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Beyond Buddhist Apology

The Political Use of Buddhism by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (r.502-549)

Tom De Rauw

To my daughter Pauline,
the most wonderful distraction one could ever wish for

and to my grandfather,
a *cakravartin* who ruled his own private universe

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INTRODUCTION

When Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (464-549) ascended the throne of the Liang 梁 (502-557) Dynasty as Emperor Wu 武 (r.502-549), he was faced with some huge challenges. First was the problem of legitimacy. Emperor Wu had seized power from one of his kinsmen, Xiao Baorong 蕭寶融 (488-502), in revenge for the murder of his older brother. According to traditional Chinese political theory, that would make Emperor Wu a usurper, as the founder of a new dynasty had to come from outside the imperial family. Aside from his personal problem of legitimation, he inherited an empire that was marked by centuries of devolution, which had started with the disintegration of the Han. The political reality of the time was that the emperors of the Southern courts did not possess any real authority, but were in fact no more than a *primus inter pares*, ruling by the grace and with the support of their fellow literati. There was a delicate equilibrium of power in which the elite of literati families was dependent on the existing Confucian political system (with the emperor as a nominal figure head) for their titles, salaries and legitimacy to govern over society. The emperor in turn needed these powerful literati families to support his claim on the throne. This co-dependence was a constant feature, even though the equilibrium often shifted to favour different families at different times. Emperor Wu was not the first Southern Dynasties emperor who tried to restore the imperial authority. What seemed to make him somewhat more effective than his predecessors, was his unique ability to make reforms in the political, cultural and religious realm which tied different modes of thought together in such an innovative way that it positioned him as ultimate head of a new cosmic order. I am in no way suggesting that Emperor Wu succeeded in becoming an autocratic ruler by his own right, but his amazing skill in reforming state ideology does seem to have brought considerable (if temporary) stability and prosperity to his realm.

In this thesis, I will take a closer look at the tactics used by Emperor Wu to reinvent the imperial persona. Despite his reputation amongst later Buddhist and Confucian historiographers, Emperor Wu was not as single-mindedly Buddhist as he is sometimes portrayed to be. He continued to fulfil his Confucian duties as head of state and even made concerted efforts to revive the faltering Confucian tradition. Although he is often stigmatized as a persecutor of Daoism, we will show that there is little basis to this claim. In fact he lavishly sponsored the Daoist community on Mao Shan and relied on the medical and alchemical expertise of some of its most respected exponents. But emperor Wu was a pragmatic politician, and he realized when he ascended the throne that, if he continued down the path of his forerunners, his rule would probably end as untimely as theirs. In the practical matters of bureaucracy and legislation there was no viable alternative to the traditional Confucian system. Yet Emperor Wu also realised that to continue in his role as Confucian head of state would for ever leave him in a vulnerable position, as he was essentially dependant on the Confucian tradition, dominated by the literati families, for his prestige as emperor. For this reason he set out to reform the imperial ritual in such a way so as to create his own legitimacy as a ruler, independent from the existing system. Fully realising the precariousness of his position, Emperor Wu made the first steps towards independent legitimacy in the field of Confucian ritual. He ordered the compilation of a ritual code that would link him directly to the idealized rituals of the Zhou, and return the prerogative of determining proper conduct and ceremony to the imperial figure. Despite this small revival of Confucian scholarship, it was clear from the start that Buddhism was set up to play the most prominent role in Emperor Wu's reforms. For the day of the coronation ceremony, he chose the eighth day of the fourth month. By the early sixth century, this date was already widely recognized among Buddhists as the birthday of Śākyamuni Buddha. As such, his coronation ceremony was nothing more than a representation of the birth of a Buddha into this world. In the first chapter I shall examine Liang Wudi’s attitude towards the Confucian and Daoist tradition.

In Emperor Wu’s Buddhist reform of imperial ideology three concepts played an important role: (1) the *bodhisattva* ideal, linked to a new view on emperorship; (2) the Buddhist concept of *mofa* (the decline of the Buddhist Teaching); and (3) the process of karmic retribution. These three elements were all part of a single imperial Buddhist ritual program, but each of them worked on a different level. The *bodhisattva* ideal was meant to remould the imperial persona into a saviour figure. After decades of constant warfare, most people were preoccupied with survival, not with who was on the throne. Moreover in the traditional Confucian ritual, an emperor was elevated far above the common people, and as such there was no direct contact between them. Everything had to be mediated by the literati. In order to make contact with his subjects directly, Emperor Wu would organise large assemblies which everyone was free to attend, from commoner to aristocracy. At these assemblies, the emperor would strip himself of his imperial regalia and don a monastic robe.

The concept of *mofa* was Emperor Wu’s legitimation for asserting his control over the Buddhist *saṃgha*. He claimed that in the final period of the Buddhist Teaching, when monks and nuns have lost their way and commit grave sins, it was up to the wise ruler of state to correct their behaviour.

In chapter two I will show how these two elements of legitimation in Emperor Wu’s Buddhist reform were theorised and how they played out in reality.

The third chapter deals with the concept of karmic retribution. The idea that one’s actions would have direct consequences for oneself and for other was at once meant to create a sense of hope among his people, as well as a new found unity. After he had successfully pushed his view on the existence of an enduring self that travel from one existence to another, Emperor Wu had the theoretical means to start implementing it. In his capacity as *bodhisattva* emperor, he would set up many initiatives of meritorious work in order to accumulate merit for the state and its people. His large assemblies functioned as fund-raisers to pay for all of these initiatives.

One thing that made Emperor Wu’s reforms in imperial ritual and ceremony so successful was his obsession with scriptural authority. Both in the field of Confucianism and Buddhism, Emperor Wu ordered the collection and cataloguing of texts. In his reforms, he made sure to have ample reference to historic precedent from these scriptures. While it was his prerogative as emperor to make changes in Confucian state ritual, he was faced with the rift that existed between those that lived outside this world to pursue religious goals and those who lived in the world. As the direct descendants of Buddha, the *saṃgha* was the bearer of the scriptural authority Emperor Wu needed. As he was no monk, Emperor Wu could not make decisions on the authority of a scripture. For that reason the success of the appropriation of Buddhist elements for his political goals hinged on four factors: (1) His ability to study and survey as many of the Buddhist scriptures as he could to make sure that no usable elements went unnoticed, and that no conflicting elements remained undetected which could be used to undermine his projected image; (2) His ability to rally the support of influential, learned monks to help him in this endeavours and to provide him with the necessary sanction for his interpretations; (3) His ability to control the Buddhist *saṃgha* in order to make it do his bidding; (4) His ability to tie all of the different elements, which were often taken out of context, together with an irrefutable internal logic. This would leave him vulnerable to attack from both political opponents and Buddhist monks who were not happy with the increased politization of, and corresponding meddling in their religion. In chapter four I shall explore the ways in which

Emperor sought to assert his control over the monastic community, starting from two case studies.

CHAPTER I

EMPEROR WU’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CONFUCIAN AND DAOIST TRADITIONS

I.1. Emperor Wu and the Confucian tradition

Confucian and modern Chinese historians have often depicted the Southern Dynasties as examples of weak and ineffective government.[1] The cause for this, they reckoned, was the abeyance of Confucian values, which was the result of the ruling elite’s preoccupation with frivolous pursuits such as literature, philosophical speculation (most importantly *xuanxue* 玄學and Buddhism), “pure conversation” (*qingtan* 清談), and the lofty ideal of reclusion, which implied a complete withdrawal from active political life.[2] But, as C. Holcombe has stated in his attempt to revaluate the Period of Division (A.D. 220-589), even though the collapse of the Han Dynasty in 220 liberated thought from the constraints of Han (Confucian) orthodoxy

> the Neo-Taoist metaphysical interests of third- and fourth-century Chinese gentlemen caused few if any of them to reject Confucianism. They simply superimposed their new interests as an additional and higher layer over the traditional Confucian substrate. The Confucian classics remained the

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[1] For some selected references to sources asserting this opinion, see Holcombe, 1994: 128.

[2] For more on *qingtan*, see further in this chapter. For more on the ideal of reclusion, see Berkowitz, 2000.

> foundation of all education, and Confucian virtues stood unchallenged. But *hsüan-hsüeh* thinkers had higher, cosmic principles in mind that caused them to reevaluate the importance of political activity, traditionally the focus of Confucian attention, and relegate it to a subsidiary position.[3]

One could add to Holcombe's statement that just as the Neo-Daoist metaphysical interests of medieval Chinese gentlemen did not cause them to reject Confucianism, neither did their interest in Buddhism. Despite the changing conception of political responsibilities, it was the Confucian state that provided the literati families with the sanction of legitimacy. And even though the monopolisation of higher offices by the powerful literati families made possible a high degree of independence from imperial interference, they still relied on their official positions within the state bureaucracy for their privileged position in society.[4] The emperor, from his part, needed the sanction of his fellow members of the elite to support his claim on the throne. This is undoubtedly a major reason why Emperor Wu, despite his illustrious devotion to Buddhism, was also a great patron of the Confucian tradition.

Before we turn to Emperor Wu's endeavours in the Confucian sphere, let us take a closer look at the literati's general stance towards Confucian values at the time of Emperor Wu. For this we have an important contemporary document at our disposal, namely the *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*), written by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591 CE).[5] This is the earliest complete example of the traditional instructions left behind for one's family members by a *pater*

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[3] Holcombe, 1994: 93.

[4] Holcombe, 1994: 72. See also Kuhn, 1991: 485.

[5] For a full translation of this work into English, see Teng Ssu-yü, 1968. For more on its author, see Dien, 1962.

familias close to his death.[6] In these family instructions, Yan Zhitui lays the most emphasis on a thorough education in the Chinese Classics, since he sees this as the foundation for proper conduct and a prerequisite for having any chance of a career in civil office. The latter attitude betrays a certain degree of pragmatism embedded in the Confucian traditionalism of the literati families.[7] This pragmatic streak of Yan Zhitui can be found throughout his *Instructions*, as he also warns his descendents against becoming soldiers or marrying into powerful families, and urges them to settle for middle ranks in office in order to avoid sticking out from a crowd, for this could be very dangerous in the unstable times of the Northern and Southern Dynasties.[8] As much as Yan Zhitui's instructions are drenched in traditional Confucian values with regards to all aspects of family life, education, customs and manners, and public service, he is not blind to the realities of human nature. In chapter eleven, entitled "*Shewu* 涉務 (*Taking care of practical affairs*)", Yan Zhitui criticizes the excesses of the literati community, which was according to him "to a great extent absurd, pompous, and ignorant of worldly affairs."[9] Their indifference to self-cultivation and duty undermined the very foundation on which their superior social status was based, for in theory their occupation with the perfection of oneself in the pursuit of becoming superior gentlemen was what gave them the privilege to govern over society as a whole.[10] If the key to literati power was their “aura of cultural superiority”, as M. Rogers calls it,[11] this aura had lost a lot of its lustre over the centuries.

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[6] See Dien, 1962: 44, and Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: x, note 1 and 2 for references.

[7] Although Yan Zhitui glorifies men of great learning who, despite their failure to attain an official appointment to office, are praiseworthy for their high standard of self-cultivation, he stresses the importance of a good Confucian education as an insurance for making a living in troubled times: "Those who have learning or skill can settle down anywhere. 有學藝者，觸地而安。[…] Whoever can keep steadily at work on a few hundred volumes will, in the end, never remain a common person. 若能常保數百卷書，千載終不為小人也。" (Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 54)

[8] Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 126-130.

[9] Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 115.

[10] Holcombe demonstrates how the cultural ideal of private rigorous self-cultivation was compatible with active public service. The 'True Man (*junzi* 君子)' governs others by his moral

Emperor Wu was not blind to this situation either. The recruitment of government officials through the Nine Ranks (*jiu pin* 九品) system[12] had brought about a gravely impaired bureaucracy since by this time virtually all higher offices were monopolised by members from powerful literati families who were more concerned with there own family interests and indulgences than with the affairs of state, while the day to day running of affairs was left to the lowest of officials. Fully realising the precariousness of his position, Emperor Wu did not confront his political adversaries head-on through a series of institutional reforms, but, as illustrated by Andreas Janousch, he sought to revive the centrality and prestige of the imperial

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example and personal virtue, so within Confucian society, personal cultivation is actually a crucial requirement for public service, even if on the surface it makes someone appear indifferent to it. See Holcombe, 1994: 125-134.

[11] Rogers, 1968: 56.

[12] The Nine Ranks system was created by Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220) and institutionalized during the Wei 魏 kingdom (220-265 CE) as a modified version of the Han selection system for government officials. During the Han dynasty local officials were expected to recommend candidates for office from their local area, based on “public opinion” of the candidate’s reputation. Under the Nine Ranks system, officials called ‘arbiters (*zhongzheng* 中正)’ were appointed by the court with the sole task of evaluating possible candidates within their jurisdiction, and ranking them on a scale from one to nine. Appointments to office were then made on the basis of these ratings. Shortly after it was initiated, the political instability of the times, and the inevitable resulting decentralisation, caused the court to lose its grip on the Nine Ranks system. Consequently control over the official selection process shifted from the court and local administration towards the members of the official class themselves. Needles to say that this led to much abuse, as the members of the official class started closing their ranks to newcomers and essentially became an hereditary elite which basically looked after its own interests, and where the rank of an individual was determined by family descent and intermarriage between powerful clans. The Nine Ranks system was in operation throughout the Southern dynasties until it was finally abolished by the Sui emperor Wen in 583 CE. For more on the Nine Ranks system, see Holzman, 1957; Miyazaki, 1956. See also Grafflin, 1990: 146-148; Jansen, 2000: 33-34; Holcombe, 1994: 77-81; Lee, 2000: 123-131.

institution through changes in the realm of culture and ritual.[13] As will be argued later on, Buddhism was to play the lead role in these innovations for the reason that it would allow Emperor Wu to circumvent the literati in his claim to supreme authority. But Emperor Wu was shrewd enough as a politician to realise that these changes could not be effected abruptly over night. Since both emperor and literati traditionally drew legitimacy and status from the Confucian tradition in a complementary way, Emperor Wu started out his mandate with serious efforts to revive the faltering Confucian tradition in order to consolidate his throne and strengthen the administrative offices by the infusion of capable, motivated and trustworthy officials.

Looking at the practical measures first, one notices that Emperor Wu's efforts of institutional reform were mainly limited to the restructuring of the educational system and, paired with that, the opening up of lower and middle rank offices to men of humble origin (*xiaoren* 小人).[14] Emperor Wu did not attempt to abolish the existing Nine ranks system altogether, as he could not risk turning the powerful families against him. However, he did try to correct its most flagrant abuses. [15] To him, this meant leaving the influential literati families in the highest offices well enough alone, but at the same time setting up state schools for those of humble origin to receive a thorough education that would prepare them for public service. Emperor Wu's preference for placing these "inferior men" in the non-ceremonious positions where the daily practical affairs were handled apparently earned him some sneers from men of status who concealed their shortcomings in administrative duties by engaging in so-called "pure (*qing* 淸)" activities.[16] Yan Zhitui, in his *Family Instructions*, sticks up for Emperor Wu, praising him for his insightfulness, and then goes on to once more criticize the parasitic literati who had been drawing their salaries for generations without contributing anything in public service.[17] The reform and revival of the institutions of Confucian learning under Emperor Wu has been examined by A. Janousch.[18] He concludes that these institutions were quite different from the ones established during the preceding two dynasties as they targeted a much larger social group, now including members from the lower ranks, they were in continuous operation throughout the dynasty, they were run by officially appointed scholars as opposed to the private initiatives of independent scholars in the previous Southern dynasties, and the subjects taught at these institutions were once again focussed on the Confucian classics. While the Imperial University (*Taixue* 太學) and the School of National Youth (*Guozi xue* 國子學)[19] continued in the line of tradition with a broad curriculum of which

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[13] Janousch, 1998.

[14] By this time the ranking of eminent literati families had already been solidified in genealogies (*baijia pu* 百家譜), which meant that all but the lowest ranks were virtually closed off to newcomers. While those with enough money to bribe there way (higher) into a falsified genealogy could still gain access to these higher social strata, most families not included in these lists were condemned to the lower offices, if any were given to them at all. These lower class literati families were designated as *hanmen* 寒門 (*Cold gate* families), referring to their limited career possibilities and the accompanying impoverishment. Military families were also often of the *hanmen* group, as military activities were regarded as inferior. Those families who fell out of the Nine Ranks system all together were called *shuren* 庶人 (commoner), or were disdainfully labelled *xiaoren* 小人 (inferior men). The *xiaoren* may not have shared in the status and privileges of the higher ranking families, but they still enjoyed a family education in the Confucian tradition, which gave them access to jobs within the official administration such as junior-secretary (*lingshi* 令史), head-clerk (*zhushu* 主書) and so on. For more on the development of the family classifications, see Grafflin, 1990. Also see Kuhn, 1991: 480-488. For the genealogies, see Johnson, 1977: 36f.

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[15] One decree ordered a change in the age requirements for holding certain offices (see *Liang shu* 1: 22-23), but there is no clear evidence to prove that these constraints on office holding were lived up to.

[16] These pure activities involved *xuanxue* and Buddhist metaphysical speculation, conducted through the medium of "pure conversation (*qingtan* 淸談)". See Holcombe, 1994: 78.

[17] Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 114-117.

[18] Janousch, 1998: 60-68.

[19] The School of National Youth was essentially an elite university for the male descendents of the ruling class. There was thus a theoretical distinction between two classes of students

Confucian studies was only one,[20] the School of Five Halls (*Wuguan* 五官), newly founded in 505,[21] was dedicated exclusively to the study of the Five Classics.[22] It is remarkable that the Erudites of the Five Classics (*Wujing boshi* 五經博士) appointed to run this institution all came from lower ranking families and had previously filled lowly positions in the Liang military hierarchy.[23] This is already a reflection of Emperor Wu's intention for creating this school, namely the recruitment of trained officials of lower rank, more likely to be grateful for the opportunity they have been handed.[24] Most of the graduates from the School of Five Halls joined the clerical offices (*li* 吏), which were more concerned with the practical aspect of administration than the more prestigious offices (*guan* 官).[25] Despite Emperor Wu's attempts to further undermine the Nine Ranks system by a renewal of the examination process, hoping thereby to redirect the emphasis back on scholarly achievement instead of pedigree, he was never able to bar the influential literati families from their hereditary offices.[26] The most he could hope to achieve was to force a wedge in their

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where one had access to a better education. In reality this distinction often proved impractical to apply, which meant that students of the Imperial University and the School of National Youth used the same campus and most likely had the same educational opportunities. Male members of the imperial family usually attended the School of National Youth, as did those of Emperor Wu, upon its establishment in 508 (*Liang shu*, 3: 49). See Lee, 2000: 59.

[20] Subjects taught at the University were: Confucian studies (*ruxue* 儒學), Mysterious Learning (*xuanxue* 玄學, comprising the study of the Book of Changes, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*), historical studies (*shixue* 史學), literary studies (*wenxue* 文學), medicine (*yixue* 醫學), and as an addition of the Liang in 505, legal studies (*lüxue* 律學). See Lee, 2000: 60-61.

[21] *Liang shu*, 3: 96.

[22] The Five Classics are the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), and the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記).

[23] Janousch, 1998: 67.

[24] The Imperial University was open only to students of families with an official rank of 5 and above. *Nan Qi shu*, 9: 145.

[25] *Liang shu*, 48: 662. See Janousch, 1998: 66.

[26] See Janousch, 1998: 68-73; 80.

closed ranks to offer the lower ranking families a chance to rise in the imperial bureaucracy, thus giving the impression that the bestowal of rank in office was an imperial favour, when in reality it remained for a large part a privilege of birth. Janousch argues that the infusion of lower rank officers into the bureaucracy, promoted on the basis of merit, must have put pressure on the higher officers to clean up their act and brush up on their knowledge. Due to the limited scope of the traditional historiography, which would have focused only on those who were in favour with the emperor, this claim however is hard to verify.[27]

As another sample of Emperor Wu's political realism, the *Liang shu* contains an edict that calls for the drafting of new genealogies (*jiapu* 家譜).[28] If he could not stop the established families from monopolising the higher offices, he could always try to weed out the elements in the genealogies which had crept in through bribery and falsification of records. The degree in which Emperor Wu's institutional reforms were successful at achieving their aim is still a matter of debate, but this sort of damage control operation gives us the idea that the appointment to office remained basically a matter of family descent until the final abolition of the Nine ranks system in 583.

Emperor Wu's efforts to undermine the influential literati families' monopoly of higher offices might have more to do with streamlining the bureaucratic apparatus than with actually seizing power from them. From the descriptions given to us by Yan Zhitui, it seems that these families kept far from anything that came close to political and administrative duties, and one may wonder just how powerful in a political sense they actually were. They certainly exerted a lot of social influence through their status as 'superior gentlemen (*junzi* 君子)', as their purported preoccupation with self-cultivation and moral perfection was what gave them the privilege and the right to govern over society as a whole.[29] However, the fact that they were often able to survive the rapid changes of regime during the Period of Division suggests that they were not too involved with court politics unless it directly concerned their privileged status.[30] During the Period of Division the power of an emperor was severely limited in a political, but also in a geographical sense. Geographical fragmentation meant that many of the more remote provinces plotted an individual course. Even the appointment of members of the imperial household to the position of provincial governor (*cishi* 刺史), which put them in charge of the armies stationed in the provinces, did not mean de facto control over these regions. This was demonstrated by the rebellion of Hou Jing 侯景 (d. 552),[31] when many of the emperor's relatives stood by and watched, waiting for the opportune moment to take a shot at the throne.[32]

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[27] Janousch, 1998: 71-73.

[28] *Liang shu*, 1: 22-23.

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[29] Their program of self-cultivation and education did not merely involve Confucian studies. *Xuanxue* and Buddhism had also become an important aspect of their aura as guardians of the high cultural values. As Emperor Wu recognized the limitations of his role as emperor in the traditional Confucian system, he adopted a new strategy which would place Buddhism at the top of the list, which would free him up to assume a whole new role as head of state, and concurrently make the literati's cultural status subjugated to his own.

[30] Holcombe, 1994: 129.

[31] Hou Jing was a general of the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-550). When his good friend and ally Gao Huan 高歡 (496-547, founder of the Eastern Wei) was on his deathbed, he received a summon which he suspected was a forgery by Gao Huan's son, Cheng 澄 (521-549). Cheng had become wary of Hou Jing's strength as by this time he commanded an army of one hundred thousand men, and wanted to strip him of his power. Hou Jing decided to seek refuge in the rival Western Wei 西魏 (534-556), but when it became clear that they did not trust him either and demanded him to relinquish control over his forces and territory, he turned to Emperor Wu of the Liang for help, even though as a general of the Eastern Wei he had often made plans to abduct the emperor and make him abbot of the Taiping 太平 monastery (*Nanshu*, 80: 1993-4). Emperor Wu accepted Hou Jing's defection against the advice of his officials, and commissioned an army to aid Hou Jing in 548. However, this army, under the command of Emperor Wu's nephew Xiao Yuanming 蕭淵明 (d. 556), suffered a catastrophic defeat in which the latter was captured and most of Hou Jing's soldiers surrendered or deserted. Startled by this turn of events, Emperor Wu quickly sent an envoy to the Eastern Wei to make peace. Hou Jing was distrustful of these negotiations and forging a letter in the name of the Wei court, he discovered that Emperor Wu would be willing to exchange him for Xiao Yuanming. Thereupon Hou Jing decided on pre-emptive action

This does not mean that an emperor did not have any power at all. As a ceremonious ruler he was the source of the literati's claim to existence, and the belief that the proper ritual and ceremony should be performed correctly in order for the country to be at peace was very real. That's why Emperor Wu also committed to the task of reviving and updating the court ritual to the contemporary social condition, thus repairing the link to the sacred past of the Zhou ritual (*Zhou li* 周禮).[33] Shortly after his ascension of the throne in 502, Emperor Wu ordered the compilation of a definitive ritual codex, stating in his decree that the division of the country and the strife among the families had come about because ritual (*li*禮) and music (*yue* 樂) had been deficient for a long time. Previous attempts at recompilation and revision of the rituals by some of his predecessors had all failed miserably because, in the opinion of Emperor Wu, the men who were assigned to this task were all selected on the basis of personal feelings rather than on account of advancement in scholarship.[34] For this reason he appointed five of his most trusted military aids, who came from the (per definition) low ranking 'military families' (*junjia* 軍家), to each supervise the compilation of one branch of the so-

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against the Liang and launched his rebellion which lasted until 552 and lay much of the country to waste. For more on Hou Jing and his rebellion, see *Liang shu*, 56: 833-863; *Nan shi*, 80: 1993-2017; *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, compiled by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) and finished in 1084), 6: 4970-5095. See also Buttars, 1998: 271-296; Marney, 1976: 135-158; Pearce, 2000; Li, 2003.

[32] *Nan shi*, 52: 1296. See Buttars, 1998: 270.

[33] See the memorial that Xu Mian 徐勉 (466-535) wrote in 524 to accompany the completed ritual code (*Liang shu*, 25: 379-383; translated in part by Janousch, 1998: 85-90). Xu Mian was an important political figure and personal assistant to Emperor Wu who, after the death of Fan Yun 范雲 (451-503), entrusted him with important matters of state. For Xu Mian's biography, see *Liang shu*, 25: 377-389. Also see *Nan shi*, 60: 1477-1486.

[34] *Liang shu*, 25: 381.

called Five Rituals (*wuli* 五禮)[35] which were to make up this new ritual code. These were the same five men who a few years later were made Erudites of the Five Classics and each placed at the head of a department of the School of Five Halls.[36] The scholarship and the institutions which were a direct result of Emperor Wu's commissioning of this immense labour signified a revival of Confucian studies. Many commentaries on the classics appeared during this time, and the number of books in the imperial library (not counting the Buddhist books, which were accommodated in a separate Buddhist library) grew to a phenomenal 44,526 scrolls (representing 6,288 different titles), which was unparalleled by any of the Northern or Southern dynasties.[37]

The revision and recompilation of state ritual, like many of the other measures taken by Emperor Wu, were probably not a sudden inspiration of his upon ascending the throne, nor was the idea developed by him alone. The well known circle of people around prince Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 (460-494; posthumous name Wenxuan 文宣) of the Southern Qi 南齊 (479-502), did not only occupy itself with literary and philosophical activities, but was also kind of a progressive think tank which sought to affect changes in the literati consciousness and political culture in the South.[38] The young literati who frequented Xiao Ziliang's villa came from both high and low ranking families, a theme which, as we have seen, was carried on by Emperor Wu, who had himself been a member of this group. Thus it seems that Emperor Wu carried out some of the political and sociological ideas that had originated in the clique around Xiao Ziliang.[39] This is further evidenced by the fact that many of the people who had been part of this clique later served in important positions during the formative years of the Liang dynasty, including the compilation of the Liang law codex,[40] and the drafting of imperial decrees.[41]

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[35] These were the 'rituals for auspicious events' (*jili* 吉禮), 'rituals for inauspicious events' (*xiongli* 凶禮), 'rituals for guests' (*binli* 賓禮), 'rituals for military events' (*junli* 軍禮), and 'rituals for blessings' (*jiali* 嘉禮). *Liang shu*, 25: 381.

[36] For their names and functions, see *Liang shu*, 25: 381.

[37] T.2103.110a23-b1. See Lee, 2000: 61, 405-6. Also see Janousch, 1998: 93.

[38] In 487, Xiao Ziliang, the son of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 482-493) of the Qi dynasty and prince of Jingling 竟陵, took up residence in his new villa on Mount Jilong 雞籠山, situated northwest of the capital Jiankang 建康 (present Nanjing), and therefore also called the Western Hill (Xishan 西山). This villa gave its name to the group of young literati that frequented it, namely "Salon of the Western Villa" (*xidi* 西邸). The most famous of its members were the so-called "Eight Friends of Jingling" (*Jingling bayou* 竟陵八友), of which Xiao Yan (the future Emperor Wu of the Liang) was one. Some of these eight people would take an active role in the formative years of the Liang dynasty, including the compilation of the Liang ritual code. For a

Unfortunately, the Liang Ritual Code, which was finished in 524, is no longer extant, so it is impossible to determine what these rituals looked like.[42] However, one striking aspect of the renewed state ritual is rather well documented, and this is what Janousch calls the vegetarian reforms. In 517, Emperor Wu decreed that the sacrificial animals used in the ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟) were to be replaced with fruit, vegetables and rice-flower-dough victims.[43] On the suggestion of Liu Xie

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listing of the names of these eight people, see *Liang shu*, 1: 2 (repeated in *Nan shi*, 6: 168). For a detailed study of the salon around Xiao Ziliang, see Jansen, 2000. Also see Vande Walle, 1976 and 1979; Tang, 1983: 457-461.

[39] Jansen, 2000: 207-226.

[40] *Liang shu*, 2: 38.

[41] Janousch, 1998: 93.

[42] The Liang Ritual Code was actually the first of its kind and inspired the compilation of later dynastic ritual codes. See Janousch, 1998: 14-15.

[43] *Liang shu*, 2: 57 and *Nan shi*, 6: 196. As the treatise on ritual in the *Sui shu* describes, this reform was hotly debated, but Emperor Wu chose not to take the opinion of its opponents into account (*Sui shu*, 7: 134). The edict ordering the abolition of animal sacrifice in the ancestral temple is preserved in the *Guang Hongmingji* 廣弘明集 (*Further Collection for the Propagation and Clarification [of Buddhism]*, T.2103; compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) in 664) under the title "*Duansha jue zongmiao xisheng zhao* 斷殺絕宗廟犧牲詔 (*Edict for the total abolition of the killing of domestic animals as sacrifice at the ancestral temple*, T.2103.293b28-294a12). In T.2103 the date 513 is given for the promulgation of the edict, but this is probably an error caused by the fusion of several events into one. The petition by the monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) and others to forbid hunting and fishing in the vicinity of the capital, mentioned at the beginning of the entry in the *Guang Hongming ji*, was launched in

劉勰 (ca. 465-522)[44], who noted that a discrepancy had arisen between the offerings of fruit and vegetables at the ancestral temple and the use of animals in other sacrificial ceremonies, this ban was expanded to the semi-annual sacrifices at the suburban altars to Heaven and Earth (*tiandi erjiao* 天地二郊).[45] The question of the development of the vegetarian ideal in Medieval China is a complicated one, so I will not go into detail here.[46] What I would like to point out is that, even though abstention from meat was already part of the pre-Buddhist Chinese tradition,[47] a fact which certainly contributed to the widespread promotion of vegetarianism at this time, its broad scale application in the state sacrifices during the Liang was quite extraordinary. Even more so because the denunciation of blood sacrifice was only one facet of a reform that sought to banish all forms of harmful behaviour towards living beings, including hunting and fishing, the use of medicine made from animal parts and so on.[48] I will return to this

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513. See Lavoix, 2002: 118n65. Emperor Wu's lengthy treatise *Duan jiurou wen* 斷酒肉文 (*On ending the use of wine and meat*), in which he swears of all worldly pleasures, can be found in T.2103.294b16-303c5.

[44] Liu Xie studied Buddhism under the guidance of Sengyou, and towards the end of his life he became a monk himself. He is the author of an important text in the defence of Buddhism, titled *Miehuo lun* 滅惑論 (*On the elimination of doubts*), contained in his teacher's *Hongming ji* (T.2102.49c3-53c19). He is also well-known for his authorship of the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心調龍 (*On the Literary Mind and Ornate Rhetoric*), one of the most influential works of literary criticism, and his claimed authorship of the *Liuzi xinlun* 劉子新論 (*Master Liu's Treatise on Renewal [in Time of Crisis]*), although this is a subject of debate. For some recent studies on Liu Xie and his *Wenxin diaolong*, see Cai, 2001; Mair, 2002. For a full translation of the *Liuzi xinlun* and Liu Xie's debated authorship, see Arndt, 1994. See also Gibbs, 1970-1971.

[45] *Liang shu*, 50: 710 and *Nan shi*, 72: 1781.

[46] Quite a few studies on the subject exist. See, for instance, Kieschnick, 2005; Lavoix, 2002; Mather, 1981; Suwa, 1978 and 1986.

[47] The abstention from meat during the mourning period was a regular custom, and those who continued their vegetarian diet for the rest of their lives were praised in the Confucian biographies for their exceptional filial piety (see, for example, *Nan Qishu*, 55: 958, 962, 964, 965, 966; *Liang shu*, 47: 648, 654, 655).

[48] Lavoix, 2002: 120.

issue when addressing Emperor Wu’s use of Buddhism in state affairs. In the context of Emperor Wu’s restructuring of Confucian ritual, it is worth mentioning that the vegetarian reforms were codified in the customary hymns (*ya* 雅) performed at these ritual ceremonies. The original hymns, written by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) [49] only a few years earlier, were rewritten by Xiao Ziyun 蕭子雲 (487-549)[50] to correspond to the modified rituals. The two hymns accompanying the inspection of the sacrificial animal and the sacrifice itself were abolished, and the remaining hymns were redrafted with abundant references to the Five Classics. Janousch argues that the many quotations from the classics in these new hymns points to a Confucian motivation, and warns that the vegetarian reforms are not to be seen as simply Buddhist in inspiration.[51] However, as I shall argue in the chapter on Emperor Wu’s construction of a Buddhist world view, Emperor Wu’s stress on vegetarianism as an expression of universal compassion and benevolence seems to have been part of a greater scheme in which the Buddhist elements outweighed the Confucian or Daoist elements. Emperor Wu’s aspiration to portray himself as the saviour of all living beings through the powerful image of a *bodhisattva*-king, required him to be consistent in Confucian state ritual as well. Given that his political position was still precarious when starting out on the total reconstruction of the traditional role of an emperor figure from a head of state in the Confucian sense to spiritual world leader in a Buddhist sense, he had to find a way to incorporate the Buddhist elements he needed to that end into the existing Confucian tradition. Thus it can be argued that the quotation of passages from the classics relating to vegetarianism were more a justification or pretext for the changing of these long-standing traditions of animal sacrifice and consumption, rather than a specific expression of deeper Confucian moral values. This is not to oversimplify things. For example, the process of *karman* and rebirth (which had been actively promoted since the days of Xiao Ziliang) implied that anyone could be reborn as an animal in a future life, so refraining from killing animals for eating or for sacrifice in this way became not only proper Buddhist practice, but an act of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and humaneness (*ren* 仁) as well.[52] There certainly was mutual influence between the Confucian and Buddhist traditions, whereby concepts from one were integrated into the other.[53] But this syncretism seems to have grown primarily from the efforts of Buddhist apologists, and was pushed increasingly hard by Emperor Wu.

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[49] Shen Yue was an important figure at the court of Xiao Ziliang and later played an important role in assisting Emperor Wu of the Liang during the period of dynastic consolidation. As a former arbiter in the Nine ranks system, he was one of the chief advisors on ritual matters of Emperor Wu, but towards the end of his life he fell out of favour. As an expert in the fields of poetry and music, he is remembered as a promoter of rules for tonal euphony, and as a historian he is celebrated as the author of the official history of the Southern Song dynasty. For Shen Yue’s biography, see *Liang shu*, 13: 232-243 and *Nan shi*, 58: 1403-1414. For an extensive study on the life and work of Shen Yue, see Mather, 1988. For Shen Yue’s input in the ritual reforms of Emperor Wu, see Janousch, 1998: 35-46.

[50] Biography in *Liang shu*, 35: 513-516.

[51] Janousch, 1998: 119, 134.

Of course the line between the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions should not be drawn all too explicitly. All three traditions were part of one and the same cultural sphere. The point to make here, however, is that despite the fact that many people were a little bit Confucianist, Daoist, and Buddhist at the same time does not mean that these people were not aware of their unique qualities and origins, and the possible discrepancies between them. Otherwise, why would the *Mingfo lun* 明佛論,[54] for example, say that one should

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[52] More on this in chapter three, which deals with the mechanism of *karman* and the debates about the existence of a soul.

[53] This process of mutual influence was not limited to concepts and terminology. For instance, there was a Buddhicisation of state banquets and imperial sacrifice through the introduction of vegetarianism, but also in the other direction we see an impact on Buddhist ritual from these traditional Confucian rituals. For instance, special hymns were written for performance during the imperial Buddhist assemblies, in likeness of state ritual. See Janousch, 1998: 168.

> 今依周孔以養民, 味佛法以養神。則生為明后, 歿為明神, 而常王矣。
> now rely on Confucius of the Zhou to take care of the people and savour the *Buddhadharma* to nurture one's spirit. Then, in life you will be an enlightened sovereign, and in death an enlightened spirit, thus will you rule eternally as a king.[55]

There are many other examples to be found that give expression to the view that the Buddhist and classical tradition were both valid, but each in its own sphere. The classical tradition encompassed the perfect code of behaviour and the values of the past sages, a way of life that had the sanction of tradition.[56] But since the decline of strict Han Confucian orthodoxy, an ever increasing number of scholars openly acknowledged that this classical tradition was not the be all and end all of philosophical thinking. There were many questions for which the Classics provided no satisfactory answer, and it was acceptable to search for these answers elsewhere, which is exactly what happened with the development of *xuanxue* and Buddhist philosophy. Of course these three modes of thought were all part of one shared cultural discourse, and, as has been discussed extensively in the secondary literature, they all had an influence and impact on one another. Nevertheless the terms "Confucianism", "Daoism (both the philosophical *xuanxue* and the religious-devotional forms)" and "Buddhism" had meaning to the Chinese of the time, and sometimes sharp lines were drawn between them by adherents of either one of these traditions.[57] For reasons of apologetics, Buddhism was often equated with Confucianism, and suitable parallels were drawn.[58] However, precedence is still given to the “inner scriptures (*neijing* 內經, i.e. Buddhist scriptures)” over the “outer scriptures (*waidian* 外典 , i.e. non-Buddhist scriptures)”, their teachings considered to be far more profound. Yan Zhitui, for example, says in his *Family Instructions* that Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou and Confucius can not be compared with Buddha.[59] As far as syncretism goes: for the literati it was more the norm to be Confucian in their public lives, and Buddhist (or Buddho-Daoist) in their personal life. Confucianism, up to the time of Emperor Wu, was deemed to be the norm for one’s public behaviour, and dictated one’s status within society, while *xuanxue* and Buddhist philosophical speculation fulfilled a personal need to understand the human condition. In the course of time a proficiency in these fields would also become a requirement for acceptance into the higher social strata as a mark of one’s level of self-cultivation, and it is exactly this growing status of Buddhist discourse among the literati elite which Emperor Wu sought to take advantage of for the creation of a new form of imperial legitimacy.

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[54] The *Mingfo lun* (*Treatise on explaining Buddhism*) was written by Zongbing 宗炳 (375-433), and is included in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445-518) *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (*Collection [of texts] for the dissemination and clarification [of Buddhism]*, T.2102).

[55] T.2102.16a6-7.

[56] Dien, 1962: 52.

Janousch, in his dissertation, equates Emperor Wu’s (Buddhist) *bodhisattva* ordination ritual[60] to the (Confucian) ploughing ritual (*gengji li* 耕籍禮), saying that Emperor Wu’s ceremonial surrender of imperial regalia before commencing with the *bodhisattva* vow stood on a par with his personal performance of the ploughing ritual, which visibly demeaned his imperial persona for the benefit of his subjects.[61] Although Janousch astutely observes that the *bodhisattva* ordination and the ploughing ceremony focussed on a different target audience, in his desire to link the traditional Confucian rituals and the new Buddhist rituals of Emperor Wu, he places too much importance on the occurrence of the ploughing ritual itself. The *Liang shu* refers to ten instances of Emperor Wu's personal performance of the ploughing ritual (*qin/gong geng jitian* 親/躬耕籍田).[62] However, an emperor's personal performance of the ploughing ritual is actually described in the *Liji* 禮記,[63] and other examples of it can be found throughout the dynastic histories predating or contemporary to the Liang dynasty.[64] On the occasion of the ploughing ritual of 523, Emperor Wu issued a decree that stated:

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[57] An obvious demonstration of this are the surviving records of debates between opponents and proponents of Buddhism, many of which were for the first time collected in the *Hongming ji*. For more on these debates, see Kohn, 1995.

[58] See Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 138-139.

[59] Ibid.: 138.

[60] See Chapter II.1.

[61] Janousch, 1998: 209-210 and 1999: 147.

> 夫耕籍之義大矣哉！粢盛由之而興，禮節因之以著，古者哲王咸用此作.
> The significance of the ploughing ritual is great indeed! The sacrificial offering of millet stems from it, and the rules of ceremony were composed on the basis of it. That's why all wise kings of yore have used this custom.[65]

This suggests that Emperor Wu did not see his performance of this ritual as something innovative, but rather as a continuation of a long established tradition. There is thus no need to see the ploughing ritual as some sort of Confucian counterpart to the Buddhist *bodhisattva* ordination ritual. Especially since, starting in 534 (perhaps due to his weakening physical state, since he had at this point reached seventy years of age), the *Liang shu* mentions that he performed every ploughing ritual from his imperial carriage (*yujia* 輿駕). This can hardly be called a demeaning posture, an important element that made Janousch compare it to Emperor Wu's ceremonial stripping of imperial regalia before taking the *bodhisattva* vows.

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[62] *Liang shu*, 2: 54; 3: 66, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 91. This corresponds to the years 514, 523, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 540, 541, and 547 respectively.

[63] Book IV: *Yueling* 月令 *Proceedings month by month*. Legge, 1885: 208.

[64] See, for example, *Sanguo zhi*, 1: 47; *Songshu*, 9: 184, 14: 47 and 18: 495; *Weishu*, 108: 2735.

[65] *Liang shu*, 3: 66.

In conclusion, we can say that Emperor Wu continued, and even revived the Confucian tradition throughout his reign, but most ardently in the first decade of his rule, because he simply had no other choice. He relied on the sanction of the Confucian tradition to legitimize his claim on the throne and needed a this-worldly oriented educational tradition to supply him with trustworthy and competent bureaucratic officials. The reforms in Confucian state ritual were aimed at taking back the prerogative of determining the cultural and political tone from the influential literati families, and created the opportunity to inject them with Buddhist concepts, such as vegetarianism, under the guise of returning to the wisdom of the Ancient Sages. However, Emperor Wu's Buddhist intentions were obvious from the very start, as he chose the eighth day of the fourth month, which was traditionally considered to be the Buddha's birthday, as the day to proclaim the foundation of his Liang dynasty.[66] On May 10th 504, three days after declaring his renunciation of Daoism in favour of Buddhism,[67] Emperor Wu issued a decree that clarified the way he actually felt about the non-Buddhist teachings, including Confucianism:

> 道有九十六種。惟佛一道是於正道。其餘九十五種名為邪道。[…] 老子周公孔子等。雖是如來弟子而化跡既邪。止是世間之善。不能革凡成聖。其公卿百官侯王宗族。宜反偽就真捨邪入正。
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> There are ninety-six teachings, but only the Buddhist teaching is the correct teaching. All the other ninety-five teachings are

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[66] *Liang shu*, 2: 34. The *Liang shu* specifies the date of Emperor Wu's ascension of the throne as a *bingyin* 丙寅 day in the fourth month of the first year of *tianjian* 天監 (502-519), which is the eighth day of that month in the sixty-day cyclical lunar calendar.

[67] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.112a3-a22. See further.

> false teachings. […] Even though Laozi, the Duke of Zhou, Confucius and others were disciples of the Tathāgata, their bequeathed teachings are heterodox (heretical, deviant). They stop at this-worldly benevolence, and can not turn the commoner into a sage. You, high ministers, officials, nobles, and clansmen should avert from what is false and go toward what is right. You should discard the false and hold to the correct.[68]

It would have been odd for Emperor Wu to openly reject all non-Buddhist philosophies, including Confucianism, but carry on endorsing the latter, unless of course we acknowledge his pragmatic need for it. Emperor Wu's crafty use of the Confucian tradition is a prime example of just how shrewd a political tactician he was.

I.2. Emperor Wu and the Daoist tradition

When discussing Emperor Wu's attitude towards the Daoist tradition, we must make a clear distinction between *xuanxue* 玄學 ("Mysterious Learning") and the religious form of Daoism. *Xuanxue*, which is often misleadingly labelled as "Neo-Daoism", was essentially a revival of interest in the philosophical Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi among Confucian scholars. This renewed form of metaphysical thinking had started to emerge towards the end of the Han dynasty when an increasing number of Confucian scholars grew disaffected towards the picayune, hair-splitting style of scholarship known as "chapter and verse (*zhangju* 章句)". This was an approach to the study of the classics that focussed on inordinate textual exegesis to the extent that "the explanation of a passage of five characters could amount to as much as twenty to thirty thousand words".[69] This rigid mode of Confucian learning, in which there was little room for individual thought, caused many to shift their interest towards the texts of *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi,* and *Yijing*, which together were known as the "Three Mysteries" (*sanxuan* 三玄). This vogue of Lao-Zhuang thought spread among the literate class like a wildfire upon the publication of such commentaries on the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* as by He Yan 何晏 (c.190-249) and Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) in the beginning of the third century. Many more commentaries would follow. But however much the fundamentals of *xuanxue* were derived from written texts, it was generally expounded orally through the medium of "pure conversation" (*qingtan* 清談) in a kind of literary salons. "Pure Conversation" had come into vogue towards the end of the Han dynasty. It originally started as a sort of reactionary movement. As power at the Han court increasingly slipped into the hands of eunuchs, an important number of officials decided to withdraw from their posts and started writing critical appraisals of the contemporary political climate and important political personalities. This movement, which was known as "pure criticism" (*qingyi* 清議), was violently repressed by those it targeted. As a consequence many intellectuals shifted their discourse away from politics to abstract metaphysical speculation, either genuinely or as a concealed form of criticism. The "pure criticism" was thus transformed into the more philosophically oriented "pure conversation".[70] This "pure conversation" would gradually become even more widespread and turn into a medium to demonstrate one's wit and sharp tongue by way of quick repartee between two individuals, making use of references to classical writings, poetry, folk sayings and the like. Eventually the skill of "pure conversation" became the standard to which one had to measure up in order to get higher up in society.[71] Because of the many superficial similarities between the concepts of Lao-Zhuang thought and those concepts contained in the *Prajñāpāramitā*-scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the literary salons and "pure conversation" served as an excellent medium for mutual discussion and exchange of ideas between *xuanxue* scholars and Buddhist thinkers, and thus were a catalyst for a Buddho-Daoist hybrid philosophy. A case in point is the concept of 'emptiness', which initially had two very different interpretations for *xuanxue* and Buddhist thinkers. The *xuanxue* approach to "original non-being" (*benwu* 本無) had all the trappings of nihilism, as it claimed that everything comes forth from this original nothingness, but this 'void' itself, paradoxically, does not exist. Many Buddhist thinkers asserted instead that it is the material world in which we dwell that is illusory, while the 'void' (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Ch. *kong* 空) is in fact real. This subtle, but nonetheless fundamental change in view, which was ultimately more positive and emotionally satisfying, was adopted in *xuanxue* philosophy. In the Chinese Buddhist interpretation of the cycle of reincarnation (Skt. *saṃsāra*) we see the influence of native Chinese materialism on Buddhist beliefs. Counter to the doctrine of *anātman* (Ch. *wuwo* 無我, the absence of an absolute individual consciousness that passes from one incarnation to the next), Chinese Buddhists believed that there had to be something like a "soul" that had to be reborn. I shall return to this in the following chapter on Emperor Wu's use of Buddhism for the creation of a new world view. The point to make for now is that since *xuanxue* was in essence a non-institutionalised philosophy, which by the time of Emperor Wu had become thoroughly entwined with Buddhist metaphysics, there was no reason for Emperor Wu to change or to prohibit it in any way. On the contrary, the philosophical discussions in the form of *qingtan* were a way to show off one's superior level of self-cultivation, and carried many Buddhist concepts across to the people engaged in the activities in the literary salons, thus serving as a medium for expounding the Buddhist doctrine. The sources remain fairly quiet about the state of *xuanxue* scholarship at the time of Emperor Wu, but this should not come as a surprise, as it is rarely mentioned anywhere in the official dynastic histories, which are biased towards Confucianism. However, two references can be found, which indicate that *xuanxue* continued in pretty much the same way as it had in the previous centuries. The *Nan shi* describes how in 548, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551), the later emperor Jianwen 簡文 (r. 550-551), personally lectured on the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* on several occasions,[72] something he would certainly not have done, had his father been opposed to it. That same *Nan shi* also says that Liang Wudi frequently lectured on the *Laozi* in the Chongyun Hall 重雲殿, a place that was mostly used for Buddhist affairs.[73] Yan Zhitui, in his *Family Instructions*, says that:

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[68] *Guang Hongmingji*, T.2103.112a24-b1.

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[69] *Han shu*, 30: 1723.

[70] See Holzman, 1956: 326-327. Also see Yu, 1985, *passim*; Holcombe, 1994: 91-94.

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[71] Many illustrations of *qingtan* repartee are reproduced in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of Tales of the World*, compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 towards the middle of the fifth century), translated by Mather, 1976.

> 自於梁世，兹風復闡，莊、老、周易，總謂三玄。武皇、簡文，躬自講論。周弘正奉贊大猷，化行都邑，學徒千餘，實為盛美。
>
> [c]oming to the Liang period, this tendency [of Taoist discussion] again flourished. The *Lao Tzu*, *Chuang Tzu*, and *Chou I* were called the Three Schools of Mysticism (Taoism) which the emperors Wu (502-549) and Chien-wen (550-551) personally lectured on and discussed. Chou Hung-cheng[74] was appointed to assist in promoting the great interest by establishing the instruction throughout the capital and other

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[72] *Nan shi*, 30: 799.

[73] Ibid., 71: 1753. For a study on the religious functions of the Chongyun Hall, see Chen, 2006: 52-57.

[74] Zhou Hongzheng 周弘正 (496-574) was said to have mastered the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* at the age of ten. He was very good at metaphysical speculation and was even asked questions by Buddhist monks. See *Chenshu*, 24: 305-310; *Nan shi*, 34: 898-899.

> cities; he gathered more than a thousand students – truly a splendid result.[75]

This passage claims that under the rule of Emperor Wu, *xuan* studies reached a new climax. Regardless of possible exaggerations on the part of Yan Zhitui, this is a clear indication of Emperor Wu's positive attitude towards *xuanxue* scholarship, a fact that is corroborated by the continued importance of "Mysterious Learning" in the school curriculum.[76]

Matters become quite a bit more complicated when we examine Emperor Wu's attitude toward the religious form of Daoism, which reached scriptural maturity around the fourth century.[77] Although many literati subscribed to the Daoist faith, Daoism as a salvationist religion had the greatest appeal to the uneducated mass and the impoverished families that had been excluded from the higher social strata by the more influential literati families.[78] So as an instrument of mass appeal it could certainly rival with Buddhism for the status of state religion. Why then did Emperor Wu not only opt for Buddhism to fulfil this role, but chose to publicly denounce Daoism, said to have traditionally been the religious orientation of the Xiao clan? Admittedly, the edict of 504 in which Emperor Wu forsakes Daoism in favour of the Buddhist teaching is preserved only in Buddhist sources,[79] which might indicate that it is perhaps a later falsification by Buddhists who wished to provide the Tang rulers with a precedent. As M. Strickmannn points out, this question had already been raised by the *Guang Hongming ji* study group at Kyoto University in 1974.[80] Strickmann, however, claims to have found evidence for Emperor Wu's suppression of Daoism in the Daoist scriptures themselves, which, strangely enough, he qualifies as more forthcoming in factual information than the often biased Confucian and Buddhist texts.[81] As it turns out, this evidence is nothing more than a single passage in a text called *Zhoushi mingtong ji* 周氏冥通記 (*A Record of Master Zhou's Communications with the Invisible World*, HY 302).[82] This text recounts the visions of the Daoist adept Zhou Ziliang 周子良 (497-516), who on account of these visions committed suicide at the age of twenty because he believed the immortals living beneath Mao Shan 茅山 urged him to take up an official position in the administration of the spirit-world. Zhou Ziliang was a disciple of the famous Daoist master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536)[83], who collected and annotated his visions and presented the completed text to the throne in 517. In one of Tao's commentaries he describes the fate of Zhou Ziliang's maternal aunt, who had entered a Daoist convent at the age of ten, but in 504 "she was constrained by a government regulation (*gong zhi* 公制), and several Daoists urged her to wed out of practical considerations."[84] The fact that Zhou's aunt decided to get married because of the pressure placed upon her by a government regulation was proof to Strickmann of the repressive measures taken against Daoism by Emperor Wu in 504.[85] Jansen has already observed that it is dangerous to make such a generalisation on the basis of so little information, and one can only agree with that.[86] The leap from a single case of a woman who, because of some unspecified government regulation, left the convent to get married, to the wholesale repression of Daoism is more a leap of faith than a well-founded conclusion. The edict of 504 in which Emperor Wu denounces Daoism nowhere mentions any active repression to be undertaken. If it is a genuine contemporary document, then at the most it seems to have been composed for propaganda reasons, rather than as an official document containing any real policy. The only source to mention a persecution of Daoists in the true sense of the word, is the *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (*Comprehensive Records of Buddha and other Patriarchs*, T.2035; compiled by Zhipan 志磐 (1220-1275) in 1269), which says that in 517 Emperor Wu issued an order to abandon all Daoist monasteries and to laicize all Daoist clergy.[87] It is very suspect that this order did not surface until more than seven centuries after these events allegedly took place, and to base any conclusions on this one sentence is imprudent at best. In further support of his hypothesis, Strickmann points to the increase of Buddhist references in Tao Hongjing's writings after 517 and a discernable decrease in the production of Daoist texts between 517 and 549 in Southern China, which he blames on the flight of many Daoist scholars to the North.[88] The former argument can easily be explained as a sign of the

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[75] Translation by Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 70.

