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Buddhism and the State in Medieval China:

Case Studies of Three Persecutions
of Buddhism, 444-846

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2016

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ABSTRACT

In the history of Buddhism in China, three major persecutions took place between the fifth and the ninth centuries. In the present research, I propose to study them together and in their broader context as a means of understanding the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China. Although a further episode of repression of the Buddhist community occurred in southern China in the tenth century, I will argue that the first three great persecutions marked a fundamental transition in the interaction between Buddhism and Chinese society.

As an attempt to study the social and political history of Buddhism in medieval China, this thesis shall accord some space to the development of the monastic community and economy during the time under examination. It will furthermore lay emphasis on the long-term factors of Buddhist development, thus hoping to shed new light on the cultural, economic, social and political reasons for the religious persecutions. As these persecutions were carried out under the orders of the ruling secular authorities, and most of the assumed reasons are related to the imperial policies, the present research is a case study through which the interaction between Buddhism and the state in medieval China will be investigated.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

The Persecutions of Buddhism in Medieval China

Preliminary Considerations

Among the most notorious episodes in Chinese Buddhist history are the four grand persecutions, which are collectively known in China as *san wu yi zong* 三武一宗 (Three Martial [Emperors] and One Ancestor [Emperor]). The first of these persecutions occurred in 446 under the Northern Wei 魏 Emperor Taiwudi 太武帝 (r. 423-452), followed by a second one in 574 under Emperor Zhou Wudi 周武帝 (r. 561-578). The third persecution took place during 843-846 under the Tang 唐 (618-907) Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840-846). This episode has been generally viewed as wielding the most fatal blow to Buddhism. The fourth and last persecution happened in 955 under Emperor Shizong 世宗 (Chai Rong 柴榮 r. 954-959) of the Later Zhou dynasty 後周 (951-960), but compared to the previous incidents, it was an event of only limited significance.¹

There has been considerable debate on the causes of these crises, but it is generally thought that Confucianism and Taoism, particularly the latter, played a decisive role in inspiring the emperors' initiative against Buddhism.² In this perspective, since Confucianism and Taoism are native ideologies, the persecutions could be seen as a form of religious conflict where the local religions reacted against an imported faith. There is certainly some truth in this argument, but it may rest on somewhat simplified assumptions. For one thing, it is unclear whether a notion of 'religion' was clearly established in medieval China, nor should we take it for granted that the existence of independent religious formations was generally acknowledged.³ It cannot be denied that especially in the fourth and fifth centuries, Taoists and Buddhists started to emerge as identifiable social groups, distinct from each other.⁴

¹ The term *san wu yi zong* is a modern category. However, already Zhipan 志磐 (ca. 1195-1274), a Song Buddhist historian, singled out these four persecutions as most noticeable in his *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (compiled ca. 1258-1269). See *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.392c-393a. On the fourth suppression see *XWDS*, 12.119; *JWDS*, 115.1529-31; *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.386c; Jan (trans.), 1966:117-118. Cf. Tao, 1985:303-304. Detailed references on the first three episodes will be given at the relevant places in this thesis.

² See below, relevant discussion of the causes of the three persecutions, Chapter 3, Section 3 and 4; Chapter 5, Section 4 and 5; Chapter 8, Section 4 and 5.

³ On the problems involved with the idea of 'religion' in early medieval China, see Campany, 2003, especially pp. 299-312.

⁴ See Barrett, 2009, especially pp. 152-161 on how Buddhism introduced a distinction between

However, this process did not automatically reflect on the state's preference for one 'religion' over another. Secondly, and importantly, although Buddhism was often strenuously criticised and even rejected by some traditionalists, it is also true that religious tolerance prevailed during most of the medieval period, save precisely for the handful of episodes of repression. Besides, as early as the sixth century, there was already a perception that Buddhism, together with Confucianism and Taoism, was one of three constituent parts of Chinese tradition.⁵ Yet, the second and especially the third persecutions happened in spite of that perception, which had to go through a long and eventful process before the imperial court fully accepted it.

In this dissertation, I propose to examine the three great persecutions between 446 and 846 as a way to explore the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China. I shall leave aside the episode of 955 both in view of its more limited nature and of the fact, which I shall duly argue, that the first three persecutions reflect a coherent period in the ideological, social and political history of Buddhism in medieval China. I will thus test a preliminary hypothesis that these three major incidents, far from eradicating the Buddhist religion from Chinese society, were critical stages in a process that enabled the former to adapt and live on in the latter, and that it is therefore important to study them together.

This project will raise a number of more specific questions along the way. Why, for example, did Buddhism start being the target of periodic attacks from the state since the middle of the fifth century, about four centuries after it entered China? Why were there no wholesale persecutions after the third one in the ninth century? And how should we understand the relationship between Buddhism and the state on the basis of these episodes? These and other issues will be considered in the course of this study. There are, however, many different perspectives from which such a topic could be approached, which I shall briefly consider in the present introduction.

Persecuting Buddhism, Persecuting Religion

It may be useful to mention in the first place that, in its long history, Buddhism was attacked by those in power several times and across different cultures. The very first such episode may have been the persecution of the Śūṅga king Puṣyamitra in India in the second century BCE, although this cannot be historically attested with certainty. This persecution,

'secular' and 'otherworldly' in early medieval China, and accordingly influenced the discourse on religious identity.

⁵ The famous recluse scholar Li Shiqian 李士謙 (523-588), for example, commented that Buddhism is like the sun, Taoism the moon, and Confucianism the five stars. *BS*, 33.1234; *SS*, 77.1754. Cf. Jan (trans.), 1966:13.

whether or not legendary, is said to have resulted from the king's desire to promote the Brahmanical tradition, through which his own authority would be strengthened since he was of Brahmin origin.⁶ In the third century CE, in Persia, the Sassanian dynasty consolidated its power by encouraging a unitary Zoroastrianism and proscribing other religious faiths, apparently including Buddhism.⁷ These early episodes echo a general model of religious persecution, resulting from the attempt to establish through violence a religious orthodoxy. In other cases, which may eventually have caused the decline and ultimate disappearance of Buddhism in India, the attacks came from foreign invaders after a military conquest, such as the White Huns in the sixth century and especially the Islamic invasions of India between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries.⁸ In East Asia, however, it has been noticed that it was usually the increasing power held by the Buddhist monastic community that caused the imperial court or secular authority to take a tough stance toward it, occasionally resulting in religious persecution.⁹ I shall discuss this interpretation in due course.

The imposition of marriage on Buddhist monks in 19th-century Japan, as we know from Richard Jaffe's detailed study, presents us with yet another type of state intervention in the monastic affairs, and arguably a form of religious purge. Before the Meiji 明治 period (1868-1912), Buddhist monks were strictly regulated under the Tokugawa rulers, and celibacy and vegetarianism were compulsory for a fully ordained monk. These rules were rigorously enforced by the state, and various punishments were applied whenever transgressions occurred.¹⁰ When the Meiji era started in 1868, however, the state regulation of the monastic community took a complete reverse turn. Apart from an increasing animosity towards Buddhism and some destructive measures against Buddhist establishments,¹¹ the state religious policy legalized monastic marriage and abolished monastic vegetarianism, thus forcibly secularizing the monastic community.¹²

In modern times, Communist regimes in several Asian countries have taken a radical stance toward religion.¹³ In China in particular, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) marked the climax of such attacks, and although Buddhism was not the only target, it certainly was

⁶ Lamotte, 1988:386-392; Crosby, 2004:641-642

⁷ Crosby, 2004:642.

⁸ Crosby, 2004:642-644.

⁹ Crosby, 2004:643-644.

¹⁰ Jaffe, 2001:15-30.

¹¹ See also Ketelaar, 1990:44-77.

¹² Jaffe, 2001:58-94.

¹³ Crosby, 2004:644-646.

most severely hit.¹⁴

As the above instances illustrate, Buddhism was persecuted many times across different cultures from its inception until modern times, although it is often unclear whether and when it was attacked as Buddhism or as a ‘religion’ among others. Nevertheless, two important factors of the persecutions, the religious and the socio-political, are readily available even from this brief overview. The former is suggested in those cases where a favourable attitude of the rulers towards one particular religion would result in the suppression of another religion or all other religions. This was already noticed long ago by Frederick Pollock, who highlighted religious exclusivism and the necessity to rely on a single doctrine of salvation as the main motivation behind the suppression of other faiths.¹⁵ More recently, Brian Grim and Roger Finke have proposed to construe persecution as “religious economy”: if state religious policy favours one religion, it would prevent religious competition. Such a lack of competition would provide an opportunity for an increasingly dominant religion to suppress its potential competitors.¹⁶ Social and political motivations, on the other hand, may be simply inspired by the practical concern to maintain social order and remove those religious ideas regarded as detrimental to it, although as a “religion is incorporated into politics, a diversity against the established gods is apt to be regarded as equivalent to treason against the established order of government”.¹⁷

Persecution, however, only represents one extreme instance in the complex relationship between religion and the state. In their review of scholarship on this topic, Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank have identified two different approaches, which they respectively qualify as “dichotomous” and “institutional frameworks”. Scholars who take a dichotomous framework approach tend to notice the constant pattern of state control of religion by means of state bureaucracies or the state’s intervention on religion’s legal status – whether peaceful or not. The institutional approach, which Ashiwa and Wank favour, views the state-religion relation as a single framework involving “multiple actors and political processes”.¹⁸ The main difference between the two views therefore is that the dichotomous approach suggests two opposed players, state and religion, whereas the institutional approach notices that there are

¹⁴ Welch, 1972:341-360; Pas,1989:1; Yang Fenggang, 2012:72-74; Rambelli & Reinders, 2014:119-133.

¹⁵ Pollock, 1882:144-175.

¹⁶ Grim and Finke, 2007 and 2011.

¹⁷ Cf. Last, 1937:83.

¹⁸ Ashiwa and Wank, 2009:3-4

complex interactions involving policies and organizations.¹⁹ As such, the dichotomous approach tends to emphasize antagonism in the state-religion interaction, while the institutional approach views not only conflict but cooperation and accommodation between those two sides.²⁰ This seems particularly relevant to the situation of Buddhism in medieval China that we have briefly outlined above and will further discuss below, which involved the alternating of persecution and patronage. As Timothy Brook has noticed with regard to China in late imperial times, a mixture of support and repression could be effectively deployed by the state to establish a preferred relationship with religious communities, not only Buddhist.²¹

In this perspective, persecution may have been one of the means and perhaps the last resort by which the state's intervention in Buddhist and religious affairs would be carried out. In order to scrutinize the Buddhism-state relationship in a balanced way, then, there are other aspects of that relationship, such as regulation or sponsorship, which warrant due consideration. Before doing this, however, and accepting the relevance of what has been discussed in this section, it is important to establish whether it is appropriate at all to consider the persecution of Buddhism in medieval China as simply an instance of religious persecution. Both the Buddhist tradition and the Chinese state held in fact distinctive views of themselves and, in time, of each other that significantly affected their interaction.

Buddhism and the State

As Robert Sharf remarked, the study of Chinese Buddhism has been broadly undertaken by two different groups of scholars, Sinologists and Buddhologists.²² The former view Chinese Buddhism as a constituent part of Chinese history, whereas the latter trace Buddhism to its Indian origin and approach Chinese Buddhism as an intercultural transmission of one tradition to another.²³ Sharf's observation is particularly important with respect to our understanding of the interaction between Buddhism and the secular authority, which can also be viewed from a Buddhologist's perspective or as an expression of a particular historical context (here medieval China). The former approach will take into account traditional Indian views of kingship and the state as well as Buddhist responses to them as a background to the continuation of this relation on Chinese soil.

¹⁹ Cf. Pitman Potter's remarks on the means by which the Chinese government regulates and controls religious communities in the present. Potter, 2003:11-31.

²⁰ Ashiwa and Wank, 2009:4-5.

²¹ Brook, 2009:23.

²² Sharf, 2005:1.

²³ Sharf, 2005:1-2. Cf. Zürcher, 2007:ix.

Few sources are available on the ancient Indian theories of the polity, which are sometimes reconstructed on the basis of such materials as the traditional epics.²⁴ It has been observed that “Indian kingship is peculiar in that the monarch as a ruler belongs to the second class, the brahman constituting the first. When the might of the ruling class is under control of brahmans the kingdom was believed to become prosperous”.²⁵ Against this background it is probably significant that Buddhism traced its origins to Siddhartha Gautama, an heir to a tribal chiefdom named Kapilavastu in ancient India,²⁶ who may have been active in the fifth century BCE.²⁷ The Buddha was notably said to come from the Kṣatriya or warrior caste, whose role was to fight for and protect the state.²⁸ The political relevance of the traditions on the Buddha's royal upbringing and caste status cannot be underestimated. In fact, the Buddhist version of social stratification ranked the Kṣatriya above the Brahmin, which is in contrast to the traditional view that advocated the reverse.²⁹ Siddhartha's very renunciation would not obscure his roots in royalty: as John Strong comments, “the Buddha's great departure and religious quest ... did not mean that he departed radically from the symbols of kingship. Rather, in Buddhist texts, the two careers – of the Buddha and the *cakkavatti* [Skt. *cakravartin*, universal ruler] – tended to be viewed as parallel and complementary”.³⁰ Moreover, it is intriguing to note that before his demise, the Buddha instructed his disciple Ānanda that his physical remains should be treated in a way comparable to that of a *cakkavatti*.³¹ Even the place where the Buddha chose to pass away was significant, for it was the capital of King Mahāsudassana, a *cakkavatti* of the distant past.³²

The significance of this theme for the actual relationship of the Buddhist community with the rulers, however, is not clear.³³ As Richard Gombrich has remarked, “in the canonical material on kingship ... [o]ne strand deals with a real king, the other with fantasy – though

²⁴ Scharfe, 1989:15-22; Drekmeier, 1962:2-6. Cf. Spellman, 1964:26-69.

²⁵ Gonda, 1966:62.

²⁶ Kosambi, 1970:108-109; Prebish and Keown, 2006:26.

²⁷ On the controversial chronology of the historical Buddha, see Bechert, 1991:1-21; Narain, 1992:185-199; Gombrich, 1992:257-259; Gombrich, 2006:32; Pachow, 1965:345-348; Lamotte, 1988:13-14; Lamotte, 1993:41-48; Hirakawa, 1990:22-23.

²⁸ Gombrich, 2006:38; Kosambi, 1970:108; Drekmeier, 1962:94-95; Basham, 1954:149-150. It is intriguing to note that all the Buddhas prior to the present Buddha were either born to Kṣatriya or brāhmaṇa families. For the Chinese version of this canonical narrative see *CAHJ*, j.1. T.1.1.3b. Cf. Lamotte, 1988:15.

²⁹ Basham, 1954:243-256; Gokhale, 1966:17; Scharfe, 1989:105, 217.

³⁰ Strong, 2001:82. Cf. Drekmeier, 1962:108-109.

³¹ See especially von Hinüber, 2009:50, and Gokhale, 1966:18; Silk, 2006:9-21; Harvey, 2013:16. Cf. Walshe (trans.), 1995:274. For canonical accounts of this episode in Chinese see *FBNHJ*, j.2. T.5.169a29-b8, 173a.15-25; *CAHJ*, j.3. T.1.20a22-b3; *DBNPJ*, j.2, T.7.199c-200a.

³² Walshe (trans.), 1995:266; Harvey, 2013:16.

³³ Cf. Tambiah, 1976:39-53; Scharfe, 1989:22.

the fantasy is created to make important points”.³⁴ The two strands seem to have converged on the view that the authority of the Buddha and his community was purely spiritual, whereas secular rulers should be approached with caution and realism.³⁵

In one canonical account, for example, a military leader tells the Buddha that according to tradition, a warrior would be rewarded after death with a place among the heavenly gods. He then asks the Buddha whether this was in accordance with his doctrine. Hesitating and then refusing to answer the question directly, the Buddha stops short of rejecting the warrior's view, but conveys as much in a roundabout way to discourage the use of violence.³⁶ Elsewhere, when King Ajātaśatru sends one of his ministers to ask the Buddha about the possible outcome of a war against the Vajjis, the Buddha's diplomatic response is that the moral standards of the Vajjis made them invincible.³⁷ The above two examples are open to interpretation, but it does appear that canonical texts present the Buddha as somewhat prudent in his dealings with those in power. At the same time, we shall not fail to note that the importance of morality and the exercise of restraint were always emphasized.³⁸

A further concern transpiring from canonical literature was about maintaining an untarnished reputation for the Buddhist community by conforming to the expectations of society and of the secular authority. Harris suggests that a noble religious pursuit was by no means the sole reason to become a monk in early Buddhism.³⁹ Some became monks and nuns simply because of hardships in life, debts or even after committing crimes.⁴⁰ In the Vinaya, we read that when the Buddha was about to codify the monastic rule against stealing or robbery, he first consulted a monk who happened to be the ex-justice chief under King Bimbisāra of Magadha.⁴¹ Having been satisfied by the latter's response, the Buddha authorizes the rule, making special reference to the secular criminal law.⁴² As Gokhale

³⁴ Gombrich, 2006:83.

³⁵ Harris, 1999:2-3; Scharfe, 1989:100; Gokhale, 1966:16; Strong, 2001:83. Gokhale also reports a tradition according to which King Ajātaśatru would have told Buddhist monks that “yours is the authority of the spirit as mine of power”; Gokhale, 1966:22.

³⁶ For the Chinese version of this discourse, see *ZAHJ*, j.32. T.2.227b13-c3. Cited in Xue Yu, 2013:194.

³⁷ *ZYAHJ*, j.34. T.2.125.738a11-b18. Xue Yu, 2013:195. In the Pāli version of the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, this story is also mentioned. Gethin (trans.), 2008:39-42; Abeynayake, 1995:30-31.

³⁸ Cf. Gokhale, 1966:23-24; Abeynayake, 1995:120-145.

³⁹ This can also be seen in the Vinaya texts, where the Buddha gives ten reasons for promulgating a rule for Buddhist monks. Most of them are intended to maintain the reputation of the Buddhist monastic community untarnished. Horner (trans.), 1949:37-38.

⁴⁰ Harris, 1999:2; also Brekke, 2002:23-26. Cf. Horner, 1949:xviii.

⁴¹ Horner (trans.), 1949:71. The Buddha was advised by the king not to ordain soldiers as Buddhist monks. Gombrich, 2006:83.

⁴² “Whatever monk should take by means of theft what has not been given to him, in such a manner of

observes, “many a rule of the Vinaya code was discreetly amended in deference to the convenience of kings such as Bimbisāra and Pasendi, the Kosalan”.⁴³ In the sutras, occasionally the Buddha would also caution his disciples to keep their distance from the secular authority, at times even warning them not to discuss politics or related topics.⁴⁴

Side by side with political pragmatism, more general views of the polity were also present in early Buddhism, as notably discussed in Stanley Tambiah’s classic treatment of Buddhist kingship in his book *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*.⁴⁵ Tambiah starts with the Buddhist myth of genesis of the world and its implications for an idea of Buddhist polity.⁴⁶ The myth centred on two kinds of beings, namely, the king — social totality, and the *bhikkhu* (mendicant monk) — homeless but transcending it. While the king is the mediator between the social order and disorder, the *bhikkhu* is the mediator between the home and the homeless. The *bhikkhu* is therefore given the superior position in contrast to the king.⁴⁷ Tambiah sees this early canonical formulation as a transition “from the conception of dharma in its encompassing aspect as a cosmologically ordinate pattern to its signification as order in the sociopolitical realms”.⁴⁸

Also of relevance here is the concept of *mahāpurisa* (Skt. *mahāpuruṣa*, great being), often applied to the Buddha but without any attribution of worldly authority. It was the second *māhapurisa*, the *cakkavatti* or universal monarch who occupied a pre-eminent position. As Tambiah has indicated, the *cakkavatti* concept in the Theravāda tradition cooperated with the ideas of *bodhisattva*.⁴⁹ From this point, it has been noted that the Buddhist theory of polity was oriented in two directions. Ideally, as Tambiah shows, the *bhikkhu* held a position superior to the king. But the *mahāpurisa* concept reveals the other side of this ideal, which shows that it was the universal monarch who held the real power. This echoes Gokhale’s observation that despite its underlying fear and anxiety toward kingship, Buddhist political

taking as kings, catching a thief in the act of stealing, would flog him or imprison him or banish him, saying: ‘you are robber, you are foolish, you are wrong, you are a thief,’ — even so a monk, taking what is not his, is also one who is defeated, he is not in communion”. Horner (trans.), 1949:72.

⁴³ Gokhale, 1966:15.

⁴⁴ ZYAHJ, j.43. T.2.125.782c4-13. Cf. Ceng, 2011:81.

⁴⁵ Tambiah, 1976, especially pp. 32-101.

⁴⁶ This myth is chiefly presented in the *Aggañña sutta* in the Pāli *Dīgha-nikāya*. For an alternative interpretation of this text as humorous in intent, see Gombrich, 2006:129-146.

⁴⁷ “The king is the fountainhead of society; the *bhikkhu* is of that society and transcends it.” Tambiah, 1976:15. It is stated in the *sutta*: “The kshatriya is the best among this folk, who put their trust in lineage. But one in wisdom and in virtue clothed, is best of all among spirits and men”. See Ling, 1981:112-113.

⁴⁸ Tambiah, 1976:38.

⁴⁹ Tambiah, 1976:39.

theory conceded that the king was essentially necessary in maintaining social order.⁵⁰

Historically, Tambiah observes that the reign of Aśoka (third century BCE) and the religious and political legend that developed after him marked a turning point for the changes in the Buddhist theory of kingship.⁵¹ He states that “Aśokan dharma comprised an encompassing positive role for kingship as the foremost creative and regulating force in the polity; indeed, we may say that the dharma of kingship maintains society as polity”.⁵² Meanwhile, Tambiah warns that the idealized Aśokan polity should not overshadow the other side of the picture — that of political absolutism.⁵³ While religious tolerance was encouraged, Aśoka would categorically disapprove anything that was construed as a schism within the Buddhist *saṃgha*, even actively interfering with it.⁵⁴ Views of kingship and the state in early Indian Buddhism were therefore ambivalent. On the one hand, as Gokhale has shown, some Buddhist canonical formulations tended to deplete or even deprive the state’s power over the Buddhist community.⁵⁵ These formulations have led scholars such as I. B. Horner to conclude that Indian Buddhist monks might have lived in a society comparatively free from harassment of the secular authority.⁵⁶ Kenneth Ch’en would also assume that in India, even the king would to a large degree respect the existence of a self-regulating monastic community.⁵⁷ In view of the conflicting model of kingship discussed by Tambiah and considering the instances of Aśoka, however, it is evident that the Buddhist canonical view of kingship could differ from the social reality.

Regardless of any Buddhist political ideal, the situation in medieval China was profoundly different. As W. J. F. Jenner observed,

For nearly all of the history of Buddhism in China ... Buddhist clerics have had only a marginal position at the higher levels of society and have been kept under the control of the secular bureaucracy. ... While emperors and officials could believe in these and other religions ... the religious life could not lead to the worldly eminence of a bishop in medieval Europe, let alone that of a pope.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Gokhale, 1966:15.

⁵¹ On King Aśoka between history and myth see also Strong 1983; Norman, 2006:113-130; Gombrich, 2006:128-136.

⁵² Tambiah, 1976:60.

⁵³ Tambiah, 1976:62.

⁵⁴ Tambiah, 1976:64. Cf. the Sāñchī Pillar Edict quoted in Nikam and McKeon, 1959:67-68. Cf. Scharfe, 1989:225.

⁵⁵ Gokhale, 1966:22.

⁵⁶ Horner, 1949:xvii. Cf. Zürcher, 2007:254, sharing the same assumption.

⁵⁷ Ch’en, 1964:75; 1973:65-67.

⁵⁸ Jenner, 1992:45. Jacques Gernet remarked in a similar manner that “as the Chinese emperors held total power over the organisation of society and the universe, and space and time, it was not possible

The overwhelming presence of imperial power over the religious communities in China has been noticed by many scholars. Perhaps this also convinced J. J. M. de Groot (1854-1921), who argued that the repeated persecutions of Buddhism resulted from the idiosyncratic religious intolerance of the Chinese imperial political system.⁵⁹ Yet, as we said, there was generally an amicable interaction between Buddhism and the imperial court that allowed Buddhism to disseminate in China throughout history. It is therefore necessary to explore briefly below the traditional idea of kingship in ancient China.

It is generally held that the Chinese notion of kingship is based on the idea that the king or emperor is a sage. At an early date (Western Zhou 周, *ca.* 1027-770 BCE), kingship was already tied up with religious and shamanistic aspects.⁶⁰ Furthermore, an imperial office was designed for religious-related matters and the offices and officials in charge of them were subject to imperial supervision.⁶¹ Later on, this notion of religious-related kingship developed into a system whereby the emperor was regarded as the Son of Heaven.⁶² As long as his reign was endorsed by the mandate of Heaven, which was reflected in social stability, plentiful harvests and a proper performance of the imperial sacrificial rituals,⁶³ then the emperor's righteous reign would be justified.⁶⁴ Consequently, the Chinese emperor reserved the exclusive right to offer sacrifices to Heaven by which his rule would be legitimized or renewed.⁶⁵

It is therefore clear that while the Chinese notion of kingship was absolutist and advocated religious prerogatives to the state,⁶⁶ the Buddhist model of kingship was dualistic, as it envisaged an ideal king who respected a more or less independent Buddhist community or even governed the state according to Buddhist teaching, such as King Aśoka.⁶⁷ These conflicting views can be seen behind the very first crisis between Buddhist monks and the imperial court, which we shall discuss shortly.

for religion in China to be an autonomous power. The various religious cults were therefore a political matter". Gernet, 1995:105.

⁵⁹ De Groot, 1903:7-15.

⁶⁰ Ching, 1993:44-46; Ching, 1997:5-18; Thompson, 1996:69.

⁶¹ Ching, 1997:8.

⁶² Maspero, 1981:54.

⁶³ Chen Shuguo discusses in detail the state religious ceremonies and the religious aspects of the imperial politics in medieval China. Chen, 2010:53-142.

⁶⁴ Twitchett and Loewe, 1986:661-663; Thompson, 1996:7071; Lewis, 2007:185-189.

⁶⁵ Zürcher, 2013:93-94; Thompson, 1996:72-73.

⁶⁶ I shall nevertheless conventionally refer to the Chinese state as 'secular', also taking into account the Buddhist claims to otherworldliness and independence, and the imperial reaction against those claims.

⁶⁷ Gokhale, 1966:22. Cf. Strong 1983:71-72.

While acknowledging the importance of traditional Buddhist views of the state, however, this study starts from the awareness that Buddhism in medieval China was an imported religion, which originated in a different cultural domain and social context. The Buddhist perception of kingship and its relationship with the secular authority in India would have differed from the situation in China, where the long-established presence of the imperial institution would pose an altogether different challenge. Perhaps even more importantly, while there is almost no evidence that may offer a context for Buddhist political ideas in ancient India, the relationship between Buddhism and the imperial power in medieval China and the three great persecutions that will be discussed in this study represent the first fully documented historical instance of a confrontation between Buddhism and the state.

We are now in a position to focus more closely on our topic, and briefly review the relevant studies on the persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China. This will enable us to see how the topic has been explored and how the present dissertation can further expand on extant research.

