛祖統紀, and another in the second year of the Zhenming 貞明 era in the Liang 梁 of the Five Dynasties (916), as documented in the Yuan dynasty text *Butuoluojia shan zhuan*. The Liang here refers to the Later Liang of the Five Dynasties period (907–923, also known as Zhu Liang 朱梁), not the Liang dynasty of the Six Dynasties period (502–557, also known as Xiao Liang 蕭梁). From the phrase “the mountain's sacred status began in the Liang dynasty” and the later reference to “Iron Hall of the Six Dynasties”, it appears the author confused these two eras. Regarding the Iron Hall, Mount Putuo literature mentions an iron-tiled hall (*tie wa dian* 鐵瓦殿) but does not specify when it was built. The building is not included in the Yuan dynasty *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* or the *Jōshōji Putuo Map*. According to *Chongxiu Putuo Shan zhi* by Zhou Yingbin 周應賓 (1554–1625) of the Ming dynasty: “In the twentieth year of the Hongwu 洪武 era (1387), Tang He 湯和, Duke of Xinguo 信國公, relocated island's residents (of Mount Putuo) to the mainland and burned the halls and monasteries. (...) Only one iron-tiled hall remained (on the island) (洪武二十年，信國公湯和徙居民入內地，焚其殿宇 [...] 僅留鐵瓦殿一所) (Zhou 1980, p. 139). This indicates that during the Qing Dynasty, the iron-tiled hall was an important architectural remnant from previous dynasties, and thus was specifically mentioned in Qing dynasty panoramic map inscriptions and imaginatively linked to the mountain's foundational history. The inscription then shifts to the spatial aspects of Mount Putuo, describing the soundscape and buildings of the two main monasteries, textually amplifying the sacred center. Subsequently, it portrays the scene of pilgrims gathering and incense smoke swirling, supplementing the visual imagery of the panoramic map.

All vertical-format panoramic maps of Mount Wutai examined share the same inscription, featuring Zhang Shangying's 張商英 (1043–1121) six poems of “Qingliangshan

shi” 清涼山詩 (Poems of Mount Qingliang) beneath the map title at the top of the image.²³ The six poems sequentially dedicated to the East, South, West, North, and Central Terraces, followed by a summary poem. These poems first appeared in Zhang’s Wutai gazetteer *Xu Qingliang zhuan* 續清涼傳 from the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), later anthologized in mountain gazetteers of Mount Wutai with minor textual variations and retitled “Fu Wutai shi” 賦五臺詩 or “Yong Wutai shi” 詠五臺詩 (Verses on the Five Terraces). The panoramic maps adopt these modified versions. These poetic inscriptions serve as supplementary material parallel to the images, guiding readers to imagine beyond what is depicted on the map. For example, the “East Terrace” poem states: “Northeastward, one clearly observes the vast sea; Southwestward, Chang’an lies within arm’s reach” (東北分明觀大海，西南咫尺望長安). Neither the sea nor Chang’an appears in the image, but the poem guides readers to imagine the vista from the East Terrace. Similarly, the “South Terrace” poem reads: “Ascending the South Terrace with a walking stick, looking north, Mount Qingliang’s expanse unfolds before my eyes” (迢迢策杖上南臺，北望清涼眼豁開). The South Terrace is typically depicted in the lower left corner of these vertical-format panoramic maps, and the poem directs readers to imagine the expansive view looking northward. The final summary poem states: “The five peaks rise majestically to touch the void, among them my master particularly dwells at the center” (五頂嵯峨接太虛，就中偏稱我師居) and “His unfolded sitting-mat spans only three *chi* wide, yet commanding mountains and rivers for five hundred *li*” (展開座具長三尺，方占山河五百餘). These lines directly correspond to the centrally placed Mañjuśrī image at the top of the map, symbolizing his protective presence over the entire Mount Wutai.

