

A Study of the Ming-Dynasty Murals at Dahui Temple through Textual Verification and Digital Reconstruction

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Abstract

The Great Compassion Hall of Dahui Temple preserves a central image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, two attendant bodhisattvas, polychrome sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, and murals depicting the story of Princess Miaoshan. Together, these remains constitute an important component of Beijing's historical and cultural heritage, with religious, artistic, literary, and spatial-narrative significance. Taking the Dahui Temple murals as its object of study, this article combines textual verification with visual analysis to reconstruct their narrative sequence, identify the scenes represented, and examine their correspondences with written sources. Particular attention is paid to the representation of Miaoshan's compulsory labor at the White Sparrow Monastery, her descent into the underworld and salvation of suffering beings, her religious cultivation at Xiangshan, and her offering of her hands and eyes to cure her father. On the basis of this research, an interactive interpretive system was developed in Axure. The system organizes the murals' original spatial setting within the hall, the mural images, and the relevant textual passages into bidirectional pathways through which users can move between space, image, and text.

Keywords

Dahui Temple; Miaoshan story; Xiangshan Baojuan; Ming-dynasty murals; digital reconstruction.

1. Introduction

Dahui Temple was built during the Zhengde reign (1506–1521) of the Ming dynasty under the patronage of Zhang Xiong, a eunuch serving in the Directorate of Ceremonial. Its principal surviving structure is the Great Compassion Hall, which houses a central image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, two attendant bodhisattvas, polychrome sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, and murals of the Miaoshan story. Architecture, sculpture, and mural painting thus coexist within a single hall.

Existing scholarship has examined Dahui Temple from several perspectives. With regard to the temple's construction, Rostislav Berezkin situates Dahui Temple within the broader contexts of Buddhist temple patronage by Ming court eunuchs and the development of urban Buddhism in Beijing, while He Xiaorong discusses the wider relationship between Ming eunuchs and Buddhism [1,6]. Studies of the hall's polychrome sculpture by Wang Mingqing, Wang Zhimin, Shan Shuhua, and others have addressed the identities, sculptural styles, and artistic significance of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities [2,7]. Regarding the subject matter of the murals, Berezkin and Han Yidan relate the paintings to the legend of Princess Miaoshan and the Xiangshan Baojuan, arguing that they do not present generic Guanyin imagery but visualize the narrative of Guanyin's original conduct (benxing) [3].

Three issues nevertheless require further investigation. First, the ten mural panels together constitute a continuous narrative. Without analyzing the figures, architecture, spatial divisions, and actions within each panel, it is difficult to explain how the cycle organizes the Miaoshan

story. Second, most extant versions of the Xiangshan Baojuan postdate the Dahui Temple murals and differ from one another. Any comparison must therefore attend to the chronological and textual limits of the surviving editions while considering the murals in relation to the broader early baojuan tradition. Third, because the murals are located behind the sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, viewing them in situ is obstructed and fragmented. Digital methods are therefore required to reconstruct the relationships among image, text, and architectural space.

In response to these issues, this article takes textual verification and digital reconstruction as its methodological framework for reconsidering the Dahui Temple murals. Axure is used to construct an interactive environment that restores the narrative structure of the mural cycle and enables movement between the original hall, the ten-panel sequence, individual scenes, and the corresponding textual passages.

2. Murals in the Great Compassion Hall: The Sculptural Program and Conditions of Viewing

2.1. Historical Background and the Buddhist Landscape of Beijing's Western Suburbs

Nalan Chengde records in *Lushuiting zashi* (Miscellaneous Notes from the Green Water Pavilion): "In the *guiyou* year of the Zhengde reign, Zhang Xiong, a eunuch of the Directorate of Ceremonial, built a temple in Weiwu Village, Xiangshan Township, Wanping County. It was imperially granted the name Dahui, and the edict was inscribed on a stele" [4]. Dahui Temple underwent repeated repairs and alterations from the Ming and Qing dynasties through the modern period. The architecture, polychrome sculpture, and murals visible today preserve important features of Ming temple art while also bearing the accumulated traces of later renovation and modern conservation. As the only surviving principal building of the temple, the Great Compassion Hall is the central material basis for examining both the historical form of Dahui Temple and the spatial relationship of its murals.

The hall faces south, is five bays wide and three bays deep, and is covered by a double-eaved hip roof with grey cylindrical tiles and *xuanzi*-style painted decoration. The relationships among the two roof levels, the bracket complexes beneath the upper and lower eaves, the raised platform, and the fittings of the front elevation remain legible and reflect the basic conventions of official Ming Buddhist architecture (Fig. 1) [5]. The architectural form of the Great Compassion Hall provides not only the physical setting in which the murals have been preserved but also the viewing routes and visual organization experienced by visitors entering the building.

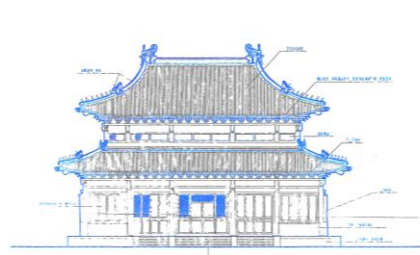


Figure 1-1. Front View of the Dabeibao Hall at Dahui Temple

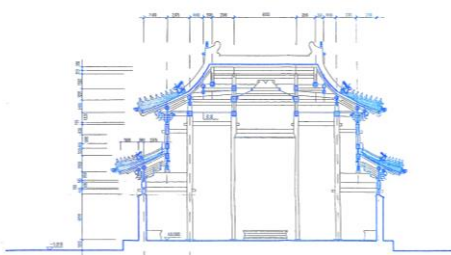


Figure 1-2. Front Section of the Dabeibao Hall at Dahui Temple

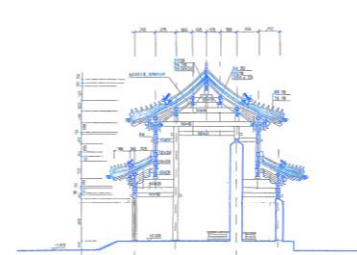


Figure 1-3. Cross Section of the Dabeibao Hall at Dahui Temple

Figure 1: Elevation and sectional drawings of the Great Compassion Hall.