Scholarship on the Persecutions of Buddhism in Medieval China

J. J. M. de Groot's *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China* (1903), briefly mentioned above, was the first important contribution in modern scholarship to the understanding of the persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China. De Groot's extensive use of primary Chinese sources still deserves our admiration. Nevertheless, his simplified premise of an orthodox Confucianism opposed to an exotic Buddhism neglected other important factors of the persecutions as well as the complexities of the confrontation between Buddhism and the Chinese state. A few decades later, Kenneth Ch'en examined the first three persecutions both in a series of articles and in his classic history of Buddhism in premodern China (1964).⁶⁸ Ch'en paid special attention to the economic, social and political factors, although he did not attempt a long-term analysis of the Buddhism-state relationship. Stanley Weinstein's monograph on Tang Buddhism (1987) devotes much space to Wuzong's persecution in the Huichang 會昌 era (840-846); he notes that "Wu-tsung appears to have conceived a deep-seated hatred of all things Buddhist that was not simply derived from the usual political and economic arguments against the church but reflected in large measure the frustrations of the growing Taoist clergy – much admired by Wu-tsung – who had been long

⁶⁸ Ch'en, 1952; 1954; 1956; 1964:147-151, 186-194, 226-233.

overshadowed by the Buddhists”.⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Weinstein explicitly stresses this factor as the main cause of the crisis.⁷⁰ This would suggest that the Tang persecution was religious insofar as one religion was receiving state recognition at the expenses of the other. At the same time, there were personal factors, as the emperor alone made the decision according to his religious preference. This interpretation will remind us of the 'religious competition' theory discussed above.

Japanese scholarship has a long tradition of research on Chinese Buddhism, and Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆 is one of its most representative examples. His in-depth studies, especially regarding the first two persecutions of Buddhism, will be referred to often in this thesis.⁷¹ Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄 continued this tradition in his multi-volume history of Chinese Buddhism, which covers all the three persecutions.⁷² Nomura Yōshō's 野村耀昌 monograph on the Northern Zhou persecution deserves some words here. The book is a very extensive study of the Northern Zhou persecution in seventeen chapters.⁷³ It thoroughly documents not only the main events, but also the development of Buddhism in that period.⁷⁴ The significance of political reform, Wei Yuansong's 衛元嵩 memorials and their role in the persecution are also discussed in detail.⁷⁵ In the last chapter, Nomura briefly compares the four persecutions of Buddhism and locates the Northern Zhou episode within those events.⁷⁶ Regarding the Huichang persecution, Kamekawa Shōshin 亀川正信 and Ono Katsutoshi 小野勝年 contributed two very important articles.⁷⁷ Ono's annotated version of the Japanese monk Ennin's 圓仁 (793/794-864) travelling diary *Nittō guhō junrei kōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記 also sheds light on several obscure events surrounding the Huichang persecution. We shall add in this group the name of Okada Masayuki 岡田正之, for his detailed study of Ennin's diary accords some space to the Huichang persecution.⁷⁸ The most important studies of the persecutions in Chinese are by Tang Yongtong in his works on Chinese Buddhist history.⁷⁹ The posthumously published book of his lectures on Sui and Tang Buddhist history discusses

⁶⁹ Weinstein, 1987:115.

⁷⁰ Weinstein, 1987:123-130. Cf. Reischauer, 1955b:253-254.

⁷¹ Tsukamoto, 1974b:37-66; 97-130; 463-640.

⁷² Kamata, 2002c:305-318; Kamata, 2002c:426-453; Kamata, 2002e:123-143.

⁷³ Nomura, 1968.

⁷⁴ Nomura, 1968:13-103.

⁷⁵ Nomura, 1968:105-143.

⁷⁶ Nomura, 1968:363-382.

⁷⁷ Kamekawa, 1942:47-68; Ono, 1989d:544-564.

⁷⁸ Okada, 1921:461-486.

⁷⁹ Tang, 1991:493-496; 538-545.

the Huichang persecution in some detail.⁸⁰ Several short articles published in the latter part of the twentieth century shall be incorporated in this dissertation whenever appropriate.⁸¹

A general comment on all these studies is that despite their certain value in terms of historical research and reference, they generally treat the persecutions as isolated events. It is certainly not the aim of this thesis to argue that these episodes were directly connected to each other. However, the three first persecutions in particular share the same total and destructive character, and as unique attempts to eradicate Buddhism from China they invite both comparison and especially an evaluation of their significance in a long-term perspective.

Other scholars have in fact singled out the period in which the persecutions took place as a stage of some significance in the history of Chinese Buddhism and of its relationship with the state and society. One thinks in particular of Jacques Gernet and his classic study of the Buddhist monastic economy in China between the fifth and tenth centuries.⁸² Gernet does not explain the rationale of his selection of this period, although it is evident from his book that the later part of the fifth century witnessed the inception of the expansion of monastic economy, which also coincided with the aftermath of the first persecution.⁸³ At one point Gernet expressly refers to the four persecutions, up to the last one in 955, in connection to the confrontation of Buddhism with the imperial state,⁸⁴ which may account for the cut-off date in the tenth century for his study.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he also stresses that the Huichang persecution marked a major shift, after which the Buddhist monastic community could not recover the social power and imperial support it had enjoyed before.⁸⁶

Without necessarily sharing Gernet's view of a Buddhist decline after the Tang,⁸⁷ this dissertation will also argue that the third persecution in the ninth century marked a watershed, after which the relationship between Buddhism and the state in China developed along a

⁸⁰ Tang, 2008:38-50.

⁸¹ Several recent articles dealing with the first three persecutions will be used throughout the present research. With respect to the Northern Wei persecution, Xiang Nanyan (1984), Zhang Jian (2004) and Liu Shufen (2005, 2008) contributed important studies. On the Northern Zhou persecution see Liu and Puhui, 2007; Liu and Jian, 1983. Zhang Jian's PhD dissertation discusses the four persecutions, but his approach differs from that of the present thesis; Zhang, 2001.

⁸² Gernet, 1995.

⁸³ Gernet, 1995:17, 99-103.

⁸⁴ Gernet, 1995:298-299.

⁸⁵ In his history of Chinese civilization, Gernet also makes some relevant comments in connection to the Tang-Song transition. Gernet, 2002:235-236.

⁸⁶ Gernet, 1995:307-311.

⁸⁷ It has been increasingly clear in recent scholarship that the Song period (960-1279) was in fact one of great vitality for Chinese Buddhism. See especially Gregory, 2002 and Foulk, 1993:148-151. Cf. Sen, 2002:66-73; Sen, 2004:102-110; Gregory and Ebrey, 1993:8.

different trajectory.⁸⁸ One further reason not to include the episode of 955 is that it significantly lacks the vehement anti-Buddhist rhetoric of the first three persecutions, which had insisted that Buddhism was incompatible with Chinese tradition. In fact, when the fourth purge took place, the emperor explicitly stressed the moral and spiritual value of Buddhism and reassured that its presence in China was legitimate.⁸⁹ Something had changed in the perception of that presence, seemingly in line with the broader transformations that brought China out of her medieval period, to which I shall now turn.

Medieval China and Buddhist History

The notion of 'medieval China' is at the core of this dissertation from its very title, and its relevance to one of its central hypotheses should be clear by now. A brief discussion of this notion is therefore in order. Chinese history has often been viewed as a succession of dynastic cycles, without more extended chronological patterns.⁹⁰ The traditional breakdown of historical periods was thus based on the downfall of a dynasty and the establishment of a new one, although, as Dušanka Mišćević points out, such successions could also involve important social transitions.⁹¹ Native theories of periodization sometimes saw Chinese history as evolving through a high, middle and near antiquities, or modified versions thereof.⁹² A major reassessment of these views was proposed by the Japanese historian Naitō Torajirō 内藤 虎次郎 (a.k.a. Naitō Konan 内藤 湖南, 1866-1934), whose periodization hypothesis rests on a long-term division and notably envisages a 'medieval period' beginning between the third and the fourth century.⁹³ The driving dynamic behind Naitō's theory was his search for China's modernity, whose early inception he pushed back to the late tenth century.⁹⁴ He notably argued that in the transition between the Tang (618-907) and Song 宋 (960-1279) dynasties, major changes occurred in China's imperial government as well as in its culture,

⁸⁸ Many scholars, whose views I discuss below, have reached the same conclusion. Edwin Reischauer, for example, argued that compared with the Huichang persecution, the other three had "no comparable lasting effects". Reischauer, 1955b:217.

⁸⁹ *ZZTJ*, 292.9529.

⁹⁰ For a criticism of the dynastic cycle see Hansen 2000:ix-xv. Cf. Eberhard, 1952:vii.

⁹¹ Mišćević, 1993:10. Cf. Wilkinson, 2000:6-9; 2013:1-3.

⁹² Chang, 1973:158-160; Brook, 1998:149-151; Ng and Wang 2005:77-78, 253-257.

⁹³ Naitō launched his hypothesis in his book *Shinaron* 支那論 (*On China*) in 1914 but developed it further in his later works on Chinese history. Fogel, 1984:165, 179-190. Cf. also Wilkinson, 2013:1-2; Twitchett, 2007a:8-10.

⁹⁴ Miyakawa, 1955, esp. pp. 540-541.

society and economic system.⁹⁵ In Naitō's scheme, Chinese history is accordingly divided into four main periods. The first period is antiquity, from the mythic origins until *ca.* 100 CE. This is followed, after a transition phase from the latter half of the Later Han 後漢 to the end of the Western Jin 西晉, by the second phase or the medieval era, extending from *ca.* 304 until 959. The second period is further divided into two stages and the second stage, between 756 and 959, is defined as the transitional period to the third period of modernity. The first stage of the modern period starts in 960 with the foundation of the Song dynasty and lasts until 1368, whereas the second stage of China's modernity includes the late imperial period and ends with the establishment of the republic in 1912.⁹⁶ Naitō's periodization, like all others, has been criticized since its inception, but there are some insightful points as far as the present research is concerned.⁹⁷ It is in fact immediately evident that our three persecutions of Buddhism fall within the framework of Naitō's medieval period. For the Japanese scholar, medieval China was characterized by the social power of aristocratic landlords, balancing and limiting the imperial institution, and, on the cultural level, by the weight of foreign influences. Significantly, Naitō noticed that the end of the medieval period witnessed the decline of the aristocracy and the emergence of autocratic government. Parallel to the increased authority of the emperor, the influence of the aristocracy on the imperial administration was deflated.⁹⁸ This may well have eroded one of Buddhism's main bases of support, since as Gernet suggested, aristocratic sponsorship had been one of the main factors behind the growth of the monastic economy.⁹⁹ The latter did in fact thrive again in the early modern period, but this time it was under the close fiscal and political control of the imperial institution.¹⁰⁰ This would have two implications for the Buddhism-state interrelation. First of all, from the Song onwards, the social power of Buddhism could not develop to such a threatening level that would prompt the imperial court to attempt its eradication. Secondly, after the medieval period, the state would have been strong enough to control Buddhism without resorting to

⁹⁵ Miyakawa, 1955:538-539; Fogel, 1984:168-184, 195-205; Twitchett, 1973:47-48. On the cultural aspects of the Tang-Song transition see Bol 1992; Yü 1994.

⁹⁶ Fogel, 1984:200. Cf. Miyazaki, 1983:53-56.

⁹⁷ Fogel summarizes some Japanese scholars' criticism of the political implications contained in Naitō's theory of Chinese history. Fogel, 1984:190-195. Gernet's division of Chinese history was on a par with that of Naitō. Gernet, 2002:22-27. Cf. Wilkinson, 2013:1-2. For a critical reassessment of the idea of medieval China and Naitō's hypothesis, see Barrett, 1998, especially pp. 75-78, where light is shed on Naitō's indebtedness to Japanese debates and Buddhist philosophies of history; see also Brook, 1998.

⁹⁸ See Fogel, 1984:168-179. Cf. Miyakawa, 1955.

⁹⁹ Gernet, 1995:289-306.

¹⁰⁰ See Gernet, 1995:305-311, and especially Walsh 2012:77-84.

major purges.

While these conjectures will need to be tested, Naitō's notion of medieval China offers a particularly useful framework for the present study. With its attention to social and economic factors, it also has the merit of stressing the underlying coherence of a period that was otherwise characterized by great political discontinuity. After the fall of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), in fact, China entered a protracted period of division.¹⁰¹ A precarious unification in the latter part of the Western Jin (Xi Jin 西晉, 265-317) came to an end in 311, when the Xiongnu 匈奴 invaded the imperial capital Luoyang 洛陽, and the court was eventually forced to escape to the south.¹⁰² While small political entities and kingdoms were established in succession in the north,¹⁰³ the Eastern Jin (Dong Jin 東晉, 317-420), based in Jiankang 建康, would rely heavily on the support of the great clans.¹⁰⁴ Imperial authority in the south was therefore weakened, as the power of the local aristocracy was increasing.¹⁰⁵ In 420, Liu Yu 劉裕 (Emperor Song Wudi 武帝, *r.* 420-422) usurped the imperial throne in the south and replaced the Jin with the (Liu) Song 劉宋 (420-479) dynasty. In the north, however, the Tuoba 拓跋 (Tabgach), a tribe of the Inner Asian Xianbei 鮮卑 people, were emerging as the main power. In 386, under the leadership of Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪, they revived the Dai 代 kingdom, renamed as Wei 魏 shortly thereafter, thus creating the (Northern) Wei dynasty (386-534). Although it took another fifty years or so for the Tuoba to unify the northern part of China (439), the year 386 is retrospectively regarded as the watershed of the long period of disunion between Southern 南朝 (420-589 CE) and Northern 北朝 (386-581) dynasties in medieval China.¹⁰⁶ Political division finally came to an end in 589, when the Sui 隋 emperor Wendi 文帝 (Yang Jian 楊堅, *r.* 581-604), an expression of the northern aristocracy of Xianbei ancestry and a successor to the Northern Zhou, conquered the southern territories. The Sui lasted less than four decades, but China remained united under the Tang 唐 (618-907), by far the longest ruling dynasty in medieval China. As Naitō and many other historians have shown, however, the Tang period was by no means homogeneous, and a major dynastic crisis following the rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (755-763) decisively undermined the

¹⁰¹ de Crespigny, 1996:xxiv-xxvii; Barfield, 1992:90-97; Gernet, 2002:176-179; Lewis, 2009a:31-33, 69.

¹⁰² Lü, 1983:60-69; Barfield, 1992:101-102; Wang, 1994:187-190, 209-222; Gernet, 2002:180.

¹⁰³ Wang, 1994:235-319; Graff, 2002:49-51; Barfield, 1992:97-130.

¹⁰⁴ Wang, 1994:319-34; Barfield, 1992:101-102; Gernet, 2002:182.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson 1977. Cf. Ebrey, 1978:19-23; Holcombe, 1994:1; Gernet, 2002:182-183.

¹⁰⁶ I shall discuss these developments in greater detail in Chapter Two.

power structure of the empire.¹⁰⁷

This very brief sketch of the main political developments in medieval China is offered only to complement the previous discussion, and will be expanded upon in the course of the thesis. Here it may be interesting to briefly compare the ‘medieval China’ concept of this dissertation with the main stages in which leading scholars have divided the history of Buddhism in China. Arthur Wright, in particular, developed a very influential periodization of Buddhism, which arranges its development in Chinese history into four main phases.¹⁰⁸ Despite variants, this general framework has been adopted amongst Buddhist scholars, such as Kenneth Ch’en and Erik Zürcher.¹⁰⁹ The first period, of ‘Preparation’, covers the time between the inception of Buddhism in China in the first century CE and the disintegration of the Western Jin dynasty in 311. The second phase, of ‘Domestication’, is seen to have lasted until the Sui unification of China in 589. As Buddhism had been in China for almost sixth centuries, Wright named the third and perhaps most crucial phase as ‘Independent Growth’, coming to an end with the Tang dynasty around 900. The fourth period, of ‘Appropriation’, covers the remaining time from the Song until the end of imperial China. Wright (as well as others) would thus place our three persecutions in two different periods: the first two in the stage of ‘Domestication’, characterized by the sustained expansion and increasing adaptation of Buddhism within Chinese society, whereas the destructive Huichang persecution is set towards the end of a period of ‘Independent Growth’ in which the religion would have been otherwise largely accepted. This and other schemes of periodization, therefore, would not see the confrontation between Buddhism and the Chinese state as a coherent stage, although they would all more or less agree on the critical significance of the third persecution in the ninth century and on the fact that Buddhism was regarded as compatible to Chinese society afterwards.

With this background in mind, in the next section I briefly review the development of Buddhism in China before the fifth century and the emergence of its conflict with the imperial establishment.

The Development of Buddhism in China until the Fifth Century

The introduction of Buddhism in China cannot be dated precisely, but scholars generally

¹⁰⁷ See below, Chapter Seven.

¹⁰⁸ Wright, 1959. Elsewhere the same scholar elaborates on the reasons for the periodization; see Wright, 1990:2-4. For other models, see Tokiwa, 1930:2-23; Kamata, 2002a:63-74.

¹⁰⁹ Zürcher, 1989a:143-149. Ch’en used the terms “introduction and early development”, “growth and domestication”, and “maturity and acceptance”. Ch’en, 1964:27-53, 58, 213-215.

agree that some knowledge of it must have reached initially the court by the first century CE.¹¹⁰ Thus in 65 CE an edict refers to Buddhist worship in the imperial family and mentions terms in transcription for Buddha, *śramaṇa* and *upāsaka*.¹¹¹ Less certain sources suggest that a Buddhist text had been transmitted in court circles as early as 2 BCE.¹¹² Although this cannot be said with certainty, it may explain how Buddhism was known to the rulers by the 60s CE; the Chinese emperors' early acquaintance with the foreign faith is in any case noteworthy. On the other hand, it is comparatively certain that Buddhism did not gain noticeable foothold beyond the court until the latter half of the second century.¹¹³ At that time the Parthian monk An Shigao 安世高 (*fl.* 148-170) was active in Luoyang, translating the first identifiable group of canonical texts.¹¹⁴ Shortly after him, the Kushana monk Lokakṣema (Zhi Loujiachen 支婁迦讖 *fl.* 168-189) engaged in the translation of major Mahāyāna scriptures, including the *Prajñāpāramitā* in 8,000 lines.¹¹⁵ Larger versions of the latter scripture were particularly influential among the literati after they were translated at the end of the third century.¹¹⁶

The extent to which Buddhist doctrines were known and understood in China at this early stage, and the degree of accommodation to native ideas, have long been debated.¹¹⁷ The practice of elucidating Buddhist concepts and terms by analogy with presumed equivalents from indigenous Chinese categories was certainly employed in Buddhist intellectual circles, and as late as the time of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416) and Sengzhao 僧肇 (383-414), although its importance may have been exaggerated.¹¹⁸ The perception of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Tang, 1991:49-50; Michihata, 1985:13-16; Yamazaki, 1971:37-41; Makita, 1981:7-9.

¹¹¹ See *HHS*, 42.1428-29. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1975:396; Kamata, 2002a:128-129; Zürcher 2007:19, 26-27.

¹¹² See *SGZ*, 30.859. This piece of information was added by the fifth-century commentator Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451), quoting a lost third-century source, the *Wei lüe* 魏略. It is accepted as reliable by some scholars (e.g. Ch'en 1964:31-32; Tsukamoto, 1974a:75), whereas others have seen it as dubious (Zürcher, 2007:25; Brough, 1965:586).

¹¹³ For a brief but well-documented discussion about the early years of Buddhism in Chinese society, see Palumbo, 2012:290-296; see also Zürcher, 2007:18-31; Ch'en, 1964:40-53.

¹¹⁴ Tang, 1991:61-62; Ch'en, 1964:43-44; Michihata, 1985:19; Zürcher, 1991:283; Zürcher, 2007:32-34; and in greater detail Nattier, 2008:38-72; and Zacchetti 2010.

¹¹⁵ On Lokakṣema see Tang, 1991:66-68; Zürcher, 1991:283, 287; Zürcher, 2007:35-36; Nattier 2008:73-89.

¹¹⁶ Zürcher, 2007:63-75.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ch'en, 1964:48-53; Wright, 1959:32-33; Tsukamoto, 1975:6-9; Maspero, 1981:38; Tang, 1991:87-91; Sharf, 2002:4-5; Wu, 1986:270-303; Bumbacher, 2007:203-228.

¹¹⁸ See Ch'en, 1964:68-69; Tsukamoto, 1975:23-31; Lai, 1979; Tang, 1991:234-238; Chen, 2001a:159-187; Kamata, 2002b:151-156. All these scholars as well as others have identified the interpretation of Buddhist concepts through analogy with Confucian and Taoist categories with a practice named in some texts as *geyi* 格義, an expression usually translated as 'matching the

distinct doctrinal option in China is likewise unclear in the early period. Between the late third and the fifth centuries, however, and especially after the translation of major Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Fahua jing* 法華經 (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*) and *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*), there was a growing tendency to consider the Great Vehicle as the highest level of Buddhist teaching,¹¹⁹ whereas the texts or ideas that were labelled as Hīnayāna were relegated to a minor status, if critically accepted.¹²⁰ With the activity of the Kuchean master Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, ca. 344-411) in Chang'an between 402 and 411,¹²¹ the prominence of the Mahāyāna in China was further enhanced,¹²² and a new, authoritative standard of translation was established.¹²³ Another major development in this period was the introduction of the Vinayas. The importance of texts of monastic discipline had been known early on,¹²⁴ but as late as Dao'an's 道安 (312-385) time, only excerpts had been introduced in China.¹²⁵ Between 404 and 406, the first complete Buddhist Vinaya, from the Sarvāstivāda school, was translated into Chinese in Chang'an.¹²⁶ During the subsequent two decades, another three complete translations were carried out and as such all but one of the major Vinaya texts became available in China. It is also noteworthy that the first two codes (Sarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka) were translated in Chang'an, where the first persecution of Buddhism would start only few decades later.¹²⁷ Gernet observes that the Vinayas chosen for translation in the early fifth century “were the most conciliatory and the least severe”.¹²⁸ This may echo the general tendency towards the domestication of Buddhism that scholars such as Wright have seen in this period, but it should also be stressed that the introduction of these voluminous codes of monastic discipline

meanings'. Against this view see Mair, 2010, who argues that *geyi* was in fact an exegetical practice of limited significance. Cf. Zürcher, 2007:184.

¹¹⁹ Tsukamoto, 1968:9-15; Ōchō, 1976:292-294.

¹²⁰ See on this point Durt, 1988:123-133.

¹²¹ The date of Kumārajīva's demise has been debated; here I follow Saitō Tatsuya's conclusion, which favours 411. Saitō, 2000:143. Cf. Saitō, 2000:126-131; Robinson, 1967:73-77 and 244-247, note 1; Tang, 1991:278; Ch'en, 1964:83; Funayama, 2004:100, especially note 16.

¹²² See Ch'en, 1964:81-88; Du, 1990:316-318; Ōchō, 1976:294-296; Kamata, 2002b:256-283; Lu, 2004.

¹²³ Pachow divides Buddhist translations in China into three stages: 1) from An Shigao's arrival in Luoyang in 148 until Kumārajīva; 2) from Kumārajīva's arrival in Chang'an in 401 until Xuanzang's 玄奘 return from India in 645; 3) from Xuanzang's translations until 1285. Pachow, 1980:102-108. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1975:407-411.

¹²⁴ Sato, 1986:9-12; Ōchō, 1976:16-52; Heirman, 2007:169-171; Funayama, 2004:98.

¹²⁵ *DSSSL*, j.1. T.54.2126.237c. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:99-100; Sato, 1986:42-53; Kamata, 2002d:126-131; Yifa, 2002:4-10; Funayama, 2004:99; Yan, 2007a:40-43; Heirman, 2007:172.

¹²⁶ Funayama, 2004:100; Heirman, 2007:175.

¹²⁷ Sato, 1986:12; Funayama, 2004:100-104; Heirman, 2007:176-177.

¹²⁸ Gernet, 1995:66.

marked for the first time the existence of the Buddhist monastic community as a separate social group with its own set of rules.

It was around this time that a confrontation between Buddhism and Chinese traditional ideas started to intensify. Zürcher summarizes four critiques, which were levelled against Buddhism by the traditionalists.¹²⁹ Firstly, the Buddhist monastic community was said to be in contrast with social order and not respecting the authority of the state. Secondly, Buddhist monks were unproductive, as they consumed without labouring in the fields. Thirdly, Buddhism itself was a foreign doctrine without any foundation in the ancient Chinese tradition. Finally and perhaps most importantly, the asceticism of Buddhist monks was a violation of the Chinese social and ethical convention of filial piety.¹³⁰ We shall elaborate on the first point shortly, since it is directly relevant to the main focus of this study, whereas the other three arguments will be referred to at appropriate places in this dissertation. As we are going to see, the ideological confrontation between Buddhism and the elite was already under way well before the first persecution, but for some time it did not undermine the essentially benign attitude of the imperial court towards Buddhism.¹³¹

It has been suggested that Confucians and Taoists initiated the attacks on Buddhism at an early date, prompting the latter side to a defensive reaction.¹³² However, the first public controversies over the foreign faith go back to the fourth century. In 340, a dispute on the duties of the monastic community took place between different political factions at the Eastern Jin court in Jiankang. While one faction argued that Buddhist monks should abide by traditional etiquette and pay homage to the ruler, a rival group of Buddhist well-wishers opposed such an approach.¹³³ This particular dispute would reoccur many times until the

¹²⁹ Zürcher, 2007:255-256. Cf. Reischauer, 1955:218-221. In his *Yu dao lun* 喻道論 (YDL), Sun Chuo 孫綽 (ca. 300-380) already reports that monks were criticised for being in breach of the traditional social rules, because of shaving their head, as well as abandoning the family duties. T.52.2102.17a. Cf. Kohn, 1995:3-5.

¹³⁰ For a detailed discussion of these four arguments, see Zürcher, 2007:256-285.

¹³¹ A poorly documented ban prohibiting Chinese people from becoming Buddhist monks may have been active at some point before the third century: see Tang, 1991:101-102; Makita, 1981:19-20. However, it does not seem to have affected the expansion of Buddhism in the same period.

¹³² Ch'en observes that criticism of Buddhism can be seen in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 or *Scripture of Great Peace* and in the *Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論 or *Master Mou's Treatise on Clarifying Doubts*. Ch'en, 1964:36-40, 51-53. Ch'en dates the two texts to the second-third century, but the exact date is debatable. Cf. Hendrischke, 2006:1-43 on the *Taiping jing*; Keenan, 1994:3-6 and Zhou, 1963:288-303 on the *Mouzi lihuo lun*.

¹³³ See HMJ, j.12, T.52.2102.79b-80b for the main documents; also GSZ, j.6, T.50.2059.360b-c; JSMBYBDS, j.1, T.52.2108.444a-c. Discussions in Zürcher, 2007:106-108; Ch'en, 1973:69-72; Adamek, 2007:41-42; Lagerwey, 2010:30-31. Zürcher translated all the official memorials and imperial edicts concerning this debate. Zürcher, 2007:160-163.

Tang.¹³⁴ The episode of 340, however, should probably be seen as the first attempt of an imperial court to intervene in the affairs of the monastic community. In fact, Buddhist monks did not even participate in the debate on that occasion, although later on they would repeatedly claim exemption from the obligation to kowtow to the emperor, something clearly at odds with Chinese social and political conventions.¹³⁵ When the controversy occurred for the second time, the eminent monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416) came forward on behalf of his community; his arguments present us with an early view into the Chinese Buddhist perception of kingship and the confrontation between Buddhism and imperial power.

