



Memorial on the Bones of the Buddha | 論佛骨表

The title is in bold font in both languages. For longer titles, they may not be separated by a bar but instead have the English title on the top line and the original language title below.

Every category in the text information section should be complete: check that there is no missing information.

Text Information

Author | Han Yu

Language | Chinese

Period | 9th Century

Genre | Discursive works

Source | Han Yu 韓愈, Han changli ji 韓昌黎集 (Collected Works of Han Changli), 2 vols. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, c. 1930, vol. II, 39:7:34-37.

Collection | Writing History: Chronicles, Legends and Anecdotes

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/memorial_bones_buddha/

What follows "text" in the URL should exactly match the file name that you are working on (ignoring the slashes but including the underscores).

Translation and introduction by Geoff Humble.

No skipped line between the subheading and the text.

Introduction to the Text

Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824 CE), also known as Tuizhi 退之, was a scholar, official, poet, and a highly influential literary figure during the Tang dynasty (619-907 CE) of China. He played an important role in the development of Confucian thought, especially the Confucian revival movement. This school of thought, often referred to as 'Neo-Confucianism' or *Daoxue* 道學 ('Learning of the Way'), became very influential in the centuries following Han Yu's death, its impact extending far beyond philosophical abstraction to shape literary and historical works, economic and social policy, and law during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE). Han Yu's major contribution to this movement lay in providing Confucian thought with practical responses to the cultural and philosophical impacts of Buddhism and Daoism, and in popularizing a literary language, *guwen* 古文 ('the language of antiquity'), which claimed a basis in the Confucian canon of the Zhou dynasty (c.1046-256 BCE) and therefore eschewed the influence of Buddhist writings. In his most famous work, *Essentials of the Moral Way*, Han Yu proposed a political, social and economic program intended to place the Confucian classics at the center of life, with society arranged around a strong and virtuous imperial center.

No indentation of paragraphs. The spacing between paragraphs is consistent (equal to one skipped line).

The Memorial on the Bones of the Buddha is a memorial, that is, a report to the emperor. It was submitted by Han Yu to Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 806-820 CE) in 819 CE in response to Xianzong's proposal to parade Buddhist relics usually kept at the Famen Temple—more specifically, a bone from the Buddha's finger—around his territory. The tone of Han Yu's appeal is elegant but vehement, and has been celebrated as an example of prose style. His memorial contrasts the 'Chinese' teachings of the ancients, which he claims are proven to provide longevity, against the 'foreign' doctrines of a 'foreign' figure (the Buddha). He argues that the Buddha's relics can only bring impurity and instability and claims that his teachings have led to turbulent and deficient imperial governance.

One interesting aspect for modern readers is how Han Yu treats Buddhism as an instrument of rulership rather than as a faith or belief system, and seeks to demonstrate that its teachings cannot rival the ancient ways. His characterization of the Buddha as a foreigner is based on customs—clothing, food and language. The portrayal of Buddhism as a corrupting influence from the outside was quite extreme and does not seem to have been typical of the period, but it should be noted that the relic was not paraded again for more than fifty years—until 873 CE.

The tone of Han Yu's memorial was not welcomed by the emperor. While serving as Vice-President of the Board of Justice, Han Yu had previously published stark criticism of Daoism and Buddhism in his essay *Yuandao* 原道 (An Examination of the Way), with only limited impact. This time, however, his criticism of the imperial center through the condemnation of previous Buddhist dynasties infuriated the emperor. Han Yu only narrowly escaped with his life and was exiled to the southern province of Chaozhou, although on the death of Xianzong a year later he was able to return to the capital and subsequently occupied several senior roles in the civil service.

About this Edition

This text has been translated from the Shangwu yinshuguan edition: Han Yu 韓愈, Han changli ji 韓昌黎集 (Collected Works of Han Changli) 2 vols. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, c. 1930, vol. II, 39:7:34-37. A slightly different version of the original text is [available online here](#).

Page numbers should be present on all pages. Pages are numbered in Roman numerals for the frontmatter and Arabic numerals for the text and translation. Page numbers should always be in the bottom right corner.

The space between the final line of text and the licence statement should be equivalent to at least one line (more is fine if it makes sense as a section break).