2.2. Spatial Relationships among the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, and the Murals

The spatial organization of the Great Compassion Hall is centered on the principal image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin. Two attendant bodhisattvas flank the central icon; the polychrome sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities stand in front of the walls; and the murals are painted behind them (Fig. 2). The central image presents Guanyin after enlightenment, the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities constitute the bodhisattva's protective retinue, and the wall paintings narrate how Princess Miaoshan endured suffering, pursued religious cultivation, saved her father, and ultimately became Guanyin.

The Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities are arranged along the eastern and western sides of the hall and extend to both ends of the north wall, forming a protective configuration around the principal icon. The sculptures are approximately 3 m high and stand on pedestals about 1.1 m high. Because they are positioned directly in front of the walls, they substantially obstruct the murals. Upon entering the hall, viewers first encounter the monumental Thousand-Armed Guanyin, the two attendant bodhisattvas, and the guardian figures arranged on three sides; the murals remain behind these sculptures. Only fragments of figures, buildings, or cloud forms can be seen through the gaps between the statues, so the pictorial narrative is divided by the sculptural program. The murals serve the integrated ritual ensemble of the hall, yet occupy a comparatively concealed position within the field of vision.

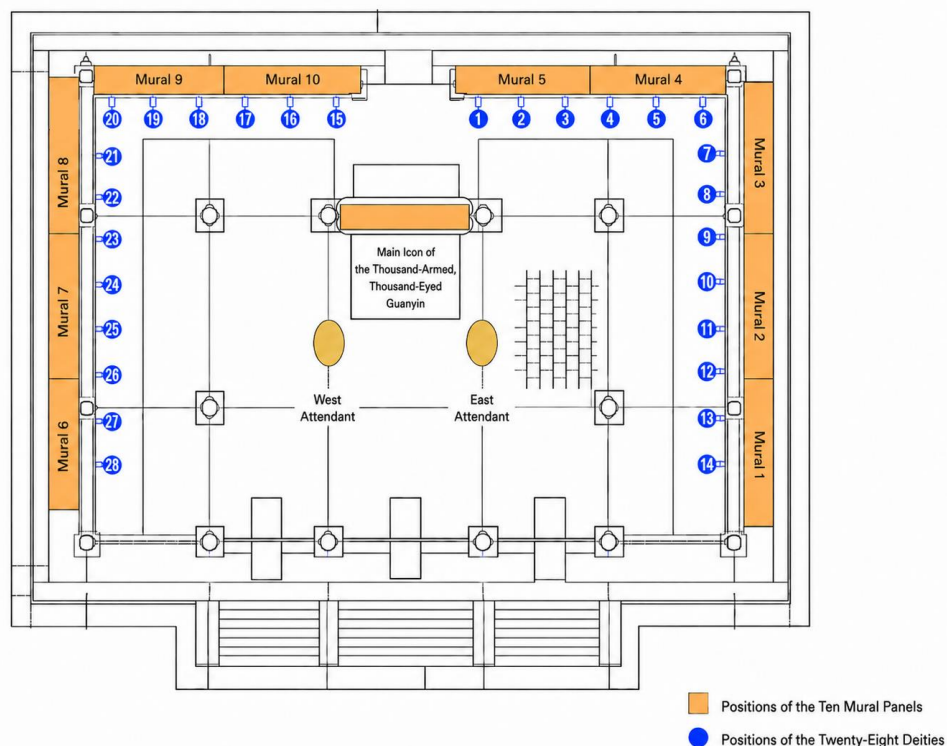


Figure 2: Spatial distribution of the sculptures and murals in the Great Compassion Hall.

2.3. Obstruction of In-Situ Viewing and the Need for Digital Reconstruction

Although the Dahui Temple murals have suffered localized flaking, staining, and fading, their overall content remains largely legible. The principal impediment to public understanding is not that the paintings are wholly invisible, but that the ensemble cannot be viewed on site as a continuous narrative. Behind the large sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, viewers can see only partial figures, buildings, or cloud forms and may be unable to identify the place of those fragments within the Miaoshan story.

Digital reconstruction responds to this condition by using unfolded digital views and scene annotations to re-present the murals that are obstructed and separated in situ as a readable narrative sequence. The Dahui Temple murals are closely related to the Xiangshan Baojuan tradition, but they do not reproduce the text line by line. The digital system therefore links individual scenes to corresponding passages in the Miaoshan textual tradition. In this way, digital reconstruction functions not only as a means of displaying the images but also as an auxiliary instrument for textual verification and visual analysis.

3. The Visual Narrative of the Miaoshan Story in the Dahui Temple Murals

The murals in the Great Compassion Hall unfold around the Miaoshan story. Through figures, architecture, landscape, and supernatural spaces, they construct a narrative movement from palace to monastery, from persecution to the underworld, and from religious cultivation at Xiangshan to Miaoshan's offering of her hands and eyes to save her father.

Taken as a whole, the mural cycle can be divided into at least six narrative sections. The first is dominated by palace buildings, court audiences, officials, and members of the royal family, establishing the courtly beginning of the Miaoshan story. The second shifts to rear gardens, courtyards, and groups of women, representing the family's attempts to persuade Miaoshan after her refusal to marry. The third introduces monastery buildings, nuns, labor, and courtyard spaces, showing the first ordeals imposed on Miaoshan after she is sent to the monastery. The fourth contains dark clouds, smoke, supernatural beings, and agitated groups of figures, indicating persecution at the White Sparrow Monastery, fire, and divine protection. The fifth is composed of a white stupa, bones, beasts, bridges, caves, mountain landscapes, and monastics, evoking death, the underworld, and cultivation at Xiangshan. The sixth repeatedly depicts the movement of envoys, court audiences, sedan-chair journeys, and acts of worship, relating to King Miaozhuang's illness, the search for medicine, the reunion of father and daughter, and the king's final conversion. The murals thus constitute a continuous visual narrative organized around the transformation of Miaoshan's identity.