In 404, Huiyuan submitted a treatise to the throne, urging the then ruler Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404) to revoke a previous decree issued in 400, which ordered Buddhist monks to prostrate to the emperor.¹³⁶ In the decree, Huan Xuan had in fact deployed the classical argument that Buddhist monastics should simply abide by established conventions.¹³⁷ Shortly afterwards, he even planned restrictive measures against the Buddhist community, on the ground that monasteries could give shelter to rebels. The historical context of such a concern lies in the rebellion of Sun En 孫恩 (*d.* 402), a Taoist follower, which had ravaged southern China between 397 and 402.¹³⁸ Huiyuan countered that Buddhism was not at all subversive, and that two orders of people should be distinguished within it. Lay followers would practise the religion whilst observing traditional social convention.¹³⁹ On the other hand, Buddhist monks had severed their ties to family and world to become ascetics; accordingly, they were no longer bound by social conventions, such as prostrating to one's parents or ruler.¹⁴⁰ Thus while Huan Xuan emphasized the central importance of Chinese tradition,¹⁴¹ Huiyuan would rather refer to Buddhist ideas of otherworldliness.¹⁴² Huiyuan's argument was well articulated, and apparently convincing enough to persuade Huan Xuan to exempt his monastic community from imperial inspection. The issue of conformity to social and political

¹³⁴ Ch'en, 1973:72-81; Weinstein, 1987:32-34, 51; Adamek, 2007:42-49.

¹³⁵ Cf. Ch'en, 1964:75; Zürcher, 2007:107.

¹³⁶ *HMJ*, j.5, T.52.2102.29c-32b. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1957:96-114; Tsukamoto, 1975:75-76; Zürcher, 2007:231.

¹³⁷ Cf. Zürcher, 2007:231-233; Ch'en, 1973:72-75.

¹³⁸ Tsukamoto, 1975:72-74; Makita, 1981:144-145; Kamata, 2002b:44-46; Mather, 1979:109; Zürcher, 2007:154-155.

¹³⁹ Cf. Ch'en, 1973:76-77; Wright, 1959:48.

¹⁴⁰ Zürcher (trans.), 2007:250-252. Cf. Wright, 1959:47-48.

¹⁴¹ *HMJ*, j.12, T.52.2102.80b, 81a-b, 82a-b, 83a-b. Huan Xuan's remarks on Buddhism as potentially harmful to society are discussed in Li, 2010:197-198.

¹⁴² See also the arguments of the lay Buddhist Wang Mi 王謐 (360-408) in *HMJ*, j.12, T.52.2102.80c-81a, 81b-82a, 82b-83a, 83b.

obligations, however, was there to stay for a long time.

Along with the rise of criticism against the Buddhist order within court circles, polemics with the Taoist priesthood also emerge in the same period, notably in connection to the legend of Laozi converting the barbarians. The story that Laozi had travelled among the barbarians and transformed himself into the Buddha is already mentioned by Xiang Kai 襄楷, a court official, in 166 CE.¹⁴³ As Zürcher points out, the early forms of the tradition have no polemical content.¹⁴⁴ In the fourth and fifth centuries, however, the story became the centrepiece of a number of scriptures, most famously the *Huahu jing* 化胡經, presenting Buddhism as a legitimate religion that Laozi had nevertheless created only to convert the sinful barbarians of the West.¹⁴⁵ Jacques Gernet would downplay the importance of Buddhist-Taoist polemics as “no more than squabbles between monks – spiteful, no doubt, but of little consequence”.¹⁴⁶ Yet, such Taoist texts as the *Huahu jing* were clearly making the case that Buddhism was inappropriate for the Chinese, and can therefore be seen as part of a bigger picture in which Buddhism was increasingly under attack.

In concluding this preliminary overview, we shall notice that Buddhism in China experienced a constant growth from its introduction around the first century to the time of the first large-scale persecution in the fifth century. Especially toward the end of this period, following a number of major canonical translations, the growing popularity of Mahāyāna doctrines, and the sanction of a separate group identity for the monks reflected in the newly introduced Vinayas, contributed to strengthen the social presence of Buddhism. This increased visibility, however, went along with growing opposition from elite and Taoist circles, and the first attempts from a Chinese court to impose some form of political obedience on the Buddhist clergy.

‘Chinese Buddhism’ and the Regulatory State

Further developments in Chinese Buddhism will be noted and discussed in the following chapters. However, some general trends can be usefully outlined in this introduction, also to

¹⁴³ Zürcher, 2007:37, 291; Ozaki, 1995:44.

¹⁴⁴ Zürcher, 2007:290. For detailed discussions of the legend of Laozi converting the barbarians see Wang, 1934; Zürcher, 2007:288-320; Kohn, 1998:275-289. Useful summaries in Mollier, 2008:7-9; Ozaki, 1995:44-46.

¹⁴⁵ See the studies in the previous note, and more recently Liu, 1998. Liu argues that the *Huahu jing* was in fact written not at the beginning of the fourth century, as generally held, but at the end of that century or at the beginning of the next, thus at the very same time when we have placed the emergence of the confrontation between Buddhism and the state.

¹⁴⁶ Gernet, 1995:xvi.

stress the importance of studying the three great persecutions together as critical points of the confrontation between Buddhism and the state in medieval China. So far, I have used the expressions ‘Buddhism in China’ and ‘Chinese Buddhism’ interchangeably, but this may not be appropriate. On the one hand, scholars such as Tsukamoto have referred to the ‘Buddhism of China’ (*Chūgoku Bukkyō* 中國佛教) as denoting a set of ideas and practices which originated in India and were then transmitted to China. This transmission involved selection, reinterpretation and reorganization.¹⁴⁷ This strand of scholarship thus suggests that Buddhism was brought to China and subsequently evolved into a Buddhism that can be called Chinese.

Other scholars have stressed the Chineseness of Buddhism in China: Zürcher, for example, suggests that Chinese Buddhism was unique, as it developed within a special social, cultural and intellectual context.¹⁴⁸ He further remarks that due to a lack of sufficient communication and accurate understanding of Indian Buddhist scriptures, Chinese Buddhism was formulated ambiguously at its inception.¹⁴⁹ Wright likewise seems to favour an understanding of Buddhism within the context of Chinese history, although he was aware of the progressive interaction between Buddhism and Chinese culture.¹⁵⁰ Kamata emphasizes that one unique aspect of Chinese Buddhism is that it was totally controlled by the imperial court.¹⁵¹ Our research will corroborate Kamata’s observation, but it will also show that Buddhism and the state came to terms with each other, and with the latter clearly in a dominant position, as the result of a long history of adjustment and occasional crisis. This process arguably gave birth to something we may call a distinctively ‘Chinese’ Buddhism. Of course, it was not only a political process, as many other aspects were present and sometimes decisively so.¹⁵² For example, the continued translation and exposition of Indian texts in Chinese, during many centuries, was instrumental to a far-reaching cultural adaptation.¹⁵³ Doctrinal accommodation was reinforced through exegesis and the so-called *panjiao* 判教 (classification of the teaching) systems, which flourished from the fifth to the eight centuries and managed to present in unitary form the heterogeneous formulations of the sutras.¹⁵⁴ Yet another area of Sinification was the continuous production, in the same extended period, of scriptures that were often

¹⁴⁷ Tsukamoto, 1968:6-7; 1975:391-396.

¹⁴⁸ Zürcher, 2007:1.

¹⁴⁹ Zürcher, 2007:2. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1975:3-23; Wright, 1959:33; Boucher, 2000:12-19.

¹⁵⁰ Wright, 1959:32-40; 1990:2.

¹⁵¹ Kamata, 2002a:5.

¹⁵² The classic discussion of the Sinification of Buddhism remains Ch’en, 1973.

¹⁵³ The central significance of canonical translations in China is captured by Takasaki as he defines the whole of East Asian Buddhism (thus including Chinese and Japanese Buddhism) as “the form of Buddhism based on Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures”. Takasaki, 1994:1.

¹⁵⁴ On the *panjiao* systems see in particular Gregory, 1991:93-114; Mun, 2006.

labelled as ‘apocryphal’ or ‘dubious’ (*weijing* 偽經, *yijing* 疑經) in the catalogues, but were in fact indigenous Buddhist texts adapting the teachings of the Buddha to Chinese culture and tradition.¹⁵⁵ Buddhist catalogues in themselves were also major instruments of cultural adaptation as well as attempts to establish orthodoxy, and it is certainly important that from the end of the sixth century they were produced under imperial sponsorship.¹⁵⁶ Finally, the disappearance from China, in the latter part of the medieval period, of Indian Buddhist schools such as Yogācāra and Mādhyamika (translation based) and the dominance of purely Chinese schools such as Chan 禪 and Pure Land 淨土¹⁵⁷ (meditation and devotion based) appear to demonstrate that in fact Buddhism in China had shifted toward a new orientation.¹⁵⁸

Yet it seems noteworthy that while the cultural adaptation of Buddhism in China was so successful in the medieval period, its political and social presence was repeatedly challenged by the state, and was only established through the trauma of the persecutions. It is legitimate to ask whether the creation of a Chinese Buddhism would have been achieved without the resolution of this conflict. I shall therefore reflect on the cultural and political aspects of Buddhism in medieval China as part of the same historical totality, following Tambiah’s suggestion to consider the transformations of Buddhism and its community in their relation with the state as a “total social fact”.¹⁵⁹ In the medieval period, beyond its internal developments in doctrine, practice and organization, Buddhism in China was in fact increasingly shaped by the regulatory initiative of the state. It is significant that this process started in close proximity to the introduction of the first complete Vinayas. The latter brought to China Indian models for the organization of the *saṃgha*, which envisaged senior clerical figures in charge of managing the monastic community.¹⁶⁰ Prior to the Vinaya translations, leading Chinese monks such as Dao’an’s 道安 (312-385) had already tried to establish rules to maintain the integrity of the clergy.¹⁶¹ The important point is that such monastic administrators were selected by fellow Buddhist monks rather than by the secular authority. From the late fourth century, however, imperially appointed monks initiated a different and

¹⁵⁵ Buswell, 1990.

¹⁵⁶ Tokuno, 1990.

¹⁵⁷ See, among many others, Ui, 1940; Yampolsky, 1967; Yanagida, 1999; Welter, 2006; Adamek 2007; Morrison, 2010 on Chan, and Michihata, 1985; Weinstein, 1987; Tanaka, 1990; Kim, 1990 on Pure Land Buddhism.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Tang, 2008:121-122, 149-150; Weinstein, 1973:269-270. Weinstein also notices the political factor in the establishment and decline of a particular Buddhist school.

¹⁵⁹ Tambiah 1976: 16.

¹⁶⁰ He, 1978:193-201; and especially Silk, 2008:17-37 and *passim*.

¹⁶¹ *DSSSL*, j.2. T.54.2126.241a-b. Cf. Xie, 2009:6-11.

direct way of regulating and monitoring Buddhist monks.¹⁶² Dao'an himself had famously commented on one occasion that in those troubled times, it would have been difficult to serve the Buddhist law without relying on the rulers of the state (不依國主, 則法事難立).¹⁶³ It goes to the credit of the Northern Wei founding emperor, Tuoba Gui, to have made the very first appointment of a monastic convener in 397, slightly less than half a century before the first major persecution of Buddhism.¹⁶⁴ Such figures were usually eminent monks commanding respect from the Buddhist community, whose activities they were to oversee on behalf of the state.¹⁶⁵ Attempts to regulate the clergy through state-appointed leaders were also made in the south during the period of division. Under the Liu Song (420-479) and the Southern Qi 南齊 (479-502), some eminent monks were charged with overseeing monastic affairs in the metropolitan area as well as local regions.¹⁶⁶ They had varying titles, such as Rectifier of the *saṃgha* (*sengzheng* 僧正) and Head of the *saṃgha* (*sengzhu* 僧主).¹⁶⁷ During the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557), Emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 502-549) even tried to appoint himself as the Lay Rectifier of the *saṃgha* (*Baiyi sengzheng* 白衣僧正).¹⁶⁸ Although he eventually abandoned the idea, he continued to appoint monks of his choice as Rectifiers, and also established a 'Household *saṃgha*' (*jiaseng* 家僧) of lavishly paid monks in attendance of the imperial household.¹⁶⁹ The title *sengzheng* was occasionally changed to *Da sengzheng* 大僧正, or Grand Rectifier of the *saṃgha* under the Liang; its authority seems to have concentrated on the metropolitan area.¹⁷⁰

However, it was in northern China that the 'regulatory state' established itself in durable form, and it is certainly no coincidence that all the persecutions of Buddhism were also launched from there; as Kenneth Ch'en has noticed, northern rulers could exert a far greater

¹⁶² On the origins of the state management of Buddhist monks in China see He, 1978:201-202; Xie, 2009:12-13, 15-17; Forte, 2003:1047-48.

¹⁶³ *GSZ*, j.5. *T.50.2059.352a*.

¹⁶⁴ *WS*, 114.3030. The appointment was apparently discontinued under Taiwudi (r. 423-452), but it was revived soon after the end of the persecution. For a full discussion, see below, Chapter 4, Section 2.

¹⁶⁵ *DSSSL*, j.2. *T.54.2126.242c-243b*; *WS*, 114.3030-31. Cf. He, 1978:202.

¹⁶⁶ *DSSSL*, j.2. *T.54.2126.242c*. Xie, 2009:19-23; Yamazaki, 1971:481-488; Forte, 2003:1053-55. On the origin of these figures in the south and their possible existence under the Eastern Jin see Yamazaki, 1971:476-480; Forte, 2003:1050-53.

¹⁶⁷ Further designations are also attested, although they do not seem to have involved different duties. See Forte, 2003:1054-55.

¹⁶⁸ Xie, 2009:34-37; De Rauw and Heirman, 2011:52-54; He, 1978:208-209.

¹⁶⁹ De Rauw and Heirman, 2011:57-66; Yamazaki, 1971:490-494.

¹⁷⁰ He, 1978:210; Xie, 2009:20-21; and in greater detail Forte, 2003:1058-64.

influence on the monastic community than their southern counterparts.¹⁷¹ In time, a comprehensive imperial administration of the Buddhist clergy (what Chinese scholars call *sengguan zhidu* 僧官制度) was put in place that, by the Song dynasty, would extend its control to virtually all monastic activities. The development of the state management of the Buddhist community in medieval China will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. One of the main arguments of this thesis will be that state control and persecutions stand in close connection to each other as respectively a norm progressively taking shape and its periodic crises. Eventually, the norm prevailed, and Buddhism lived on within it as an integral part of Chinese society.

Sources for This Thesis

For historical research such as this, some general remarks about its source materials will be apposite in this introduction. There are mainly two types of sources, being extant remains of the past and the written records, and both may have been produced with or without a deliberate intention to document a historical situation.¹⁷² The major primary source materials in the present study are written texts, and they are also mainly of two types. A first group of primary sources consists chiefly of the standard dynastic histories. Prior to the Tang dynasty, a great many of such histories were written by scholars working in a private capacity, although often connected to the court. From the seventh century, however, historical writing and the compilation of dynastic histories were usually carried out under imperial auspices.¹⁷³ It has been often pointed out that these historical compilations were generally the work of bureaucrats writing for other bureaucrats.¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, their reliability as source materials should be carefully considered against their respective backgrounds and contexts.¹⁷⁵ As Dien comments, however, this is a complicated issue, as the credibility of the documents in (and contents of) the histories is one thing, while the selection that historians made of those documents could be quite another.¹⁷⁶ It should be borne in mind that dynastic histories would always give priority to court affairs, and religious matters would only be reported if relevant to those affairs. While this limitation is less severe for a study as the present one devoted

¹⁷¹ Ch'en, 1973:82. For the concept of 'regulatory state', see Brook, 2009.

¹⁷² Howell and Prevenier, 2001:17-18.

¹⁷³ Dien, 2011; Ng and Wang, 2005:115-121 and *passim*.

¹⁷⁴ Dubs, 1946:31. Twitchett, 1992:5-30. Cf. Dien, 2011:515-516.

¹⁷⁵ Howell and Prevenier, 2001:19-20.

¹⁷⁶ Dien, 2011:509-510. Cf. Sargent, 1944; Dubs, 1946. On the relationship between sources and historiography in medieval China, see Xiong, 2006:5-8.

precisely to the relationship between a religion and the state, it still involves a significant lack of evidence for the broader social situation.¹⁷⁷ With respect to Buddhism, some dynastic histories such as the *Wei shu* 魏書 (compiled ca. 551-554)¹⁷⁸ and the *Sui shu* 隋書 (compiled ca. 622-656 CE), in particular the former, accorded important space to the discussion of this religion's history and followers in China.¹⁷⁹ The main reason for the *Wei shu*'s inclusion of Buddhist topics lies in the Buddhist proclivities of his chief compiler, Wei Shou 魏收 (507-572).¹⁸⁰ While the *Wei shu*'s 'Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism' (*Shi Lao zhi* 釋老志) remains a highly valuable source for the modern scholar, we should also be alert to Wei Shou's Buddhist background: for example, his portrait of Cui Hao 崔浩 (one of the main instigators of the persecution in 446), which presents the latter's death as karmic retribution, cannot be said to be free from bias.¹⁸¹ Such possible distortions shall be kept in mind when using this material in connection to our topic. The exceptional case of the *Wei shu* aside, it should be stressed that references to Buddhism in the official historical record would be minimal, unless a direct relevance to imperial matters was assumed.¹⁸² It is therefore inevitable to extend our research to a second group of historical sources, of Buddhist authorship, whose nature I briefly discuss below.

The main aspect of Buddhist sources is that they were collected and compiled by Buddhist monks (or lay devotees in a limited number of cases) for religious purposes; accordingly, historical accuracy was not their foremost priority. Moral judgment, apologetic concerns and religious rhetoric would from time to time obscure their treatment of the evidence.¹⁸³ On the

¹⁷⁷ Dien, 2011:510-512. Although Dubs highlights that occasional references of events related to ordinary people were recorded in the dynastic histories, references to such events were rare. In addition, such mentions were only made insofar as they were relevant to the larger perspective of the social elites. Dubs, 1946:31-32. Cf. Lan, 1978:15-16. As Skaff observes, this also applies to historical writing on foreign peoples. Skaff, 2012:53.

¹⁷⁸ On the *Wei shu*, see Ware, 1932:35-45; Dien, 2011:528-530.

¹⁷⁹ James Ware's translations of the sections on Buddhism and Taoism of *Wei shu* and *Sui shu* are still useful, if dated. Ware, 1933a:100-181; Ware, 1933b:215-250.

¹⁸⁰ Dien, 2011:529. On the *Wei shu* and its reception in medieval China see Ng and Wang, 2005:89-90.

¹⁸¹ WS, 35.826, 114.3035.

¹⁸² Balazs, 1964:129-149. An historian such as Fan Ye 范曄 (398-446), the author of the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, may have held an unfavourable attitude toward Buddhism, but at the same time he could not entirely ignore its popularity in his own time. Ng and Wang, 2005:105. In other dynastic histories, inclusion of biographical materials on eminent Buddhist monks may have resulted from similar historical considerations. Cf. Dien, 2011:519.

¹⁸³ For some general remarks on Buddhist sources, especially those produced by early medieval Buddhist monks or lay Buddhists, see Zürcher, 1982:161-164; 2007:10-17. Cao Shibang's collected essays on the studies of Buddhist hagiographies, biographies of eminent monks and general Buddhist historiography are very useful. Cf. Cao, 1999, especially his general comments in pp.22-66.

other hand, as scholars have pointed out, Buddhist collections of historical documents such as the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (T.2102, compiled ca. 510-518) and *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (T.2103, compiled 664) contain valuable materials, and may reveal critical awareness in their selection.¹⁸⁴ These two large compilations include in fact a large variety of documents and genres, ranging from treatises of religious apologetics to letters and official decrees, with occasional comments made by the compilers.¹⁸⁵ The *Guang hongming ji* in particular includes documents on major historical events concerning Buddhism, such as the first two persecutions, which can be compared with the information in the dynastic histories. In some cases, the information that Buddhist chroniclers collected was extracted from the dynastic histories themselves. For instance, in the *Guang hongming ji*, Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) includes large excerpts from the *Wei shu* section on Buddhism and Taoism, interspersed with his own comments.¹⁸⁶ According to Liu Linkui's detailed research, Daoxuan substantially condensed the *Wei shu*'s information on Buddhism, but it is not evident that his religious agenda guided his summary.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, occasional remarks do clearly betray the religious motivation of Daoxuan. For instance, in the case of the Northern Wei persecution, Daoxuan laid special emphasis on the hearsay about Cui Hao's death as the result of karmic retribution. In general, this source insists on Cui Hao's responsibility and on the emperor's regret after the persecution.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps Daoxuan's religious purpose is even more perceptible in the fact that its *Wei shu* excerpts, and further documents on the Northern Wei persecution of Buddhism, are placed in a 'Chapter on Conversion to Righteousness' (*Guizheng pian* 歸正篇), which brings together documents concerning major opponents of Buddhism in early medieval China, such as Cui Hao, and the Buddhist apologia that refutes them.¹⁸⁹ Despite their conspicuous religious motivations, it may be underscored that Buddhist writers such as Daoxuan collected and preserved some very important documents regarding Buddhism and its development in medieval China. This strand of source materials is especially valuable as a complement to the terse notes on Buddhist matters in the dynastic histories.¹⁹⁰

Of great historical significance are also several collections of biographies of eminent

¹⁸⁴ Chen, 2001:39-50; Liu, 2011:32-33.

¹⁸⁵ Liu, 2011:80-105.

¹⁸⁶ On Daoxuan, see Wagner, 1995:78-101; Chen, 2001:23-31; Yamazaki, 1981:159-186.

¹⁸⁷ Liu, 2011:149-154

¹⁸⁸ *GHMJ*, j.2. T.52.2103.102c. Cf. Liu, 2011:154-157.

¹⁸⁹ Liu, 2011:91-92.

¹⁹⁰ Liu, 2011:54-79.

monks, all of which were also written by Buddhist monks: the biographical section in the *Chusanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (T.2145) by Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518);¹⁹¹ the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T.2059) by Huijiao 慧皎 (d.554);¹⁹² the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T.2060) by Daoxuan;¹⁹³ and the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (T.2061) by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001).¹⁹⁴ Although they are hagiographical works,¹⁹⁵ these collections present a valuable Buddhist perspective on historical events, which is often helpful to balance and complement imperial records.¹⁹⁶ For example, through the biographies we get to learn about the fate of individual monks during the persecutions, and this information in turn sheds light on the nature and scope of the persecutions themselves.¹⁹⁷ As Arthur Wright rightly points out referring to Huijiao's work, "when used as historical source, it is a vital record of the great figures in the history of the first centuries of Chinese Buddhism and a valuable corrective to secular histories of the period A.D. 67-519".¹⁹⁸

Needless to say, apart from the two broad groups of sources discussed above, historical materials that are relevant to this study, sometimes significantly, will be found in several other genres and categories such as epigraphical works,¹⁹⁹ literary compositions,²⁰⁰ private writings²⁰¹ and literary anthologies.²⁰² They will be discussed whenever appropriate in the course of the thesis.

¹⁹¹ Link's detailed study of Sengyou's works sheds light on the structure and source materials of the latter's Buddhist biographies. Link, 1957:293-294; also Link, 1960:25-34. Cf. Wright, 1990:95-111; Cao, 1999:274-290.

¹⁹² In two detailed studies discussing Huijiao's work, Chen Yuan and Ji Yun explore the similarities between Buddhist hagiography and the Chinese tradition of historical writing. Chen, 2001:18-23; Ji, 2009:49-71. Kieschnick's analysis of Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*, its sources and structure is also illuminating. Kieschnick, 2011:536-550. Some similarly detailed comments, see Cao, 1999:87-102.

¹⁹³ Wagner, 1995; Cao, 1999:122-142.

¹⁹⁴ Chen, 2001:31-38; Yamazaki, 1981:299-305; Makita, 1981:111-145; Cao, 1999:158-168

¹⁹⁵ Kieschnick, 1997; 2011:549-550.

¹⁹⁶ Wright, 1990:73-114; Zürcher, 2007:10. Cf. Kieschnick, 1997:4-11; 2011; Zheng, 1987:34; Xu, 2006:17-50. See also the observations on Buddhist hagiography in Shinohara, 1992:98-111, 117-130.

¹⁹⁷ Liu, 2011:233-249.

¹⁹⁸ Wright, 1990:73-74.

¹⁹⁹ Harrist, 2008:19-23. On the relevance of epigraphic sources to historical research, see Cen, 1981:47-75.

²⁰⁰ For instance, two poems written by the Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852) will be discussed in connection to the Tang Huichang persecution, as a literary echo of the extent to which the Buddhist community had been hit.

²⁰¹ A prime example is the *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (*LYQLJ*), written by Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之 in ca. 550, which offers invaluable information about Buddhism in Luoyang during the Northern Wei dynasty. Various critical editions of the *LYQLJ*, such as by Zhou (2010) and Fan Xiangyong (1978) will be used in this research.

²⁰² Pan Yihong discusses a number of such sources in connection to the Sui and Tang histories. Pan, 1997:7-15.

Before leaving this overview of our historical materials, it may be relevant to briefly discuss the way in which different sources refer to the critical event of the persecutions. It should be noticed in the first place that, although the expression *san wu yi zong* 三武一宗 in reference to the four main persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China is a modern usage, the Song Buddhist historian Zhipan had already grouped these four events together in the thirteenth century, revising previous narratives.²⁰³ It is also worth noting several different terms used by Buddhist chroniclers regarding the state's initiatives against the Buddhist clergy. When the monastic community was under official scrutiny, the term *jianshi* 檢試, meaning 'check' or 'evaluation' could be used.²⁰⁴ More often we come across the term *shatai* 沙汰,²⁰⁵ which can be reasonably translated as 'purge' and generally refers to more restrictive measures, often resulting in the laicization of monks, although not in a proscription.²⁰⁶ However, when it comes to the major persecutions, we encounter such terms as *hui* 毀 or 'destruction',²⁰⁷ *fa nan* 法難 or 'disaster of the Law', *fei jiao* 廢教 or 'abolition of the teaching',²⁰⁸ and *fei Fo* 廢佛 or 'abolition of [the religion of] the Buddha'.²⁰⁹ Zhipan uses especially the last two expressions in connection to the three main persecutions between 446 and 846. In the passage where he groups together these three events with the persecution under the Later Zhou in 955, he speaks instead of four times in which the Law of the Buddha had met destruction (*Fofa zaohui you sishi* 佛法遭毀有四時).²¹⁰ Here the underlying criterion seems to have been the physical destruction of Buddhist establishments and especially images. Elsewhere in his work, the Buddhist historian appears in fact to downscale the impact of Zhou Shizong's persecution, as he says that although this ruler had it in itself to destroy Buddhism, he could not find an assistant that could help him reach the cruelty of the 'three Wus' (*san Wu* 三武).²¹¹ Zhipan's history of Buddhism in China seems therefore to corroborate our decision to focus on the first three persecutions as uniquely destructive events, and expressions of a prolonged confrontation between Buddhism and the Chinese state. Perhaps more importantly, the Buddhist historian, writing at the end of the Song period,

²⁰³ See above, n. 1.

²⁰⁴ For example, *HMJ*, j.13. T.52.2012.85c.

²⁰⁵ See e.g. *GSZ*, j.6. T.50.2059.360c; *FZTJ*, j.36. T.49.20035.341c.

²⁰⁶ The term *tiaoliu* 條流, which Reischauer translates as "regulate" (Reischauer, 1955a:229), is also used in the sources in a similar way to *shatai*.

²⁰⁷ See e.g. *GHMJ*, j.2. T.52.2103.102c; j.3. T.52.2103.123c.

²⁰⁸ See e.g. *FZTJ*, j.29. T.49.2035.291c13, 361c13, 389c26.

²⁰⁹ *FZTJ*, j.34. T.49.2035.328c13; j. 39.369a27; j.42.389b25.

²¹⁰ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.392c-393a.

²¹¹ For a full translation and discussion of this passage, see below, p.67.

would see that confrontation as already long behind him.