[76] Lee, 2000: 372. The *Nan shi* (71: 1753)

[77] For an overview of the development of the early Daoist tradition, see Seiwert, 2003: 23-93. For more on the differentiation between Daoism and popular religions, see Stein, 1979.

[78] Holcombe, 1994: 96. As an example of the scepticism with which Daoist religious practices were sometimes received by the members of educated literati families might serve Yan Zhitui's warning "not to waste money on crazy superstitions such as Daoist charms or thanksgiving sacrifices." Teng Ssu-yü, 1968: 21.

[79] The edict is included in *Guang Hongming ji* (T.2103.112a3-a22), and quoted in *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 (*Treatise on Discerning what is Correct*, compiled by Falin 法琳 (d. 640) in 626; T.2110.549b5-c12). A full translation can be found in Jansen, 2001: 93-94 (and also in Jansen, 2000: 212-214).

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[80] Strickmann, 1978: 468n2. See Ota, 1964.

[81] Ibid: 468.

[82] See *Daozang: Sanjiaben*, volume 5, pp. 518-542.

[83] Tao Hongjing was one of the most important Daoist scholars of his time, and he is seen as the foremost representative of the Mao Shan school of Daoism. He had close ties to Emperor Wu of the Liang. Tao Hongjing had interpreted the many auspicious signs that were reportedly seen all over the country upon the founding of the Liang dynasty, and thus provided the emperor with an important tool of legitimation, the approval of Heaven. Emperor Wu had great respect for Tao Hongjing's talents and in 535 conferred the title of *Shanzhong zaixiang* 山中宰相 "Prime Minister Amidst the Mountains" on him (see *Fozu lidai tongzai*, T.2036.550.c25; *Nan shi*, 76: 1899). Tao Hongjing's biography can be found in the *Liang shu*, 51: 742-743; *Nan shi*, 76: 1897-1901. For a study on Tao Hongjing's life and work, see Strickman, 1977 and 1979. Also see Berkowitz, 2002: 209-215.

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[84] *Daozang*, volume 5: 533a. Cf. Strickmann, 1978: 468-469.

[85] Strickmann, 1978: 469.

[86] Jansen, 2002: 108. Thomas Jansen (2002) gives a short overview on the state of Chinese, Japanese and Western scholarship regarding the question of Emperor Wu's alleged persecution of Daoism.

[87] T.2035.350a1.

[88] Strickmann, 1978: 472.

zeitgeist. There is nothing unusual about the mixed use of Daoist and Buddhist concepts in a single text, as there was a prolific cross-pollination between these two religions during the Period of Division, despite (or perhaps because of) the efforts on both sides to make distinctions between them.

For the latter argument Strickmann does not provide us with much concrete evidence, other than an enumeration of texts composed shortly after Emperor Wu's death, which he contrasts to the limited output of scriptures in the years between 517 and 549.[89] In search of some references to Daoists fleeing north due to an active repression of their religion in the Liang, I found only one case, which is repeated in several Buddhist sources. This case concerns a Daoist priest named Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (d.u.)[90], who is primarily referred to in the context of his disastrous debate with the Buddhist monk Tanxian 曇顯 (d.u.)[91], which eventually drove emperor Wenxuan 文宣 (r. 550-559) of the Northern Qi to issue his own decree to discard Daoism in 555.[92] What is relevant to the present topic, is that when Daoxuan tells this anecdote, he starts off by saying that Lu Xiujing was originally from the Liang, but travelled north with his students in an act of rebellion because he was angry that Emperor Wu had given up his Daoist beliefs.[93] The initiative for the self induced exile is clearly placed with Lu Xiujing himself, and is even interpreted as a malicious defection. Taking into account Daoxuan's motives for making his collection of Buddhist apologetic writings, it is all the more significant that he does not place the cause for Lu Xiujing's departure from Liang with a persecution of Daoists, but rather with the resentment he felt towards Emperor Wu for his choice of religion. After all, if it was Daoxuan's purpose to give the Tang emperors a precedent for publicly converting to Buddhism, he could have made a very strong case by giving them a model for persecution. However, presuming that Daoxuan would have made use of any and all arguments against his Daoist adversaries, the fact that he limited himself to portraying only the sordid personalities and the narrow-mindedness of his Daoist adversaries, makes it unlikely that a persecution of Daoism took place during the Liang dynasty. The story of Lu Xiujing is repeated in three later Buddhist sources as well, but with slight modifications. The *Zhenzheng lun* 甄正論 (*Treatise on Determining the Truth*, T.2112; compiled during the reign of Empress Wu, sometime after

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[89] Strickmann, 1978: 472n20,21.

[90] The Buddhist sources speak of a Lu Xiujing who lived in the sixth century, so it is clearly a different person from his famous namesake who lived from 406 to 477. The latter Lu Xiujing was an influential Daoist scholar of the Tianshi 天師 (Heavenly Master) tradition who codified Daoist liturgy and whose catalogue *Sandong jingshu mulu* 三洞經書目錄 (*Catalogue of the Scriptures of the Three Caverns*) laid the foundation for the formation of the later Daoist canon (see Verellen, 2004: 239). Zhipan, in the *Fozu tongji*, also points to this fact in an editorial note, saying that "since some forty years separate the Taishi 泰始 period of the [Southern] Song dynasty (465-472) from the Tianjian 天監 period of the Liang dynasty (502-520), this can not be the same Lu Xiujing. Therefore, when it says that he fled from Liang to Wei because of Emperor Wu's abandonment of Daoism, we must presume it refers to Lu Xiujing's disciples in order for this to be credible." (T.2035.357b19-21)

[91] Biography in *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, T.2060; compiled by Daoxuan): T.2060.625a19-c13.

[92] This decree, and the circumstances leading up to its promulgation, can be found in the *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.112c8-113b16. Lu Xiujing had made the mistake of attacking the Buddhists with an argument based on terminology, saying that the Buddhists labelled their own religion as "inner (*nei* 內)", which he saw as a synonym for "small (*xiao* 小)", while they

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branded the Daoist religion as "outer (*wai* 外)", which he associated with "great (*da* 大)". Tanxian rebutted by applying Lu Xiujing's associations to the emperor, which made it look as if Xiujing regarded the emperor, who lived inside [the palace] (*chunei* 處內), as less important than the officials, who lived outside [the palace] (*chuwai* 處外). Lu Xiujing and his companions could not respond to this, and so the emperor declared the Daoists swindlers and frauds that the unenlightened laymen continued to worship for no good reason. Emperor Wenxuan challenged those who called themselves immortals (*zi wei shenxian zhe* 自謂神仙者) to climb the Three Ranks Terrace (Sanjue Tai 三爵臺), throw themselves from it and fly to the sky as immortals. All who tried fell to their deaths, thus wiping out the false and erroneous teaching from the realm of the Qi, so there were no longer two faiths. See T.2103.113a12-17, 113a22-24.

[93] See *Guang Hongmingji*, T.2103.112c12-13 and *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.625.b1-3.

690) [94] says that Emperor Wu was for some time at the beginning of his reign deceived by Lu Xiujing, but later came to his senses and wrote the letter in which he rejected Daoism.[95] The *Beishan lu* 北山錄 (*Record of North Mountain*, T.2113; compiled by Shenqing 神清 [d. 814]) takes this story one step further and asserts that Lu Xiujing fled (*ben* 奔) to the Northern Qi because he had slandered the Buddhist teaching, for which Emperor Wu had ordered his execution.[96] The *Fozu tongji*, finally, says that Lu Xiujing had changed the Liang for the Wei, only to find that emperor Wenxuan of the succeeding Northern Qi dynasty also favoured Buddhism, which once again filled him with resentment.[97]

Regardless of historical truth, it is clear that, on the basis of the scarce sources relating to Emperor Wu's attitude towards Daoism, it is impossible to ascertain if a suppression of Daoism took place during the Liang. However, for the reasons cited above, it seems highly unlikely that such an active repression occurred. The purported 'suppression' of Daoism is merely the result of wishful thinking that links Emperor Wu's personal letter of conversion to Buddhism (and his later circular urging others to do the same) to the passage in the *Fozu tongji* that speaks of the laicization of Daoist clergy members. Even Strickmann, the most vehement proponent of the Daoist repression theory, seems undecided at times. Although on one occasion he says that "there is no doubt that the ban against Taoists was both serious and effective," [98] in another instance he says that "[t]here is no evidence that the effects of this were felt at Mao Shan," [99] and concludes that "Mao Shan continued to function as an officially recognized centre of Taoist ordination even after the proscriptive measures of 504." [100] In addition, Tao Hongjing was not the only Daoist master that Emperor Wu admired. The *Nan shi*, for example, also speaks of the great admiration Emperor Wu had for Deng Yu 鄧郁 (d. 511), who made an elixir for him.[101] Running ahead to one of Emperor Wu's most important Buddhist ceremonies, namely that of the Great Assemblies, to which we shall return in detail when discussing Wu's practical application of Buddhism in government, we can add one more piece of evidence in support of our claim that no major persecution of Daoism took place. On one of these Great Assemblies, organised in 547 – to which people from all walks of life were welcome, regardless of their social or religious status – a three-hundred-year-old women showed up with a gift for the emperor. She identified herself as the leader of a Daoist community living on an island mountain called Fuhu 浮鵠 "Floating Snowgoose". All members of that community were over one hundred years old, which was an indication of their successful practice of longevity techniques. The gift was a red sitting mat, made of reed under which red birds often made their nest, which was taken as an auspicious sign.[102] If we assume that Emperor Wu truly received an auspicious gift from the leader of a Daoist community who exaggerated her age for dramatic impact, then we have here another element of proof that no persecution of Daoism occurred. If it did, then it would be unlikely that a Daoist community would attend one of Emperor Wu's Buddhist ceremonies bearing auspicious gifts.

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[94] The *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Kaiyuan Era [713-741] Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures*, T.2154; compiled by Zhisheng 智昇 in 730) says it was compiled in the Tianhou era (*tianhou dai* 天后代) of the Tang dynasty (T.2154.625a12). There is no era name (*nianhao* 年號) like this during the Tang dynasty. Tianhou (Heavenly Empress) is, however, a title of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 684-704). In 674, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649-683) bestowed the title Tianhuang 天皇 (Heavenly Emperor) on himself and the title Tianhou on his wife, Wu Zhao 武曌, the later Empress Wu (see Chen Jinhua, 2002: 125). The author of the anti-Daoist pamphlet *Zhenzheng lun*, was Xuanyi 玄嶷, a converted Daoist who, under the name Du Yi 杜乂, served as Head (*zhu* 主) of the Hongdao Daoist monastery 弘道觀 before his conversion sometime between 690 and 695 (see Forte 1976: 123-124). For more on the date and author of the *Zhenzheng lun*, see Palumbo, 1997.

[95] T.2112.568c17-18.

[96] T.2113.593c23-24.

[97] T.2035.357b1-2.

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[98] Strickmann, 1978: 469.

[99] Strickmann, 1979: 157.

[100] Strickmann, 1979: 157n102.

[101] *Nan shi*, 76: 1896. For some reason, Emperor Wu did not dare to take this elixir. See Jansen, 2001: 108n74.

[102] *Nan shi*, 7: 225. Cf. Chen, 2006: 71.

The relative silence in the Daoist sources pertaining to the time of Emperor Wu then should be sufficient to conclude that, although Emperor Wu probably did not persecute the Daoists, neither did he support them on a scale comparable to his sponsorship of Buddhism, with the exception of certain schools such as that of Tao Hongjing on Mao Shan, which focussed primarily on alchemy and medicine. As we will see in the following chapter, Emperor Wu chose to adopt Buddhism as state religion because it was better suited for his purpose of reinventing the imperial figure as a universal, compassionate ruler. Proclaiming the outright repression of a religion which many of his subjects subscribed to would have run counter to all that he tried to achieve, namely a harmonious society with the emperor as political and spiritual leader. He might have discouraged the practice of Daoism, as he considered it inferior to Buddhism, but that must have been about all the negative measures he took towards the restriction of Daoism.

I.3. Assessment of Emperor Wu's stance towards the Confucian and Daoist traditions

As we have seen in this chapter, Emperor Wu of the Liang was, despite his reputation amongst later Buddhist and Confucian historiographers, not as single-mindedly Buddhist as he is sometimes portrayed to be. He continued to fulfil his Confucian duties as head of state and even made concerted efforts to revive the faltering Confucian tradition. Although he is often stigmatized as a persecutor of Daoism, we have shown that there is little basis to this claim. In fact he lavishly sponsored the Daoist community on Mao Shan and relied on the medical and alchemical expertise of some of its most respected exponents. But Emperor Wu was a pragmatic politician, and he realized when he ascended the throne that, if he continued down the path of his forerunners, his rule would probably end as untimely as theirs. In the practical matters of bureaucracy and legislation there was simply no alternative to the traditional Confucian system, which meant that Emperor Wu was confined to the boundaries set by tradition and by its bearers, the powerful literati families. Emperor Wu's efforts were for the largest part directed towards the training of the lower ranking literati families and their integration into the official bureaucracy. But he also realised that to continue in his role as Confucian head of state would for ever leave him in a vulnerable position, as he was essentially dependant on the Confucian tradition, dominated by the literati families, for his prestige as emperor. For this reason he set out to reform the imperial ritual in a profound way so as to create his own legitimacy as a ruler, independent from the existing system that left the literati families and the emperor co-dependant on one another for their authority as leaders of society. Fully realising the precariousness of his position, Emperor Wu made the first steps towards independent legitimacy in the field of Confucian ritual. He ordered the compilation of a ritual code that would link him directly to the idealized rituals of the Zhou, and return the prerogative of determining proper conduct and ceremony to the imperial figure.

But, as we have observed when discussing Emperor Wu's relation to the Confucian tradition, it was clear from the start that Buddhism was set up to play the most important role in Emperor Wu's reforms. For the day of the coronation ceremony, he chose the eighth day of the fourth month. By the early sixth century, this date was already widely recognized among Buddhists as the birthday of Śākyamuni Buddha. One of the earliest references to this date can be found in the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行夲起經 (*Scripture on the Origin of the Self-Cultivation* [of the Buddha], T.184), which was translated by the Indian Zhu Dali 竺大力 (d.u.) and the

Sogdian Kang Mengxiang康孟詳 (d.u.) at the end of the second century.[103] During the festivities in celebration of the Buddha's birthday it became customary to wash a statue of the Buddha with fragrant water in commemoration of the washing of the Buddha by the gods immediately after his birth.[104] The earliest scripture translated into Chinese that is dedicated to the practice of "bathing the Buddha (*xifo* 洗佛, *guanfo* 灌佛, *yufo* 浴佛)" is the *Guanxi foxingxiang jing* 灌洗佛形象經 (*Scripture on Bathing the Buddha Image*, T.695), translated by Faju 法炬 (fl. 290-306) around the turn of the third century. This scripture states that all Buddha's from the ten directions are born on the eighth day of the fourth month, all of them leave home on this day to embark on their spiritual quest, they all achieve enlightenment on this day, and they all enter *parinirvāṇa* on this day.[105] The earliest record of the performance of the Buddha bathing ceremony also dates from the end of the third century,[106] and another early allusion to it is recorded in the biography of Fotudeng 佛圖澄 (d. 348) in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*, T.2059; compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554) ca. 530).[107] Other references to this ceremony, predating the Liang dynasty, can be found for both northern (*Wei shu*, 114: 3032) and southern dynasties (*Song shu*, 47: 1409, *Nan shi*, 17: 473; 32: 833), which suggests that by the sixth century the concept of the Buddha's birthday was well known in all of China. The significance of Emperor Wu's symbolic choice of date would therefore not have gone unnoticed to the people of his realm. Although there are no other references to Buddhist symbolism in the ceremony that inaugurated the beginning of his reign, it would not be long until Emperor Wu gradually introduced more and more Buddhist elements into the imperial ritual and ideology. The eighth day of the fourth month would be used for the staging of other important events, such as the *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony, which we will discuss in more detail in the following chapter.

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[103] T.184.463c11. On this scripture, see Zürcher, 1972: 36, 333n99. For an overview of the existing translations of the accounts of the Buddha's life at the end of the fifth century, see Mather, 1987: 31-32.

[104] See Zürcher, 1972: 327n53.

[105] T.695.796c16-20.

[106] Zürcher, 1972: 28.

[107] T.2059.384b26. For more on Fotudeng and a full translation of his biography, see Wright, 1948.

CHAPTER II

CREATING A FOUNDATION OF LEGITIMACY: REINVENTING THE IDEOLOGY OF EMPERORSHIP

II.1. The *bodhisattva* ideal

In the *bodhisattva* concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism Emperor Wu found the perfect ideological basis to remould the traditional view on the imperial persona.[108] Emperor Wu, over the years, carefully constructed the foundations for his new image of emperor as *bodhisattva*, starting off with making personal symbolic gestures and gradually building up to more institutionalised events. His choice to ascend the throne on the eighth day of the fourth month, which coincided with the Buddha's birthday, must surely have had a symbolic significance, although to my knowledge no sources mention any Buddhist inspired ceremony to accompany it. It was not until 504, also on the Buddha's birthday, that Emperor Wu publicly denounced his belief in Daoism and announced his conversion to Buddhism. Although he also urged his ministers and members of his family to follow his example, no "official" action was taken.[109] A few days after Emperor Wu's appeal, two officials sent a memorial to the throne in which they declared their wish to convert to Buddhism.[110] In this memorial, the authors already talk about the possible advantage of having an "imperial *bodhisattva*" (*huangdi pusa* 皇帝菩薩) on the throne to lead the people to salvation.[111] From this moment on, the official dynastic histories describe Emperor Wu's increasingly ascetic lifestyle, culminating around his fiftieth birthday, in 513.[112] Renouncing all pleasures of life, Emperor Wu stopped eating meat and fish, and limited himself to only one meal a day, consisting of bean soup and coarse grains. He dressed in cotton garments, ceased all sexual activity, stopped drinking wine and never listened to music again. In 517 Emperor Wu ordered the sacrificial victims in state and court rituals to be replaced by dough effigies, and two years later, after almost two decades on the throne, he extended his prerogative to make changes in the traditional (Confucian) imperial ritual to include the realm of Buddhist ritual, when he took the *bodhisattva* vows in a ceremony of his own design. Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination ritual has been the subject of a detailed study by Andreas Janousch, so I shall limit myself here to discussing some aspects relevant to the present research on the political use of Buddhism by Emperor Wu.[113]

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[108] Several sources refer to Emperor Wu's adoption of titles linked to the *bodhisattva* ideal. The *Nan shi* (7: 206, 219) and *Wei shu* (98: 2187) report that he was addressed as *Huangdi pusa* 皇帝菩薩 (Imperial Bodhisattva). The Buddhist historical work *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (*Comprehensive Records of the Buddha*, T.2035; compiled by Zhipan 志磐 (d.u.) between 1258-1269) cites a memorial in which he is addressed as *Guozhu jiushi pusa* 國主救世菩薩 (*Bodhisattva*-ruler that Saves the World). See T.2035.350b23.

[109] For the discussion on Emperor Wu's alleged repression of Daoism, see chapter one.

By the early sixth century, the *bodhisattva* ideal had firmly lodged itself in the thought-patterns of Chinese Buddhists, and it had become fashionable among laymen and monks alike to take the *bodhisattva* vows (*pusa jie* 菩薩戒) to affirm their aspiration to strive for Buddhahood for the sake of others.[114] The origins of the *bodhisattva* vow in China can be traced to the translations of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (*Sūtra on the Ten Stages [of the Bodhisattva Path]*)[115] and the *Bodhisattvabhūmisūtra* (*Sūtra on the Stages of the Bodhisattva [Path]*),[116] as well as to the indigenous Chinese *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (*Brahmājālasūtra*, T.1484).[117] At the time of Emperor Wu, various methods of *bodhisattva* ordination, based on these and other scriptural sources, were used side by side. Through a careful selection of passages from several of these existing methods, Emperor Wu constructed his own unique *bodhisattva* ordination ritual.[118] The performative aspects of this ritual are preserved in a Dunhuang manuscript entitled *Chujiaren shou pusajie fa* 出家人受菩薩戒法 (*Procedure for Ordaining Those Who Have Left the Family Life in the Bodhisattva Precepts*, Pelliot 2196).[119] The colophon does not allow us to directly link this manuscript to Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination of 519, but as

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[110] T.2103.112b8-c5. This memorial is appended to Emperor Wu's appeal to stop worshiping the teaching of Laozi (*Sheshi Lilao daofa zhao* 捨事李老道法詔), as preserved in the *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.111c24-112c7.

[111] T.2103.112b21-22.

[112] *Liang shu*, 3: 97; *Nan shi*, 7: 223. Although only the *Nan shi* explicitly links this ascetic lifestyle to his believe in Buddhism, it is clear that Emperor Wu wanted to create an aura of sanctity around his person that could fit both the ideal of the *bodhisattva* and that of the sagacious scholar-recluse.

[113] Janousch, 1998: 173-226; 1999. Also see Yan, 1999: 173-225.

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[114] For a study of the *bodhisattva* precepts, see Demiéville, 1930; Kuo, 1994: 37-58.

[115] Translated by Dharmarakṣa (Ch. Zhu fahu 竺法護, ca. 233-311) as *Jianbei yiqie zhide jing* 漸備一切智德經 (T.285) and later by Kumārajīva as *Shizhu jing* 十住經 (T.286). These two sūtras are also included as a chapter in the *Buddhāvataṃ sakasūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經), translated by Buddhabhadra (Ch. Fotuobatuoluo 佛馱跋陀羅, 359-429) between 418 and 422 (Gregory, 1991: 9. See T.278.542a1-548b29) and by Śikṣānanda (Ch. Shicha'nantuo 實叉難陀, 652-710) around 699 (Gregory, 1991: 66. See T.279.178b25-184c29).

[116] Two translations of this text were made in the fifth century. One is the *Pusa di chi jing* 菩薩地持經 (T.1581), translated by Dharmakṣema (Ch. Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385-433) between 414 and 421. The other is the *Pusa shanjie jing* 菩薩善戒經 (T.1582), translated by Guṇavarman (Ch. Qiunabamo 求那跋摩, 367-431) in 431. These two translations are possibly based on two different Indian versions (Groner, 1990: 226).

[117] The *Fanwang jing* was traditionally said to have been translated by Kumārajīva in 406, but it was in fact composed in China, probably around the middle of the fifth century (see Groner, 1990a: 252-257). For a translation, see De Groot, 1983.

[118] For Emperor Wu's scriptural sources, see Janousch, 1998: 177-183; 1999: 116-121.

[119] This manuscript has been transcribed and edited with a short introduction by Tsuchihashi Shūkō, 1968. For a summary of the procedure described in this manuscript, see Janousch, 1999: 123-128.

Andreas Janousch points out, the postscript gives the date of completion as the fifth month of 519, which is only one month after Emperor Wu's ordination ritual. In addition, it mentions that the text was copied by imperial order.[120] If it truly was, then it is very likely that this is the text compiled and used by Emperor Wu himself, for it is improbable that he would endorse the spread of a rival ordination method alongside his'. Contrary to what its title suggests, the *Chujiaren shou pusajie fa* also contains the method for ordaining lay people as *bodhisattva*.[121] In his study of this manuscript, Andreas Janousch notices some striking differences between the ordination ritual of lay people and members of the monastic community. The biggest difference is that, while in the ordination ritual for monks and nuns the precepts are itemised in great detail, in the ordination ritual for the laity the emphasis is not on the precepts themselves (in fact, they are not even summed up before being conferred) but on the religious zeal and devotion expected of the *bodhisattva*-to-be. In the ordination for lay people, the presiding "Master of Ceremonies" (*zhizhe* 智者, lit. "Wise man") expounds the merits and obligations of a *bodhisattva* and asks the candidate whether he or she would be able to perform these duties. The Master of Ceremonies then asks twenty specific questions to test the willingness of the candidate to make sacrifices for the sake of the greater good. These questions include, for example, whether the disciple is willing to sacrifice various parts of his body and even his own life for the sake of all sentient beings, and whether he or she is able to sacrifice his possessions, body, family, and country for the furthering of the Buddhist Teaching.[122] Keeping in mind that this ordination ritual was compiled, and first performed by Emperor Wu, the question about the willingness to sacrifice one's country (more to the point one's rule thereof) for the good of the Buddhist *Dharma* seems to make a lot more sense. In front of a great mass of witnesses, Emperor Wu thus stated his intentions to work for the salvation of all sentient beings and propagate the True *Dharma* in his role as imperial *bodhisattva*. This strategic move broke him free from the shackles of traditional Confucian emperorship, which defined the imperial prestige in terms of a privilege bestowed by Heaven. By propagating his new *bodhisattva* ordination ritual, Emperor Wu wanted to create a new form of community in which everyone – monks and lay people alike – is linked to each other in the universal network of karmic retribution and where everyone is equally able and responsible to accumulate merit that could be distributed to those who might need it. In this new society, religious prestige is measured by the accumulation of merit, and as emperor, Wu was in a more powerful position to accumulate merit than others. It is exactly this accumulation and distribution of merit that was an important aspect of Emperor Wu's use of Buddhism for the purpose of imperial legitimation.

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[120] Janousch, 1999: 116.

[121] Perhaps the original full title was *Zaijia chujia shou pusa jie fa* 在家出家受菩薩戒法, as the text is referred to by the author in the postscript. See Janousch, 1999: 119.

[122] See Janousch, 1999: 123. These questions on the willingness to sacrifice one's body, family, and possessions already hint to the emperor's later ceremonies of self-renunciation (*sheshen* 捨身), wherein Emperor Wu gave himself to the monks as slave only to be ransomed by huge sums of cash. We shall return to the sheshen ceremony in chapter three.

Before we continue, it is necessary to nuance some of Andreas Janousch's conclusions about Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination ritual. When confronted with the above-mentioned differences between the ordination procedure for laity and clergy, he deduces that these differences were deliberately inserted to symbolically make the monastic ideal of the traditional *saṃgha* inferior to the *bodhisattva* ideal.[123] While it is undoubtedly so that the altruistic, universal qualities of bodhisattvahood were pushed forward as the highest attainable ideal, elements of Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination and his broader policies make it unlikely that the ultimate goal was to completely bypass the *saṃgha* as mediators between the secular and the sacred. If it were the goal of Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination ritual to give the laity complete spiritual independence from the *saṃgha*,[124] then why was the presiding Master of Ceremonies a monk? If bodhisattvahood was deemed to be attainable without the mediation of the monastic community, and if the monastic ideal was seen as inferior to the *bodhisattva* ideal, then why did Emperor Wu put on a monk's robe before undergoing the ordination ritual?[125] Despite the fact that final ordination was granted directly by the Buddha without mediation of the Master of Ceremonies who (after having questioned the ordinand on his earnestness and religious zeal) merely acted as a guarantor,[126] the ordinand starts the ceremony by requesting the Master of Ceremonies "the favour of being granted the ordination.[127]" During the course of the ceremony, the ordinand was expected to repeatedly show his reverence for the Master of Ceremonies, a monk, by bowing to him and by touching his feet.[128] Andreas Janousch is right when he says that the *saṃgha* was cast in a role as guardian of the precepts,[129] but this need not be as negative as he interprets it to be, since a great deal of emphasis is placed by Emperor Wu on the observance of these rules of behaviour. Only if people keep to the *bodhisattva* precepts can the ideal of a universal community in which everyone works together to accrue merit be attained. While it is true that the *bodhisattva* ordination ritual of Emperor Wu followed an existing trend that signified a steady departure from the more Indianised model of monastic-oriented Buddhism of previous centuries towards the more lay-oriented, individualistic Chinese Buddhism of later ages,[130] it cannot be maintained that this was its explicit purpose. With the *bodhisattva* ordination ritual, as with every other Buddhist element used in his reforms, Emperor Wu was very meticulous about providing a sound scriptural basis for his claims. In the colophon to the *Chujiaren shou pusajie fa*, Emperor Wu writes:

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[123] Janousch, 1999: 122; 129.

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[124] Ibid., 132.

[125] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.469b24.

[126] Janousch, 1999: 130-131.

[127] Ibid., 123.

[128] Ibid., 123-125.

[129] Ibid., 133.

[130] Ibid., 132n45. Also see Weinstein, 1973: 269-274.

> The sequence compiled here does not necessarily derive from one particular sūtra. [The individual stes] follow what has been translated from sūtras and are substantiated through quotations. Some of the instructions of these sūtras were not complete. [Thus,] I have compared [these scriptural sources] to orally transmitted practices, and, [so] there is a basis for everything. I did not presume to hold to my own privately cherished [views], [which would lead to] unfounded action. Only the order of the compiled [instruction] has been arranged [relying on] my own power to make the “Method by Which Laypeople and Those Who Have Joined the Sangha Receive the Bodhisattva Precepts,” *zaijia chujia shou pusa jie* 在家出家受菩薩戒. [Thus,] I do not dare to denigrate myself. As everything has been compiled and collected by myself, how could I exalt myself [and this ritual]? [On the other hand,] everything in this text is [either] from the sūtras, i.e., is the Buddha’s word, or is from the sayings of the bodhisattvas and is based on their practices. How could I [therefore] slight myself [and this ritual]?[131]

This colophon is an important piece of information, as it describes in the words of emperor Wu himself his strategy of taking elements from different scriptures and pasting them back together (admittedly sometimes out of context at his own discretion, as it was his imperial prerogative to make changes in the realm of imperial ceremony) while adding, where necessary, elements from “orally transmitted practices”. This is nothing more than a fancy way of saying that he took from the scriptures the elements that were useful to his purposes, and if he did not find what he needed, simply added them on the recommendation and authority of his (monastic) advisors. The great care taken in securing scriptural authority for his Buddhist reforms is characteristic for Emperor Wu's methodology. As the *saṃgha* was not only a guardian of the precepts, but of the scriptural tradition as well, Emperor Wu still relied on the exegetical compliance of the members of the monastic community to legitimize his claims in the sphere of Buddhism.

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[131] Original text in Tsuchihashi, 1968: 109. Translation by Janousch, 1998: 181.

To conclude, the reason that the ordination ritual for the laity was so different from that for the clergy, was probably not because it was the intention to lower the prestige of the monastic community below that of the ordained laity, but because they were simply designed for different target audiences. The ordination for monks and nuns focuses more on the technical side of things, such as going over the different precepts for novices, monks and *bodhisattvas*, because this was after all the distinguishing feature of what it meant to be a monk. The ordination for lay people puts the emphasis more on the devotional aspect, because one could not expect all lay people to uphold all of the regulations all of the time in real life situations. More important for these lay people was the expression of their religious zeal, rather than the technicalities of the precepts themselves. As a result of the huge popularity of Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination, the *saṃgha* did come under pressure, but not in the way suggested by Andreas Janousch. It was not the *saṃgha*'s status that became affected by it, but it did increase the pressure on the monastic ideal, which translated into higher demands on the monks' and nuns' behaviour and religious motivation, as we shall see with the propagation of the vegetarian ideal. When so many lay people took the *bodhisattva* vows and strove to uphold the *bodhisattva* precepts, it follows that those who had left the family life in pursuit of spiritual advancement were expected to, at the very least, uphold these same principals. If not, then what was the point of becoming a monk or nun? In other words, the true power of

Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination lay in the fact that it used an existing concept to create a religious community that transcended the boundaries between monks and laymen, and "united the worlds of the secular and the sacred under his all-encompassing rule.[132]" This religious community was bound to each other through the workings of karmic retribution, so all members of this community were called upon to look out for one another by adhering to a set of moral guidelines, captured in the *bodhisattva* vows. But through all this, the *saṃgha* never lost its prestige as an important pillar of the *triratna*, and remained important as a field of merit to Emperor Wu and to all pious laymen.

For now, let us return to Emperor Wu and the political dimension of his *bodhisattva* ordination. A description of Emperor Wu's ordination can be found in the biography of the monk Huiyue 慧約 (450-535), who acted as 'Master of Ceremonies' on the occasion.[133] Although the biography does not go into the details of the ceremony itself, it does reveal some interesting elements. First of all, it says that Emperor Wu "humbled his imperial dignity by bowing down three times in reverence and temporarily changing his imperial robes for a monk's robe (屈萬乘之尊。申在三之敬。暫屏袞服恭受田衣。)". The fact that Emperor Wu discards his imperial robes is a symbolic transition from his role as a secular ruler to that of a spiritual leader.[134] In switching garments, Emperor Wu did not really mean to debase his imperial persona, but aimed at heightening his prestige and extending his influence by assuming the part of a religious saviour figure. Second, it says that Emperor Wu was the very first to be ordained, and on that day another forty-eight thousand people (members of the imperial household, as well as clergy and laity, literati and commoners) were registered (*zhuji* 著籍) as [*bodhisattva*] disciples. If the account of the 519 *bodhisattva* ordination is accurate, this would mean that everyone who took the *bodhisattva* vows was entered into a register. Since there is no mention of this register in other sources, it is impossible to ascertain what the function of such a register might have been. Was a person's real name entered into this register, or was the newly ordained *bodhisattva*'s religious name written down so as to create an alternate community of initiated? Did the *bodhisattva* ordination come with any rights or duties such as exemption of taxes (like an ordained monk or nun) or obligatory financial contributions? Were these registers consulted when it was time to appoint offices or consider promotions? Unfortunately, until some new sources turn up, we may never know the answer to these tantalising questions. Regardless of the fact whether or not these registers were used as an incentive or pressure tool, the massive scale on which the people of the Liang are said to have taken the *bodhisattva* vows suggests that this strategy of Emperor Wu was one of the most successful in the whole campaign for the Buddhification of state and court ritual. Not only Buddhist sources like the biographies of Huiyue and Fayun法雲 (467-529) speak of the large number of people who "followed the fashion of the time (*qushi* 趣時)" and underwent Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination.[135] The official dynastic histories, which generally take a censorious or indifferent stance towards Emperor Wu's Buddhist activities, have records of this as well. Although the *bodhisattva* ordination of Emperor Wu himself is largely

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[132] Ibid., 113.

[133] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.469b21-28. For a translation, see Janousch, 1999: 114-115 (For the reference to Huiyue's role as Master of Ceremonies, see T.2060.464c5). According to the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, Zhizang was also nominated for the job of Master of Ceremonies by the Rectifier of Monks Huichao, but Emperor Wu decided on Huiyue instead (T.2060.467a15-17). This is more than likely because of the fact that Zhizang had foiled Emperor Wu's plans on more than one occasion, such as his attempt to become a lay Rectifier of Monks. For more on the selection of the Master of Ceremonies, see Yan, 1999: 191-199.

[134] Emperor Wu's biography in the *Wei shu* (96: 2172-2188) also explicitly mentions how he consistently exchanged his ritual imperial robes for a monk's robe when performing Buddhist rituals (see *Wei shu*, 96: 2187). The *Nan shi* contains two more examples of Emperor Wu

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dressing in monastic robes during Buddhist gatherings, which suggests that this had become a standard symbolic gesture (see *Nan shi*, 7: 206; 7: 218).

[135] See *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.496b21-28 and T.2060.464c5-14 respectively.

ignored – save for the *Nanshi*, which laconically states: “On the eighth day of the forth month the emperor received the Buddha precepts at the Wu’ai hall.[136]” – the biography sections of both the *Liangshu* and *Nanshi* contain references to people who took the *bodhisattva* vows. The fact that several records of the *bodhisattva* ordination made it into the dynastic histories despite their conservative, anti-Buddhist bias is a sign of the deep penetration of this custom in the society of the time.

In 524, Xiao Yu 蕭昱 (d.u.), a paternal cousin of Emperor Wu, was brought up on charges for casting unauthorised coin money. His family background saved him from execution, but as an alternative he was banished to Linhai 臨海, about 300 km southeast of the capital Jiankang. However, before he was even half way there, Emperor Wu recalled him to the capital, on the condition that he would take the *bodhisattva* vows. Moved by this act of clemency, Xiao Yu changed his behaviour and firmly kept to the precepts, earning the praise and encouragement of Emperor Wu.[137] This incident shows that Emperor Wu’s *bodhisattva* ordination was not merely intended as a tool for imperial legitimation, but was genuinely believed to have the potency to change a person’s behaviour for the better, as this story no doubt was meant to illustrate. In this instance, it also allowed the emperor to camouflage the preferential treatment of one of his relatives as the act of a compassionate *bodhisattva*-emperor.

The biography of Jiang Ge 江革 (d. 535)[138] mentions how:

> 時高祖盛於佛教。朝賢多啟求受戒。[139]
>
> at the time, Emperor Wu was deeply immersed in Buddhism,[140] and many court nobles requested to receive the [*bodhisattva*] precepts.

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[136] *Nan shi*, 6: 197. See Janousch, 1999: 114.

[137] *Liang shu*, 24: 372; *Nan shi*, 51: 1265.

[138] *Liang shu*, 36: 522-526; *Nan shi*, 60: 1473-1477.

[139] *Liang shu*, 36: 524; *Nan shi*, 60: 1475.

Jiang Ge sincerely believed in cause and effect (*yinguo* 因果), but the emperor, who was not aware of this, labelled him a non-believer. In an effort to change Jiang Ge's mind, Wu wrote him a poem called "Awakening the Mind" (*jueyi shi* 覺意詩), which was accompanied by an order that said: "One cannot but believe in retribution in this world. Why should you oppose me like you opposed Yuan Yanming元延明 (d.u.)? [141]" With this question Emperor Wu clearly links the validity of the doctrine of karmic retribution to the legitimacy of his rule as emperor. The reason that Jiang Ge stubbornly refused to serve Yuan Yanming was that he did not recognize him as his legitimate sovereign. If Jiang Ge saw Emperor Wu as his legitimate sovereign, then he should accept the reality of karmic retribution. If he refused to belief in the Buddhist doctrine of cause and consequence, then this would be interpreted as a rejection of the

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[140] As an illustration of how much the official historians frowned upon Emperor Wu's sponsorship of Buddhism, we see that the *Nan shi* uses the much stronger and more negative expression 'deluded by Buddhism' (*huo yu fojiao* 惑於佛教).

[141] When Yuan Faseng 元法僧, governor of Xuzhou 徐州 (in present day northern Jiangsu), changed his allegiance from the Wei to the Liang in 525, he brought the territory of Pengcheng 彭城 with him. Jiang Ge was dispatched by the Liang court to assist Yuan Faseng at Pengcheng, but by the time he got there, it had already been reconquered by Wei troops, and Jiang Ge was captured. Yuan Yanming, the new governor of Xuzhou, heard of his talents and sought to employ him. Jiang Ge, feigning an illness of the feet, did not bow to him. Yanming wanted to punish him by hurting the very feet where Jiang Ge claimed to feel pain, but when he noticed the severity in Jiang Ge's speech and facial expression, he decided not to. In another incident, Jiang Ge scolded one of his fellow captives for cooperating with Yanming. When the latter heard of this, he ordered Jiang Ge to write the text for a dedicational stele and for a sacrificial ceremony. Ge once again refused in protest of his prolonged captivity. Yanming repeatedly pressed him under the threat of suffering, and when, finally, Jiang Ge was brought in for whipping, he turned to Yanming with a stern countenance and said: "I am sixty years old. You cannot kill me without reporting this to your lord. But though I might die on this fortunate day, I swear I will never pick up a brush for you." Realising that he could never break Jiang Ge's spirit, Yanming stopped his attempts to coerce him into submission. A short while later, Jiang Ge was released and sent back to the Liang court with a letter of praise from his former captor (*Liang shu*, 36: 524).

legitimacy of his rule, parallel to the case of Yuan Yanming. Thus, the belief in karmic retribution is seen as proof of loyalty to the emperor and acceptance of the legitimacy of his rule, founded as it was in Buddhist principles. The biography goes on to report that immediately after, Jiang Ge begged to receive the *bodhisattva* precepts, thus clearly pledging his allegiance to Emperor Wu. From this account one cannot help but feel that, at the time of Emperor Wu, taking the *bodhisattva* vows was not always a voluntary decision to make, and political reasons were at least as important as religious motivation. As the biography of Jiang Ge shows, an official who did not take the *bodhisattva* vows was clearly at risk of being labelled a potential political adversary.

Michel Strickmann says that even the Daoist alchemist Tao Hongjing took the *bodhisattva* vows,[142] which, if true, would be another potent example of the socio-political pressure that came along with it. Unfortunately, he does not list a source for this claim, and based on the account in the *Liang shu* and *Nan shi*, it seems that Tao Hongjing did take the five precepts for Buddhist lay people (*wu dajie* 五大戒) on the occasion of his visit to the Aśoka temple in 505, but there is no mention of him taking the *bodhisattva* vows.[143] Since he was favoured by Emperor Wu for his skill in alchemy, Tao Hongjing might have gone through the motions of taken the lay precepts to please his benefactor, but from the correspondence between him and Shen Yue, it is clear that he did not have a particularly high opinion of the Buddhist doctrine of *karman*.[144] It is therefore unlikely that he would have undergone Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination ritual as a sign of his approval.

The *Wei shu*, which is noticeably cynical about Emperor Wu's lavish sponsorship of Buddhism, has the following entry:

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[142] Strickmann, 1978: 471.

[143] *Liang shu*, 51: 743; *Nan shi*, 76: 1899.

[144] T.2103.122b-123a. See Mather, 1988: 138-141.

> 令其王侯子弟皆受佛誡。有事佛精苦者, 輒加以菩薩之號。其臣下奏表上書亦稱衍為皇帝菩薩。衍所部刺史郡守初至官者, 皆責其上禮獻物。多者便云稱職, 所貢微少, 言為弱惰。故其牧守, 在官皆競事聚斂, 劫剝細民, 以自封殖。多妓妾粱肉金綺, 百姓怨苦, 咸不聊生。[145]
>
> [Emperor Wu] ordered his noblemen, sons and brothers to take the Buddhist precepts (most likely the *bodhisattva* precepts). Those who served the Buddha, strove [for good] (Skt.*vīrya*) and underwent hardships (Skt. *duḥkha*) were unceremoniously awarded the title of *bodhisattva*. When his ministers wrote memorials to the throne, they called [Xiao] Yan “imperial *bodhisattva*” (*huangdi pusa*). When the governors and prefects appointed by Yan first took up their office, they were all commanded to make offerings.[146] In many cases it happened that, although a person was competent in his function, when his offerings were small, he was labelled as weak and indolent. Therefore, once Yan’s officials were in office, they all vied with each other in accumulating wealth through heavy taxation, and they plundered and fleeced the populace in order to get themselves appointed to office. While they had many concubines, fine millet, meat, precious metals and silk, the people suffered hardships and had nothing left from which to live.

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[145] *Wei shu*, 96: 2187.

[146] It is not very clear for whom these offerings were destined. If these offerings were meant to be made to the “Imperial Bodhisattva”, it seems unlikely that he would keep them for himself, but rather it can be assumed that these donations would be handed over to Emperor Wu’s various institutions for meritorious works. Another possibility is that the offerings were to be made to the Buddhist monasteries directly, as a sign of allegiance to Emperor Wu’s cause.

Although this description of the influence of Buddhism in the appointment to office is somewhat coloured by anti-Buddhist feelings, there seems to be no reason to assume we have to discard it as totally fictional either. As the account of Jiang Ge shows, officials were sometimes pressed to openly show their support of Buddhism or run the risk of being labelled as potential subversive elements. Therefore there is no reason to assume that those who were a candidate for being appointed to some of the highest offices, such as governor and prefect, were not expected to make massive donations as a token of their allegiance to the Buddhist programme of Emperor Wu. And even if we compensate for possible exaggerations by the author of the *Weishu*, it is quite plausible that some officials sought to heighten their chances of promotion by making large donations to Emperor Wu's cause. It is difficult to ascertain whether these large scale donations put such devastating extra strain on the taxpaying population, since this argument is so reminiscent of the traditional accusation by anti-Buddhists that the sponsoring of Buddhist monasteries is a waste of government resources.[147]

Before we conclude this discussion on the *bodhisattva* precepts, I would like to point out a conflicting source that I came across in my research on the political aspect of the ordinations. The *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 (*Treatise on Discerning the Right*) devotes its entire last chapter to "exposing the falsehoods of Daoism (*chu dao weimiu* 出道偽謬)." Towards the end of this chapter, the author, Falin, encloses Liang Wudi's edict of 504 in which the latter denounces his belief in Daoism and urges others to follow his example. This is followed by a letter written by his sixth son, Xiao Lun 蕭綸 (ca. 503/8-551),[148] in which he asks permission to denounce

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[147] For more on the economics of Emperor Wu's Buddhist ritual programme, see further.

[148] Despite his alleged *bodhisattva* ordination, Xiao Lun appears to have been severely lacking in *bodhisattva* qualities. His biography mentions several incidents in which he humiliates or even murders commoners. He is also credited with having planned several attempts on his father's life, for which he was initially stripped of his rank and status. He was, however, pardoned by his father and reinstated. When Hou Jing invaded the capital, Xiao Lun

Daoism and take the *bodhisattva* precepts (*chi she laozi shou pusa jie wen* 勅捨老子受菩薩戒文).[149] According to Falin, Xiao Lun received permission to “turn away from his misguided beliefs and set out on the right path” on May 5, 505. If this account is reliable, then this would mean that the imperially sanctioned *bodhisattva* ordination came into play shortly after Wu’s denunciation of Daoism, fifteen years before the emperor’s public *bodhisattva* ordination. However, reliability is exactly what this document is lacking, as in 505 Xiao Lun was only two years old at he most.[150] Though not likely, it is still possible that this request was written on the young prince’s behalf. But yet another piece of information contradicts this. Xiao Lun is referred to as the Prince of Shaoling 邵陵王 (a fiefdom of two-thousand households), but he did not receive this title until 514.[151] Both these factors suggest that this document has either been dated incorrectly by Falin, or that it is a forgery, made to convince the rulers of the Tang – who were supporters of Daoism – that there were precedents for members of the imperial family to embrace the Buddhist faith. We can therefore not take Falin’s proof for an early performance of the imperially sanctioned *bodhisattva* ordination into account.

From the examples above, it is clear that, aside from a ritual function, the *bodhisattva* ordination ritual had a political and social dimension as well. Since Emperor Wu had established himself as an imperial

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fled to the Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577), where he was recognized as the Prince of Liang (i.e. rightful successor to the Liang throne), but shortly after he was captured and killed by the Western Wei 西魏 (534-556), who feared he might have been planning an offensive against their own contender for the Liang throne, Xiao Cha 蕭詧 (519-562). For his biography, see *Liang shu*, 29: 431-436; *Nan shi*, 53: 1322-1326. Cf. Buttars, 1998: 269-270, 414-415.

[149] *Bianzheng lun*, T.2110.549c20-550a18.

[150] His precise date of birth is not given in his biography, but we can estimate his approximate year of birth. Xiao Lun was designated as the sixth son of emperor Wu. Xiao Gang 蕭綱, the later Emperor Jianwen 簡文 (r.549-551), was born in 503 as Wudi’s third son. Xiao Yi 蕭繹, Wudi’s seventh son, was born in 508. Therefore Xiao Lun must have been born between 503 and 508 to merit his designation as sixth son.

[151] *Liang shu*, 29: 431.

bodhisattva, his prestige as emperor-saviour now hinged on his ability to accumulate and distribute merit on a scale that was bigger than anyone in the empire or the entire world could muster. In chapter three will shall take a closer look at the different initiatives of Emperor Wu for accumulating merit and explore how he distributed it in large orchestrated events.

II.2. Final [Period of the] Dharma (*mofa* 末法)

Another important element with which Emperor Wu sought to shape his new world vision, was the widespread notion that the Buddhist teaching had entered, or was about to enter, the final phase before its total disappearance from this world. In particular he focused on the role he felt a *bodhisattva*-emperor should assume during this final period, while at the same time carefully avoiding the eschatological imagery which had come to surround this concept. Sometime between 519 and 522, Emperor Wu had conceived of the idea to assert his personal control over the *saṃgha*'s behaviour by proclaiming himself "Lay Rectifier of Monks (*baiyi sengzheng* 白衣僧正)".[152] In the biography of the monk Zhizang智藏 (458-522) we find a rendering of the discussion that ensued after Emperor Wu asked for this monk’s opinion concerning his plan: [153]

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[152] The title of *sengzheng* 僧正 "Rectifier of Monks" was given to the supervisor of the Buddhist *saṃgha*, who was primarily responsible for upkeeping the moral standards of the monks and nuns. The *sengzheng* was recruited from within the *saṃgha* and appointed by the emperor. The term first appeared under the Liang dynasty (see Forte, 2003: 1043-1070). The *baiyi* 白衣 (white-clad) in Emperor Wu's title, refers to his lay status. In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (*Dazhidu lun* 大智度論, T 1509), the term *baiyi* 白衣 ("White Clad", Skt.: *avadātavasana*) refers to a Buddhist lay believer who observes the ten basic precepts, without having been ordained. In China, the habit of wearing white clothes as a characteristic of Buddhist lay devotees was rather unusual. Instead, the symbolism of white clothes became in some way related to prophecies about a future ruler. It does not appear that Emperor Wu intended to use this connotation of the term for propaganda reasons, as later the Sui emperors would. See Seiwert, 2003: 153-157.

> 後以疏聞藏。藏以筆橫轢之告曰。佛法大海非俗人所知。帝覽之不以介意。斯亦拒懷略萬乘**季代**一人。而帝意彌盛。事將施行於世。雖藏後未同。而敕已先被。晚於華光殿設會。眾僧大集。後藏方至。帝曰。比見僧尼多未誦習。白衣僧正不解科條。俗法治之傷於過重。弟子暇日欲自為白衣僧正亦依律立法。此雖是法師之事。然佛亦復付囑國王。向來與諸僧共論。咸言不異。法師意旨如何。藏曰。陛下欲自臨僧事。實光顯正法。但僧尼多不如律。所願垂慈矜恕此事為後。帝曰。弟子此意豈欲苦眾僧耶。正謂俗愚過重。自可依律定之。法師乃令矜恕。此意何在。答曰。陛下誠欲降重從輕。但**末代**眾僧難皆如律。故敢乞矜恕。[154]
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> Later, in a written demand, he asked Zhizang [for his opinion]. Zhizang crossed out the letter with a brush and said: “The vast sea of the Dharma (*dharmasamudra*) is not something a layman can understand.” The emperor, upon inspecting [the reply], did not think it was something he had to take seriously. This was, to him, just another monk who in the **age of decline** (***jidai***) opposed and belittled the emperor. In any case, his mind had been made up to put this measure into effect, even if Zhizang would disagree to the end. So a decree had been issued to arrange an assembly at the Huaguang Hall[155] that evening. The monastic community had already assembled in great numbers, and only later did Zhizang arrive. The

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[153] Zhizang’s biography can be found in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, T.2060.465c7-4467b27. We shall examine the figure of Zhizang and his discussion with Emperor Wu in more detail in chapter four.

[154] T.2060.466b14-b28. For a discussion of this debate, see Janousch, 1999: 137-140.

[155] For more on this hall, see Chen, 2007: 22-26.

emperor said: “If we scrutinize the monks and nuns, [we find] that there are many who are not well versed [in the Buddhist teaching]. If a lay Rectifier of Monks should not understand the regulations [of the *vinaya*], and should want to control them through the use of secular law, they would be harmed by excessive strictness. I, the Buddha’s disciple, will in my spare time assume the role of lay Rectifier of Monks, and shall establish a law codex [for monks and nuns], based on the *vinaya*. Even though this is [normally] the duty of a Dharma master, the Buddha also entrusted it to the king of state. I have hitherto discussed this matter with [members of] the *saṃgha*, and they all expressed the same [support for my plan]. Dharma master, what is your opinion?” Zhizang replied: “Your Majesty wishes to personally supervise the affairs of the monastic community, and this will truly bring splendour to the True Dharma. But even though many monks and nuns do not act in accordance to the vinaya, the vows you made to be compassionate and forgiving are more important than this matter [of punishing them for their wrongdoings]. The emperor said: “How could it be my intention as the Buddha’s disciple to wish hardship on the *saṃgha*? As I just said, excessive strictness is [an attribute] of ignorant laymen. I [on the other hand] can personally bring [the *saṃgha*] to order by relying on the *vinaya* regulations. When you, Dharma master, commanded to be compassionate and forgiving, what did you mean by this?” Zhizang answered: “Your Majesty truly wishes to stop being severe and rather be lenient. However, during the **final period [of the Dharma] (*modai*)** it is nearly impossible for all members of the *saṃgha* to act according to the vinaya. Therefore, I dare to beg you to be compassionate and forgiving.

Embedded in this conversation are important clues to Emperor Wu's ideological justification for assuming control of the monastic community. First, there are the two terms *jidai* 季代 and *modai* 末代, which hint at the use of *mofa* imagery in this debate. Second, we notice how Emperor Wu claims that Buddha himself entrusted the task of regulating the monastic community to the king of state. Before elaborating on these two markers of Emperor Wu's use of *mofa* belief in the shaping of his Buddhist world vision, I will take a few pages to go into the concept of the decline of the Buddhist teaching as it existed at the beginning of the sixth century.[156]

II.2.1. The Final [Period of the] Dharma at the time of Liang Wudi

Since the complex subject of *mofa* cannot possibly be done justice here in a few pages, I shall limit myself to some relevant remarks on the Buddhist concept of decline as it was conceptualised both in institutional and non-institutional Buddhist circles.[157]

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[156] The most up-to-date study of the Buddhist doctrine of decline is that of Nattier (1991). For some interesting comments on Nattier's book, see the review by Hubbard (1993). In his study on the Three Stages (*Sanjie* 三階) movement, Hubbard (2001) also gives an extensive treatment of the rhetorical function of *mofa*. See also Hubbard (1999), Chappell (1980), Lamotte (1958: 210-222), Yamada Ryūjō (1956), Takao (1937).