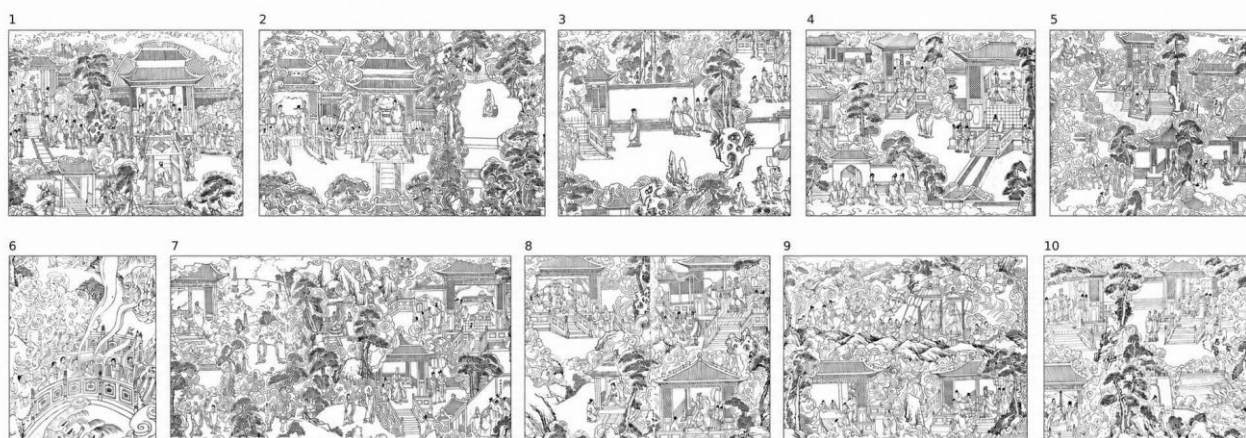


Figure 3: Overview of the ten mural panels at Dahui Temple.

3.1. Courtly Marriage Arrangements and the Order of Royal Authority

Court scenes form the opening portion of the Dahui Temple murals. The first and second panels repeatedly depict large halls, terraces, gates, attendants, and centrally positioned or elevated figures. The hierarchical arrangement of the figures around the person occupying the principal position constructs a recognizable order of the royal court. The Miaoshan story begins with King Miaozhuang's lack of a male heir and his attempt to resolve the problems of dynastic

succession and familial continuity by arranging marriages for his three daughters. Miaoshan's refusal to marry initiates the series of conflicts that follows.

Palace architecture here performs a narrative function. Raised platforms, hall entrances, steps, and balustrades differentiate figures according to status and emphasize the force of the father-king's command and the royal order. The solemn palace setting establishes a stronger basis of conflict for Miaoshan's subsequent renunciation, suffering, and enlightenment. The second panel continues the courtly setting while gradually advancing the narrative toward Miaoshan's refusal of marriage and the family's attempts to persuade her. Together, the two panels show that her decision to enter religious life did not arise simply from private emotion, but took shape within an order jointly constituted by royal authority, paternal command, and the institution of marriage.

3.2. Persuasion in the Rear Garden and Miaoshan's Refusal of Marriage

The atmosphere of the third panel changes markedly from that of the preceding two. Formal audience halls are no longer the principal setting; instead, the scene is composed of courtyards, enclosing walls, covered corridors, and groups of women. Female figures occupy a prominent position, and their poses more closely suggest everyday conversation, attendance, and persuasion.

The rear garden performs a particular function in the Miaoshan story. It remains within the bounds of the palace, yet differs from the formal space of court audience. Miaoshan's placement there indicates that she is still controlled by her father's authority; the arrival of her mother, sisters, and palace women shows that the conflict has shifted from the public command of the king into the interior of the family. For Miaoshan, refusal of marriage means not only disobeying her father's order but also rejecting the mode of life represented by her mother, sisters, and the women of the palace: the secular expectations attached to the roles of princess, wife, and mother.

In the rear-garden scenes, a comparatively gentle courtyard environment visualizes the internalization of conflict. Unlike the overt pressure of royal authority in the main audience hall, persuasion in the rear garden expresses the constraints of affection, kinship ethics, and gender order. Miaoshan's persistence at this stage further separates her from the identity of an ordinary royal daughter and prepares the narrative for her entry into the monastery and the punishments that follow.

3.3. Labor in the Monastery and the First Ordeal

The pictorial space of the fourth panel is no longer confined to the palace rear garden but is composed of multiple courtyards, halls, covered corridors, and interior scenes. It includes introductions at the foot of steps, seated meetings indoors, and waiting attendants—scenes that retain traces of courtly order—as well as nuns, elderly figures, and activities resembling labor and service. These elements indicate that the narrative has moved from persuasion in the rear garden to the ordeals imposed on Miaoshan after she enters the monastery.

In the Miaoshan story, the conflict does not end with her refusal to marry. King Miaozi sends her to the White Sparrow Monastery, ostensibly allowing her to practice religion while continuing to exert pressure through the monastic setting. Baojuan narratives commonly recount that she is assigned such tasks as sweeping, carrying water, pounding grain, and preparing food, and is subjected to surveillance and deliberate obstruction by members of the monastery. A supernatural figure participating in labor at the upper left of the panel may be associated with the dragon deities, earth gods, and spirits who secretly assist Miaoshan in the baojuan. The fourth panel therefore does not merely depict her entry into the monastery; it represents her first trial within the monastic institution and the divine protection elicited by the steadfastness of her religious resolve.

This panel effects a double transformation in both narrative space and the form of conflict. Although Miaoshan has left the palace, royal authority has not truly withdrawn; it continues to operate through arrangements and commands within the monastery. The monastery is therefore not represented as an entirely tranquil space of religious practice, but temporarily becomes the site at which Miaoshan's conviction is tested. The pressure placed on her is likewise transformed from the persuasion of kin into labor, surveillance, and disciplinary punishment.