An Outline of the Dissertation

At the end of this introduction, we shall outline the organizational layout of the dissertation and its constituent chapters. In the foregoing discussion, we have first of all presented the research topic as well as briefly commented on the rationale behind our selection of the three persecutions, with special reference to its relevance towards a reassessment of the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China. The persecution of Buddhism was considered in historical and cross-cultural perspective outside of China, and also against the broader views of scholarship on the conflict between state and religion. A working hypothesis emerging from this initial exploration is that although the Buddhist community had its own cultural and social identity, including distinctive views of the polity, in medieval China it had to engage in a sustained confrontation with the regulatory agency of the imperial state, which ended up reshaping it in significant ways.

The main dissertation that follows will consist of three parts, totalling seven chapters, with each part discussing one persecution against its respective historical and political contexts. The following is an outline of the chapters and their main contents. After this introduction, the second chapter discusses the historical and social background of the Northern Wei dynasty, under which the first great persecution occurred. We shall discuss here how Buddhism was received by the Northern Wei imperial elite, resulting in the progressive formulation of a religious policy; and how it spread more generally in the society, leading to the development and consolidation of the monastic community.

In the core third chapter, we will deal in detail with the proscription of Buddhism under the Northern Wei as well as a number of relevant issues. It will be pointed out at the outset that prior to the great persecution of Buddhism in 446, there were several imperial decrees imposing restrictions on the Buddhist clergy. I shall therefore start with these decrees so as to pave the way for the discussion of the main crisis. The remaining part of the third chapter will consider the political, social, economic and ideological aspects of the persecution, duly taking into account the findings of the relevant modern scholarship. This discussion, we hope, will shed light on the major logic behind the persecution, and more generally on the first important confrontation between the Buddhist community and the Chinese state and society. The chapter will conclude on a critical examination of three personalities that Buddhist sources blame for the persecution. Beyond their specific historical responsibilities, these three characters will emerge as ideal types reflecting as many aspects of the crisis, also to be found

in the later incidents and thus offering some ground for comparison.

The second part of the thesis will open in the fourth chapter with a brief analysis of the aftermath of the Northern Wei persecution. We shall discuss the circumstances of the state restoration of Buddhism soon after the demise of its first persecutor, and follow the growth of the monastic community and its evolving relationship with the state in the latter part of the fifth and early decades of the sixth centuries. This will be an opportunity to explore the historical, social and political background of the period leading to the second persecution under the Northern Zhou. Special attention will be paid to the development of the state regulation of the Buddhist clergy from the Northern Wei to the Northern Zhou, as well as to the remarkable expansion of the monastic economy. In a useful contrast, this chapter will finally assess the trajectory of Buddhism in the South during the period of division, and the possible reasons why there was no major persecution there, while this happened twice in the North.

The fifth chapter, being core to the second part, will look closely at the build-up and unfolding of the Northern Zhou persecution before addressing its causes and impact. Although the Northern Zhou proscription of Buddhism is less well documented in the dynastic histories than the other two episodes, it is certain that its implementation was extensive and thorough. Building on previous research, we shall notably assess the reliability and significance of the reportedly staggering numbers of Buddhist clergy and monasteries affected. In dealing with the causes of the persecution, we shall again focus on the economic, social, political and ideological aspects. This exercise will reveal a first important group of parallels and differences with the Northern Wei incident. Following the template and the rationale of the first part, this chapter and part will also end on a discussion of the three personalities traditionally seen as the chief culprits for the persecution. Their connection will rest chiefly on the testimony of Buddhist sources, but secular historical materials will also contribute important elements. The upshot will yield further insights into the relationship between the Buddhist community and the imperial state during and beyond the persecution.

At the beginning of Part Three, the brief sixth chapter dealing with Buddhism under the Sui dynasty will offer a necessary historical foreword to the development of Buddhism in the Tang period, leading to the Huichang persecution.

In the seventh chapter, the focus will move to the historical and social background of the Tang dynasty. The state of the Buddhist religion will be initially assessed from the growth of its clergy and establishments as well as from the rise and decline of canonical translations. The second part of this chapter will present the interaction of the Buddhist community and

the imperial court under two different but related rubrics: the Tang political use of religion and their religious policy, in each case considering the role and responses of the Buddhist clergy. This will link to the ensuing discussion of the controversies between the latter and the court on such issues as the obligation for monks to pay homage to their parents and to the emperor; a partly related topic will be the reception of Buddhism among the literati and the broader Tang officialdom. The last part of the chapter will dwell on the Buddhist monastic economy, which by Tang times not only reached massive proportions, but, crucially, also achieved forms of official recognition.

Expanding on the foregoing discussion of the historical and religious contexts of the Tang period, the eighth chapter will deal with the final persecution on our list. The proscription of Buddhism in the Huichang era will reveal itself as the long-drawn outcome, if traumatic, of an evolving attempt of the state to curb the Buddhist community. It will therefore be appropriate to discuss this crisis as a process rather than a single event, in which the violent rhetoric of the anti-Buddhist edicts obscures certain reservations in the initiative of the government. Following our initial analysis of the persecution, we shall explore its different factors and motivations, embracing as usual religious, social, political and especially economic aspects. The last part of this chapter will make room for some longer concluding considerations, which will assess the hypothesis that the Tang persecution, more than any previous crisis, marked the climax and largely the end of the conflict between Buddhism and the imperial state. To test this conclusion, we shall also present some facts regarding the fourth persecution in the tenth century, which we have mentioned at the beginning of the present introduction. The contrast in nature, scope and rhetoric between this late incident and the previous ones should, we hope, justify our historical selection and eventually support our general interpretation.

A final chapter of conclusions will review the main findings of the dissertation. Beyond the significance of the three great persecutions, several aspects will be considered, including the social presence of Buddhism, the Chinese adaptation of Buddhism and the influence that Buddhism exerted on Chinese society, culture and politics. We expect a new, comprehensive picture of Buddhism in medieval China to emerge from this study. If the long-term view of the protracted conflict and eventual accommodation between Buddhism and the Chinese state should yield any further insight to the excellent but piecemeal explorations of previous scholarship, this thesis will be justified.

PART ONE
The Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534) Persecution (440-446)

CHAPTER TWO
The Background of the Persecution

2.1 A Brief History of the Tuoba/Northern Wei

Sources for the early history of the Tuoba 拓跋 (Tabgach) people, from which the Northern Wei would emerge, are scarce and unverifiable,¹ but it is generally assumed that they were a clan or a sub-tribe of the Northern Xianbei 鮮卑.²

The history of the Xianbei Tuoba can be generally divided into three phases.³ The first period, of which very little is known, goes from their mythic origins until the middle of the second century CE, when they settled in Hulunchi 呼倫池 (Heilongjiang 黑龍江) as a more unified tribe, led by Tanshihui 檀石槐 (*d.* 178-183).⁴ This may be viewed as the start of the second phase of the Xianbei Tuoba. By this time, Tanshihui had made several successful forays into the Dai 代 prefecture, forcing the Han army into a defensive position, although no decisive victory was gained before his death.⁵ One of the clans in Tanshihui's large tribal chiefdom was the Tuoba.

In 342, a more stable power base was built by Tuoba Shiyijian 拓跋什翼犍 (318-376) in Shengle 盛樂 (present-day Neimenggu 內蒙古).⁶ This was dissolved three decades later, when Tiefu 鐵佛 tribesmen (part of the Xianbei) attacked the Tuobas with the help of the Former Qin (Qian Qin 前秦, 351-394).⁷ Shiyijian died later on, probably victim of a patricide.⁸ Notwithstanding, in 386, taking advantage of the Former Qin's collapse, the tribe closed ranks under the leadership of Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪 (*r.* 386-409), whose accession is

¹ Holmgren (1982) offers a valuable examination of the sources on the early history of the Tuoba; see esp. pp. 14-22. Cf. Boodberg, 1979:222-235; Ma, 1962:239-243; de Crespigny, 1984:290-291. According to Holmgren (1982:79 n. 4), the name Tuoba is first attested in the late fourth century.

² Bai, 2007:23-25; Holmgren, 1981-1983:37-53; Holmgren, 1982:7; Liu, 1994:57-92; Wong, 2004:44-46. On the origin and possible interpretation of the name Tuoba, see Boodberg, 1979:235-239; Ma, 1962:2-3; Rogers, 1968:6.

³ Barfield, 1992:85-90; 105-114; 118-120. Cf. Wang, 1995:69.

⁴ Boodberg, 1979:234; Holmgren, 1983:8; Barfield, 1992:88-90; Wong, 2004:44; Rogers, 1968:5; Yü, 1986:444; Pearce, 1994:469.

⁵ Yang, 1973:17-18; Barfield, 1992:89-90; Yü, 1986:444-445; de Crespigny, 1984:333-342.

⁶ Corradini, 2003:191; Liu, 1994:194-195; Wong, 2004:45; He, 1992:5-6.

⁷ Lewis, 2009a:79.

⁸ Lu, 2003:58; Holmgren, 1982:75; He, 1992:6-7.

retrospectively accepted as the start of the Northern Wei dynasty.⁹ This enabled them to counterattack their rivals, especially the Murong 慕容, another subtribe of the Xianbei. Meanwhile the Tuobas were able to infiltrate into the Eastern Jin territories.¹⁰ Having defeated most of his competitors, Tuoba Gui established a new capital in Pingcheng 平城 in 398.¹¹

A Tuoba state thus developed in the late fourth century, although very little can be gleaned about its administration.¹² Senior tribal members were appointed as assistants to the tribal chief. The criterion for such selections seems to have depended chiefly on blood, less so but also necessarily on some form of meritocracy.¹³ By the turn of the fifth century, the Tuoba/Northern Wei was undoubtedly the strongest kingdom in the northern part of China. Building on his tribe's military prowess, Emperor Tuoba Tao 拓跋燾 (Taiwudi 太武帝, *r.* 424-452) started a series of successful military campaigns in the 420s. This resulted in the conquest of the kingdom of Xia (夏 407-431) and the conquest of Chang'an in 430-431.¹⁴ After fierce fighting in the next eight years, in 439 Taiwudi finally crushed the Northern Liang (北凉 397-439) in Gansu, thus virtually unifying the north.¹⁵

Some words about the Northern Liang are relevant here. They emerge from obscurity around 397, when the founder Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜 (358-433; *r.* 412-433) rebelled against the Later Liang (後凉 386-403).¹⁶ By 401, Juqu Mengxun eliminated all of his potential rivals, which enabled him to further his military ambition.¹⁷ A decade later, in 412, he secured Guzang 姑臧 and thereafter declared himself King of Hexi 河西王 (King of West of the River). In 421, Juqu Mengxun defeated the Western Liang (西凉 400-421) and annexed many of its territories, including Dunhuang 敦煌.¹⁸ All of these regions were

⁹ See Yao, 2007:11-12; Holmgren, 1982:44-50; Holmgren (trans.), 1982:77; Lewis, 2009a:79. Wong, 2004:45-46; He, 1992:7.

¹⁰ He, 1992:7-9.

¹¹ Wang, 1994:512-513; Liu, 1994:177-199; Ebrey, 1978:24; Tang, 2002:186; Barfield, 1992:118-119; Corradini, 2003:193; Rhie, 2002:295-298; He, 1992:13-15.

¹² Bai, 2007:49-50. Ma, 1962:261. He, 2001:54-55.

¹³ *WS*, 113.2971; Tang, 2002:193-194.

¹⁴ Wang, 1994:305-306; Graff, 2002:72.

¹⁵ Wong, 2004:45. Barfield, 1992:120.

¹⁶ *SoS*, 98.2412-13; *WS*, 99.2203. Cf. Mather, 1959:51-52; Wang, 1994:311-312; Juhl, 1995:58; Hong, 1992:93-94.

¹⁷ *SoS*, 98.2413-14; *WS*, 99.2204. Cf. Hong, 1992:95-100; Howard, 2000:244.

¹⁸ Wang, 1994:312-313; Juhl, 1995:59-60; Gu, 2003:111-112; Howard, 2000:246. Tsukamoto Zenryū discusses the historical development of Buddhism in the Dunhuang region during the period of disunion: Tsukamoto, 1975:323-346.

strategically located on the trade route that both the Liu Song court in the south and the Northern Wei emperors could not afford to lose contact with.¹⁹ Juqu Mengxun cultivated an amicable relation with the Song court, and kept generally on good terms with the Northern Wei as well.²⁰ After Juqu Mengxun died in 433, his son Juqu Mujian 沮渠牧犍 attempted to maintain a working diplomacy with the Northern Wei court,²¹ but in 436 that relation changed after the fall of the Northern Yan (Bei Yan 北燕 409-436).²² In 439, Taiwudi's armies destroyed the Northern Liang, but some of the Juqu members and their tribal cousins, the Lushui Hu 廬水胡 (Barbarians of Lushui),²³ settled down in Gaochang 高昌 (near Turfan, Xinjiang 新疆) around 444-445.²⁴ In 445, Gai Wu 蓋吳, a member of the Lushui Hu, led an uprising near Chang'an, which was directly related to the persecution of Buddhism and shall be discussed in another section.

Turning to the south, in 420 the Eastern Jin was terminated when Liu Yu 劉裕 (363-422) usurped the imperial throne and established the (Liu) Song 劉宋 dynasty (420-479). Liu Yu sought political legitimacy through the claim that he was a descendant of a brother of the Han founding Emperor Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202-195 BC).²⁵ The first two emperors of Liu Song, Wudi 武帝 (Liu Yu) and his successor Shaodi 少帝 (Liu Yifu 劉義符, r. 422-423), reigned for only four years in total. Nevertheless, the third emperor Wendi's 文帝 (Liu Yilong 劉義隆, r. 423-453) reign lasted for some thirty years, one of the longest reigns in the south during the disunion period and almost exactly coinciding with Taiwudi's rule in the north. It will be noted that while Buddhism flourished in the south under Wendi, the Northern Wei situation was very different.

2.2 The Cultural Context of the Tuoba/Northern Wei

The Tuoba were a nomadic society, at least until contact was possible with the sedentary

¹⁹ Yu, 1995:144-145.

²⁰ Yu, 1995:145-146; Hong, 1992:108-110; Tang, 1983:168-176. In 427, Juqu Mengxun sent his envoys to the Northern Wei court to forge an alliance. *BS*, 2.43. In 430, Juqu Mengxun paid tributes to the Northern Wei court. The following year, Juqu Mengxun sent his son Juqu Anzhou 沮渠安周 as an envoy to the Northern Wei capital. *BS*, 2.44.

²¹ Hong, 1992:112-113; Yu Taishan, 1995:155.

²² When Juqu Mujian succeeded his father, the Northern Wei court recognized his authority by conferring on him all the titles his father held. *WS*, 87.2206; *BS*, 2.48.

²³ *WS*, 4.89-90. Yao Weiyuan points out that the Lushui Hu people might be another name for the Yuezhi 月氏 who lived in Anding 安定 and Xingcheng 杏城. Yao, 1962:364-368. Cf. Hong, 1992:93.

²⁴ Wang, 1994:313, 513; Hong, 1992:116-118; Yu, 1995:146; Graff, 2002:72-73.

²⁵ *SoS*, 1.1. Beck, 1986:371-372. Mather, 1979:106.

Chinese between the second and third centuries.²⁶ Such early connections may have brought about a possible assimilation of Chinese cultural elements, if only limited.²⁷ As a result, the nature of the original religion of the Tuoba people is not entirely clear. It has been hypothesized that it was a mixture of shamanism, animism and ancestor worship.²⁸ All these elements could be seen in popular forms of Buddhism and Taoism, with which the Tuoba people felt at ease when they encountered them.²⁹

The development of the socio-political system of the Tuoba people can be divided into two main stages, before and after the foundation of the Wei dynasty. Hardly anything is known about the first stage, but it has been assumed that the Tuoba emerged from the fusion of different sub-tribes at that time. There was a general chief with other chiefs of associated sub-tribes constituting the upper social echelon.³⁰ Starting from around 338, appointments of officials are noted in the dynastic history,³¹ but it is only in 398 that Emperor Daowudi ordered the office of imperial recruitment to register recruited officials and to establish their hierarchy.³² From this time onwards, few more visible policies were composed that laid the foundation for the Northern Wei administrative framework.

Thomas Barfield observes that the Northern Wei adopted a dual structure of governance: the conquered Chinese would be administered by prominent Chinese clans, whereas the Tuoba people would be ruled and military affairs be conducted by the Tuoba elites.³³ This delicate strategy required a balanced approach whereby the interests of both sides had to be attended.³⁴ The Tuobas and all the nomadic conquerors of the time faced the choice of either adopting the Chinese administrative system or being assimilated by it. The acceptance of a sophisticated administrative system was somehow inevitable.³⁵ Nevertheless, other aspects such as their own nomadic military organization would have to be maintained.³⁶ Consequently, the Tuoba Wei only adopted Chinese political structures selectively, and the

²⁶ See Lu, 2001:18-27. Cf. Holmgren, 1982:7; Yang, 1973:17.

²⁷ For example, in the *WS*, it is hinted that when some of the Tuoba leaders spent time in Luoyang and Hebei 河北, they were exposed to elements of Chinese culture, such as Buddhism and Taoism. *WS*, 114.3030, 3048. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:147-148, 302-303; Ware (trans.), 1933a:126; 1933b:223-224.

²⁸ Lu, 2001:53-60. Richard Mather also suggests that the Northern Wei religion was “a blend of shamanism and animism.” Mather, 1979:106. Cf. Jenner, 1981:25.

²⁹ Jenner, 1981:25-26; Mather, 1979:106-107.

³⁰ Wang, 1994:509-511; Ma, 1962:245-257; Lin, 1995:77-81; Mao, 1991:31-34.

³¹ *WS*, 113.2971-72. Cf. Tang, 2002:193-194; Mao, 1991:33-36.

³² *WS*, 113.2972.

³³ Barfield, 1992:119

³⁴ Barfield, 1992:124.

³⁵ Chen, 2001a:141-142.

³⁶ Graff, 2002:97; Caswell, 1988:4.

process was conducted with considerable caution and great flexibility.³⁷ Even by the time of Taiwudi, the Tuoba elites insisted on wearing their traditional clothes and speaking their own language, which attests to the strong conservatism within the court.³⁸ It is against this background that we should understand the cultural factor of the Northern Wei persecution of Buddhism.

2.3 The Relationship between the Tuoba and Chinese Elites

Since the early years of the Tuoba conquest, talented Chinese scholars, especially from the local influential clans, were noticed for imperial recruitment.³⁹ However, a lack of complete trust between the Tuoba traditionalists and the recruited officials of Chinese background at times resulted in political intrigues and brutal executions.⁴⁰ Yet due to practical reasons, a working relationship was formed between these two sides.⁴¹ Cui Hong 崔宏 (?-418) and his son Cui Hao 崔浩 (381-450) are two telling examples of the complex relationship of cooperation and competition between the Tuoba aristocracy and the conquered Chinese social elite. The father, Cui Hong, was a talented scholar before he was recruited by the rulers of Former Qin and Later Yan (Hou Yan 後燕, 384-407).⁴² When Tuoba Gui conquered the Later Yan prefecture of Changshan 常山 (present-day Hebei province 河北) in 396, Cui Hong was appointed anew as a Northern Wei official.⁴³ For the next 20 years until his death, Cui Hong served as one of the most trusted advisors in the imperial officialdom. Cui Hong's talent and knowledge of law and ritual procedure were indispensable to Tuoba Gui, as many important projects were carried out by Cui Hong or under his supervision.⁴⁴

Cui Hao, on the other hand, did not shun court intrigue and probably died of it. We shall discuss Cui Hao further on in a case study, so only some relevant information will be provided here. Due to his father's prestigious social status and imperial connections, Cui Hao secured an excellent education at a young age. He made his political apprenticeship working

³⁷ Lu, 2001:29-35.

³⁸ Graff, 2002:97-98; Johnson, 1977:40; Lu, 2001:32-35.

³⁹ Liu, 1986:303; Mo, 1986:323-325.

⁴⁰ Graff, 2002:98; Lu, 2001:66; Wang, 1994:551.

⁴¹ Wang, 1995:70-73.

⁴² WS, 24.620.

⁴³ WS, 24.620-621. He became a Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate (Huangmen shilang 黃門侍郎). The imperial dynastic appellation Wei 魏 is said to have been suggested by Cui Hong. He, 1992:15-16.

⁴⁴ WS, 24.621-623; BS. 21.770.

along his father in imperial circles.⁴⁵ But around 424, Cui Hao seems to have been caught in the political intrigue and was expelled from the court. Yet his talent was apparently appreciated by Taiwudi, for even when he was away from the centre of power, the emperor would covertly consult him on important matters.⁴⁶ In 426, Cui Hao was recalled to the court and from then on, he held important posts until 450 when he was executed. There are several possible reasons for Cui Hao's death but one of them is certainly the mistrust between the Tuoba elite and recruited Chinese officials.⁴⁷ For the Tuoba ruling elite, Cui Hao's insistence on Chinese cultural superiority would be an open insult, whereas for Cui Hao, the Tuoba elite needed education in the Confucian tradition.⁴⁸

2.4 Religious Policy of the Tuoba/Northern Wei

At the outset, it will be noted that the imperial religious policy in this context is little more than the emperor's attitude towards Buddhism and Buddhist monks. Some Tuoba leaders might have heard of Buddhism around the second century, although they were not fully exposed to it until a century later.⁴⁹ At first, they merely paid some cursory attention to the religion.⁵⁰ In the course of their military conquests, encounters between the Tuoba and the Buddhist community increased.⁵¹ It was around that time, as we have seen, that Dao'an in the north lamented that it was difficult to uphold the Buddhist religion without support from the ruler.⁵² The comment is probably indicative of the social condition against which the Northern Wei religious policy should be understood.⁵³

In an edict issued in 398, Emperor Tuoba Gui decreed that Buddhism was a religion of historical significance and spiritual sublimity. Consequently, he ordered his officials to build shrines so that Buddhist followers would have places of worship.⁵⁴ It was under this ruler, in 397, that the monk Faguo 法果 (*fl.* 397-416) was appointed as the monastic convener (*daoren tong* 道人統), an episode that inaugurated a new era of Buddhism-state relationship, which

⁴⁵ WS, 35.807-815.

⁴⁶ WS, 35.815.

⁴⁷ Zhou, 1963:118-120. For a review of previous speculation about the reasons of Cui Hao's execution, see Lu, 2000:67-68, n. 1; Zhou, 1963:117-120.

⁴⁸ Chen, 2001a:149-154; Mather, 1979:114-115.

⁴⁹ Tsukamoto, 1974a:63-68; Tsukamoto, 1974b:5-10.

⁵⁰ WS, 114.3030. Cf. Yamazaki, 1971:88-89; Tsukamoto, 1974a:147-150; 1974b:6-9; Tang, 1991: 487; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:51; Ware, 1933a:127.

⁵¹ Yamazaki, 1971:89-90; Tsukamoto, 1974b:6-20; Tsukamoto, 1974a:149-150; Tang, 1991:487; Corradini, 2003:195-196.

⁵² See above, p. 25, footnote 163.

⁵³ Kamata, 2002c:276-277.

⁵⁴ WS, 114.3030; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:52.

would continue for the next four centuries until the end of the third persecution.⁵⁵ Faguo and other eminent monks also received patronage from the imperial court.⁵⁶ This supportive religious policy was continued under Emperor Mingyuandi 明元帝 (Tuoba Si 拓跋嗣, r. 409-423), for he not only sponsored Faguo but also ordered that Buddhist monks should guide ordinary people.⁵⁷ From Mingyuandi's reign, the court also started to support Taoism.⁵⁸ It is worth noting that up until the early years of Emperor Taiwudi's reign, the imperial attitude toward religions, especially toward Buddhism, was constantly tolerant and receptive. Taiwudi would invite eminent monks to the imperial court for religious discussion. During Buddhist festivals, the emperor would even personally participate in some ceremonies.⁵⁹

Faguo politely declined the official titles that Mingyuandi conferred on him.⁶⁰ When he passed away, he was once again granted several posthumous titles, which were inherited by his son.⁶¹ On the other hand, it is clear that he did practically yield to the demands of the political power.

Faguo's role therefore should be understood as a combination of a religious leader and a coordinator between the Buddhist community and the imperial court. This will give us some clue for Faguo's perception of the Buddhism-state relationship. Faguo reasoned that since Emperor Taizu 太祖 (Tuoba Gui) was "enlightened and devoted to the Path" (*mingrui haodao* 明叡好道), he was the real manifestation of the *tathāgata* (i.e. the Buddha). Hence Faguo suggested that Buddhist monks should venerate the emperor as they would be revering the Buddha.⁶² Faguo defended his stance by saying that,

The one who can spread the way (i.e. the teaching of the Buddha) is none other than the master of the people (i.e. the emperor). I am not venerating the son of heaven (i.e. the emperor) but I am venerating the true Buddha.⁶³

⁵⁵ On Faguo's appointment see *WS*, 114.3030; *DSSSL*, j.2. T.54.2126.243a-b. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:153-154; Xie, 2009:14-15; Forte, 2003:1048-49.

⁵⁶ Another monk named Tanzheng 曇證 also received rewards from the emperor (Taizong). Due to Tanzheng's old age, the emperor also conferred on him the honorary title *Laoshou jiangjun* 老壽將軍 (General of Old Age). Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:156; Tsukamoto, 1974a:156-157. Emperor Taizu also sent gifts to the eminent Buddhist monk Zhu Senglang 竺僧朗. *GSZ*, j.5. T.50.2059.354b.

⁵⁷ *WS*, 114:3030; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:52.

⁵⁸ *WS*, 114.3030, 3049.

⁵⁹ *WS*, 114.3032, 3033; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:56; 64. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:147; Tsukamoto, 1974a:165-166; Tsukamoto, 1974b:52.

⁶⁰ *WS*, 114.3030-31. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:153-154.

⁶¹ *WS*, 114.3030; *DSSSL*, j. 2. T.54.2126.243a. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:155-156; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:53; Kamata, 2002c:273.

⁶² *WS*, 114.3031. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:53; Orzech, 1998:114.

⁶³ *WS*, 114.3031. Tsukamoto, 1974a:155-156. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:53.

It is impossible to know from where Faguo drew the inspiration for such an idea.⁶⁴ Yet the overtone of the rhetoric that the emperor is the sole factor of a prosperous Buddhist community is reminiscent of Dao'an's statement. Although we cannot detect the source of Faguo's idea, it must be borne in mind that the comparison of the Buddha to the *cakkavatti*⁶⁵ in early Buddhist scriptures would not be unknown to some third- or fourth-century Chinese Buddhist monks. Moreover, as we alluded earlier, the Buddha himself was said in canonical texts to have been well aware of the inevitability of the power of the secular authority and therefore to have taken a realistic approach to it. The difficult political circumstances of the fourth century are further attested to by the case of Fotucheng 佛圖澄 (232?-348), a Buddhist monk who spread Buddhism in the north.⁶⁶ As Arthur Wright points out, in order to seek support from the ruling Shi 石 clan, Fotucheng considered carefully "both the condition of the country and the character of his patrons".⁶⁷ Fotucheng's way of achieving his religious goal included the performance of magical powers and advice on politics and warfare.⁶⁸ Thus when Shi Hu 石虎 (295-349) asked Fotucheng regarding his predicament between upholding the Buddhist precept to abstain from killing and the necessity to enforce capital punishment, the latter replied that,

Worship of the Buddha on the part of emperors and kings lies in their being reverent in their persons and obedient in their hearts and in glorifying the Three Treasures. [It lies in] not making cruel oppressions and not killing the innocent. As to the rogues and irresponsibles whom the civilizing influence does not reform, when they are guilty of crime, they must be put to death, and if they are guilty of an evil deed, they must be punished. You should execute only those who should be executed and punish only those who should be punished.⁶⁹

We can note that although Fotucheng emphasized the importance of justice and

⁶⁴ Liu Xinru suggests that in the Kushan Empire (first-third century CE), the Buddhist community had to depend on the support of the imperial court. Liu, 1994:118-119. On the *cakravartin* ideal among the Kushan rulers, see Verardi and Grossato, 1983:269-282; Rosenfield, 1993:29-30. Such examples, if they existed, may have been known to Buddhist monks in medieval China. Shortly after Faguo's times (*ca.* 420), a ruler in the northwest, the Xiongnu leader Helian Bobo 赫連勃勃, also claimed to be a Buddha; he reportedly had a Buddha image painted on his back and commanded Buddhist monks to kowtow to him. *JSMBYSDS*, j.2. T.52.2108.452a; cf. Ch'en, 1973:78.