[157] With the terms "institutional" and "non-institutional" Buddhism, I wish to distinguish between a) Buddhism as it was shaped by an established (mostly metropolitan) clerical elite, who (often in conjunction with the secular authorities) built a canon of scriptures which to them contained the authoritative Buddhist teachings; and b) so-called "popular" Buddhism as it was practiced by the common people, which readily adopted elements from local Chinese cults and practices. It must be said that on more than one occasion the elements of folk belief which sneaked into Buddhism were valorised by the elite doctrinal specialists, and subsequently became part of the mainstream tradition.

Mofa in institutional Buddhist circles

The Buddhist prophesy of its own decline is almost as old as Buddhism itself. Even though the Buddha's teaching was conceived as absolute and unchanging (Skt. *paramārtha*), the fact that it was taught, learned, and practiced by sentient beings meant that it also operated, like these sentient beings, within the conventional realm (Skt. *sam✿vr✿ti*), and was thus transitory (Skt. *anitya*) and subject to causality.

One of the earliest traditions foretelling the eventual extinction of the Dharma is the story of Mahāprajāpatī, the aunt and foster mother of the Buddha.[158] When she asks permission to go forth and become a nun, her request is initially refused by Buddha, but owing to the arbitration of Ānanda, she was in the end granted ordination. However, Buddha warns Ānanda that because of the admittance of women into the order, the true Dharma will only endure for five hundred instead of one thousand years. Unrelated to this anecdote, there are other predictions about the extinction of the Dharma in both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna texts.[159] It can thus be said that the ultimate demise of the Buddhist Dharma was universally accepted throughout the Buddhist community, and was certainly not considered heterodox. It is interesting to see then that many scriptures which formed the basis for these beliefs blame the downfall of Buddhism (though inevitable in any case, due to the working of causality) on the laxity and moral depravity within the *sam✿gha*.[160] The *Mahāparinirvān✿asūtra* translation by Faxian 法顯 (ca. 340- ca. 420),[161] for example, quotes Buddha as saying that after his *nirvān✿a*, eighty years before the True Dharma will be extinguished, evil monks will join up with demons to corrupt and destroy the True Dharma. They will themselves make [fake] scriptures in which they turn right and wrong upside down.[162] It is peculiar that a religion would make prophesies about its own disappearance, let alone hold its own clergy accountable for this demise. As Buddhism gained popularity in China, the latter would be used against it not only by opponents of this non-Chinese religion, but also by sectarian Buddhist milieus who singled out the established clergy as the evil monks who are responsible for the downfall of the Buddhist teaching of which the texts speak.[163]

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[158] For a study on the story of Mahāprajāpatī, see Heirman, 2001: 278-293. See also Nattier, 1991: 28-33.

[159] One of the more famous stories in Hīnayāna literature is that of the King of Kauśāmbī. This story is set in an unspecified future time, when northwest India is attacked by a coalition of foreign kings, and Buddhists everywhere are brutally persecuted. The King of Kauśāmbī will defeat this alliance of anti-Buddhist kings, but fearing the karmic consequences of his bloody military campaign, he will invite all the monks of Jambudvīpa to the capital to attend a great *pos✿adha* ceremony in order to gain merit for himself. At this ceremony, however, a conflict arises between the followers of the last arhat named Sūrata, and those of the last tripit✿aka-master named Śis✿yaka. The following struggle ends in the death of all monks present and with that, the Correct Teaching will disappear from the world until the future Buddha Maitreya will bring it back. For the different versions of this story, see Nattier (1991: 145-207). For other predictions of decline in Hīnayāna, see Chappell (1980: 124-133); Nattier (1991: 27-64 *passim*). Major Mahāyāna texts with reference to the extinction of the Dharma are the *Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapun✿d✿arīka-sūtra)*, *Diamond (Cutter) Sūtra (Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra)* and other major *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures; the *Mahāparinirvān✿a-*

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sūtra, which in its Chinese recension also mentions the Kauśāmbī story (T.374.473c14-474a5); and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra* (Hubbard, 2001: 56).

[160] Not all scriptures that predict a decline of Buddhism offer any explanation of its cause, though. For a short treatment of the reasons for decline, see Nattier, 1991: 119-132.

[161] Three versions of the *Mahāparinirvān✿asūtra* exist in Chinese: (1) the *Da banniyuan jing* 大般泥洹經 in 6 fascicles (T.376), a short, preliminary translation by Faxian 法顯 (? - 422), made between 416 and 418; (2) the *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 in 40 fascicles (T.374), a more complete version, translated by Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (?Dharmaksॐema) (385-433) between 414 and 421 (also called the Northern Text); and (3) the *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 in 36 fascicles (T.375), which is a revision and integration of versions (1) and (2), edited by Huiyan 慧嚴, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 and others during the first half of the Liu Song (420-479) Dynasty (also called the Southern Text). See Demiéville et al., 1978: 47, 243; Mizuno, 1982: 195. For a translation into English of the northern text (T.374), see K. Yamamoto, 1973-1975.

[162] T.376.894c9-12.

[163] The orthodox monks in turn applied the same judgement to the sectarians, blaming them and their heterodox views and interpretations for the sorry state the Buddhist monastic

Besides struggling to cope with the consequences of the decline theory (mainly the question whether it was still possible to attain true insight and correct practice in the time of decline), Chinese Buddhists also looked into the academic question of how the dates for the respective stages in the decline of the Buddhist doctrine were to be calculated. Already early on in India there existed a tradition that after the "golden age" of the Buddha's own lifetime would follow a less favourable period in which it would be increasingly difficult to practice and study the True Teaching, and in which more and more misconceptions would gain currency, as it was no longer possible to check doubtful issues with the teacher. But the stages in the existence of the Buddha's doctrine were not dated the same by everybody, and different timetables of decline existed side by side.[164] Stemming from the traditional Chinese preoccupation with history, these timetables were used by Chinese Buddhists to locate their place in Buddhist history. Later Chinese Buddhist scholars such as Jizang 吉藏 (549-623), Fei Changfang 費長房 (d. after 596), Daoshi 道世 (d. 683),[165] and others would compare all the existing schemes known to them in an attempt to establish a definitive historical timetable of decline,[166] but already from the fifth century there are records of people

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community was in. Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667), for example, saw the widespread distribution of heterodox scriptures (i.e. scriptures that were not officially sanctioned by the established clergy through admission in the catalogues of canonical texts, see note 69) as an evidence that the final period of the Dharma had been reached (T.2149.333c26). See Seiwert, 2003: 132.

[164] For an overview of the existing timetables of decline, see Nattier, 1991: 27-64. Also see Chappell, 1980: 133-135.

[165] For references, see Hubbard, 2001: 68, note 41.

[166] It is to the efforts of these scholars that we owe the scheme of the "three stages (*sanjie* 三階) of the teaching", dividing the post-Buddha era into three periods: a first period of the True Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法), during which the teachings of Buddha are known and practiced in all their purity; a second period of the Semblance Dharma (*xiangfa* 像法), during which religious practice limits itself to the emulation of external forms, but lacks true insight; and a third and

dating a certain historical event, or an historical person in reference to the timetables of decline.[167] Emperor Wu of the Liang is also said to have historically situated Aśvaghoṣa (Ch. Maming 馬鳴; second century CE) at the time of the True Teaching (*zhengfa*) and Nāgārjuna (Ch. Longshu 龍樹; late second century CE) at the time of the Semblance Teaching (*xiangfa*),[168] which proves his familiarity with, and adoption of the widely held Buddhist notion of decline. As we shall see, there was, at the time of Emperor Wu, no uniform terminology to describe the point in time when the Buddhist doctrine is about to disappear from this world, but the belief that this moment was inevitably to come (or had already begun) certainly had currency among all layers of monks and laymen. The noticeable difference between the institutional and non-institutional Buddhist circles was mainly the adding of apocalyptic themes by the latter.

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last period of the Final Dharma (*mofa* 末法) in which even the semblance of religious practice is gone and the world is lost in sin and injustice.

Hubbard compares the development of the Chinese tripartite system of decline to the construction of the *panjiao* 判教 systems. He argues that “the various systems of organizing the teachings along a continuum of decline should be seen as but another variant of *p’an chiao*, including the polemic and/or apologetic hermeneutics of such organizing schemes. That is to say, in the Indian “production” stage of the decline tradition, we are dealing with disparate units of oral and literary tradition deployed in a polemic fashion and not with a coherent or systematized *doctrine* of decline. In China, however, […] the disparate units of the decline tradition were combined and organized until they coalesced and came to be thought of as a coherent system or doctrine of decline. (Hubbard, 2001: 69)” See also Hubbard 1993, 141-144.

[167] See Hubbard, 2001: 66.

[168] In his commentary on the *Bailun* 百論 (Skt. *Śata[ka]śāstra*, *Treatise in One Hundred Verses*, T.1569; attributed to Āryadeva, 3rd century CE), Jizang enumerates some sources with conflicting datings for Nāgārjuna, among which he also mentions the *Fa puti xin yinyuan* 發菩提心因緣 (*The Causes for Uttering [the Vow] of Attaining the Enlightened Mind*) by Emperor Wu of the Liang (T.1827.233a12-13). Unfortunately this text is not extant. See Hubbard, 2001: 66, note 35.

Mofa in non-institutional Buddhism

As the scriptures that formed the basis for the decline-of-Buddhism concept were gradually translated into Chinese, the interest of the Chinese was peaked, and the Buddhist imagery related to the end of Buddhism soon began to mix with indigenous belief systems. The constant interaction and mutual influence which characterised the relationship between Buddhism and Daoism from the very beginning, eventually led to the formation of a mixed Buddho-Daoist eschatology from around the beginning of the fourth century. The general tenor of the time, characterised by a sense of social, political and moral degeneration (which seems to have been triggered by the collapse of the Han Empire and intensified with the conquest of Northern China by non-Chinese nomadic tribes) caused many people to believe that the world was heading for a cataclysmic end, which in turn fuelled the development of new and existing eschatological themes. The imagery and terminology for this eschatology seems to have been largely borrowed from Mahāyāna devotionalism, while Daoism provided the theme and model for the structure as a whole.[169]

E. Zürcher identifies five Buddhist themes which originally had no eschatological or messianic connotations, but got mixed up with Daoist believes to form a Buddho-Daoist hybrid eschatology: the cyclical conception of time, devided into cosmic eras (Skt. *kalpa*, Ch. *jie* 劫), and the periodic destruction of the universe; the prophecies concerning the degeneration and final disappearance of the Buddhist doctrine; the appearance of future Buddhas, in particular Maitreya; the saving powers of *Bodhisattvas*; and the belief that pious believers could be reborn in paradise-like regions outside our universe (for instance Amitābha's "Pure Land" in the West, or Akṣobhya's paradise in the East).[170] These themes were not correlated in a coherent structure, but often contradicted each other.[171] However, under the influence of the existing Daoist tradition,[172] these themes were all to be joined together into a single prophesy of the end of time from around the fourth century: the *mofa* notion (which originally merely implied a state of moral degeneration) was directly linked to the idea of *kalpa*-disasters, and the occurrence of both was bumped up from the distant to the near future. This meant that the disappearance of Buddha's teaching and the consequent moral depravity, ignorance and suffering were merely a prelude to the imminent destruction of the physical world. Similarly, the incarnation of Maitreya was moved forward from a time of prosperity in the distant future to this impending age of doom, and his function was changed from that of a teacher to a powerful Messiah, with the power to deliver the good people from these cosmic disasters.[173]

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[169] Zürcher, 1982b: p.10.

[170] Zürcher, 1982b: 6-10.

Focussing on the element of the *Final Period of the Dharma*, we can say that even though the Buddhist *mofa* thought was not *stricto sensu* eschatological in nature, the perception of it underwent a strong influence from the emerging Buddho-Daoist eschatology. The *(Foshuo) fa miejin jing* 佛說法滅盡經 (*Sūtra on the Annihilation of the Dharma*, T.396; compiled in the late fourth to mid fifth-century by an unknown author)[174] paints a vivid image of the last years of the Buddhist doctrine. In a world corrupted by defilements, demons will join the monastic order to destroy it from the inside. These demons will break every possible precept, slander the

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[171] The descent of the future Buddha Maitreya into this world, for example, was described as taking place in a time of great moral and material prosperity, whereas the *mofa* theme depicts the period after the final disappearance of the doctrine as a time of extreme ignorance, misery and sin.

[172] For a short overview of the Daoist eschatological tradition, see Seiwert, 2003: 80-93. Zürcher (1982: 2-6) also briefly lists the basic concepts in Daoist eschatology. Also see Mollier, 1990.

[173] For more on the Maitreya cult, see Zürcher, 1982b: 13-16; Sponberg & Hardacre, 1988; Deeg, 1999.

[174] The earliest extant catalogue to mention the *Fa miejin jing* is Sengyou's *Chu sanzang jiji* (T.2145.28c18). For further bibliographical details on this text, see Zürcher, 1981: 48, note 20.

Buddha's and *bodhisattvas*, and make life impossible for those still trying to practice the doctrine. They will indulge in commerce with no thought for charity and cause the temples and monasteries to fall into disrepair. This moral depravation will also be accompanied by apocalyptic occurrences such as warfare, famine, floods and epidemics. The length of days will shorten and man's lifespan will decrease.[175] It is obvious that the clerical establishment was not keen on these kinds of scriptures, since they, in essence, ratified the view of many of the opponents of Buddhism, namely that the monks were degenerate and severely lacking in religious fervour. Many titles of apocryphal[176] scriptures with millenarian and messianic content, usually branded as "spurious (*wei* 偽)" or "dubious (*yi* 疑)" in the official catalogues, are littered across the Buddhist bibliographies, their authors warning against their potentially harmful effects.[177] The reason that the *Fa miejin jing* was included in the official Buddhist canon, despite its initial rejection as a "spurious" scripture,[178] was perhaps the fact that it did not mention a time frame in which these catastrophic events were to take place (so it might be said to take place in the distant future) and because it is clearly stated that the ones responsible for the wretched image of the monastic community are the demons who have infiltrated it.

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[175] Several other Chinese Buddhist apocrypha give similar detailed descriptions of the moral degeneration during this final period, for example: *Foshuo danglai bian jing* 佛說當來變經 (*Sūtra on Imminent Changes*, T.395; attributed to Dharmarakṣa, 3rd century?), *Foshuo xiangfa jueyi jing* 佛說像法決疑經 (*Sūtra For Removing Doubts During the Semblance Dharma*, T.2870 ; anon., 5th century?), *Guanding jing* 灌頂經 (*Consecration Sūtra*, T.1331; wrongfully attributed to Śrīmitra, early 6th century. See Strickman, 1990: 90). See Zürcher, 1982b: 17n32; Seiwert, 2003: 129-130.

[176] Despite its Judeo-Christian connotations, the term "apocrypha" is conventionally applied to scriptures of Chinese origin which had no Sanskrit original counterpart. Up to the time when the Buddhist scriptures started to circulate in printed form, hand-copies of these scriptures had to be made. This provided ample opportunity for the creation of new scriptures, which were consequently introduced as translations of Sanskrit or Middle Indic originals, and thus "genuine" sūtras. A more appropriate term, Buswell suggests, might therefore be "indigenous scripture" or "original [Chinese] scripture" (Buswell, 1990: 5). The criteria used by compilers of official catalogues, however, were not so unambiguous, and there are many examples of scriptures from Chinese provenance which made it into the canon of orthodox scriptures, because they were not recognized as such, or because their content was considered harmless or even beneficial. The content or political implications of a text might cause it to be excluded, and it was not uncommon for the same scripture to be judged differently at different times, according to the political situation (Seiwert, 2003: 131-132). For more on Buddhist apocrypha and the function of catalogues with regards to canonisation, see Tokuno [1990: 31-74] and Mizuno, 1982: 111-128. For the relationship between Buddhist apocrypha and political issues, see Zürcher (1982a); Lewis (1990: 207-238); and Forte (1990: 239-249). For more on the creation of Buddhist catalogues, see Drége (1991: 177-193).

The *Fa miejin jing* is a representative example of Six Dynasties eschatological theory, as it contains many of the elements popular during this period, including the appearance of the *bodhisattva*-saviour Yueguang 月光 (T.396.1119b1).[179] Yueguang had at this point already evolved from being only a minor character in an *avadāna* story to being a powerful *bodhisattva*-saviour who, in the final period of the Dharma, appears on this world to restore the True Doctrine for an interlude of fifty-two years, after which the Buddhist Teaching will disappear from this world completely and mankind will be steeped in spiritual darkness.[180] The popularity of Yueguang would later be exploited by both emperor Wen 文 (r. 581-604) of the Sui 隋Dynasty (581-618) and by Wu Zetian武則天 (r. 690-705) for reasons of legitimation,[181] but it is clear from scriptural sources such as the *Fa miejin jing* that this *bodhisattva*-saviour was already the focus of apocalyptic expectations at the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang and before.[182] But before we take a closer look at the ways in which Emperor Wu did or did not make use of these notions of decline of the Buddhist Dharma, it is necessary to examine the terminology used in the conversation between emperor Wu and Zhizang more closely, since the meaning of the terms *jidai* and *modai* is not described in the secondary literature.

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[177] Among these are several scriptures in which Maitreya is associated with eschatological themes. For some examples, see Zürcher, 1982b: 14-16.

[178] While Sengyou listed the *Fa miejin jing* in the category "translator's [name] lost (*shiyi* 失譯)", Fajing 法經 (d.u.), the author of the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 (*Catalogue of Scriptures*, T.2146; compiled in 594), branded it (and other editions of this text with different titles) as a spurious scripture (T.2146.127a2). Only a few years later, Fei Changfang included the *Fa miejin jing* in his *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記 (*Record of the Three Treasures Throughout History*, T.2034; compiled in 597) without even hinting at its possible Chinese origin (T.2034.58c12). However, Fei Changfang is notorious for arbitrarily assigning dates and author's names to texts of uncertain origin for the sake of enhancing the authenticity and credibility of the Buddhist textual transmission (see Mizuno, 1982: 104-106; Tokuno, 1992: 43-47). But except for the critical Daoxuan, who still doubted its authenticity (T.2149.334c21), the *Fa miejin jing* escaped further scrutiny by later cataloguers and was included in the Buddhist canon.

[179] Yueguang is short for Yueguang tongzi 月光童子 (Skt. *Candraprabhakumāra*, "Prince Moonlight"). For an extensive treatment of this figure, see Zürcher (1982b).

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[180] The emergence of Yueguang during the time of the disappearance of the Buddhist doctrine is, in the *Foshuo fa miejin jing*, likened to an oil-lamp that briefly flickers up right before it is extinguished (T.396.1119b4-5). This idea of a final revival of Buddhism before it is extinguished can also be found in other, contemporary scriptures. For references, see Zürcher, 1982b: 28, note 51.

[181] Both Sui Wendi and Wu Zetian had legitimation problems, since they were regarded as members of the imperial family whose emperor they ousted. Because of their family relations, they could not legitimately found a new dynasty of their own, but would be seen by tradition as usurpers, who broke the rightful line of succession. Wu Zetian had the additional problem that she was a woman, and in imperial China, political ethics excluded a woman from assuming supreme power. Wu Zetian was the consort of the third emperor of the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907), Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649-683). When he died, she successively deposed two of her sons and personally took control of the government as Wuhou 武后 “Empress Dowager Wu” until in 690 she declared the founding of her own dynasty, Zhou 周 (690-705). To solve their problem of legitimacy, both emperor Wen and empress Wu made use of Buddhist themes such as the *cakravartin* ideal, relic-veneration and the prophesy of Yueguang (Prince Moonlight). For the political use of Buddhism by emperor Wen, see Wright, 1957; Chen, 2002a: 51-118. For Wu Zetian, see Forte, 1976; Chen, 2002a: 112-148; Chen, 2002b; Guisso, 1978; Deeg, 2001.

[182] See Zürcher, 1982b: 27-29.

II.2.2. Use of the terms *jidai* 季代 and *modai* 末代

In the following section I will show that both the terms *jidai* and *modai* belong to the Buddhist eschatological discourse, which was so popular throughout medieval times in China.

The term jidai 季代

Jidai [183] was not very commonly used, and unfortunately the earliest examples to be found in Buddhist sources all date from well over a century after Liang Wudi's time. Assuming that Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667), the author of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, relied on a contemporary record of events leading up to the discussion between Emperor Wu and Zhizang, this would make it the earliest documented use of the term. It makes sense therefore to see if Daoxuan uses this term elsewhere in his oeuvre, and what he understood by it. Towards the end of his *Shimen guijing yiyi* 釋門歸敬意儀 (*Procedures of Veneration for Buddhists*, completed in 661, T.1896) Daoxuan writes:

> 季代常徒禮敬為切。領余撰銀擬用箴銘。[184]

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[183] Ji 季 is here used in the sense of 'last month (of a season)' and *jidai* as such is probably related to *jishi* 季世, which is used to designate the last, declining years of a dynasty. The closing years of a dynasty are traditionally described as a period of moral depravity on the part of government and officials, when corruption, rebellion and warfare is rampant, and Heaven shows its discontent by way of natural disasters. This aspect of the traditional view of dynastic cyclicity, as we have seen, bears a certain resemblance to the moral depravity and calamities described in Buddhist eschatological writings.

[184] T.1896.868c19.

> During the final period [of the Dharma], the disciples' display of reverence is of the utmost importance, which led me to compile these precious propositions [for correct veneration], using admonitions carved in stone.

This remark of Daoxuan reflects the view that in the final period of the Dharma, it is no longer possible to come to a correct understanding of the True Buddhist Dharma, but the best thing to hope for is accumulating merit through the rigorous practice of the monastic discipline and the austere reverence of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. In the *Ji gujin fodao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡 (*A Collection of Discussions concerning the Buddhist Teaching in Past and Present*, T.2104; compiled in 664) another of Daoxuan's writings, he designates two monks as "*jidai hufa zhi kaishi* 季代護法之開士 (Bodhisattva who defends the Buddhist Dharma during the final period)[185]" and "*jidai zhi bianshi* 季代之辯士 (Disputer of the final era)[186]" respectively. Since there is nothing in the context which links *jidai* to the end of a dynasty or something similar, it is reasonable to assume Daoxuan was referring to a Buddhist concept.

An additional, but even later example of the use of *jidai* can be found in the preface to the *Zhenzheng lun* 甄正論 (*Treatise on Determining the Truth*), in which the author Xuanyi 玄嶷 (d.u.) states:

> 生於季代。心有昏於通理。[187]
>
> Being born in the final period, my heart was ignorant of true insight into the nature of things.

Xuanyi, with this remark, undoubtedly wished to explain the reason for his initial adherence to Daoism. However, it is not certain beyond any doubt that *jidai* here refers to the final period of the Dharma (*mofa*), because, as we will see further on, Empress Wu, who granted Xuanyi's request to become a Buddhist monk and appointed him as *duweina* 都維那 (Skt. *karmadāna*, overseer of monks, responsible for the distribution of duties in a monastery) of the Fo shouji Monastery 佛授記寺 in the capital Luoyang, was opposed to the view that *mofa* had been reached. An innocent, short reference to the final period of the Dharma, like the one made by Xuanyi, might have been tolerated, however, for it did not have any dangerous consequences for the legitimacy of the rule of Empress Wu.

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[185] T.2104.381a13.

[186] T.2104.382b10.

[187] T.2112.559c7.

The term modai 末代

Modai is found much more frequently than *jidai*, and although it also occurs in a context in which it merely refers to the period after Buddha's death, there is an equal amount of instances where it is an allusion to the final period of the Dharma with its eschatological connotations. This broad application of the term *modai* is not a sign of a possible incorrect interpretation. On the contrary, in this sense the use of the term *modai* is comparable to that of the term *mofa* 末法, which, according to J. Nattier, started out as nothing more than a stylistic variant of the term *moshi* 末世 (Skt. *paścimakāla*; "later age", i.e. the period after Buddha's death)[188], but

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[188] According to Nattier the term *mofa* is not a Chinese translation of an Indian Buddhist term or concept, but was rather a stylistic variant of *moshi* 末世, first used by Kumārajīva in some of his translations to better correspond with the terminology of the already familiar concepts of *zhengfa* 正法 (Skt. *saddharma*, True Dharma) and *xiangfa* 像法 (Skt. *saddharma-pratirūpaka*, Semblance [of the True] Dharma). See Nattier, 1991: 103.

With the translation of Buddhist texts in China, a vast number of technical terms had to be transferred into Chinese, including the terms discussed above. The huge linguistic differences between Sanskrit and Chinese provided ample room for reinterpretations, as the characters used for the translation of a certain Sanskrit term often had other connotations besides the meaning used to convey the Sanskrit original. This was also the case for the term *moshi* which was used to translate the Skt. *paścimakāla*. Although the original Sanskrit term referred only to the period following Buddha's death, the use of the Ch. *mo* 末 (with a superlative over time became a focal point for the scattered notions about the eventual disappearance of the Buddha's teaching.[189]

For the sake of brevity, I shall limit myself to some of the more representative examples of the term *modai* to be found in various genres of Buddhist texts. Regrettably, as was the case with *jidai*, these examples all post-date Emperor Wu of the Liang, most of them dating from the sixth and seventh centuries. Still, these examples can give us an indication of how we should perceive *modai* at the time of the Liang dynasty.

In Narendrayaśas' (Ch. Naliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍, 490?-589) translation of the *Samādhirājasūtra* (Ch. *Yuedeng sanmei jing* 月燈三昧經, T. 639; translated in 557)[190] *modai* appears in several of the verses (Ch. *jie* 偈, Skt. *gāthā*). For example:

> 末代可怖時。近於無上道。護持我法藏。 記彼持是經。[191]

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meaning of "end, last, final") for the Skt. *paścima* (which most often has a comparative meaning of "later, subsequent, following") opened the way to the unique interpretation of three distinct periods in the Buddhist Doctrine in Chinese Buddhism.

[189] The vague line between these two connotations of the term *mofa* lasted at least until the formation of the Three Stages School (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教), established by Xinxing 信行 (540-594). In the *Lotus* and *Nirvān*[illegible]*a Sūtra*, *mofa* is used as an equivalent for *moshi* 末世 or *houshi* 後時, which are terms used to refer to the period after Buddha's extinction, rather than as references to a specific period in a formal system of time periods (Hubbard, 2001: 77-79).

[190] Skilton (1999a: 347-8) suggests that Narendrayaśas made his translation of the *Samādhirājasūtra* from a separate Sanskrit recension of the text, which went by the title *Candrapradīpasamādhisūtra*. The change in title, he says, post-dates that of *Samādhirājasūtra* and probably came into vogue as an alternative title because the *sūtra* deals with the enlightenment of Candraprabhakumāra (Ch. Yueguang tongzi 月光童子, Prince Moonlight), who, as we shall see, rose from being an secondary figure in *avadāna* literature to being a prominent saviour figure who was prophesised to be reborn in China. For more on the *Samādhirājasūtra*, see Skilton 1999a and 1999b.

[191] T.639.591a8-9.

In the final period, in this terrifying age, keep close to the supreme way [of Buddha]. Protect and keep my storehouse of Buddhadharma, keep this in mind and sustain this *sūtra*.

於此末代惡世時。斯為最勝上供養。[192]
In this final period, in this evil time, this is the supreme offering (Skt. *pūjā*).

彼見彌勒佛。若於末代時。持於此經者。得上愛樂心。[193]
Those who see the Buddha Maitreya, even if they [live] in the final period, if they keep to this *sūtra*, they will obtain a supreme loving, good mind.

末代怖畏時。難可得修行。若得聞此經。便得無盡辯。[194]
In the final age, in this fearful time, when it is difficult to obtain the proper conduct, if one hears this *sūtra*, one will obtain inexhaustible powers of discrimination.

於末代惡世中。正戒正法毀壞時。[195]
In the evil time of the final age, in the time when the True precepts and the True Dharma are destroyed […]

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[192] T.639.563a21.

[193] Ibid., p.594b7-8.

[194] Ibid., p.594b13-14.

[195] Ibid., p.573c13-14.

There are many more references to the final period of the Dharma in Narendrayaśas' translation, and even though there is no statement of a distinct third period of *mofa*, such as was expounded by Huisi only a year later,[196] Chappell (1980: 146) interprets these references in a similar way, and claims that his "message of impending doom left an indelible mark on Chinese Buddhists at the end of the sixth century, and seemed to be quickly corroborated by the persecution of the Northern Chou.[197]"

The Tiantai 天台 patriarch Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597) usually avoided any mention of the end of the Dharma in his commentaries,[198] but in the *Weimo jing xuanshu* 維摩經玄疏 (*Profound Commentary on the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, T.1777; written shortly before his death) he does show himself to be a disciple of his master, Huisi:

> 異外國外人各說一究竟道。末代時有師子身內蟲法師禪師。云莊老教與佛教一種。[199]
>
> In other countries, other people will each proclaim their very own ultimate (Skt. *uttarā*) doctrine. In the final period the Buddhist Teaching will be destroyed from the inside,[200] and

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[196] The theory of the three stages of the Dharma was for the first time elaborated in the *Nanyue Si da chanshi li shiyuan wen* 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文 (*Document of the Great Chan-master [Hui]si on Establishing the Vow*, T.1933), written by Huisi 慧思 (515-577), the second patriarch of the Tiantai 天台 school, and said to have been completed in 559 AD. Huisi was actually one of the few preachers who openly declared that the world had already entered the Final Period. In the *Nanyue Si da chanshi li shiyuan wen* he states that he was born in the 82nd year of *mofa* (T.1933.787a5). See Magnin, 1979: 104-116.

[197] For more on Narendrayaśas and the "Three Stages" concept, see Chappell, 1980: 145-147. Also Hubbard 2001: 62, n24.

[198] Lewis 1990: 212, 234n16.

[199] *Weimo jing xuanshu*, T.1777.530b14-15.

[200] The expression "*shizi shen nei chong* 師子身內蟲 (the lion gets eaten by worms from the inside)" goes back to Narendrayaśas' translation of the *Lianhuamian jing* 蓮華面經 (T.386; translated in 584) in which Buddha tells Ānanda:

> dharma masters and meditation masters will say that the Zhuang-Lao Teaching and the Buddhist Teaching are the same.

Most of Zhiyi’s other writings lack the connotation of *modai* in the sense of a period of degeneration of Buddha’s teaching. Instead it is occasionally used to refer to the later period of Buddha’s sermonising career, when,

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> 譬如師子命絕身死。若空若地若水若陸。所有眾生不敢食彼師子身肉。唯師子身自生諸虫。還自噉食師子之肉。阿難。我之佛法非餘能壞。是我法中諸惡比丘猶如毒刺。破我三阿僧祇劫積行勤苦所集佛法。(T.386.1072c23-28)
> When a lion dies, none of the sentient beings which live in the sky, on earth, in water, or on the land will dare eat its body. Only from the lion's body itself will issue forth insects which will eat the lion's flesh. Ananda, my teaching cannot be destroyed by others [non-Buddhists]. It is evil monks from within the teaching who, like a creeping poison, will destroy the teaching which I collected through accumulating practice and working hard for three great numberless aeons.

This expression can also be found in the *Renwang banruo boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經 (*Transcendent Wisdom Scripture of Humane Kings*, T.245; attributed to Kumārajīva, but written ca. 470-490) and *Renwang huguo banruo boluomiduo jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經 (*Transcendent Wisdom Scripture of Humane Kings Who Wish to Protect Their States*, T.246; “retranslated” by Bukong 不空 (Skt. Amoghavajra; 705-774) around the middle of the eighth century), where Buddha warns King Prasenajit:

> 大王我滅度後四部弟子。一切國王王子百官。乃是任持護三寶者。而自破滅如師子身中虫。自食師子肉非外道也。
> Great King! After my extinction the four classes of disciples, all the kings of states, the princes, and the one hundred officers and those appointed to hold and protect the Three Jewels will themselves destroy [the Teaching] as worms in a lion’s body consume his own flesh. [And these] are not the heterodox [teachers]! (T.246.844b23-25; see Orzech 1998: 272 for translation)

The influence of the fifth-cenury version of the *Renwang jing* on Zhiyi will be touched upon a little further.

from the viewpoint of the *panjiao* 判教 system,[201] he revealed the most complicated, and most correct teaching.[202] It is important to note that the *Weimo jing xuanshu* is in fact the only work which was written down by Zhiyi himself. All other works attributed to him were actually put on paper by his disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561-632), and some of them were not compiled in their final form until 27 years after the original lecture.[203] Therefore there is no sure way of attributing specific passages or ideas to either Zhiyi or Guanding,[204] except for the *Weimo jing xuanshu*. To me it does not seem unlikely that the silence of Zhiyi concerning the concept of a degeneration of the Dharma is due to the filtering out of these elements (which were, at the time, regarded as potentially disruptive by orthodox Buddhism) by Guanding. Given that Zhiyi's mentor, Huisi, was an avid proponent of the *mofa* thought, it would be rather peculiar that Zhiyi had no opinions about the subject. In fact, Orzech has shown that Zhiyi's thought was influenced by the fifth-century recension of the *Renwang jing* (*Scripture for Humane Kings*), a scripture with very overt references to the demise of the Buddhist Teaching. The correspondence between Zhiyi and Yang Guang 楊廣 (569-618), the future Emperor Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 (r.

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[201] *Panjiao*, or 'classification of the periods of teaching' started as early as the mid-fifth century with the monk Huiguan 慧觀 (d. between 424 and 453, T.2059.368b25). Faced with a large body of Buddhist scriptures which contained numerous internal contradictions and discrepancies, but were all believed to be the word of Buddha, the Chinese Buddhists attempted to bring order to this situation by dividing the Buddha's teachings into chronological periods. In the earlier periods, Buddha had to adapt to the level of understanding of his audience and preached a simplified version of the doctrine. As the understanding of his audience grew, he revealed more difficult and abstract facets of the doctrine until at last the ultimate truth had been revealed.

[202] For more on Zhiyi's system of *panjiao*, see Ch'en 1964: 305-311.

[203] T.1718.1b20-22.

[204] See Swanson's review of Hirai Shun'ei 平井俊榮, *Hokke mongu no seiritsu ni kansuru kenkyū* 法華文句の成立 に関する研究 [Studies on the formation of the *Fa hua wen chu*], Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1985; in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14: 2-3 (1987), pp. 271-273.

604-617),[205] is strewn with references to the *Renwang jing*, and quotations from the *Renwang jing* can be found throughout his works, mainly as a basis for the construction of his Three Truths (*san di* 三諦) concept.[206] Based on these facts, I suggest that the quotation from Zhiyi's *Weimo jing xuanshu*, using the term *modai*, should indeed be interpreted as a reference to a period of degeneration of the Buddhist Teaching, similar to the concept of a final period (*mofa*).

Another Tiantai patriarch, Zhanran 湛然(711-782), in a review of Zhiyi's commentary of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, writes:

> 如來大慈平等說法。非止但為現在亦欲遠被正像末代有緣。[207]
> The Tathāgata, in his great compassion, expounded the Dharma to all beings equally. It does not cease to be, but its manifestation does undergo the effects of the periods of True Dharma, Semblance Dharma and Final Dharma.

The context here leaves little doubt as to the use of *modai*, as it is juxtaposed to the terms *zheng[fa]* and *xiang[fa].*

In Śubhakarasim✿ha's (Ch. Shanwuwei 善無畏, 635-735)[208] *Da piluzhena chengfo jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏 (*Commentary on the Sūtra on Mahāvairocana's Attaining Buddhahood*, T.1796), written down by his disciple Yixing 一行 (683-727),[209] we find the following passage:

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[205] For more on the relationship between Emperor Yang and Zhiyi, see Xiong, 2006: 162-165.

[206] See Orzech, 1998: 122-123; Swanson, 1989: 38-56.

[207] *Weimo jing lüeshu* 維摩經略疏 (Summary of [Zhiyi's] Commentary on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*) T.1778.563b16-17.

[208] Śubhakarasim✿ha was one of the three eighth-century "Tantric masters (Ch. *asheli* 阿闍梨, Skt. *ācārya*)" who were said to have brought Tantric Buddhism to China. The other two were Vajrabodhi (Ch. Jin'gangzhi 金剛智, 671-741) and Amoghavajra, who, as we have seen, made a new translation of the *Renwang jing*.

[209] Yixing, who was a Chan monk before he became Śubhakarasim✿ha's disciple, was very influential at the Tang court during the last ten years of his life. As a gifted mathematician and astronomer, he was charged with revising the faulty calendar. He built a water-powered

> 然此妙法。如來在世猶多怨疾。何況末代惡世之中。[210]
>
> But even at the time when Buddha was still alive, this wonderful Dharma (*saddharma*) was much hated and despised. How much more is this the case in this evil world of the final period!

Once again it is not completely certain if *modai* is to be interpreted as the final period of the declining Dharma, or merely as the 'later period', i.e. the period following Buddha's death. Two factors plead the case of the former: first of all, the period following Buddha's death is mostly referred to with the term *houshi* 後世/時.[211] And second, the period following Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* was originally not referred to in pejorative terms. The additional designation of this period as evil in the example above, suggests that a specific period, namely the final period of the existence of the Dharma in this world, is intended.

An edict issued by Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-649) of the Tang dynasty (618-907) in 644 opens with the following statement:

> 如來滅度以末代澆浮付囑國王大臣護持佛法。[212]

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armillary sphere (celestial globe) to observe the movements of the sun, the moon, and the five known planets. Yixing also organised an expedition to the Southern Seas to chart the stars in the southern skies, which were not discernable in China, and is reportedly the first man in the world to have calculated the length of a meridian degree. See Ch'en, 1964: 481-482.

[210] T.1796.787b27-28.

[211] The possible difference between the two terms *modai* and *houshi* can be seen in Narendrayaśas' translation of the *Samādhirājasūtra*, where it says: 若於後世末代時 (T.639.590a2). Here *modai* is probably to be seen as a subdivision of *houshi*. In other words, the translation is most likely: "In the last period of the later age [following Buddha's death]".

[212] *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略 (*Brief Study of Buddhist History*, compiled by Jue'an 覺岸 in 1354) T.2037.815c3.

> After the Tathāgata's extinction [into *nirvāṇa*], because of the decadent ways [of the *saṃgha*] during the final period, the kings of states and the great officers were entrusted with protecting and maintaining the *Buddhadharma*.

This initial sentence is most likely based on the fifth-century version of the *Renwang jing*,[213] which Emperor Taizong probably knew fairly well. In 630 he had ordered all the monks of the capital to recite the *Renwang jing* on the twenty-seventh day of each month in order to secure blessings for the state.[214] Considering the nature of the *Renwang jing*, with its explicit allusions to the decline of the Dharma, there is little doubt as to the use of *modai* here.

To conclude our search for usage of the term *modai*, let us turn to the writings of Daoxuan, author of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of Zhizang, whose discussion with Emperor Wu of the Liang was the reason for our search, and Daoshi, a close collaborator of Daoxuan at the Ximing monastery 西明寺. In the *Zhujing yaoji* 諸經要集 (*Essentials of the Sūtras*, T.2123), Daoshi explains the provenance of the term *triratna* (Ch. Sanbao 三寶, "Three Jewels", i.e. Buddha, *Dharma*, and *Saṃgha*):

> 不為世間八法所改。故名為寶。又具六意。故須敬也。一佛能誨示。法是良藥。僧能傳通。皆利益於我。報恩故敬。二末代惡時。傳法不易。請威加護。故須致敬。[…][215]
>
> As they are not changed by the eight influences of passion,[216] they are called "jewels". They also embody six ideas for which

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[213] Cf. T.245.833b13-16. He simply replaces the lengthy "In the eighty, eight-hundred, eight-thousand years [after my extinction], when there is no Buddha, no Dharma, no Saṃgha, no male believers and no female believers 八十年八百年八千年中，無佛無法無僧，無信男無信女時" with the term *modai*.

[214] *Fozu tongji*, T.2035.363b28-29.

[215] *Zhujing yaoji*, T.2123.1c16-19.

> they should be revered. First, Buddha is good at teaching, the *Dharma* is a good medicine, and the *Saṃgha* is good at passing on knowledge. They all benefit me, and in acknowledgement I revere them. Second, in the evil age of the final period, it is not easy to transmit the *Dharma*. I call on [the Three Jewels] for strength and protection, and therefore should extend them my reverence. […]

In the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (*Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Law*, T.2122; compiled in 668), Daoshi devotes an entire section to the "extinction of the Law (*famie* 法滅),[217]" which he opens with the assertion: "The True [Dharma] and Semblence [Dharma] have come to pass, and the Teaching has drifted into the final period [of decline] 正像推移教流末代.[218]" Further references to the *mofa* period can be found in passages in the *Fayuan zhulin* discussing Daoxuan's visionary experience, in which the gods came to him in a dream to instruct him.[219] As a *vinaya* master,

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[216] *Bafa* 八法 (Eight dharmas) is here a synonym for *bafeng* 八風 (Eight winds, or influences which stir up the passions, namely gain-loss, defamation-eulogy, praise-ridicule, sorrow-joy).

[217] *Fayuan zhulin*, T.2122.1005a5-1013a3.

[218] Ibid., p.1005a10.

[219] In the second month of the year 667, only eight months before his death, Daoxuan claimed to have had a vision in which the Four Heavenly Kings appeared to him and instructed him. References to the divine instruction appear in several writings of Daoxuan's own hand, and in the *Fayuan zhulin* (for references to relevant passages, see Shinohara, 2000: 301-302, 304). The quotations take the form of newly revealed sermons of the Buddha and tell the stories about various objects used by the Buddha during his life time. In the story about Buddha's robe (Ch. *sengjiali* 僧伽梨, Sk. *saṃghātī*), which had previously belonged to Buddha Kāśyapa and was given to him by a tree deity at the beginning of his search for enlightenment, it is told that, before entering *nirvāṇa*, Buddha circled the ordination platform (*jietan* 戒壇) at Jetavana three times, wearing his robe, and then "entrusted it to the sentient beings who uphold my Teaching during the Final Period of the Dharma 付我住持末法眾生 (T.2122.560c8, paraphrased from the translation of this passage by Shinohara, 2000: 309-313)." In another passage, it is said that the Buddha's robe will be placed at the monks' ordination platform for six years and then at the nuns' ordination platform for another six

Daoxuan not only sought to remedy the lack of discipline so rampant among members of the monastic community, but, like so many others, wanted to explain the reason behind it. And, like so many others, he got caught up in the concept of the declining Dharma. Apparently Daoxuan believed that the world had entered the fourth of five stages in the decline of the Dharma, and that its existence could be prolonged for a maximum of two hundred years through the rigorous practice of the monastic discipline.[220] In the *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (*A Transcription of Abridged Revisions in the Four-Part Vinaya*, T.1804; compiled in 626), Daoxuan's most prominent commentary on the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya*, he uses both the terms *modai* and *mofa* in a comparable context:

> 今末法中善根淺薄不感聖人示導。[221]
>
> In this final period of the Dharma (*mofa*), the roots of goodness are very thin and people are not receptive to the guidance of the sages.
>
> 今時末法造寺唯有處所事得受用。[222]
>
> Nowadays, in the final period of the Dharma (*mofa*), when people build a monastery, it is merely a dwelling place, designed for comfort.
>
> 末代之中此法殆盡。[223]

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years to guard against the rise of evil monks and nuns during the age of decline, and to serve as a relic of the True Dharma (T.2122.589b26-29). Shinohara (2000: 339) hints at a possible connection between this "revealed" sermon and Daoxuan's efforts towards the end of his life to establish a renewed Mahāyāna ordination platform. For more on Daoxuan's efforts to revive Buddhist monasticism, see Chen Huaiyu, 2005 (pp. 114-158 in particular).

[220] See Takao, 1937a: 12-16.

[221] *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao*, T.1804.141b7.

[222] Ibid., p.134c23.

> In the final period (*modai*) this Dharma is all but gone.

In the biography of Tanyan 曇延 (516-588)[224], included in Daoxuan's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (T.2060.488a3-489c25), we also find a letter that Tanyan left to Emperor Wen of the Sui close to his death:

> 春秋七十有三矣。臨終遺啟文帝曰。延逢法王御世偏荷深恩。[…]但末代凡僧雖不如法。簡善度之自招勝福。[225]
>
> At age 73, when close to his death, [Tanyan] wrote to Emperor Wen in a bequeathed letter: "I, Yan, having [lived at a time] when a Dharma-king ruled the world, am, from my side, grateful for your great kindness. […] However, during this final period (*modai*), not all monks act in accordance with the Dharma. You should select those who are good and save/examine them (deliver them), so you will bring unsurpassed blessings upon yourself."

And in the *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (*An Expansion of the Collection for the Dissemination and Clarification [of Buddhism]*, T.2103; compiled in 664), as a final example, is the following passage:

> 末代門學師心者多。不思被忍辱之衣示福田之相。縱恣饕餮以酒肉為身先。[226]

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[223] T.1804.17b17.

[224] Tanyan was held in high esteem by Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, who built a temple for Tanyan and his disciples and named it after him. He also named two gates of the new capital after Tanyan (Yanxing gate 延興門 and Yanping gate 延平門), an honour, Daoxuan comments, that was without precedent among Buddhist monks in China (T.2060.489a8-12). See Chen Jinhua, 2002: 36-37.

[225] T.2060.489b16-19.

[226] T.2103.292b18-21.

> In the final period (*modai*) there are many of the disciples who follow their impulses. They do not think about covering themselves in the robe of forbearance (Ch. *renru* 忍辱, Skt. *kṣānti*) and projecting the appearance of a field of merit. They give free rein to there passions, they are greedy, and they consider wine and meat as the basic requirements for their bodies.

From all these examples it is clear that both the terms *jidai* 季代 and *modai* 末代 were, at the time of Liang Wudi and after, often used to refer to an advanced stage in the decline of the Buddhist dharma when monks and nuns no longer follow the precepts and the True Teaching is difficult, or even impossible to practise. Emperor Wu incorporated this notion of decline into his world vision, because the moral laxity of the monks described in the Buddhist scriptures themselves, rather than by the opponents of Buddhism, provided him with the ideological justification for assuming the role of head of the monastic community without debunking his image of Buddhist patron. Even though Emperor Wu was not the first Chinese emperor to attempt to impose restrictions on the conduct of the members of the clergy,[227] he was the first one, to my knowledge, who motivated his proposed action through the use of *mofa*, and thus Buddhist, ideology, rather than to hinge on his secular authority. In other words, he took a popular Buddhist concept, and tried to use it to his advantage.

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[227] In 493, Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (r. 471-500) of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534) issued an edict calling for the compilation of a clerical code (*sengzhi* 僧制) in 49 articles (Wei Shou, *Wei shu* 114: Vol. 8, 3039). Since this compilation is not extant, we cannot know for certain whether these regulations were part of the secular law or merely a selection of monastic rules compiled by imperial decree to entice monks and nuns to follow the monastic discipline more strictly.

II.2.3. Emperor Wu and his application of *mofa* thought

So what exactly did Emperor Wu want to achieve by referring to the decline of Buddhism? First of all, I wish to draw attention to the fact that Emperor Wu did not, in his discussion with the monk Zhizang, mention the age of decline directly, only as a comment on Zhizang's refusal to sign his proposal. However, the imagery he uses in the debate is that of undisciplined monks who clearly need to be chastised. Although this theme in itself is not exclusive to *mofa* ideology, the way in which Emperor Wu shrugs off Zhizang's refusal to ratify his proposal to become lay Rectifier of Monks as just another example of a monk who in the final age opposes and disrespects the emperor,[228] together with Zhizang's use of *mofa* imagery in his rebuttals,[229] strongly suggests that this was a key element in Emperor Wu's justification for appointing himself as (disciplinary) head of the monastic community. Since the circular in which Emperor Wu asked the monks for their opinion regarding his plans is not extant, we cannot be sure whether he definitely referred to the final period of the Dharma in such clear terms. Fortunately, the discussion between Emperor Wu and Zhizang contains some additional elements which give a glimpse into the broader picture. Besides making use of the, at that time, widely popular notion of the decline of the Buddhist teaching to rationalise his decision to take over responsibility for governing the Buddhist monastic community, Emperor Wu also seems to seek some scriptural basis to further support his claim. Twice in the discussion he can be quoted as saying that the Buddha has entrusted the ruler of the country with the duty of governing the *saṃgha*:

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[228] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.466b16.

[229] Zhizang grants that the emperor's personal supervision of monastic affairs would help to revitalize the True Dharma (*zhengfa*) (T.2060.466b23-24), but warns that in the final age (*modai*) it is all but impossible for all monks to act according to the *vinaya* (T.2060.466b28).

> 此雖是法師之事。然佛亦復付囑國王。[230]
>
> Even though this is the duty of a Master of the Dharma, the Buddha also entrusted it to the king of state (*fuzhu guowang*).

> 帝曰。惟見**付囑國王**治之。[231]
>
> Emperor [Wu] said: "I have only seen [in the scriptures] that [Buddha] entrusted the king of state (*fuzhu guowang*) to govern them (i.e. the *saṃgha*)."

Emperor Wu repeats this same statement in the beginning of his prohibition on meat and alcohol.[232] To my knowledge there is only one scripture that so emphatically places the care for the Buddha's legacy in the hands of secular rulers, and that is the *Scripture of Humane Kings*.[233] In fact, the wording used by Emperor Wu seems to be drawn directly from this scripture, for in the "Entrustment (zhulei 囑累)" chapter, Buddha tells King Prasenajit (Ch. Bosini 波斯匿):

> 我誡敕汝等，吾滅度後，八十年八百年八千年中，無佛無法無僧，無信男無信女時，此經三寶，**付囑諸國王。**[234]

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[230] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.466b21-22.

[231] Ibid., p.466c2.

[232] See further.

[233] With *Scripture of Humane Kings*, I refer to the fifth and eighth century versions of the *Renwang jing* 仁王經(T.245 and T.246), an indigenous Chinese scripture which passed itself off as an Indian original of the *Prajñāpāramitā* genre (see note 93). For a study and translation of this scripture, see Orzech, 1998.

[234] T.245.833b17.

> Now let me caution you and the others. In the eighty, eight hundred, and eight thousand years after my extinction, when there will [eventually] be no more Buddha, Dharma and Community, nor any male or female believers (*upāsaka* and *upāsikā*), this scripture, together with the Three Jewels, will be entrusted to all the kings of states (*fuzhu zhu guowang*).

But if Emperor Wu draws from the *Scripture of Humane Kings* for scriptural authority, then why does he not mention it by title? What is more, in the preface to his commentary on the *Mahāprajñapāramitā-sūtra*,[235] Emperor Wu even rejected the *Scripture of Humane Kings* as a suspect scripture (*yi jing* 疑經).[236] It is clear that Emperor Wu, on the one hand, could have wished for no better scripture to quote than the *Scripture for Humane Kings* as an authoritative source for proclaiming his duty as a ruler to uphold the *Buddhadharma* in the age of decline (in this case by correcting the behaviour of the monks and nuns). On the other hand he must have deemed the nature of the text incompatible with his goals. Orzech has shown how the *Scripture for Humane Kings*, as an apocryphal text, was the product of the social and political climate in North China during the

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[235] Emperor Wu's commentary on the *Mahāprajñapāramitā-sūtra* is not extant, but its preface is preserved in the *Chu sanzang jiji* (T.2145.53b28-54c11), which gives the title of Emperor Wu's commentary as *Dapin zhujing* 大品注經 (T.2145.52a19). Later catalogues, such as *Da Tang neidian lu* (T 2149.55.266c21) and *Lidai sanbao ji* (T 2034.49.99b25) listed it under the title *Mohe banruo boluomi zi zhujing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜子注經. Elsewhere we can find further evidence that the commentary is based on the *Dapin [bore] jing* 大品[般若]經 (T.2060.426c27), which is an alternative title for the extended, 27 fascicle edition of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 (*Mahāprajñapāramitā-sūtra*), translated by Kumārajīva in 404 (T.223). Emperor Wu attached a great deal of importance to this *sūtra*, because he believed that copying and reciting this text would confer blessings upon his deceased parents and protect the empire from ill fortune. See Yan Shangwen, 1998: 101.

[236] T.2145.54b20. Sengyou himself seems to give the *Scripture for Humane Kings* the benefit of the doubt, as he merely lists it under the category "translator's [name] lost (*shi yi* 失譯)" (T.2145.29c19).

Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534), in particular the growing state control over Buddhism promoted by the likes of Tanyao 曇曜 (fifth century)[237] in the aftermath of the great persecution of 445.[238] In essence, the scripture attempted to break away from the relationship between Buddhism and the state as it existed in the Northern Wei, where the emperor was identified with the Buddha[239] and monastic institutions were made dependant on state institutions for administration. It therefore ambiguously equated the ruler with a *cakravartin* and a *bodhisattva* (promising him divine protection for his state and for his own person), while at the same blaming the ultimate demise of the Buddhist Dharma on the overregulation of the *sam❁gha* by the state. As we have seen, the decline of Buddhism was a popular theme at this time, and the scenes described in the *Scripture for Humane Kings* are packed with eschatological material popular during the Six Dynasties, such as, for instance, the figure of “Prince Moonlight (Yueguang)”. The *Scripture for Humane Kings* is, however, the only text that explicitly blames the disappearance of Buddhism on the restrictive measures decreed by temporal rulers.[240]

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[237] Tanyao, who secretly continued to wear his monastic robe during the persecution of Emperor Taiwu 太武 (r. 424-452), was later appointed “Superintendent of Monks (*shamen tong* 沙門統)” by Emperor Wencheng 文成 (r. 452-456), and is seen as the architect of state Buddhism during the Wei dynasty. One of his more well-known measures is the establishment of the Saṃgha (sengqihu 僧祇戶) and Buddha Households (fotuhu 佛圖戶), which is one of the things the Scripture of Humane Kings reacted against (Orzech, 1998: 120). For more on Tanyao and the Saṃgha and Buddha Households, see Tsukamoto, 1937 (a portion of this work concerning Tanyao has been translated into English by Sargent, 1957); Ch’en, 1964: 153-158; Gernet, 1995: 100-105; Orzech, 1998: 113-115, 120-121.