Most lists of further reading will include annotations. If there are annotations, they should appear in a smaller font, in italics, with a bullet point.

Further Reading

Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 450-51.

- *An introduction to Han Yu.*

Dalby, Michael T.. 'Court Politics in Late T'ang Times,' Denis Twitchett (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 561-681, pp. 666-68.

- *Discusses the extent to which Han Yu influenced Emperor Wuzong's suppression of Buddhism in the 840s.*

Somers, Robert M.. 'The End of the T'ang,' *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part 1*, pp. 682-789, p. 714.

- *Describes the parade of the Buddha's finger bone in 873 CE.*

Strong, John S.. *Relics of the Buddha*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 2004, p. 186, and p. 186, n. 22.

- *A discussion of the relic of the Buddha's finger, and of relic worship in the Tang dynasty.*

Weinstein, Stanley. *Buddhism Under the T'ang*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 102-3.

- *Discusses the controversy over Han Yu's critical memorial.*

Han Yu 韓愈, *Han changli ji* 韓昌黎集 (*Collected Works of Han Changli*), 2 vols. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, c. 1930, vol. II, 39:7:34-37.

- *An edition of the text.*

After the frontmatter, the text and translation should start on a new page.



For prose texts, the first line of each paragraph should be aligned. In some cases, such as here, this is difficult to do exactly because of the different languages, but the impression should be of consistent alignment.

Memorial on the Bones of the Buddha | 論佛骨表

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臣某言：伏以佛者，夷狄之一法耳。自後漢時流入中國，上古未嘗有也。昔者黃帝在位百年，年百一十歲；少昊在位八十年，年百歲；顓頊在位七十九年，年九十八歲；帝嚳在位七十年，年百五歲；帝堯在位九十八年，年百一十八歲；帝舜及禹，年皆百歲。此時天下太平，百姓安樂壽考，然而中國未有佛也。其後殷湯亦年百歲，湯孫太戊在位七十五年，武丁在位五十九年，書史不言其年壽所極，推其年數，蓋亦俱不減百歲；周文王年九十七歲，武王年九十三歲，穆王在位百年：此時佛法亦未入中國，非因事佛而致然也。

漢明帝時始有佛法，明帝在位纔十八年耳。其後亂亡相繼，運祚不長。宋、齊、梁、陳、元魏已下，事佛漸謹，年代尤促。惟梁武帝在位四十八年，前後三度捨身施佛，宗廟之祭不用牲牢，晝日一食止於菜果，其後竟為侯景所逼，餓死臺城，國亦尋滅。事佛求福，乃更得禍。由此觀之，佛不足事，亦可知矣。

Your humble servant submits: this practice of bowing to the Buddha is merely a philosophy of the Yi and the Di [i.e., people beyond the civilized realm]. Flowing into China during the Later Han, it had not been present in ancient times. Of the ancients, Huangdi 黃帝 was on the throne for a century, and lived to be 110¹; Shao Hao 少昊 ruled for 80 years, dying at 100²; Zhuan Xu 顓頊 kept his throne for 79 years, living to be 98³; Di Ku 帝嚳 ruled for 70 years and lived to 105⁴; Di Yao 帝堯 had 98 years on the throne and lived to be 118⁵; Emperors Shun 舜 and Yu 禹 both lived to be 100⁶. At that time the world was peaceful and happy, the common people living long and joyful lives, but China did not yet have Buddhism. After this, Tang 湯 of Yin 殷 lived to 100 too, Tang's grandson Tai Wu 太戊 was on the throne for 75 years, Wu Ding 武丁 was on the throne 59 years, and although the books of history do not give his final age, if one had to guess it would most likely not fall short of a century⁷. King Wen of Zhou 周文王 lived to be 97, King Wu 武王 lived to 93, King Mu 穆王 ruled for 100 years⁸: at this time too Buddhism had not yet arrived in China, and this [longevity] was not a result of serving the Buddha.