⁶⁵ For remarks about the close comparison between the Buddha and a *cakkavatti*, see Scharfe, 1989:217-218.

⁶⁶ On Fotucheng see the biography in *GSZ*, j.9. T.50.2059.383b-387a; trans. in Wright, 1948:338-370. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:145-146; Tsukamoto, 1974a:140-146; 1974b:7-8.

⁶⁷ Wright, 1948:325.

⁶⁸ *GSZ*, j.9. T.50.2059.383c-384c; trans. Wright 1948:338-352. Cf. Wright, 1948:325-327.

⁶⁹ Wright (trans.), 1948:352, translating *GSZ*, j.9. T.50.2059.385a-b.

compassion, his approach was practical. Such a situation is comparable to that which Faguo experienced when he was appointed as the monastic convener. We should also mention that the close association of eminent monks and political leaders seems to have been a sensitive issue to the ambitious rulers of the time.⁷⁰ It must have been particularly delicate in those cases where Buddhist monks, like Fotucheng himself, were versed in astrological techniques and prognostics.⁷¹ T.H. Barrett has convincingly argued that in coping with religious groups, patronizing them was a way for the secular rulers to control them closely.⁷² An illustration of this aspect comes from the case of the Indian monk Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385-433).⁷³

When Emperor Taiwudi learned that Dharmakṣema was an expert of prognostics, he ordered Juqu Mengxun of the Northern Liang to send the monk from Guzang 姑臧 (Gansu) to the capital. Considering that Dharmakṣema would be employed against him, the Liang ruler had the monk assassinated en route.⁷⁴ This may suggest that the emperor and Juqu Mengxun were both attracted to and alarmed by the monk's alleged supernatural powers. Gu Zhengmei, on the other hand, assumes political motives in the emperor's intention to invite Dharmakṣema.⁷⁵ Gu speculates that since the Indian monk was the single most important Buddhist translator in Northern Liang, his role might have been more than religious. His purported supernatural skills would of course be even more attractive to an ambitious ruler,⁷⁶ and Juqu Mengxun is expressly said to have regularly consulted Dharmakṣema on state matters in view of his ability to make predictions.⁷⁷ Moreover, Gu points out that translation

⁷⁰ Tsukamoto, 1974c:7-9. For instance, eminent monks such as Senglang and Faguo were said to be associated with Emperor Daowudi (r. 386-409). Both of them were asked to take a post as the emperor's advisors. Even Taiwudi (r. 424-452), who persecuted Buddhism, had a friendly relationship with Buddhist monks such as Huishi. *WS*, 114.3033. Tsukamoto, 1974a:180. For other cases of Buddhist prognostics of the time, Ch'en, 1964:145-146.

⁷¹ Ch'en, 1964:145-146. As Ch'en has suggested, these patterns can be drawn from the relationship between Fotucheng and Shi Le (ruler of Later Zhao, 328-352); Kumārajīva and Yao Xing; Tanyao and Emperor Daowudi (emperor of Tuoba Wei); and Dharmakṣema and Juqu Mengxun (ruler of Bei Liang kingdom, 412-439). Ch'en, 1954:267; Mather, 1959:25-26.

⁷² Barrett, 2000:xxi.

⁷³ On Dharmakṣema see Chen, 2004b:233-259; Tsukamoto, 1974a:169-172, n. 1; Kamata, 2002c:26-37.

⁷⁴ *WS*, 114.3032; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:57; *WS*, 36.833; *GSZ*, j.2. T.50.2059.336c. Cf. Ch'en, 1954:270. In *Bei shi*, Dharmakṣema is said to have been versed in sexual techniques and maintained a secret liaison with a princess. *BS*, 93.3084. But in both *WS* and *BS*, it is explicitly stated that the monk was skilled in prognostics. *WS*, 36.833; *BS*, 33.1214.

⁷⁵ Gu, 2003:108-109.

⁷⁶ Gu, 2003:110-111. See also Yamazaki, 1971:86-88.

⁷⁷ Gu, 2003:111. Cf. *WS*, 114.3032 (曉術數、禁呪，歷言他國安危，多所中驗。蒙遜每以國事諮之).

projects and stūpa foundations in the Northern Liang illustrate Juqu Menxun's intention of using Buddhism as a political ideology in his kingdom, something that would have rendered Dharmakṣema indispensable.⁷⁸ According to Gu, Taiwudi would have been motivated by a similar intent.⁷⁹ The failure of such a mission, Gu tells us, lies with the strong influence of Cui Hao, who not only held a Confucian view of government but also abhorred Buddhism.⁸⁰

There are some moot points in this reconstruction that need to be addressed. First, Dharmakṣema's contribution to the Northern Liang Buddhism was enormous⁸¹ but it is unclear whether Juqu Mengxun intended to be a Buddhist king.⁸² Even if Juqu Mengxun was interested in Dharmakṣema as an advisor for his Buddhist ideology, the monk's alleged magical power, as Gu herself argued, would be just as attractive.⁸³ On one occasion, Juqu Mengxun is said in fact to have attempted a major purge of Buddhism on the ground that its worship was not effective, probably referring to its magical claims.⁸⁴ Finally, if the Tuoba emperor wanted Dharmakṣema merely for religious purposes, the monk would not have posed a threat to Juqu Mengxun. There seems to have been a lack of communication between the two sides, which resulted in the unfortunate death of Dharmakṣema. But although Gu's thesis is difficult to back up in full, her argument gives us a clue to a possible continuity between the minor purges and the total persecution of Buddhism, and sheds light on the different patterns of Buddhism-state relationship behind them.

To conclude this overview of the Northern Wei's attitude towards Buddhism, the first point we have come across is the imperial ascendancy over the monastic community. Faguo is a typical example: he was not selected by his fellow monks but was appointed by the emperor. He was instructed to guide the people in spiritual matters, a condition that seems to have been requisite to a stable relationship between the Buddhist community and the imperial court. This is arguably the normal pattern of Buddhism-state relationship during the Northern Wei,

⁷⁸ Gu, 2003:111-126. On Dharmakṣema's translations see Du, 1998:7-82 and Chen, 2004b:217-233.

⁷⁹ Gu, 2003:134-135.

⁸⁰ Gu, 2003:126-153.

⁸¹ Soper, 1958:141.

⁸² Buddhist works of art and translation were supported in the Northern Liang even after Juqu Mengxun, but it is difficult to know the role played by Buddhism in the imperial politics. Cf. Soper, 1958:141-164.

⁸³ Cf. Kamata, 2002c:34-35.

⁸⁴ In 429, Juqu Mengxun waged war against Qifu Mumu 乞伏暮末 (r. 428-431) of the Western Qin (Xi Qin 西秦 385-431) but his son Juqu Xingguo 沮渠興國 (*d.* 431) was captured during the battle and presumed dead. Juqu Mengxun was reportedly furious, saying that "to venerate the Buddha has no effect" 事佛無應, and ordered the laicization of monks under the age of 50. Shortly after, due to some miracle, Juqu Mengxun is said to have showed remorse. *GSZ*, j.14. *T.50.2059.336b*. Cf. Ōchō, 1976:329; Soper, 1958:141; Kamata, 2002c:34-35; Gu, 2003:125-126.

which enabled Buddhism to develop. Even the minor purges prior to the final persecution reveal a considerable degree of restraint that was, however, completely abandoned when a large-scale repression was applied. The persecution therefore might indicate a temporary collapse of the normally functional interaction between Buddhism and the imperial court.

2.5 Development of Buddhism before the Persecution

Dao'an's comment mentioned previously can be interpreted in different ways – such as the importance of the secular ruler's role in spreading the religion or the unfavourable conditions facing the monks of the time.⁸⁵ As for the latter, Dao'an's biography does refer repeatedly to ongoing political disarray in his lifetime.⁸⁶ This too can be said of the cases of Fotucheng and Dharmakṣema, which we have just discussed. Wright points out that due to political instability, ordinary people would seek solace in religion,⁸⁷ which resulted in the popularity of Buddhism during that time.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the acceptance of Buddhism and the Buddhist establishment arose from two different sets of conditions. While people would turn to Buddhism as a means of spiritual consolation, the Buddhist establishment itself could only be developed during a time of social stability and economic prosperity.⁸⁹

As discussed before, from the time of north and south division, Buddhism witnessed its second phase of domestication.⁹⁰ It will be noted that southern Buddhism was modeled on the intellectual background of the southern gentry society, whereas the northerners showed more interest in the practical side of the religion, such as the magical power of Buddhist prayers and rituals.⁹¹ In the north, Chang'an, Liangzhou 涼州 and some other areas were strongholds of Buddhism, but the Northern Wei capital Pingcheng was not one of them.⁹² After the Northern Liang collapsed in 439, however, a major wave of forced migration from Liangzhou to Pingcheng took place, as more than 30,000 households, a large number of which were probably devoted to Buddhism, resettled at the Wei capital.⁹³ Some eminent monks from the Northern Liang were Senglang 僧朗 (d.u.),⁹⁴ Huishi 惠始 (d. ca. 435-439), Tanyao 曇曜 (fl.

⁸⁵ Tang, 1991:320-321.

⁸⁶ See GSZ, j.5. T.50.2059.352c. Cf. Zürcher, 2007:184-187; Kamata, 2002a:367-371.

⁸⁷ Wright, 1959:40-41.

⁸⁸ Tang, 1991:188-189.

⁸⁹ Gernet, 1995:7-14.

⁹⁰ See above relevant discussion of the periodization of Buddhism in China in p.17.

⁹¹ Wright, 1959:44-64. Liu, 1994:143-144. Gernet, 1995:220-221. Zürcher, 2002:22-30.

⁹² Yamazaki, 1971:71-93. Tsukamoto, 1974b:5-11.

⁹³ WS, 4.90, 114.3032. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:60; Gernet, 1995:233; Du, 1991:83-86.

⁹⁴ Kamata, 2002b:339-353.

ca. 435-490) and Xuangao 玄高 (d. 444).⁹⁵ Tanyao in particular would play a crucial role in restoring Buddhism after the persecution.⁹⁶ The expectation of a massive growth of a Buddhist presence at the capital may or may not be related to a decree commanding the laicization of monks under the age of fifty (to be discussed below) issued in 438.⁹⁷ It seems in any case plausible to assume that Buddhism continued to develop in Pingcheng until the persecution.⁹⁸

2.6 The Buddhist Monastic Community

The status of monastic Buddhism in China prior to the translation of the Vinaya remains unclear.⁹⁹ When monks are mentioned in this period, it is often simply stated that they “left the household” or were admitted to monasteries.¹⁰⁰ This situation did not immediately change when translations of four major Buddhist Vinaya codes were completed in the first half of the fifth century. Valerie Hansen’s thoughtful examination of a number of documents in Gāndhārī Prakrit from the ancient kingdom of Kroraina (Loulan 樓蘭), unearthed around Niya 尼雅 (in modern Xinjiang) and dating to the third-fourth centuries, reveals a challenging picture of the local Buddhist monastic community. The most striking feature is that there, Buddhist monks were seemingly half-lay religious professionals, often married, rather than monastic ascetics.¹⁰¹ These monks usually resided at home, but were required to participate in religious ceremonies at specific times. They were therefore householders rather than full-time renunciants.¹⁰² Besides, the absence of Vinaya rules would make room for codes of conduct which were promulgated by secular rulers.¹⁰³ Disputes within the monastic community would be settled either by a committee of appointed senior monks or by a royal court.¹⁰⁴ The Chinese situation may not have been entirely the same, although certain similarities can be surmised. For example, Faguo, despite renouncing his lay family, is said to have had a son, apparently born prior to his ordination, who inherited some of the imperial titles conferred

⁹⁵ Tsukamoto, 1974a:178-183. *FZTJ*, Vol.38. T.49.354a.

⁹⁶ See below, pp. 80; 84; 89-91.

⁹⁷ Cf. *WS*, 114.3032 and the discussion below.

⁹⁸ For a general history of the Buddhist development in Pingcheng before the persecution, see Tsukamoto, 1974a:11-33.

⁹⁹ Heirman, 2002:402-407.

¹⁰⁰ See *DSSSL*, j.1. T.54.2126.237c-238b. Cf. Cao, 1984:218-219; Yifa, 2002:3-8; Funayama, 2004:98-99.

¹⁰¹ Hansen, 2004:294.

¹⁰² Hansen, 2004:293-294.

¹⁰³ Hansen, 2004:294.

¹⁰⁴ Hansen, 2004:295.

upon him. It seems certain that when Faguo was appointed as the monastic convener, he was a Buddhist monastic. But the conferral of official titles on a Buddhist monk was not common at all, which suggests that he might at the same time be regarded as an advisor to the emperor.

Although the application of Vinaya rules before the persecution is uncertain, the Vinaya translations did mark a turning point in monastic Buddhism in China. As Funayama Toru illustrates, the last two decades of the fourth century saw an increasing awareness of the importance of Vinaya texts amongst some leading Buddhist monks, such as Dao'an.¹⁰⁵ Another aspect of this quest for conformity was the establishment of a common monastic surname. In 385 Dao'an proposed that instead of adopting their masters' surnames, Buddhist monks should take *shi* 釋, the initial character of the Chinese transliteration of one of the Buddha's epithets – *shijiamouni* 釋迦牟尼 (*Śākyamuni*) – as their common clan name.¹⁰⁶ This is likely to have provided Buddhist monks in China with a sense of collective identity.¹⁰⁷ As Zürcher noted, this is also the time when we first meet the idea that “the *saṅgha* is and must remain a brotherhood which is not of this world, a group with its own ideas and its own code of conduct”.¹⁰⁸ These developments between the late fourth and the early fifth centuries are therefore likely to have demarcated the Buddhist monastic community as an identifiable social group, something which would have aroused a degree of concern for the imperial court and may have influenced the until then constantly amicable interaction between Buddhism and the state.

Since the great persecution of 446 was triggered off in Chang'an, it will be important to discuss the state of Buddhism there before the persecution and notably during the Indo-Kuchean master Kumārajīva's time in the city (402-411).

Already around 100 CE, Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78-139) *Rhapsody of the Western Capital* (*Xijing fu* 西京賦) drops Buddhist allusions in its lyrical description of what was then a cosmopolitan and prosperous capital city.¹⁰⁹ In the late third century, Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (*Dharmarakṣa, *fl.* 266-308) translated Buddhist scriptures in Chang'an.¹¹⁰ From the fourth century onwards, Chang'an was controlled in succession by different warlords, some of

¹⁰⁵ Funayama, 2004:99-100. Cf. Sakaino, 1930:276-295; Cao, 1984:218-222; Tang, 1991:213-214; Yifa, 2002:8-16.

¹⁰⁶ *GSZ*, j.5. *T.50.2059.353a*; *SSYL*, j.1. *T.54.2127. 285c*. Cf. Tang, 1991:322-324.

¹⁰⁷ Palumbo, 2012:314-315.

¹⁰⁸ Zürcher, 2007:258, reporting the position of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416).

¹⁰⁹ Yamazaki, 1971:35; Wright, 1959:21; Zürcher, 2007:29.

¹¹⁰ See especially Boucher 2006.

whose interest in Buddhism made Chang'an a Buddhist stronghold.¹¹¹ The foremost example is the reign of Yao Xing 姚興 (366-416; *r.* 394-416) of the Later Qin (後秦 384-417), when with the help of Kumārajīva and his disciples, Buddhism flourished.¹¹²

In 402, Kumārajīva was brought to Chang'an and he spent the rest of his life there, translating Buddhist texts into Chinese until his death in ca. 411.¹¹³ As Kumārajīva was fully supported by Yao Xing, Buddhism started to revive and large numbers of people participated in Buddhist gatherings.¹¹⁴ Kumārajīva was originally from Kucha, where Buddhism was popular by the time of his birth. He was trained under and grew up with masters of the then influential Sarvāstivāda school.¹¹⁵ But Kumārajīva is best remembered as the translator of Mahāyāna scriptures and the founder of the Chinese Madhyamaka school.¹¹⁶ Collaborating with Furuoduoluo 弗若多羅 (*Puṇyatāra), Kumārajīva was also responsible for completing the translation of the Sarvāstivāda vinaya in 406, the first such translation in China.¹¹⁷ One interesting episode regarding Kumārajīva is that it is said he was forced to have sexual intercourse with women,¹¹⁸ but it is not impossible that Kumārajīva did it of his own free will.¹¹⁹ If so, this would remind us once again of the Buddhist community at Niya. It is noticeable that Kumārajīva's father had been a Buddhist monk before he married or was seduced by the king's daughter.¹²⁰ If he was forced to break the rule, then it can be assumed that the secular authority in Kucha controlled monastic affairs, even their lifestyle.

The Buddhist community of Chang'an during Kumārajīva's time might also reflect the diverse nature of Buddhism. Kumārajīva himself lived in a special compound assigned by Yao Xing, where he was assisted by a team of eminent monks to translate Buddhist scriptures.¹²¹ This community seems to have functioned differently from a normal Buddhist monastery. Hence it is stated that as a result of Kumārajīva's profane relation with women,

¹¹¹ Xiong, 2000:17-20. Liu, 2005:6-7. On Dao'an and his Buddhist activities in Chang'an in the late fourth century, see Zürcher, 2007:200-204.

¹¹² Ch'en, 1964:101-103. Xiong, 2000:20-22. On the canonical texts translated by Kumārajīva or under his supervision, see Wang, 2005:10-28.

¹¹³ Tang, 1991:290; Juhl, 1995:63.

¹¹⁴ *JS*, 95.2051-52.

¹¹⁵ Palumbo, 2010:7-8; Tang, 1991:282-283; Lu, 2004:15-16; Ch'en, 1964:81.

¹¹⁶ Ōchō, 1979:86-118.

¹¹⁷ *GSZ*, j.2. *T.50.2059.333a*. Cf. Funayama, 2004:100.

¹¹⁸ *CSZJJ*, j.14. *T.55.2145.100a*; *GSZ*, j.2. *T.50.2059.332c*; *FZLDTZ*, j.7. *T.49.2036.529a*.

¹¹⁹ *JS*, 95.2051-52. In Buddhist sources, it is recorded that Kumārajīva was forced by the king to take women as a means of the king's eugenic fantasy. *CSZJJ*, j.14. *T.55.2145.100a*.

¹²⁰ *JS*, 95.2499. In fact, in a late Buddhist source, the compiler, a Buddhist monk, flatly states that Kumārajīva's father was revered as the grand master of the empire. He then had a son from his association with the king's daughter. *FZLDTZ*, j.7. *T.49.2036.528c*.

¹²¹ *GSZ*, j.2. *T.50.2059.330a*; *JS*, 95.2502.

Buddhist monks in Chang'an started to live in private quarters instead of monasteries. In order to curb further infringement of monastic rules, Kumārajīva warned his fellow monks by performing some miracles.¹²² One can speculate that Buddhism in Chang'an during this time was unique to the extent that cases of unorthodox practice could be positively attested.

Chang'an's brief season as a leading Buddhist centre came to an end with Kumārajīva's demise and the collapse of Yao Xing's kingdom around 416. The situation was worsened during the ensuing years between 418 and 425, when Chang'an was occupied by the Xiongnu leader Helian Bobo 赫連勃勃 (*d.* 425), who imposed a restrictive policy on the Buddhist community, and may have launched a veritable persecution at one point.¹²³ In 425, Helian Bobo died, but six years later Chang'an was seized by Emperor Taiwudi, whose challenging encounters with the Buddhist community had been increasing in the meantime.¹²⁴ It may be noted that from 418 until the 446 persecution, the Buddhist community in Chang'an seems to have been in disarray, in striking contrast to the situation at the Wei capital.

We shall briefly mention the interaction between Buddhism and Taoism in the fifth century before the persecution. Sectarian attacks and polemical exchanges both inside and between religious communities constituted a considerable aspect of religious life in the fourth and fifth centuries.¹²⁵ From the early fifth century, however, Buddhists and Taoists were preoccupied with the institutionalization of their own religions, with the latter especially assimilating a number of traits from the former.¹²⁶ From the Taoist side, the Taoist priest Lu Xiujing 陸修靜¹²⁷ (406-477) sanctioned scriptures in which Buddhism was strenuously attacked. Yet he also drew inspiration from the Buddhist model in compiling the first canon of Taoist texts.¹²⁸ Also significant at the time was the prevailing phenomenon of cataloguing religious texts.¹²⁹ Lu Xiujing's innovative *san dong* 三洞 (Three Caverns) division of the Taoist canon assumed its form around 437.¹³⁰ On the Buddhist side, we have mentioned that the translations of Buddhist disciplinary rules probably fostered the awareness of a common

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ The *Wei shu* mentions in passing that when Helian Qugai 赫連屈丐 (i.e. Helian Bobo) was in Chang'an, he would have all the Buddhist monks and lay people buried alive. *WS*, 114.3033. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:180-183; Lai, 2003:149; Liu, 2011:142-149.

¹²⁴ *WS*, 4A.72. Cf. Wong, 2004:49.

¹²⁵ Tsukamoto, 1974b:37-42; Stein, 1979:43.

¹²⁶ Maspero, 1981:49-52, 275-276; Mollier, 2008:10-22; Zürcher, 2013:159-163; Kohn, 2003:36-39

¹²⁷ For a biographical sketch of Lu Xiujing see Chen Guofu, 1975:39-45.

¹²⁸ Bokenkamp, 2001:194-199. Yamada Toshiaki holds an opposite view with respect to this matter. Yamada, 1995:78-83.

¹²⁹ Bokenkamp, 2001:181-182.

¹³⁰ Ōfuchi, 1979:260-262; Robinet, 1993:150-151; Kobayashi, 1995:30-31; Yu (trans.), 2000:465-468.

monastic identity among Buddhist monks. As a result of attacks levelled against them, some leading Taoist priests such as Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365-448) tried to reform Taoism.¹³¹ Kou's religious reform focused on the moral aspect of Taoism which had drawn criticism from not only Buddhists but also from traditional Confucian observers.¹³² Importantly, Buddhist terms and ideas occur in a text that is thought to have been compiled by Kou Qianzhi,¹³³ which may accordingly betray Buddhist influence on him.¹³⁴ Although this cannot be said with certainty, sectarianism and cross-fertilization between religious groups were part of the bigger picture around the time of the first major persecution of Buddhism.

¹³¹ Ōfuchi, 1979:259; Robinet, 1997:74-75; Barrett, 1996:14; Yamada, 1995:70; David C. Yu (trans.) 2000:352-363.

¹³² David C. Yu (trans.), 2000:358-361; Yamada, 1995:72-75.

¹³³ There are terms such as *jielü* 戒律 (rules of discipline), *zhengfa zhi jiao* 正法之教 (teaching of the True Law) and *jiulong* 九龍 (nine dragons), which are not traditionally Taoist, whilst they are seen more often in Buddhist scriptures. Yang, 1956:38, 40-43. Cf. Chen, 2001a:125-138.

¹³⁴ Chen, 2001a:123; Tang, 1991:493; David C. Yu (trans.), 2000:361-363.

CHAPTER THREE The Persecution of Buddhism under the Tuoba/Northern Wei

3.1 The First Edicts of Restriction on Religious Activities

On 2 February 442 Emperor Taiwudi attended a Taoist shrine at the capital and ritually received registers of ordination, thus cementing his relationship with the Taoist priest Kou Qianzhi.¹ In the early years of the Shiguang 始光 era (424-428), probably in 425, Kou had been introduced to the imperial court and his presence seems to have gradually convinced Taiwudi to accept Taoist doctrines.² This religious influence, however, was not exclusive for some time. As we mentioned, Gu Zhengmei argues that Taiwudi may also have considered Buddhist ideas as a context for his ruling ideology. This cannot be said with certainty, but it is significant that only by 440 Kou managed to convince the emperor to adopt a reign title clearly inspired by the Taoist tradition, Taiping zhenjun 太平真君 (Perfect Ruler of Great Peace).³ On the other hand, we should note that when the heir apparent cast doubt about a magnificent Taoist establishment – the Jinglun tiangong 靜輪天宮 (Heavenly Palace of Tranquil Circuit), which was supposed to reach to heaven – the emperor shared the prince's concern.⁴ Hence Taiwudi, like many of his contemporaries, was probably merely utilizing selected religious ideas as an aid to political and social order. However, in 438, an imperial decree was issued to laicize Buddhist monks under the age of 50.⁵ The immediate aim of this act was to bolster military recruitment into the imperial army, and its enforcement may have been limited in time.⁶ The next noticeable decree on religious matters was issued on 15 February 444 (Taiping zhenjun 5. 1. *wushen*), prohibiting witchcraft and prognostics. The decree states:

These foolish commoners do not have knowledge and put their deluded faith into the wicked; in private they support masters of witchcraft; they hide books of prophecies, *yin-yang*, esoterica and wizardry. In addition, followers of the *śramaṇas* (*shamen* 沙門) are using deceptions of the Western barbarians, and with wickedness generate

¹ *WS*, 4.94; *SS*, 35.1094; *CFYG*, 53.587b; *ZZTJ*, 124.3895 Cf. Mather, 1979:118; Kohn, 1998: 304; Seidel, 1983.

² Mather, 1979 remains the most detailed study on this connection.

³ *WS*, 114.3053.

⁴ *WS*, 114.3032, 3053; *CFYG*, 53.588a.

⁵ *WS*, 4.88. Cf. Tang, 1991:494; Tsukamoto, 1974b:57-58. According to the *Bei shi* account, the decree was issued in third month of 438; there was a military expedition in the seventh month. *BS*, 2.52; *ZZTJ*, 123.3867. Cf. Xiang, 1984:51. The date is given as 439 elsewhere in *WS*, as it is stated that after Liangzhou was sacked, the laicization process started. See *WS*, 114.3032. Cf. Liu, 1994:148.

⁶ The *Zizhi tongjian* states that “because these people are strong enough, so [the emperor] laicized them as ordinary people in order to support war efforts.” *ZZTJ*, 123.3867.

disgrace; this is against the civilizing rule by which unity is produced, and spreads pure virtue all under heaven; now then, from as high as the princes and dukes, and as low as the ordinary commoners, those who personally support the *śramaṇas*, masters of witchcraft and the goldsmiths and silversmiths (*jinyin gong qiao zhi ren* 金銀工巧之人) in their home, should send them to the relevant imperial governmental offices and they should not hide them. This must have been done by the fifteenth day of the second month of this year (19 March 444); once the deadline has passed, if some people continue to disobey the order, then these masters of witchcraft and *śramaṇas* will be executed; their supporters and their whole families will be punished by death penalty.⁷

The above edict mentions witchcraft and books of prophecies as well as other related practices. But importantly, it mentions in no uncertain terms Buddhist monks (*śramaṇas*) and their role in the practice of deluded faith.⁸ It is also worth noting that such practices were regarded as heterodox and as a cause of social turmoil.⁹ Taken together, the aforementioned two edicts reveal a Buddhist community somewhat unpleasantly exposed to the imperial court. Such a situation would have been sufficient for the emperor to launch a persecution, and notably the decree issued in 444 would have offered a suitable pretext. In other words, the initial minor edicts may be linked to the major persecution in 446, although I will argue below that the latter did not follow directly from the former. For now, we should note that the decrees of 438 and 444 stand in stark contrast to what emperor Daowu had proclaimed only four decades earlier, in 398:

Since the rise of the Law of Buddha it is now a long time. Its blessing and beneficent powers mysteriously reach to life and death. Its divine traces and the models it has bequeathed may indeed be trusted. We hereby command the officials to build and adorn images; and repair the official residences in the capital and see to it that the believers have places in which to stay.¹⁰

Another decree issued by Emperor Mingyuandi also mentions that the emperor “commanded the *śramaṇas* to guide the people’s customs”.¹¹ This shows that the earlier imperial decrees clearly stated that Buddhist monks should promote Buddhism so as to guide the populace, with the subtext that the Buddhist community should abide by and be in accordance with the imperial government. By contrast, the ban on witchcraft and prophecies and the Buddhist monks’ involvement in these practices would suggest that at the time, the Buddhist community was no longer seen as in conformity with the imperial religious policy.