[131] See Orzech, 1998: 107-121.

[132] The Superintendent of Monks (then still called *daoren tong* 道人統) Faguo 法果 (d. 419) stated that the emperor was a present-day Tathāgata whom should be honoured in the highest by all *śramaṇas*. He always saluted the emperor with his palms pressed together, explaining his actions to other people (monks) by saying: “能鴻道者人王也, 我非拜天子, 乃是禮佛耳 The person best able to spread the doctrine, is the ruler of men. Therefore it is not the Son of Heaven that I salute, but I am actually worshipping the Buddha.” (Wei shu 114: 3031)

[240] Nattier, 1991: 128.

This would explain why Emperor Wu does not mention the *Scripture for Humane Kings* by title. Even though he was attracted to this text because of its portrayal of a king as the preserver of the Buddhist Dharma in the time of decline, he still had to reject it officially, as it is the only Chinese scripture which openly blames the downfall of Buddhism on too much government control, an issue which was more pressing in the North, but could also be stretched to incorporate Emperor Wu's attempted control over the monastic community by imposing laws upon them and assuming the role of head of the monastic community.[241] Perhaps this is the reason why, in his discussion with Zhizang, Emperor Wu twice emphasises that he will rely on the *vinaya* (*yi lü* 依律) to rectify the monks,[242] thus distancing himself from the practices described in the *Scripture for Humane Kings*, where it says that "in future eras the kings of states [...] will register, regulate, and restrict the Buddhist disciples, comparable to the laws for commoners/laymen (*baiyi fa* 白衣法) and the laws for soldiers and slaves (*bingnu fa*兵奴法)." [243]

With the *Renwang jing* off limits, Emperor Wu's authoritative scriptural basis for his claim on the right to rectify the monk's behaviour became very thin. There was another scripture which had become very popular by the sixth century, and which – lucky for him – also speaks of corrupted monks in a time after the Buddha's death, namely the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, which we have discussed above. Already in 508 Emperor Wu had ordered an extensive commentary to be written on the

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[241] The concerns Emperor Wu had in regards to the passages describing the causes for the decline of the Buddhist Dharma did not keep the *Scripture for Humane Kings* from becoming immensely popular with subsequent rulers. By the time of Bukong's eighth century version of the text, however, many of the passages that strongly emphasise the opposition to government control had been omitted or modified. Also had the text been cleared of all reference to the apocalyptic figure of Yueguang, thus making it more suitable for adoption by the rulers of state. See Orzech, 1998: 287-288.

[242] T.2060.466b21 and b26.

[243] T.245.833c16.

Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra by the monk Falang 法朗 (d.u.).[244] This was the *Da banniepanzi zhujing* 大般涅槃子注經 (*Annotated Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*), which in not extant.[245] Only four years later, in 512, he commissioned Baoliang 寶亮 (444-509) to make another commentary, the *Da banniepan jing jijie* 大般涅槃經集解 (*Collected Explanations on the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, T.1763) in 71 fascicles.[246] Clearly this *sūtra* was important to him. Emperor Wu's use of *mofa* imagery in his discussion with Zhizang makes one wonder if his interest in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* was not only prompted by its potent concept of universal Buddha-nature, but also by the opportunity it created to assume a guiding role for the shepherdless monks and nuns. Luckily for emperor Wu, Zhizang did not attack the assumption that the Buddhist teaching was in a final stage of decline, only that it was at all possible for a ruler to do anything about it. Still, the lack of a scriptural basis that was not rife with eschatological undertones, coupled with Zhizang's attack, must have made Wudi insecure, and in the end caused him to abandon this course.

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[244] Not much is known about this monk. His secular name was Chen 沉 and he was originally from Wu. He died somewhere during the Tianjian reign period (502-520). He did not get a biography of his own, but some subordinate biographical information is provided in the biography of the monk Sengshao 僧韶 in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.460b5-11). He is not to be confused with the famous master of the Sanlun school, who had the same name, but lived from 507 to 581.

[245] See *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426c11. The *Da Tang neidian lu* (*Great Tang Dynasty Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures*, compiled by Daoxuan in 664) says only that this commentary was written at the beginning of the Tianjian reign period (see T.2149.266c18-20).

[246] *Fozu lidai tongzai*, T.2036.545b26.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION OF THE NEW BUDDHIST IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY IN SOCIETY: KARMIC RETRIBUTION

In the traditional Confucian concept of emperorship, politics were highly intertwined with rituals, which were often regarded as representative of a dynasty's legitimacy and essential to its survival.[247] An emperor thus had many ritual duties to perform, but these were essentially a court matter. None but a privileged few were allowed to attend the state and court rituals, which meant that the impact of these rituals was rather limited. The relationship between an emperor and his people was equally distant and impersonal. In an age of extreme political and social instability, Emperor Wu recognised this as a major weakness, because nobody really seemed to care about who was on the throne, only about how to survive in such volatile times. In order to make his relationship to the people more involved and personal, Emperor Wu turned to Buddhism, which he attempted to use as a glue to tie his empire together into a coherent and caring community.[248] An important component of this glue was the concept of karmic retribution, which allowed him to impact the lives of his religious subjects more directly. If he could convince people of the reality of karmic cause and consequence, then he could devise and stage elaborate rituals to intervene in this process directly, thus turning himself into a saviour figure on which his people might rely. Emperor Wu's efforts to valorize the doctrine of karmic retribution are evident from his vehement attack on Fan Zhen's treatise on the destruction of the *shen* 神. Once the concept of an enduring self had been defended – in his eyes successfully so – against its objectors, Emperor Wu could turn his attention to working out the practical application of karmic retribution in imperial ritual. Emperor Wu's efforts concentrated mainly on the accumulation of merit through the performance of meritorious work, making large donations to the *saṃgha*, and personally striving for a virtuous, almost ascetic lifestyle. The accumulated merit he then distributed among all beings in the world to bring them blessings.

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[247] McDermott, 1999: 2.

[248] Apparently Emperor Wu was not the first monarch to realise the potential of Buddhist morals to bring peace, unity and order to society. Emperor Wen 文 (r. 424-454) of the Liu Song dynasty (420-478) is quoted as having said: "If only the people of Our realm all were purified by the transforming influence (of Buddhism), We would be able to realize Great Peace (*taiping* 太平) without any effort – what more would there be to do?" (T.2103.100a27; translation by Zürcher, 2002: 29). Of course we have to be careful with taking such

III.1. The theory of karmic retribution

The belief in karmic retribution was one of the most identifiable characteristics of Buddhism as it started to spread throughout China from the beginning of our common era. The idea that a person reaped the consequences of actions in former lives (be they good or bad) helped the Chinese to explain the seeming discrepancies between a person's moral behaviour and the good or bad fortune that befell him. For this reason, the doctrine of karmic retribution became very popular, and in the course of time even influenced the native Chinese concepts of destiny and fate. By the time that Xiao Yan, the future Emperor Wu of the Liang, frequented the

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utterances at face value, especially since this one is from the apologetic *Guang Hongming ji*. Since Emperor Wen is also on record for taking several restrictive measures against Buddhism, it can be questioned if he really considered Buddhism to be so beneficial to his rule. See Zürcher, 2002: 29.

Western Villa of Xiao Ziliang, the doctrine of karmic retribution had evolved into a tool in the hands of the literati elite to explain their privileged social status and the inequality in society.[249] Xiao Yan, as a member of the clique around Prince Xiao Ziliang, had witnessed the debates between the proponents of the native concept of destiny on one side and the Buddhist doctrine of karmic retribution on the other side. Noticing the existence of strong opposition to the Buddhist literati's view on social inequality and its potentially disruptive effect on the stability of society, he took this concept and lifted it to another level. Instead of making it into a mere tool for justifying the privileged position of the influential literati families, he turned the concept of karmic retribution into an instrument of imperial legitimation. Since, in the Buddhist view, all beings were essentially determined in their personal development by the workings of *karman*, Emperor Wu sought to relieve the karmic burden of his subjects in order to acquire the profile of *bodhisattva* saviour. He set out to accumulate merit on an unprecedented scale through a wide variety of meritorious works, and then went on to distribute this merit during large orchestrated events. Before we examine Emperor Wu's methodology, we shall first explore its theoretic background.

III.1.1 Transfer of merit in Buddhist thought

In the Buddhist doctrine of karmic retribution, merit (Skt. *puṇya*, Ch. *gongde* 功德) is the result of a good moral act that will bear positive effect for the doer in a later life.[250] Every good deed adds to the "credit" of the doer and aids him or her to eventually attain final liberation from the fetters of saṃsāric existence. In early Hīnayāna Buddhism, the accumulated merits (or demerits) were considered to be strictly personal. No one could protect another from the bad consequences of his or her deeds, nor could one share in the good fortune that would result from another person's good deeds.[251] However, despite the fact that it ran counter to the original theory of *karman*, Buddhist religious practice saw the development of the idea that merit could be transferred.[252] Although it is mostly associated with Mahāyāna Buddhism and the benevolence of *bodhisattvas*, transfer of merit was also incorporated into the practices of Theravāda Buddhism through the incorporation of existing popular notions among lay Buddhists. Joseph McDermott argues that the idea of merit transference arose first in lay Buddhist circles out of popular beliefs and other Indian religions. This idea was then taken up by the monastic community when it realised that it could be used to its advantage as a means to encourage donations to the *saṃgha*.[253] This explains why many Pāli texts examined by McDermott describe a process whereby a gift made in name of a *preta* [254] is donated to members of the monastic order so that the merit obtained by this act could help to redeem the *preta* from its pitiful state.[255] The idea of merit transference is already attested in Indian *stūpa* inscriptions dating from around the second century BCE,[256] but Joseph McDermott sees in the *Milindapañha* (*Questions of [King] Menandros*, compiled in the first century CE) a first clear textual step from the original belief in the possibility of ascribing charitable acts to others,[257] to the actual sharing of the merit that resulted from these good deeds.[258] The idea was that the merit earned by performing some meritorious deed could be accrued to someone else in particular (often a deceased relative) or to all living beings in general. The ingenuity of this concept was that by giving away one's earned merit, it was not depleted, but in fact increased, since the transference of merit to someone else was a good deed in itself. So by giving away one's merit, it actually increases, causing the giver to have access to an unlimited supply of merit.[259] In the *Milindapañha*, when king Menandros asks Nāgasena if demerits resulting from bloody deeds can be shared in the same way as merits can be shared, Nāgasena answers negatively. In other words, the transfer of merit only goes one way, although the explanation given by Nāgasena is tentative at best. He starts by saying that the question of why demerits cannot be shared is as pointless as asking why the Ganges does not flow upstream or why birds and men have two legs. The nature of merit, he asserts, is simply very different from that of demerit. Nāgasena uses the following metaphor to illustrate his point: a single drop of water that falls into the sand is quickly absorbed and thus only affects the spot on which it fell. A rainstorm, however, would saturate the ground, causing the water to eventually spread around for several miles. The reason, then, that merit is so much greater than demerit is because, as we have said before, the act of giving away merit is a meritorious act in itself, which causes the goodness in a person to increase. By giving away merit, it continually increases, saturating a man with goodness until it overflows to others. When a person commits a bad act, he will come to regret this act (according to Nāgasena that is) and consequently turn away from his evil. As a result of this the evil will not increase.[260] In other words, Nāgasena's explanation for why demerit cannot be shared with others hinges on the theory that merit is much more significant than demerit, a point he also makes elsewhere.[261]

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[249] I shall return to this further on in this chapter.

[250] This process is often described in terms of agriculture: by performing a morally good action, one plants a seed in the "field of blessing" (*futian* 福田) of which at some point in the future one will harvest the "fruits" (*guo* 果).

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[251] For some representative quotations from the Pāli canon, see McDermott, 1974: 385 and 1980: 190-191.

[252] For more on concept of merit transference, see Hara, 1968-1969; Holt, 1981; Gombrich, 1971; McDermott, 1971: 79-94, 1974, 1977, 1980; Malalasekera, 1967, Lehtonen, 2000: 193-197; Bechert, 1992; Schopen, 1985 (reprinted in Schopen, 1997: 23-55).

[253] Joseph McDermott cites the *Sādhīna Jātaka* to demonstrate that the notion of merit transference was not incorporated into canonical practice without opposition. See McDermott, 1971: 92-93 and 1974.

[254] A *preta* or "ghost" is one of the five paths of rebirth, where one is reborn to suffer from human deprivations such as cold, heat, hunger and thirst. It was especially the latter two features that were emphasised in Chinese and Japanses Buddhism, influenced by the descriptions in Mahāyāna scriptures. This led to the Chinese translation of the term as *egui* 餓鬼 (Jap. *gaki*), "hungry ghost".

[255] McDermott, 1971: 92. Also see Holt, 1981: 23; Gombrich, 1971: 204; Schopen, 1997: 36-38.

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[256] Schopen, 1997: 7, 42.

[257] For an example of the practice of making donations in someone else's name (in this case a *preta*), see McDermott, 1971: 82.

[258] McDermott, 1977: 462-463. The *Milindapañha* contains the supposed philosophical discussions between the Greek-Bactrian king Menandros and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. The answers given by Nāgasena generally follow the Sarvāstivāda tradition of Buddhism, though not exclusively. There are also signs of influence from folk religious ideas. See McDermott, 1977: 460 and 1971: 201-224. For a study on the Chinese versions of the *Milindapañha*, see Demiéville, 1924. For a full translation of the *Milindapañha* into English, see Rhys Davids, 1890-1894 and Horner, 1963-1964.

[259] McDermott, 1977: 463. Also see Malalasekera, 1967: 85-86; Lehtonen, 2000: 196. Andreas Janousch compares the transfer of merit to a monetary transaction: "If merit, thus, to the Buddhist lends itself to accumulation and exchange like money, then directing one's accruing merit to benefit others is like paying money into a high-interest account. By giving it away, it will in fact increase." Janousch, 1998: 205.

In the Theravāda tradition, the transfer of merit played its role predominantly in funeral rites and memorial services for the dead. In the Mahāyāna tradition it had a much bigger role to play, as it was the driving force behind one of its important concepts, the *bodhisattva* ideal. A *bodhisattva* is a "being on the path to full enlightenment". Driven by their infinite compassion for those still trapped in the endless cycle of rebirth, they postpone entering into *nirvāṇa* and work for the salvation of all sentient beings instead. The career of a *bodhisattva* starts with the arising of the aspiration to strive for Buddhahood (Skt. *bodhicitta*, Ch. *putixin* 菩提心), and involves the development of the six perfections (Skt. *pāramitā*, Ch. *liu du* 六度or *boluomiduo* 波羅蜜多). These are: generosity (Skt. *dāna*, Ch. *bushi* 布施), moral virtue (Skt. *śīla*, Ch. *chijie* 持戒), forbearance (Skt. *kṣānti*, Ch. *renru* 忍辱), fervour in religious practice (Skt. *vīrya*, Ch. *jingjin* 精進), meditation (Skt. *dhyāna*, Ch. *chanding* 禪定), and insight into the true nature of things (Skt. *prajñā*, Ch. *zhihui* 智慧).[262] While the last five *pāramitā*s are mainly intended for the *bodhisattva* himself to attain Buddhahood, it is the first *pāramitā* of giving that invokes the *bodhisattva* to share his knowledge with others and help those in need. Giving to others is considered to be a great source of merit, and could take on extreme forms. There are countless anecdotes in the *jātakas* and *sūtras* of animals, humans and *bodhisattvas* who sacrifice their own lives for the sake of others. But although the biographies of Buddhist monks include several anecdotes of monks who allow themselves to be devoured by wild animals, give their flesh to the starving, or offer their blood to mosquitoes and leeches,[263] the most common form of giving, by far, was of a material kind. As the monastic community had always depended on donations from pious laymen, it should come as no surprise that the act of giving to the *saṃgha* was promoted as one of the most meritorious acts to be undertaken by a lay Buddhist. Among the wealthy laymen, donating money and goods was not only done for the merit accrued, but also often served as a showcase for one's wealth, increasing a donator's prestige.[264] This is also the case for kings or emperors, who sometimes made extremely large donations to the Buddhist monks and nuns so as not to be outdone by other members of the elite and thus risk having their prestige overshadowed by that of others. In this regard, Emperor Wu of the Liang, who is infamous for his massive donations to the monastic community, was not unique. What was unique, was how he transformed these donations into an instrument of imperial legitimation. Emperor Wu sought out new ways to donate to the Buddhist monastic community to accumulate merit, and in large orchestrated events distributed this merit to his subjects and to all sentient beings in the world.

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[260] McDermott, 1977: 463. See Rhys Davids, 1890-1894, vol. 2: 152-157.

[261] See Rhys Davids, 1890-1894, vol. 1: 123-124 and 128-129.

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[262] These six *pāramitā*s are sometimes extended with an additional four to correspond to the ten *bodhisattva* stages. These four *pāramitā*s are: skilful means (Skt. *upāya*, Ch. *fangbian* 方便), religious aspirations or vows (Skt. *praṇidhāna*, Ch. *yuan* 願), the power to fulfil these aspirations (Skt. *bala*, Ch. *li* 力), and spiritual wisdom (Skt. *jñāna*, Ch. *zhi* 智). For more on the *bodhisattva* doctrine, see Kawamura, 1981 and Harvey, 1990: 170-191.

[263] For references, see Kieschnick, 1997: 39-40. Also see Gernet, 1995: 242.

[264] This is attested, for example, in the *Weishu* (114: 3038), where it says that in their efforts to build *stūpa*s and monasteries "無知之徒, 各相高尚, 貧富相競, 費竭財產, 務存高廣 people mindlessly assert their pride in surpassing one another. Poor and rich compete with each other in exhausting their resources, bent on [building ever] higher and bigger." (Translated by Gernet, 1995: 234)

III.1.2. The debates on the existence of the soul and karmic retribution

One of the well-known idiosyncrasies of medieval Chinese Buddhism is the Chinese thinkers' belief in an enduring 'self', an absolute spiritual identity that transcends physical existence and travels through time and space in a continuous cycle of rebirth. Indian Buddhists denied that there was such a thing as an *ātman*, a permanent identity that travelled from one form to the next through the process of reincarnation. This is the doctrine of no-self (Skt. *anātman,* Ch. *wuwo* 無我). *Saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of death and rebirth, to them was an impersonal process regulated by cause and effect, in which consciousness was no more than a temporary interaction of the five aggregates (*skandha*), which have no physical reality of their own. Even though this mode of thinking resembles the existential nihilism of *xuanxue* 玄學materialist thinking, early Chinese Buddhists found this abstract interpretation of *saṃsāra* difficult to conceive. For them, the process of rebirth and *karman* implied that something like a personal identity had to be reborn to reap the rewards or bad consequences of actions in a previous existence. They interpreted rebirth as a reincarnation or transmigration of the spirit. This is where we tread on dangerous terminological ground. In most of the literature on this subject, the personal identity that travelled from one existence to the next is conventionally designated as a "soul" or "spirit" (often deliberately placed between quotation marks to indicate its conceptual character).[265] However, despite the authors' awareness of the dangers inherent in designating a particular Chinese concept with an English term, a precise definition of this conventional label is seldom spelled out. As Lo has shown in his study on the Chinese concept of *shen* 神, which he deliberately leaves untranslated, this term is multivalent. It can mean anything from an external phenomenon such as "god", "spirits", and "supernatural" to an individualized concept such as "spirit", "soul" and so on.[266] In the context of the early medieval debates on the nature of *shen*, Lo says that it is often justifiable to translate *shen* as "soul" or "spirit". However, he warns that, in these debates, the way in which the disputants used the term could be very different.[267] A precise definition of *shen*, as it was used by the debater, was never formulated at the beginning of the discussion. As a consequence, Lo says, it is common to find two debaters arguing without actually communicating with each other, as they each start from their own conception of *shen* and focus only on the formulation of their propositions. Specifically, this means that the debates were focussed on the analogies used and their logical implications, rather than the nature of *shen* itself.

Speculations on the nature of shen

There had been much speculation on the nature of a person's enduring self long before the introduction of Buddhism into China, and in the wake of these speculations were left a plethora of terms that all refer to something that can loosely be called a “human soul”.[268] Before the sixth century BCE in northern China, the concept of *po* 魄was used for the principle of life that animated corporeal being with thought and action.[269] Etymologically, *po* refers to the growing light of the new moon.[270] No later than the sixth century BCE the image of the changing phases of *po*, the moon’s essence (light), was, by analogy, associated with the destiny of a person’s essence (spirit).[271] Around the same time in southern China we find the concept of *hun* 魂, which was equivalent in meaning to *po*, but had a different etymological root. *Hun* seems to be related to “mist” or “cloud”, which means that, like *po*, it equates the essence of a human being to some evanescent natural phenomenon.[272] Lo draws the conclusion that “the early Chinese did not believe in a permanent soul since *hun* would evaporate like a mist and *po* would phase out like the light of the moon.” [273] By the sixth century BCE the two concepts of *po* and *hun* merged into the idea that a human was endowed with a dual soul, although at first it was probably not very clear in precisely what way the *po* and *hun* were related to each other. As time went by, this relationship became better defined, and, according to Yu, it reached its definitive formulation by the second century BCE at the latest.[274] The duality of *hun* and *po* was linked to several other dualities: *hun* was linked to *qi* 氣, heaven and the *yang* 陽principle, while *po* was linked to *xing* 形, earth and the *yin* 陰principle. Thus *hun* and *po* became part of the belief that a human life consists of a bodily part and a spiritual part. The physical form

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[265] For more on the Chinese concept of the "soul", see Smith, H., 1958; Yu, 1964-65, 1981, 1987; Harrell, 1979; Liebenthal, 1952; Pachow, 1978; Lai, 1981b; Overmyer, 1974; Brashier, 1996. For more on the debates on the immortality of the "soul", see Lai, 1981a; Liu M.-W., 1987, Tang, 1983: 303-306. The most comprehensive study of the Chinese concept of *shen* 神 as "spirit" or "soul" is Lo, 1991.

[266] Lo, 1991: 4.

[267] Ibid., 5.

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[268] For a discussion of these terminologies, see Lo, 1991: 19-28.

[269] For a study on the *po* and *hun* 魂 concepts, see Yu, 1987: 369-378. Also see Hu, 1945-1946.

[270] The earliest occurrence of this character is on a Zhou oracle bone that is dateable to the eleventh century BCE. See Yu, 1987: 370.

[271] Hu, 1945-1946: 30; Yu, 1987: 370.

[272] Lo, 1991: 24.

[273] Ibid., 25.

[274] Yu, 1987: 374.

(*xing*) depends on the produce of earth for its survival, while the spirit relies on the invisible life force (*qi*) that comes from heaven. The physical form and the spirit are each governed by an animating force, namely the *po* and *hun*. *Hun* was classified in the *yang* category, and was hence an active and heavenly substance. *Po* was classified in the *yin* category, and was as such a passive and earthly substance.[275] When a person died, it was believed that his *po* returned to the earth while his *hun* ascended to heaven. The *po* was thought to linger in the decaying body of the deceased until it had completely decomposed. If the *po* was not properly cared for by its surviving relatives through the performance of sacrifice, or if it had met with a violent death, it was believed that it could roam around as a ghost (*gui* 鬼), causing all sorts of trouble.[276] The term *gui* is much older than *po* or *hun*. It was originally used in conjunction with *shen* 神, where *shen* designated the spirits that dwelled above, in heaven, where as *gui* referred to the spirits that dwelled below, on earth. The concept of *guishen* is as early as the second millennium BCE, and towards the end of the Zhou dynasty, it was incorporated into the dualistic *hunpo* concept. When the *hun* ascended to heaven, it could linger there for some time as a *shen* (supernatural being), just as the *po* could linger on earth as a *gui*. It is important to note that neither *po* nor *hun*, *gui* nor *shen* were thought to be eternal: "When the bones decay the p'o is also destroyed. There are cases in which the p'o has not been dissipated for a hundred years. No hun can exist for more than five generations."[277] In the course of time, the concept *hun* would gain in importance at the expense of *po*. By the second century CE, the Han philosopher Zheng Xuan鄭玄 (127-200) described *hun* as the basis of a man's consciousness and intelligence whereas he limited the function of *po* to "hearing distinctly and seeing clearly" (*ermu congming* 耳目聰明).[278] *Po* had lost its eschatological features and was reduced to governing only bodily functions such as the senses. From the Jin up to the Liang dynasty, *po* eventually was interpreted as the physical body itself, as opposed to *hun*, which then came to be understood as both the sensory and spiritual functions of the body.[279] As a result of the dualistic nature of the *hunpo* concept, the redefinition of one term inevitably had its impact on the fortunes of the other. Other terms emerged besides *hun* to refer to the spiritual essence of the human body.

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[275] Ibid., 374-375.

[276] For more on the concept of *gui*, see Poo, 2004 and H. Smith, 1958. Also see Lo, 1991: 22.

[277] H. Smith, 1958: 175. Translation from Wieger, 1930 : 346. Cf. Overmyer (1974: 213), who says that the consensus seemed to be that the *gui* (i.e. the *po* that has returned to the earth) remained until the body had completely decayed and the *shen* (i.e. the *hun* that had ascended into heaven) lingered for no more than six or seven generations, as long as sacrifices were performed at the ancestral temple.

A detailed discussion of the intermediary phases of the Chinese notion of the "spirit" would lead us too far astray from the issue at hand. Suffice it to say that by the late fifth and early sixth century, under influence of Daoist philosophy, the compound *jingshen* 精神 ("essence-spirit") had become a predominant lexical variation of *shen*, which was meant to elucidate the perception of *shen* as the ultimate, unchanging principle of life, the realisation of the Dao within an entity.[280] Since the Dao is constant, the *jingshen*, as a sublimation of the Dao within the myriad things, is immortal in a certain sense as well. However, this immortality does not entail the survival of a personal identity, characterized by memory and character, as *jingshen* itself is not imbued with personal identity. The *jingshen*, defined as the essence of the Dao that is present in all things, ultimately aims at being reunited with the impersonal Dao from which it originates.[281] As Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-443)[282] explains in his *Mingfo lun* 明佛論 (*An Exposition of Buddhism*)[283]:

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[278] As cited by Yu, 1987: 376.

[279] For references, see Lo, 1991: 210n22.

[280] See Lo, 1991: 21-26.

[281] Ibid., 23.

[282] Zong Bing, courtesy name Shaowen 少文, descended from a family of high officials, and was considered a great painter, calligrapher, musician and *qingtan* adept. As was the vogue of the time, he never took office, but chose to dedicate his life to the pursuit of self-realisation.

> 自道而降便入精神。常有於陰陽之表。非二儀所究。[284]
> From the Dao, it descends and enters into the [individual] souls. It always remains outside the cycle of *yin* and *yang* and is not affected by them.

In his efforts to expound and defend the Buddhist principle of rebirth, Zong Bing resorts to the neo-Daoist concept of *jingshen* to demonstrate that a person's spiritual essence does not perish (*bumie* 不滅) upon the death of the physical body, as it is impervious to the transformations of *yin* and *yang*. Under the influence of its conditioning causes (Skt. *pratyaya*, Ch. *yuan* 緣) the *jingshen* shifts to form individual perceptions (Skt. *vijñāna*, Ch. *shi* 識, i.e. conceptual consciousness that arises from causes and conditioning factors).[285] What governs these individual perceptions is often called an individual's "spiritual intelligence (*shenming* 神明)",[286] which is the self-conscious sublimation of the *jingshen*, the spiritual component of a person pervaded with a sense of self. But it is clear from the terminology used, that at this point we have already shifted to the Buddhist angle of the debates on the immortality of the *shen*. If we return briefly to the state of affairs in pre-Buddhist China, we can conclude that, before the impact of

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He became a student of the Buddhist monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-417), and actively defended Buddhism against its assailants. See Zürcher, 1972: 218-219. Also see Liebenthal, 1952: 378n175. For Zong Bing's biography, see *Song shu*, 93: 2278-2279 and *Nan shi*, 75: 1860-1863.

[283] The *Mingfo lun* was written by Zong Bing ca. 433. It is an essay in defence of Buddhism, in which he tries to explain away what he considered to be misconceptions of the Buddhist faith on the part of its opponents. Zong Bing's treatise is preserved in its entirety in the *Hongming ji* (T.2102.9b5-16a24). See Zürcher, 1972: 15. For a full translation of the *Mingfo lun* in English, see Liebenthal, 1952: 378-394.

[284] *Hongming ji*, T.2102.9c29-10a1.

[285] Ibid., p. 10a3-4.

[286] For a discussion of the how the term *shenming* was interpreted during the late Warring States period, see Szabó, 2003.

Buddhism on Chinese thinking, *shen* was considered to be the principle of life, thought and action in a person. As such, it was no more than the spiritual counterpart of the physical body, on which it relied for its existence. Thus, the disintegration of the physical body also meant the end for the *shen* that resided within.[287] This belief is reflected in the Daoist quest for physical immortality, which was so popular in Han times. Since the *shen* was dependant on the body for its survival, those who strove to achieve immortality developed techniques to prolong the existence of the mortal body or to replace it during the course of life with an immortal and incorruptible body.[288] In a way this meant that, although the relationship between *shen* and body was congruent, the physical body was of paramount importance. All this would change as Buddhism began to began to spread more widely between the third and fifth centuries CE.

The arrival of Buddhism in China signified a turning point in the Chinese perception of *shen*. The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth pushed the boundaries of *shen* from a psychophysical element of life to a metaphysical element that could survive the destruction of the body and be reborn into another host. However, as we have remarked before, the Chinese Buddhist converts' ontological spin on *shen* originated in a distorted view on the process of *karman* and rebirth. Despite the Buddha's denial of the existence of an enduring spiritual identity (*ātman*), the Chinese had difficulty making sense of karmic retribution through rebirth without relying on something like an enduring self that reaps the benefit or detriment of actions in a former existence. If one keeps to the view that there is no enduring self that will undergo the consequences of its actions in a later life, this opens the way to immorality and nihilism. Therefore a continuous element in the cycle of rebirth was introduced. This perceived transmigrating entity was identified with the native concept *shen*.[289] As a result, the materialist conception of *shen* acquired a deeper ontological interpretation. Since a person's *shen* was conceived to leave the body upon death only to be reborn in a new body, it transcended physical existence and was, to a Buddhist believer, effectively immortal.[290] This claim was fiercely disputed by the non-Buddhist, Chinese materialist thinkers, who kept to the view that the *shen* perishes together with the body. Both proponents and opponents of the immortal *shen* theory resorted to the use of analogies to prove their point. A well-known analogy that was used to illustrate the mortality of *shen*, was the so-called fire-and-firewood analogy (or its variant the candle-and-light analogy), which says that one's *shen* is like fire (light), and one's body is like firewood (candle): as long as there is fuel, the fire will burn. When the fuel is spent, the fire extinguishes and nothing of it remains.[291] The Buddhist monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-417)[292] used this same analogy to prove exactly the opposite position. In his influential treatise *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 (*A śramaṇ a does not pay homage to a king*)[293], Huiyuan says that the passing of the *shen* from one incarnation into the next is like fire that travels from one piece of firewood (*xin* 薪) to the next. When the first piece of firewood burns up, the flame can pass on to another piece of firewood. Although the first piece of firewood is different from the second one (just like the first body is different from the second one) the flame itself does not change.[294] At first glance it might seem odd to find a theoretical discussion of the survival of *shen* in a treatise that was essentially aimed at proving the autonomous status of the monastic community. However, upon closer inspection, it turns out that the theory of the immortal *shen* is the ultimate basis of Huiyuan's entire line of reasoning. In the preceding parts of the treatise, Huiyuan starts building his case with a socio-political analysis of

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[287] Lo, 1991: 144.

[288] H. Smith, 1958: 177. For a study on the pursuit of physical immortality during the Han, see Yu, 1964-1965. For a study on what was understood by immortality of the body (shen 身) in Daoism, see Kohn, 1990.

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[289] Liebenthal, 1952: 336; Holcombe, 1994: 111.

[290] Mather, 1955: 28. The assertion that the *shen*, which was essentially a product of the five aggregates (which have no ultimate physical reality of their own), could be immortal and thus somehow stood outside of the chain of interdependent causation, created some difficulty for the early Chinese Buddhists. In the end, this problem was solved by the proposition of the metaphysical doctrine that *shen* is formless (*wuxing* 無形) and transcends the physical realm, a concept which owes much to *xuanxue* philosophy. For a detailed discussion on the solution of this issue, see Lo, 1991: 146-194.

[291] The candle-and-light analogy, which is basically the same as the fire-and-firewood analogy, is already used in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (compiled under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (ca. 177-122 BCE) in the second century BCE). For references, see Lo, 1991: 97.

[292] Huiyuan is a very important representative of early Chinese gentry Buddhism. As a descendent of a literati family, he enjoyed a traditional Confucian education and became a student at the Imperial University (*Taixue* 太學). He also studied the main scriptures of *xuanxue* philosophy (*Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and *Yijing*) from an early age, and was deemed an expert on them. Later in life his interests shifted to Buddhism, and when he was 21 years old he became the disciple of Dao'an 道安 (312-385). Huiyuan's family background allowed him to circulate in the higher social class of the literati, to which he belonged by birth, and his proficiency in secular scholarship gave him the opportunity to proclaim Buddhist ideas in a

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language that the literati could understand. A biography of Huiyuan is included in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2059.357c23-361b13), and *Chu sanzang jiji* (T.2145.109b10-110c9). For a translation of this biography, see Zürcher, 1972: 240-253. For more on Huiyuan and his activities, see Zürcher, 1972: 204-239; Liebenthal, 1950, Ch'en, 1964: 103-112; Tang, 1983: 341-373; Tsukamoto, 1985: 759-898.

[293] This treatise is preserved in the *Hongming ji*, T.2102.29c19-32b11. Huiyuan wrote this treatise in response to the anti-clerical measures taken by Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404) between 402 and 404. Huan Xuan was a powerful governor and military commander of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317-420) who had taken advantage of the Sun En 孫恩 rebellion (399-402) to enter the capital in 402 as a "liberator" and proceeded to take control of the government in the following years until finally, in 404, he declared himself emperor of his own dynasty, which he called Chu 楚. His reign would last but a few months. Huan Xuan was not opposed to Buddhism on a doctrinal level, but he was wary of the influence of the metropolitan clergy in political intrigues at the court. He therefore took some measures in an attempt to curb the autonomous status of the clergy and reopened the debate about whether or not a *śramaṇ a* should submit to secular authority. Huiyuan was allowed to present his case as representative of the Buddhist clergy, and the outlines of this argument are preserved in his *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun*. See Zürcher, 1972: 231-239. Also see Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976: 60-70. For a full translation and discussion of the *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun*, see Hurvitz, 1957.

[294] *Hongming ji*, T.2102.32a2-4.

the difference between lay devotees (*zaijia* 在家)[295] and monks (*chujia* 出家)[296]. The former lives in the world and therefore remains subject to secular authority, but the latter has severed all ties to this world and therefore is no longer subjected to a worldly authority. The efforts of the monk, however, benefit the empire by virtue of his exemplary conduct, despite his living outside the world. In the following part, Huiyuan elaborates on the way in which the *shen* gets trapped into the cycle of rebirth because of its desires and emotions (*qinggan* 情感)[297]. The only way for a living being to reach the state of *nirvāṇa* is to end the desires that bind him or her to life. “Heaven and Earth,” he says, “can give life to the living beings, but can not cause them not to transform (i.e. die). The ruler can sustain his subjects [by good government], but can not prevent catastrophes from happening to them.” [298] What Huiyuan is saying, is that no ruler can help his subjects to achieve deliverance from *saṃsāra*, therefore he can not expect to have sway over those who sever their ties to the world in an attempt to cut off their passions. In part four of the treatise, Huiyuan counters the objections made by his imaginary opponent[299] that there is nothing outside of what can be perceived with the senses, and that the there can only be one interpretation of the principles underlying the physical world, and that is the version provided by the ancient sages.[300] In his reply, Huiyuan discloses his theory that the Chinese sages are merely manifestations of the Buddha, and their teachings are ultimately variations on a theme. This theory presupposes the existence of an immortal *shen* that can be reborn into other beings, and this is where we return to the issue we started from. In the fifth and final part of the *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun*, Huiyuan's opponent explicitly states his belief that "the endowment of *qi* 氣 is limited to one life,"[301] repeating some of the same arguments that we have seen above, including the fire-and-firewood analogy. As we have seen, Huiyuan reinterpreted the fire-and-firewood analogy to illustrate how the *shen* could go from one body to another without a change in its essence.[302] According to Lo, it is with this reply that Huiyuan ushered in a new phase in the early medieval debate about the *shen*, because he effectively argued for the indestructibility of the *shen* on the assumption of karmic rebirth, a concept which up to that point the Eastern Jin thinkers had not bothered to examine.[303] In other documents of Huiyuan's hand he further elaborates on the nature and significance of karmic retribution,[304] and in doing so, he shifted the focus from the ontological discussion of *shen* to the practical and moral considerations of the destiny of *shen* after death. One's *shen* was effected by the process of *karman* and rebirth, and only through cultivation of one's *shen* could *nirvāṇa* ultimately be reached. Of course, Huiyuan was by no means the first to explain the process of karmic retribution, as this was one of the distinguishing features of Buddhism. However, the validity of the doctrine of karmic retribution had not been part of the debate around the nature of *shen* among Chinese thinkers before Huiyuan wrote this treatise, nor had there been much speculation about what exactly it was that traveled through the endless cycle of rebirth. In reaction to Huiyuan's advocacy of an enduring *shen* in relation to karmic retribution, rival thinkers took recourse to the concept of "destiny (*ming* 命)" to invalidate the Buddhist point of view.

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[295] Ibid., p.30a10-b4.

[296] Ibid., p.30b5-23.

[297] Ibid., p.30c10. Liebenthal (1950: 248-249) translates *qing* 情 as “the will to live”, i.e. clinging to life.

[298] Ibid., p.30c18-19.

[299] Part three, four, and five of the treatise are written in the typical oratory style of *qingtan* (Pure Conversation), where the author, who acts as the “host (*zhu* 主)”, answers the questions of an imaginary opponent, designated as a “guest (*bin* 賓)”, and counters his following objections. Although it is by no means certain that the treatises written in this style are records of actual oral debates, the arguments given by the imaginary opponent would have to be reflections of the general arguments given in the polemic for the treatise to be a relevant contribution to the discussion.

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[300] *Hongming ji*, T.2102.30c29-31a1.

[301] Ibid., p.31b15.

[302] Huiyuan even claimed that the fire-and-firewood analogy was derived from a Buddhist text, but he failed to specify which one that was. For a discussion of three possible Buddhist sources, see Lo, 1991: 298-304.

[303] For a detailed discussion of Huiyuan's view on *shen* and the shift in focus in the debates from this time on, see Lo, 1991: 157-169.

[304] *Ming baoying lun* 明報應論 (*Explaining Karmic Retribution*, T.2102.33b9-34b2), and *Sanbao lun* 三報論 (*On the Three Retributions [in the Present Life, the Next Life, and Later Future Lives]*, T.2102.34b3-c25).

Karmic retribution versus destiny

After the publication of Huiyuan's treatise, the debates about the immortality of the *shen* continued unabated until the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang,[305] but ever since this theme was invariably linked to the concept of karmic retribution and rebirth. This combination did not facilitate the debates, and one's stance towards the *shen* question came to be dominated by one's belief in either destiny or retribution.[306] Let us first take a look at what is meant with the two terms "destiny" and "karmic retribution".

As is the case with countless Chinese concepts, the notion of *ming* has many interpretations, depending on the time in which and on the person by whom it is used.[307] A detailed sketching of the varying interpretations of *ming* throughout time is beyond the scope of the present research, but in order to understand what the debates between the proponents of destiny and karmic retribution were about, it is necessary to point out some general characteristics of this term. Generally speaking, modern scholars discern two categories of interpretations, namely “descriptive” and “normative”.[308] At the extreme end of the scale, the descriptive interpretation of *ming* refers to an impersonal force outside of individual human control that determines the course of events on earth. In this sense, *ming* is often translatable as “blind fate” or “fixed fate”. This *ming* is predestined and not tied to an ethical or moral principle, which means that it does not punish immoral behaviour with misfortune or reward moral behaviour with good fortune. As such it is entirely impossible to predict one’s fixed fate or to alter it by changes in behaviour.[309] For this reason, it is designated as a fatalistic *ming*. On the other end of the spectrum is the normative interpretation of *ming*, which takes *ming* as “decree (from Heaven)” and links it with *yi* 義 (morality, righteousness) to mean something like “moral duty”.[310] In other words it is one’s assigned function in the order of things. This does not mean a fatalistic surrender to the “will of Heaven”, but rather it is carrying out the decree of Heaven from a personal motivation to do the right thing. In between these two extreme interpretations of *ming*, there is a whole range of interpretations with varying degrees of determinism. The most well known of these is probably the concept of *tianming* 天命 (Decree from Heaven), which is to a degree normative because it states that a ruler receives his mandate to rule from Heaven (*ming* in the literal sense of “decree”, but with an undertone of inherent “moral duty” that goes with it), but is also to a degree descriptive as the bad execution of this mandate will lead to inescapable punishment, which can be interpreted as a form of moral determinism.[311] The early Confucian belief that there was a supreme moral judge (Heaven) that rewarded or punished human behaviour in respect of its moral nature, was in a way also a teleological belief in retribution within one life.[312] However, this belief created problems very early on, as it failed to explain why, if Heaven was benevolent, did good people meet misfortune and bad people prosper? This is probably why subsequent Confucian philosophers stepped away from the notion of Heaven as moral judge and controller of fate, and adopted a more naturalistic view of Heaven as “Nature”.[313] The question about the justification of personal fortune and misfortune, however, kept burning in the minds of Chinese thinkers. The philosopher Wang Chong 王充 (27- ca. 100 CE), author of the *Lunheng* 論衡 (*Critical Essays*), addressed this problematic relationship between behaviour and destiny. He asserted that an individual’s nature (*xing* 性) and destiny (*ming*) were in no way related. A good person could encounter bad luck and a bad person could have good luck. Heaven, he said, does not act (*wuwei* 無為), but everything happens of its own accord. This is the principle of *ziran* 自然 (naturalness), on which we shall elaborate further on. To Wang Chong, destiny is predetermined, and it can not be influenced by man. It simply is what it is.[314] This fatalistic stance toward destiny would grow in popularity as the Han dynasty continued to decay.[315]

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[305] In the postscript to his *Hongming ji*, which was compiled ca. 515, Sengyou pointed out six major issues which were still the object of debate at his time. These "six doubts (*liuyi* 六疑)", as he calls it, were the main points of confusion that made people attack Buddhism. The second of these doubts, he still identified as "the false belief that when people die their *shen* is extinguished, and therefore there is no such thing as the Three Periods, i.e. past, present, and future (*ren si shen mie wuyou sanshi* 人死神滅無有三世; T.2102.95a18)."

[306] Liu M.-W., 1987: 404. For a study of the polemic between destiny and retribution, see Lo, 1991: 29-85.

[307] For a study of the semantic field of *ming* in pre-Buddhist China, see Raphals, 2003. For a discussion of the concept *ming* in early Confucian thought, see Slingerland, 1996.

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[308] Slingerland, 1996: 567.

[309] Ning, 1997: 495.

[310] Slingerland, 1996: 567; Raphals, 2003: 547.

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[311] Ning, 1997: 496. Also see Overmyer, 1974: 211.

[312] The belief that those who do good will encounter good fortune while those who do bad will encounter misfortune can be found in several of the Confucian classics: in the *Analects* we find that “the virtuous will live long lives (*Analects*, VI. 21; see Lau, 1979: 84)” and that “life and death are the decree of Heaven; wealth and honor depend on Heaven (*Analects*, XII. 5; see Lau, 1979: 112).” In *Mencius* it says that “those who are obedient to Heaven are preserved; those who go against Heaven are annihilated (*Mencius*, IVa.7; see Lau, 2003: 79).” See Lo, 1991: 32.

[313] This interpretation is adopted by Xunzi (see Fung, 1952: 31). For a more detailed discussion of the concept *tian* in the *Xunzi* (with further references), see Lee J., 2005: 20-24.

From around the beginning of our common era, another notion of destiny had started to develop, mainly in religious Daoist circles, and that was the notion of *chengfu* 承負. *Chengfu* had the meaning of “received burden”, which basically meant that a person could be punished for the bad behaviour of one of his ancestors, or could place a burden on his descendants by doing something immoral.[316] A record of good and bad deeds was entered into the Register of Destiny (*minglu* 命祿) by the gods, along with a person’s date of birth and death even before they had been born.[317] On the up-side, it was deemed possible to change one’s inherited destiny through virtuous behaviour, although this obviously conflicted with the fatalistic view on destiny that claimed that one’s life was predetermined at birth.[318] The fatalistic view on destiny was also expounded in *xuanxue* philosophy, where it was linked to the concept *ziran* 自然 (“being thus of itself”, naturalness).[319] Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312) denied that there was a metaphysical essence or source of things. In his view, there is nothing that creates other things, but instead all things create themselves. They are the way they are by themselves, and there is no deliberate intention behind their creation.[320] *Ziran* thus referred to the inborn physical nature of a thing, which randomly arose of itself, but consequently predetermined the course of development of that thing. This idea was conveyed to the notion of *ming*, which came to be understood as random fate. Whether someone is born with good luck or bad luck is simply a matter of chance. If a person was born unlucky, no matter what he did, he would always be unlucky, because that was his randomly assigned nature. As *xuanxue* was enormously popular with the early medieval literati, it is not surprising that most of them shared the fatalistic view on destiny, based on the concept *ziran*. Nevertheless, the contradictory belief that one's destiny was also connected to one's moral behaviour had a large following as well, and it was not uncommon for the literati to adopt both stances at the same time.[321] It was this faith in the possibility to influence destiny through personal action, and a lingering feeling of dissatisfaction with the apparent randomness of one's fortune in relation to one's moral behaviour that would ensure the swift co-option of the Buddhist doctrine of *karman* in China.

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[314] For more on Wang Chong’s views on destiny, see Fung, 1953: 162- 167. Also see Raphals, 2003: 547-551. For a translation of the *Lunheng*, see Forke, 1962.

[315] Lo, 1991: 30.

[316] On the concept *chengfu*, see Hendrischke, 1991; Maeda, 2006: Lo, 1991: 39-57. Cf. Seiwert, 2003: 39.

[317] Lo, 1991: 50.

[318] Lo (1991: 48-57) points out some contradictory passages in Daoist religious scriptures such as the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (*Scripture of Heavenly Peace*), which seem to contain both deterministic and non-deterministic attitudes towards destiny. This contradiction remained either unnoticed or unresolved, for no theoretical writing on the subject is extant.

[319] See Lo, 1991: 58-65.

[320] For more on the concept *ziran* in the thought of Guo Xiang, see Ziporyn, 1993.

It is unnecessary in the context of the present research to explain in detail the origin and development of the Buddhist doctrine of *karman* and retribution, because in the debates between its proponents and opponents, it was mostly used in a polemical and pragmatic way. In a nutshell, the basic idea of karmic retribution is this: all deliberate actions of an individual generate *karman*. Good actions are rewarded with good *karman* (also labelled "merit") and evil actions are punished with bad *karman*. The good *karman* causes good fortune to befall a person, while the bad *karman* causes bad fortune. The retribution of *karman* is an automatic process of cause and effect, so there is no ultimate moral judge.[322] *Karman* passes out of existence when the appropriate reward or punishment is received, although this does not necessarily happen within one and the same lifespan. *Karman* that has not yet produced result is transferred from one life to the next, so a person can enjoy or suffer the consequence of an action from a former life, as well as from the present life. Likewise, the retribution of an action can be carried over into a subsequent existence.[323] The karmic process thus exists of an individual's actions by which *karman* is accumulated, and by the good or bad events that happen to that individual whereby *karman* is dissipated. When this doctrine of *karman* entered China, it resolved many of the questions that the Chinese had been struggling with, most importantly the question of why good things happen to bad people and vice versa. The Buddhist notion of retribution gave the Chinese a plausible model for explaining the apparent discrepancies between an individual's actions in this life and the good or bad fortune that befell him or her.[324] Furthermore, this Buddhist doctrine reminded of the concept *ziran* (as karmic retribution happened naturally, without any external instigator), but did not share its fatalistic origin in randomness.

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[321] Ibid.: 65.

[322] Huiyuan, for instance, explains that there is no ultimate judge to decide what is good or bad, but that the process of karmic retribution is automatic and natural (for which he uses the term *ziran*, which, as we have seen, was used in the *xuanxue* conception of destiny). He compares this natural relationship between an action and its retribution to that between a form and its shadow (*xing* 形 – *ying* 影), a sound and its echo (*sheng* 聲 – *xiang* 響). See T.2102.33c20-24.

Despite the fact that the idea of karmic retribution got assimilated into Chinese culture,[325] it still got dragged into the polemic between the opponents and defenders of Buddhism, not because it was fundamentally unacceptable or incompatible with indigenous Chinese beliefs, but because Buddhism as a whole was rejected as a foreign doctrine for which the superior literati elite (who saw themselves as the bearers of Chinese culture) saw no use, and which they feared could disrupt the social order. As we have seen, with Huiyuan's participation in the debates about Buddhism in general, and the immortality of *shen* in particular, karmic retribution became part of the polemic. Huiyuan started his defence of an enduring self from the assumed reality of karmic retribution, thereby tying both concepts together in these debates. Opponents of Buddhism felt that they could not debunk the logic that something like an enduring self had to travel from one existence to another to reap the retribution of his *karman* (which, as noted earlier, was a typical Chinese interpretation that went contrary to the Buddha's original teaching of no-self), so they turned to their indigenous Chinese concepts of destiny (the fatalistic worldview based on *ziran*) to debunk the Buddhist doctrine of karmic retribution. If karmic retribution could be proven to be invalid, the need for an immortal *shen* would disappear with it. The debates about the immortality of the *shen* from then until the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang became invariably linked to one's belief in either hard destiny or karmic retribution.

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[323] In his short essay *Sanbao lun* 三報論 (*On the Three [Types] of Retribution*, included in the *Hongming ji*, T.2102.34b3-c25) Huiyuan identified three kinds of retribution, namely in the present life for deeds now done (*xianbao* 現報), in the next rebirth for deeds now done (*shengbao* 生報), and in subsequent lives (*houbao* 後報). For a translation of this treatise, see Liebenthal, 1952: 362-365.

[324] Lo, 1991: 71.

[325] As we have seen, many people held on to their fatalistic view of destiny, while at the same time reaching out for the possibility to change one's fate through moral behaviour. It is this belief in retribution as the basis for morality that clearly underwent the influence of the Buddhist *karman* doctrine. Lo, 1991: 84.

Fan Zhen on the destructibility of the shen

The debates about the immortality of the *shen* reached their zenith around the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century AD, with Fan Zhen 范縝 (ca. 450-ca. 515)[326] as the most vehement of the attackers. The first of these debates took place at the court of Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 around 489,[327] and after a short lull they flared up again under the reign of

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[326] For a biography of Fan Zhen, see *Liang shu*, 48: 664-671 (translated by Jansen, 2000: 232-246). A second, shorter biography is included in the *Nan shi*, 57: 1420-1422.

[327] Jansen, 2000: 172, 260.

Emperor Wu of the Liang around 507.[328] A lot of ink has flowed over the philosophical contents of these discussions.[329] However, what is relevant to this thesis, is finding clues about Emperor Wu's motivation to counter them so carefully. But first, let us take a look at Fan Zhen and his famous treatise *Shenmie lun* 神滅論 (*Treatise on the Destructibility of the Shen*).[330]

Fan Zhen was born into a literati family of some importance. Due to the untimely death of his father, however, he grew up in poverty as the status of his family declined. When he was about twenty years old, he became the student of Liu Huan 劉瓛 (434-489)[331] with whom he studied for many years . Fan Zhen is characterized by Thomas Jansen as a conservative member of the traditional landowning literati, who were often critical of the metropolitan, court-based literati.[332] While the landowning literati in the provinces relied on their large estates for revenue and local authority, the court-appointed literati in the capital relied on their salaries and, foremost, on their prestige as court officials. The latter spent a lot of their time indulging in leisurely activities such as poetry and philosophical discussion in literary salons, while their duties were either neglected or carried out by their subordinates. In protest of this decadent court lifestyle, Fan Zhen wore straw sandals and simple garments. He was very upfront and loved to make provocative statements, which did not always go down well with his literati friends. None the less, he was admired for his succinct phrasing.

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[328] *Hongming ji*, T.2102.60b-68c.

[329] Balazs, 1932 and 1964: 262-265: Liu M.-W., 1987; Lai, 1981b: 146-148; Pachow, 1978: 33-35; Chang, 1973; Tang, 1983: 470-473; Lo, 1991: 195-217.

[330] Fan Zhen's treatise is reproduced in his biography in the *Liang shu*, 48: 665-670. It is also incorporated, with slight textual variations, in the rebuttal of Xiao Chen 蕭琛 (478-529), which is recorded in the *Hongming ji* (T.2102.55a9-57c4). For a translation of the *Shenmie lun*, see Balazs, 1932: 220-234; Makita, 1973-1975, vol. 3: 482-499; Ren, 1973: 335-353; Jansen, 2000: 235-246.

[331] Biography in *Nan Qi shu*, 39: 677-680; *Nan shi*, 50: 1235-1238.

[332] Jansen, 2000: 154.