The *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* is unique in that its inscription beneath the map’s lower frame appears in three languages: Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian. It is the only multilingual panoramic map. Saren Gaowa and Qian (2021, pp. 87–107) compared the three language versions and concluded that the inscription was translated from Mongolian, with the Chinese part possibly referencing Laozang danba’s *Qingliangshan xin zhi*. The inscription first cites the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經) and the *Ratnakūṭa Dhāraṇī Sūtra* (*Baozang tuoluoni jing* 寶藏陀羅尼經) as identifying Mount Qingliang as Mañjuśrī’s dwelling place, then declares: “Devotees from all directions who either pilgrimage to the sacred site of Qingliang, or view this mountain map, and who hear about the miraculous dharma of the Bodhisattva, will in this life be free from all disasters and illnesses, enjoy longevity and prosperity. After death, they will be reborn in auspicious realms, all by the Bodhisattva’s compassionate grace” (四方善士凡朝清涼聖境，及見此山圖，聞講菩薩靈驗妙法者，今生能消一切災難疾病，享福長壽，福祿綿長。命終之後，生於有福之地，皆賴菩薩慈化而得也。). It concludes by praising the woodblock carver Gelong Longzhu and explaining the merit of printing this map. This inscription emphasizes that viewing the panoramic map offers the same benefits as making a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai, imbuing the image with sacred significance while also encouraging the printing and circulation of the map through promises of merit.

Although the historical narratives in these inscriptions may not align perfectly with actual history, reading the inscriptions alongside the images helps unfamiliar viewers understand the sacred sites and guides them to imagine experiences from specific locations depicted. When different versions of panoramic maps reprint the same inscriptions, wrongly written characters frequently occur, reflecting the limited literacy of artisans from folk workshops who were unfamiliar with the legends and stories of the sacred sites.

Woodblock-printed panoramic maps primarily emerged during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with most concentrated in the Qing period. This era marked both the height of Chinese woodblock printing and the formalization of China’s sacred mountain system. On

one hand, accumulated social wealth during this time stimulated cultural prosperity, with woodblock printing enabling efficient textual and visual reproduction, allowing information to spread more widely through text-image media. On the other hand, as Buddhism became increasingly integrated into daily life across social strata, and with the preliminary formation of the three major Buddhist sacred mountains (Wutai, Emei, and Putuo) during the Ming dynasty and the establishment of the four famous Buddhist mountains system during the late Qing and Republican periods, pilgrimage became a multi-class and multi-ethnic travel activity. Woodblock-printed panoramic maps emerged under these dual trends, transforming sacred sites from unique geographical locations into replicable, portable, and interpretable representations on paper.

Some sacred maps also include publisher or printer information. Both the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* and the *Puyin Putuo Map* were produced under the names of monastic abbots, though they were likely not the actual artists or engravers but representatives of the publishing monasteries. The *Chijian Putuo Map* bearing the inscription “Carved during the lotus month of the guimao 癸卯 year, permanently preserved at Yuantong Monastery” suggests it was printed by Yuantong Monastery on Mount Putuo. The *Jingyuanji Putuo Map* and the *Chijian Putuo Map* marked “Printed by Renhe Tang” were probably works of two commercial publishers. By the Qing dynasty, the production and printing of panoramic maps had become institutional work. Some structurally similar panoramic maps may have used or referenced a template from the same artist, but different engravers created stylistic variations, particularly evident in how mountain forms are depicted. Some panoramic maps rendered mountains with intricate texture strokes technique (*cunfa* 皴法) that reflected literati landscape painting aesthetics, while others used simple color blocks to show mountain features with minimal three-dimensional effect. All colored panoramic maps examined in this study used hand-coloring applied after monochrome woodblock printing. Although color printing technique that used assembled blocks (*douban* 餽版) were already mastered and utilized in Ming and Qing China, none of the panoramic maps adopted this method. This was perhaps because most panoramic map buyers had lower expectations for image quality, making hand-coloring more cost-effective. For maps like the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, varied post-production coloring styles also facilitated distribution to multi-ethnic audiences.