⁷ *WS*, 4.97; *BS*, 2.56; *QHWW*, 1.3515b. Cf. Orzech (trans.), 1998:112; Lu, 2003:59-60.

⁸ Cf. Yasui, 1966:267.

⁹ Yasui, 1966:261; Lu, 2003:83-110.

¹⁰ Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:52, translating *WS*, 114.3030.

¹¹ Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:52, translating *WS*, 114.3030.

In September 444, the eminent monks Xuangao 玄高 and Huichong 慧崇 were executed.¹² These deaths were said to be political, as Xuangao was revered by the crown prince. It has been assumed that Cui Hao and his political faction had been in opposition to the prince's clique.¹³ The execution of these well-connected monks has therefore been seen as the result of a plot by Cui Hao.¹⁴ However, we shall remember that earlier in the same year there had been the edict involving Buddhist monks in a general ban on witchcraft and heterodox practices; it is clear that the political environs were very sensitive at the time, and Xuangao and Huichong could be easily seen as disregarding the imperial orders.¹⁵

Some remarks about Xuangao may be relevant here. Xuangao was born to a family whose religious affiliation appears to have been Taoist. His mother even shared a *née* surname with that of Kou Qianzhi, and both of these two families were located in the same region where Taoism was preeminent. But by the time of Xuangao's birth, his family had converted to Buddhism.¹⁶ When Xuangao was only fifteen years old, he already was versed in many Buddhist scriptures, Vinaya texts in particular.¹⁷ He was allegedly endowed with supernatural powers, which he frequently used.¹⁸ His biography places him in Pingcheng at the time (444) when Taiwudi decreed that privately supported monks should be turned over to the imperial administration. Moreover, Xuangao's reported skills in magic would have made him liable to the ban on prognostics and witchcraft.

Another decree issued only three days after the one targeting monks, sorcerers and smiths also attests to the general concerns of the emperor in that period:

Sons [of families] from the rank of the prince and duke to the officials and literati, should be enrolled in the Imperial Academy. Sons of craftsmen (*baigong jiqiao* 百工伎巧) and soldiers should inherit the professions of their respective fathers and brothers. It is not allowed to establish private schools (不聽私立學校). In case of transgression, teachers shall be put to death individually, whereas masters [of such schools] shall be executed together with their entire households.¹⁹

¹² *GSZ*, j.11, *T.50.2059.397c-398a*; *FZTJ*, j.38, *T.49.2035.354a-b*. Cf. Tang, 1991:494; Tsukamoto, 1974b:59. A brief biographical sketch of Xuangao can be found in Tamaki, 1971:79-82; see also Lai, 2003:152-161.

¹³ *NQS*, 57.983-984; *GSZ*, j.11, *T.50.2059.397a4-21*. Cf. Tang, 1991:491; Lai, 2003:153-154.

¹⁴ Tang, 1991:492.

¹⁵ The purge on witchcraft and prognostic practices must have been very strict. According to *FYZL*, a monk named Chaoda 超達 was unjustly arrested under such a charge. *FYZL*, (Zhou, et al), 2003:1542. *T.2122.672b*.

¹⁶ Cf. Tang, 1991:490; Lai, 2003:152-153.

¹⁷ *GSZ*, j.11, *T.50.2059.397a4-21*. Cf. Tang, 1991:491; Lai, 2003:153-154.

¹⁸ *GSZ*, j.11, *T.50.2059.397b-c*.

¹⁹ *WS*, 4B.97; *BS*, 2.56; *ZZTJ*, 124.3903.

The aforementioned two decrees, following very shortly in time, were probably related; they both addressed issues of religion, education and the circulation of techniques, notably showing a deep concern for craftsmen, a category to which Buddhist monks were seemingly seen as close. The severity of the prescribed punishment should also be stressed. He Dechang notes that while Buddhism was purged, Confucian ideology and classical education were being promoted.²⁰ This is a valid observation, but the imperial government seems to have had a broader religious and social agenda. For instance, several months later, Cui Hao advised the emperor to abolish all shrines and deities except the fifty-seven gods that were recorded in the *Sidian* 祀典 (*Classic of Sacrificial Rituals*), a suggestion to which the emperor readily consented.²¹ From the above discussion, it will be evident that before the great persecution of 446, a series of restrictions on social and religious matters had already been put in place, which attempted to bring Buddhist monks and other social groups under imperial supervision. Furthermore, it might be posited that as a more visible and organized religious group, Buddhism was the main target for restriction. We shall now turn to the next stage of the persecution in 446.

3.2 The Persecution of Buddhism in 446

When examining the Northern Wei persecution of Buddhism, scholars usually consider the laicization of Buddhist monks in 438 as the starting point.²² Tsukamoto notably points out that the execution of Xuangao and Huichong in 444 was a clear signal of the persecution two years later. He suggests that Cui Hao successfully persuaded the emperor to execute the two monks in order to weaken the connection between the Buddhist community and influential court officials. What Cui Hao needed thereafter was a suitable pretext, which the rebellion of Gai Wu 蓋吳 conveniently offered.²³ This is an acceptable argument if we follow the mainstream sources in which Cui Hao is depicted as either showing or inciting hostility to Buddhism. Nevertheless, we shall notice that the severe punishment imposed on the Buddhist clergy during the persecution, allegedly involving burying monks alive, may point to something more complex. The interval of two years between 444 and 446 may suggest that however persuasive Cui Hao might have been, the emperor did not initially want to enforce a

²⁰ He, 1992:43.

²¹ *WS*, 108.2739; *ZZTJ*, 124.3906. Cf. He, 1992:43.

²² E.g. Corradini, 2003:196; Tsukamoto, 1974b:57-58; Tang, 1991:494; Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:66, n. 1.

²³ Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:66, n. 1; Tsukamoto, 1974b:59-60.

total proscription of Buddhism. It might well be the case that after the decree in 444, Buddhism was under strict imperial scrutiny. The situation was different two years later, however, for the emperor, Cui Hao and the Buddhist community itself. We therefore propose that the initial purges and the main persecution be viewed as separate stages. The first stage, between 438 and 439, was a measured process, although it did start to undermine the Buddhist community. The second stage is reflected in the decrees of 444, which intended to regulate the Buddhist communities as part of an attack on heterodox practice and private education. As for the total persecution of 446, it may be viewed as an isolated incident, which took place at a time when the relation between Buddhism and the court was strained, and the anti-Buddhist sentiment in the latter was growing. In the framework of this hypothesis, I shall reconstruct below a scenario for the persecution and discuss a number of related issues.

In December 445, Gai Wu 蓋吳 (417-446 CE),²⁴ a man of the Lushui Hu 廬水胡 ethnicity, started a rebellion against the Wei government in Xingcheng 杏城, in an area near Chang'an where several mutinies had already occurred.²⁵ The rebellion, which at first seemed unstoppable, further inflamed an already tense situation. Within a couple of months, the deputy military commander in Chang'an was killed and Gai Wu's forces infiltrated some parts of the city.²⁶ Consequently, the emperor decided to conduct the counteroffensive in person, and led the imperial army to Chang'an. Once there, in an unspecified Buddhist monastery, arrows, bows and other weapons were uncovered.²⁷ It was a disastrously damaging discovery for the monastic community, and all the monks involved were executed on the spot.²⁸ A further search revealed that there were wine and unclaimed properties belonging to lay people in the monastery storage. A hidden chamber was also found inside the premises, which the resident monks were alleged to use for sexual meetings with aristocratic women.²⁹ By this time, Emperor Taiwudi concluded that all of the monks in Chang'an were in violation of the Vinaya rules and probably involved in Gai Wu's rebellion. According to the sources, Cui Hao then advised the emperor to launch a general persecution

²⁴ Gai Wu's personal details are unknown, but according to the *Song shu*, he was twenty-nine years old when he led a rebellion in 445. *SoS*, 95.2339. Thus he must have been born in *ca.* 417.

²⁵ *WS*, 4.97-99; *ZZTJ*, 124.3912-3914.

²⁶ *WS*, 4.99; *SoS*, 95.2339.

²⁷ *WS*, 114.3033-34; *ZZTJ*, 124.3923. There is no detail about the monastery but it is certain that Gai Wu occupied parts of Chang'an. *WS*, 4.99. Moreover, when Emperor Taiwudi defeated Gai Wu, local rebels who were accused of collaboration were also executed. *WS*, 4.100.

²⁸ *WS*, 114.3034.

²⁹ *WS*, 114.3034; *BS*, 2.58; *GHMJ*, j.7. T.50.2103.135c. Cf. Orzech, 1998:112. The *Sui shu* suggests that this specific incident was the reason why Emperor Taiwudi imposed the persecution. *SS*, 35.1098.

of Buddhism.³⁰

Perhaps intending to emphasize the gravity of the matter, a decree was issued in Chang'an, which warned that privately sponsored monks should be surrendered to the imperial authorities:

These *śramaṇas* are using deceptions of the Western barbarians, and with wickedness generate disgrace; this is against the civilizing rule by which unity is produced, and spreads pure virtue all under heaven. All those who privately support *śramaṇas*, from the rank of prince and duke below, will send them to the relevant imperial offices. They should not hide them. The deadline is the fifteenth day of second month of this year (28 March 446). Should they not bring them out after the time limit has passed, the *śramaṇas* will be put to death individually; those harboring them will be killed [with] their entire families.³¹

As Tsukamoto points out, the above decree might be excerpted from the one issued in 444 in Pingcheng.³² That is not impossible, given the overlapping contents of the two documents, but the assumption is not incontrovertible. A similarly worded decree may in fact have been reissued in Chang'an, just before the final persecution. First, it is certain that the latter took place in the third month of the year (April-May 446), thus after the said edict.³³ Secondly, Emperor Taiwudi arrived in Chang'an on 15 March 446 (Taiping zhenjun 7.2.2), before the edict itself. It was probably shortly after his arrival in Chang'an that the emperor discovered the forbidden items in the monastery in question and ordered the execution of monks involved. Simultaneously, a first imperial decree may have been issued, or rather the decree of 444 may have been issued anew. As a follow-up, or perhaps persuaded by Cui Hao, the emperor finally took the next move and announced a second, more general decree. It is worth noting that while the earlier decree of 444 had several different targets, the 446 decree was exclusively aimed at Buddhist monks.

According to the *Wei shu's* 'Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism', after the initial decree the crown prince tried in vain to dissuade the emperor from enforcing executions and the destruction of statues.³⁴ The emperor, however, announced a further and more severe edict:

Formerly, a stupid lord of the Later Han, who believed in evil and delusion, pretended to have had a dream and then started to venerate the barbarian evil spirits, causing

³⁰ WS, 114.304; ZZTJ, 124.3923. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:184-189 and 1974b:62.

³¹ WS, 114.3034. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:184-189.

³² This decree is indeed confusing as it repeats verbatim part of the contents of the decree issued in 444. Tsukamoto, 1974a:186-187, n. 5; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:66, n. 1.

³³ WS, 4.100.

³⁴ WS, 114.3034; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:65.

disarray to the heavenly order.³⁵ From olden days there was no such thing as this (i.e. Buddhism) in the Nine Provinces (i.e. China). Its deceptions and big words are not in accordance with the nature of human beings. In the later ages, there were ignorant lords and misguided sovereigns, and there was none of them who was not confused by it. As a consequence, governance and orthodox teachings were not prevailing, rites and propriety were destroyed. The way of the ghosts was thriving while the law of the imperial sovereignty was regarded as insignificant. From then on, there came times of chaos and calamity one after another. Heaven severely punished those evil actions and people died in great numbers. The five areas of the realm all became mounds of ruins. Within a thousand miles you could not find a living soul, only desolation. All this should be attributed to that belief (i.e. Buddhism). I inherited the heavenly succession and was confronted with misfortune. I will eradicate the false ideas and restore the truth in order to reestablish the governance of [Fu]xi and [Shen]nong.³⁶ I shall eliminate all things related to the barbarian god (*hu shen* 胡神) and wipe out its vestiges. By thus doing I will not dishonor the Feng 風 (clan).³⁷ From this moment onwards, anyone who dares to venerate the barbarian god and erect statues of clay or bronze will be executed together with their entire families.

Although I have spoken of a barbarian god, if you ask the barbarian people of today, they will all say that it does not exist. All these things were forged by pupils of miscreants such as Liu Yuanzhen 劉元真 and Lü Bojiang 呂伯疆 during the former age of the Han.³⁸ They believed in absurd thoughts of barbarian people and expanded on them using the false ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi. None of this is true, but it resulted in the termination of the imperial law and order. Indeed they were the leaders of the grand wickedness. Extraordinary people will be able to perform extraordinary tasks. Who else if not me could do away with this forgery of many generations? Let the officials convey the order to the armies and regional governors that wherever there are Buddha images and barbarian scriptures, they should destroy and burn them all; and all the *śramaṇas* regardless of age are to be buried alive.³⁹

This edict offers several motivations for the persecution. First, it categorically denounces Buddhism as an evil cult of barbarians. Emphasis is then placed on a Chinese mythical past, in a seeming attempt to bypass the (Liu) Song claim of Han inheritance and hence reassert the legitimacy of the Northern Wei ruler. Faithful to his title of Taiping zhenjun (‘Perfect Lord of

³⁵ An allusion to the legendary dream of the Han emperor Mingdi 明帝 (r. 57-75), which according to tradition had resulted in the introduction of Buddhism in China.

³⁶ The utopian age of the mythical first rulers of China, supposedly filled with peace, stability and prosperity. Tsukamoto, 1974a:193; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:67, n. 3.

³⁷ According to Tsukamoto, *Feng* 風 (lit. 'wind') in this passage is the clan name of mythical ruler Fuxi 伏羲. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:67, n. 3.

³⁸ Liu Yuanzhen could be a teacher of Zhu Daoqian 竺道潛 (286-374), a Buddhist monk, while the latter, Lü Boqiang, is not clearly identified. He was possibly a disciple of a monk called Kang Falang. See Tang, 1991:495; Tsukamoto, 1974a:191-192; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:67, n. 4; Tokiwa, 1930:580; Zürcher, 2007:77-78. However, it seems unlikely that either of them lived during the later Han dynasty. Hurvitz (trans.), *ibid.*

³⁹ WS, 114.3034-35; also in *QHWW*, 1.3516a. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:66-67; Tsukamoto, 1974a:190-194; Orzech, 1998:113.

Great Peace'), he would restore the peaceful reign of an earlier utopia, which had existed long before the Han dynasty.⁴⁰ Secondly, the imperial edict mandates the total destruction of Buddhist statues and scriptures, which was in striking contrast with the imperial religious policy until the persecution. Finally, the decree ended by ordering that Buddhist monks should be buried alive, an extreme punishment occasionally applied to rebels.

In the *Wei shu* annals of Taiwudi, thus a different section of the same source, the incident is briefly reported as follows:

In the third month (of Taiping zhenjun 7, i.e. between 12 April and 5 May 446), an edict ordered that in all prefectures *śramaṇas* should be buried alive and Buddha statues destroyed. [The edict also ordered] two thousand households of craftsmen (*gongqiao* 工巧) to migrate from Chang'an to the capital.⁴¹

It does seem therefore that executions of monks were ordered on a massive scale, although the number of those actually killed remains unknown.⁴² Having failed to dissuade the emperor to minimize the destruction, the crown prince deliberately delayed its implementation, while probably also warning the Buddhist community.⁴³ This would have secured enough time for Buddhist monks to either escape,⁴⁴ or disguise themselves in layman's clothes.⁴⁵ Many portable Buddhist items such as images and scriptures were saved by various means.⁴⁶ Another entry in the annals reports the following:

In the summer, in the fourth month, on the *jiashen* day (12 May 446) his majesty's carriage returned from Chang'an. On the *wuzi* day [of that month] (16 May 446), in the city of Ye 鄴城, when a five-storied pagoda was destroyed, two jade [imperial] seals were found inside a clay statue. On both [seals] an inscription said: "Having received the mandate from Heaven, we shall endure in eternal prosperity". On one [seal] a side was inscribed with the words: "Seal of transmission of the realm of the Han, received by the Wei".⁴⁷

The incident indirectly confirms the ongoing destruction of Buddhist establishments. The political implications of the inscriptions on the seals are not entirely clear. They might

⁴⁰ Cf. Mather, 1979:112-113; Kamata, 2002c:300-301.

⁴¹ *WS*, 4.100; also *BS*, 2.58. In the *Nan Qi shu* one reads that "initially, Foli (i.e. Taiwudi) launched an expedition to Chang'an against the barbarians of Jie. He killed all *people of the way* (*daoren*, i.e. Buddhist monks) there". *NQS*, 57.990.

⁴² Cf. Ch'en, 1964:150.

⁴³ *WS*, 114.3034-35.

⁴⁴ After Xuangao's execution, his disciple Xuanchang 玄暢 made a successful escape to the south in 445. *GSZ*, j.8. T.50.2059.377a.

⁴⁵ *WS*, 114.3036.

⁴⁶ *WS*, 114.3035.

⁴⁷ *WS*, 4.101; *BS*, 2.58-59.

suggest that the persecution of Buddhism, coupled with a censure of the iniquitous Han emperors, paved the way for Taiwudi to renew the mandate of heaven. With Buddhism undone, the Wei would finally supersede the decadent Han and bolster their own legitimacy. This is, of course, purely speculative, although there does seem to be a connection with the criticism of the Han in the main edict against Buddhism.

The persecution was in place throughout Emperor Taiwudi's reign. However, already after Cui Hao's execution in 450, the stringency of the persecution is said to have lessened. Buddhist sources⁴⁸ attribute this to the fact that Emperor Taiwudi regretted his decision to persecute Buddhism, which seems to be most unlikely.⁴⁹ More than five years of proscription would have certainly cancelled any public presence of Buddhism. The *Wei shu* notes that as the ban was gradually relaxed, Buddhist monks and devotees could start to practice again but in secret.⁵⁰ It is beyond our ability to know whether the emperor tried to amend his decision, but it is certain that the anti-Buddhist policy was not lifted until the emperor's demise.

3.3 The Causes of the Persecution

The persecution resulted from several causes, which can nevertheless all be seen in a general connection to the imperial religious policy at the time. The total proscription revealed that a cooperative relationship between Buddhism and the state was unattainable, and marked an abrupt transition from religious tolerance to total repression. I have argued above that although there was a connection between the minor purges of 438 and 444 and the total persecution of 446, they should be understood differently. The former seem to have been measures designated to subordinate or regulate a number of social groups involved in religious or semi-religious activities, among which the Buddhist clergy was a primary target. It is not impossible that the earlier edicts were steps paving the way for the great persecution. This assumption, however, is subject to the qualifications I have presented above. Thus while the major incident in 446 seems to have ensued rather unexpectedly from the Gai Wu rebellion, the initial purges may be indicative of the difficult relationship between Buddhism and the imperial court. In other words, from 438 onward, as Buddhism was increasingly exposed as a formidable social force, the imperial government started to overhaul its policy

⁴⁸ The dynastic histories are silent about this issue and therefore the Buddhist sources cannot be verified. According to the *Gaoseng zhuan*, after the execution of Cui Hao, Taiwudi felt remorseful about the persecution, and delegated a royal prince to restore Buddhist monks. *GSZ*, j.11. T.50.2059.

⁴⁹ The *Wei shu* only mentions in passing that the emperor regretted his decision to persecute Buddhism without any further hints about the restoration of Buddhism. *WS*, 114.3035.

⁵⁰ *WS*, 114.3035 (禁稍寬弛，篤信之家，得密奉事，沙門專至者，猶竊法服誦習焉). Cf. Orzech, 1998:114.

toward it. Nevertheless, the incident in Chang'an proved that such a policy was inadequate. The previously friendly relationship between the monastic community and the court collapsed, and the persecution ensued as an almost inevitable consequence.

Let us now turn to the opinions and hypotheses advanced by previous scholarship concerning the factors of the persecution.⁵¹ First, both the dynastic history and Buddhist sources either directly blame Cui Hao for the persecution or at least suggest as much. According to the *Wei shu* in particular, Cui Hao had no faith whatsoever in Buddhism, and in his conversations with the emperor would repeatedly lash against it (尤不信佛，與帝言，數加非毀); in 446, as Taiwudi was furious after uncovering the unlawful practices of the monks of Chang'an, Cui, who had followed the ruler in his campaign, seized the opportunity and instigated the drastic measures against the clergy.⁵² This narrative has then understandably shaped the perception of modern scholarship, which has credited Cui Hao as the mastermind of the persecution.⁵³ The Taoist priest Kou Qianzhi is also said to have been responsible for the anti-Buddhist religious policy, which further led to the final proscription.⁵⁴ Other sources suggest political motivations for some incidents in the background of the persecution, in particular for the assassination of Xuangao, which would have occurred because of this monk's close association with the heir designate, Tuoba Huang 拓跋晃 (427-451).⁵⁵ On one occasion, Xuangao had healed a rift between the emperor and the prince through the performance of a Buddhist ritual.⁵⁶ Seeing this reconciliation as a potential threat to his political ambition, Cui Hao then persuaded the emperor that Xuangao had conspired against

⁵¹ For a summary of scholarship on the Northern Wei persecution, see also Liu, 2005:1-3.

⁵² See *WS*, 114.3033-35, especially p. 3034 (帝既忿沙門非法，浩時從行，因進其說。詔誅長安沙門，焚破佛像，敕留臺下四方令，一依長安行事); cf. *ZZTJ*, 124.3923. According to the same source, Kou Qianzhi and Cui Hao had a strong disagreement apparently on the same occasion, although the object of dispute is not made clear. A third important piece of information in the *Wei shu* is that the emperor finally showed his remorse after Cui Hao's execution (*ibid.*).

⁵³ See e.g. Tsukamoto, 1974b:41-43; Welch, 1966:151-152; Gu, 1996b:160-161; Kamata, 2002c:309-313. Lewis remarks concisely that "between 444 and 446, the emperor denounced Buddhism, although this seems to have been at the behest of Cui Hao's Chinese faction rather than Kou Qianzhi." Lewis, 2009a:204.

⁵⁴ The *Wei shu* says that Cui Hao venerated Kou Qianzhi's *dao*. *WS*, 114.3033. Cf. Kamata, 2002c:305-310. Tokiwa suggests that the persecution reflects the first clash between Buddhism and Taoism. Tokiwa, 1930:579-580. Cf. Barrett, 1996:14-15. Welch suggests that while Kou Qianzhi was motivated by religious sectarianism, Cui Hao's main concern was the ideological purity of imperial governance. Welch, 1966:151. Tsukamoto provides further details about Cui Hao's association with Taoist activities. 1974b:41-43, 49-52.

⁵⁵ Cf. Lu, 2001:69-70, 94-96. Tsukamoto notes that political competition among court officials could also be expressed in opposing religious preferences. Tsukamoto, 1974b:59-61.

⁵⁶ *NQS*, 57.983-984; *GSZ*, j.11. *T.50.2059.397c-398a*.

him.⁵⁷ However, it is unclear whether this incident was directly related to the main persecution, at the time of which there is no explicit report of political intrigue.⁵⁸ He Dechang does suggest an ongoing power struggle between the emperor and the Tuoba elite.⁵⁹ But the same scholar points out that in this political manoeuvring the prince and Cui Hao were not opponents but allies.⁶⁰ That aside, it should be borne in mind that both Cui Hao's dislike of Buddhism and the crown prince's fondness for it were not unknown in the court. Hence it is not impossible that religious matters would be entangled in the imperial politics, especially during a time when Buddhism had been targeted for scrutiny.

Further and somewhat varied reasons have been advanced by modern scholars, which I will critically reassess below. Max Weber commented in passing that the persecution of Buddhism in China mainly derived from "the currency and mercantilist interests of Confucianism; and naturally, the widespread competition for prebends". He continues that "there was also the antagonism of Confucians toward Sultanism (*sic*) which was supported by the Buddhists".⁶¹ Weber's opinion typifies the religious competition theory as well as the intolerant image of Confucian literati shared by de Groot, although it fails to account for the respective positioning of Confucians and Buddhists towards the emperor on the occasion of the 446 episode. Tokiwa assumes four reasons for the crisis, which are largely based on the dynastic history, especially the imperial edicts. They are: 1) the perception that Buddhist monasticism was at odds with Chinese tradition; 2) the infiltration of rebels and drifters in the monastic ranks; 3) the political potential of Buddhism; and finally 4) the consolidation of the ideological division so as to unify the kingdom.⁶² Tokiwa's opinion is but one example here, and the majority of modern scholars' views are based on the imperial decrees of 444-446.⁶³

Among the immediate causes for the crisis of 446, apart from Gai Wu's rebellion, the incident in the Chang'an monastery and the possible connection between monks and rebels,⁶⁴ it has also been suggested that a ban on alcoholic drinks was in place before the persecution.

⁵⁷ GSZ, j.11. T.50.2059.397c. Cf. Lu, 2001:95-96.

⁵⁸ Zhou, 1963:117-118. The *Nan Qi shu* does say that the crown prince and Cui Hao were enemies. NQS, 57.983. Lu, however, notes that other sources suggest a different situation, since Cui Hao seemingly advised the emperor to appoint the crown prince as chief minister. Lu, 2001:78-79.

⁵⁹ He, 2000:47-48; also He, 1993:7. He argues that conservative members of the Tuoba elite were planning a coup against Taiwudi in order to stop the reforms that the emperor was introducing with the assistance of Cui Hao.

⁶⁰ He, 2000:47.

⁶¹ Weber, 1964:195. 'Sultanism' is Weber's term for autocratic government.

⁶² Tokiwa, 1930:380.

⁶³ See e.g. Tsukamoto, 1974b:55-65; Zhang, 2000:97; Ch'en, 1964:147-151; Tang, 1991:493-496; Kamata, 2002c:316-317.

⁶⁴ Caswell, 1988:4, pointing to BSL, j.5. T.52.2113.

The discovery of wine in a monastery might thus have been interpreted as a violation of imperial regulation, and coupled with the discovery of weapons would have further precipitated the imperial reaction.⁶⁵ Alcohol prohibition, however, is only attested with certainty some time after the persecution.⁶⁶

Another catalyst for the persecution may have been a prophecy or rumor that the Wei rulers would be eliminated by someone named Wu 吳.⁶⁷ This happened to be Gai Wu's personal name. Lu Zongli has dismissed the significance of this scenario, noting the time gap between the prophecy and the persecution and emphasizing instead the restrictive measures against Buddhism ahead of Gai Wu's rebellion.⁶⁸ However, the concern for such predictions in court circles should not be underestimated.⁶⁹ Moreover, well before the Gai Wu rebellion, there had been repeated skirmishes between the Wei and the Liu Song in the south.⁷⁰ When Gai Wu rebelled, he appealed to the Liu Song emperor for a possible alliance.⁷¹ After some negotiation, he was finally granted several official titles attesting to his recognition from the southern rulers.⁷² The relevant point here is that Buddhism was highly regarded at the Liu Song court. As a religion, Buddhism should have kept aloof of the political animosity between the north and south. Yet suspicions of disloyalty would have played their part in times of war and increasing regulation, and the discovery of weapons in a Buddhist monastery may well have got the best of Taiwudi's residual reservations about a total eradication of Buddhism. In any case, the prophecy scenario should alert us to a political anxiety that may have been an important factor of the crisis.