Fan Zhen frequented the Western Villa of the Qi prince Xiao Ziliang, but unlike his host, he did not believe in Buddhism, which he perceived as a threat to national stability due to its disruptive effect on society. Fan Zhen's biography describes the following discussion between Xiao Ziliang and himself:

> 子良問曰。君不信因果。世間何得有富貴。何得有賤貧。縝答曰。人之生譬如一樹花。同發一枝俱開一蔕。隨風而墮。自有拂簾幌墜於茵席之上。自有關籬牆落於糞溷之側。墜茵蓆者殿下是也。落糞溷者下官是也。貴賤雖復殊途。因果竟在何處。
> Ziliang asked: "If you, Sir, do not believe in cause and effect (Ch.: *yin*因 *guo*果; Skt.: *hetuphala*), then how [do you explain that] there are wealth and eminence, and poverty and lowliness in the world?" Zhen answered: "Human life is like the blossoms of a tree. They all come from the same branch, and they all spring from a single stem. When they fall, they get carried off by the wind. Some of them brush against hanging-screens or curtains and land on cushions or mats. Others collide with bamboo fences or walls and fall alongside a cesspool. Those who land on cushions and mats are [eminent nobles such as] your Highness, the Heir-Apparent. Those who fall by the cesspool are [lowly commoners such as] your humble servant. Even though eminence and lowliness follow very different paths, where does cause and effect come into it?[333]

This anecdote is presented to the reader of the biography as the direct cause leading up to the composition of the *Shenmie lun*, however, as Hu

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[333] *Liang shu* 48: 665. Translated by Schmidt-Glintzer 1976, 121-122; Liu M.W., 1987: 404; Jansen, 2000: 234-235.

Shi argues, the transmitted text of the treatise probably dates from the time of the second round of debates at the court of Emperor Wu of the Liang in 507.[334] Nevertheless, it is clear that at the time of Xiao Ziliang's salon in the Western Villa, the debate concerning the mortality of the *shen* had resurged with Fan Zhen on centre stage, and the conversation between Fan Zhen and Xiao Ziliang cited above gives away important clues to Fan Zhen's motivations. Xiao Ziliang apparently subscribed to the doctrine of *karman*, which he applied to justify the differences in social hierarchy.[335] Fan Zhen from his part followed the *xuanxue* view on destiny when he stated that one's social status comes about all by itself (*ziran*) and is dependent solely on the luck of the draw. So in essence, the debate that ensued was one between karmic retribution and hard destiny, and the composition of the *Shenmie lun* is to be seen in that context. When Fan Zhen wrote that the physical body (*xing* 形) and *shen* are one, and that the

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[334] Hu, 1984. Cf. Jansen, 2000: 268-269.

[335] The idea that *karman* was responsible for social inequality was attested in many Buddhist scriptures. The *Milindapañha* (believed to date from the first century CE) for instance, has the following passage:

> The king said: "Why is it, Nāgasena, that all men are not alike, but some are short-lived and some long-lived, some sickly and some healthy, some ugly and some beautiful, some without influence and some of great power, some poor and some wealthy, some low born and some high born, some stupid and some wise?" The Elder replied: "Why is it that all vegetables are not alike, but some sour, and some salt, and some pungent, and some acid, and some astringent, and some sweet?" "I fancy, Sir, it is because they come from different kinds of seeds." "And just so, great king, are the differences you have mentioned among men to be explained. For it has been said by the Blessed One: 'Beings, O brahmin, have each their own Karma, are inheritors of Karma, belong to the tribe of their Karma, are relatives by Karma, have each their Karma as their protecting overlord. It is Karma that divides them up into low and high and the like divisions.'"

Rhys Davids, 1890-1894, vol. 1: 100-101.

shen can not survive the death of the physical body, he essentially wanted to disprove the theory of karmic retribution, for how could there be a transfer of *karman* if there was no enduring self to carry it along from one life to the next? [336] With his attacks on the concept of an eternal *shen* and the karmic proces, Fan Zhen did not merely wish to contest a Chinese Buddhist point of doctrine for the purpose of philosophical discussion. There was also a political dimension to his treatise, as is evident from his concluding chapter. [337] In the popular style of *qingtan*, an imaginary opponent asks: “What advantage is there to knowing that the *shen* perishes [at death]?” Fan Zhen answers:

> 浮屠害政。桑門蠹俗。風驚霧起。馳蕩不休。吾哀其弊。思拯其溺。[338]
> The [teaching of] Buddha is harmful to government, and the Buddhist monks corrupt the Chinese customs. Like stormy winds and rising mist it spreads [across the nation] without interruption. As I am deeply troubled by the abuses [of the Buddhist faith], I pondered on a way to save those that have been swept away by it.

He then goes on to give some examples of the detrimental effect that Buddhism had on society in his opinion. Many of the arguments raised by Fan Zhen are representative of those typically used by the anti-Buddhist disputers throughout early medieval times.[339] He says, for instance, that the Buddhist monks are unfilial; that they waste the state’s valuable resources; that they are unproductive; that they deplete the army of conscripted soldiers and keep men from assuming official posts etc. And the reason that people turn to Buddhism, he explains, is that it “confuses people with vague words, scares them with the sufferings of Avīci hell (*abi* 阿鼻)[340], lures them in with empty statements , and elates them with the joys of Tuṣita heaven (*doushuai* 兜率)[341].” The concluding paragraph of the *Shenmie lun* thus exposes the real motivation for its composition. The attack on the concept of an eternal *shen* is meant to invalidate the theory of karmic retribution, which Fan Zhen saw as an instrument of legitimation in the hands of those in authority, and as a way through which the ruling elite kept the general populace docile and obtuse.[342] He also urged his readers to stop sponsoring Buddhism, because he felt that the Buddhist emphasis on personal liberation endangered the moral fabric of society by turning the focus away from the good of the collective towards a search for personal benefit.

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[336] I will not repeat the arguments and analogies used by Fan Zhen, nor the ensuing rebuttals by pro-Buddhist scholars, as this has been the object of many detailed studies in the past. For the literature, see footnote 83.

[337] *Liang shu*, 48: 670.

[338] Ibid.

[339] For an overview of the most common arguments against Buddhism in early medieval China, see Zürcher, 1972: 254-285.

Fan Zhen was certainly not the first ‘conservative’ to utter his criticism of the Buddhist doctrine of retribution, nor was he the only one of his time. It is known from correspondence between Shen Yue 沈約 and Tao Hongjing 陶弘景, the acknowledged leader of the Mao Shan 茅山 school of Taoism, that the latter too was appalled by this idea that suffering and good fortune were the results of one’s own actions in past lives.[343] However, as much as Fan Zhen wished to free the people from the perceived dangers of karmic retribution, he never formulated a satisfactory explanation of his own for the imbalance between people’s moral behaviour and competence on the one hand, and their social status and official rank on the other hand. In the end he remained stuck in the fatalistic view that all was decided by chance at the moment of birth.

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[340] This is the last and deepest of the eight hells, where the misfortunate are subjected to cruel torturing, die, and are instantly reborn to suffer again.

[341] This is the fourth heaven in the realm of desire (*yujie* 欲界), where all future Buddha’s are reborn before descending to earth as the next Buddha. It is the abode of Maitreya Buddha.

[342] Jansen, 2000: 154, 169.

[343] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.122b-123a. For more on the relation between Shen Yue and Tao Hongjing, see Mather 1988, 115-120, 138-140.

Emperor Wu and the debates about the destiny of the shen

As Emperor Wu developed his new Buddhist ideology for legitimation purposes, this fatalistic idea of destiny clashed with the goals he tried to achieve. After all, how would he be able to portray himself as a *bodhisattva*-emperor, a universal saviour who did all he could to relieve the karmic burden of his subjects, if his people's fates were predetermined anyhow? Therefore, at the time of Liang Wudi, the debates began anew in earnest. Fan Zhen and Emperor Wu were, according to Fan Zhen's biography, old friends from the time of Xiao Ziliang's Western Villa, and Emperor Wu was always delighted to see him.[344] This is not surprising, as they shared some similar values, most importantly the idea that the monopolization of the higher offices by the high ranking literati families had to stop, and that the ranks of office had to be reopened to people of competence, rather than to scions of influential families who were often incapable and negligent in their duties. However, their views on what measures had to be taken to achieve this were very different. Fan Zhen recognized the abuses that had corrupted the Nine Ranks system, but he still believed the system to be viable in its original form. He wanted to return to the recommendation of suitable candidates from the local level up, based on a candidate's capabilities and personality, rather than the ranking of the family to which he belonged.[345] Even before he had been declared emperor of the Liang dynasty, Xiao Yan formulated his view on the matter in a memorial addressed to the Qi throne.[346] In this memorial he criticized the abuses of the Nine Ranks system as well, but unlike Fan Zhen (who advocated a decentralized recruitment of officials) he pleaded for a stronger centralization of the selection process.

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[344] *Liang shu*, 48: 665.

[345] For more on Fan Zhen's views on the Nine Ranks system, see Jansen, 2000: 154-155, 164-165.

In 507, only five years after Xiao Yan became emperor, Fan Zhen systematized his polemic against Buddhism in general, and the existence of the soul in particular, in the form of his treatise *Shen mie lun* 神滅論 (*On the Extinction of the Spirit*).[347] His motivation behind this was probably the thought that, if he could undermine one of the basic principles that Emperor Wu's world vision was based on (namely the existence of an eternal soul which undergoes the process of death and rebirth), he might succeed in completely debunking Emperor Wu's image as a Buddhist saviour, and put an end to the politization of this non-Chinese religion.[348] Emperor Wu wanted to settle the debate for once and for all. In an attempt to be thorough about it, he formulated a twofold rebuttal of Fan Zhen's treatise: one on Confucian grounds,[349] and one on Buddhist grounds.[350]

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[346] For this memorial, see *Liang shu*, 1: 22-23. Translated by Jansen, 2000: 160-162.

[347] The *Shen mie lun* 神滅論 as an independent work is no longer extant. It has been preserved in the form of quotations in the *Nan shen mie lun* 難神滅論 (T.2102.55a9-57c4), a refutation of the *Shen mie lun*, written by Xiao Chen 蕭琛 (478-529), who was one of the so-called 'Eight Friends of the Prince of Jingling (*Jingling bayou* 竟陵八友)' and a cousin to Fan Zhen. It is also repeated, with small deviations, in Fan Zhen's biography in the *Liang shu*, 48: 665-670 For a brief summery of the question about the dating of the *Shen mie lun*, see Jansen 2000, 268-269. For a full translation of the *Shen mie lun*, see Balasz, 1964: 266-276. Also see Lo, 1991: 195-217; Liu M.-W., 1987; Jansen, 2000: 172-193; Hu, 1984; Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976: 119-123.

[348] Jansen 2000, 216.

[349] See *Da Liang huangdi chi da chenxia shenmie lun* 大梁皇帝敕答臣下神滅論 (*The Emperor of the Great Liang Orders [His Officials] to Respond to [Fan Zhen's] Shenmie lun*), in *Hongming ji*, T.2102.60b5-18. For a translation, see Jansen, 2000: 216-217.

[350] Emperor Wu wrote a treatise titled *Li shenming chengfo yiji* 立神明成佛義記 (*Substantiated Essay On establishing the Shenming as That Which Attains Enlightenment*, T.2102.54a8-c20)

As most arguments for or against the existence of the *shen* had already been formulated at one time or another during the last round of debates at the court of Xiao Ziliang, Emperor Wu's rebuttal on Confucian grounds brings little news to the table. More interesting is the tactic he uses to settle the debate. Rather than letting the issue drag out in an endless polemic that ultimately might make him seem ineffectual in the art of discussion, Emperor Wu calls on his officials to take sides. Though it is not exactly sophisticated debating technique, his drastic move seems not to have missed its mark. Once sixty-two of Emperor Wu's highest officials have answered either in agreement (which fifty-eight of them do) or disagreement, there is no more record of debates taking place after that. By exposing the debates for what they (also) were, Emperor Wu draws the card of numbers. It is to be expected that the people who had been placed in high ranking jobs by the emperor would not dissent him. Still, it must have sent a powerful message to any potential opponents of Emperor Wu's Buddhist reforms that he had great support from the people he often knew from the days at Western Villa of Xiao Ziliang.

Emperor Wu's treatise "*On Establishing the Shenming as That Which Attains Enlightenment*" actually seems far removed from the actual debates with Fan Zhen and his possible backers. In this treatise, Emperor Wu grapples with the notion of universal Buddha-nature, and how to rhyme it with the concept of the *shen*. In the course of his philosophising he turns to the term *shenming* to express the idea of an enduring, never changing self which is destined for enlightenment. Emperor Wu's efforts in applying the concept of *shen*, which he had been defending against Fan Zhen, to the Buddhist theory of universal Buddha-nature is to be seen as groundwork for the practical application of his Buddhist vision in society. If he could prove that there was not only an enduring self which transmigrated from one existence to another, but that this enduring self

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in which he comes to define the *shen* in terms of a permanent Buddha nature. For an analysis of the philosophical intricacies of this treatise, see Lai, 1981a; Lo, 1991: 218ff.

was endowed with Buddha-nature that could be attained by all, then he could offer his people salvation from the troubles of life. The next logical step was to put this notion of enduring self into practice by letting it interact with the concept of karmic retribution. After the theoretical stage was set, it was time for Emperor Wu to let it all play out in practice.

III.1.3. Merit as ideology

Accumulating merit

Since the time of the Buddha, the most common way in which a lay person could accrue merit besides observing the lay precepts (Skt. *pañcaśīla*, Ch. *wujie* 五戒)[351] – which in the sixth century were more or less overshadowed by the immensely popular, more extensive *bodhisattva* precepts – was by making donations to the monastic community.[352] These donations could take many forms, and every type of donation yielded a relative degree of merit. In the *Ekottarāgama* (Ch. *Zengyi ahan jing* 增一阿含經, T.125), for example, the Buddha specifies seven meritorious acts of giving: (1) building monasteries; (2) providing furnishings for these monasteries (beds and seating); (3) providing monks and nuns with food; supplying them with (4) clothing and (5) medicine; (6) constructing wells with drinkable water; and (7) building hostels for travelling [monks and nuns].[353] Thus, it should come as no surprise that one important manner in which Emperor Wu sought to accumulate merit was by making lavish donations to the monastic community. This in itself is nothing remarkable, as both emperors from the past as well as emperors of the contemporary Northern dynasties often sponsored the construction and maintenance of monasteries.[354] What distinguished Emperor Wu's efforts from those of his peers was the methodological approach to and ideological scope of his sponsorship. The opponents of Buddhism had often raised objections against what they considered to be a disruptive foreign religion on the account of its negative impact on the Chinese economy.[355] A commonly heard argument in this polemic was that the building of lavish monasteries and the casting of huge bronze statues was paid for by high levies imposed on the common people, while the construction itself was often carried out by corvée labourers, which put an additional strain on the peasant population. The *Guang Hongmingji* has the following entry about the construction of an extravagant monastery under the Liu Song emperor Ming 明 (r. 465-472):

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[351] The five lay precepts prohibit (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual conduct, (4) lying, and (5) the consumption of intoxicating substances (usually alcohol). These moral precepts were sometimes expanded with three additional precepts that focussed more on ascetic practice: (6) no eating after noon, (7) no singing, dancing, playing music (or attending such performances) or wearing perfume and decorative accessories, and (8) no sleeping on luxurious beds. These eight precepts (*bajie* 八戒) were not expected to be observed in everyday life, but they were usually followed during the *upoṣadha* days, the regularly held assembly of both *saṃgha* and laity for ritual purification. The frequency and dates of these assemblies were variable over time. See Vande Walle, 1976: 123-126. Also see Kuo, 1994: 19, 21-22; Zürcher, 1972: 164-165, 374; Forte – May, 1979.

[352] For a study on the concept of merit as it relates to material donations, see Kieschnick, 2003: 157-219.

> 勞役之苦百姓筋力。販妻貨子呼嗟滿路。佛若有知。念其有罪。佛若無知。作之何益。[356]

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[353] *Zengyi ahan jing* (*Ekottarāgama sūtra*), T.125.741c6-19. See Kieschnick, 2003: 158.

[354] Emperor Xuanwu 宣武 (r. 500-516) of the Northern Wei, for example, is described in Buddhist sources as being inclined towards Buddhism. He personally wrote down the translation of several *sūtras* and recited them in the imperial temple. He also ordered the construction of several notable temples. Among these was the Yongming 永明 temple, which was intended to house the foreign monks that arrived in the capital (*Fozu tongji*, T.2035.355b19-27).

[355] For a short overview of the most common arguments of anti-Buddhists before the sixth century, see Zürcher, 1972: 256-262. For a study on the impact of Buddhism on the Chinese economy from the fifth century onward, see Gernet, 1995. Also see Ch'en, 1973: 125-178.

[356] *Guang Hongming* ji, T.2103.127c14-16.

> The hardships of corvée labour left the common people exhausted, [forcing them] to sell their wives and children, who filled the streets with their sobbing wails. If the Buddha knows about this, then he will certainly consider it sinful. If he does not know about it, then what is the benefit of constructing [this monastery]?

Even if this account is blown out of proportion for polemic reasons, the main reason for bringing it up – which is the use of corvée labour, normally intended for the realisation of state projects, in the construction of Buddhist monasteries – is most probably based on facts.

If Emperor Wu was to accumulate merit by making large material donations to the monastic community, then it was clear that he had to avoid arousing the resentment of those who thought it wrong to misappropriate state resources for this purpose, which could cause his donations to be regarded as 'sinful' (*youzui* 有罪). In 545, towards the end of Emperor Wu's reign, one of his most trusted officials, He Chen 賀琛 (481-549), made an earnest plea to address four major problems of the time: (1) the corruption of officials (caused by the emperor's overly lenient attitude towards them); (2) the extravagant, wasteful lifestyle of the officials; (3) the harshness of the penal laws; and (4) the overspending on construction projects, by which he probably hinted at the construction of Buddhist monasteries.[357] Emperor Wu was furious and wrote a rebuttal to He Chen's critique.[358] On the charge of overspending, he emphasised that his projects do not cause the people to be wanting in food and drink. More than that, these projects are not at all expensive, when taking into account the merit (*gongde*) they generate for the entire nation. To use a metaphor, Emperor Wu says that spending money on construction [of monasteries] is like turning one melon into several dozen [by planting its seeds] (*bian yi gua wei shu shi zhong* 變一瓜為數十種). The initial investment is largely compensated for by the beneficial results. From an account in the *Guang Hongming ji*, it becomes clear that it was a continuing concern of Emperor Wu to underscore that his Buddhist projects were not completed at the expense of the common people. On the occasion of a great gathering in the Tongtai 同泰 monastery[359] in 533, the historian Xiao Zixian蕭子顯 (489-537)[360] wrote:

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[357] For the biography of He Chen, see *Liang shu*, 38: 540-550. He Chen's petition can be found on pp. 543-546.

[358] *Liang shu*, 38: 546-550.

> 所造寺塔及諸齋會。不藉子來之民。[…] 一役之勞計限傭賚。故能構製等於天宮。[361]
>
> For the construction of monasteries and *stūpas*, down to [the organisation of] vegetarian feasts, [the emperor] does not take advantage of the people that come to him like children. […] The work of one corvée labourer is calculated and wages are bestowed accordingly. Therefore, one can construct things on a scale equal to the imperial palace.[362]

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[359] The Tongtai 同泰 monastery (located on the palace grounds, just north of the inner palace walls) served as the centre of Emperor Wu's Buddhist activities, both public and private. According to the *Lidai sanbao ji* (T.2034.49.45a12-18 and 99c9-11), construction on this monastery started in the second year of Putong 普通 (521) and was finally completed in the eighth year of Putong (527). Upon its completion, Emperor Wu ordered a gate to be made in the north side of the palace walls, opposite the monastery, to serve as his personal access. He called this gate Datong 大通, and on the day of its inauguration, he changed the title of the reign period to Datong (527-528) as well (Cf. *Nan shi*, 7: 205). The *Liangjing siji* 梁京寺記 (*A Record of the Monasteries in the Capital of the Liang*, T.2094; author unknown) states that starting from the beginning of the Datong period, not a year went by that Emperor Wu did not visit the Tongtai monastery (T.2094.1024b1). For a study on the religious and political importance of the Tongtai monastery for Emperor Wu, see Yamada, 1975.

[360] Xiao Zixian is the author of the *(Nan) Qi shu* (南)齊書. He was himself a descendent of the former imperial family of Qi.

[361] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.237c6-8.

[362] Cf. Janousch, 1998: 164.

Once again it is emphasized that the people were not the victims of some crazed emperor with delusions of grandeur. The corvée labourers recruited to work on the construction of Buddhist monasteries were apparently paid like hired labourers, which had to ensure that they did not fall into financial ruin caused by months of unpaid work, such as had happened under the rule of Emperor Ming of the Liu Song dynasty.

Xiao Zixian's account reveals some other important elements in relation to Emperor Wu's campaign of merit accumulation, such as the organisation of vegetarian feasts (*zhaihui* 齋會). The origin of these vegetarian feasts can be traced back to the traditional *upoṣadha* days, the regularly held gatherings of both *saṃgha* and laity for ritual purification. On these days, the Buddhist lay people observed the eight lay precepts, which included the rule against eating after noon.[363] As described in the *Fengfa yao* 奉法要 (*Essentials of [Buddhist] Religious Practice*; a basic manual for the practicing Buddhist (lay) devotee, compiled by Xi Chao郗超 (336-377) and preserved in the *Hongming ji*, T.2102.86a23-89b2), no fish or meat was supposed to be served on these days.[364] It became customary on the *upoṣadha* days for wealthy lay patrons to organize vegetarian banquets to which they invited monks, nuns and lay people to collectively enjoy a vegetarian meal. The donation of food to the *saṃgha* thus provided the laity with an opportunity to cast themselves in the role of *dānapati* (almsgiver) and accrue merit.[365] Over time, vegetarian feasts were also held on special occasions, such as on the commemoration days of deceased relatives etc.[366]

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[363] The frequency and dates of these assemblies were variable over time, but in general there were six fast-days in each month and three months of fasting each year (see Vande Walle, 1976: 123-126; Kuo, 1994: 19, 21-22;Zürcher, 1972: 164-165; Forte – May, 1979). During the *upoṣadha* days, the regular five lay precepts were expanded with three additional precepts that focussed on ascetic practice: (6) no eating after noon; (7) no singing, dancing, playing music (or attending such performances) or wearing perfume and decorative accessories; and (8) no making use of high beds or seats. As the observance of these eight precepts (*bajie* 八戒) was closely linked with the fast-days, the latter are therefore are also called *baguan zhai* 八關齋 "Fast-days with [observance of] the Eight Precepts" (see Kuo, 1994: 51). For a study on the *baguan zhai* as perceived during the Qi and Liang dynasties, see Martin, 2002. During the Liang, these *baguan zhai* were regulated, as we can see from the preface of such a regulation (*Baguan zhai zhi xu* 八關齋制序), written by the crown prince Xiao Gang, and preserved in the *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2102.324c4-26. Penalties for falling asleep during the assembly, leaving without permission or failing to return before the lecture of three *sūtras* has finished, for example, comprised of ten prostrations.

[364] *Hongming ji*, T.2102.86b12.

The organisation of vegetarian feasts, mentioned in Zixian's account, is not unique to Emperor Wu's reign. This popular practice had already received imperial sponsorship from the fifth century onward.[367] Zixian does emphasise, once again, that these feasts were not paid for with state money, but that they were financed by donations made by lay people "without the need for issuing orders or collecting taxes (*bu dai haoling bu xu keshuai* 不待號令不須課率). [368]" "For this reason," he says, "one knows that the emperor's power of transformation (*huali* 化力) has arrived, and that the good roots [369] of the people have been perfected (*suoyi zhi shi huangshang huali zhi suodao baixing shangen zhi youcheng* 所以知是皇上化力之所到百姓善根之有成). [370] " Although the custom of organizing vegetarian feasts was not instigated by Emperor Wu, the widespread scale on which these vegetarian feasts were organised by lay Buddhists communities during his reign is represented by Xiao Zixian as proof of the emperor’s “power of transformation”, which means that he reckoned that the people were inspired to develop good morals in response to the powerful example of the emperor’s virtuous conduct.[371] In underscoring time and again that the resources for Emperor Wu’s sponsoring of monastic institutions were not taken out of the state budget, Zixian tantalizingly mentions the creation of an institution whose task it seems to have been to collect and redistribute donations made by lay people:

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[365] According to Shen Yue, the vegetarian feasts were a simulation of the ancient Indian tradition of the monk's begging rounds. This Indian custom never caught on in China due to the negative view on mendicancy there. However, as the monks in China did not beg for their food, they essentially deprived the Buddhist laity of an important opportunity to accrue merit for themselves. This opportunity was reintroduced with the organization of vegetarian banquets. For Shen Yue's views on the vegetarian feasts, see T.2103.273b10-c4, translated by Mather, 1988: 154-156. Also see Mather, 1981. Cf. Janousch, 1998: 166.

[366] See Janousch, 1998: 165-167.

[367] Janousch, 1998: 165-166.

[368] T.2103.237c13.

[369] These roots of goodness (*shan'gen* 善根) are generosity (*shi* 施), kindness (*ci* 慈), and moral wisdom (*hui* 慧).

[370] T.2103.237c15. Translated by Janousch, 1998: 164.

> 初上造十三種無盡藏。有放生布施二科。此藏利益已為無限。而每月齋會。復於諸寺施財施食。[372]
>
> Before, the emperor had created thirteen types of Inexhaustible Treasuries (*wujin zang*), which have two divisions: one for releasing living beings, and another for alms giving. The blessings of these Treasuries are already limitless, but on top of this, riches and food are donated to all monasteries during the monthly vegetarian feasts.[373]

Other than the mention that some of the resources of these Inexhaustible Treasuries were used for buying and releasing caged animals (*fangsheng* 放生), and for making donations (Ch. *bushi* 布施, Skt. *dāna*), there are no other clues to tell us what else these Treasuries were used for, or how they were funded and organised. Thus it is unknown if these Inexhaustible Treasuries are related in function and organisation to the homonymic institution of the Three Stages Sect (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教), which reached the zenith of its popularity only a century later.[374] Xiao Zixian does include the name and background of the man responsible for the *fangsheng* branch of the Inexhaustible Treasuries: Zhang Wenxiu 張文休, who is otherwise unknown, made a daily tour of the butcher shops in the capital and rescued countless animals from being killed by “paying a ransom (*shu* 贖)” for their release.[375] Prior to that, Wenxiu had been the official in charge of food transportation to the capital, but when he started distributing some of the gain (intended for the palace) to the poor, he was brought up on charges and faced the death penalty. Emperor Wu, however, was so greatly moved by this act in the spirit of the *bodhisattva* precepts, that he refused to give permission for the execution and pardoned him instead. Out of gratitude for the emperor’s magnanimous forgiveness, Wenxiu performed his new task with such dedication that “while running around the capital, he sometimes forgot to eat or rest, his feet almost not touching the ground.” It was said that of all the animals, domesticated or wild, there was none that did not get set free by him.[376]

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[371] For the development of Buddhist religious communities during the sixth and seventh centuries, see Gernet, 1995: 259-277. Also see Ch’en, 1973: 281-294.

[372] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.237c17-19.

[373] Cf. Janousch, 1998: 164. Also see Chen, 2006: 85.

[374] In the Three Stages Sect, the Inexhaustible Treasuries functioned as institutions of social welfare that simultaneously secured the financial independence of the monastic community and provided for the continuous accumulation of merit as a result of religious donation. For

The Inexhaustible Treasuries have the characteristic that, by their nature, they double the merit accrued. In a first phase, merit is earned by the person making the donation. In a second phase, merit is generated when this money is used to perform meritorious acts. There is evidence to suggest that Emperor Wu’s Inexhaustible Treasuries were established long before Xiao Zixian’s account of the 533 assembly was written. The *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (*Collection of Records Concerning the Publication of the Tripiṭaka* , compiled by Sengyou ca. 515) mentions the existence of a record of Emperor Wu’s founding of the ‘Ten Inexhaustible Treasuries’ (*Huangdi zao shi wujinzang ji* 皇帝造十無盡藏記).[377] This not

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more on the Three Stages Sect and the function of their Inexhaustible Treasuries, see Ch’en, 1973: 158-171; Hubbard, 2001: 153-188; Gernet, 1995: 210-217. Also see Lewis, 1990.

[375] The term “ransom” was also used in Emperor Wu’s ceremonies of self-renunciation (*sheshen*), where he would give himself as slave to a monastery only to be ransomed by his ministers for a large sum of cash. We shall examine this custom further on in this chapter.

[376] See *Guang Hongmingji*, T.2103.237c19-27.

[377] *Chu sanzang jiji*, T.2145.93b9.

only means that the institution of the Inexhaustible Treasuries was created before 515, but – barring typographical errors – more branches were added to it over the years, increasing the initial number of divisions from ten to thirteen.[378] This attests to its success as an instrument to sensitize the people to the Buddhist virtue of giving. At the end of his report on the 533 assembly at the Tongtai monastery, Xiao Zixian draws up the final balance of what the assembly has yielded in donations: court officials and commoners gave a total of 11,140,000 cash,[379] in addition to the 3,430,000 cash from the heir apparent, and 2,700,000 cash from the empress and the imperial concubines.[380] As expected, Emperor Wu comes out of this report as the biggest *dānapati* of all, with more than two hundred and one varieties of donations, ranging from precious metals and cash to silk and utensils, totalling over 10,960,000 cash in value.[381]

Great Assemblies

The 533 assembly, which was referred to as a "Great Unrestricted Assembly for Clergy and Lay People (*daosu wuzhe dahui* 道俗無遮大

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[378] A possible early example of the Inexhaustible Treasury (or a precursor thereof) at work can be found in the biography of the monk Fayue 法悅 (d. after 509) in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2059.412b17-413a9). When a gigantic statue was being cast for the Zhuangyan 莊嚴 monastery in the fifth year of Tianjian (509), the artisans had miscalculated the amount of copper needed for its construction and subsequently ran out of source material before the statue could be completed. Even the donations of lay devotees were not sufficient to accomplish the job, so the emperor ordered three thousand pounds of "meritorious copper (*gongde tong* 功德銅)" to be supplied to the artisans to finish the statue (see T.2059.412c12-15). From this anecdote, we may assume that this "meritorious copper" was a stock of copper from the state treasury reserved to make contributions to the construction of statues for Buddhist monasteries with the aim of accumulating merit for the nation.

[379] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.237c29.

[380] Ibid., 237b22-24.

[381] Ibid., 237b20-21.

會)”,[382] was certainly not an isolated event. Almost twenty similar gatherings are recorded to have taken place during the reign of Emperor Wu, although the names given to them may vary.[383] While the translation of the term *daosu wuzhe dahui* (and its variants) might seem straightforward, its interpretation needs some consideration. Max Deeg sees *wuzhe hui* 無遮會 as a rendering of the Sanskrit term *pañcavārṣika*.[384] The *pañcavārṣika* – as practiced by Aśoka and other early Buddhist monarchs – was a large celebration, traditionally said to be convened every five years, at which the ruler publicly made lavish donations to the Buddhist monastic community to show his commitment to the Buddhist faith.[385] As Max Deeg has demonstrated, *wuzhe* 無遮 is not a transcription of the Sanskrit word *mokṣa* (liberation),[386] neither does he deem it likely that *wuzhe* is a semantic interpretation of that term in the sense of “[being] without hindrances”. It probably represents a translation of the term *nirargaḍa*, which refers to the ‘donations without restriction’ that featured in an originally Brahminic ceremony called *viśvajit*.[387] In this Brahminic sacrificial ceremony, which took place every five years, the householder donated large portions of his possessions or even everything he owned. In one version of this ceremony, the sacrificer would walk out of his house, leaving his door open for the poor and the needy to take away everything they could use, and then re-enter his empty house to start his life afresh.[388] This feature of exhaustive giving, which was a huge part of the *pañcavārṣika*, would later be singled out in translation of the term into Chinese, rendering *pañcavārṣika* as *wuzhe hui*, where the *wuzhe* referred to the magnitude of the donation as "limitless" rather than to the social scope in the sense of "free for all to attend, regardless of one's social status." [389] This interpretation of the term *wuzhe hui* seems to fit in with its usage in the *Fayuan zhulin*, for example, where we find specific categories of assemblies, according to their purpose:

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[382] Ibid., 236c19.

[383] Other terms used to refer to these assemblies include *wuzhe dahui* 無遮大會, *wuzhe dazhai* 無遮大齋, *pingdeng hui* 平等會, *pingdeng fahui* 平等法會, *sibu dahui* 四部大會, *wu’ai hui* 無礙會, *wu’ai dahui* 無礙大會, *wu’ai fahui* 無礙法會, *wu’ai faxishi* 無礙法喜食, or simply *fahui* 法會 or *dahui* 大會. For a complete list of the assemblies and their sources, see Suwa, 1997: 59-76. In the biography of Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518), contained in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2059.402c3-403a2), its author Huijiao claims that this practice of organizing large gatherings (which he designates as *wuzhe daji* 無遮大集) goes back to this illustrious monk, who was an important ally of Emperor Wu on Buddhist matters (T.2059.402c16). For a detailed study on the figure of Sengyou, plus a complete translation of the *Gaoseng zhuan* biography, see Link, 1960.

[384] For his exhaustive study on the origin of the *pañcavārṣika* in India and China, see Deeg, 1995 and 1997.

[385] For the aspect of donations made during the *pañcavārṣ ikạ* see Strong, 1983: 91-96. Etienne Lamotte (1958: 66) asserts that the five year gap to be observed between two *pañcavārṣ ika*was not absolute, but rather referred to the distribution of wealth accumulated in the state’s treasuries over the course of five years.

[386] Cf. Lévi-Chavannes, 1916: 42, note 41.

> 為四方僧設大施會。或設五年無遮施會。或慶寺慶像慶經幡等施設大會。或延請僧至所住處設大福會。[390]
>
> [In order to accrue merit], set up an Assembly of Great Giving (*dashi hui*) for the monks from all over the country, or set up a Quinquennial Assembly of Unlimited Giving (*wunian wuzhe shihui*). In celebrating a monastery, a [Buddha] statue, [scrolls of] *sūtra*, or other [kinds of] donations, set up a Great Assembly (*dahui*). When inviting monks to come to your place of residence, set up an Assembly of Great Blessing (*dafu hui*).

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[387] Deeg, 1997: 66.

[388] Agrawala, 1966: 73.

[389] Deeg, 1997: 65-66.

[390] *Fayuan zhulin*, T.2122.512b8-10. Same as Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602-664) *Da Aluohan nantimiduoluo suoshuo fazhu ji* 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記 (*Nandimitrāvadāna / Nandimitra's Record of the Abiding Dharma Explained to the Great Arhats*; translated in 654), T.2030.13b18-20.

Here the term *wuzhe* is clearly linked to giving (*shi* 施), which corroborates its interpretation as "unlimited giving". In the case of Emperor Wu, however, it appears that the *wuzhe* does not refer to the massive size of the donations alone, but certainly does express the idea of universal equality in these assemblies. This can be deduced from the fact that some of the variant terms used to describe Wudi's assemblies clearly define the participants, such as *pingdeng hui* 平等會 (Assembly of Equals),[391] *pingdeng fahui* 平等法會 (*Dharma*-assembly of Equals),[392] and *sibu dahui* 四部大會 (Great Assembly for the Four Disciples, i.e. monks, nuns, laymen and lay women).[393] The typical large donations were probably part of all these assemblies, but Emperor Wu obviously had a broader interpretation of the term. One should thus ask the question if we can rightfully call Emperor Wu's assemblies *pañcavārṣika*.

In a recent paper, Chen Jinhua argues that these assemblies, organised by Emperor Wu, were meant as *pañcavārṣika* in emulation of the Indian Buddhist king Aśoka.[394] The question of whether or not Emperor Wu strove to imitate Aśoka in this and other matters is complex, and scholars have often jumped the gun without any real evidence.[395] Yan Shangwen devotes an entire chapter to the alleged Aśokan influence on Emperor Wu, but the evidence presented in support of his theory is rather circumstantial.[396] Yan's main arguments are: (1) the new translation of the *Aśokāvadāna* made in 512 by the monk Sengjiapoluo 僧伽婆羅 (*

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[391] Assembly held in 530. See *Nan shi*, 7: 207.

[392] Assembly held in 536. See *Nan shi*, 7: 212.

[393] Assembly held in 533. See *Liang shu*, 3: 77 and 42: 600; *Nan shi*, 7: 210 and 18: 512.

[394] See Chen, 2006, pp. 77-78 in particular. On king Asoka, see Strong, 1983; Thapar, 1961; Smith, 1990.

[395] The assertion that Emperor Wu mirrored himself on king Aśoka can be found in many secondary sources, mostly without motivation or references to primary sources. See, for example, Tang, 1983: 342; Ch'en, 1964: 125; Zürcher, 1989: 230; Faure, 2002: 27-28; Overmeyer, 1976: 153; Strickman, 1996: 380; Smith, 1990 [1901]: 36-37.

[396] See Yan Shangwen, 1999: 286-303.

Saṃghavara?/ Saṃghabhara?, 460-524)[397], which Emperor Wu personally wrote down;[398] (2) the frequent quotations from the *Aśokāvadāna* in the Buddhist encyclopædia *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 (*Different [Entries] on Sūtra and Vinaya*, T.2121; compiled by Sengmin 僧旻 (467-527), Baochang 寶唱 (466 - ?) and others between 508 and 516 on the order of Emperor Wu); and (3) the commitment of resources to the restoration of several Aśoka temples. With respect to the first argument, one can point out that an earlier translation of Aśoka's life history already existed at the time of Emperor Wu. This is the still extant *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 (T.2042), translated by An Faqin 安法欽 (d.u.) around 300 CE.[399] It is not so remarkable that more than one translation of the same scripture was produced over the course of time, as this happened frequently. The fact that a second translation of the *Aśokāvadāna* was made during the Liang dynasty by the foreign monk Sengjiapoluo (a native of Funan 扶南), might simply mean that this text was part of the repertoire that this well-respected monk had memorised and was asked to translate into Chinese, along with ten other texts he translated over the seventeen years he spent in the Liang capital.[400] It certainly does not imply that Emperor Wu specifically asked for this text to be translated for propagandistic reasons. After all, if this were the case, Emperor Wu would not have allowed six years to pass between the time of Sengjiapoluo's arrival in the capital and his translation of the *Aśokāvadāna*. Also, the emphasis that Yan places on the fact that Emperor Wu personally wrote down the translation of the

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[397] Demiéville et al, 1978: 281. Sengjiapoluo's name is also reconstructed into Sanskrit as Saṃghapāla (e.g. Chen, 2002a: 35) or Saṃghabhadra (e.g. Faure, 2002: 26, note 4). His biography is contained in *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426a3-b12.

[398] This is the *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經 (T.2043).

[399] This text has been translated into French by Przyluski, 1923.

[400] The *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* says that Sengjiapoluo arrived at the capital of the Liang in 506, after being invited by the emperor to participate in the translation efforts. He remained there until his death in 524. By that time he had translated eleven texts, for a grand total of forty-eight fascicles, of which the *Aśokāvadāna* took up seven (T.2060.426a12-15).

Aśokāvadāna seems a bit precipitous,[401] as this piece of information can only be found in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記 (*Record of the Three Treasures throughout History*, T.2034; compiled by Fei Changfang 費長房 in 597),[402] a catalogue that is notoriously unreliable due to its author's ulterior motives in trying to prove the superiority of Buddhism over Daoism, even if it meant conscientiously altering facts and dates.[403] It is possible that Fei Changfang extrapolated this claim from the biography of Sengjiapoluo in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, which simply says that the first time Sengjiapoluo translated a *sūtra*, Emperor Wu personally received his words in writing.[404] Considering Sengjiapoluo's date of arrival – which was 506 – it is doubtful that this *sūtra* was the *Aśokāvadāna*, translated in 512. Neither is it clearly stated if Emperor Wu personally wrote down all of Sengjiapoluo's other translations. Therefore it is not tenable to maintain that Emperor Wu personally wrote down the translation of the *Aśokāvadāna*, let alone that he would have done so because of the great importance he attributed to it as a model for emulation. Considering the great respect Emperor Wu seemed to have had for Sengjiapoluo's knowledge and skill, as evidenced by the fact that the latter was invited to become one of Emperor Wu's "family monks (*jiaseng* 家僧)[405]", it would be more prudent to assume that Emperor Wu personally attended the translations as a sign of respect towards this monk, rather than towards a specific scripture.[406] As for Yan's second argument that the *Jinglü yixiang* borrows heavily from the *Ayuwang jing*, this too needs to be brought down into perspective. Yan gives a listing per fascicle of the number of times the

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[401] Yan, 1999: 289.

[402] *Lidai sanbao ji*, T.2034.98b9.

[403] Mizuno, 1982: 104-106.

[404] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426a16.

[405] We shall take a closer look at this institution initiated by Emperor Wu in chapter four.

[406] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426a19.

Jinglü yixiang records the *Ayuwang jing* as the source of an entry.[407] The total number of references, by his count, comes to twenty-one.[408] Although this might seem a lot, a random test with any other scripture used as a source for the *Jinglü yixiang* reveals that this number is anything but exceptional. For example, the number of entries in the *Jinglü yixiang* that identify the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (*Sūtra of the Wise and the Ignorant*, T.202; said to have been translated by Huijue 慧覺 in the first half of the fifth century)[409] as a source is thirty-nine.[410] The *Ayuwang jing* and *Xianyu jing* do not share a mutual theme, so it is unlikely that both source texts would have been selected to serve the same purpose in the *Jinglü yixiang*, namely that of glorifying the Aśoka-as-*cakravartin* (Ch. *Zhuanlun wang* 轉輪王, "Wheel-turning King") ideal, as Yan claims.[411] As it is, the encyclopædic entry on *cakravartin* takes up only one fascicle out of the fifty that make up the *Jinglü yixiang*, and of that fascicle, the paragraph on king Aśoka is only one of the twelve that make up this entry.[412] It therefore seems a bit bold to claim, as Yan does, that the *cakravartin* ideal, as exemplified by king Aśoka, makes up the core of the *Jinglü yixiang*.[413] In addressing Yan's third and final argument, which is that Emperor Wu invested a lot of money in the restoration of Aśoka temples, [414] this too seems to receive more focus than it is worth, for several reasons. First, the keyword in all of this is indeed "restoration (*gaizao* 改造)". To my

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[407] Yan, 1999: 292. Yan apparently missed a reference to the *Ayuwang jing* in fascicle forty-seven (T.2121.252a24), because he does not include it in his list.

[408] If we include the reference he missed, this would bring the total to twenty-two.

[409] Cf. Demiéville et al, 1978: 31, 245.

[410] *Jinglü yixiang*, T.2121: 12b15, 25b25, 66b28, 66c22, 73a28, 89c18, 93b24, 95a20, 95c4, 95c22, 96a12, 96c21, 116b24, 119a8, 119b13, 121a15, 122c11, 131c21, 136c19, 137a3, 139a14, 140a13, 145a27, 146b19, 163a25, 174a21, 189b27, 191c4, 191c17, 195b5, 197c28, 203a22, 203c11, 205a27, 215c15, 217a15, 254b5, 256c27, 257c5.

[411] Yan, 1999: 293. The *cakravartin* ideal is an ancient Indian myth of kingship that goes back to at least the tenth century BCE. The imagery is that of a benevolent universal monarch who rules over the entire universe according to the Dharma, through moral example and wisdom. The reign of a *cakravartin* ushers in a Golden Age of prosperity and peace. This ideal was present not only in Buddhism, but in other Indian religions, such as Jainism, as well. In Buddhism, the *cakravartin* was the secular equivalent of the Buddha, sharing with the latter the thirty-two bodily markings of a Great Man (Skt. *Mahāpuruṣ alakṣaṇạ* Ch. *sanshi'er daren xiang* 三十二大人相). However, the *cakravartin* concept was originally too ideal, too "mythical" to be adopted by any real-life king, as it was pretty inflexible: either a king possessed the thirty-two marks of the Great Man (in which case he was a *cakravartin*) or he did not. Either he ruled over the entire universe perfectly according to the Dharma, or he did not. Either his reign was a Golden Age (in which crops sprouted out of the ground of their own accord, without the need for agricultural activity), or it was an age of cosmic degradation. This is where, according to John Strong, the *Aśokāvadāna* provides a sort of middle ground, by creating a subdivision of a type of *cakravartin*, namely that of one who "rules one fourth [of

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the universe (i.e. only one of the four continents of Indian cosmology)] (Skt. *caturbhāga cakravartin*, Ch. *sifen zhuanlun wang* 四分轉輪王)," or, alternatively designated as a "cakravartin who relies on armed force to rule the cosmos (Skt. *balacakravartin*)". This classification of *cakravartin*s was further developed over time. The most systematic presentation of the *cakravartin* categorisation can be found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, which divides them into four categories according to the material used to make there wheel, the number of continents they ruled, and the way they achieve the conquest of their territory. These four types of *cakravartin* are: (1) the King of the Golden Wheel (Skt. *suvarṇacakravartin*, Ch. *jinlun wang* 金輪王), who rules all four continents of Buddhist cosmology (namely Uttarakuru in the North, Pūrvavideha in the East, Apara Godanīya in the West, and the human continent of Jambudvīpa in the South) and who conquers them by simply his personal presence, causing all minor kings to submit to his virtue; (2) the King of the Silver Wheel (Skt. *rūpyacakravartin*, Ch. *yinlun wang* 銀輪王), who rules three continents (all the above except Uttarakuru) and who conquers them after some sort of non-violent "encounter" with the petty kings; (3) the King of the Copper Wheel (Skt. *tāmracakravartin*, Ch. *tonglun wang* 銅 輪王) who rules two continents (Pūrvavideha and Jambudvīpa) and who conquers these after a "quarrelsome confrontation" without the (large scale) use of weapons; and (4) the King of the Iron Wheel (Skt. *ayaścakravartin*, Ch. *tielun wang* 鐵輪王) who rules only Jambudvīpa and conquers it by means of the sword (though the mere threat of his army is often enough to make the minor kings submit to him without the need for all-out war). For a more detailed discussion on the *cakravartin* ideal, plus references, see Strong, 1983: 44-56.

[412] The chapter on the *cakravartin* ideal can be found in fascicle twenty-four of the *Jinglü yixiang* (T.2121.128c16-136b9). The paragraph on king Aśoka is the last of the chapter (*Jinglü yixiang*, T.2121.135a23-136b8).

[413] Yan, 1999: 293.

[414] Yan, 1999: 302.

knowledge, Emperor Wu did not build a new Aśoka temple during his reign, but merely restored existing ones.[415] The fact that the Aśoka pagodas were believed to date back to the time of king Aśoka himself actually precluded the option of founding new ones.[416] The only alternative would have been to "discover" new sites, but Emperor Wu, cautious as always not to contradict scriptural data, seems not to have gone down that road, as no sources speak of this.[417] Second, the two restoration projects reported in historical sources both occurred in a time span of 2 years, between 536 and 538 CE. The fact that these undertakings took off when Emperor Wu was already on the throne for several decades, lends little credence to the notion that these Aśoka temples were somehow exceptionally vital for the ideological foundation of Emperor Wu's rule.[418]

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[415] Yan (1999: 300-301) lists three sources on the restoration of existing Aśoka temples: (1) The *Liang shu* (54: 790) speaks of the restoration of the relic pagoda in the Aśoka temple (*Ayuwang si* 阿育王寺) in the third year of the Datong 大同 period (537). A careful reading of the subsequent background story seems to indicate that this was the pagoda of the Changgan 長干 monastery in Danyang 丹陽 (located only five miles south of the capital Jiankang, cf. T.2094.1024b23-b26), which according to legend was one of the 84,000 pagodas containing Buddha relics that king Aśoka had constructed all over the world in a single night, with the help of supernatural beings. The Changgan monastery itself had been founded by emperor Jianwen 简文 (r. 371-373) of the Eastern Jin 晉 dynasty (see Faure, 2002: 36). (2) The *Liang shu* (54: 792) also speaks of the renovation of the (Aśoka) pagoda in the Mao 鄮 district of Kuaiji 會稽 (in present day Zhejiang) in 536. (3) The *Guang Hongming ji* (T.2103.203c10-204a9) contains an edict issued by Emperor Wu ordering the excavation and reburial of the Buddha relics stored in the Aśoka pagoda of the Changgan monastery due to its renovation in 538. Although the dates given in the *Liang shu* and the *Guang Hongming ji* vary, it is likely that both sources are talking about one and the same restoration project, stretched out over several years, but focussing on different events during that process. The *Fozu tongji* (T.2035.350a22) also mentions the restoration of the Aśoka temple in the Mao district, but places it in 522. This can only mean that either one of the two sources is flawed (in which case the preference would go to the *Liang shu*, since the *Fozu tongji* was compiled in the thirteenth century, which leaves a lot of time for errors to creep into historical records), or that the Aśoka temple was renovated in 522, but had to be restored once more in 536 due to some disasterous occurrence, such as a fire or flood. However, there is nothing in the historical records to support this second theory, so until some new evidence shows up, the first theory seems to be the most plausible.

The discovery of these and other Aśoka pagodas in China is credited to a man named Liu Sahe 劉薩何 (fl. second half of the fourth century CE), who is the protagonist of a miracle story that has him enter into hell upon his death, only to be resurrected by the *bodhisattva* Guanyin after being told to go on a pilgrimage to the (then lost) Aśoka pagodas. For a study on the figure of Liu Sahe and the different versions of the story, see Vetch, 1981: 137-148 and 1984: 61-78. For a study on the Aśoka relic pagodas in China, see Faure, 2002. Also see Strong: 2004: 124-149.

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[416] According to the Chinese Buddhist tradition, this miraculous, worldwide, simultaneous construction of 84,000 *stūpa*s had taken place during the reign of king Jing 敬 (r. 519-476 BCE) of the Zhou 周 dynasty (see *Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2059.409b27).

[417] Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty did try to build on the Aśoka legend in order to transform Buddhism into a state ideology with the purpose of unifying his empire after so many centuries of division. A major propaganda tool for achieving this, was the arranging of a massive relic distribution campaign all of his own, in emulation of king Aśoka. On several occasions during the Renshou 仁壽 period (601-604) he sent envoys to every corner of his empire with what he claimed were genuine Buddha relics and orders to construct a pagoda to preserve them in. The ultimate goal of Sui Wendi was to prove that he was some sort of *bodhisattva* reborn in China as future emperor to rescue Buddhism from being eradicated by secular rulers who were hostile to that religion, as had been the case in the past. To that end, an elaborate legend was created around the circumstances of his birth and his upbringing by the "divine" nun Zhixian 智仙 (d. after 574). For emperor Wen's Aśoka-like relic distribution campaign, see Chen, 2002a: 51-87. There was also possibly an imperial relic-distribution campaign during the Tang, but this centered around so-called *dharma*-relics, i.e. printed *sūtras*. See Barrett, 2005.

[418] In his article on Liang Wudi's Buddhist assemblies, Chen Jinhua (2006: 77-78) more or less rehashes Yan Shangwen's first and last argument without providing any new evidence. Thomas Jansen (2000: 212, footnote 50) rightfully points out that there are no known sources in which Emperor Wu explicitly identifies himself with king Aśoka, but he nonetheless chooses to lend credence to the theory, primarily on the grounds of archaeological data first presented by Teng Gu (1935), and revisited by Annette Kieser (2002: 147-148). The pillars that Wu ordered to be erected at his father's grave mound had no precedent in China, but their form showed many resemblances to the pillars that had been put up by king Aśoka in the third century BCE. Though it is likely true that Emperor Wu introduced this non-traditional style of grave design to break with the customary representation of emperorhood and reflect

Perhaps more important were the festivities surrounding the restoration of these pagodas, as on the occasion of the exhumation and reburial of the Buddha relics in the *Ayuwang* pagoda of the Changgan monastery, Emperor Wu held at least three of his “Great Unrestricted Assemblies” there.[419] The *Liang shu* (54: 791-792) tells of a “Great Unrestricted Assembly, *wu'ai dahui* 無礙 (written in its variant form 日+寸) 大會” held on the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month of the third year of the Datong period (September 17, 537). On this day the exhumed relics (a strand of hair and a tooth) were washed in a golden alms bowl while Emperor Wu did obeisance to them several dozen times. In response, a radiant beam of light burst from the relics. Emperor Wu was so affected by this occurrence, that he asked the Great Rectifier of Monks Huiling 慧令 (d.u.)[420] if he could take one of the relics back to his palace for a while for veneration. On the fifth day of the ninth month (September 24, 537), Emperor Wu held another Great Assembly to honour the relics. With a crowd of over one million onlookers, Emperor Wu donated gold and silver to the Changgan monastery for a total value in the order of ten million cash. Upon the reburial of the relics on the fifteenth day of the ninth month of the fourth

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the Buddhist ideological basis for his rule (Buddhist imagery could already be found on the traditional steles, but the form had hitherto remained pretty much the same), the connection with Aśoka was not necessarily intentional. Annette Kieser (2002: 148) speculates that the design for these pillars had been brought back by the pilgrim monk Faxian 法顯 (? - 422), who described them (and possibly drew them) in his *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳 (*Biography of the Eminent monk Faxian*, T.2085.859c23-c27 and 862b27-c3), a text also referred to as *Foguo ji* 佛國記 (*A Record of Buddhist Countries*; see Deeg, 2005). It is also possible that this Buddhist style of pillars was introduced by foreign monks and merchants from countries of the Indian cultural sphere who entered China through the ports in the South – such as Guangzhou 廣州 – and often made their way to the capital. The point is that the pillars used by Emperor Wu could simply have been used for their distinctly Buddhist appearance, rather than their affiliation with king Aśoka.

[419] The choice of the Changgan monastery as the location for these three Great Assemblies was clearly motivated by the occasion, but appears to have been rather the exception than the rule. Most of Liang Wudi's Great Assemblies were held in the Tongtai 同泰 monastery.