Many panoramic maps we see also bear monastery seal impressions, proving that these maps were brought to the sacred sites. These seals signified that the map shared in the sacredness of the actual sacred site. Even today, pilgrims at Mount Wutai purchase handkerchief printed with monastery location maps and request stamps, while at Mount Putuo, visitors bring a kind of flag of Avalokiteśvara’s command (*guanyin lingqi* 觀音令旗) requesting stamps from the three major monasteries.²⁴ These sacred seals serve as tangible carriers for intangible sacredness. We cannot fully understand how widespread panoramic maps were in the commercial market, but some acquisition information offers some clues. The Museum of Ethnography (Etnografiska Museet) in Stockholm, Sweden, holds a *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* purchased by Sven Anders Hedin in Inner Mongolia in April 1930.²⁵ The Helsinki Cultural Museum holds another copy of the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* acquired by a Finnish expedition from a Beijing Shop in Ulaanbaatar (Chou 2018, p. 157). This information reminds us that panoramic maps could be traded as mass-produced art pieces far from the depicted regions, and their buyers might never have the opportunity to visit the actual sacred sites.

Panoramic maps can be viewed as folk artworks with cartographic traits, created by anonymous artisans. The spatial distortions and adjustments rendered these maps unreliable as functional topographic guides. Beyond these panoramic representations, did practical guidemaps of sacred sites exist in pre-modern China? The Library of Congress

houses a volume titled *Wutaishan daolu quantu* 五臺山道路全圖 (*Road Map of Mount Wutai*), also produced through woodblock printing with post-production coloring (Figure 20).²⁶ While covering a similar area to Mount Wutai panoramic maps, it distinctively emphasizes roads, meticulously marking monastery names and distances between them, as well as waterways and bridges. Viewers can easily understand how to reach each monastery. Rather than being produced as a large-format scroll, it was made into a 19.5 cm × 8.9 cm booklet that travelers could conveniently carry and consult. The *Wutaishan daolu quantu* confirms the existence of practical guidemaps beyond panoramic maps, further supporting the artistic nature of panoramic maps.

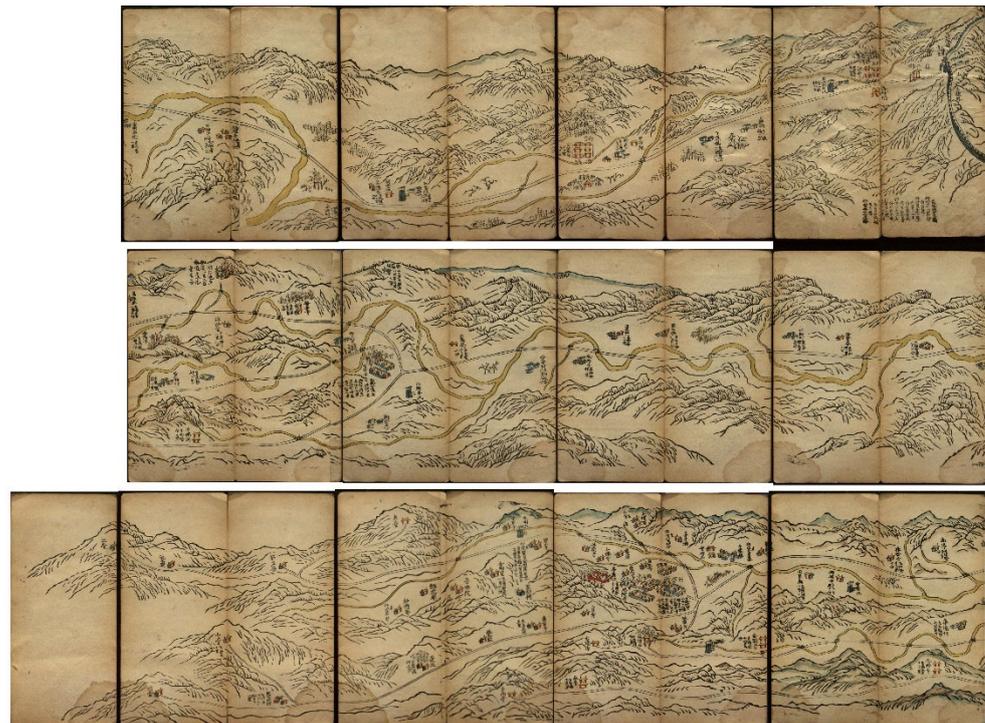


Figure 20. The *Wutaishan daolu quantu*. © Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. No known restrictions on publication. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012402693> (accessed on 23 May 2025).