Charles Orzech has pointed out yet another significant aspect of the persecution, its cultural and ethnic motivations. He notes that Buddhism

⁶⁵ Zhang Jian, 2000:98-99.

⁶⁶ According to the *Wei shu*'s section on *Legal and Penal Law*, the regulation on wine prohibition was first laid down in 459. *WS*, 111.2875. However, in Tuoba Huang's biography, it is said that when the prince was chief minister (444-451), a ban on wine had already been issued. *WS*, 4.109; *BS*, 2.64.

⁶⁷ In the *Song shu*, the prophecy simply says that "the one destroying the barbarian is Wu 滅虜者吳也". *SoS*, 95.2339. The term 'barbarian' (*lu* 虜) can be certainly understood as a reference to the Tuoba Wei or even to Taiwudi, as confirmed by the variant wording (滅魏者吳) in the *Zizhi tongjian*; this source refers in fact to a rumor (*eyan* 訛言) rather than a prophecy, which prepared the ground for Gai Wu's rebellion as a form of propaganda. *ZZTJ*, 124.3914.

⁶⁸ Lu Zongli, 2003:60-61.

⁶⁹ For example, Liu Jie 劉潔, a senior figure in the imperial government, in 444 was accused of conspiracy against the emperor and executed with more than a hundred of his kin after a prophetic script or book (*chenshu* 讖書) was found in the house of one of his aides. *WS*, 28.688-689; *ZZTJ*, 124.3904. Cf. Lu, 2003:61-62; He, 1992:40-41.

⁷⁰ *ZZTJ*, 124.3914-3929.

⁷¹ *SoS*, 95.2339-2340; *ZZTJ*, 124.3914.

⁷² *SoS*, 95.2340-2341; *ZZTJ*, 124.3922.

... with its foreign associations, did not sit well with certain members of the aristocracy, who wished to be seen as “Chinese.” ... to be Buddhist was by definition to be *not* Chinese. Seen in this light, the persecution of Buddhism initiated in 446 was an attempt to assert a purified definition of Chineseness. To be Chinese one had to expunge Buddhism from one’s discourse as well as from one’s life and politics.⁷³

Orzech further remarks that the persecution “was preceded by a build-up of anti-Buddhist sentiment among key Confucian and Taoist officials who may be viewed as the radical vanguard of the force of sinification”.⁷⁴ He continues that “the body politic was to be cleansed by the eradication of all bodily signs of Buddhist authority. The persecution of Buddhism that began in 444 was the first comprehensive attempt (but certainly not the last) to enforce a deeply felt distinction between Buddhists and Chinese”.⁷⁵

I have quoted at length from Orzech as he makes his point eloquently. However, there are weaknesses in his interpretation. He suggests that members of the Tuoba aristocracy, who wished to affirm their ‘Chineseness’, inspired the persecution. Yet the vocal enemy of Buddhism was a member of the Chinese elite, Cui Hao, whereas the crown prince, despite being a Tuoba high-ranking aristocrat, was openly devoted to the religion. As mentioned, the relationship of these two key players between themselves and the rest of the court is ambiguous.⁷⁶ In any case, as this discussion has made clear, we should not understand the religious purges prior to 446 as a planned preparation for the final elimination of Buddhism. It is likely that the emperor’s suspicion of Buddhism increased in stages, focusing initially on heterodox activities such as prophecy-making and on privately sponsored monks; this seems to have been the case in particular with the assassination of Xuangao and Huichong in 444, pointing to Taiwudi’s uneasiness that an association between influential monks and the elite, coupled with certain practices such as religious rituals and prognostics, could destabilize the court and society. Prophetic rumors about a political usurper in Chang’an and the untimely exposure of Buddhism’s involvement in such activities would only deepen the emperor’s distrust of the religion and its clergy, an opportunity that Cui Hao would not fail to exploit. Returning to Orzech’s argument, the edict of 446 did attack Buddhism as a religion of barbarian origin, but its proclamations should not be taken at face value. It may be helpful here to remember what the crown prince stated in his petitions to Taiwudi to restrain the killing of monks and the destruction of statues:

⁷³ Orzech, 1998:111.

⁷⁴ Orzech, 1998:112.

⁷⁵ Orzech, 1998:113.

⁷⁶ Cf. Chen, 2001a:123; Mou, 1987:80-93.

He frequently handed up memorials setting forth the error of killing the śramaṇas. He also stated that the sins were not the sins of the portraits and statues, that if this religion were stopped and all the temple gates shut and for generations not repaired or worshipped, the earth and wood and the red and green colors would naturally crumble.⁷⁷

The prince, who by this time was not only the heir designate but also the chief minister, here accepts the abolition of Buddhism but cautions against the destruction of paintings and statues as well as the killings. He thus makes the case that the destruction of Buddhist symbols was not essential to the emperor's initiative. Had he known that the persecution was culturally motivated and aimed precisely at eradicating all signs of Buddhism because it was not Chinese enough, he would presumably have kept silent or formulated his argument differently.

The order to kill Buddhist monks in 446 is another aspect that warrants some discussion. We have seen above that already in 444, in the edicts against witchcraft and other heterodox practices, the death penalty was threatened for those failing to surrender privately supported monks. On the other hand, in the section on legal matters in the *Wei shu*, it was customary for Northern Wei emperors, including Taiwudi, to reprieve or mitigate the application of the penalty.⁷⁸ That aside, there was a long and constant tradition of severe punishment for war captives, rebels and traitors. In 391, Tuoba Gui is said to have massacred the entire town of Wuyuan 五原 after its fall. Later the same year, having defeated the tribal leader Wei Chen 衛辰, five thousand members of his tribe were killed in retaliation.⁷⁹ This kind of extreme punishment prevailed during the period, with some further terrifying cases occurring under Taiwudi.⁸⁰ Moreover, the 'Laws on Banditry' (*Zeiliu* 賊律), which envisaged the death penalty for rebels, were expressly applied for religious leaders accused of deluding the masses with wicked words (*yaoyan huozhong* 妖言惑眾).⁸¹ This background gives some context to the decrees of 444 and 446, which extended the punishment to the families of those transgressing them. The execution of eminent monks in 444 should also be seen against this general policy.

The distinctive aspect of the main edict of 446, however, was that all monks, regardless of

⁷⁷ Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:66, translating *WS*, 114.3034. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:190, 192. Orzech notes the crown prince's plea in passing without further comments. See Orzech, 1998:112-113.

⁷⁸ *WS*, 111.2874-75.

⁷⁹ *WS*, 2.24.

⁸⁰ *WS*, 4.84.

⁸¹ *WS*, 111.2884-85

age, were to be buried alive. It may be relevant to note that Taiwudi had rushed to Chang'an to quell the Gai Wu rebellion one month before the persecution, and mass executions of people involved in the uprising were already taking place.⁸² On the other hand, execution by live burial is rarely documented, and there is no evidence that it was employed on other occasions during the rebellion. We know from an entry in the *Nan Qi shu* that during a raid against the Liu Song in 450,⁸³ Taiwudi would put Buddhist monks (*daoren* 道人) into cages.⁸⁴ The *Gaoseng zhuan* also mentions that monks contravening the imperial orders would be put to death, although again without indicating the method of execution.⁸⁵

I would argue that the very perpetration of mass killings in 446, if we accept it on the basis of the extant sources, would suggest a lack of planning. The scale and severity of the persecution stands in fact in such a stark contrast to the overall restraint of the earlier purges that it seems difficult to see the former as proceeding from the latter. Moreover, in 446, when the Wei emperor went to Chang'an, he may have convinced himself that the Buddhist community represented a major threat to the imperial authority, since the previous edicts had failed to bring it under control. In understanding this aspect of the persecution, we may note Liu Shufen and her argument. Liu maintains that the persecution ensued from Taiwudi's anxiety towards the ruling house of the Northern Liang and its tribal connection with Gai Wu, since both belonged to the Lushui Hu. Liu's theory is not immediately clear but its general thrust is that Taiwudi would fret at a return of the Juqu clan.⁸⁶ In 439, the Northern Liang had been destroyed but remaining members of the ruling house had fled to Gaochang and other cities in the Tarim basin, where they stayed until the 450s.⁸⁷ When Gai Wu challenged the emperor in 446, the latter feared that Gai Wu and the remaining members of Juqu clan could form a united force against him.⁸⁸ Importantly, since Gai Wu and the Juqu clan were both devoted to Buddhism, the latter could favour a common front extending to the Liu Song imperial court, whose diplomatic relation with Gai Wu was forged around that time.⁸⁹

Liu Shufen's theory is thought-provoking, and has the merit of offering a broader political context for the crisis of 446. The brutality deployed on that occasion also suggests that the

⁸² *BS*, 2.58; *WS*, 4.100.

⁸³ This year for the incident is according to Tsukamoto, 1974b:64.

⁸⁴ *NQS*, 57.990. Tsukamoto, 1974a:64.

⁸⁵ *GSZ*, j.10. T.50.2059.392b.

⁸⁶ Liu, 2008:10-25; 2005:3.

⁸⁷ *WS*, 4.93-94. Liu, 2008:11-12; 2005:11-12.

⁸⁸ Liu, 2008:43-45; Liu, 2005:14.

⁸⁹ Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:168-169, n. 1; Zürcher, 2002:26-28.

persecution may have been aimed at something more than the Buddhist community.⁹⁰ In line with this aspect, we may add that at approximately the same time, Buddhism played a noticeable role in international politics, as the Liu Song dynasty was seen as an important Buddhist stronghold.⁹¹ This background may also offer a clue as to why Taiwudi threatened the Liu Song emperor in a letter by saying that he would send “Brahmins” (*poluomen* 婆羅門) skilled in spells to harass the south.⁹² Although the letter was written around 450, it may still reflect Taiwudi’s attitude toward the south and Buddhism during the persecution. In the letter, the Wei emperor notably mentions Gai Wu’s rebellion and the alliance between these two sides.⁹³ Again, probably it was during that skirmish that Taiwudi is alleged to have caged captured Buddhist monks en route, perhaps frustrated by the flourishing Buddhist community there. A further point is that when Gai Wu made his appeal to the southern court, he not only flattered the Liu Song emperor as the legitimate ruler, but also used the most uncomplimentary terms in attacking the Northern Wei sovereign, and even challenged the very legitimate existence of his dynasty.⁹⁴ Taiwudi’s sensitivity to the Song-Gai Wu alliance would further explain the fact that in the edict of 446, Buddhism and the Han dynasty were both attacked. The Liu Song, who claimed descent from the Han, and Gai Wu were both supportive of Buddhism, and attacking the latter could also be a way to strike out at Taiwudi’s political enemies.

3.4 Case Studies: Three Individuals

In the seventh century, the Buddhist monk Daoshi’s 道世 (?-683) would offer the following summary of the persecutions that Buddhism had suffered before his days:

Ever since Buddhism was diffused to the East (i.e. China), it has already been persecuted three times by malicious kings in Zhendan (China). Firstly, Helian Bobo, who was the ruler of the kingdom of Xia, after conquering Chang’an, killed all the monks he encountered there. Secondly, Taiwudi of the Wei dynasty took advice from Cui Hao and persecuted the Three Jewels. Shortly afterwards the emperor was remorseful and he punished Cui Hao with the five severest penalties. Thirdly, Emperor Wu of the Zhou dynasty merely took action to laicize monks. These three emperors did not have a long reign as a result of their poor treatment of Buddhism. They suffered painful diseases while they were alive and went to hell after death.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Liu also discusses about this aspect of the persecution. Liu, 2005:17.

⁹¹ *SoS*, 97.2380-85; Zürcher, 2002:36-42.

⁹² *SoS*, 95.2347; *QHWW*, 1.3517b.

⁹³ *SoS*, 95.2346-47; *QHWW*, 1.3517a-b.

⁹⁴ *SoS*, 95.2339-41. Cf. He, 1992:41.

⁹⁵ *FYZL*, j.98. T.53.2122.1012c. This passage is echoed in *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.392c-393a.

In this narrative not only the emperor but also imperial officials are blamed for the persecutions. Daoshi's understanding as a Buddhist monk of the Buddhism-state interrelation suggests an interesting pattern in all the repressions of his faith known to him. Instead of exploring their reasons, he put the blame upon rulers and officials for inflicting suffering on Buddhism. In the work of the Song Buddhist historian Zhipan (*ca.* 1200-1275), this pattern is fully spelled out, and in all the persecutions, the emperors share the responsibility with someone else, this time including Taoist priests:

I would comment that from ancient times, any master of the people (i.e. ruler) who destroyed Buddhism (*hui Fo* 毀佛) was always assisted by his ministers in order to achieve his goal. As such, the Wei Emperor Taiwudi relied on Cui Hao, the Zhou Emperor Wudi counted on Zhang Bin 張賓 and Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩; and the Tang Emperor Wuzong relied on Li Deyu 李德裕 and Zhao Guizhen 趙歸真. Hence they caused humiliation to the grand law (i.e. Buddhism), but rulers and ministers all met a dreadful retribution. How such a pity that would be to each of them! As to implementing purges (*shatai* 沙汰), there were for example Huan Xuan 桓玄 in the Jin dynasty, Fu Yi 傅奕 (554-639) in the Tang dynasty, Yao Chong 姚崇 (651-721) under the reign of the Bright Emperor (Xuanzong *r.* 712-756), Li Xun 李訓 under Wenzong 文宗 (*r.* 827-840). But all these occasions were restrained by the current circumstances which would start now but ended then. Therefore, these were all small troubles of one time, which cannot be compared with the cruelty of the three Wus' persecutions. As for Emperor Shizong 世宗 (*r.* 954-959) of the [Later] Zhou (951-960), it was in his nature to destroy Buddhism, but he could not find an assistant. Han Yu 韓愈 and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 had it in their nature to attack Buddhism, but they could not meet their lord. Had Zhou Shizong got his Cui Hao, even more *śramaṇas* would have been killed than with Taiwudi's cruelties. [Similarly], had Han [Yu] and Ouyang [Xiu] lived under the reigns of the three Wus, the destruction of statues and the killing of monks would have been not less than those caused by Cui [Hao] and Li [Deyu]. Cui Hao met his death by being cut in two whereas [Li] Deyu died at his place of exile. ... Lu Zhi remarks: Tuizhi (Han Yu) stopped attacking Buddhism after he met Dadian 大顛 (a Chan master; 732-824); Zu Xiu says: Yongshu (Ouyang Xiu) dissolved his [anti-Buddhist] sentiment after he met Yuantong (a Buddhist monk). It is true that only Han [Yu] and Ouyang [Xiu] died peacefully. It is proven that these knowledgeable ones (virtuous monks) were able to alter bad deeds by their virtuous power.⁹⁶

In the above, a cooperation of three parties is assumed behind each persecution. They are the emperor, the minister and the Taoist priest.⁹⁷ Interestingly, these three parties somehow correspond to the political, cultural and religious factors of the persecutions. In the following

⁹⁶ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.386b-c.

⁹⁷ The Taoist Kou Qianzhi is not mentioned here in connection to the persecution of 446, but Zhipan does involve him with Taiwudi and Cui Hao elsewhere in his work. *FZTJ*, j.36. T.49.2035.345b.

case studies we shall explore in some detail the possible motivations of the people who have been held accountable for the Northern Wei persecution. By studying these individuals and their personal association with the persecution, some traits of the relationship between Buddhism and the state will hopefully emerge.

3.4.1 Cui Hao 崔浩 (381-450)

Cui Hao was a member of the Cui 崔 clan of Qinghe 清河 (in modern Hebei), one of the four most influential clans in fifth-century northern China.⁹⁸ Both he and his father had held important posts in the imperial court of the Tuoba Wei.⁹⁹ However, sometime during the reign of Mingyandi and the beginning of that of Taiwudi (424), he was removed from his official post. In the subsequent seclusion, Cui met his future fellow courtier Kou Qianzhi, an erudite Taoist priest with whom he was soon to establish a lasting friendship.¹⁰⁰ Kou was reportedly convinced that Cui was a man of great talent, despite his current misfortune.¹⁰¹ As Tsukamoto noted, however, Cui Hao's mother was the grand-daughter of Lu Shen 盧諶 (285-351), who had close associations with the Taoist community. This would be no doubt an important reason for Cui Hao's long-term connection with Kou Qianzhi.¹⁰² Between 425 and 426, Cui was called back to the Wei court and was appointed as a senior advisor to the emperor.¹⁰³ He then was involved in all the important imperial matters until his death in 450.¹⁰⁴ His fortunes may have rested in part on his astrological skills, which seem to have weighed in his promotion under Mingyandi's reign.¹⁰⁵ This may also explain the fact that when Cui befriended Kou, what impressed him most was the latter's knowledge of diagrams and prognostics.¹⁰⁶ Both of them later urged the emperor to change his reign title to the Taoist-sounding Taiping zhenjun.

Concerning Cui Hao's attitude towards Buddhism, several episodes are worth mentioning. Cui Hao's wife is said to have been a devoted Buddhist, but whenever she recited Buddhist scriptures, notably the *Diamond sutra*, Cui would seize and burn them, throwing the ashes in

⁹⁸ Chen, 2001a:146-147; Tsukamoto, 1974b:41; Nomura, 1968:364-365.

⁹⁹ Lu, 2001:77-81; Wang, 2006:65; Tsukamoto, 1974b:41-42; Nomura, 1968:365; and above, sec. 2.3.

¹⁰⁰ *WS*, 35.815; *BS*, 21.778-779.

¹⁰¹ *WS*, 35.814-815; *BS*, 21.778.

¹⁰² Tsukamoto, 1974b:42-43.

¹⁰³ *WS*, 35.815; *BS*, 21.779.

¹⁰⁴ Wang, 2006:65-69; Mather, 1979:111-112.

¹⁰⁵ *WS*, 35.807-812.

¹⁰⁶ Chen, 2001a:138-141.

the toilet.¹⁰⁷ At another time, Cui Hao teased his distant cousins because of the latter's humbler family background as well as their association with Buddhism. The story runs as follows:

Cui Hao, the prefect of Jizhou [Cui] Ze 曠 and the governor of Yingyang [Cui] Mo 模 were of similar ages. Cui Hao was the eldest, next was Mo and then Ze. The three of them had different ancestors, but Mo and Ze were kin. Cui Hao took pride in that members of his family had all been ministers for generations during the former Wei and Jin dynasties. Hence he always humiliated Mo and Ze. Mo would counter: "Taojian (Cui Hao's nickname), you may insult me, but why do you abuse my kin Zhou'er (i.e. Cui Ze)?" Shizu (i.e. Taiwudi) heard this story, and he therefore spared these two families when he executed Cui Hao and his clan. Cui Hao had no faith in the way of the Buddha, but Cui Mo was deeply devoted to it. Wherever he was, even covered in dust, he would pay his devotions to the [Buddha's] statues. Cui Hao would laugh at him and say: "You have dust on your head and you bow to the barbarian god (*hu shen* 胡神)".¹⁰⁸

The anecdote suggests that Cui Hao's arrogance may also have come from his privileged family background, one of the standards by which he would judge people.¹⁰⁹ Following this logic, Cui Hao may have ridiculed Buddhism as a religion followed by those less privileged than him. However, other stories cast him in a different light. Cui, for example, associated himself with Wang Huilong 王慧龍 (d.u.), a fervent Buddhist whom he knew as such,¹¹⁰ but never showed any negative attitude towards him. On the contrary, Cui Hao even irritated the emperor by assuming Wang's noble pedigree based on his physical appearance.¹¹¹ As Xiang Nanyan points out, such cases suggest that Cui Hao might have been concerned more about social class than religious affiliation.¹¹²

It has been argued that Cui Hao was a devoted Taoist and regarded Kou Qianzhi as his master, thus implying a religious factor in his dislike of Buddhism.¹¹³ This cannot be said with certainty, for they disagreed with each other regarding the persecution of 446. Kou seems to have been disappointed by Cui Hao's radicalism and advocacy of violence against

¹⁰⁷ *WS*, 35.826, and with more details in *GHMJ*, j.2. *T.52.2103.102c*. According to another account, he would do this with anyone caught reading a Buddhist scripture. *GJFDLH*, j.1. *T.52.2104.368a*; *MBJ*, j.3. *T.51.2082.796b*; *SQ*, 8.282.

¹⁰⁸ *WS*, 35.827; *ZZTJ*, 125.3944.

¹⁰⁹ See *ZZTJ*, 125.3941. Cf. Chen, 2001a:153-154; Zhou, 1963:118-120, 1985:342-349; Tsukamoto, 1974b:51-52.

¹¹⁰ Wang Huilong was raised in times of unrest by a Buddhist monk named Sengbin 僧彬 (according to rumors, he was in fact his son). When he died, his friends built a Buddhist temple by his graveyard. *WS*, 38.875-877.

¹¹¹ *WS*, 38.875-876. Cf. Lu, 2001:74-75.

¹¹² Xiang, 1984:52-53.

¹¹³ Chen, 2001a:154-158. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:43; Mather, 1979:117.

Buddhist monks.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, it might be noted that Cui Hao disliked Taoist classics such as *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, saying that these texts must be forgeries, and especially Laozi would have written a better book.¹¹⁵ We may wonder, then, as to how Cui Hao might have influenced the emperor and changed the course of his religious policy. Cui's tenure of office almost exactly paralleled Taiwudi's reign, and from the 430s onwards, he was one of the most, if not the most, trusted officials at court. His power as advisor was indeed enormous, and even extended to military matters.¹¹⁶ When the crown prince urged the emperor to drop a costly Taoist project, Taiwudi refused to intervene, merely arguing that Cui Hao backed it. For this reason, we may follow Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) as he stresses Cui Hao's responsibility in the persecution.¹¹⁷

Against this background, we may assume that three reasons would have aroused Cui Hao's antagonism toward Buddhism. From a cultural point of view, Cui Hao was a traditionalist, whose pride in Confucian ideas may have made him reject Buddhism outright. The popularity of Buddhism in some areas would have only intensified Cui's antipathy toward it. In consolidating the ruling ideology, any elements regarded as heterodox would have to be destroyed, and Buddhism would be regarded as such.¹¹⁸ This may have eventually proved more important than his occasionally more tolerant attitude at the personal level, and would also explain his disagreement with Kou Qianzhi. Cui Hao may have thus championed those aristocrats who wanted Buddhism eradicated, but other members of the elite supporting the religion would have been at odds with him. Hence it has been suggested that Cui Hao's very radical stance toward Buddhism may have been an important reason for his political downfall.¹¹⁹ We will not comment further on that, as the evidence only confirms that Cui Hao angered the emperor with his indelicate handling of the historical records on the ruling clan. On the other hand, the brutal execution of Cui Hao, which was extended to four related clans apart from his own, suggests a political disgrace going well beyond the religious argument at the Wei court.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ WS, 114.3035; Tsukamoto, 1974a:195; 197.

¹¹⁵ WS, 35.812.

¹¹⁶ Mather, 1979:116; He, 1993:5-7; Gu, 1994b:159. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:41-42.

¹¹⁷ ZZTJ, 124.3923.

¹¹⁸ Tsukamoto, 1974b:50-52; Mather, 1979:114-115.

¹¹⁹ Gu, 1996:160-161. Cf. Lu, 2001:94-96. The dynastic history corroborates this scenario to some extent, as it states that when Cui Hao was brutally executed on Taiwudi's order, people ridiculed him by saying that his violent death was the retribution of his role in the persecution. WS, 35.826.

¹²⁰ I therefore agree with Wang Yitong, who suggests more complex causes for Cui Hao's end. Wang, 2006:51-53.

3.4.2 Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365-448)

Since Kou Qianzhi was a Taoist priest, his purported involvement in the persecution can be viewed as a religious factor. As Grim and Finke suggested, a strong alliance between the state and a favoured religion may result in the expansion of that particular religion at the expenses of all others, which will be persecuted or suppressed.¹²¹ The case of Kou Qianzhi will enable us to test this thesis on the Northern Wei persecution. To start with, in comparison with Cui Hao, Kou Qianzhi was a more reclusive figure. It is fairly certain that Kou was a learned Taoist priest from the Celestial Master tradition.¹²² In terms of social status, Kou was a member of the elite, and his brother Kou Zanzhi 寇讚之 (*d.* 448 CE) held prefectural appointments for many years.¹²³ Kou is said to have been interested in Taoist practices from an early date, but it was not until he met the mysterious Chenggong Xing 成公興 (*fl.* 400-417?) that he developed his main religious ideas.¹²⁴ Chenggong Xing was knowledgeable about Indian medicine and an expert in astrological calculations.¹²⁵ He may have had links of some significance with the Buddhist community in the north, for he had studied under Tanying 曇影 (?-418),¹²⁶ a monk in Kumārajīva's group.¹²⁷ Possibly also due to this connection, Kou seems to have been familiar with at least some aspects of Buddhism.¹²⁸ From the end of the fourth century until around 424, he lived on Mount Song 嵩山 near Luoyang. During that time, Kou is said to have received two revelations from the Most High Lord Lao (Taishang Laojun 太上老君), the deified Laozi, one in 415, and the second one in 423, just before he was invited to the court.¹²⁹

After Kou's arrival and Cui Hao's insistent recommendation, Emperor Taiwudi invited

¹²¹ Grim and Finke, 2011:70.

¹²² WS, 114.3049. Cf. Mather, 1979:103; Tsukamoto, 1974a:305, 307 n. 2. In the *Yun ji qi jian* 雲笈七籤, Kou is mentioned as a Taoist priest of unknown origin, who was popular as a teacher and healer in northern China. *YJQJ*, 110.2412. In a recent study, Liu Yi contends that Kou Qianzhi was not a Celestial Master priest. Liu Yi, 2002:274-275. This may be speculative, for Kou presented his teachings as coming from a new form of the Celestial Master tradition. Cf. Kobayashi, 1995:21.

¹²³ WS, 114.3049. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:305, 307, 309; Chen, 2001a:120-123; Mather, 1979:106; Yu, 2000:353-354.

¹²⁴ WS, 114.3049-50. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:305-311; Ware (trans.), 1933b:226-228; Lei, 2005:5-7; Mather, 1979:107-112, David C. Yu (trans.), 2000:354.

¹²⁵ For more about Chenggong Xing, see Tsukamoto, 1974a:307-308, n. 3.

¹²⁶ Tanying's biography is in *GSZ*, j.6. *T.50.2059.364a*.

¹²⁷ WS, 114.3031. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:158-159, 308; Mather, 1979:112; Chen, 2001a:126-127.

¹²⁸ Chen, 2001a:127-133; Mather, 1979:113-114.