[420] In the *Liang shu* mistakenly written as *Huinian* 慧念. See Forte, 2003: 1062.

year of Datong (October 23, 538), Emperor Wu set up another Great Assemby to raise donations of gold, silver, necklaces, bracelets and other precious items from the aristocracy and wealthy families to be buried along with the relics.[421]

This brings us back to our original question of whether or not Emperor Wu conceived his massive assemblies as *pañcavārṣika* in emulation of king Aśoka. To find an answer, we should return to the terminology used. The *Aśokāvadāna* translation of 512 clearly refers to the *pañcavārṣika* held by king Aśoka with the term *wunian dahui* 五年大會 "Great Quinquennial Assembly",[422] which is a literal translation of the Sanskrit word. Another term used is *wunian gongde dahui* 五年功德大會 "Great Quinquennial Meritorious Assembly." [423] Not once is an assembly of Emperor Wu referred to like this in the sources.[424] The term was surely known to him, because it also features in the *Jinglü yixiang*, the Buddhist encyclopædia compiled on his order.[425] What might we conclude from this? Perhaps Emperor Wu was inspired by the example of Aśoka, but purposely chose not to call his assemblies "*wunian dahui* (*pañcavārṣika*)*"*, simply because of the fact that he held them much more often. A greater motivation for avoiding the term, however, might have been the fact that a direct link between himself and the figure of king Aśoka would have run counter to what he was trying to achieve, as it would limit the view on his person to that of a secular leader, when in fact he wanted to create a perception of the imperial persona as spiritual leader of the Buddhist community (both clergy and lay people), as a *bodhisattva*-emperor rather than as a *cakravartin*.[426] As such, his assemblies were to be a reflection of this *bodhisattva* image. Hence the reason that Emperor Wu is reported to regularly have lectured on the Buddhist *sūtras* at the beginning of the festivities. One report on an assembly in the Chongyun Hall 重雲殿 [427] held in 541 takes on propaganda-like characteristics when it describes how Emperor Wu, through his lecture, was able to solve the audience's doubts or ignorance:

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[421] The *Guang Hongming ji* (T.2103.203c24) also mentions the Great Unrestricted Assembly of 538, but provides no details. It does add that on the occasion, Emperor Wu declared a great amnesty (T.2103.204a7-8).

[422] T.2043.163a9, 163a12, 163a15, 163b9, and 163c10.

[423] T.2043.154b15.

[424] Incidentally, the Jin dynasty version of the *Aśokāvadāna* does not have this term either, but uses *banzheyuse* 般遮于瑟 to transcribe the word *pañcavārṣ ika* See T.2042.105a19, 105c12, 105c22, 106a16, and 106a18.

[425] See T.2121.89c19-90b4.

> 於是操持慧刃解除疑網。示之迷方歸以正轍。莫不渙然冰釋欣然頂戴。若蓮華之漸開。譬月初而增長。[428]
> Thus [His Majesty] wielded the blade of wisdom and freed them from the snares of doubt. By showing them where they had gone astray, he brought them back to the right track. For each and every one, doubts melted like ice in springtime, and joyfully they all bowed [to His Majesty's instructions]. As a lotus flower opens and the crescent moon waxes, so their understanding grew.[429]

Turning so many people on the right path to enlightenment was a very meritorious deed in itself, and the wording used to describe Emperor Wu's skill at lecturing clearly reflect his *bodhisattva* qualities. The personal lecturing of Emperor Wu at the Great Assemblies was therefore equally important as the large display of donations.

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[426] To be more precise, if Emperor Wu had wanted to mirror himself on king Aśoka, this would have made him a *cakravartin* of the Iron Wheel. As Forte (1976: 141) remarks: "frankly, no Chinese sovereign would ever have accepted such a vulgar instrument of government as a wheel of iron. If this was all that Buddhism had to offer, then it was worth-while holding on to China's own theory of the T'ien-hsia."

[427] As Chen (2006: 47-72) demonstrates, this hall served as a sort of palace chapel (*nei daochang* 內道場). Though not dedicated to Buddhism exclusively (Chen, 2006: 57), according to Daoxuan Emperor Wu organised monthly lecture assemblies here, which a thousand monks could attend at one time (T.2060.548b7). Emperor Wu himself often lectured on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. Cf. Chen, 2006: 53-54.

[428] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.236a1-3.

[429] Translation by Chen, 2006: 65.

Sheshen

Another way in which Emperor Wu sought to accumulate merit and reflect his *bodhisattva* qualities, is the practice of *sheshen* 捨身, meaning "to relinquish the body/the self". In using the word *sheshen* one has to bear in mind that, even at the time of Emperor Wu, this term referred to two distinct devotional practices, as it could mean both an act of physical self-sacrifice (not necessarily resulting in death) and the symbolic gift of one's property and personal services to the *saṃgha* (the latter was usually of a temporary nature).[430] Although both practices had the same objective of living up to the ultimate *bodhisattva* ideal of exhaustive giving, one was clearly more extreme than the other. This naturally meant that the more "civilised" symbolic donation of oneself was more widely practised by (wealthy) lay devotees than the acts of self-immolation, which would surely still have borne a social stigma among the tradition-minded elite who, despite the lofty religious motive for doing so, might regard the purposeful mutilation of one's own body as unfilial.[431] Since both practices of *sheshen* have been the subject of previous studies, I shall limit myself to exploring some elements that are relevant to this thesis.[432] First of all, as much as he wanted to reflect the *bodhisattva* image, Emperor Wu never physically sacrificed himself, but limited himself to symbolically donating all of his possessions to the monastic community and offering himself as a slave to the Tongtai monastery for a limited period of time, only to be ransomed by his ministers for a huge sum of money. One source suggests that Emperor Wu effectively disapproved of the physical form of self-sacrifice, at least the variant of auto-cremation, which had become something of a popular custom by the sixth century. The *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法花傳 (*Biographies of [Masters who] Expounded and Praised the Lotus Sūtra,* T.2067; compiled by Huixiang 慧詳 (d. after 706) during the early Tang Dynasty) renders a conversation between Emperor Wu and the monk Daodu 道度 (462-527), in which the latter makes his intention known that he wants to burn himself to be rid of his physical form. To this Emperor Wu replies:

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[430] Cf. Gernet (1995: 244-247), who theorises that the donation of property and services to the monastic community is an economic mechanism within a religious context, whereby someone repays his karmic debts through the donation of goods.

[431] Although James Benn (2007: 104-131) discusses the debates about the permissibility of self-immolation among Buddhist scholars, he does not treat the question of how this practice was perceived from the traditional Chinese perspective on filial piety, nor am I aware of any such study on the subject. John Kieschnick does cite some interesting examples from the dynastic histories of lay Buddhist officials who mutilated themselves as a display of filial devotion towards a deceased parent, and surprisingly these acts were favourably received by the authors of these histories. In many cases, the mourner cut himself in the finger (or even severed it) to copy out a Buddhist *sūtra* in his own blood to earn merit for his dead father or mother. See Kieschnick, 1997: 49-50; ibid., 2001.

> 必欲利益蒼生。自可隨緣修道。若身命無常。棄尸陀林。施以鳥獸。於檀度成滿。亦為善業。八萬戸蟲。不容燒燼。非所勸也。[433]
>
> If you really desire to create merit for beings, you ought to follow conditions in order to cultivate the Way. When your body and life become impermanent, then you should have your corpse cast into the forest. By donating it to the birds and beasts one completely perfects *dānapāramitā* and also makes good *karma*. Because of the eighty thousand worms it is not

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[432] On the origins of Buddhist self-immolation in India, see Ohnuma, 1997 and 1998; Lamotte, 1987. On the practice of auto-cremation and other forms of self-sacrifice in Chinese Buddhism, see Benn, 2007, 2006, 1998; Gernet, 1960; Jan, 1965; Funayama, 2002. Also see Kieschnick, 1997: 35-50. On the symbolic self-sacrifice as practiced by Liang Wudi, see Janousch, 1998: 213-220. Also see Yan, 1999: 264-285.

[433] *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, T.2067.24c22-24. Cf. *Fayuan zhulin*, T.2122.992c16-20.

> appropriate to burn yourself. It is not something to be encouraged.[434]

From this fragment it seems that Emperor Wu wanted to discourage the custom of auto-cremation as a form of self-sacrifice, though several cases of self-immolation are recorded to have taken place at Emperor Wu's Great Assemblies.[435] Emperor Wu's personal conviction against literal "abandonment of the body" might have stemmed from his well-documented concern for the proper display of filial piety towards his deceased parents.[436] Daoxuan describes Emperor Wu's continued pain over the death of his parents and his efforts in perpetuating their memories:

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[434] Translation by Benn, 2007: 4. The argument about how the eighty thousand worms (parasites) that inhabit a human body would be destroyed together with the person that burns himself (thus effectively committing the offence of killing) is repeated by Huijiao in his comment on the category of self-immolators in his *Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2059.406a26-28).

[435] See *Nan shi*, 7: 225 and *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.236a17-18. Cf. Chen, 2006: 67, 71-72, 84. In his report on the Great Assembly of 533, Xiao Zixian divides the donations into ten categories in accordance with the purposes designated to them by the donors. Categories eight and nine are related to self-sacrifice. Zixian distinguishes "those who renounced (*sheshen*) and gave themselves to the masses [in service] (或捨身施大眾者)" and "those who burned their finger(s) as offerings to the Three Jewels (燒指供養三寶者)" (T.2103.238a3-4). This too suggests that self-immolation of both the symbolic and the physical kind were a fixed part of Emperor Wu's assemblies, no doubt intended to stir up the religious fervour of the crowd to increase their generosity.

[436] In the very beginning of the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*), Confucius says to his disciples: "Our bodies – to every hair and bit of skin – are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them: this is the beginning of filial piety." (Legge, 1879: 466) For this reason it was highly offensive to one's parents to commit acts of self-mutilation. This argument had often been used in early anti-Buddhist polemics to demonstrate the "evils" committed by those who entered into the monastery and mutilated or degraded their bodies by shaving their heads and exposing their naked shoulders. It was, of course, also considered unfilial for a man not to continue the paternal lineage and to abandon his original surname. Cf. Zürcher, 1972: 281-285. Also see Ch'en, 1968 and 1973: 14-50.

> 頻代二皇。捨身為僧給使。洗濯煩穢仰資冥福。每一捨時地為之震。相繼齋講不斷法輪。為太祖文皇。於鍾山北澗。建大愛敬寺。[…] 千有餘僧四事供給。[…] 帝又於寺中龍淵別殿。造金銅像舉高丈八。躬伸供養每入頂禮。歔欷哽噎不能自勝。預從左右無不下泣。又為獻太后。於青溪西岸建陽城門路東。起大智度寺。[…] 以申追福。五百諸尼四時講誦。寺成之日。帝顧謂群后曰。建斯兩寺。奉福二皇。用表罔極之情。以達追遠之思。而不能遣蓼莪之哀。復於中宮起至敬殿景陽臺。立七廟室。[…] 設二皇座。具備諸禮冠蘊奩篋。舉目興慕晨昏如在。衣服輕暖隨時代易。新奇芳旨應時日薦。帝又曰。雖竭工匠之巧。殫世俗之奇。水石周流華樹雜沓。限以國務不獲朝夕侍食。惟有朔望親奉饋奠。而無所瞻仰。內心崩潰如焚如灼。又作聯珠五十首。以明孝道。又制孝思賦。廣統孝本。至於安上治民移風易俗。度越終古無德而稱。[437]
>
> [Emperor Wu] repeatedly gave himself (*sheshen*) [to a monastery] on behalf of his deceased parents as a servant to the monks [in order to] cleanse [his parents] from obstructions and defilements, and to entreat good fortune for their next life. Every time he gave himself [to a monastery], the earth trembled for him. He would successively fast and recite [from the scriptures], and incessantly [turned] the *Dharma* wheel.[438]
>
> For [his deceased father] *Taizu* 太祖 Wenhuang 文皇 [439], [the emperor] constructed the Da'aijing 大愛敬 monastery[440] near

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[437] T.2060.427a06-b14. I have left out the descriptions of the monasteries, temples and Buddha statues, since they are not relevant to the theme of Emperor Wu's concern for filial piety.

[438] The Wheel of the Dharma (*falun* 法輪) is a symbol for the Buddhist teaching. It has eight spokes, representing the Noble Eightfold Path to enlightenment. "Turning the Wheel" means to propagate the teaching.

[439] These are the posthumous title and temple name of Emperor Wu's father, Xiao Shunzhi 蕭順之 (444-494).

> the creek north of Mount Zhong,[441] […] [There were] more than a thousand monks [present], who were supplied with the four necessities.[442] […] The emperor also had an eighteen feet high gilded bronze [Buddha] statue constructed in another temple building of the monastery, named Longyuan 龍淵 (Dragon Abyss). He personally made offerings [to his late father there], and every time he entered [the temple], he would kneel down and touch the statue's feet with his forehead. Sobbing and choking with emotion, he could not constrain himself. Of his following there were none who did not shed a tear [in sympathy for his grief]. [Emperor Wu] also founded the Dazhidu 大智度 convent on the western bank of the Qingxi 青溪 river,[443] east of the road [to] Jianyang 建陽 city gate, in dedication to [his deceased mother], the Empress Xian獻太后.[444] […] All five hundred [resident] nuns recited and chanted [from the scriptures] all year round to transfer blessings to the deceased (*zhuifu* 追福).[445] On the day that the convent was finished, the emperor looked back over his

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[440] The *Shishi ji gulüe* 釋氏稽古略 (*Brief Historical Survey of Buddhism*, compiled by Jue'an 覺安 in 1354; T.2037.49.795b1) says that it was built in the ninth year of Tianjian (510), but this date is not mentioned in any other source. The *Liangjing siji* (T.2094.1024a16-b26) says that the Da'aijing monastery was built in the first year of Putong (520) on the northern peak of mount Jiang 蔣 (an alternate name for mount Zhong).

[441] Mount Zhong 鐘 was located just east of the capital Jiankang.

[442] The four necessities of a Buddhist monk are: clothing, shelter, medication and food.

[443] This river had its source southwest of Mount Zhong. It flowed through Jiankang and into the river Qinhuai 秦淮, a tributary of the Yangtze river, over a distance of approximately 10 Chinese miles. It has dried up and no longer exists today.

[444] His mother Zhang Zhirou 張至柔 (d. 469) died when Wu was only six years old (*Liang shu*, 3: 95). When he had ascended the throne, Emperor Wu confered on her the posthumous title of Emperor-Mother Xian 獻太后. According to the *Sishi ji gulüe*, the Dazhidu convent was built in the same year as the Da'aijing monastery, namely 510 (T.2037.795b2).

[445] On the notion of sending blessings after the deceased in relation to the building of state monasteries, see Forte, 1983: 685-686.

> shoulder and said to his consorts: "By building these two monasteries, I offer merit to my deceased parents. Through it, I express my boundless affection [for them], and through it, I realise my thoughts off perpetuating their memory [with the performance of the proper sacrifices]. But still I cannot dispel the grief of Liao'e 蓼莪.[446]" So again he erected the Zhijing 至敬 temple and Jingyang 景陽 terrace in the Central Palace [grounds], [447] and established seven shrines. […] When setting up the altars for his deceased parents, [the emperor] furnished them with all the ceremonial [items], [such as] the official's cap [for the male ancestor] and small boxes containing make-up and grooming items [for the female ancestor]. When gazing up [to these shrines] with exalted, affectionate thoughts, it was like they were present there, morning and evening. [The offered] clothes were light or warm according to the changing of the seasons. New and unusual fragrances were offered daily and in accordance with the time of year. The emperor said: "Even though I use the skills of the craftsmen to the fullest extent and exhaust all worldly wonders, still [puddles of] water and rocks are scattered around everywhere and the vegetation is growing rank. I am restricted [in my time] by state affairs and therefore I am unable to pledge food [to my deceased parents] morning and evening. Only on new moon and full moon (i.e. the first and

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[446] Name of a poem in the "Minor Odes (*Xiaoya* 小雅)" chapter of the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*). In this poem a son expresses his grief over the fact that he can no longer serve his deceased parents and thus repay the huge debt he feels he owes them for bringing him into this world and loving and nurturing him. Phrases from this poem are often quoted in utterances of filial piety. See Legge, 1970 [1893-1895]: 352.

[447] This is the palace where the emperor and empress live. It is called the Central Palace, to differentiate it from the Eastern Palace (also called Spring Palace, the residence of the heir apparent) and the Western Palace (where the emperor's concubines live).

> fifteenth day of the lunar month respectively) can I personally make offerings of food and drink to them. I have nothing to look up to with reverence. It is killing me inside. It is like I am being consumed by fire.” So he wrote fifty “linked verse” style poems (*lianzhu* 聯珠)[448] to illustrate the principles of filial piety, and made the *Xiaosi fu* 孝思賦 (*Narrative Verse on Filial Sentiments*)[449] in which he extensively gathered all the essentials of filial piety. When it comes to regulating the higher social ranks, governing the people, and changing [people's] customs and common practices, it surpasses anything in the past. One can not praise it enough.

With the building of two large state-sponsored monasteries in commemoration of his deceased parents, Emperor Wu clearly wanted to integrate a Buddhist element into the traditional ancestral worship, which was a vital cornerstone for the legitimacy of any Chinese dynasty.[450] One cannot underestimate the impact of Wu’s example, since it became a common practice from the seventh century onward to build Buddhist temples for imperial ancestors.[451] In relation to the subject of *sheshen*, the very first line of the account above jumps out for the bold claim it makes, namely that Emperor Wu performed his acts of self-sacrifice for the purpose of transferring the resulting merit to his deceased parents posthumously. This is probably an overstatement on the part of Daoxuan, as deeper investigation into the matter reveals that Emperor Wu's *sheshen* ceremonies served a purpose that largely transcended his personal desire to express his feelings of filial piety. There are records of four *sheshen* ceremonies held by Emperor Wu during his reign, which took place in the years 527, 529, 546 and 547.[452] It is worth mentioning that only the first *sheshen* ceremony of 527 is brought up in the Buddhist sources, while all other references are drawn from the official dynastic histories. The description of the *sheshen* in 527 in the *Liang shu* says:

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[448] This was a genre of poetry characterised by the linking of one's own verse with an extant one. This genre has a history that goes back to the early Han dynasty, but really came to bloom during the Liang. Xiao Gang 蕭綱(503-551), the later emperor Jianwen 简文 (r. 549-551), was a very skilled poet and wrote several of this type of verses. On “linked verse” and Xiao Gang's literary activities, see Marney, 1976: 76-117.

[449] Emperor Wu’s *Xiaosi fu* (whose preface likely served as a source for this account) is contained in the *Guang Hongming ji* (T.2103.336c26-338a3).

[450] As we have seen, Emperor Wu continued to perform the ritual sacrifices in the imperial ancestral temples, but had the live victims replaced by dough effigies. The *Sui shu* (7: 134), in discussing Emperor Wu’s vegetarian reforms in state sacrifice, mentions the construction of the Zhijing temple and Jingyang terrace as well, and says that Emperor Wu offered “pure food (*jingzhuan* 淨饌)” there twice a month. “From then onward until the destruction of the capital, no bloody food was [offered] in any of the ancestral temples [ever again] (自是訖於臺城破，諸廟遂不血食．).”

> 三月辛未，輿駕幸同泰寺捨身。甲戌，還宮，赦天下，改元。[453]
>
> On April 24, [the emperor] visited the Tongtai monastery in [His] imperial carriage and He renounced himself there. On April 27, He returned to the palace, where He announced a nation-wide amnesty and changed the reign-title [to Datong 大通].

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[451] See Forte, 1983.

[452] For 527, see *Liang shu*, 3: 71; *Nan shi*, 7: 205; *Jiankang shilu*, 17: 478; *Fozu tongji* T.2035.350b2-3; *Fozu lidai tongzai*, T.2036.547c7; *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.427b17-19. For 529, see *Liang shu*, 3: 73; *Nan shi*, 7: 206-207; *Jiankang shilu*, 17: 478-479. For 546 and 547, see *Liang shu*, 3: 92; *Nan shi*, 7: 218-219; *Jiankang shilu*, 17: 483. According to the *Sui shu*, two independent records of these *sheshen* ceremonies were made, namely the *Liang Wu huangdi dashe* 梁武皇帝大捨（*The great renunciations of Emperor Wu of the Liang*) in 3 fascicles, written by Yan Jing 嚴暠 , and the *Huangdi pusa qingjing dashe ji* 皇帝菩薩清淨大捨記（*The great Pure Renunciations of the Emperor-Bodhisattva*) in 3 fascicles, written by Xie Wu 謝吳, but neither text is extant. See *Sui shu*, 33: 979 and 34: 1010 respectively.

[453] *Liang shu*, 3: 71.

The *Nanshi* provides more details:

> 初，帝創同泰寺，至是開大通門以對寺之南門。[…]自是晨夕講義，多由此門。三月辛未，幸寺捨身。甲戌還宮，大赦，改元大通，以符寺及門名。[454]
>
> Earlier, the emperor had [ordered] the construction of the Tongtai monastery, and to make it [more] accessible he [ordered] the Datong gate to be opened [in the palace walls] opposite the monastery's southern gate. […] From then on, lectures [on the Buddhist teaching] were given morning and evening, and [the emperor] passed through that gate frequently. On April 24, [the emperor] visited the monastery and renounced himself there. On April 27, He returned to the palace, announced a great amnesty and changed the reign-title to Datong to tally with the monastery's and gate's name.

The *Nanshi* account directly links the emperor's first *sheshen* to the completion of the Tongtai monastery and the opening of the Datong gate that provided a direct access to the monastery from the palace. It seems that the construction of the Tongtai monastery signalled a milestone in the development of a Buddhist imperial ritual, because for the first time since starting out on his Buddhist reforms, Emperor Wu now had a state monastery under his control which could serve as the venue for all of his subsequent Buddhist ceremonies – including most of the Great Assemblies and his three other self-renunciations – without having to make an appeal to the mediation of the monastic community. Aside from its function as a venue for Emperor Wu's Buddhist ceremonies, the Tongtai monastery seems to have played an important part in the collection, and therefore also probably the distribution, of donations.[455] We have already discussed the huge sums of money that were raised during Wudi's Great Assemblies in the Tongtai monastery, but the *sheshen* ceremony in 527 too was coupled with the donation of huge sums of cash, as the *Fozu tongji* reports:

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[454] *Nan shi*, 7: 205.

> 駕幸同泰寺舍身。群臣以錢一億萬奉贖。皇帝歸宮。[456]
> [In the first year of Datong, Emperor Wu] went to visit the Tongtai monastery in His imperial carriage and He renounced himself there. His ministers offered an astronomical amount [to the monastery] as ransom for the emperor, who [subsequently] returned to the palace.

Thus, not only did Emperor Wu's personal self-renunciation generate merit, but the large donation paid by the ministers generated merit of its own as well. What remains unclear in all this is where exactly the money for this ransom came from. As we have seen in Xiao Zixian's report on the Great Assembly of 533, every effort was made to stress that the funds for Emperor Wu's Buddhist activities were not taken from the state treasury. If we take this assertion seriously, then that leaves the court officials as the ones saddled with the bill.[457]

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[455] Although there is no record on the distribution of money, materials, or commodities from the Tongtai monastery, it is plausible that, in its function as imperially supervised monastery, it was involved in the organisation of the Inexhaustible Treasuries, which have otherwise left no mark in the official imperial bureaucracy. Since most of the fundraising activities in the wake of the Buddhist ceremonies took place on the premises of the Tongtai monastery, it would be reasonable to assume that the gathered donations were stored somewhere on its grounds as well, to be distributed from there on out.

[456] *Fozu tongji*, T.2035.350b2-3.

[457] The *Liang shu* (3: 73) identifies the reluctant payers as "all from the highest nobility and highest officials on down" (*gongqing yixia* 公卿以下). One cannot help but get the feeling that these involuntary donations, extracted from the political elite to further Emperor Wu's Buddhist cause, had a more sinister and pragmatic purpose as well, and that was to bleed his

While the *sheshen* of 527 appears to have stood on its own as a solitary event, the following *sheshen* of 529, 546 and 547 were integrated into more elaborate ceremonies, centred on a Great Assembly. In addition, they were fringed with much more ceremonial procedures: when entering the Tongtai monastery to attend the Great Assembly, Emperor Wu first took off his imperial robes and donned a monk's frock (釋御服 披法衣). After that he made his abode in a small monastery cell where he lived in frugal conditions while carrying out menial tasks. The following day(s), Emperor Wu lectured on the Buddhist teaching to an audience of monks and lay people. After several days the court officials would come to the monastery to offer a huge ransom for the emperor's release, to which the monks would agree in silence.[458] Two days later, the court officials submitted a memorandum at the eastern gate of the monastery in which they requested Wu to return to the palace and take up his duties as emperor once again. Only after repeating this request two more times, does Wu finally accede to return. Three days later, Emperor Wu organised a second Great Assembly attended by over fifty-thousand people, after which he went to the Taiji 太極Hall (the place where he had first declared the reign-title Tianjian 天監upon his official enthronement ceremony) to declare a nation-wide amnesty and a change of reign-title.[459] In fact, all four *sheshen* ceremonies had resulted in a change of reign-title, an element that, together with the prior discarding of imperial regalia and subsequent petitions to reinstate his status as emperor, is very reminiscent of the imperial ascension ritual, whereby it was customary for the emperor-

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potential political adversaries financially in order to weaken their position. As we have seen above, the officials were expected to make large donations as a sign of their loyalty and vigour, which ultimately caused them to impose higher taxes on the people to cover their financial losses.

[458] The number of days which the emperor spent in the monastery as a servant was not fixed, and became steadily longer over time: four days in 527, fifteen days in 529, thirty-seven days in 546, and forty-four days in 547.

[459] *Nan shi*, 7: 206-207. The accounts of the 546 and 547 *sheshen* are very similar.

to-be to refuse the throne that was offered to him three times before accepting it. Once a new emperor had been inaugurated, a new reign-title was proclaimed. Emperor Wu had gone through these motions as well when he had ascended the throne, refusing the formal request by the abdicating heir to the Qi throne to take his place, only to accept after two more pleads by his entourage.[460] As such, the elaborate *sheshen* ceremonies had two layers: not only did they function as a means for the emperor to demonstrate his *bodhisattva* qualities by selflessly giving himself in service to the *saṃgha* (and by substitution to the Buddha), of which the resulting merit could then be used for the benefit of the entire nation, but at the same time they had all the trappings of a ceremony for the renewal of his emperhood. The latter is corroborated by the fact that Emperor Wu turned to the Vice Director of the Department of State (*shangshu puye* 尚書僕射) Xu Mian徐勉 (466-535)[461] to draw up a set of ritual regulations (*yizhu* 儀注) for his *sheshen* ceremony.[462] Xu Mian had already supervised the compilation of the Liang Ritual Code, and his involvement indicates that “the 529 *sheshen* and the later ones were official imperial rituals, sanctioned by scriptural sources and codified in writing.[463]”

Emperor Wu’s *sheshen* ceremonies were the object of criticism, not only by official historians, but by Buddhist scholars as well.[464] The Sanlun 三論 (Three Treatises, i.e. *Madhyamaka*) master Jizang 吉藏 (549-623), who had already criticised Liang Wudi’s erroneous understanding of the

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[460] *Liang shu*, 1: 28-29. For a chronology of the fulfilment of the ceremonial requirements for Emperor Wu’s accession, see Buttars, 1998: 210-257.

[461] Biography in *Liang shu*, 25: 377-387.

[462] See Janousch, 1998: 216.

[463] Ibid. 216. For the compilation of the Liang Ritual Code, see ibid. 47-53.

[464] For some examples of criticism on Emperor Wu’s *sheshen* in the dynastic histories, see Janousch, 1998: 217, note 93.

Two Truths (*erdi* 二諦) concept,[465] felt compelled to set the records straight about the proper meaning of the term *sheshen*. First of all, Jizang says that when it comes to the virtue of giving (Ch. *shi* 施, Skt. *dāna*)

> 施有內外。捨身是內。捨餘是外。外易內難。[466]
>
> there are [two kinds, namely] inner and outer. The renunciation of the body (*sheshen*) is inner [giving], the renunciation of everything else (*sheyu*) is outer [giving]. Outer [giving] is easy. Inner [giving] is hard.

He goes on to elucidate his analysis of the term *sheshen* with some examples:

> 問。捨身命財何異。答。若捨身為奴。則不開捨命。又捨頭目支節施人為捨身。為人取死為捨命。又釋。捨身即是捨命。但本意不同。故成兩別。如投身救虎。命雖不存。以肉施彼。意在施身也。他不耐我在。須得我死。於彼事乃辦。菩薩為茲殞命。身雖不存。是只捨命。自身命外。國城妻子。悉以施人。為捨財。梁武別釋此為一小科義。[467]
>
> Question: What is the difference between renouncing oneself, one's life and one's wealth?
>
> Answer: If *sheshen* would be to become a slave, then this does not explain the giving of one's life. [If on the other hand] one gives up one's head, eyes and limbs, then the *dānapati* is [in fact] performing [an act of] *sheshen*. When a person [allows himself] to be killed, then this is renouncing one's life. I shall explain this further. Although renouncing oneself is also

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[465] See *Erti yi* (*Meaning of the Two Truths*), T.1854.108b11-13. Cf. Lai, 1978 and 1980 *in passim*.

[466] *Shenman baoku* (*Treasury of the Śrīmālā Sūtra*), T.1744.34b27.

[467] Ibid., 36b23-c2.

> a renunciation of one's life, the original intention [behind the action] is not the same. That is why we distinguish between the two. If I should renounce myself in order to save a tiger, then, although my life would come to an end, [the purpose was] to feed the tiger with my flesh. [Thus] the intention lies in the renunciation of the self [for the benefit of another being, not in losing one's life]. If [the tiger] does not tolerate my presence and absolutely wants me dead, and then acts on this, then the *bodhisattva* will lay down his life for this [rather than to kill the tiger in self-defence]. Though the self would come to an end, this is only giving up one's life [since the initiative did not come from oneself]. Now aside from oneself and one's life, if one gives everything [one owns] from country, cities, wives and children, then this is to renounce one's wealth. Now, Emperor Wu of the Liang interpreted this differently, and only performed [renunciation] in its most narrow sense.

Jizang, the theoretician, approaches the issue of *sheshen* from a semantic angle, and concludes that Emperor Wu misused the term *sheshen* in the context of his renunciation ceremonies. He does not condemn Emperor Wu's *sheshen* ceremonies as such, only the vocabulary used to describe them, and the exaggerated hype created around what he deemed to be "an easy" virtue. The way Jizang sees it, the act of *sheshen* involves the loss of one's life, though that is not the ultimate intention behind it. The real meaning of *sheshen* is to selflessly help other beings with complete disregard for oneself, even unto the end of life. As such, Emperor Wu should have called his ceremonies *shecai* 捨財 "renouncing one's wealth". Though Jizang accuses Wu of interpreting *sheshen* in a narrow sense, in practice it appears to be Jizang who held on to a restricted view, as by his time the term had long been established for all forms of renunciation, be it in the literal or figurative sense, and would continue to be used thereafter. Another critic of Wudi's *sheshen* ceremony was emperor Taizu 太祖 (r.960-976) of the Song 宋dynasty (960-1273). When visiting a monastery in 972, he rattles on about how profoundly he understands the essence of the Buddhist teaching and therefore grasps its potential benefits to the state and its people, but prefers to pacify the nation by virtue of his exalted example. Unlike Liang Wudi, he says, who "in an act of self-renunciation gave himself as slave [to the monastic community], which is a one-sided, Hīnayānistic way of looking at it, and is thus not something that ought to be imitated by following generations (捨身為奴。此小乘偏見。非後代所宜法也).[468]" Emperor Taizu, reproaches Emperor Wu for clinging to, what he calls, a Hīnayānistic way of interpreting the ideal of *sheshen*. He ostensibly alludes to the perceived insincerity inherent in giving oneself up as slave to the *saṃgha*, only to be ransomed a few days later. This is indeed rather far removed from a Mahāyānistic understanding of the *sheshen* ideal, with its emphasis on altruistic self-sacrifice without a second thought for one's own life. The Hīnayānistic characteristic of Emperor Wu's *sheshen* can perhaps be explained by the possible origin of this custom, which leads us back to king Aśoka once again.

It has already been suggested that Emperor Wu's inspiration for his *sheshen* ceremony came from the *Aśokāvadāna.*[469] Both Chinese versions of this text contain the story about Aśoka's *pañcavārṣika*, though they differ in detail.[470] In broad outlines, the story tells how during a *pañcavārṣika* a playful bidding match ensues between king Aśoka and his son Kuṇāla, who try to outstrip each other in their donations to the *saṃgha*. In a final bid to outdo his son, Aśoka presents all of his possessions (from which he excludes the contents of the state treasury) to the monks, including his kingdom, his harem, his palace attendants, himself, and his son Kuṇāla.[471] After personally serving the monks and throwing in some extra donations in the form of monastic clothing, he pays a huge ransom to redeem all he had given before. One cannot deny that Emperor Wu's *sheshen* ceremony shows some remarkable similarities to that of Aśoka, as they share almost all of the same elements, namely the gift of his person to the *saṃgha* during a *pañcavārṣika* / Great assembly, the personal serving of the monks, and the payment of a huge ransom. The only difference is that Wu offered only himself, and not his country, concubines, palace attendants or children. As we have seen, the donation of material goods and service to the monastic community was perceived by some as a limited, Hīnayānistic interpretation of *sheshen*. In the case of Aśoka it was only normal for him to act in a Hīnayānistic way, for the idealised view on the *bodhisattva* as it would be expounded in the Mahāyāna literature did not yet exist.[472] Still stuck on the offside of the rigid boundary between those who lived outside this world in pursuit of religious goals (the monks and nuns), and those who lived in this world, ensnared in all of its impediments (the laity), king Aśoka was limited to making donations to display his religious fervour and sincerity. Being king allowed him to make a donation that could not be surpassed by anyone in the world, not even his own son. Thus by giving all, Aśoka reached the pinnacle of what a lay *dānapati* could achieve. When the *bodhisattva* ideal underwent a reinterpretation in Mahāyāna Buddhism, so did the concept of *sheshen*. As it was now deemed possible for all to attain bodhisattvahood, emulation of the selfless forms of self-sacrifice performed by the *bodhisattva* took on more extreme forms such as found in the *sūtras* and in the *jātaka* literature. Nevertheless, the original practice whereby one donated as much as one could to the *saṃgha*, even up to one's own freedom (to serve as a menial in the monastery), continued to exist side by side with the more idealised, "Mahāyānistic" practice of total self-renunciation.

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[468] *Fozu tongji*, T.2035.399a10-11.

[469] Tang, 1983: 320-322.

[470] See T.2042.105c8-106a19 and T.2043.140c9-141b5. For an English version of this story (which is a translation from the Sanskrit original, but it closely follows the *Ayuwang jing*), see Strong, 1983: 265-268.

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[471] The *Ayuwang jing* (translated in 512) has Aśoka emphatically exclude the state treasury from his donation (我今唯除七寶庫藏 一切 […] 施眾僧, T.2043.140c24-25). The *Ayuwang zhuan* (translated ca. 300) could be interpreted as saying that Aśoka gave the whole content of the state treasury to the monks, along with everything mentioned above (我盡庫藏 一切 […] 施僧, T.2042.105c21-22). It is unclear whether this difference is due to a mistranslation or ambiguous choice of words on the part of An Faqin, or if the story of king Aśoka had undergone this small, but vital change in the centuries that separated the two versions. The Sanskrit version translated by John Strong has Aśoka excluding the state treasury as well, but since it is an edition based on a large number of original manuscripts, it is unclear where we have to place it in history. Cf. Strong, 1983: 169.

[472] Generally speaking, the concept of the *bodhisattva* was interpreted differently in the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna branches of Buddhism. In Hīnayāna a *bodhisattva* was a being destined to reach enlightenment, and as this was considered to be relatively rare, it was thought that only one *bodhisattva* would exist at any given time. The attainment of bodhisattvahood, like Buddhahood, was reserved for the exceptional person. In Mahāyāna the ideal of the *bodhisattva* was expanded in its application. Here, a *bodhisattva* transformed into a being that is on the verge of full Buddhahood, but for altruistic reasons chooses not to do so in order to save as many people as possible from suffering. Many *bodhisattvas* were

The sources contain several references to such materialistic *sheshen* performed before those of Emperor Wu. The *NanQi shu*, for example, contains the following anecdote:

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believed to be active at the same time (which sparked a large-scale devotional movement within Buddhism), and in addition it was now said to be possible for everyone to aspire to bodhisattvahood. In other words not only monks and nuns could make progress towards enlightenment, but the laity, who in Hīnayāna had been reduced to mere supporters of the *saṃgha*, could achieve enlightenment as well by following the *bodhisattva* path. This path centred around the development of the six virtues (*pāramitā*), of which giving (*dāna*) – in Hīnayāna virtually the only way for lay people to accrue merit – was one. Though Jeffrey Samuels (1997) has demonstrated that many of the so-called Mahāyānistic elements of the *bodhisattva* ideal were already present in Hīnayāna scriptures, and thus underwent no major doctrinal development in early Mahāyāna, he maintains that there is a big difference in its application, as described above. For a collection of studies on the *bodhisattva* ideal in East Asia, see Kawamura, 1981.

> 世祖在東宮，專斷用事，頗不如法．任左右張景真，使領東宮主衣食官穀帛，賞賜什物，皆御所服用．景真於南澗寺捨身齋，有元徽紫皮袴褶，餘物稱是．於樂遊設會，伎人皆著御衣．[473]
>
> When Emperor Wu 武 (r. 483-493) still resided in the Eastern Palace (i.e. was still crown prince) there was sometimes an appropriation of supplies that was not entirely legal. When Zhang Jingzhen 張景真 (d. 479) was appointed as Head of the Office for Clothes and Food for the Eastern Palace, he was given miscellaneous items in reward, all of which were items of imperial clothing. [When] Jingzhen set up a vegetarian feast in the Nanjian南澗 temple and renounced himself, he borrowed purple leather [shoes],[474] trousers, court dresses and other things [from the Office for Clothes and Food] dating back to the Yuanhui 元徽 era [of the Liu Song dynasty].[475] When [later] an assembly was set up in Yueyou 樂遊, all the craftsmen [who worked on the monastery there] wore imperial robes.[476]

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[473] *NanQi shu*, 31: 573.

[474] According to the *NanQi shu* (2: 39) the imperial concubines wore purple leather shoes, therefore I add “shoes” in the translation.

[475] The Yuanwei era coincides with the reign of child-emperor Houfei 後廢 (r. 473-477) of the Liu Song dynasty (420-479), who ascended the throne at the tender age of nine (ten by the Chinese way of counting age). His reign, however, was anything but tender, as the historical records speak of the many cruelties committed by the unmanageable, spoiled child.

[476] As one can imagine, this unlawful appropriation of imperial items did not go down well with the ruling emperor, Gaodi 高帝 (r. 479-482). In the beginning of the Jianyuan 建元 era (479-482) he ordered the execution of Zhang Jingzhen. Emperor Wu, then still crown-prince, sent someone over to his father to plead for Zhang Jingzhen’s life. Gaodi became so enraged, that the messenger quickly backed down and withdrew. Although it is not specified for what reason Zhang Jingzhen was executed, it is very likely that it was for this unlawful appropriation of imperial goods. See *NanQi shu*, 24: 745; *Nan shi*, 41: 1051.

Although Zhang Jingzhen does not give himself as a servant to the monastery – which, considering the questionable origin of his donation need not be surprising – his act of renunciation does take place during an assembly of some sort, namely a vegetarian feast, and it does involve the donation of what should, in the spirit of the ceremony, be personal belongings. The motive for entering only this single, negative example of a *sheshen* ceremony in the official history is a bit puzzling. At first glance, one might suspect that the scandalous undertone of the anecdote betrays the most likely reason for its inclusion in the official dynastic history, and that is to demonstrate that the devotional practice of Buddhism and state administration do not mix. If we keep into account that the author of the *Nan Qi shu* is Xiao Zixian, this motivation seems less likely, as it was Xiao Zixian who wrote the laudation of Emperor Wu's Great Assembly of 533. Why then would the same author praise the use of Buddhism in politics in one report, and condemn it in another? Perhaps the reason for bringing up the case of Zhang Jingzhen was to contrast it to the *sheshen* of Emperor Wu, who unlike Jingzhen did not take items belonging to the state to offer to the Buddhist monastic community, but only made use of his own personal wealth or of donations made by others. By citing this negative example, Emperor Wu's virtues would shine through all the brighter.

Jacques Gernet provides three further examples of symbolic acts of self-renunciation.[477] The first example is of a seventy-year-old woman of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534) who in 515 gave herself up as a slave to the *triratna* (以身自施三寶為婢). Her three sons all put on slave garments and went to the monastery, weeping for their mother. As the monks were moved by their display of affection, they allowed them to ransom their mother with reels of cloth. After that, she took the vows and became a nun.[478] The second example is taken from the colophon to a copy of the

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[477] Gernet, 1995: 244-245.

[478] See *Weishu*, 71: 1571; T.2035.355c3-5.

Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra from Dunhuang, translated by Lionel Giles.[479] This colophon states that, in 531, person so-and-so from the Northern Wei gave himself, his wife, children, servants and domestic animals to the *saṃgha*. He then paid several thousand cash to ransom them, and wished the money to be used on copying *sūtras* so that the resulting merit would bring him and his family the blessing of long life, the attainment of enlightenment, and a chance to return to the capital, from which they had been forced to flee. These two examples show that the practice of *sheshen* was also well known in the North, and thus not exclusive to the Southern dynasties. The second example is also interesting, because it demonstrates that the merit accrued by the act of *sheshen* could be transferred to other people and could be dedicated to a specific goal by the donator. Gernet's third example comes from the *Guang Hongming ji*, which contains a dedicational text to accompany the *sheshen* ceremony performed by the Prince of Nanjun 南郡王from the Southern Qi, written by Shen Yue.[480] In this text, the prince vows to donate one-hundred-and-eighteen personal items.

To the examples provided by Gernet we can add the case of Shen Yue, who besides writing the dedicational text for the Prince of Nanjun performed a *sheshen* ceremony of his own in 509, for which the dedicational text is also preserved in the *Guang Hongming ji*.[481] In this text, Shen Yue regrets that by enriching himself he has injured others. To make amends, he vows to set up a (vegetarian) feast for one hundred people, and to make a donation of himself (*sheshen*) and of one-hundred-seventeen items of clothing. Instead of serving as a menial in a monastery, he vows to "go forth from home just like the Buddha, for one day and one night (一日一夜同佛出家)."

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[479] For references, see Gernet, 1995: 373, note 44.

[480] *Nan Qi Nanjun wang sheshen shu* 南齊南郡王捨身疏(T.2103.323c26-324a14).

[481] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.323b14-c25. For a translation of this text, see Mather, 1988: 157-159.

One final case leads us to the monk Zhizang, who we have already encountered in a fierce debate with Emperor Wu on the latter's wish to instate himself as leader of the monastic community. In spring of the final year of the Tianjian period (519):

> 捨身大懺。招集道俗。并自講金剛般若以為極悔。惟留衣缽。餘者傾盡一無遺餘。陳郡謝幾卿。指掛衣竹戲曰。猶留此物尚有意耶。藏曰。身猶未滅意何由盡。而尚懷靖處託意山林。還居開善因不履世。[482]
>
> [Zhizang] renounced himself in a in a display of utter repentance. He invited monks and lay people over for an assembly and personally recited the *Jin'gang banruo*金剛般若,[483] which he considered to be the ultimate [act of]

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[482] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.466c27-467a3.

[483] *Jin'gang banruo* 金剛般若 is short for *Jin'gang banruo boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, which is the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*The Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom of the Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion*, or *Diamond Sūtra* for short). Many translations into Western languages have been made over the years. One of the standard translations remains that of Price-Wong, 1969. Zhizang probably recited the earliest translation of the text, made by Kumārajīva ca. 401 (T.235). The *Diamond Sūtra* plays the leading role in an important episode of Zhizang's life:

> There was once an old woman from the countryside who was a skilled physiognomist. She had reckoned a hundred good and ill fortunes and not once had she been wrong [in her predictions]. She said to Zhizang: "Your clever argumentation is unparalleled and your reputation is widely known in the world. However, your life will, unfortunately, not be a long one, possibly only reaching thirty-one years of age." He was at that time already twenty-nine years old and was very startled by this report. He used up all his strength to develop his religious activities and made a solemn vow not to go through the door again [to remain inside for study]. He was reciting the *Diamond Sūtra* while waiting for death to come claim him, when suddenly he heard a voice, speaking from the void, saying: "My good son, you are about to turn thirty-one. You were told that your time would run out at this moment, but due to the powers of the *Diamond Sūtra*, you have come to double your

> repentance. He only kept his monk's robe and begging bowl and everything else he gave away to the last thing. Xie Jiqing 謝幾卿 (d. after 525)[484] of the Chen-district pointed to his robe and bamboo [begging bowl] and said in jest: "Since you hold on to these items after all, it seems you still have a mind that clings to this world?" Zhizang said: "As my body has not yet perished, how can my intentions completely end? Yet I harbour the intention of pacifying my senses (*chu* 處),[485] committing my intentions to [a life] in reclusion, and also to

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> lifespan!" After this, Zhizang went to the physiognomist, who stood up in great surprise, saying: "How is it you are still among the living? When I last saw you, you had the physiognomy of someone who did not have long to live, but now this is completely gone! You, *śramaṇa* are truly unfathomable." Zhizang asked: "How old do you think I will get now?" She replied: "According to your complexion and bone-structure, I would say more than sixty years old." Zhizang said: "Fifty is already a full life, it is not dying young. The circumstances have changed." And he then informed her of the reason for all of this. The physiognomist gladly accepted his explanation and when finally, at the end of his life he passed away, all had transpired the way the physiognomist had predicted. Thereupon, the monks and laymen from west of the Yangtze all competed with each other in reciting the *Diamond Sūtra* [which had saved Zhizang's life]. There were many acknowledged miracles [that occurred in response to these recitations]. (*Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.466a23-b8)

At the time of his *sheshen* ceremony in 519, Zhizang was sixty-two years old, exactly double of the originally predicted thirty-one year lifespan. This, together with the fact that he recited the *Diamond Sūtra* again, which had saved his life the previous time, suggests that maybe his act self-renunciation was an attempt to postpone his death again. If so, he was moderately successful, as he lived another three years before death caught up with him. This case demonstrates that the performance of a symbolic self-renunciation was often inspired by motives of personal gain, rather than altruism.

[484] Biography in *Liang shu*, 50: 708-710.

[485] This term refers to the six senses and the sensations that come from them (Skt. *āyatana*). Paired up, they are: (1) eyes-seeing, (2) ears-hearing, (3) nose-smelling, (4) tongue-tasting, (5) skin-feeling, and (6) mind-thought process.

> apply myself to the [development of] benevolence. For this reason I no longer dwell in this world [and have effectively renounced myself].”

This anecdote is interesting, because it renders a limited, but informative discussion on the value of a *sheshen* as executed by Zhizang. Xie Jiqing pertinently makes the observation that there is a blatant incongruity in purporting to renounce oneself, but subsequently holding on to material things meant to support that self. The irony of the symbolic *sheshen* ceremony, picked up on by Jiqing, must surely not have been lost on other critics either, and if he wanted to lend any credibility to the sincerity of his self-renunciation (and to the custom as a whole), Zhizang had to formulate a coherent retort. Zhizang clarifies to his critic that the ultimate goal of the *sheshen* is to signal one’s intent to break the chain of interdependent causation by purifying the six senses which cause the mind to cling to existence and to create the delusion of a self.[486] As such, the *sheshen* is effectively a renunciation of the self, but as long as the body lives, it needs certain things to survive. Holding on to some items in order to nurture the body, does not mean that one clings to the self. It is simply out of necessity, for without the body there can be no mental practice to shut out the six senses. One will never be able to reach enlightenment by allowing the body to die, as this will prevent the necessary spiritual practice from being performed. This explanation feels somewhat “Hīnayānistic” as it stresses individual effort in spiritual training. Zhizang might just as well have retorted in a “Mahāyānistic” fashion by saying that the gift of one’s personal belongings earns that person merit, and therefore sets him further on the road to enlightenment. And merit is what it was all about for Emperor Wu, so perhaps this too is a point on which Zhizang and Wu would not have seen eye to eye, if ever they should have discussed the issue.

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[486] When the six senses come into contact with external objects (*sparśa*), the resulting perception (*vedanā*) will cause the senses to crave for more (*tṛṣṇā*). This in turn gives rise to attachment (*upādāna*) to the elements of life, which cause new actions to arise, which in turn result in a new existence (*bhava*). Existence leads to (re)birth (*jāti*), which leads to old age and death (*jarāmaraṇ à*), thus starting a new cycle.

The examples above show that by the time of Liang Wudi first *sheshen* ceremony, this custom was already widespread in China and had assumed many different forms. It is therefore hard to say whether or not Emperor Wu drew inspiration for his *sheshen* ceremonies from the retranslated *Aśokavadāna* or simply build on an existing custom. Throughout all of his Buddhist (and Confucian) endeavours, Emperor Wu strove to have sound scriptural authority. Perhaps this is the reason for the retranslation of the *Aśokavadāna*: not because he had never heard of the practice and sought inspiration for a ceremony of his own, but because he wanted a strong historic precedent for his actions in the form of authoritative scripture. As the older version of the *Aśokāvadāna* was ambiguous as to the donation of state property and the payment of ransom, he opted for a retranslation which would clarify these items.

III.2. The promotion of vegetarianism

An important feature linked to the doctrine of rebirth and karmic retribution is the promotion of a vegetarian diet. Emperor Wu's name inevitably pops up in studies on the development of vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism, as his reign signified a period of intense propagation of vegetarianism among Buddhist laymen as well as monks.[487] Vegetarianism was not a trait unique to Buddhism. In the Confucian tradition it was customary to abstain from meat during the period of mourning after the death of a relative.[488] Nor was vegetarianism a defining feature of Buddhism, as the consumption of meat had initially not been a problem for monks, provided they had not seen or heard the slaughter, or did not suspect that the animal had been killed especially for them.[489] However, as more Mahāyāna scriptures were translated into Chinese, important Mahāyānistic concepts such as compassion (*ci* 慈) and the *bodhisattva* ideal infiltrated the thoughts of Chinese Buddhists. The emphasis on universal compassion for all living beings, be they humans or animals, added a new, moral layer to the question of whether or not it was permitted to eat meat, because the focus now shifted from the possible social or physical consequences for the individual who consumed the meat to the suffering of the living being on the receiving end of the butcher's knife. This increased moralisation of monastic regulation meant that one need not have butchered the animal with his or her own hands in order to be deemed responsible for its death. Consuming its meat is exactly the same as killing it, so the next logical step for a compassionate Buddhist to take, is to adopt a vegetarian diet. The three most influential scriptures that explicitly call on all disciples of the Buddha to stop eating meat are the

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[487] For more on vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism, see Lavoix, 2002; Kieschnick, 2005; Heirman – De Rauw, 2006; Mather, 1981 (especially pp. 421- 423); Suwa, 1988. Also see Forte – May, 1979. Two studies that focus directly on Emperor Wu's promotion of a vegetarian diet in the context of his political reforms are provided by Janousch (1998: 105-172) and Yan Shangwen (1999: 228-261).

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[488] In premodern China, eating (certain types of) meat had for a large part always been a class privilege, limited to those who could afford the luxury. Hence the existence of the term "meat-eaters" (*roushizhe* 肉食者) applied to the ruling class. The adoption of a sober diet (excluding meat) was therefore not only interpreted as the ascetic practice of someone aspiring to become a sage, but also as a silent protest against the gluttony and decadence of those in power. See Sabban, 1993: 86; Kieschnick, 2005: 193.

[489] All *vinayas* permit the consumption of meat if these three conditions are met, but some enumerate certain kinds of meat that are to be avoided. These are, for example, meat of elephants, horses, dogs, human beings, etc. The reasons for this are mostly practical. Some animals, such as elephants or horses, belong to the king's army, and are therefore too 'high class' to be consumed. Other animals, like dogs, are eaten by low class people, so eating them could offend the rich, upper class benefactors. Still other animals posses magical powers, or might attack the monk. For references to the relevant *vinayas*, see Heirman – De Rauw, 2006: 60.

(Mahāyāna) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*,[490] and *Fanwang jing* 梵網經. The first two scriptures are important in the development of the *Tathāgathagarbha* thought, the assertion that all sentient beings are destined to become Buddhas one day. This idea that all living beings are endowed with the essence of Buddhahood softened the “ontological and moral distinctions between humans and other beings”,[491] and thus highlighted the universalistic aspect in the theory of rebirth and karmic retribution, namely that animals and humans are all connected through time and space in the endless cycle of rebirth, and that the animals we eat today could very well have been our relatives in a past life. The *Fanwang jing* was seen as a kind of Mahāyāna supplement to the *vinaya*, a guideline of moral precepts to help both lay people and monks and nuns on the right path to enlightenment. By the early sixth century, these so-called *bodhisattva* precepts had became very popular among lay people, and from there infiltrated the life of monks and nuns until they were finally introduced into the ordination ceremony.[492] The *Fanwang jing* repeats many of the same arguments in favour of vegetarianism that were posed in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, so we can assert that a lot of the scriptural basis and ‘vocabulary’ of the discourse on vegetarianism had been presented by the time that Emperor Wu ascended the throne.

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[490] There are three extant translations into Chinese. The earliest translation was made by Guṇabhadra (Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅, 394-468) around the middle of the fifth century under the title *Lengjia abaduoluobao jing* 楞伽阿跋多羅寶經 (T.670). About a century later, Bodhiruci (Putiliuzhi 菩提流支, fl. early sixth century) made a new translation, the *Rulengjia jing* 入楞伽經 (T.671). A final translation was made by Śikṣānanda (Shicha’nantuo 實叉難陀, 652-710) during the reign of Empress Wu (r. 684-705). This is the *Dacheng rulengjia jing* 大乘入楞伽經 (T.672). For a translation (based on the Sanskrit version of this scripture) and study of this text, see Suzuki, 1956 and 1930.