3.4. Persecution, Fire, and Supernatural Intervention

The fifth panel is markedly dramatic within the mural cycle. On the right, a large expanse of dark cloud intermingles with flames, producing an intense atmosphere of disaster; deities appear among the clouds at the upper left, while armed warriors and kneeling figures occupy the lower left. Together, these elements form a composite scene of Miaoshan's persecution at the White Sparrow Monastery, supernatural protection, and the escalation of punishment. In contrast to the verbal admonition represented in the court and rear-garden scenes, the narrative emphasis has shifted to bodily suffering, and the conflict between Miaoshan and her father has developed from a matter of family ethics into the violent suppression of Buddhist practice by secular authority.

From the perspective of visual narration, the burning of the White Sparrow Monastery marks an escalation in King Miaozhuang's punishment; the deities in the clouds represent the intervention of Buddhist protective forces; and the armed warriors suggest the intensification of punishment after the fire fails to make Miaoshan submit. The panel therefore does not simply depict a conflagration. Through the imagery of disaster, it presents a direct confrontation between secular royal authority and supernatural religious power. The harsher the father-king's punishment becomes, the more visibly Miaoshan receives divine protection; the more seriously her body is threatened, the more clearly her religious identity emerges. The fifth panel thus constitutes a crucial pictorial node in her transformation from a sufferer subjected to monastic labor into a recipient of Buddhist salvation.

3.5. The Underworld, Mountain Landscape, and Religious Cultivation at Xiangshan

In the lower half of the mural cycle, the sixth and seventh panels shift the narrative emphasis from secular conflict to religious salvation and mountain cultivation. They contain a white stupa, bones, beasts, bridges, caves, monastics, and mountain landscapes. These elements clearly point toward death, the underworld, wilderness, and religious practice. In the Miaoshan story, death, descent into the underworld, and cultivation at Xiangshan are decisive stages in the transformation of her identity. Her entry into the underworld is an important moment in the movement from individual religious practice to the salvation of others. Images of the underworld, the dead, bridges, and the white stupa expand the narrative from the ethics of the royal family to the Buddhist domains of karmic retribution and salvation.

The bridges, bones, groups of figures, and scenes of reception in the sixth panel may be related to Miaoshan's descent into the underworld and her salvation of the dead. The seventh panel uses mountain landscapes, stupas, pavilions, and cloud forms to represent her state of religious cultivation after entering the sacred realm of Xiangshan. Together, the two panels articulate a progression in identity from "sufferer" to "one who saves" and then to "religious practitioner at Xiangshan." This transformation provides the narrative basis for the subsequent search for medicine and Miaoshan's offering of her hands and eyes to save her father.

3.6. The Search for Medicine, Recognition, and Final Conversion

The eighth, ninth, and tenth panels repeatedly depict court audiences, riders traveling at speed, the introduction of visitors, the presentation of objects, journeys by sedan chair, and ceremonial

entourages. These scenes convey a clear sequence of “transmitting messages—seeking—formally inviting—paying reverence.” In relation to the Miaoshan story, they may correspond to King Miao Zhuang’s illness, the dispatch of envoys to seek medicine, the request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan, the recognition of father and daughter, and the king’s final conversion.

Within the Great Compassion Hall as a whole, this concluding sequence corresponds to the central image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin. The wall paintings narrate how Miaoshan offers her hands and eyes to cure her father, whereas the central sculpture presents her solemn form after she has become the Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin. The narrative temporality of the murals ultimately converges with the sacred temporality embodied by the principal icon: viewers comprehend the process of Miaoshan’s attainment through the paintings and encounter Guanyin after attainment when worshipping the central image. The relationship between murals and sculpture is therefore not merely decorative, but one of cause and result, narrative and manifestation.

3.7. Summary: From Story Images to a Hall-Based Narrative

The preceding analysis shows that the Dahui Temple murals organize their narrative around the transformation of Miaoshan’s identity. The courtly marriage arrangements represent the secular order she inhabits as a royal daughter; persuasion in the rear garden represents her persistence within family ethics; labor in the monastery and the burning of the White Sparrow Monastery represent the punishment she suffers and the supernatural protection she receives; the underworld and Xiangshan episodes mark her transformation from a sufferer into one who saves others; and the search for medicine and recognition by her father show her completion of both filial devotion and religious attainment through the offering of her hands and eyes. The cycle thus forms a clear narrative line in which Miaoshan is transformed from a princess who refuses marriage at court into Guanyin, capable of saving both her father and all sentient beings. This narrative line also demonstrates that the Dahui Temple murals are not simply illustrations of the Xiangshan Baojuan. The baojuan provides narrative motifs and key episodes, but the painters had to reorganize them across the walls of the hall. Through spatial transitions among palace, rear garden, monastery, underworld, mountain landscape, and Xiangshan, the temporal sequence of a performed narrative was converted into wall paintings available to visual apprehension. Located behind the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, the murals join the sculptural program of the Great Compassion Hall in constructing a devotional space centered on Guanyin. This spatial and visual condition constitutes the fundamental reason for digitally reconstructing the mural cycle.

4. From the Xiangshan Baojuan to the Dahui Temple Murals: Textual Tradition and Pictorial Translation

4.1. Identifying the Textual Tradition

Since the Song and Yuan periods, the Miaoshan story has developed a relatively stable narrative framework. King Miao Zhuang has three daughters; Miaoshan refuses marriage and resolves to enter religious life; she is punished by her father, suffers in a monastery, dies and descends into the underworld, proceeds to Xiangshan for religious cultivation, offers her hands and eyes to cure her father, and ultimately manifests as the Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin. These episodes circulated in Guanyin biographies, baojuan, drama, mural painting, wall sculpture, and oral tradition [8,9]. The appearance in the murals of only such principal motifs as refusal of marriage, renunciation, salvation of the father, and transformation into Guanyin would therefore be insufficient to demonstrate a relationship with the Xiangshan Baojuan.