Buddhism began to arrive in China at the time of Emperor Ming 明 of the Han, and Mingdi was only on the throne for 18 years⁹. Afterwards chaos and the fall [of dynasties] followed in quick succession, and no dynasty was fated to last. Under the Song 宋, the Qi 齊, the Liang 梁, the Chen 陳, the Yuan Wei 元魏 and their successors, the Buddha was served ever more sincerely, and the [lifespan of their] dynasties became [ever more] especially brief¹⁰. Only Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝¹¹ retained his throne for 48 years; he tried to offer himself to the Buddha three times in all. He gave offerings at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, but without sacrificing livestock; he dined only once a day, consuming merely fruit and vegetables. Eventually he was forced out by rebellion and starved at Taicheng 臺城, and soon the dynasty was destroyed too. Serving the Buddha to seek happiness thus brings only calamity. From this one sees that Buddha is not worth serving - this can be quite clearly understood.

In this case, a large space was left so that the following paragraph would not be split across two pages. This is fine but it is certainly not mandatory. It is more important that a paragraph is not crammed onto a page to the point that it overlaps with the page number or merges with the license statement.



夫佛本夷狄之人，與中國言語不通，衣服殊製，口不言先王之法言，身不服先王之法服，不知君臣之義、父子之情。假如其身至今尚在，奉其國命，來朝京師，陛下容而接之，不過宣政一見，禮賓一設，賜衣一襲，衛而出之於境，不令惑眾也；況其身死已久，枯朽之骨，凶穢之餘，豈宜令入宮禁？孔子曰：「敬鬼神而遠之。」古之諸侯行弔於其國，尚令巫祝先以桃茢祓除不祥，然後進弔。今無故取朽穢之物，親臨觀之，巫祝不先，桃茢不用，群臣不言其非，御史不舉其失，臣實恥之！

This Buddha was originally a foreigner, unfamiliar with the language of China, with a different system of dress, a mouth unable to speak the ceremonial words of the former kings, a body unable to wear their ceremonial robes; [he would] not have understood the filial righteousness of lord and subject, the filial affection of father and son. [Even] supposing he was still alive today, and accepting an order from his country had come to the court, Your Majesty would tolerate and accept him, showing him policy and ceremony, granting him a robe and escorting him safely to the border; [but he would] not be allowed to delude the masses. Much less so now that he is long since dead - how can the order be given for these withered bones and inauspicious remains to be introduced into the confines of the palace? Confucius said, "Respect spirits but keep them at a distance." The ancient lords, if bringing a corpse back to their country, would first have a shaman use a peachwood broom to expel inauspicious [presences], only then bringing in the body. Now, for no good reason, [Your Majesty is] taking this filthy thing, looking at it in person, without the preparation of a shaman, without using the peachwood, without the other ministers advising against it, without the censor highlighting the error; your servant is truly ashamed to see this [come to pass]!

乞以此骨付之有司，投諸水火，永絕根本，斷天下之疑，絕後代之惑，使天下之人，知大聖人之所作為，出於尋常萬萬也，豈不盛哉！豈不快哉！佛如有靈，能作禍祟，凡有殃咎，宜加臣身，上天鑒臨，臣不怨悔。無任感激懇悃之至，謹奉表以聞。臣某誠惶誠恐。

[Your servant] begs that these bones be turned over to a suitable office, all washed and burned away and eternally destroyed, in order to remove doubt from the world, resolve the misgivings of later generations, and to make the people understand that the actions of the great sage [emperor] are utterly beyond the ordinary. Would this not be mighty? Would this not be decisive? If this Buddha has power, and can call down disastrous punishment, this ought to be placed on my person; if a heavenly warning must be faced, your servant will not complain. This memorial is solemnly presented for inspection with the utmost sincerity and gratitude. Your servant in reverence and in awe.

Critical Notes

- 1 Huangdi 黃帝, the mythical 'Yellow Emperor,' was traditionally regarded as having ruled c. 2698–2598 BCE, and popularly regarded as one of the 'Five Emperors,' sage rulers and common ancestors of the Han Chinese.
- 2 Shao Hao 少昊, traditionally regarded as having ruled around 2598-2525 BCE, and according to some accounts the son of the Yellow Emperor, is also included as one of the 'Five Emperors' in some accounts.
- 3 Zhuan Xu 顓頊, also known as Gaoyang 高陽, is traditionally regarded as being the grandson of the Yellow Emperor, and regarded as another of the Five Emperors.