[491] Campany, 1996: 390.

[492] See Heirman – De Rauw, 2006: 63.

It is clear that Emperor Wu did not invent the vegetarian movement he was so vehemently to defend and propagate. He more or less grew up with it, so in some respect he was merely a product of the times. Prince Xiao Ziliang had been a strong proponent of the vegetarian diet, something which no doubt had been a major inspiration to Emperor Wu in the expression of his faith.[493] Shen Yue, a devout lay Buddhist who had been an important member of the clique around Prince Xiao Ziliang and who later served as one of Emperor Wu's chief advisors on ritual matters during the formative years of the Liang dynasty, in the final years of his life had written a pamphlet to promote compassion for all living beings. This essay, titled *Jiujing cibei lun* 究竟慈悲論 (*On Ultimate Compassion*)[494] is essentially an appeal for vegetarianism in the extreme, as he even condemns the fabrication of silk, which inevitably requires the killing of the silk worm. It is unclear if this passionate plea by Shen Yue was a contributing factor to Emperor Wu's decision to commence his vegetarian campaign, but it stands on its own as an example of some of the contemporary ideas about the subject amongst Buddhist laymen. A first motive behind Emperor Wu's efforts to promote vegetarianism among his subjects might thus be described as sincere religious fervour. When abolishing the use of live animals in the Confucian ritual sacrifices at the ancestral temple and the altars dedicated to Heaven and Earth in 517, he might simply have acted on personal religious feelings, inspired by his illustrious forerunners. However, a document contained in Daoxuan's *Guang Hongming ji* suggests that deeper motives underlay the vegetarian reforms. This document, titled *Duan jiurou wen* 斷酒肉文 (*On the abstinence from alcohol and meat*)[495], records the events that took place at a large assembly of monks, convened by Emperor Wu in the Hualin 華林 palace around the year 522 CE with the purpose of generalising the vegetarian diet for monks and nuns.[496] The opening address, given by Emperor Wu at this occasion, starts off with the telling phrase:

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[493] Lavoix, 2002: 116-117.

[494] His essay is preserved in Daoxuan's *Guang Hongmingji,* T.2103.292c8-293a27. For a discussion and translation of this essay, see Mather, 1988: 161-166. Also see Mather, 1981: 422-423; Lavoix, 2002: 115-116.

[495] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.294b16-303c5.

> 夫匡正佛法是黑衣人事。迺非弟子白衣所急。但經教亦云。佛法寄囑人王。是以弟子不得無言。[497]
> Although correcting the [practice of the] Buddhist teaching is a monastic affair that I, as a lay disciple should not concern myself with, the scriptural teachings also say that “the Buddha’s Law is entrusted to the kings of men.” Therefore I can not but speak up.

This is not the only time that Emperor Wu is on record using this justification for meddling in the internal affairs of the monastic community. Almost a decade before, this same argument had popped up in the discussion between Zhizang and Emperor Wu when the latter wished to inaugurate himself as ‘Lay Rectifier of Monks’ (*baiyi sengzheng* 白衣僧正). As we have seen, this idea that the preservation of the proper Buddhist teaching was entrusted to the secular authorities was closely linked to *mofa* beliefs, and for that reason it was another of Emperor Wu’s key concepts.[498] This very first sentence of Emperor Wu’s opening address leaves no doubt for the reader that the objective of this great assembly was not merely religious, but also political in nature. Since his previous attempt to become the de-facto bureaucratic head of the monastic community had failed, he could not coerce the monks and nuns to adopt a vegetarian diet by the promulgation of a law to that effect, since it would not be considered binding by the *saṃgha*, which enjoyed a relatively autonomous status when it came to imperial bureaucratic control. Thus, the only option left to Emperor Wu was to pressure them into it by doctrinal argument, peer pressure, shame tactics, and a display of imperial might.

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[496] The precise date of these events is uncertain. Suwa Gijun (1978) suggests that the assembly took place between 518 (after the sacrifice of animals in the ancestral temple had been abolished) and 523 (since one of the participants identified by name died in 524). Valérie Lavoix (2002: 120, note 76) proposes the year 522, based on the title used to introduce a man named Zhou She 周捨 (469-524, biography in *Liang shu*, 25: 375-377).

[497] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.294b18-20.

[498] See previous chapter on *mofa*.

Most of Emperor Wu's doctrinal arguments can be traced back to the established authoritative scriptures on the subject, namely *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, and *Fanwang jing*. The starting point of his plea is 'compassion' for all living beings, but above all, he emphasises the workings of karmic retribution as it is linked to the endless cycle of rebirth. In the *Duan jiurou wen*, he says that:

> 一切親緣遍一切處。直以經生歷死神明隔障。是諸眷屬不復相識。今日眾生或經是父母。或經是師長。或經是兄弟。或經是姊妹。或經是兒孫。或經是朋友。而今日無有道眼。不能分別。還相噉食不自覺知。噉食之時。此物有靈。即生忿恨還成怨對。向者至親還成至怨。如是之事豈可不思。暫爭舌端一時少味。永與宿親長為怨對。可為痛心難以言說。白衣居家未可適道。出家學人被如來衣習菩薩行。宜應深思。[499]
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> All family relationships are represented in every station [in the cycle of rebirth]. Continuously passing through life and death, the 'spirits' (*shenming*) [of kinsmen] are separated from each other. Because of this, family members do not recognize each other [in another form]. Of all the sentient beings today, some were once our father and mother, some were once our teachers and respected elders, some were once our brothers and sisters, some were once our children and grandchildren, some were once our friends. But now we have no truth-discerning eye and do not recognize them. Consequently, we

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[499] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.297a24-b4.

> eat each other without ever being personally aware of it. At the moment we eat them, these things have supernatural powers, and they will grow resentment towards us and become spiteful enemies. Those who were once our closest kin will become our ultimate doom. This being so, how can one not contemplate these matters?! For a momentary wriggle of the tongue and a short instant of taste, we bring about eternal wrath from our loved ones and elders. It is difficult to express in words how utterly deplorable this is. Laymen can not yet conform to this *dao*, but you, learned monks, wearing the Tathāgata's garments and practicing the *bodhisattva* way should deeply contemplate this.

The horrific image of devouring one's own relatives is clearly used as a karmic deterrent against eating meat. Not only does this act bring about bad things for the one who does the eating, one also has to face the possibility of being devoured oneself in a future existence. The use of this imagery also brings a deep-rooted Confucian value into play, namely that of filial piety. If the threat of bad karmic consequence was not enough to convince people to stop eating meat, the fear of committing the ultimate unfilial act certainly would be. By linking every living being in this world together in the karmic process, a universal community is created where it is everyone's responsibility and duty to look after every other living being. After all, if you did not, you might be harming a loved one, or next time it might be you. The reason for Emperor Wu to emphasise the need for a vegetarian diet on karmic grounds is thus to portray himself as a guardian of all living beings, looking out for his subjects in whatever form by inspiring laymen by example and coercing the monastic community to live up to the standards expected of them. In the quote we also see why Emperor found it necessary to counter Fan Zhen's *Treatise on the Destructibility of the Shen* and establish the existence of a lasting entity (which he designated *shenming*) that has the essence of Buddhahood, and travels from one life to the next until its final return to *nirvāṇa*. In the debates about the nature of the 'soul', the existence of an enduring entity, such as the *shenming*, was conceived to be a prerequisite for the validity of the doctrine of karmic retribution. How could there be karmic retribution if there was no agent to transfer the karmic burden to a new entity? If there were no enduring self, how could one claim that it is possible to devour one's relatives? In other words, if there were no enduring self, the process of karmic retribution would lose all of its individualistic appeal. This in turn would debunk Emperor Wu's efforts to portray himself as a universal saviour to his people. After all, if there was no enduring self, what was there to be saved from a miserable future existence? If Emperor Wu wanted to assert that all life is determined by the workings of karmic retribution (and not by random fate, as many *xuanxue* thinkers believed) and that he could save people from their plights, he simply needed consensus on the existence of an enduring entity.

Emperor Wu's emphasis on the karmic process can be found throughout his opening speech. Monks and nuns who eat meat and drink alcohol are accused of being worse than followers of other teachings, since

> 今佛弟子酣酒嗜肉。不畏罪因不畏苦果。即是不信因不信果。與無施無報者復何以異。[500]
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> nowadays, Buddhist disciples drink themselves into a stupor and eat meat. They do not fear [actions that produce] a bad cause and they do not fear its bitter consequence, which means they do not believe in cause and effect. How do they differ from those who do not give and do not receive a reward (i.e. those who do not live by the Buddhist doctrine of karmic retribution)?

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[500] Ibid., p.294b28-29.

The belief in the truth value of the doctrine of karmic retribution is singled out by Emperor Wu as a defining feature of what makes a good Buddhist.

> 凡出家人所以異於外道者。正以信因信果信經。[501]
>
> That by which a monk differs from the followers of other teachings, is exactly his belief in cause and consequence, and [the contents of] the *sūtra*s.

However, this line of reasoning was not followed by the monks and nuns themselves. Although none of them questioned the validity of the doctrine of *karman*, many of them remained unconvinced that they were not allowed to eat meat, as the *vinaya*s did not mention such a prohibition. The *vinaya*s merely restricted the consumption of certain kinds of meat that could have harmful social or personal consequences, and specify that the meat could not have been killed by them or especially for them. The core problem with scriptural arguments for or against vegetarianism, is that there are two types of scriptural authorities that contradict each other. On the one hand there are the *vinaya*s, and on the other hand there are the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s such as those mentioned before, that quote the Buddha as saying that eating meat is wrong. On a doctrinal level, these discrepancies were easily explained away by the standard explanation that the Buddha's teachings were adapted to the intellectual capacities of his audience and in time revealed an increasingly complex teaching that was ever closer to the 'truth'. On a practical level, however, the problem for the monastic community remained unresolved: in matters of monastic regulation, should one regard the *vinaya*s as ultimate authority, or are the *sūtra*s equally authorative as the word of the Buddha. And what rule should the monastic community follow when these two sources are conflicting? As John Kieschnick concludes, the monks who were asked if quotes from the *sūtra*s could be granted the status of monastic regulation did not dare to make such a bold conclusion, as this would mean that one of the sources would have to be discarded as spurious.[502] Emperor Wu, from his side, seemed convinced that the *sūtra*s were the ultimate reference in case of doubt, if not because he looked at this matter from the perspective of a laymen, then surely because he knew he had to make this call if his intended aim of converting the monastic community to vegetarianism was to succeed. Immediately after singling out the doctrine of cause and effect as a defining point of belief for a Buddhist monk or nun, he says that

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[501] Ibid., p.294b22.

> 所明信是佛說經言。[503]
>
> that which they put their faith in, are the words of the *sūtra*s
> as spoken by the Buddha.

Despite Emperor Wu's efforts to settle the vegetarian question in his mass conference, the debates based on the scriptures, in the end, remained inconclusive.

In drawing on Buddhist imagery for the purpose of reinventing imperial ideology, Emperor Wu generally ensured that he had a solid scriptural foundation, as was also the case with his propagation of vegetarianism. However, this alone was obviously not going to be enough to persuade the great bulk of the monastic community, so Emperor Wu also drew on other methods to change their minds, or at least to coerce them into behaving in the way he would like them to. A powerful tool for doing this was to apply peer pressure. At one point during the 522 assemblies, Emperor Wu asks three monks if they have ever eaten meat. Two of them claim never to have eaten meat, while the third respondent reluctantly confesses that, though he never ate meat when he was younger, he now, in his old age, occasionally makes an exception to this rule when ill.[504] These three monks were most likely singled out for questioning on the basis of their exemplary behaviour, or perhaps they did not dare to acknowledge any 'inappropriate' behaviour when addressed on a personal level. It is interesting to note that the third respondent, a monk named Baodu 寶度 (d.u.), emphasises that no meat was ever served in the Dinglin 定林[505] and Guangzhai 光宅monasteries during his stay there, not even in case of illness. These two monasteries were state-sponsored monasteries,[506] which made it all the more important to stress that they

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[502] Kieschnick, 2005: 200.

[503] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.294b23.

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[504] Ibid., p. 299b13-18.

[505] There were actually two Dinglin monasteries, both located on Mount Zhong 鍾山 (just NE of the capital Jiankang 建康) The original monastery was built in 424 by Huijue 慧覺 (d.u.). When the monk Dharmamitra (*Tanmomiduo* 曇摩蜜多, 355-442) came to this temple in 433, he made such an impression that he was allowed to build a second monastery on the West flank of Mount Zhong. This was called the Upper Dinglin 定林上 monastery and the original was renamed Lower Dinglin (下) monastery.

[506] The Guangzhai monastery was founded by Emperor Wu shortly after he ascended the throne in 502. It was his former residence which by his order had been converted into a monastery (*Liang shu*, 49: 698 and *Nan shi*, 72: 1780). The monk Fayun 法雲 (467-529), who was an important advisor to the emperor on Buddhist matters, was made abbot of this monastery by imperial edict (T.2060.464b5). The Dinglin (shang) monastery was the scene of great translation and compilation activity at the time of Emperor Wu. In 508, for example, Sengmin 僧旻 (467-527), who was revered together with Zhizang and Fayun as one of the three great Dharma masters of the Liang (T.1779.716b13-15, T.2060.548b12), was detached from the Zhuangyan 莊嚴 monastery to the Dinglinshang monastery to start work on a monumental compilation of essential passages from the *sūtra*s, titled *Zhongjing Yaochao* 眾經要抄 (*Most Essential Copies of the Collected Scriptures*, not extant) in eighty-eight scrolls (T.2060.426c8-9). More than thirty people were involved in this project alone (see *Da Tang neidian lu*, T.2149.266b20-24), and apparently the people involved in these kinds of projects were not only Buddhist monks. Lay scholars were assigned to them as well, such as Liu Xie, author of the *Wenxin diaolong* and the Buddhist apologetic treatise *Miehuo lun* (see *Liang shu*, 50: 712).

The fact that the abbot of the Guangzhai monastery was appointed by imperial edict, and that monks and laymen could be assigned to the Dinglinshang monastery to work on imperially sponsored projects concerning the Buddhist scriptures, suggests that these monasteries were entirely meat-free. After all, if the state-sponsored monasteries did not abide by Emperor Wu's wishes, what were the chances of other monasteries falling in line? It is clear that, aside from doctrinal arguments, the non-conforming monks and nuns were also exposed to peer pressure in the form of the extolled exemplary behaviour of those monks and nuns who lived up to the increasingly popular vegetarian ideal.

Another tactic used by Emperor Wu in his quest to convert the monastic community to a vegetarian diet was to appeal to their sense of shame. In his opening address, he compares meat-eating and wine-drinking monks both to followers of other teachings and to lay Buddhists, and they come up short in every detail.[507] He says, for example, that even though the non-Buddhists eat meat and drink wine, at least they are not hypocrites. And even though the laymen eat meat and drink wine, at least they are not desecrating monasteries and temples by doing it on the premises, nor do they cause others to think badly of the Buddhist teaching on the basis of their lousy example. A layman who eats meat and drinks wine is not violating any monastic vows, unlike a monk who does so (although, as we have seen, this is strictly speaking not true when it comes to eating meat). It is quite rare to see Emperor Wu openly fulminating against undesirable elements of the monastic community like this, as he is basically repeating many arguments in the polemic of the opponents of Buddhism. On the other hand, from early on in his reign, he had felt the need to 'rectify' the conduct of the Buddhist monks and nuns, hence the creation of the office of *sengzheng* and his later attempt to become a lay *sengzheng* himself. It is difficult to ascertain if Emperor Wu's critique made enough of an impact to compel the monastic community to conform to his wishes. After all, if the monks themselves did not believe they were doing

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were state-sponsored. On the various functions and designations of these state-sponsored monasteries (the so-called "Great Monasteries," *dasi* 大寺), see Forte, 1983.

[507] Emperor Wu lists nine points of comparison with non-Buddhists and nine with regards to Buddhist lay people. *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.294b22-295c13.

anything wrong, what was the Emperor going on about? However, the reminder that their behaviour was thoroughly scrutinized by the non-Buddhists, the Buddhist laymen in general and Emperor Wu in particular, might have been enough to persuade some of them to clean up their act. After all, the monastic community was to a degree still dependant on donations from wealthy lay people, and if these benefactors – of which Emperor Wu no doubt was the most important one in the capital area – had developed higher expectations of what a monk was supposed to behave like, then offending these patrons was probably not such a good idea, lest you wanted to risk losing out on donations. Perhaps this was the real pressure mechanism behind Emperor Wu’s ventilation of discontent.

As a final instrument of persuasion, Emperor Wu turned to old-fashioned threats. Having turned up the pressure on the attending monks and nuns by dazzling them with the impressive staging of the assembly and a large arsenal of assistants (both eminent members of the Buddhist clergy as well as influential lay Buddhist supporters) who defended his point of view, Emperor Wu leaves nothing to the imagination when he warns:

> 今日僧眾還寺已後。各各檢勒使依佛教。若復飲酒噉肉不如法者。弟子當依王法治問。諸僧尼若被如來衣不行如來行。是假名僧。與賊盜不異。如是行者猶是弟子國中編戸一民。[…] 不問年時老少。不問門徒多少。弟子當令寺官集僧眾[…]捨戒還俗著在家服。[508]
>
> From now on, after you have returned to your monasteries, each and every one of you shall restrain themselves in accordance with the Buddha’s teachings. Should you still drink wine and eat meat, and act contradictory to the *Dharma*, I shall have you punished according to state law. All those monks and nuns who wear the Tathāgata robes but do not act

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[508] *Guang Hongming ji*, T.2103.297c7-14.

> according to the Tathāgata path are falsely assuming the title of monk and differ not from thieves or brigands. Those who act like that shall be looked upon as someone listed in the state population register.[509] […] Irrespective of a monk's age or number of disciples, I will order the monastery officials to assemble the community of monks and […] excommunicate them and make them dress in lay garments.

Here we see the end stage in an evolution towards an ever more outspoken challenge to the independent status of the *saṃgha*. In 508, still in the early years of his reign, Wu had ordered Fayun to compile a set of Rules for Monks (*sengzhi* 僧制), which, according to Daoxuan, became a norm for all who came after him.[510] It is unclear what these "rules" implied and to what degree they were ever implemented, as further evidence is lacking. Still, they must have missed their intended goal, since several years later Emperor Wu set his sights on becoming a Lay Rectifier of Monks himself. This meant that he aspired to work his way into the existing monastic hierarchy and assume the role of leader of the monastic community, complementary to his role as head of state. When announcing a proposal to this effect, soliciting the approval of the monastic leaders, he chose his words carefully to avoid bringing on the clerical elite's disgruntlement. By stressing that he would adhere to the *vinaya* rules, he, to all intents and purposes, humbled his imperial authority in the hope of gaining much more in return, namely some form of effective control over the monastic community and a new, potentially more powerful ritual and political role as spiritual leader of his empire. When his efforts were thwarted by Zhizang's rebuttal, Emperor Wu set out on a different course, and shifted his focus back to developing the *bodhisattva* ideal. In 519 he had reinvented the *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony and in a large orchestrated ceremony became the first to take these renewed *bodhisattva* vows. As Andreas Janousch argues, he sought to become spiritual leader of both the lay people and the monastic community at once.[511] When his attempts at controlling the *saṃgha* through institutional supervision had failed, Emperor Wu renewed his attempts to assert some desperately needed control over the Buddhist *saṃgha* on the basis of his spiritual predominance as *bodhisattva* emperor. In seeking to force upon them the vegetarian diet as the expression of a quintessential feature of the *bodhisattva* ideal, he once again delivered a scriptural basis for his claims, though he had to convince his audience that the *sūtras* had ultimate authority on the subject of monastic discipline. Hardened by his previous failure to become Lay Rectifier of Monks, Emperor Wu emphasised his resolve by threatening to do exactly the opposite of what he had intended to do before, and that was to punish those who did not follow the new rule against eating meat according to state law. One can wonder if Emperor Wu actually had sufficient power or influence to implement these threats, as there is to my knowledge no record of any monk or nun being stripped of his or her monastic robe for breaking any of the *vinaya* or *bodhisattva* regulations. Nonetheless, a few years after his *bodhisattva* ordination, Emperor Wu must have felt secure enough in his position as spiritual leader of the Buddhist community that he no longer saw the need to solicit support from the entire monastic community, but could now reversely put pressure on them with the backing of the many lay people who had been won over by the appeal of the emperor's reinvented religious community.

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[509] When someone was ordained as a monk or nun, that person was effectively struck from the population registers, thus exempting him or her from taxes and corvée labour. When Emperor Wu says that he will look upon the misbehaving clergy as people on the population registers, he means that he will deal with them as normal subjects.

[510] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.608a14-16.

Having discussed Emperor Wu's methods of converting the monastic community to a vegetarian diet, we still have to answer the question of why it was apparently so important to Emperor Wu that the monks and nuns stopped eating meat. As is often the case, one must be careful not to draw any oversimplified conclusions, as there are always various factors to consider. As said before, Emperor Wu was a product of his time, which means that he was certainly influenced by the general historical trend toward vegetarianism, especially the example of his former patron Xiao Ziliang and his entourage. A sincere personal wish to sensitize the monastic and lay communities to these moral issues he felt so strongly about might certainly have been an underlying motive for the 522 assembly. However, the fact that Emperor Wu did not adopt a vegetarian diet until several years after his enthronement and public conversion to Buddhism,[512] coupled with his sudden fanatic zeal in convincing others to do the same, hints at an ulterior motive. In his speeches, Wu invariably associates the consumption of meat with its disastrous karmic results, and urges his audience to act in agreement with the *bodhisattva* way (*pusa xing* 菩薩行). As we have see when we addressed some of Emperor Wu's other measures, the promotion of vegetarianism was merely a component of a larger scheme that had as its focal point the doctrine of karmic retribution and transference of merit. After all, if Emperor Wu wanted to portray himself as a *bodhisattva*-king who directly impacted the lives of his subjects by accumulating merit and then distributing it to them in order to counterbalance any bad *karman* on their part, he could hardly go around eating meat. As Wu himself logically concludes, if our lives are conditioned by karmic retribution, we can, on account of the deeds in our former lives, be reborn as animals, and are thus potentially someone else's lunch. Therefore, if you want to be a saviour to your people, you cannot devour them when they happen to have been reborn in animal form. On the same level, if Emperor Wu wanted to appear credible, it was imperative that the monks and nuns – who, as a pillar of the *triratna*, were supposed to be of the highest moral conduct and wisdom – lived up to lay people's expectations. No matter how meticulously Emperor Wu crafted an image of himself as a *bodhisattva* saviour, if the Buddhist monastic community did not reflect the aura of sanctity he relied on for spiritual and ritual authority, then it would all be an empty measure. The increasing popularity of vegetarianism among Buddhist lay people made it necessary for Emperor Wu to bring the monastic community up to this new moral level, if he was going to make it serve as an example of the transforming powers of his imperial virtue.

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[511] See Janousch, 1998: 173-227; 1999.

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[512] The first record of Emperor Wu's rejection of worldly pleasures, including a renunciation of meat and fish, dates from 513 (*Liang shu*, 3: 97; *Nan shi*, 7: 223) or 511 CE (T.2122.389a21-24), depending on the source.

As a final reflection on the issue of vegetarianism and the monastic community, we can quote from a petition that was presented to Emperor Wu by Guo Zushen 郭祖深 (fl. early 6th century):

> 都下佛寺五百餘所。窮極宏麗。僧尼十餘萬。資產豐沃。所在郡縣。不可勝言。道人又有白徒。尼則皆畜養女。皆不貫人籍。天下戸口幾亡其半。而僧尼多非法。養女皆服羅紈。其蠹俗傷法。[..]皆使還俗附農。罷白徒養女。聽畜奴婢。婢唯著青布衣。僧尼皆令蔬食。如此。則法興俗盛。國富人殷。不然。恐方來處處成寺。家家剃落。尺土一人。非復國有。[513]
>
> The number of Buddhist monasteries in the capital is over five hundred, and all of them are extremely lavishly decorated. The number of monks and nuns [that inhabit these monasteries] is more than one hundred thousand, and their income and properties are extensive. As for the commanderies and counties, I cannot even begin to put [the calculation of their numbers] into words. Furthermore, the monks have lay attendants and the nuns keep female servants, all of which are not registered. As a result, the

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[513] *Nan shi*, 70: 1721-1722.

> census is reduced by half (and so is the tax revenue). A lot of monks and nuns violate the *Dharma*, and by dressing the female servants in white garments, these corrupt lay people bring harm to the *Dharma* [as well]. […] Let them all return to lay status and turn to farming. Put a stop to these lay attendants and female acolytes, and permit the possession of slaves. Make these slaves wear only garments made from black cloth, and force the monks and nuns to stick to a vegetable diet. Like this, the *Dharma* will flourish, the lay people will prosper, the country shall be rich and its people shall thrive. If these measures are not taken, I fear that monasteries shall [continue to] be founded everywhere and that one family after another shall take the tonsure until the empire will not even have a foot of land or a single subject [left].[514]

These objections raised against the conduct of Buddhist monks and nuns are not new, as they form a continuous part of the anti-Buddhist polemic.[515] However, the suggestion of forcing monks and nuns to follow a vegetarian diet exclusively in order to put a halt to the growing number of monasteries and clergy members is quite innovative. Although the question of the rise of vegetarianism as a norm in Chinese Buddhism is far too complex to allow us to highlight a single determining cause, it is none the less intriguing to see that some people at least saw it as a means to deter undesirable elements from entering into the religious life. Emperor Wu’s tirade against the hypocritical and sacrilegious behaviour of Buddhist monks and nuns on the point of eating meat (and, let us not forget, drinking wine) certainly reflects some of these concerns about the large number of people who entered the monastic life for the sole reason of living an easy life, rather than living a life of austerity in pursuit of spiritual advancement. If he could enforce a vegetarian diet in the monastic community and show that the decision to take the tonsure was not without obligation, then maybe he could discourage unmotivated elements from taking the tonsure. In this way, mandatory vegetarianism might enable Emperor Wu to circumvent the dilemma he had created for himself: in order to appear as the greatest (Chinese) sponsor of Buddhism in history, he made donations to the monasteries on a massive scale. On the downside, the monasteries' ensuing wealth allowed them to support many more monks and nuns, not all of whom were as motivated as they should be. Without having to give up on these large displays of imperial sponsorship, vegetarianism could act as a counterbalance to offset the growing decadence of the monasteries by keeping unmotivated elements out of the religious ranks and forcing a more becoming aura of sanctity on the remaining monks and nuns. In the end, it is unclear if Emperor Wu was ever able to enforce a vegetarian diet on the Buddhist clergy, although, perhaps his efforts to do so were as important as actually succeeding. After all, in the final period of the *Dharma*'s decline, when the monks and nuns are mostly corrupted, it was entrusted to a *bodhisattva*-king to rectify the *saṃgha*'s behaviour. Since the True Dharma would eventually disappear, it is not said that a king might actually succeed in doing so completely.

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[514] Translation based on Gernet, 1995: 115.

[515] For an overview of the most common arguments of anti-Buddhists and the counter-arguments of Buddhist apologists, see Zürcher, 1972: 254-285.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE SECULAR AND SACRED MEET: COOPERATION AND OPPOSITION WITHIN THE *SAṂGHA*

In the previous chapters we have seen how in changing the ceremonial function of the emperor figure, Liang Wudi was careful to provide a sound scriptural foundation for his reforms. The reforms in traditional Confucian ceremony could be accomplished without much difficulty. After all, the bearers of that tradition were the learned literati, to which he belonged himself, and as emperor he had the prerogative to make changes in imperial ceremony. For the Buddhist reforms, things were not so straightforward. Here, Emperor Wu had to overcome the rift that existed between those that had left the family-life in the pursuit of unworldly goals and those that still dwelled in this world. As only the *saṃgha* was the bearer of the Buddha's teaching, it was they who had the spiritual authority to judge which interpretation was correct and which was not. Therefore it was important for Emperor Wu to ensure himself of the sanction of the Buddhist monastic community if his Buddhist reforms were to be believable.

IV.1. Liang Wudi's attempts to control the *saṃgha*

Emperor Wu's desire to assert his control over the *saṃgha* was spread over two levels, namely that of individual monks, and that of the *saṃgha* as a whole. For his theoretical, ideological needs, Wu appealed to influential, well-respected scholar-monks (so-called *dharma*-masters, *fashi* 法師) on an individual level, rather than seek the scholarly sanction of the *saṃgha* as a whole. The latter would not only be unpractical, but getting the opinions of all monks in the capital aligned would in all likelihood prove to be impossible, as there were not only doctrinal disagreements among the monks and nuns, but political ones as well. As we shall see, not everyone was happy with the emperor's meddling in monastic affairs and some brave individuals confronted Wudi head on in heated debates.

IV.1.1. Personal advisors

Several of Wudi's advisor monks have been the object of previous studies, so I shall only mention them in passing here, and add a few comments as it is relevant for this thesis. The first monk to deserve mentioning is Baozhi 寶誌 (418?-514).[516] Baozhi was a stereotypical

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[516] Baozhi's biography, contained in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2059.394a15-395a3) says that he died in the winter of the thirteenth year of Tianjian, which is late 514 or even januari 515. Nobody knew his age, but it was believed that he had stopped aging around his fifties. A man who claimed to be Baozhi's maternal uncle said that he was four years younger than him,

"miracle worker" whose erratic behaviour made people believe that his wisdom exceeded the conventional. Baozhi did not shave his head like a monk should, and reportedly washed his hear with urine. He could go without food for weeks on end and was able to project his body at three places at once. Baozhi constantly spoke in conundrums that often proved to be prophetic. In fact, when Emperor Wu's third son, Xiao Gang, was born in 503, Baozhi said to the emperor:

> 皇子誕育幸甚。然冤家亦生。[517]
>
> The birth of your progeny is auspicious indeed, but [today] your nemesis has also been born.

As it later turned out, Hou Jing, the rebel that ended Emperor Wu's reign, had been born on the same day as Xiao Gang. From other reported occurrences, it seems that Baozhi was respected by Wu for his supernatural abilities, more than for his exegetical knowledge. However, in a time when people believed in the reality of supernatural abilities, having such a powerful and revered monk by his side would certainly have added prestige to Emperor Wu's Buddhist programme. When Baozhi died, he was buried with full honours, and Emperor Wu had portraits of him distributed all over the realm for veneration.[518]

Another ally of Emperor Wu was the respected *vinaya* master Sengyou, author of the *Chu sanzang jiji* and *Hongming ji*.[519] As his biography says, Sengyou had cordial ties with the emperor, up to the point that his dealings with the court raised suspicions with the other monks. On

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which meant that Baozhi would have been ninety-six years old at his time of death. For a translation of the biography with a short introduction, see Berkowitz, 1995.

[517] *Shenseng zhuan* 神僧傳 (*Biographies of Supernatural Monks*, author unknown), T.2064.970b17-18.

[518] T.2059.394c28.

[519] For a translation and discussion of Sengyou's biography (*Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2059.402c3-403a2), see Link, 1960.

the emperor’s order both parties came together to settle this matter.[520] Unfortunately nothing more is said about this incident, but it does demonstrate Sengyou’s intimate connection with Wudi. Sengyou’s biography is interesting for other clues it provides as well. Reading the biography, we learn that Sengyou was a regular lecturer at the court of Xiao Ziliang, of which we know that Emperor Wu was a guest as well.[521] It is probable that the two met there before there was even thought of Xiao Yan overturning the Qi dynasty. Sometime between 483 and 493, Sengyou received an order (probably from prince Xiao Ziliang) to go to the area of Wu 吳 (present day Suzhou) to lecture on the *vinaya*, and also to “set up *pañcavārṣika* (*wuzhe daji*), *sheshen* ceremonies, and vegetarian feasts”.[522] It is interesting to see that three major components of Emperor Wu’s Buddhist ritual programme were already being disseminated by Sengyou on orders from the Qi court, where they most likely came from Xiao Ziliang, given the latter’s well-known religious zeal in conversion. If the chronology in the biography is correct, and there is no indication to the contrary, then this proves that Emperor Wu was not the inventor of all these Buddhist ceremonies, but that he built on the ideas that were already present at the court of Xiao Ziliang. Sengyou was also an important ally to Emperor Wu for the reason we already mentioned at the beginning, and that is the compilation of the *Hongming ji* and *Chu sanzang jiji.* Both works are the product of an intense surge in the collecting and cataloguing of scriptures, which took off in earnest under the rule of Liang Wudi.[523] It is most likely Emperor Wu's continued concern for scriptural authority that triggered these huge collection and cataloguing efforts. The *Hongming ji* was a collection of apologetic writings ranging in date from around the fourth century to the early years of Emperor Wu’s reign.[524] This last aspect is significant, because it suggests that the *Hongming ji* was not meant merely as an historical overview of the polemical discussions on Buddhism throughout its early history in China, but was also intended to be used as a propaganda tool at the time of completion. The most notable example of this is the extensive and detailed report on the debates about the existence of the *shen*. Two out of the *Hongming ji* ’s total number of fourteen fascicles are dedicated to these debates.[525] The documents preserved are not only philosophical treatises and discussions. Once the arguments had been laid out, sixty-two high officials were asked to take sides, and the letters they wrote in reply are added in closing. These letters add little to the debate about the existence of an enduring self, but in general merely praise the Emperor’s theory in the loftiest words, and occasionally rehash his arguments for emphasis. Interestingly enough, although the circular itself was written by the monk Fayun法雲 (467-529),[526] no monks are among the sixty-two respondents. This suggests that this circular was highly politically charged, and served as no less than a role call for Emperor Wu’s political allies. Among the sixty-two respondents, we also find the five Erudites of the Five Classics (*Wujing boshi* 五經博士), who were teachers at the School of Five Halls (*Wuguan* 五官), which was dedicated to the study of the Five Classics exclusively. It is clear that no one in Emperor Wu’s bureaucracy could escape the increased Buddhification of his administration.

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[520] T.2059.402c21.

[521] Ibid., p.402c13.

[522] Ibid., p.402c16.

[523] Drège (1991: 24-37) provides numbers for the quantity of fascicles stored in the Palace library during any given dynasty. It is striking to see that in the first half of the sixth century, the number of fascicles in the imperial collection almost doubled in comparison to the preceding Southern Dynasties.

Sengyou’s *Chu sanzang jiji* is a catalogue of Buddhist scriptures (*jinglu* 經錄), expanded with a selection of prefaces to translations of *sūtras* (*jingxu* 經序) and biographies of monks (*sengzhuan* 僧傳). The importance of a catalogue to Emperor Wu’s efforts in searching for useful scriptures is quite clear. Something which set Sengyou’s catalogue apart from its predecessors, was the incorporation of new sections in which to list “suspect (yi 疑)” scriptures and “forgeries (wei 偽)”.[527] This is another logical result from a preoccupation with legitimacy and authoritative scripture. In order to be authoritative, it was important for a scripture to be proven authentic beyond doubt. As we have seen, Emperor Wu rejected the *Renwang jing* (Scripture of Humane Kings) as a spurious text on the grounds of its dubious origin and content. Heaving a catalogue that told its reader what was genuine (thus authoritative) and what was not, was an important step towards creating a canon of officially approved scriptures.

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[524] For an overview of the contents of the *Hongming ji*, see Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976.

[525] These are fascicles nine and ten, T.2102.54a1-68c15.

[526] Ibid., p.60b21-28.

IV.1.2. Monks of the [Imperial] Family (*jiaseng* 家僧)

Advisers like Baozhi and Sengyou obviously endorsed Emperor Wu’s Buddhist agenda, but it seems they still maintained their independent status throughout their voluntary association with him. Early on in the reign of Wudi, however, we see the emergence of an institution called *jiaseng* 家僧 “Household-monks”. This term appears for the first time during the Liang dynasty, and did not last much beyond it either. Of the thirteen biographies in Buddhist sources to identify their subjects as *jiaseng*, eight held the title during the Liang, three (possibly four) during the Sui, and one during the early Tang.[528] The biographies of some of these *jiaseng* provide some very interesting information about the nature of this title. Fachong's biography starts off stereotypically with saying that he wanted to become a monk at a very early age. However his parents did not give their permission, as they wanted him to marry. Fachong agreed to marry on the condition that he would afterwards be free to join the *saṃgha* (which means after he had secured a male heir to continue the family line). Like Sengyou, he was a popular lecturer at the Western Villa (Xidi 西邸) of Xiao Ziliang, which might be where he met the later Emperor Wu. In 508, Fachong was invited by the latter to become a Monk of the [Imperial] Family, and this is where the story gets interesting. Once Fachong had been made *jiaseng*

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[527] Strickman, 1990: 102.

[528] The eight *jiaseng* of the Liang were: (1) Fachong 法寵 (451-524), *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* T.2060.461b23; (2) Sengqian 僧遷 (465-523), ibid. 461c15; (3) Sengmin 僧旻 (467-527), ibid. 462c12; (4) Fayun 法雲 (467-529), ibid. 464b4; (5) Huichao 慧超 (?-526), ibid. 468b2; (6) Mingche 明徹 (? -522), ibid. 473b25; (7) Sengqian 僧遷 (495-573), ibid. 476a4; (8) Sengjiapoluo 僧伽婆羅 (* Saṃghavara?/ Saṃghabhara?, 460-524), ibid. 426a19, *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* T.2154.537c23. Notice that numbers two and seven are two different monks with the same name. The second Sengqian was *jiaseng* to Liang Wudi, but later became Rectifier of Monks for the Later Liang 後梁 (555-587). The *jiaseng* of the Sui were: (1) Tanxie 曇瑎 (ca. 536-618), T.2060.670a27; (2) Zhiwen 智文 (509-599), ibid. 609c27; (3) Huijing 慧淨(d.u.), *Da Tang neidian lu* T.2149.281c20; (4) possibly also Huisheng 慧乘 (d.u., Sui-early Tang),

> 敕施車牛人力衣服飲食。四時不絕。寺本陜小。帝為宣武王修福。下敕王人繕改張飾以待寵焉。因立名為宣武寺也。[529]
> [Emperor Wu] ordered carts, oxen, labour service, clothes and food to be provided to him all year round. And as his monastery was initially rather small and the emperor wished to confer blessings on [his deceased older brother], the prince of Xuanwu,[530] he ordered the [former] prince's attendants to expand and embellish [his old monastery] and treat him like an honoured guest there. Thereupon the name of the monastery was changed to Xuanwu si.

This passage leaves little to the imagination as to what lavish rewards were bestowed upon those who became Emperor Wu's personal monk. A first glance, it might seem that a *jiaseng* was invited by the emperor only to

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T.2060.633b25 (chronology unclear). Wuji 無跡 (846-925) is mentioned as *jiaseng* for the Tang (*Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2061.898a12).

[529] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.461b24-26.

[530] Prince of Xuanwu is the posthumous title conferred by Emperor Wu on his older brother, Xiao Yi 蕭懿, whose murder in 500 had been the reason for launching his campaign against the Qi.

become a sort of personal “field of blessing (*futian* 福田)” that allowed him or his relatives to accrue personal merit by making donations. Yet it appears that this sumptuous funding came with strings attached. Fayun was appointed as *jiaseng* by imperial decree in 508, for which he was given a very generous stipend (*ziji youhou*資給優厚).[531] Here there is no more mention of any religious motives for making Fayun a Household Monk. On the contrary, the wording used suggests that it was more like he was recruited for an important job. If so, Fayun was put to work to earn his rewards, because he appears all over the Buddhist sources in some form or function. Already in 508, just before or after his appointment, Fayun was ordered to make a commentary on the *Dapin jing* 大品經, but when some eminent courtiers asked him to lecture on this commentary, he feigned an illness and did not go. Emperor Wu ordered him to do it anyway. Also in that same year, Fayun was appointed as abbot of the Guangzhai 光宅 monastery, and was given as first duty the task to compile a set of Rules for Monks (*sengzhi* 僧制), which was to become “a norm for all who came after him”.[532] These rules are not extant, so we cannot really be sure what was in them, but these were probably rules of conduct for monks and nuns taken from the *vinaya*, meant to be inforced. Here we see Fayun for the first time as the propagator of Liang Wudi’s interests, and it would not be the last time. Around the same time, Fayun had sent a circular to the high officials to ask them for their approval of Emperor Wu’s views on the existence of the *shen*, and his name pops up in relation to the *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony of 519 and the debates about the vegetarianisation of the *saṃgha* in 522.[533] In 525, Fayun was appointed as *da sengzheng* (Head Rectifier of Monks), making him responsible for the conduct of all monks and nuns in the empire. In short, Fayun was active in just about every aspect of Emperor Wu's Buddhist reforms, and can therefore be seen as one of his most important allies. One might wonder just how much his "generous stipend" had anything to do with this. Upon his death, Fayun was buried with full imperial honours at the Dinglin 定林 monastery (at the foot of Mount Zhong), where two other *jiaseng* were buried as well.[534]

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[531] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.464b4.

[532] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.464b5.

[533] Fayun was a bit reluctant to take the *bodhisattva* ordination himself, as Janousch (1999: 133-135) has shown, but in the end he was ordered by the emperor to do it.

Huichao had also, like Fayun, combined the functions of (*da*) *sengzheng* and *jiaseng*. Other than the fact that this biography also mentions a sizeable remuneration for his job as *sengzheng* (and probably *jiaseng* as well), not much more details are provided.[535] The same can be said for Sengmin, whom, it was said, was provided with the four necessities (i.e. clothing, shelter, medication and food),[536] and for Mingche, who received personal financial support all year long without fail.[537] However unfortunate this lack of information is, it puts all the more focus on the great financial compensation given to these monks, which was apparently deemed such an important feature, that is was repeated in the biography of every *jiaseng* to have held the title during the Liang. This close (financial) relationship with the emperor went at the cost of much of the monks' independence, and was therefore frowned upon by those within the monastic community who wanted to preserve their independence and focus on spiritual, rather than worldly goals.[538] Perhaps this is why our next *jiaseng*, Sengjiapoluo, chose to publicly redistribute the money that was given to him.

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[534] Fachong and Mingche were also buried at the Dinglin monastery.

[535] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.468a21.

[536] Ibid. 462c13.

[537] Ibid. 473b25.

[538] In his preface to the *Gaoseng zhuan*, Huijiao criticises the worldly and sycophantic clergy that surrounded Emperor Wu. He says that in judging the worthiness of a particular monk, one should not be blinded by worldly success: "If men of real achievement conceal their brilliance, then they are eminent (高 *gao*) but not famous (名 *ming*); when men of slight virtue happen to be in accord with their times, then they are famous but not eminent." Translation by Wright, 1954: 392-395.

> 婆羅不畜私財。以為嚫施成立住寺。[539]
>
> [Sengjia]poluo did not accumulate personal wealth, but gave it away [to finance] the construction of a monastery to live in.

By giving away all the wealth he was given as *jiaseng*, Sengjiapoluo showed either true virtue or a sensitivity to the problem of accumulating wealth as a monk. His solution, however, is rather creative, as it can be understood that he donated this wealth for the construction of a monastery of his own. In this way the money he gave away in a public display of piety would in the end flow back to his monastery. That the money served to finance his personal projects instead of disappearing in his own pocket is just a minor difference.

The biography of our last *jiaseng* paints a colourful picture of how monks in the capital sometimes clashed in competition over imperial favour. Sengqian's (465-523) biography is almost taken up completely by the following anecdote:

> 天監十六年夏。帝嘗夜見沙門慧詡。他日因計法會。遷問詡曰。御前夜何所道。詡曰。卿何忽問此。而言氣甚厲。遷抗聲曰。我與卿同出西州俱為沙門。卿一時邀逢天接。便欲陵駕儕黨。我惟事佛。視卿輩蔑如也。眾人滿坐詡有慚忒。[540]
>
> In the summer of the sixteenth year of Tianjian (517), Emperor Wu spent a whole night talking with the *śramaṇa* Huixu, and they planned to set up a *Dharma*-assembly on another day. [Seng]qian asked [Hui]xu: "What did you and the emperor talk about last night?" "Why do you ask me this, so out of the blue?" [Hui]xu barked back in an aggressive tone. [Seng]qian, now raising his voice as well, said: "You and I

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[539] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426a20.

[540] Ibid., p.461c16-22.

> both hail from Xizhou, and we are both *śramaṇ as* You have only met with the emperor once, and already you want to shove aside someone from your own kind to better yourself. I serve only the Buddha. When I look at people of your sort, I have nothing but disdain." As the seats were completely filled with people, [Hui]xu felt extremely humiliated.

It is perhaps a little ironic that Sengqian accuses Huixu of putting his own interests before those of a fellow monk, and by extension the monastic community, when he himself is a personal advisor to the emperor. Especially the remark that he serves only the Buddha seems ill-considered, to say the least. One cannot help but feel that Sengqian felt jealous and threatened by the fact that another monk had managed to keep the emperor interested for a whole night while talking about a something he was not meant to know. Or at least that is how he interpreted Huixu's reluctance to reveal the topic of his conversation with Emperor Wu. This anecdote is a nice example of how Emperor Wu's large-scale sponsoring of Buddhism was not all positive for this religion. His attempts to gain control over the *saṃgha* by forging alliances with individual monks brought out feelings of rivalry and suspicion within the monastic community. Many of the metropolitan clergy were formerly members of low-ranking, impoverished literati families who saw the tonsure as a means to gain access to the higher social strata that were blocked off to them by the powerful families. As metropolitan monks they could either live a leisurely life of luxury or they could rekindle their frustrated ambitions by trying to incur the favour of the emperor. *Jiaseng* like the monks discussed above would not necessarily have shared in political power, but their immense prestige would have certainly gained them lots of influence in the society of the time, not to mention financial gain. If it was cooperation Emperor Wu needed from the monks to give his Buddhist reforms legitimacy, then there was no shortage of men who were more than happy to oblige. Still, as always, there were those who refused to be controlled, which only widened the cracks in the monastic community. Not only was there rivalry between the ambitious ones, but also between the opponents and proponents of Emperor Wu's political agenda. In the following section I shall discuss Emperor Wu's attempts to control the *saṃgha* further by presenting two case studies in which all these elements are represented.

IV.2. Cooperation and opposition: two case studies

IV.2.1. Baochang 寶唱 [541]

The biography of Baochang寶唱 (ca. 466- ?)[542] is interesting to this thesis for two reasons: (1) The biography of Baochang gives us quite a bit of information about the interests and Buddhist activities of Emperor Wu and his son Xiao Gang, the future emperor Jianwen, in the form of subordinate biographical information (called *fu* 附).[543] (2) As an accomplished scholar and writer, Baochang was an important ally to Emperor Wu in building a foundation of scriptural authority for his Buddhist reforms.

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[541] Biography contained in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426b13-427c20. For a study on Baochang and his relation to the *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (*Biographies of Famous Monks*) and *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (*Biographies of Nuns*, T.2063)), see De Rauw, 2005.

[542] In his biography there is mention of the death of his father "close to his thirtieth birthday" (T.2060.50.426b24). In order to observe the proper rites of mourning, he then temporarily "puts his constant practice on the side, leaves the capital and restricts himself exclusively to listening." All this happened in the second year of *Jianwu* 建武 (495), so (keeping in mind the traditional Chinese way of counting age, where one is considered to be one year old at the time of birth) we can place his date of birth around 466.

[543] The use of subordinate biographies, appended to a main biography, has its origins in secular historiography. In secular biographies, these subordinate biographies mostly described the lives of sons, grandsons or other relatives of the principal subject. In Buddhist biographies, these subordinate biographies are mostly linked to the principal subject by a master-disciple relationship, by a common activity or interest, or by the adherence to the same temple. In this case, we might say that the relationship between Baochang (principal

Not much attention has previously been given to the monk Baochang in the literature, other than a few stray lines about his authorship of the *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (*Biographies of Famous Monks*)[544] and the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (*Biographies of Nuns*, T 2063). He is credited with being the first one to systematically create an organised body of biographies of Buddhist monks, but beyond that, not much is said about him. However, Baochang's biography reveals that there is a lot more to Baochang than meets the eye. He appears to have been an important figure in the monastic community of Jiankang and he was very much favoured by Emperor Wu and Xiao Gang. Baochang participated in a number of translation and cataloguing projects under imperial patronage, and for a while he was appointed as abbot of the Xin'an 新安monastery[545]

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subject) and Emperor Wu (subordinate biographical information) is one between protégé and sponsor.

[544] Although this biographical collection is no longer extant, fragments of it are preserved in the *Meisōden shō* 名僧傳抄, which is a selective summary of a *Mingseng zhuan* manuscript then in the possession of the Tōdaiji at Nara, made by the Japanese monk Shūshō 宗性 in 1235. He copied out the table of contents, portions of thirty-six biographies and a topical finding list of items that interested him (mainly evidences of the working of the grace of the *Bodhisattvas*). The *Meisōden shō* is included in the XZJ.134.1a-34a. Two quotations from the preface to the *Mingseng zhuan* are contained in Baochang's biography (T 2060.50.427b29-c9 and 427c18).

[545] This monastery, situated in the capital, was build by emperor Xiao Wu 孝武 (r. 453-464) of the (Liu) Song(劉)宋 Dynasty (420-479) in memory of his favourite concubine. Her son, Ziluan 子鸞, at that time held the title of "Prince of Xin'an", and the monastery was named after him. When Ziluan was killed by his jealous older brother, the so-called "First Deposed Emperor", at the age of ten, the latter also destroyed the Xin'an temple, named after his younger brother, whom he hated so vehemently. The succeeding emperor Ming 明 (r .466-472) ordered the monastery to be restored (*Nan shi,* 78: 1963; *Gaoseng zhuan,* T.2059.377c23-24). The Xin'an monastery is mentioned left and right in the Buddhist chronicles, but appears to have been of rather modest importance.

and as head of the first Imperial Buddhist Library in history. Like many of the advisor monks we have seen above, Baochang was plagued by controversy too, in life as well as in death. As a member of the clerical elite of the capital, he became the object of verbal attacks by Huijiao, who, as we have seen, in the preface to his *Gaoseng zhuan* criticized the worldly and sycophantic metropolitan clergy who surrounded the pious emperor Wu in general, but also the emphasis Baochang placed on “fame (*ming* 名)” over “eminence (*gao* 高)” in his selection of biographies in particular. Even among his peers in the capital, there were rumours that his true intentions did not lie in the practice of Buddhism, but in the pursuit of worldly goals.[546]

Life and times of Baochang

According to the biography, Baochang came from a poor family and had to work hard in the fields to provide for himself and his parents. Because the plot of land they owned was too small to provide ample means of living, he looked around for other jobs on the side. Thus he found work as a copyist and was able to make some extra money. The question that now arises is if this means that Baochang did in fact come from a poor family of peasants, as a reading of his biography seems to suggest. As Zürcher has pointed out, many among the famous monks whose biographies are included in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* are said to have lived in poor and difficult circumstances before entering the monastic order. Poverty is one of the virtues of the Buddhist monk, and from that perspective, the Buddhist biographical collections show a tendency to standardize the lives of its heroes according to a set of fixed patterns.[547] A clue to Baochang’s origins can be found in the choice of words in his biography. Daoxuan writes:

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[546] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.426b22-23.

[547] Zürcher, 1972: 6-9.

> 至於傍求。傭書取濟。寓目流略便能強識。[548]
>
> Looking for some extras on the side, he took up a job as a copyist to obtain a little financial help. [While] checking for inaccuracies [in the texts], he could thus strengthen (*jiang*) his knowledge [at the same time].

From this passage we know that Baochang was able to read and write characters. At the same time, the use of the word “strengthen” presupposes a prior education. Both these elements point in the direction that Baochang was not the son of peasants, but rather a descendant of a low ranking literati family that had lately fallen on hard time. As a member of such a family, he would have enjoyed a more or less standard classical literary education, comprising the study of the Confucian classics, with the intention of preparing him for a possible career as a government official. As the higher ranks of magistracy were at this time still monopolized by the so-called “Great Families (*menfa* 門閥)”, Baochang, as so many like him, would have been excluded from the higher circles of political, economical and intellectual life. When in 483 Sengyou was ordered to go to Wu, the region where Baochang was born and raised, the latter immediately left the family life to become his disciple. At the time Baochang was already eighteen years old, rather late in comparison to the age of other novice monks mentioned in the biographical literature.[549] This element, in addition to the fact that Baochang came from an impoverished literati family, could lead one to speculate that it is not unlikely that, with his career options in the civil service limited by his background, Baochang made a conscious decision to try Buddhism as a ticket to fame and an easier life.

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[548] T.2060.426b15-16.

[549] The age at which a monk becomes a novice is not always given. However, a great deal of biographies contained in the Buddhist biographical collections mention that the monk in question “left family life at an early age (*shao chujia* 少出家)”. In the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* nearly a hundred biographies specify the age at an individual entered the monastic order. Of these, almost eighty percent were (considerably) younger than Baochang was. Most (sixty-nine percent) were between 7 and 15 years old.

In Baochang’s biography there is mention of the fact that, after studying under Sengyou for an undetermined number of years:[550]

> 又惟開悟土俗。要以通濟為先。乃從處士。[551]
>
> [Baochang] becomes aware of the importance of non-Buddhist scholarship, and made it his priority to become knowledgeable about them. To that end, he started studying non-Buddhist writings under the guidance of several “retired gentlemen (*chushi* 處士)”.