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Over the past century, Buddhist sacred sites in China have undergone tremendous changes. Changes in transportation, religious organization structures, and pilgrimage groups have continuously reshaped the sacred landscape, while the contemporary worldview has subjected sacred sites to a process of disenchantment. Panoramic maps provide us with a regional visual window into pre-modern Chinese sacred sites. These maps seem to be less concerned with accurately representing physical space, instead silently conveying sacred meanings of the Bodhisattva's realm to their viewers. When medieval travelers undertook arduous pilgrimage journeys to the sacred mountains, they could hardly have imagined that centuries later, as sacred landscapes were replicated and disseminated, these sacred sites would transcend spatiotemporal distances and flow to the frontiers. Panoramic maps are both media for representing sacred sites and manifestations of the sacred sites themselves. Through these maps, sacred sites achieved their greatest openness to the broadest popular audience.

Despite some progress made in this study, several questions remain open for further discussion: (1) Woodblock depictions of sacred sites can often be found before gazetteers of sacred sites. These smaller-format images display landscape structures similar to

panoramic maps but omit many details. Did these images of different sizes and origins come from the same group of artists or artisans? (2) Different panoramic maps show marked variations in depicting landscape and figure details, perhaps reflecting regional artistic styles. Can we use these variations to discuss the stylistic origins of these anonymous creator groups? (3) Today, only Mount Wutai still maintains the practice of stamping on maps, seemingly a continuation of the older tradition of stamping on panoramic maps. When exactly did panoramic maps become popular, and when did they decline? How did different sacred sites influence each other to make this a universal format? Future exploration of these issues may provide insights for understanding panoramic maps of Buddhist sacred sites.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
NLC	National Library of China
	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and
T	Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1934.

Notes

- ¹ Panoramic woodblock-printed maps titled as *shengjing* 勝境 (scenic site) include the Republican period *xiyue Huashan shengjing quantu* 西嶽華山勝境全圖 (*Panoramic Map of the Scenic Site Western Peak Huashan Mountain*) and *Xinhui xiangxi Xijing Huashan shengjing quantu* 新繪詳細西京華山勝境全圖 (*Newly Drawn Detailed Panoramic Map of the Scenic Site Huashan Mountain in Xijing*). Similar titling is also found in panoramic landscape paintings such as *Hu shan shengjing tu* 湖山勝境圖 (*Painting of Scenic Sites of Lakes and Mountains*) by Wan Shanglin 萬上遴 (1739–1813) and *Yangzi shengjing tu* 揚子勝境圖 (*Painting of the Scenic Site Yangtze River*) by Sesshū Tōyō (c. 1420–1506). Among panoramic maps of Buddhist sacred sites, a few examples also bear the term *shengjing* 勝境 in their titles. These include the Qing dynasty *Da Jiuhua Tiantai shengjing quantu* 大九華天臺勝境全圖 (*Panoramic Map of the Scenic Site of Tiantai of Great Mount Jiuhua*) and *Nanhai mingshan Putuo shengjing* 南海名山普陀勝境 (Scenic Site of the Famous Mountain Putuo in the South Sea) held in the National Library of China, and a privately collected *Zhejiang Taizhoufu Tiantai-shan shengjing quantu* 浙江臺州府天臺山勝境全圖 (*Panoramic Map of the Scenic Site of Mount Tiantai in Taizhou Prefecture, Zhejiang*) dated to the first year of the Guangxu 光緒 era (1875). However, more panoramic maps depicting Buddhist sacred mountains are titled with the term *shengjing* 聖境 (sacred site), rather than *shengjing* 勝境.
- ² Among the copies of the *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map* examined by the author, the copy held by the National Library of China (catalog no. 214.253/074.2/1846) and that of the Library of Congress (catalog no. gm71005058) are monochrome line drawings on paper. Another copy at the Library of Congress (catalog no. gm71005136) is a hand-colored paper print. The copies held by

the National Palace Museum in Taipei (catalog no. 故購-(畫-000135-00000) and the Rubin Museum of Art (object no. C2004.29.1) are hand-colored on fabric.