Critical notes generally begin immediately after the text (with the equivalent of three or four lines of space between the text and the notes), unless the text concludes near the end of a page. "Critical Notes" should have the same heading style as the subheadings in the frontmatter. If "Translation" or "Transcription" are present as subheadings in the notes section for texts with NUMBERED notes, this should be flagged as an error. The division into "Translation" and "Transcription" should only be used for texts where notes are labeled by line numbers.

Notes should generally be in full sentences, ending in periods. The exception is where notes indicate manuscript emendations and are a single word or very short phrase.

There is no indenting for notes. Each note should be aligned consistently. The space between the numbers and the notes should not be as wide as the subheading "Critical". Excessive spacing between numbers and notes should be flagged as an error.



The Spring – The Hecatomb for Diane, VII | Le Printemps – L'hécatombe à Diane, VII

D'un outrageux combat, la fortune & l'amour
 Me veulent ruiner & me veulent bien faire
 L'amour me veut aider, & fortune contraire
 Le brouille ne le trompant de quelque nouveau tour
 L'un fit dedans les yeux de Diane sejour.
 Luy embrasa le cœur & l'ame debonnaire,
 L'autre luy opposa une troupe adverse
 De malheurs pour sa mort, & pour mon dernier jour
 Diane assiste moy, nostre perte est comune
 Faisons rompre le col à l'amour, à injuste fortune
 Inconstante, fascheuse, & qui nous a trahis
 Combattans pour l'amour, c'est pour nous ma maistresse
 Loge le dans mon cœur & au tien ma Deesse
 Qu'il ait passages forts, la langue & le pais.

Some texts, such as this one, begin each new line with a capital letter. This is one area of acceptable inconsistency between the texts in the collection. However, there should be consistency WITHIN a text. Please highlight inconsistencies within a text so that they can be corrected.

With* an outrageous combat, fortune and love
 Wish to ruin me and wish to do me good.
 Love wants to help me, fortune on the contrary
 Upturns it with some new trick*.
 5 One stays a while in Diane's eyes,
 Sets alight her heart and good-natured soul;
 The other opposes him with an enemy troop*
 Of misfortunes for his death, and for my last day.
 Diane attends me, our loss is mutual;
 Let us break the neck of unjust fortune—
 10 Inconsistent, adverse, and who has betrayed us.
 Fighting* for love, it [love] is for us, my mistress,
 Lodge it in my heart, and in yours, my goddess,
 So that it may have safe passage, both the language* and the land.

Verse texts have line numbers indicated every five lines. Check that these numbers are correctly aligned with the lines on either side. Check that all line numbers are present and that there are none extra (i.e. going beyond the end of the text).

Some texts (including most verse texts) have asterisks indicating where there are critical notes. In these cases, the critical notes are labeled with line numbers, as on the next page. Some verse texts may have superscript numbers indicating the presence of notes, and this is not an error. In such cases, the notes should simply be numbered as in the prose text above and not labeled with line numbers.

Critical Notes

Another point of variance between texts is whether they use British or US punctuation, which is most noticeable with single vs double quotation marks and whether periods and commas fall within or outside quotation marks. Either is acceptable but usage should be consistent.

- Line 1** I've opted for 'with' rather than a more literal 'from' or 'of' because it sounded more natural to me in English.
- Line 4** I've chosen to just write 'trick' once here, for the sake of the flow of the text, even though 'trompant' and 'tour' could both be rendered in English as versions of 'trick.'
- Line 7** The 'him' being opposed in this line (and the 'his' referred to in the subsequent line) refer to Love; Fortune is bringing an enemy troop against Love.
- Line 11** Véronique Ferrer's 2019 critical edition adds a note to clarify the intention of the word 'combattant', or 'fighting', in this instance: "To be understood in the sense of 'by fighting for love, we fight for ourselves.' The poet here subverts the traditional motif of the combat between love and fortune, a common cause for lovers' separation, by envisaging their loving union as a defensive weapon." Véronique Ferrer (ed.). "Hécatombe à Diane." *Le Printemps*, Librairie Droz, 2019, p. 56 (in French).
- Line 14** Henri Weber's 1960 critical edition of the *Printemps* explains that references to 'having the language' were common wartime allusions: "The general sense of the verse is thus: that love may keep the country by possessing its main access points and the complicity of inhabitants who give him all necessary information." Henri Weber (ed.). "L'hécatombe à Diane." *Le Printemps: L'hécatombe à Diane et Les Stances*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1960, p. 64, n. 5 (in French).