More probative are episodes that are elaborated in the baojuan tradition and can also be translated into concrete visual motifs: labor at the White Sparrow Monastery, supernatural

assistance, the burning of the monastery, salvation in the underworld, the Naihe Bridge, the request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan, and the recognition of father and daughter. The Dahui Temple murals are especially close to the Xiangshan Baojuan tradition because they retain details from the monastery, underworld, and Xiangshan episodes rather than depicting only the broad outline of Miaoshan's refusal of marriage and her offering of hands and eyes.

4.2. Labor at the White Sparrow Monastery and Supernatural Assistance: The Visualization of Baojuan Detail

The fourth panel uses several monastic courtyards to construct the scene of Miaoshan's labor at the White Sparrow Monastery. Monastery buildings, nuns, work activities, and supernatural figures show that Miaoshan continues to undergo trials within the monastic setting. In the Xiangshan Baojuan, the abbess orders her to carry water and firewood, wash rice and dishes, prepare offerings, tread the grain-pounding device by day, and turn the mill and tend the incense lamps at night, intending to force her to abandon her resolve through exhausting labor. Miaoshan remains steadfast, however, and moves supernatural beings to assist her. The text states: "Great ghosts turned the mill, lesser ghosts pounded grain; dragon deities carried water, and the earth god hauled firewood"[10, fols. 15a–17a]. The mural places the two stages—Miaoshan's performance of arduous labor and the supernatural beings' assumption of that labor—within a single pictorial field. Courtyard divisions separate the different tasks, while cloud forms introduce supernatural figures into ordinary monastic space.

4.3. The Burning of the White Sparrow Monastery and Salvation in the Underworld: From Punishment to Salvation

In the fifth panel, a large expanse of dark cloud, fire and smoke, soldiers, and deities are juxtaposed to form one of the most strongly catastrophic scenes in the mural cycle. The Xiangshan Baojuan describes soldiers whose "fire-lances and fire-arrows came as swiftly as clouds", states that the king "maliciously ordered the monastery gate to be destroyed by fire", and depicts Miaoshan seeing "fire rising on every side and smoke spreading across heaven and earth"[11, fols. 51a–52a]. She then prays to the buddhas to protect the nuns of the monastery. In the mural, the dark clouds and smoke visualize the escalation of King Miaozhuang's punishment, while the deities in the clouds indicate the intervention of Buddhist protective forces.

More importantly, the burning of the White Sparrow Monastery does not remain an isolated scene of disaster, but is connected to the subsequent episode of salvation in the underworld. In the baojuan narrative, after entering the underworld Miaoshan witnesses the suffering of sinners, judgment by the kings of hell, bridges, and the dead, and uses the power of compassionate vows to save those who suffer. The appearance of a white stupa, bones, beasts, bridges, and monastics in the lower mural panels indicates that the cycle preserves the baojuan's themes of karmic retribution and Buddhist salvation.

4.4. The Naihe Bridge and the Request for Hands and Eyes at Xiangshan: The Spatialization of Religious Instruction

Within the underworld episode, the bridge is one of the most readily identifiable visual details. The Xiangshan Baojuan states that "the Nai River was transformed into a lotus pond" and that Miaoshan "personally crossed the bridge and saved all the sinners in the river"[11, fol. 73a]. The bridge, white stupa, bones, and monastic figures visible in the Dahui Temple murals can therefore be understood as a pictorial translation of the baojuan episode of salvation in the underworld, rather than as generic landscape or wilderness motifs.

The request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan constitutes the crucial link between the textual narrative and the principal icon in the hall. Court audiences, journeys by envoys, audiences in the mountains, sedan-chair processions, and ceremonial entourages in the later panels may

relate to King Miao Zhuang’s illness, the dispatch of envoys to seek medicine, the request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan, the king’s visit to Xiangshan to offer thanks after his recovery, and the recognition of father and daughter. The Xiangshan Baojuan states that the cure “requires the hands and eyes of a person free from anger, to be compounded into an efficacious medicine that will remove the illness”. It further describes King Miao Zhuang’s arrival at Xiangshan: “all carried incense and flowers and bowed before the immortal”, and records that “after the hands and eyes were given, the bodily form had changed; King Miao Zhuang could not recognize his own flesh and blood” [11, fols. 93a–106a]. The wall paintings narrate the process by which Miaoshan offers her hands and eyes to save her father, while the central image presents her as the Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin after attainment. Within the same hall, the two are linked as narrative cause and manifested result.

Table 1: Key Correspondences between the Dahui Temple Murals and the Xiangshan Baojuan

Mural episode	Visual representation	Corresponding text in the Xiangshan Baojuan
Labor at the White Sparrow Monastery	Monastery buildings, nuns, labor, and supernatural figures	“Carrying water and firewood, washing rice and selecting vegetables”; “A hundred beasts brought firewood to fill the monastery; a thousand birds delivered vegetables like clouds of smoke” [10, fols. 15a–17a].
Burning of the White Sparrow Monastery	Dark clouds, fire and smoke, soldiers, and deities in the clouds	“Fire-lances and fire-arrows came as swiftly as clouds”; “set fire to destroy the monastery gate”; “smoke spread across heaven and earth” [11, fols. 51a–52a].
Salvation in the underworld	White stupa, bones, bridge, beasts, and monastics	“The Nai River was transformed into a lotus pond”; “she saved all the sinners in the river” [11, fol. 73a].
Request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan	Envoys traveling, an audience in the mountains, a sedan-chair procession, and recognition of father and daughter	“The hands and eyes of a person free from anger are required”; “all carried incense and flowers and bowed before the immortal” [11, fols. 93a–106a].

4.5. Summary: The Baojuan Is Not a Script; the Murals Are a Hall-Based Reorganization

The foregoing comparison demonstrates the close relationship between the Dahui Temple murals and the Xiangshan Baojuan tradition. The baojuan supplied the narrative framework of the Miaoshan story and a number of key episodes, but the murals are not line-by-line illustrations of the text. Baojuan performance advances temporal narration through prose exposition, sung verse, and repeated questions and responses; the murals, by contrast, translate that performed temporality into multiple scenes juxtaposed across palace, rear garden, monastery, underworld, mountain landscape, and Xiangshan.