3 Held in the National Library of China, catalog no. 214.253/074.2/1908.

4 Held in the National Library of China, catalog no. 214.253/074.2/1870.

5 Seen in the Sungari 2022 Spring Auction: *Wanjuan* 萬卷—Letters by Notables and Rare Book Special Sale.

6 Seen in the Rongbao (Beijing) 2018 Autumn Art Auction: *Piaoxiang* 縹緗—Special Sale of Rare and Classical Books.

7 Held in the BnF, catalog no. ark:/12148/btv1b55000446j.

8 Held in the National Library of China, catalog no. 223.321/074.3/1903.

9 The two maps are identical in content and composition, but differ in the border thickness and break points, suggesting they were produced from two different printing blocks with the same content.

10 These three seals were imperially bestowed to the three main monasteries—Puji Chan Monastery, Fayu Chan Monastery, and Huiji Chan Monaster. Even today, pilgrims still maintain the custom of requesting seal stamped at these three monasteries.

11 Seen in the Sotheby's 2016 auction: China in print and on paper, including the library of Bernard Hanotiau and the Floyd Sully collection, Lot 217.

12 Held in the BnF, catalog no. ark:/12148/btv1b7200227q and ark:/12148/btv1b7200251c.

13 Currently there is no further information available to clarify the exact meaning of “Jingyuanji”. It is possible that ji (記) indicates the name of a publisher or store.

14 “Mount Potalaka” here refers specifically to Mount Putuo. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between these two names, see Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*, Chapter 9 (Yü 2001, pp. 351–406).

15 “Independent” is used in contrast to the picture of Mount Wutai in Cave 361. Previous research has fully explained that the two screened panels in Cave 361 can be joined together and interpreted collectively. See Zhao (2010), pp. 36–47.

16 This story first appeared in Zhijing's 志靜 “Preface to the *Usnīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī*” (佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經序) written in the first year of Yongchang 永昌 (689) and was included in Mount Wutai gazetteers after the Song Dynasty.

17 Tian Meng believes this scene depicts Emperor Kangxi's tour (Tian 2008, pp. 31–33). From the bustling atmosphere and character actions in the image, it can be inferred that this is an imperial pilgrimage, but there is no sufficient evidence to confirm that the person in the sedan chair is Kangxi.

18 Zhang Fan points out that the Tibetan version of Mount Wutai gazetteer, *Zhing mchog ri bo dwangs bsil gyi gnas bshad dad pa'i pad + mo rgyas byed ngo mtshar nyi ma'i suang ba*, edited by Mongolian and Tibetan monks Rol pā'i rdo rje and Leang skya in the 18th century, features characteristics of Mount Wutai's mandalization (see Zhang 2019, pp. 149–86). This *Gelong Longzhu Wutai Map*, also from a Mongolian-Tibetan monastery, might to some extent be viewed as a visual representation of Mount Wutai's mandalization.

19 Combined plan-elevation drawing methods generally used the following approach: main buildings were depicted in elevation view, while other elements like roads and water systems were depicted in plan. This drawing method was commonly seen in urban maps attached to gazetteers. Some independently published maps including the *Chang'an tu* 長安圖 (*Map of Chang'an City*) and *Pingjiang tu* 平江圖 (*Map of Suzhou City*) also adopted this method. Bird's-eye axonometric drawing methods were more common in Qing dynasty urban maps, with the *Tianjin chengxiang baojia quantu* 天津城廂保甲全圖 (*Map of Baojia in Tianjin City and Suburbs*) being a typical representative.