"Line X" should be italicized and the text which follows should be neatly aligned, with the consistent spacing between the numbers and the notes, and between one note and the next.



Ce est un legier companage
Qui tot le cors lor asoage;
Mes ja o Dieu n'ert heritage
Qui primes fist tel mariage!

It's a light spread
That restores their whole body;
But cursed by God be the one
Who first invented this pairing!

The spacing between lines and between stanzas should be consistent.

Andreu a sa chartre finee;
Bien l'ont li Engleis graantee,
Que rien nule n'i ont trovee
Qui ne seit verité provee.

It is acceptable for line numbers to be closer to the translation than the original text. They should generally be close to the center of the page.

385 André has finished his charter;
The English have guaranteed
That they found nothing in it
That isn't the proven truth.

Bien l'ont graanté li Flamenc,
Et Borgueignon et Loherenc,
Que prendrei ge tot à renc.
Mes en verité vos aprenc

The Flemish have guaranteed it,
390 The Burgundians, the Lotharingians,
Which I would all enlist.
But let me tell you in truth

Que Engleis, Breton, Angevin,
Mansel, Gascoign, et Peitevin,
Tienent Andreu a bon devin,
Quer partot dit veir. C'est la fin.

That the English, the Bretons, the Angevins,
Those from the Mans, the Gascons, the Poitevins,
395 Believe André is a good fortune teller,
Because he tells the truth all the time. This is the end.

Explicit Arflet.

Here ends 'Alfred.'

Hii sunt duodecim pares Francie.
Dux Burgondie.
Dux Normannie.
Dux Aquitanie.
Comes Flandrie.
Comes Campanie.
Comes Sancti Egidii.
Archiepiscopus Remensis.
Archiepiscopus Lingolnensis.
Episcopus Beluacensis.
Archiepiscopus Lugdunensis.
Episcopus Novioniensis.
Episcopus Cathalaunensis.

These are the twelve peers of France.
The Duke of Burgundy.
400 The Duke of Normandy.
The Duke of Aquitaine.
The Count of Flanders.
The Count of Champagne.
The Count of Saint Giles.
405 The Archbishop of Reims.
The Archbishop of Langres.
The Bishop of Beauvais.
The Archbishop of Laon.
The Bishop of Noyon.
410 The Bishop of Châlons.



Critical Notes

This is an example where the notes are organized into "Transcription" and "Translation" because the author edited the text himself and is indicating where emendations were made. This is usually only the case for European texts that were previously unedited. Most texts in the collection are new translations, not new editions. Where only the translation is new, the notes typically pertain only to the translation (and may provide additional context to aid the reader).

Transcription

Line 11	<i>escoles</i>	
Line 44	<i>c'est</i>	
Line 51	<i>voudreit</i>	
Line 52	<i>sor sor</i>	
Line 58	<i>este</i>	
Line 123	'Aol' stands for 'oil' (pronounced well), meaning yes. 'Aol' also means garlic; these lines contain an untranslatable pun that alludes to the French's penchant for garlic expressed below.	
Line 233	<i>blasmet</i>	
Line 238	<i>bieli</i>	
Line 246	<i>corent</i>	Where the entire note is a phrase from the original source, no period or capitalization is needed. In such cases, the excerpt of original language should be italicized. If instead the author is making a comment on the original language, that should comprise a full sentence and any excerpted text should be contained within quotation marks (e.g. in the note to l.123 above).
Line 251	<i>bo...die</i>	
Line 257	<i>desnooe</i>	
Line 289	<i>l'aveient</i>	
Line 291	<i>et ou</i>	
Line 308	<i>donc</i>	
Line 335	<i>donc</i>	
Line 347	<i>al</i>	
Line 349	<i>Fanee</i>	
Line 364	<i>cresçant</i> (Holden)	

Translation

Line 4	Literally: 'he does not value them the price of an almond'.
Line 80	Probably 'Galleis', Gauls. Holden 1973, n. in v. 80.
Line 239	Alternatively: 'he orders some rye bread'.
Line 304	Allusion to the fire known to light up every Holy Saturday at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.
Line 344	A line is missing in the original text.