The purpose of textual comparison is therefore to explain how the painters selected the episodes within the baojuan tradition that were most amenable to visualization and reorganized them within the Guanyin devotional space of the Great Compassion Hall. Details such as labor at the White Sparrow Monastery, supernatural assistance, the burning of the monastery, salvation in the underworld, the Naihe Bridge, and the request for hands and eyes

distinguish the Dahui Temple cycle from more general imagery of the Miaoshan story and reveal its close connection to the performative baojuan tradition. At the same time, the spatial combination of the principal icon, attendant bodhisattvas, the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, and the wall paintings gave that performed narrative a new visual form within a Ming Buddhist temple in Beijing.

5. Digital Reconstruction and the Interpretation of Beijing's Cultural Heritage

5.1. Digital Reconstruction as the Reconstruction of Relationships, Not Speculative Repainting

The Dahui Temple murals are comparatively well preserved; digital reconstruction should therefore not be centered on conjectural repainting. The central problem is that the murals are obstructed by the polychrome sculptures and separated by the spatial organization of the hall, making it difficult for the public to comprehend their narrative sequence and textual relationships as a whole.

The focus of reconstruction is consequently the re-establishment of relationships among the mural images, between image and text, and between murals and sculpture. Digital interpretation brings together the original positions of the panels, the organization of scenes, textual correspondences, and routes of viewing in order to interpret the heritage site through a reconstructed network of relations.

5.2. Unfolding the Murals, Annotating Scenes, and Linking Texts

The digital reconstruction of the Dahui Temple murals began with high-resolution digital unfolding. The ten panels were first arranged according to their original positions on the walls so that the overall narrative structure could be viewed. The internal scenes of each panel were then divided and annotated, including courtly marriage arrangements, persuasion in the rear garden, persecution at the White Sparrow Monastery, the underworld, cultivation at Xiangshan, the search for medicine, and recognition. Finally, identifiable scenes were correlated with the Miaoshan textual tradition, with distinctions made among widely circulating narrative motifs, details more closely associated with early baojuan traditions, and elements that remain subject to further verification.

5.3. A Multilevel Digital Interpretive Path for Public Display

For public presentation, the digital reconstruction adopts a multilevel interpretive pathway. The first level provides an overview of the murals, high-resolution details, and their original locations. The second is a narrative guide that links the ten panels according to the sequence of the Miaoshan story, enabling users to understand the progression from refusal of marriage to religious attainment. The third is a spatial guide explaining the relationships among the murals, the principal image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, the attendant bodhisattvas, and the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, and clarifying why the paintings are difficult to view in situ. The fourth is a textual guide that links key scenes to related episodes in the early Xiangshan Baojuan tradition, thereby situating the images within their literary and devotional contexts.

This mode of presentation both reduces the burden placed on on-site verbal explanation and compensates for the limitations of viewing the murals in their original position. It provides an alternative route of understanding for visitors who cannot examine the paintings at close range and, for researchers, a platform on which visual details and textual relationships can continue to be investigated.

5.4. Scholarly Boundaries and Conservation Ethics in Digital Interpretation

Digital display often privileges completeness, vividness, and visual clarity. In the case of historical murals, however, excessive repainting or excessive certainty may obscure the actual condition of the surviving work. Areas of loss, fading, and obstruction should not all be eliminated, because they are themselves part of the murals' material history. Digital reconstruction may provide supplementary scene identifications and textual correspondences, but it must clearly distinguish what is directly visible in the original object, what is the result of scholarly judgment, and what remains conjectural supplementation.

Accordingly, the information architecture classifies the Dahui Temple material into three evidentiary levels. The first comprises elements directly identifiable in the images, including halls, groups of figures, bridges, the white stupa, sedan chairs, and cloud forms. The second comprises interpretations that can be proposed with relatively high probability on the basis of the Miaoshan story and early baojuan traditions, including persuasion in the rear garden, the burning of the White Sparrow Monastery, salvation in the underworld, and the request for hands and eyes at Xiangshan. The third comprises matters that still require on-site examination, higher-resolution imagery, or additional documentary support, such as the identities of individual figures, the sequence of local scenes, and the specific textual sources for certain details. This classification strengthens public understanding while preserving appropriate scholarly caution.

5.5. The Digital Reconstruction in Practice: An Axure-Based Interactive System

On the basis of the relational reconstruction and interpretive pathway outlined above, the project further translated the results of textual verification into an operable interactive system implemented in Axure. The technical procedure is explained below in three stages.

5.5.1 Technical Workflow from Textual Verification to Interactive Information

Digital reconstruction proceeded from the mural cycle as a ten-panel whole. The mural images, plan of the hall, panel locations, and textual passages were first assigned a unified numbering system; each panel was then segmented according to figures, architecture, objects, actions, and scene boundaries. Image-text collation established scene titles, corresponding sung passages, and the sequence of episodes, while spatial analysis recorded each panel's position in the hall. The organized material was converted into four categories of interactive information: the original spatial setting, the ten-panel sequence, scenes within individual panels, and textual explanation. Axure manages the connections and interface states among these categories. The hotspots and textual pop-ups in Axure derive from the image segmentation and textual verification completed in the preceding research, while page transitions follow the panels' positions on the walls and the narrative order of the story. After implementation, panel numbers, episode titles, textual folio references, forward and backward navigation, and return positions were checked panel by panel to ensure that the same scene was not identified differently in the article, the overview diagram, and the interactive pages.

5.5.2 Interaction Logic and Its Implementation in Axure

Users first locate the murals in relation to the principal icon and the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities on the plan of the Great Compassion Hall. After selecting a wall position, they enter the unfolded view of the ten panels and then move from a single panel to its individual scenes and related textual passages. On completing their examination, they may return to the original panel position or continue to an adjacent panel. The system thus establishes two parallel routes: one reads the story continuously from the first to the tenth panel; the other moves from the original spatial setting to a detail, checks the corresponding text, and then returns to the hall.