20 Two exceptions seen in this research are the *Jōshōji Putuo Map* and the *Wutai Zhucha Map*. Both maps use elevations for buildings. The former adopts a bird's-eye view for landscape scenes, still reflecting an obvious spatial depth. The latter uses an expanded courtyard drawing approach for buildings and bird's-eye view method for landscapes. The lines representing mountain contours are not clear enough, with weak spatial depth except for the peaks.

21 The skylight (*tianchuang* 天窓) above the Tidal-sound Cave appears in the *Butuoluojia shan zhuan*: “On the full moon day of the third month in the Shaoxing wuchen 戊辰 year (1148), Cheng Xiufu 程休甫 from Poyang 鄱陽 and Shi Hao from Siming 四明 (modern Ningbo, Zhejiang) came here. Early the next morning, they visited the Tidal-sound Cave but saw nothing. They burned incense and offered tea, with auspicious flower patterns floating in the cup. After returning to the monastery and finishing their meal, at dusk, they revisited the cave entrance. Prostrating themselves on the moss-covered steps and gazing intently into the cavernous space, they saw only scattered rocks. As their interest waned and they were about to leave, a monk directed them: ‘There is an opening at the top of the cliff, through which one can look down.’ Climbing up, and in the midst of looking around, an auspicious manifestation suddenly appeared, radiating golden light, with clearly discernible eyebrows and eyes. What both of them saw was identical, except that Shi Hao additionally saw a pair of teeth as white as jade. Overjoyed, they wrote this on the wall, hoping that future visitors hoping to observe this would not grow weary, and would not give up after not seeing it at first glance”. (紹興戊辰三月望, 鄱陽程休甫, 四明史浩, 至此翼早詣潮音洞, 寂無所睹。炷香供茶, 盞浮花瑞。歸寺食訖, 哺時, 再至洞門, 俯伏苔磴, 凝睇嵌空, 惟亂石累累, 興盡欲返。有僧指曰: 岩頂有竇, 可以下瞰。攀緣而上, 瞻顧之際, 瑞相忽現, 金色照耀, 眉目了然, 二人所見不異, 惟浩更睹雙齒潔白如玉。於是慶快, 用書於壁, 庶幾來者觀此無疲, 不以一見不見而遂已也。) (T 51,

- no. 2101, p. 1137) Cheng Xiufu and Shi Hao's experience established the skylight above the Tidal-sound Cave as a new point for observation.
- 22 All these panoramic maps do not label Lingjiu Peak by name, but they all depict and label Damo Peak 達摩峰 (Dharma Peak) to its left. According to the gazetteer *Putuo luojia xin zhi* 普陀洛迦新志: "Lingjiu Peak is behind Puji Monastery, serving as the monastery's main mountain" (靈鷲峰, 在普濟寺後, 為寺主山); "Damo Peak 達磨峰, *mo* 磨 also written as *mo* 摩, is to the right of Lingjiu Peak" (達磨峰, 磨亦作摩, 在靈鷲峰右), we can identify Lingjiu Peak.
- 23 Mount Qingliang 清涼山 here refers to Mount Wutai. The name Mount Qingliang (Clear and Cool Mountain) comes from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and Mount Wutai is believed to be the Mount Qingliang mentioned in the sūtra. For more on the relationship between Mount Wutai and Mount Qingliang, and the early history of Mount Wutai becoming a Buddhist sacred site, see Andrews (2022).
- 24 The flag of Avalokiteśvara's command is a yellow triangular flag printed with the character *ling* 令 (command), phrases such as *Nanhai Putuoshan jinxiang* 南海普陀山進香 (pilgrimage to Mount Putuo in the South Sea) and *fozu guanyin* 佛祖觀音 (Buddha and Guanyin), along with images of boats. At Huiji Chan Monastery in 2020, a lady from Shengsi 嵯泗 told the author that her husband was a boat captain. She wrote her husband's name, township and village, and boat numbers on the flags. After having the flags stamped with seals from the three major monasteries, his husband would hang it on the fishing boat to ensure safety at sea and bring good fortune for fishing.
- 25 See URL: <https://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1860064> (accessed on 23 May 2025).
- 26 See URL: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012402693> (accessed on 23 May 2025).

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