



## **MERIT-MAKING AND RELICS IN A CROSS- CULTURAL SETTING**

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Dana (generosity) is a paradigmatic merit-making practice throughout Buddhist Asia and the wish to generate merit is one of the main reasons behind the construction of the monumental statues and elaborate temples and stupas found almost wherever Buddhism has become established. According to teachers in one international Buddhist network (the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition or FPMT), association with holy objects can purify the *ōkarmic obscurationsö* in the *ōmindstreamö* that are deemed to be the root cause of all suffering, thus clearing the way for *ōspiritual realizationsö* and ultimately, enlightenment. FPMT leaders have therefore prioritised a range of projects to create holy objects at their centres around the world, including the Great Stupa currently being built near Bendigo in Victoria. This paper is based on participant-observation in a travelling exhibition of Buddhist relics destined to be placed inside this stupa. The intended audiences for this exhibit vary, but it includes FPMT members from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. My interest here is how Anglo-European FPMT members respond to and interpret the relics and the underlying ideology of merit.