The system is implemented through dynamic panels, hotspots, page links, and global variables. On the Great Compassion Hall page, dynamic panels switch between the in-situ view and the

unfolded mural view. In the ten-panel overview, each panel has an entry point and forward/backward navigation. On an individual-panel page, hotspots are placed over the original image: hovering reveals the boundaries of a scene; clicking preserves the selected state; and the information area on the right simultaneously displays the scene title, visual elements, and link to the relevant text. The text is presented in an overlay dynamic panel, and closing the overlay returns the user to the same scene. Global variables record the current panel, selected detail, and zoom state, so that users do not need to relocate the image after returning from the textual page. Image viewing includes three basic states: original image, enlarged detail, and reset. Hotspot boundaries are defined according to architecture, clouds, rocks, and groups of figures; a large composite scene may contain several subsidiary hotspots. The same page framework is maintained throughout the ten panels, whereas the number of scenes, textual content, and local relationships within each panel are configured according to the results of the research.

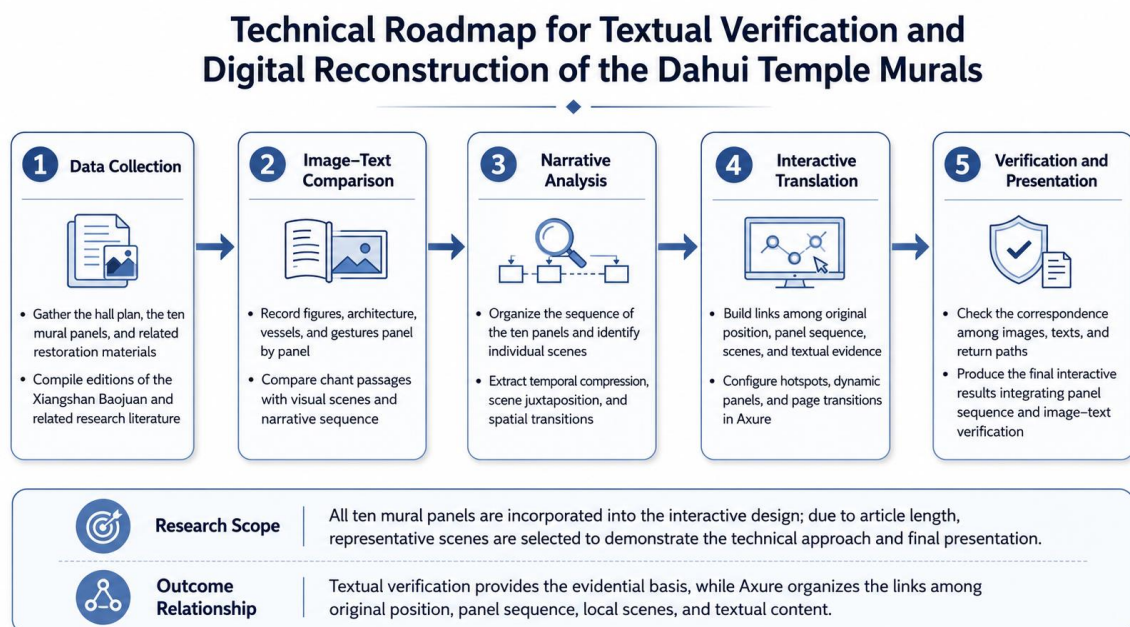


Figure 4: Technical workflow for textual verification and digital reconstruction.

5.5.3 Presentational Effects of the Digital Reconstruction

The unfolded mural view first restores the continuous sequence of the story. The in-situ view retains the obstruction of the murals by the polychrome sculptures, while the unfolded view presents the complete images. Movement between the two allows the murals to be viewed both as elements of the original hall and as a continuous narrative. Hotspots divide each complex panel into viewable details. The distribution of work among courtyards in the fourth panel, the spread of smoke and fire in the fifth, the areas above and below the bridge in the sixth, and the repeated journeys in the ninth thereby acquire a clearer internal hierarchy in the process of interaction.

Text links are attached directly to the corresponding image regions, allowing users to examine the sung passages on which an episode title is based and then return to the original image for verification. The interactive reconstruction also preserves orientation between the whole and the detail. After a user enters any panel, the interface continuously displays its position within the ten-panel sequence; closing a textual pop-up leaves the user at the same detail; and returning to the Great Compassion Hall reveals the location of that panel on the wall behind the guardian sculptures. The four panels illustrated in the article are representative examples from the complete project, while the remaining panels use the same logic to connect image, text, and architectural space.