To a Buddhist monk moving in the circles of the literate upper class, being knowledgeable about non-Buddhist scholarship (most noticeably *Xuanxue* 玄學) was not merely a tool for propagating Buddhism in terms that their target audience could understand, nor just a prerequisite for being able to demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism over these Chinese teachings. Knowledge of Chinese history, poetry and philosophical writings was admired in and of itself, and could in itself propel a monk to great fame.[552] Many Buddhist scholar-monks studied the Chinese classics, so in this respect Baochang’s interest in them is nothing out of the ordinary. It is striking however that the biography describes how, as a consequence of his frequent involvement in worldly affairs, people started to suspect that Baochang had worldly ambitions. When he went to visit his family, people even said that he would probably not return to the monastery to live as a Buddhist monk, but perhaps choose to pursue a civil career.

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[550] John Kieschnick gives a brief description of what the education of a young novice must have looked like. See Kieschnick, 1997: 118-123.

[551] T.2060.50.426b20-21. These “retired gentlemen” were literati who, by their own choice, kept clear of an official career to devote themselves to a life of private study and self-cultivation modelled on the ideal of the hermit, untroubled by the rigid framework of Confucian scholarship and safe from the dangers of politics. For more on the eremitic ideal, see Berkowitz (2000).

[552] Kieschnick, 1997: 112-118.

Although one can certainly not exclude a certain level of Buddhist piety from the part of Baochang, it is not unlikely that his motives for becoming a Buddhist monk were probably not all of a spiritual nature. If indeed it was his intention to use Buddhism as a means to enhance his position in society, then his plans were far from fruitless. After fleeing east from the chaos that accompanied the fall of the Southern Qi, he was summoned by Emperor Wu of the Liang to take up the position as abbot of the Xin'an monastery in 505 AD. This monastery does not appear to have been a particularly important one, but to become an abbot by imperial appointment is no small feat in itself. After this, Baochang was ordered to oversee the compilation of a whole series of books that were to contain a listing of all the Buddha’s, *bodhisattva’s* and important deities mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures, and the proper rituals described in these scriptures to implore their protection and benefaction. The edict of Emperor Wu, ordering the compilation of these books, is partly preserved in the biography of Baochang:

> 時會雲雷遠近清晏。風雨調暢百穀年登。豈非上資三寶中賴四天下藉神龍。幽靈協贊方乃福被黔黎歆茲厚德。但文散群部難可備尋。[553]
>
> The seasonal storms have abated far and near, and the weather [is now so favourable that] it causes the harvest of the hundred grains to increase. How could it be that [for this] we do not rely first, on [the protection of the] Three Jewels,[554]

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[553] T 2060.50.426b28-c2.

[554] The “Three Jewels (Ch. *sanbao* 三寶, Skt. *Triratna*)” of Buddhism are Buddha, Dharma (the Teaching) and *Saṃgha* (the community of monks and nuns).

> second on the Four Deva's[555], and third on the *devas* and *nāgas* ! When the supernatural beings provide us with assistance, only then can prosperity cover the people and can they rejoice in their virtue. However, since the writings [about these issues] are scattered over a host of books, it is difficult to research it to the fullest extent.

From this edict it is clear that Emperor Wu placed great importance in these books, since they would make it clear to him on which supernatural beings he could call for aid in the ruling of his empire. This adds a new dimension to Emperor Wu’s zeal in collecting and cataloguing Buddhist scriptures. Though we have until now always approached this issue from a systematic point of view (which was certainly important for the calculating Wu), we must not forget that in era under review, people genuinely believed in the power of reciting and copying scriptures. Not only the information they contained was thus important for Wu to build his ideological framework, but the pious part of Wu must certainly also have believed in the power of Buddhism to protect his state and his imperial family. Belief alone would never have been enough to build an entirely new Buddhist state ideology on, but it played its part nevertheless. According to the biography, Emperor Wu was constantly worried that his house would come to an untimely end and that his dynasty would fall without the protection of the powers of Buddhism.[556] The books that Baochang was ordered to make, played an important role in Emperor Wu’s scheme of ruling through the wielding of Buddhist forces, and the fact that Baochang was entrusted with this task is a clear sign of his close relationship with the emperor, for the latter would not have given this vital task to someone he did not trust completely. Daoxuan mimics Emperor Wu's line of reasoning when he says that the performing of the rituals described in these books is the reason that for almost fifty years the realm of the Liang was relatively peaceful.[557]

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[555] These are the Four Deva-kings who guard the compass points of the Buddhist continent Jambudvīpa. In the East there's Dḥrtarāṣ ṭra(*Chiguo tian* 持國天), who is also associated with the colour white. In the South there's Virūdhaka (*Zengchang tian* 增長天), associated with the colour blue. In the West there's Virūpākṣ a(*Guangmu tian* 廣目天), associated with the colour red. In the North, finally, there's Vaiśravaṇ a(*Duowen tian* 多聞天), associated with the colour yellow.

[556] T 2060.426c28-427a3.

The compilation of these important books did not come about without a hitch, however. In 510, Baochang became very ill. Fearing the worst, he started praying, and uttered the two vows that, should he recover, he would search around for Buddhist scriptures everywhere to make sure nothing would get lost, and along the way search for records of monks of past generations to honour and perpetuate their memories. The chronology of subsequent events is not all clear, but it is probably at this point that Baochang abandoned his post as abbot of the Xin'an monastery without asking for or receiving the approval of the emperor, with the intention of going East to recuperate from his illness and start fulfilling his vows. The emperor, displeased, sent someone after Baochang. As punishment for his offence, Baochang was banished to Yuezhou 越州 in the far south (in present day Guangdong). Emperor Wu's reaction is quite understandable, considering that not only did Baochang walk away from his duties as abbot of the Xin'an monastery, but, more importantly, his disappearance also meant a delay in the production of the books necessary for the protection of the empire. Baochang requested that the Rectifier of Monks (*sengzheng*) Huichao adjudicate the case according to the “codex established on the basis of the *vinaya*”.[558] As we have seen in the discussion between Emperor Wu and the monk Zhizang, the emperor was trying to assert state control over the conduct of the Buddhist monks and nuns by developing a form of state law, based on the *vinaya* rules (attaching punishments from secular law to the transgressions described in the *vinaya*) and by pronouncing himself “Lay Rectifier of Monks (*Baiyi sengzheng* 白衣僧正)”. Zhizang, when asked for his opinion by Emperor Wu, severely criticised him for these plans, after which the emperor abandoned them.[559] The fact that Baochang actually requested to be sentenced according to Emperor Wu’s proposed laws, is another clear indication that he was more concerned with his relationship with the emperor than with what was in the best interest of the Buddhist monastic community as a whole. In spite of his display of submission to the emperor, Huichao sentenced Baochang to exile with penal servitude (*tu* 徒) in Guangzhou 廣州 (present day Canton).[560] Exile does not occur anywhere in the *vinaya* literature as a form of punishment. However, it is a common form of punishment in secular law, which seems to implicate that at least for a while (or perhaps even for this one particular case, since Baochang requested it himself) Emperor Wu's codex based on *vinaya* was in effect.

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[557] T.2060.426c6-7. Cf. *Da Tang neidian lu,* T.2149.266c9-17. It is in fact notable that the rule of Emperor Wu was one of the longest in Chinese history, and certainly long in comparison to the many short-lived reigns of other emperors during the *Nanbei chao* period. Daoxuan, looking back on this, could not help himself but to link this historical fact to the fervent promotion of Buddhism by Emperor Wu and the workings of the forces of Buddhism, as harnessed in these books of Baochang's.

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[558] T 2060.427c11. The sentence “*yi lü yi fa* 依律以法” as it is written in the biography is difficult to interpret. In the biography of Zhizang we read of the discussion that took place between Emperor Wu and Zhizang about whether to implement a set of laws for monks and nuns, based on the *vinaya* rules. There the description *yi lü li fa* 依律立法 “the codex that was established on the basis of the *vinaya* rules” is used (T.2060.466b21). I therefore emend 以 to 立 in this phrase in Baochang’s biography.

[559] Emperor Xiao Wen 孝文 (r. 471-500) of the Northern Wei 北魏 Dynasty (386-534) had also imposed a set of state laws on the community of monks, the *sengzhi* 僧制 or “laws for monks”, in 492 (*Wei Shu,* 114: 3039). During the Tang Dynasty the community of monks was once again restricted by state laws around 637, with the implementation of the “Rules for Buddhist and Daoist clergy (*dao seng ge* 道僧格)”. See Heirman-De Rauw, 2006; Ch’en, 1973: 95; Tokuno, 1990: 65, note 34.

[560] This was at the time a centre of Buddhist activity in the South as a result of the arrival of foreign monks by the sea routes, so even though Huichao sent him farther away than his previous location of banishment, it is not entirely clear to me whether Huichao wanted to make Baochang’s punishment lighter of worse.

Whatever the case, Baochang would remain in Guangzhou for about four years and in that time he kept working on his collection of biographies of monks. All the while, pressure was being placed on him officially to finish his collection.[561] Was he told that since he departed in search of records of monks' lives, he could only return upon completion of his collection? This is of course mere speculation. What is certain, is that a request for pardon was addressed to the throne upon completion of his rough draft, and the emperor lifted the ban in 514. Soon after, Baochang's *Mingseng zhuan* was revised and prepared for publication in its definitive form.[562]

From this moment onward Baochang would be back on Emperor Wu's side. When Sengshao 僧紹 (d.u.), an otherwise unknown monk from the Anle 安樂 monastery, was ordered to make a catalogue of Buddhist scriptures in 515, it did not meet the high standard expected of it, and Baochang was ordered to make it anew. His catalogue was very well received and, following this, he was ordered to take charge of the *Hualinyuan baoyun jingzang* 華林園寶雲經藏.[563] This was the private library where Emperor Wu stored his collection of Buddhist scriptures.[564] As Drège (1991: 177) points out, this was the first time in history that an emperor had established a Buddhist library that was not part of the Imperial Library, but stood completely independent from it. Baochang thus in fact became the emperor's personal librarian on all matters of Buddhism. Along with this position came the major responsibility to collect, catalogue and safeguard the Buddhist scriptures, which were considered so crucial by the emperor. In the years following, Baochang also completed the other projects he had begun while he was abbot of the Xin'an monastery.

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[561] T.2060.427c14-15. Perhaps his literary activities were part of his penal servitude as monk.

[562] Contrary to what Arthur Wright (1954: 409) concludes on the basis of the entry in the *Lidai sanbao ji* (T.2034.45a10) I do not take the year 519 as the date of completion. The biography mentions that on the day the *Mingseng zhuan* was to be published, the emperor gave the order to end Baochang's banishment after which 此僧史方將刊定 "this history of monks would soon be emended and [published in its] definitive edition" (T.2060.427c16-17). I do not think that it would take Baochang only four years to write his biographical collection, but five years to emend it. In the preface to his *Mingseng zhuan* (of which an extract is reproduced in the biography) Baochang says that Sengyou's writing of the *Chu sanzang jiji* had exerted great influence on him. Since the *Chu sanzang jiji* was first published in 515, Baochang probably also wrote the preface to his *Mingseng zhuan* around 515, when it too was published for the first time. In the preface Baochang also states that he had to drop some material from his finished version and would continue to correct these omissions in his spare time (T.2060.427c7-9). In that light the date of 519, given to the *Mingseng zhuan* in the *Lidai sanbao ji*, might be the date of a second, revised and enlarged edition of the *Mingseng zhuan*, but this is by no means certain, and in any case is not the date of completion of the *Mingseng zhuan* proper. For a more detailed discussion on this, see De Rauw, 2005: 212-215.

Baochang's date of death is not known. However, certain facts help us to venture an educated guess. The great literary activity of Baochang after his return to the capital suddenly stops around 518. There are repeated references in his biography to serious illness,[565] which together with his age of 52 at the time may lead us to surmise that Baochang died not too long after 518.[566]

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[563] T 2060.426c21-25.

[564] The *Hualin yuan* was originally a hunting-park of the rulers of Wu, situated in the northern outskirts of the capital. Since the late fifth century it had housed a court-sponsored Buddhist temple and was probably no longer used for hunting (Zürcher [1982: 175, note 8]). This park was the site where Emperor Wu constructed a (or expanded the previous) monastery in 527, which he called Tongtai 同泰 monastery. This is the place where he often gave himself to the community of monks as menial (*sheshen* 捨身) and organised lavish Buddhist rituals and preaching sessions, in which he himself took part.

[565] In his biography, two periods of serious and prolonged illness are recorded. One time, at the end of the Qi Dynasty, he suffered from a "wind-disease" for a period of five years (T 2060.50.426b25). The second time he had a bad case of beri-beri disease, and abandoned his post as abbot of the Xin'an monastery to seek a remedy for his illness (T 2060.50.427c10).

[566] The fact that Baochang's biography is not included in Huijiao's *Biographies of Eminent Monks* does not mean, as Wright (1954: 400) thought, that he must have died after the completion of this work ca. 530. Rather this absence is to be seen in light of Huijiao's feelings towards Baochang. Huijiao did not approve of Baochang's collection of biographies, because he thought they placed more emphasis on the fame of a monk than on one's moral virtues.

Baochang's literary achievements

Since Baochang's biography is included in the category "translators," it is not surprising that Daoxuan emphasized Baochang's literary achievements when compiling his biography. The following are mentioned by title in his biography as writings of Baochang's own hand:

(1) *Xu falun lun* 續法輪論 (*Further Treatise on the Dharma Wheel*; not extant)[567]
(2) *Fa ji* 法集 (*Dharma Collection* ; not extant)[568]
(3) *(Liangdai) Zhongjing mulu* (梁代)眾經目錄 ([*Liang dynasty*] *Catalogue of* [*Buddhist*] *Scriptures*; not extant)[569]

He also deemed the structuring and writing style sub-standard. Moreover, Huijiao had a thorough disliking of the metropolitan clergy, thinking them too involved in worldly matters and court politics. As we have seen above, Baochang was a prime example of such a monk. That must have been reason enough for Huijiao to exclude this "famous" monk from his collection of "eminent" monks. A century later, Daoxuan came to a different conclusion, and made a place for him in his *Further Biographies*. In fact, he placed Baochang's biography second in his collection. This suggests that Daoxuan considered Baochang's role in history to have been short-changed by Huijiao.

[567] There is no mention of this work in any of the Buddhist or non-Buddhist catalogues. According to the biography, Baochang departed on a short missionary journey through the eastern regions of the Liang Empire in order to discuss Buddhist principles with Daoists and laymen. He wrote down the broad outlines of these debates in a book titled *Xu falun lun* 續法輪論 (T.2060.426c16-18).

[568] The *Fa ji* is not mentioned in any Buddhist catalogue as the work of Baochang. However, the *Sui shu* (35: 1089) mentions a *Fa ji* in 107 scrolls as the work of Baochang.

[569] This is Baochang's remake of Sengshao's *Hualin fodian zhongjing mulu* 華林佛典眾經目錄 (not extant). It listed 1433 titles, totalling 3741 scrolls (T.2149.337b14-16). The *Lidai sanbao ji* lists the categories into which this catalogue was divided (T.2034.126b6-26). Baochang's

(4) *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 (*Different Forms of Sūtra and Vinaya* ; extant, T.2121)[570]
(5) *Zhongjing fangong shengseng fa* 眾經飯供聖僧法 (*Manual for Offering Food to Sagacious Monks [according to] the Scriptures* ; not extant)
(6) *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (*Biographies of Famous Monks*; not extant)

Five other works are described but are not mentioned by title in Baochang's biography. By comparing these descriptions[571] with the titles attributed to Baochang in later Buddhist catalogues, it is possible to supply the likely titles:

(7) *Zhongjing yonghu guotu zhu longwang ming lu* 眾經擁護國土諸龍王名錄 (*Catalogue of Names of all the Nāga Kings who Protect the Empire [as identified in] the Scriptures* ; not extant)
(8) *Zhongjing hu guo guishen ming lu* 眾經護國鬼神名錄 (*Catalogue of Names of Demons and Spirits who Protect the Empire [as identified in] the Scriptures* ; not extant)

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catalogue was used as a base of reference by compilers of subsequent bibliographical collections. Since it is no longer extant, it is impossible to make comparisons. However, the frequent use of the phrase "*jian Baochang lu* 見寶唱錄 (see Baochang's catalogue)" in those subsequent catalogues strongly indicates the indebtedness of those later authors to Baochang.

[570] This work is an anthology of the Buddhist scriptures. The *Jinglü yixiang* and the *Biqiuni zhuan* are the only two complete works of Baochang that are extant (not counting the fragments of the *Mingseng zhuan* that survive in the *Meisōden shō*). The preface to the *Jinglü yixiang* explains that Sengmin 僧旻(467-527) was ordered to compile a collection of essential copies of Buddhist scriptures in 508. This was the *Zhongjing yaochao* 眾經要抄in 88 scrolls. Since there were still some things that were unclear, the emperor ordered Baochang in 516 to copy some essential information from the body of scriptures to help clarify these confusing passages. The resulting work was the *Jinglü yixiang* in 50 scrolls (*Jinglü yixiang*, T.2121.53.1a).

[571] T.2060.426b20 and 426c3-4.

(9) *Zhongjing zhu foming* 眾經諸佛名 (*Names of All the Different Buddha's [as they appear in] the Scriptures* ; not extant)

(10) *Zhongjing chanhui miezui fa* 眾經懺悔滅罪法 (*Manual for Confession and Eradication of Sin* ; not extant)[572]

(11) *Chuyao lüyi* 出要律儀 (*Essentials of the Vinaya Rules* ; not extant)[573]

Besides the eleven works discussed above, the biography also mentions two projects that Baochang helped with, but for which he is not credited as author in the catalogues, namely: (1) structuring Falang's 法朗 (d.u.)[574] *Da banniepanzi zhujing* 大般涅槃子注經, a commentary on the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*,[575] and (2) editing emperor Jianwen's *Fabao lianbi* 法寶聯璧.[576]

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[572] These four books might first have been part of a large compilation of unknown title, counting close to a hundred scrolls. In Baochang's biography we read: "[the emperor] ordered [Bao]chang to summarily compile a collection of records in order to determine the priorities of the time, [namely,] establishing good fortune and warding off disaster (ill fortune), [fulfilling] Buddhist rituals of confession and removal of obstacles [in the path to enlightenment], [executing] sacrificial offerings to spirits and demons, or [making] sacrificial offerings to the *nāga*-kings, the gods of rain and water. The book was divided into categories (sections) and counted close to a hundred scrolls" (T.2060.426c3-4). This compilation probably did not survive as a whole in Daoxuan's time, but certain chapters from it seem to have been preserved as separate books. Titles seven to nine in our list are catalogues with the names of all the water spirits, demons and ghosts, and Buddha's respectively, as they are mentioned in the scriptures. These catalogues probably also contained sacrifices, magical spells and prayers associated with each divinity, used to implore their protection. Title ten is a manual of Buddhist rites of confession. It seems that Emperor Wu had great interest in this subject, for he also commissioned the compilation of other confession manuals. For a detailed study of these Buddhist rites of confession, see Kuo, 1994.

[573] This work is not extant today and although mentioned in the *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (T 2149.55.266c8; compiled by Daoxuan in 664), it is not listed in any other catalogue, Buddhist or non-Buddhist. Looking at the title and reading the biography, it is possible that this work contained extracts of the collected sayings of Baochang's master Sengyou concerning matters of *vinaya*. This doesn't seem so far fetched, considering that Sengyou was most famous for his study of *vinaya* (in fact his biography is included in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan* under the heading "*minglü* 明律, (disciplinarians)"). Daoxuan himself was also a master of *vinaya*, so it does not seem unlikely that in the course of his studies he stumbled across this forgotten work of Baochang, and is therefore the only catalographer to mention it.

From these lists we may conclude that Baochang was involved in just about all aspects of scripture, from manuals to catalogues and everything in between. Most of these books were ordered early on in Emperor Wu's reign, and have to be seen as part of a large enterprise that involved both Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures. Emperor Wu relied on Baochang as his chief librarian to collect, catalogue and safeguard all the vital material needed for the formation of his ideology. Therefore it is no exaggeration to designate Baochang as one of the most important allies of Emperor Wu.

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[574] Not much is known about this monk, except that his secular name was Chen 沉 and he was originally from Wu. He left the family life in 463 and died somewhere during the Tianjian reign period (502-520). There is no independent biography of this monk, but some subordinate biographical information is provided in the biography of the monk Sengshao 僧韶 in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* (T.2060.460b5-11). Not to be confused with the famous master of the Sanlun school, who had the same name (lived 507-581).

[575] Not extant. The *Da Tang neidian lu* says that this commentary was written at the beginning of the Tianjian reign period (T.2149.266c18-20). The *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, which teaches that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature and therefore the potential for attaining Buddhahood, had become very popular at this point in time, as it was considered to be the ultimate teaching of the Buddha. In fact, there were so many commentaries on the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* that Emperor Wu of the Liang commissioned Baoliang 寶亮 (444-509) and others to collect all of the existing commentaries in a collection called *Da banniepan jing jijie* 大般涅槃經集解 in 71 scrolls (T.1763).

[576] In catalogues also called *Fa(bao) ji* 法(寶)集 (T.2034.100a9-13, T.2147.172b15, T.2148.207a23, T.2149.263c28). This work is not extant. Xiao Gang wrote quite a lot on Buddhism. The *Nanshi* 7 (Vol. 1: 233) lists 4 works, namely: *Fabao lianbi* (Linked Jade of the Dharma Jewel) in 300 scrolls, *Yujian* 玉簡 (The Jade Tablets) in 50 scrolls, *Guangming fu* 光明符 (The Brilliant Tally) in 12 scrolls, and *Muyu jing* 沐浴經 (Sutra on the Bathing [of the Buddha on his birthday]) in 3 scrolls. All four works are lost.

IV.2.2. Zhizang智藏 (458-522)[577]

Zhizang is known together with Fayun 法雲 and Sengmin 僧旻 as the “Three Great Dharma Masters of the Liang Dynasty”.[578] While the latter two served as Household Monks (*jiaseng*) to Emperor Wu, Zhizang did not. At first glance this might seem odd. Why would these three Satyasiddhi masters be placed under one joint header of “Great Dharma Masters”, but not all serve as personal advisors to the emperor? A reading of Zhizang’s biography makes clear that he was anything but an advisor to Wudi. In a time when the monastic community had to stand by and watch how its autonomy was slowly being taken away, Zhizang was not afraid to utter his criticisms to the emperor directly. Up until now, Zhizang’s name has been almost exclusively mentioned in the context of the fierce debate between him and Emperor Wu concerning the emperor’s plans to become a lay “Rectifier of Monks”. This is not only true for this dissertation, but for many other studies as well.[579] Zhizang’s biography, however, deserves a much closer look, as it provides invaluable information on how some scholar monks tried to resist the emperor on an ideological level. In this way, his biography paints a colourful picture of court Buddhism in the Southern Dynasties and of the tense relationship between the monastic community, fighting to maintain its independent status, and the secular powers, trying to assert government control over the actions of the Buddhist monks and nuns.

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[577] Biography contained in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.465c7-4467b27.

[578] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.548b12. All three were masters of the Satyasiddhi (Ch. Chengshi 成實) school of Buddhism, which was the predominant philosophical school during the Southern Qi and most of the Liang. It is said that Emperor Wu later shifted his interest to Madhyamaka (Ch. Sanlun 三論), but did not correctly interpret its concept the Two Truths (conventional and absolute). See Ch’en, 1964: 129-134. Cf. Jizang’s *Weimojing yishu* 維摩經義疏, T.1781.912a.

[579] See, for example, Janousch, 1999: 136-140; Ch’en, 1964: 126; Tang, 1983: 342; Yan, 1999: 139.

Zhizang, defender of the faith

Who was the “troublemaker” Zhizang? Exactly how did he protest Emperor Wu’s encroachment on the monastic community, and avoid being disciplined? There are not that many sources that can tell us something useful about Zhizang. By far the most information can be extracted from Zhizang’s biography in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*. Most biographies included in this compilation start off by giving a short account of the family roots (when known) of the monk in question. Zhizang’s biography is no exception. It does stand out a little for the amount of information provided on his family background. Before he became a monk, his secular name was Gu Jingzang 顧淨藏. The Gu family was one of the traditional families from the area of Wu 吳 (present day Suzhou), and enjoyed a certain level of prestige. In Zhizang’s biography we read that he was an eighth generation descendant of a rank one official and a lady of the imperial family. The biography then goes on to list the offices held by his ancestors, from his great-great-grandfather down to his father. Even though a monk was supposed to sever all ties with his family upon entering the monastic community, it is clear that a monk’s family background remained a very crucial factor in determining his religious career. Just how important these family ties were, becomes clear from an incident at the palace, featuring Zhizang. At the time of Emperor Wu, the biography says, monks were free to wander in and out of the palace as they pleased. The only thing that was off-limits was the seat-of-honour in the lecture hall, which was exclusively reserved for the emperor. When Zhizang heard about this arrangement, he became infuriated. He stormed into the palace, climbed the stairs to the lecture hall, crouched down on the seat reserved for the emperor, and said in a defiant voice:

> 貧道昔為呉中顧郎。尚不慚御榻。況復迺祖定光。金輪釋子也。檀越若殺貧道即殺。不慮無受生之處。若付在尚方。獄中不妨行道。[580]
>
> This poor monk was formerly a member of the Gu family of Wu, and as such I am not beneath the imperial seat. Furthermore, I am a descendant of Buddha Dīpam✿kara and a son of the Śākya of the Golden *Cakra*. If our *dānapati* wishes to kill me, then so be it. I am not worried about not being reborn. And should he wish to hand me to the authorities [for punishment], well, being in prison does not hinder one's striving for enlightenment.

When this incident was brought to Emperor Wu's attention, he did not punish Zhizang for this blatant show of disrespect, but on the contrary abolished the honorary seating arrangement. In Zhizang's action, we find not only a criticism of Emperor Wu's Buddhist policy, but of his secular policy as well, or rather of the contradiction Zhizang saw between Emperor Wu's words and deeds. Through the use of Buddhist ritual, Emperor Wu wanted to bridge the gap which normally existed between the Son of Heaven and his subjects. For example in the ritual of *sheshen*, in which he offered himself to the monastery to serve as a menial, or in the performance of the *Bodhisattva* ordination ritual in 519, Emperor Wu very consciously humbled himself by stripping himself of his imperial regalia. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that, as a *bodhisattva* emperor, he was willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of his people, and for the benefit of all living beings in his realm and beyond. This universal call for unity, expressed in the regular organisation of Great Assemblies, extended his power to all people in the world. But if indeed Emperor Wu wanted to humble and sacrifice himself for the salvation of others, why then, did Zhizang ask, should he assume such a prestigious position in the lecture hall, distancing himself so clearly from the other attendants and taking on a leading role? By identifying himself as a member of a literati family of standing, Zhizang also criticizes the contradiction between Emperor Wu's self-projected image of saviour and the new social hierarchy he wished to establish. If Emperor Wu were true to his word, then in his world of universal compassion and equality Zhizang, as a member of the Gu-family, should have as much right to sit on that seat in the lecture hall as Emperor Wu. As a monk, Zhizang stresses that he is a descendant of Buddha Dīpaṃ karạ which is a rebellious reference to Emperor Wu's *bodhisattva* ordination ritual. By creating a new *bodhisattva* ordination ritual, Zhizang claims, the emperor has broken the line of transmission for authoritative *bodhisattva* ordination. According to the *Pusa dichi jing* 菩薩地持經 (*Bodhisattvabhūmi sūtra*, T.1581; translated by Dharmakṣema (385-433) in 418) a lawful tradition of *bodhisattva* ordinations had been started by the Buddha Dīpaṃ kara when he had conferred these precept on the Śākyamuni Buddha in a previous existence. Once that line is broken (as is the case with regular ordinations as monk or nun as well) all subsequent ordinations become invalid until the line of transmission can be restored. Here, as in his other altercations with Emperor Wu, Zhizang succeeds in thwarting the emperor's plans by finding a base that had not been covered by the emperor's ideologues. Though the emperor could claim to have relied on sound scriptural foundation in creating his *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony, Zhizang asserts that all this scriptural basis does the emperor no good, because he cannot reforge that link back to the instigator of the ritual, the Buddha Dīpaṃ kara. Emperor Wu's ordinations are therefore invalid in Zhizang's eyes.

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[580] *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060.466a19-21.

If we take another look at the discussion between Wudi and Zhizang on his intention to become Lay Rectifier of monks, we see the same clever use of words. For the sake of convenience I shall reproduce the relevant parts of the debate here:

Later, in a written demand, [Emperor Wu] asked Zhizang [for his opinion]. Zhizang crossed out the letter with a brush and said: “The vast sea of the Dharma (*dharmasamudra*) is not something a layman can understand.” The emperor, upon inspecting [the reply], did not think it was something he had to take seriously. This was, to him, just another monk who in the age of decline (*jidai*) opposed and belittled the emperor. In any case, his mind had been made up to put this measure into effect, even if Zhizang would disagree to the end. So a decree had been issued to arrange an assembly at the Huaguang Hall that evening. The monastic community had already assembled in great numbers, and only later did Zhizang arrive. The emperor said: “If we scrutinize the monks and nuns, [we find] that there are many who are not well versed [in the Buddhist teaching]. If a lay Rectifier of Monks should not understand the regulations [of the *vinaya*], and should want to control them through the use of secular law, they would be harmed by excessive strictness. I, the Buddha’s disciple, will in my spare time assume the role of lay Rectifier of Monks, and shall establish a law codex [for monks and nuns], based on the *vinaya*. Even though this is [normally] the duty of a Dharma master, the Buddha also entrusted it to the king of state. I have hitherto discussed this matter with [members of] the *saṃgha*, and they all expressed the same [support for my plan]. Dharma master, what is your opinion?” Zhizang replied: “Your Majesty wishes to personally supervise the affairs of the monastic community, and this will truly bring splendour to the True Dharma. But even though many monks and nuns do not act in accordance to the *vinaya*, the vows you made to be compassionate and forgiving are more important than this matter [of punishing them for their

> wrongdoings]. The emperor said: “How could it be my intention as the Buddha’s disciple to wish hardship on the *saṃgha*? As I just said, excessive strictness is [an attribute] of ignorant laymen. I [on the other hand] can personally bring [the *saṃgha*] to order by relying on the *vinaya* regulations. When you, Dharma master, commanded to be compassionate and forgiving, what did you mean by this?” Zhizang answered: “Your Majesty truly wishes to stop being severe and rather be lenient. However, during the final period [of the Dharma] (*modai*) it is nearly impossible for all members of the *saṃgha* to act according to the *vinaya*. Therefore, I dare to beg you to be compassionate and forgiving.” The emperor asked: “I venture to ask: if a monk commits a crime, should he be punished according to the Buddhist Law or not?” Zhizang answered: “[…] You have to do both, punish him and not punish him.” The emperor said: “We have only read that it is said that the ruler is entrusted with governing the *saṃgha*. Where did you read that one should not punish them?” Zhizang answered: “Devadatta is an example of this matter. The Tathāgata ignored him and did not punish.”

After this the emperor sought to reverse his orders and abandoned the idea.

In order to justify his proposition to become a lay ‘Rectifier of Monks’, Emperor Wu argued that he saw it has his right and even his duty as a ruler living in the age of the decline (*modai* 末代) to see to it that the behaviour of the monks and nuns was in accordance with the *vinaya* regulations. To this end he even proposed to submit the monastic community to a set of secular laws, based on the *vinaya*. It is clear that it was not merely the intention of Emperor Wu to safeguard the purity of the *saṃgha* in the age of decline, but also to bring the monastic community under his direct control. Since Emperor Wu had already asked many influential monks, who had been afraid to challenge him, to sign the decree for approval, Zhizang realised that any unfounded objection from his part would make him look like an insurgent. Therefore he attacks the internal logic of Emperor Wu's ideological construction. He opposes Emperor Wu's will to punish monks to the *bodhisattva*-vows he had taken earlier, which forced him to be forbearing and lenient. To illustrate his point, Zhizang refers to the case of Devadatta, Buddha's wicked cousin, who was not punished by Buddha, despite all his wrongdoings. To his shame, Emperor Wu admits that he does not know who Devadatta is, but this seems unlikely in light of his extensive knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures. It is more likely that at this point in the debate, Emperor Wu realised that the debate was lost, feigning ignorance as a last defence against Zhizang's winning argument.

After he was forced to admit his defeat, the sycophantic monks who were present during this debate starting to apologise to the Emperor for Zhizang's behaviour. Emperor Wu, however, silenced them and said:

> 藏法師是大丈夫心。謂是則道是。言非則道非。致詞宏大。不以形命相累。諸法師非大丈夫。意實不同言則不異。弟子向與藏法師碩諍。而諸法師默然無見助者。豈非意在不同耳。事遂獲寢。[581]
>
> Master Zhizang is truly a great man! If he says it is so, then it is so. If he says it is not so, then it is not so. He does not twist his words to accord to the vogue of the times. All you *Dharma* masters are not great men. Even though your thoughts are really different, your words are all the same. When I was being severely admonished by master Zhizang, I was not

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[581] Ibid., p. 466c8-13.

> helped by any of you. Then that must mean that in actual fact you all agree with him! This matter is closed.

From this sneer at the attending monks we can draw two conclusions: (1) Emperor Wu greatly respected Zhizang for his insight in the Buddhist doctrine. (2) Emperor Wu felt as if he had been let down by his advisors, who in his eyes were obviously mere ‘yes-men’ who had done nothing to prevent him losing face, thus forcing him to abandon his plan to become lay ‘Rectifier of Monks’. After this, Wudi took a different course in trying to get the monastic community as a whole in line with his ideology. This is where the debates about the vegetarian diet of monks and nuns comes back into play, but since we have already treated this in chapter three, we shall not go into it again.

Emperor Wu built his new Buddhist state ideology by using notions and concepts drawn from the Buddhist scriptures themselves. Thus, the more knowledge he could acquire, the better his chances would be of countering any possible opposition. To this end, Emperor Wu ordered the compilation of catalogues, compendia, translations, and commentaries on a large scale. This is where we can place Baochang as an invaluable ally to the emperor. Wudi’s tactic of using Buddhist notions to assume control over the Buddhist community was a rather effective one (at least for controlling the Buddhist community in the metropolitan area). After all, how could the clergy object to such a pious ruler, who seemed only to have their best interests at heart? Emperor Wu’s tactic, however, did have one major, inherent weakness: in order to be effective, the information he extracted from the Buddhist writings, with which he sought to justify his leading role as emperor in Buddhist matters, had to be brought together into a coherent structure with its own internal logic. And this is exactly where Zhizang (and others beside him) choose to attack, in their attempts to maintain the *saṃgha’s* autonomy.

In the end, Emperor Wu’s Buddhist reforms turned him into the *saṃgha*’s “best enemy” or “worst friend”: his lavish sponsorship heralded a golden age for the Buddhist monasteries and temples in the South, but at the same time it made the monastic community lose some of its self-determination. Under the guise of best intentions, Emperor Wu slowly but surely nibbled at the autonomous position of the Buddhist clergy so he could recruit them into his scheme, willingly or otherwise.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation we have examined how Liang Wudi used Buddhism to reinvent his role as emperor in an attempt to restore power to the throne, if not politically, then at least ideologically. When he ascended the throne as founder of his own dynasty, he was faced not only with a personal problem of legitimacy, but with huge social and political problems as well. At the time, neither wealth nor political power was concentrated in the throne. Rather, it was a small number of powerful literati families that manipulated the imperial court, monopolised the higher offices and collected great wealth. While the lower rank families were left behind in frustration, the rest of the population was trying to survive in a country torn apart by the endemic wars of the time. Emperor Wu set out to make reforms in administration to counter some of the political and social fragmentation that had resulted from a centuries-long devolution of imperial power. He reorganised the educational system in such a way as to allow members of the lower ranking literati families to gain access to an official career, in the hope of alleviating their frustrations and circumventing the influence of the powerful aristocratic families. He also ordered a review of the genealogies, which served as de-facto registers of social rank. Nevertheless, in reality Emperor Wu's political position was too weak to effectively break the high ranking families' position of power this way. Especially in the early years of his reign, he relied on their sanction to stay firmly on the throne.[582] On the other hand it was so that the literati families needed the emperor figure too. The legitimacy of their claim to rule society came from the traditional Confucian state, which relied on an emperor figure to carry out the Mandate of Heaven and preserve cosmic order. Not possessing the necessary authority to centralise political power around the throne, it was this ritual aspect of emperorship in which Emperor Wu decided to make the difference.

It was clear from the very start that Buddhism was going to play the leading role in Emperor Wu's reforms. For his inauguration as founding emperor of the Liang dynasty, he chose the eighth day of the fourth month, a date that by the early sixth century was already widely recognized among Buddhists as the birthday of Śākyamuni Buddha. But since Buddhism could not provide an alternative for the practical administration and legislation of the empire, Emperor Wu had no choice but to continue his role as Confucian head of state as well. Just as the foreign invaders in the North had understood the need to maintain the Confucian state structure as the proven way to administer such a vast empire, so did Emperor Wu realise the unfeasibility of totally restructuring the existing system. But he also realised that to continue in his role as Confucian head of state would for ever leave him in a vulnerable position, as it essentially left him dependant on the Confucian tradition, dominated by the literati families, for his prestige as emperor. For this reason he set out to rebuild the ritual role of an emperor with Buddhist concepts, with the purpose of creating his own legitimacy as a ruler. Fully realising the precariousness of his position, Emperor Wu made the first steps towards independent legitimacy in the field of Confucian ritual. He ordered the compilation of a ritual code that would link him directly to the idealized rituals of the Zhou, and return the prerogative of determining proper conduct and ceremony to the imperial figure. Once this cape had successfully been rounded, he could start to inject the traditional state ritual with Buddhist elements until it had unrecognisably been transformed to reflect an entirely new vision of society and emperorship. Important elements in Liang Wudi's Buddhist reforms were the *bodhisattva* ideal, karmic retribution, and the concept of *mofa*. The first two concepts were used to re-envision the view on society and the role of an emperor therein, while the third concept was mainly used to legitimize Emperor Wu's predominance over the *saṃgha*.

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[582] A time-honoured strategy followed by Southern Dynasty emperors to ensure the support of the traditional powerful families was by forging marriage alliances to them. The Liang crown prince, Xiao Gang, for example, was married off to a woman from the influential Wang 王 clan. See *Liangshu*, 1: 158. Cf. Buttars, 1998: 90. Also see Mather, 1990.

In 519, Emperor Wu took the *bodhisattva* vows in a huge public ceremony of his own making. Before undergoing the *bodhisattva* ordination, he removed all symbols of emperorship and put on a monk's robe. By stripping himself of his imperial regalia and giving up his supreme position of secular ruler (at least symbolically), he sought to get something more potent in return: the image of spiritual mentor to his people, who ruled through his superior virtue in walking the *bodhisattva* path and was therefore a leader to be loved, worshiped and emulated. In a time when emperors were often no more than pawns in the power struggle between powerful political factions who did not really fear or revere whoever was on the throne, this newfound religious prestige was much more potent than the diluted imperial prestige of old, as it would for the first time since long make people care about who was actually on the throne. By assuming the role of a *bodhisattva* who would gladly sacrifice all he has for the sake of his people, he lifted the perception of the emperor figure to a higher level. No longer was the emperor this unreachable man, highly elevated above the common people, and somewhat oblivious to their hopes and fears. He had become a personal saviour to them all. By creating this direct spiritual link between him and his subjects – many of whom followed in Wu's footsteps in taking the *bodhisattva* vows – he circumvented the traditional mediation of the literati in the performance of state ritual. On top of that, it created an entirely new vision on society, where the emphasis was on universal equality between all living beings. This was a huge turnaround from the traditional social model, which was highly hierarchic. To strengthen his *bodhisattva* image, Emperor Wu adopted an almost ascetic lifestyle, denouncing all pleasures in life, and drastically cutting back the expenditure of his court.

The notion of karmic retribution was a powerful instrument for giving people hope, a sense of purpose, and for tying them all together in a universal community wherein everyone looked out for everyone else. Even more important, it gave the emperor a means to personally intervene in the karmic destiny of his subjects, reinforcing his saviour image. As imperial *bodhisattva*, Wu developed an elaborate program for collecting merit, which could then be distributed to everyone in the world to improve their present and future lives. Key ceremonies in this merit accumulation programme were Emperor Wu's Great Assemblies. These assemblies, which in keeping with notion of universal equality were open for all to attend, were all about the accumulation and distribution of merit. Merit was mostly accrued from reciting *sūtras* and making donations, though there were also occasional acts of self-immolation by zealous guests. As *bodhisattva* emperor, he took it upon himself to personally lecture on the scriptures to help his subjects on the right path to enlightenment, and in a display of ultimate giving, he would make a donation of himself to the monastic community, only to be ransomed by his ministers for exuberant amounts of money. These so-called acts of *sheshen* (self-renunciation) not only functioned as fundraisers, but as ceremonies of imperial renewal as well, designed to reaffirm Wudi's image as *bodhisattva*-emperor. The donations raised during the Great Assemblies were deposited in a large fund, called the Inexhaustible Treasuries. Money from this fund was used to finance Emperor Wu's Buddhist ritual programme, which had the important advantage that no resources had to be arrogated from the state treasury. This meant that possible critics of Emperor Wu's endeavours had one less argument to fight his imperial Buddhist programme. Money from the Inexhaustible Treasuries was used, among other things, for constructing and renovating buildings and statues, supplying monasteries with necessities, and buying and releasing animals from butcher shops. As such, these Inexhaustible Treasuries had the added advantage of doubling the merit earned, as first merit is earned by the person making the donation, and then merit is generated again when the money from the Treasuries is used to perform meritorious acts.

In changing the ceremonial function of the emperor figure, Liang Wudi was careful to provide a sound scriptural foundation for his reforms. He realised that, in order for his reforms to be effective and to have a lasting effect, he could not simply make changes as he saw fit, for this would never be accepted without the backing of solid historical or scriptural precedent. The reforms in traditional Confucian ceremony could be accomplished without much difficulty. The bearers of that tradition were the learned literati families, to which he belonged himself, and as emperor he had the prerogative to make changes in imperial ceremony. While the literati families held much of the real political power, the still relied on the imperial institution for their titles, salary and ideological justification. In that respect, it was perceptive of Emperor Wu to set out on his quest to regain imperial control in the one area where the literati families stood weak. When starting out on the reform of imperial ceremony in 502, he surrounded himself with competent and trusted scholars, who would meticulously comb the Classics in search historical precedents to justify his reforms.

For the Buddhist reforms, things were not so straightforward. Here, Emperor Wu had to overcome the rift that existed between those that had left the family-life in the pursuit of unworldly goals and those that still dwelled in this world. As only the *saṃgha* was the bearer of the Buddha's teaching, it was they who had the spiritual authority to judge which interpretation was correct and which was not. Therefore it was important for Emperor Wu to ensure himself of the sanction of the Buddhist monastic community if his Buddhist reforms were to be believable. For his theoretical, ideological needs, Wu would appeal to influential, well-respected scholar-monks (so-called *dharma*-masters, *fashi* 法師) on an individual level, rather than seek the scholarly sanction of the *saṃgha* as a whole. For this purpose he created the institution of *jiaseng* 家僧 "Household-monks". While it might have been enough to receive the approval of only a few accomplished scholar-monks on doctrinal issues, Emperor Wu still needed the support of the monastic community as a whole if his reign was to successfully project the appearance of sanctity. He could hardly claim to be a virtuous and effective *bodhisattva*-leader, if the most direct descendants of the Buddha did not support him or behaved contrary to the values he propagandised. This part proved to be trickier, as after several centuries of being pushed on the defensive by opponents of Buddhism, the Buddhist monastic elite had become weary of any sort of interference in what they considered to be their own internal affairs. As they were no longer a part of this world, the monks and nuns felt that they should not subjected to secular rules. In an attempt to assert some form of control over the *saṃgha* without making it look like an outright encroachment on their self-proclaimed autonomy, Emperor Wu tried to manoeuvre himself into the position of head of the monastic community (*baiyi sengzheng*) with the promise of weighing their actions off according to the *vinaya*, not the regular state laws. He thus promised them freedom from state control, but under the strict condition that they hold rigorously to the *vinaya* rules, something he would personally see to. This, he claimed, was a task appointed to him by the Buddha himself, who had warned that in the ages after his *parinirvāṇa* his teaching would gradually be distorted until finally it was lost completely while at the same time the monks and nuns would become ever more corrupt. At the time of Emperor Wu, a *sūtra* that could lend scriptural authority to this claim already circulated, namely the *Renwang jing* (*Scripture of Humane Kings*). But probably due to the fact that this scripture explicitly blamed the downfall of the Buddhist teaching on too much government control, Liang Wudi chose to reject it as a spurious scripture (which indeed it was). Nonetheless, it seems that no one really objected to the premise that the *saṃgha* had gone off the rails due to the degeneration of the Buddhist teaching, not even members of the monastic community itself, at least not those monks whose prestige was high enough for their opinions to be valued). When the emperor passed around a circular in which he asked the addressed monks to ratify his proposal to become a Lay Rectifier of Monks (*baiyi sengzheng*), it seemed that none of the eminent monks dared to oppose, safe for Zhizang. Zhizang realised that he stood relatively isolated in his conflict with Emperor Wu, because although most of the other monks did not necessarily agree with Emperor Wu's proposal, they were either too intimidated by him or had too much personal interest in staying on Wudi's good side to take an opposing stand. Therefore, Zhizang took on Emperor Wu in a polemic discussion on the premise that it was impossible for anyone, even the emperor to reverse the devolution of the monastic community. What won Zhizang the debate in the end, was his ability to single out the contradictions in Emperor Wu's newly crafted Buddhist world vision. If the emperor was genuinely a *bodhisattva* – which is what he claimed to be after his *bodhisattva* ordination several years before – then his vows of compassion would actually prohibit him from punishing those who committed an offence. When the emperor, grasping at straws, retorted that it was said that the ruler is entrusted with governing the *saṃgha* and not that he should not punish them, Zhizang cites the example of Devadatta, the Buddha's wicked cousin, who was not disciplined by the Buddha despite of his many sins. When Emperor Wu has to admit with shame that he has never heard of Devadatta, he is furious with his advisers, who have failed to foresee this argument. This is a good example of how much Emperor Wu relied on scriptural authority to make his claims stand. Since he was unable to scrutinize all the Buddhist scriptures personally, he had to rely on scholar monks to assist him. And when they failed to cover all their bases, the consequences could be bad, as Emperor Wu was forced to abandon his plan to become de-facto head of the monastic community. Once Emperor Wu realised that institutional control was no longer a viable option, he chose to pursue a different strategy. Instead of personally taking control of the *saṃgha* as a secular ruler, he shifted his focus back to developing the *bodhisattva* ideal in order to put pressure on the *saṃgha* to change its ways from within. In 519 Wudi had taken the *bodhisattva* vows in an elaborate public ordination ceremony. The idea of taking the *bodhisattva* vows itself was not new, but Emperor Wu had redrafted the existing scriptures on the subject to come up with two separate ceremonies for monks and laymen. As the first to be ordained according to the new *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony, Emperor Wu enjoyed of spiritual seniority over those who followed in his footsteps (as per the *Fanwang jing*), but at the same time he stood on a par with all other members of this new religious community, bound together in equality to all strive for the salvation of others. The immense popularity of the *bodhisattva* ordination among the laity (which, as we have seen, was probably artificially heightened by incentive and pressure mechanisms such as registries) put an increased pressure on the *saṃgha* to live up to the standards expected of it. When so many lay people vowed to live by the *bodhisattva* precepts, it was only natural for them to expect of those who had left the family life to devote themselves to unhindered spiritual practice to exhibit an even more highly developed sense of propriety. This is how we have to understand Emperor Wu's pressure on the monastic community to adopt a vegetarian diet. Since he wanted to create a new kind of universal community, wherein everyone looked out for everyone else, he emphatically integrated the Buddhist concept of karmic retribution with the Confucian concept of filial piety. After having defended the existence of a transmigrating self (*shen*), Emperor Wu, in his address called *Duan jiurou wen*, pointed out to the people that these *shen* were represented in all stages of the cycle of life and death, including animals and insects. Thus by eating meat, one could effectively be devouring a deceased relative who had been reborn in animal form. By sensitizing his subjects to the issue of eating meat, Emperor Wu extended his cosmic community beyond the living and into the realm of the afterlife. It also superseded the traditional concepts of filial piety and ancestor worship by adding a universal dimension to them. Filial piety was no longer the highest virtue to aspire to, but through the concept of karmic retribution, one's duty to one's ancestors came to be extended to all living beings.

Though it is difficult to assess how successful Emperor Wu's Buddhist reforms were in restoring power to the throne, there are signs that they did at least have an impact on the relation between the emperor and the literati families. The *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (*Records of Miraculous Retribution*, T.2082)[583] tells the following anecdote:

> 梁武帝微時。識一寒士。及即位。遊於苑中。見牽舟。帝問之。尚貧賤如故。敕曰。明日可上謁。吾當與汝縣令。此人奉敕而往。會故不得見。頻往遇有事。終不得通。自怪之以問沙門寶誌。誌方為大眾講經。聽者數千人。寒士不得進。寶誌謂。眾曰。有人欲來見問。請開道內之。眾人乃為開。此人進

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[583] The *Mingbao ji* is a collection of fifty-seven Buddhist miracle tales, collected by the Buddhist layman Tang Lin 唐臨 (ca. 600 - ?) in the mid-seventh century.

未至。寶誌迎謂曰。君為不得縣令來問耶。終不得矣。但受虛恩耳。過去。帝為齋主。君其疏許施錢五百。而竟不與。是故今日但蒙許官。終不得也。此人聞之終去。帝亦更不求之。[584]

When Emperor Wu of the Liang was young, he was acquainted with a poor scholar.[585] Later, after he ascended the throne, while enjoying himself in his [imperial] park the emperor saw the same poor scholar towing a boat. The emperor questioned him and found out that he was still poor and humble as before. "Tomorrow you may come for an audience," the emperor commanded, "and We shall give you a position as district magistrate." The poor scholar received the command and went for the audience, but something came up and he was unable to see [the emperor]. He often returned but something always happened and he never obtained an audience. Thinking this odd, he went to aks the *śramaṇ a*Pao-chih 寶誌about it. Pao-chih was at that time lecturing on a sutra to a large crowd. There were several thousand in the audience, and the poor scholar could not gain entry. "There is someone who wants to come ask me a question," said Pao-chih to the crowd. "Please open a way and let him in." The crowd then opened a path for him, and the poor scholar came forward. Before he reached the front, Pao-chih greeted him and said, "Is it not because you have failed to obtain the position of district magistrate that you come to question me? You will never get the position, it is only an empty promise. Previously, when the emperor held a vegetarian feast, you

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[584] T.2082.790b4-15.

[585] *Hanshi* 寒士 refers to a member of one of the low ranking literati families that had been shut out from higher offices by the powerful families. As we have seen, Emperor Wu actively recruited officials from these families, because he hoped they would be more loyal and efficient than those from the powerful families, who often did nothing more than to cash their paycheques and leave the work to others. See Grafflin, 1990; Holcombe, 1994: 135-136.

> wrote out a statement promising five-hundred cash, but you never paid up. So now, even though you have been promised a position, you will never obtain it.” When the poor scholar heard this, he stopped going to court, and the emperor never sought him out again.[586]

Since the name of the “poor scholar” is not mentioned, there is no way of knowing whether this story is true or not. Yet it reflects the social climate of the time in a twofold way. First, the story confirms that the assemblies organised by Emperor Wu were accessible to people from the lower social strata, which reflects that the theory of equality propounded by the emperor was applied in practice as well. Second, the story demonstrates that the balance of power had tipped slightly in favour of the emperor. Wudi was known for attracting officials from low ranking literati families to streamline his bureaucratic system, but the protagonist of this story is not so lucky. He is promised a job by Emperor Wu, only to learn that the latter never intended to keep his word. The reason for this, he is explained, is that during one of Emperor Wu’s vegetarian feasts (perhaps a Great Assembly?) he had promised to donate five-hundred cash, but had never made good on it. As a result, his future career options are completely cut off. Although it is significant that the story speaks of a poor scholar, and not a member of the high ranking families being blocked from an official position due to his stinginess during a Buddhist assembly, it is still a sign that Emperor Wu had regained the initiative from the literati families. Where before the literati and the emperor were co-dependant on each other for their legitimacy to rule society, Emperor Wu seems to have succeeded in creating his own Buddhist legitimacy independently from the literati families, who due to its success, now had to subject themselves to this new imperial legitimacy in order to hold on to theirs. This does not mean that the co-dependence had seized to exist all together, but rather that the nature of that co-dependence had shifted. Though Buddhism, not Confucianism, now legitimised Emperor Wu's claim on the throne, he still needed the support of the powerful literati families, for it was to a large degree their wealth which financed his Buddhist imperial programme. Both parties, it seems, had come to a silent understanding that an elaborate sponsoring of Buddhism, combined with the advocating of a new Buddhist vision on society, could serve both sides for the better. On the one hand it provided Emperor Wu with a new form of legitimacy in an unstable time when emperors followed each other in a rapid succession through murder and intrigue and had a hard time justifying their claim on the throne. On the other hand, it allowed the literati families to maintain their prestige, but now more as magnanimous sponsors of Buddhism, rather than as representatives of the Confucian state. Emperor Wu's reforms turned out to be, in the end, a system of mutual advantage and benefit. Perhaps this restored balance between the two centrifugal forces of emperor and literati is what allowed Emperor Wu to rule for as long as he did, and to turn his reign into the golden age of the Southern Dynasties. His creative use of Buddhism to restore a certain measure of authority to the imperial institution shows that Emperor Wu might perhaps not necessarily have been a powerful emperor, but he certainly was a skilled politician and ideologue.

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[586] Translation by Gjertson, 1989: 169-170.

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XZJ.	(*Wan) xu zangjing* (卍) 續藏經. 150 vols. Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, 1968-70 (Reprint of the *Dai Nippon zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經. Edited by Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧. 120 cases. Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin 藏經書院 , 1905-1912.) Texts

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