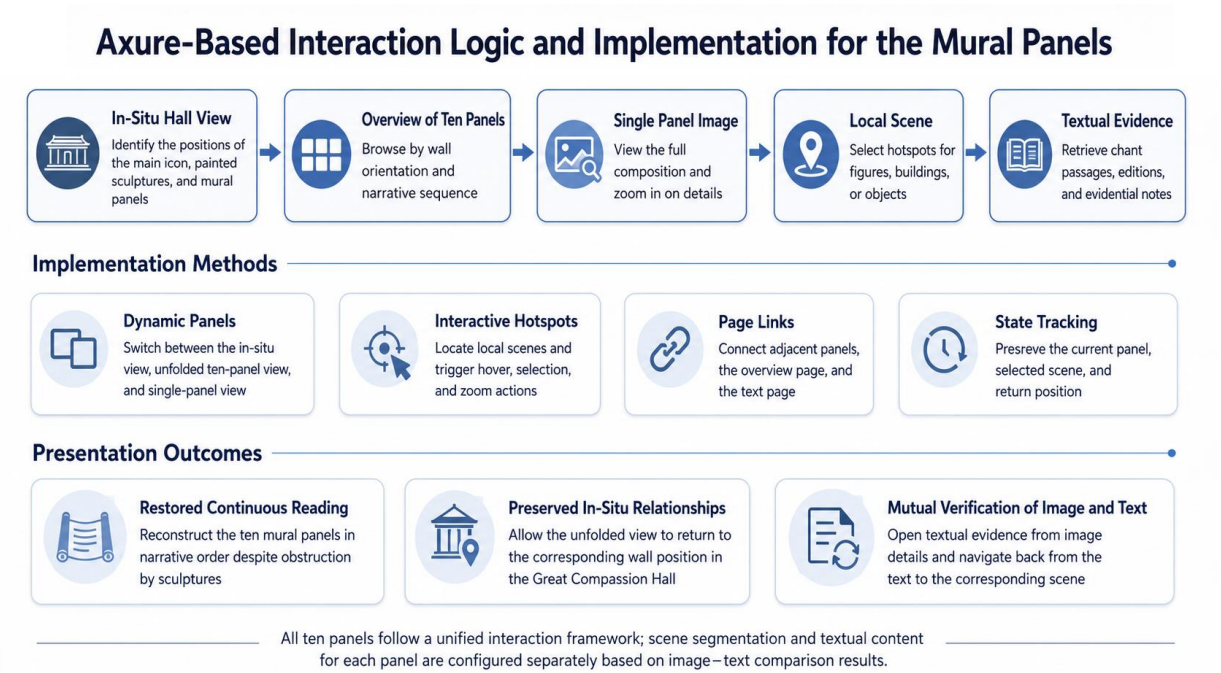


Figure 5: Interaction logic and implementation of the Axure system.

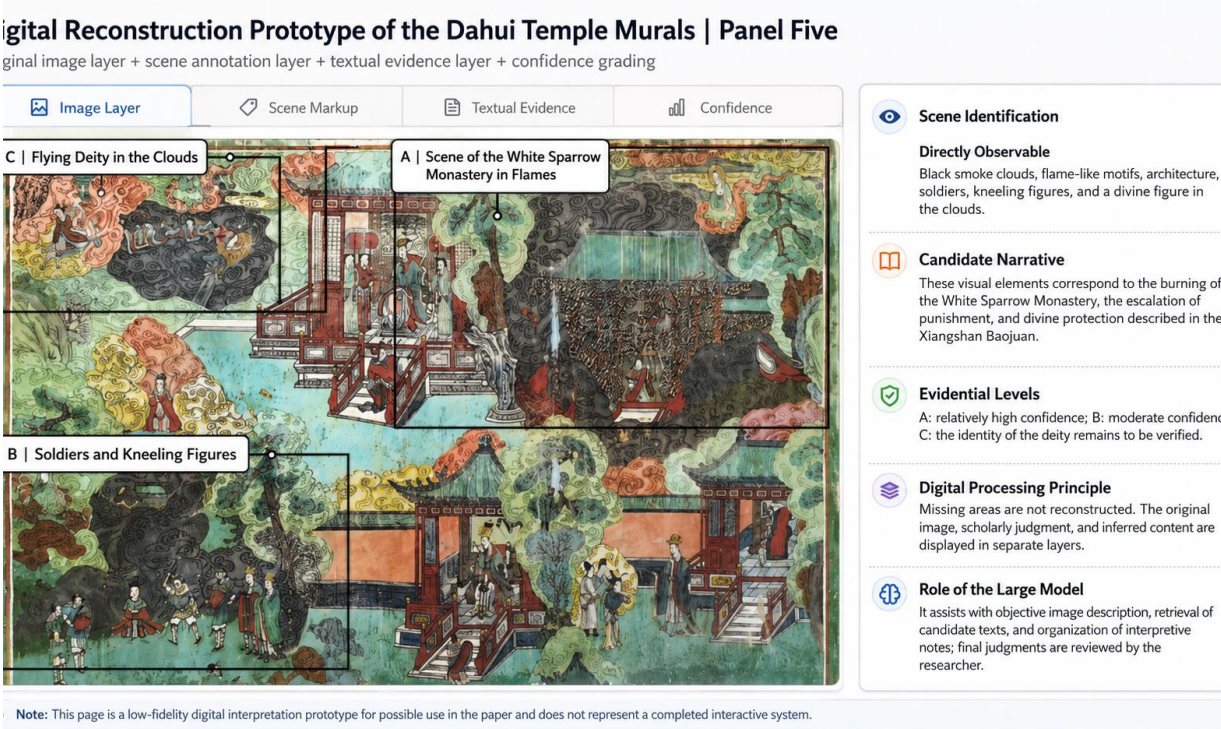


Figure 6: Representative digital interpretation of the fifth mural panel.

6. Conclusion

The murals of the Great Compassion Hall at Dahui Temple constitute an important example of Buddhist art in Ming Beijing. Taking the story of Princess Miaoshan as their subject, they organize refusal of marriage, persecution, descent into the underworld, cultivation at Xiangshan, the offering of hands and eyes to save the father, and final conversion into a continuous wall narrative. The close relationship of the murals to the Xiangshan Baojuan

tradition shows how the Miaoshan story was pictorially reorganized within a Ming Buddhist temple in Beijing.

The distinctiveness of the Dahui Temple murals also lies in their original spatial setting. Located behind the polychrome sculptures of the Twenty-Eight Guardian Deities, they join the central image of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin and the two attendant bodhisattvas to form the Guanyin devotional program of the Great Compassion Hall. The wall paintings narrate Guanyin's original conduct; the central icon presents the result of attainment; and the guardian sculptures constitute the protective system. Together, these three components demonstrate that the murals are not autonomous images but integral parts of the hall's ritual and spatial organization. In the context of conserving and adaptively using Beijing's cultural heritage, digital reconstruction of the Dahui Temple murals should be centered on the reconstruction of relationships. Unfolded mural views, scene annotation, textual links, and explanations of viewing routes can help the public understand a pictorial narrative that cannot be viewed continuously in situ, while also providing researchers with a platform for further verification. The Dahui Temple murals are therefore not only a cycle of Ming religious images, but also an important heritage resource requiring sustained interpretation and adaptive use within Beijing as a nationally designated historic and cultural city.

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