¹²⁹ Apart from the account in the *Wei shu*, see CFYG, 53.586a-587a; SS, 35.1093; *YJQJ*, 110.2412. Cf. Liu, 2002:276-277; Yang, 1956:17; Fukunaga 1987:71-72.

more Taoist priests to the capital and officially proclaimed his support to Taoism.¹³⁰ Kou secured increasing trust from the emperor because of his predictions and advice during some military campaigns, in particular in 426.¹³¹ However, Kou's hard work only paid off in 440, when he finally convinced the emperor to adopt the reign title Taiping zhenjun. In 442 Taiwudi also received from Kou Taoist registers of initiation.¹³² Thereafter, the emperor offered increasing support to the Taoist priest, and sponsored the creation of a Taoist establishment, where Kou's disciples were also accommodated.¹³³

As mentioned, Kou had connections with the Buddhists during the years of his religious apprenticeship. This may be the reason why he at least tried to dissuade the emperor before the main persecution was launched.¹³⁴ We have also seen that Kou initiated major reforms in Taoist organization and ritual.¹³⁵ As some scholars have indicated, these reforms particularly focused on ethical and social aspects, so as to eliminate any ground for conflict between Taoism and Confucianism, and more generally with the imperial ideology.¹³⁶ He could thus dismiss the anti-dynastic rhetoric of earlier Taoist leaders.¹³⁷

Erik Zürcher has been among those assuming that it was Kou Qianzhi "who urged the emperor to eradicate the 'barbarian' faith, and instead adopt his own brand of reformed Daoism".¹³⁸ This view, however, does not seem to be supported by the evidence. As Tsukamoto rightly notes, in the texts that Kou presented to Taiwudi, several allusions to Buddhism and Buddhist monks can be found, although they are seen as inferior to Taoism.¹³⁹ Yet the legitimate existence of Buddhism was recognized. On the other hand, since Kou was

¹³⁰ *WS*, 42.946, 114.3052-3053; *SS*, 35.1093-94; *BS*, 27.990. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:321-322; Ware, 1933b:235; Mather, 1979:115; Chen, 2001a:120-123. Tsukamoto also points to the mention of Taoist establishments at the Northern Wei capital in the *Shui jing zhu* 水經注 (*Notes on the Classic of Waterways*), an early sixth-century source. Tsukamoto, 1974a:322, n. 4.

¹³¹ *WS*, 114.3053; *CFYG*, 53.586a-b. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:325-327; Mather, 1979:115.

¹³² *CFYG*, 53.587b. Ching, 1997:222; Mather, 1979:118; John Lagerwey has important remarks in this connection: "the persecution of Buddhism came to a halt after Shizu's assassination in 452, but a number of precedents had been set: the first and perhaps most important was the attack on Buddhism as foreign, for this argument would resurface in every Buddhist-Daoist confrontation thereafter, in the Northern Zhou, the Tang, the Song and the Yuan. The second is that all successive emperors of the Northern Wei received a Daoist initiation, as would the next persecutor of Buddhism, Wudi of the Northern Zhou (r. 661-578)." Lagerwey, 2010:32.

¹³³ *WS*, 114.3052-53. Tsukamoto, 1974a:321-324.

¹³⁴ *WS*, 114.3035; cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:184-188. *GSZ*, j.25. T.50.2060.646c; cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:70-71; Ren, et al, 1990:217; Qing, 1996a:447-449; Liu, 2008:30.

¹³⁵ *SSJGL*, j.2. T.49.2037.789a. Tang, 1991:493; Mather, 1979:110-111; Tsukamoto, 1974a:106-107; Yang, 1956:21-26; Ren, et al, 1990:202-208.

¹³⁶ Qing, 1996a:407-412; Mather, 1979:112.

¹³⁷ *WS*, 114.3051. Tsukamoto, 1974a:312-314; Ge, 1987:143-144.

¹³⁸ Zürcher, 2002:28.

¹³⁹ Tsukamoto, 1974a:107. See also Chen, 2001a:126-137.

an influential presence at court, he would have had ample opportunities to instigate the destruction of Buddhism, had he wished to do so. But that is not the case, and even at the last minute he seems to have tried to restrain the emperor.

In conclusion, beyond a passing mention in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, there seems to be no solid evidence to implicate Kou Qianzhi in the persecution of Buddhism.¹⁴⁰ In fact, his deathbed testimony attests to the fact that he was not confident about the future of his own religious community, implying that it would end soon.¹⁴¹ It is perhaps not so far-fetched to speculate that despite his tireless efforts, Kou was aware of the impermanent nature of political patronage. Factional court politics might have convinced Kou to take a milder approach to the Buddhist community. Yet Kou's religious purpose and Cui Hao's political agenda were bound to converge. Kou Qianzhi was then caught in the middle of the persecution and, willingly or unwillingly, involved with those who launched it. On the other hand, it is implausible to see Kou Qianzhi as personifying a religious motivation, which would have contributed to the ultimate destruction of Buddhism. Kou and his religio-political ideas may have been exploited at a time when the tension between Buddhism and the court was mounting. The state's preference for his religious views may have made the attack against competitors more likely, in accordance with the religious competition scenario of Grim and Finke. Still, we should not overlook the exclusive authority that the imperial government held in medieval China. This may well have been the foremost factor behind the persecution, as I discuss below.

3.4.3 Emperor Taiwudi (太武帝 408-452; r. 423-452)

Before discussing the role of Taiwudi, some words should be spent about the heir apparent. Tuoba Huang was Taiwudi's first son and was made crown prince in 432 when he was five years old.¹⁴² However, the prince died tragically in 451 when he was only twenty-four years old, one year before the emperor himself was killed.¹⁴³ In 444, Tuoba Huang was also chief minister of the imperial government.¹⁴⁴ This important post enabled him to delay significantly the enforcement of the persecution in 446. Apart from that, it is hard to know how the anti-Buddhist policy affected his relation with Cui Hao. However tense that relation may have been, the latter was able to hold on to the power centre for another four years after

¹⁴⁰ See *GSZ*, j.10. T.50.2059.392b.

¹⁴¹ *WS*, 114.3053.

¹⁴² *WS*, 4.107.

¹⁴³ *WS*, 4.109.

¹⁴⁴ *WS*, 4.96; *SoS*, 95.2337-38; *BS*, 4.56.

the persecution until 450. Tuoba Huang, on the other hand, did not suggest to his father that the persecution should be lifted after Cui Hao's death.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, as we mentioned, when he advised his father to abolish a costly Taoist establishment, he was told that the project was lobbied for by Cui Hao. Such instances would suggest that Cui Hao's influence in the court was indeed formidable. Even if the prince had allies in the court, they seem to have been living in the shadow of Cui Hao's faction. That said, however, regardless of Cui Hao or the prince, the emperor's decision was final.

Emperor Taiwudi was one of the most able, if not the ablest, emperors of the Northern Wei dynasty. Although he ascended to the throne in 423 when he was only fifteen, he soon established himself as a military leader, and managed to conquer several small kingdoms between 430 and 439, thus effectively unifying the northern part of China.¹⁴⁶ Despite repeated failures, Taiwudi made no less than three major attempts to overpower the Liu Song.¹⁴⁷ This might be one of the reasons why he was depicted as a merciless barbarian in the dynastic histories of the south. We have seen how the *Nan Qi shu* noted his maltreatment of Buddhist monks. In Buddhist sources, Taiwudi's image was further tainted, for he is said to have died from a painful death and suffered in hell.¹⁴⁸ In reality, as observed, Taiwudi had not disdained to take part in Buddhist activities during the early years of his reign. The emperor met Kou Qianzhi around 426 but it was not until 440-442 that the emperor showed a clear preference for Kou's religious ideas, as reflected in the adoption of the reign-title Taiping zhenjun. Even the small religious purges prior to 446 had focused chiefly on the suppression of heterodox and potentially subversive practice.¹⁴⁹ Xuangao and Huichong were executed around the time of these purges, but there is no record of other monks meeting the same punishment. Executions of monks that took place during Taiwudi's military campaigns may have been aimed at re-establishing imperial authority rather than religious in nature.

Having clarified the background of the persecution of 446, we shall now summarise the main points concerning Emperor Taiwudi's role in it. In a word, this role was crucial, for the final decision would have to be made by him. But it would be simplistic to explain the persecution with the emperor's brutality or fanatical devotion to Taoism. Although we do not have a complete record of the emperor's religious policy, its main lines of development are sufficiently clear. As we have seen, Taiwudi had an increasingly close connection with Kou

¹⁴⁵ *WS*, 114.3035. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:195-197.

¹⁴⁶ See above, sec. 2.1.

¹⁴⁷ *SoS*, 95.2330.

¹⁴⁸ *BSL*, j.7. T.52.2113.619a.

¹⁴⁹ Tsukamoto, 1974a:58-59.

Qianzhi after the latter was invited to the court, and occasionally he consulted the priest on military matters. As a result, Kou and his disciples received the emperor's patronage. Taiwudi's endorsement of Kou's Taoism reached its climax when the latter conferred upon the former Taoist registers of initiation in 442. At one point, he is said to have engaged in Taoist devotions daily.¹⁵⁰ His support, however, was not without reservations. The following example is indicative of the emperor's attitude. When the crown prince expressed his opposition to Kou Qianzhi's plans to erect a large Taoist temple, objecting to the huge expenditures it would involve,

Shizu (i.e. Taiwudi) totally agreed with what Gongzong (posthumous title of the prince) had said. But because Cui Hao firmly supported [the project], it was difficult to defy his wish. Having considered for a while, [the emperor] said: "I too know he could not succeed but since it has been started, why scruple about five or three hundred [days of] labour".¹⁵¹

The episode shows Taiwudi as rather pragmatic in his patronage of Kou Qianzhi, which is said to have increased under the influence of Cui Hao.¹⁵² In any case, Kou Qianzhi's attitude during the persecution makes any assumption that the emperor launched it due to his fondness of Taoism rather implausible.

In general, the *Wei shu* presents a rather linear trajectory for Taiwudi's religious policy. If we follow this account, initially the emperor assented to the old policy by revering Buddhism. However, he was a man of military action rather than of religious or intellectual pursuits.¹⁵³ There seems to have been a religious vacuum at court before Kou Qianzhi was introduced to the emperor, after which things gradually changed. Such a change, however, did not happen overnight.¹⁵⁴ The attacks against the Buddhist clergy, as we have seen, also went through a number of different stages, and the extensive support that Buddhism enjoyed at the Wei court, certainly not limited to the crown prince, must have played a critical role in the process.¹⁵⁵ If

¹⁵⁰ "[He] would follow the feast and offer prayers, as well as worship six times a day". *WS*, 114.3053. Cf. Ware (trans.), 1933b:248.

¹⁵¹ *WS*, 114.3053; *CFYG*, 53.587b-588a. Cf. Ware (trans.), 1933b:238.

¹⁵² *BS*, 2.55. Mather, 1979:115.

¹⁵³ Caswell goes so far as to say that "in both Taiwu Di's support of Buddhism and his persecution of it, the crux of the matter was Buddhism as an instrument of power and authority which could be used by the emperor or destroyed utterly. There was, in a very real sense, no halfway position allowed or taken in either case". Caswell, 1988:21-22.

¹⁵⁴ As we have seen above, at least sixteen years passed between Kou's introduction at court (424) and Taiwudi's public display of support to Taoism, starting with the adoption of the era name Taiping zhenjun in 440.

¹⁵⁵ For example, Gao Yun 高允, a senior official who assisted Cui Hao in compiling the official chronicle of the Northern Wei but also one of the most trusted associates of the crown prince, is

there was a turning point, this is more likely to have been when Emperor Taiwudi actually encountered Buddhism during his military conquests. His stance toward the Buddhist community progressively hardened in the following years, and his religious policy changed accordingly under the weight of volatile social conditions and delicate political circumstances. Those conditions and circumstances can be seen as the indirect but effective causes of the persecution.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This part of the thesis focused on the first great persecution of Buddhism in China under the Northern Wei dynasty. I started from an overview of the social, historical and cultural contexts of the Tuoba state. This was then followed by a discussion of Buddhism and its development in northern China up to the fifth century, as well as of the Northern Wei religious policy towards it. The general picture of religious groups and their interaction was also considered. In the second section, I presented an analysis of the Northern Wei persecution of Buddhism and of its historical causes. Finally, some remarks were offered on the three main historical personalities behind the persecution and their role in it.

The Northern Wei religious policy up to the first part of Taiwudi's reign was consistent and generally favourable to Buddhism. Nevertheless, the Northern Wei may have been the very first dynasty to successfully implement some forms of political control over the Buddhist clergy. Beyond the Buddhist ideals of polity and kingship, the experience of the Tuoba state presents us with a first significant example of confrontation between Buddhism and the political authority, in which the latter developed attempts to restrain and direct the former. The appointment of Faguo as monastic convenor in 397 and this monk's statement on venerating the emperor as the Buddha are highly symbolic of such a situation. Turning to the persecution, the Buddhism-state relationship could be seen from a different angle. Having combed both the original sources and the insights of modern scholarship, we are inclined to assume that the chain of events up until the minor religious purges between 438 and 444 should be seen as separate from the major persecution in 446. As such, the factors of these two sets of purges and persecution should be distinguished. Up until the execution of two

described in his biographies as a Buddhist devotee who was a monk for a time and frequently sponsored vegetarian feasts. *WS*, 48.1089; *BS*, 31.1131. Cf. Kamata, 2002c:340-342; Tsukamoto, 1974a:181-182, n. 3. Gao also wrote elegant rhapsodies in praise of Buddhism (*GHMJ*, j.29. T.52.2103.b-c) and a eulogy commemorating the monk Huishi (*WS*, 114.3033; cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:180). Whether or not Xuangao's execution was the result of a violation of the imperial decree of 444, it is certain that his association with the crown prince did not square so well with the emperor's stance at that point.

eminent Buddhist monks in 444, the imperial government had sought to restrain the Buddhist community, as part of a broader attempt to establish control over religious activities. However, the great persecution of 446 conveys a very different message; that is, the failure of the previous religious policy in general, and the inadequacy of the implementation of such a policy. Even the unclaimed properties in the Chang'an monastery in the incident that sparked the final repression can be interpreted as an indication of a dependent-sponsor relationship, which should have been a taboo after the decree of 444. Moreover, the two-year interval may suggest that while the new policies were working at the capital, they were failing elsewhere and notably in Chang'an. The crown prince's somewhat awkward plea can be read as a dignified acquiescence to the persecution, which further points to the disarray of the state's attempts to regulate Buddhism by then. The persecution was then a powerful if traumatic way of restoring the preferred relationship between Buddhism and the imperial court.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is rather logical to conclude that since Buddhism was not well regarded by some influential imperial officials such as Cui Hao, coupled with the unstable social and political conditions, as well as the inconsistent religious policy, the persecution would be a matter of time. All the other factors, such as political prophecy and court intrigue, may have merely precipitated the eventuality of the persecution. Thus, the reputed maxim of the Indian King Ajātaśatru regarding the separation between the king and the religious community resonates here in a different perspective.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the Northern Wei religious policy was based on the premise that Buddhism should be supported so that it would guide people in the society. In other words, Buddhist monks should keep their monastic community in conformity with the imperial religious policy, which would be beneficial to the populace. The professed separation of Buddhism and the state therefore was premised upon this expectation of conformity. When Taiwudi attacked Buddhism, he could thus resort to an argument that would be used frequently afterwards: that since Buddhist monks diverged from their religious vocation, no tolerance should be accorded to them.¹⁵⁷ Such a situation will suggest two preliminary considerations regarding the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China.

Firstly, the basis of that relationship is the inevitability of the power of the imperial court. It has emerged from our discussion that, under the Northern Wei, even Taiwudi was not entirely and consistently opposed to Buddhism. As we repeatedly suggested, it is simply not convincing to explain Taiwudi's persecutory edicts as the result of his abhorrence of

¹⁵⁶ See above Introduction, footnote 35.

¹⁵⁷ *WS*, 114.3034; Tsukamoto, 1974a:184-189. Cf. *SS*, 35.1098.

Buddhism. I have argued that the minor religious purges up to 444 should not be seen as planned steps in preparation for the final persecution. However, those purges reveal to a considerable extent the increasing tension between the Buddhist community and the court. The success of Cui Hao's lobbying for a total persecution and Kou Qianzhi's reluctance during the crisis point to yet another aspect of the confrontation between Buddhism and the state. It may be tempting, based on the former, to follow Orzech's view of the persecution as an attempt to remove Buddhism from Chinese culture. Yet we should not fail to note the significant reservations of Kou Qianzhi, who at the time, in the north, was the leader of the main Chinese religious alternative to Buddhism.

Hence while reading the persecution as an attempt to eradicate Buddhism from China seems problematic, we can understand that episode as a crisis unveiling the tension between the Buddhist community and the imperial elite. By bringing that tension to a breakdown, however, such a crisis may well have hastened in traumatic ways the process of accommodation between these two sides. I shall test this hypothesis in the following parts of the thesis.

PART TWO
The Northern Zhou 北周 (557-581) Persecution (574-577)

CHAPTER FOUR
Preliminary Notes and a Brief History of the Time

When Cui Hao, its supposed instigator, was executed in 450, the persecution of Buddhism was relaxed, and it came to an end after Taiwudi was murdered one year later.¹ Shortly thereafter, a new emperor announced the restoration of Buddhism. An edict on 6 January 453 admitted that mistakes had been made during the repression, which was now presented as originally aimed only at criminal elements infiltrated in the ranks of the Buddhist clergy. The edict thus stated that in implementing a well-intentioned policy, the imperial officials had misunderstood the order (*shi zhi* 失旨) and enforced a total proscription.² This reconstruction of the crisis is revealing of how the court saw its relation with the Buddhist monastic community: the latter was allowed to exist, but it was not independent, nor was it exempted from imperial regulation. The state reverted to controlling Buddhism rather than attempting to destroy it.

As we have mentioned, the very first monastic convener had been appointed by the Northern Wei emperor in 397.³ But when Faguo died, the importance and relevance of the post descended into obscurity.⁴ Instead, it was the Taoist Kou Qianzhi, although unofficially, who held a role similar to that of Faguo. Kou seems to have endeavoured to restrain the persecution of Buddhism, although he largely failed to achieve his objective. In the ensuing discussion, we shall see that a more developed religious policy played an important role in maintaining a functional relationship between the Buddhist community and the court. Despite a number of restrictive measures, there was no wholesale persecution after the first one until a new total proscription occurred in 574.

4.1 Social and Historical Contexts

In 452, Taiwudi was murdered by a eunuch named Zong Ai 宗愛 (*d.* 452), and the imperial

¹ On this transition, see Tsukamoto, 1974b:69-72, and the discussion below.

² WS, 114.3036; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:69-70; CFYG, 51.568a. Cf. Tang, 1991:497; Kamata, 2002c:319. For the date of the edict, see WS, 5.112.

³ WS, 114.3030-31. Caswell, 1988:21; Kamata, 2002c:270-271.

⁴ Kamata, 2002c:323. He Guangzhong notes that another monastic convenor named Fada 法達 may have been appointed some time after the demise of Faguo. He, 1978:218. The *Gaoseng zhuan* does mention in passing that Fada held this role at the time when Xuangao was executed, but the context of the mention is the miraculous appearance of Xuangao after his death to Fada. GSZ, j.11. T.50.2059.398b.

authority was temporarily transferred to the Prince of Nan'an 南安王, Tuoba Yu 拓跋余. Later in the same year, Tuoba Jun 拓跋濬 ascended the throne as the new emperor (Wencheng 文成, *r.* 452-466), and shortly afterwards he was to announce the restoration of Buddhism that I have discussed above.⁵

During Taiwudi's time, limited social and economic reforms had been introduced, albeit slowly and with great caution.⁶ Conservatism in the Northern Wei court remained strong until Emperor Xiaowendi (Tuoba Hong 拓跋宏 *a.k.a.* Yuan Hong 元宏 *r.* 471-499) started major reforms in the 480s.⁷ Against this historical background, in 494, Xiaowendi relocated the imperial capital to Luoyang and there set in motion a deep transformation of the Tuoba state, including the Sinification of its elite and the adoption of Chinese surnames for its main clans.⁸ The decision to transfer the capital remained a secret from the Tuoba aristocracy in Pingcheng.⁹ This has prompted scholars to speculate that the emperor's decision to build a new power base in Luoyang was probably due to major divisions in the court.¹⁰ Such an assumption is not without basis, for the crown prince was under pressure to align with the Tuoba traditionalists at the old capital.¹¹ After being involved in the latter's unsuccessful manoeuvres, he committed suicide, probably under imperial orders.¹² To appease resentment from the Tuoba conservatives, certain compromises had to be reached.¹³ However, the unity of the Northern Wei elite had been fatally undermined, with far-reaching repercussions on the destiny of the dynasty several decades later.¹⁴ It is relevant to mention here that when the new capital was designed, Buddhist monasteries were taken into account.¹⁵

One particular reform of some significance for this thesis is the "equal field" (*juntian* 均田) system, whereby measured portions of land were allocated to eligible tenants. Under the new

⁵ *WS*, 4.106; *BS*, 2.62. Cf. Zhang, 1983:448.

⁶ Jenner, 1981:17-23; He, 2001:29-36. Cf. Holmgren, 1983:77-83.

⁷ Xiong, 2000:118-123; Zhou, 1963:117-120.

⁸ Wang, 1953:296; Zhou, 1963:120-121; Graff, 2002:98; Lewis, 2009a:81; Lu, 2001:161-162; Cf. Ho, 1966:70.

⁹ Jenner, 1981:38-39; Lu, 2001:158-161.

¹⁰ Lu, 2001:151, 183-189; Tang, 2002:599; Jenner, 1981:26-37, 39-52; Zhang, 2010:277-281; Wang, 1953:296; Pearce, 2001:164; Ho, 1966:70-71.

¹¹ Lu, 2001:177-192; Lü, 1983:515-517; Eisenberg, 2008:85-91.

¹² *WS*, 22.588. Lu, 2001:187-189.

¹³ Gu, 2011:20-49; Lü, 1983:514; Lu, 2001:177-180.

¹⁴ Zhou, 1964:121-124; Pearce, 2001:152-153; Mao, 2007:5-7; Pearce, 2001:152-153, 164; Lewis, 2009a:81-82; Twitchett, 2007a:3. Jenner offers a detailed analysis of the cultural, political and economic considerations behind the move. Jenner, 1981:38-62.

¹⁵ *LYQLJ*, j.1. T.51.2092.999b; Fang (ed.), 1978:6-7; Zhou (ed.) 2010:22-23. Cf. Jenner (trans.), 1981:141.

system, introduced around 485, males aged fifteen or above (but below seventy) would be accorded five acres of farming land, while females would receive 3.3 acres.¹⁶ Apart from the farming land, another 3.3 acres would be allocated to a household for cultivating mulberry trees.¹⁷ In return, the tenants were required to pay an annual tax of approximately 120kg in grains and about 1236cm in cotton.¹⁸ A portion of the land was a permanent holding, which would not be repossessed by the government after the tenant reached the age of retirement.¹⁹ Furthermore, the inheritable land could be either sold or purchased under imperial regulations. Illicit dealings were by no means unheard of under the new system, and at times Buddhist monasteries were implicated in illegal land appropriation.²⁰ It is also relevant that two decades before the 'equal field' reform, the monk Tanyao 曇曜 (*fl. ca.* 435-490), who was to play a leading role in the Buddhist revival after the persecution, was given permission to organize the so-called *samgha* and Buddha households²¹ to cultivate barren lands.²² It is unclear whether these households were permanently registered by the government, but the system is likely to have established a precedent with far-reaching consequences for the Buddhist monastic economy in the decades to come.²³

In 499, Emperor Xiaowendi passed away, after inaugurating and completing several important reforms. The court in Luoyang meanwhile showed the first signs of political intrigue that would lead to the collapse of the dynasty three decades later.²⁴ In 500, Yuan Ke 元恪 ascended the throne (Emperor Xuanwudi 宣武 *r.* 500-515), but he was still a minor. Consequently, his authority was overshadowed by a group of six senior aristocrats acting as regents.²⁵ In 515, the next emperor, Yuan Xu 元颢 (Emperor Xiaoming 孝明 *r.* 515-528)

¹⁶ Tang Changru suggests that the introduction of the 'equal field' system can be dated between 485 and 490. Tang, 2002:455-459. Cf. Caswell, 1988:26. The eligibility of females was based on marital status rather than age. Jiang, 2004:160. Measuring standards differed from time to time (for the period of disunion, see Qiu, 1992:58-69); the figures offered here are approximate.

¹⁷ *WS*, 110.2853-54; *TD*, 1.17-18. Wang, 1994:528; Twitchett, 1970:2.

¹⁸ *WS*, 110.2855. Balazs, 1964:109; Wang, 1994:52; Zhou, 1963:11.

¹⁹ The land required to plant mulberry trees could be kept even if a tenant reached the age of retirement or died.

²⁰ *WS*, 110.2854; *TD*, 1.18. Gernet, 1995:104-116.

²¹ These two terms will be explained further below.

²² Gernet, 1995:100-102; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72-73.

²³ In a memorial submitted in 509, the Convenor of śramaṇas Huishen 惠深 states that monks owned eight impure things, including lands and slaves. *WS*, 114.3041. In Prince Yuan Cheng's 元澄 memorial (517), reference is made to the extensive lands held by the monasteries. *WS*, 114.3045. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:85, 92.

²⁴ Pearce, 1994:475; Zhang, 1983:541-542.

²⁵ Zhang, 1983:541-542.

succeeded to the throne when he was only seven years old.²⁶ The resulting power vacuum at the court offered ground for political manoeuvring. In 523/524, due to the mishandling of a crisis of food distribution, a mutiny took place in a garrison in the northern part of the empire.²⁷ The uprising was swiftly dealt with, but the cause can be attributed in part to political mismanagement as well as to the lingering disagreement between the conservative Tuoba elite and the officials in the new capital.²⁸

Following this incident, several rebellions occurred in the ensuing years. Although by 528 all the major insurgences had been suppressed, the Northern Wei unity was on the verge of crumbling.²⁹ Meanwhile, political intrigue at court intensified, particularly between Emperor Xiaoming and Dowager Empress Ling (靈太后 *née* Hu 胡 ?-528). In secrecy, the emperor sought help from a warlord named Erzhu Rong 爾朱榮 (493-530) but before his arrival, the emperor was dead, probably murdered. Using this as a pretext, Erzhu Rong marched into Luoyang and executed the Dowager Empress, along with many of her political associates.³⁰ Temporary order was restored under the puppet Emperor Xiaozhuang 孝莊帝 (Yuan You 元攸 *r.* 528-530), but the disorder continued. Erzhu Rong himself was killed shortly afterwards. Having removed Erzhu Rong, the emperor endeavoured to restore the imperial authority, but he also was soon to fall victim to the vicious circle of conspiracy at the hands of Erzhu Zhao 爾朱兆 (?-533).³¹

The visible sign of disintegration of the Northern Wei can be traced back to 530, when Gao Huan 高歡 (496-547), a general, was allowed to lead some remaining soldiers from the six garrisons and resettle them near Yecheng 鄴城.³² A year later he confronted his superior Erzhu Zhao in a military conflict that initiated the partition of the unified Northern Wei dynasty.³³ The conflict continued until Erzhu Zhao's death in 533, but Gao Huan had already sacked Luoyang in 532 and dethroned the then emperor (Yuan Ye 元暉 *r.* 530-531).³⁴ The new ruler, Emperor Xiaowudi 孝武帝 (Yuan Xiu 元修 *r.* 532-534), escaped from Luoyang to Chang'an in 534, probably seeking protection from Yuwen Tai 宇文泰 (507-556), another

²⁶ WS, 4.221; BS, 4.143.

²⁷ Dien, 1962:3; Mao, 2007:7; Jenner, 1981:84; Pearce, 1994:476; Wang, 1994:569-571.

²⁸ Lewis, 2009a:81-82; Wang, 1994:565-569; Gernet, 2002:193-194.

²⁹ Wang, 1994:569-577; Lewis, 2009a:82-83; Jenner, 1981:85-86.

³⁰ Jenner, 1981:86-90; Lü, 1987:32.

³¹ Lewis, 2009a:83; Wang, 1994:582-583.

³² Jenner, 1981:97-98; Lü, 1987:32; Zhang, 1983:551-552; Wang, 1994:584-586.

³³ Graff, 2002:102.

³⁴ Wang, 1953:297, 584-588; Zhang, 1983:552-554; Graff, 2002:102-103; Eisenberg, 2008:96-98, 129-130.

powerful general.³⁵ But he died soon after, allegedly poisoned.³⁶ This violent factional strife then finalized the breakdown of the Northern Wei and the inception of the Eastern (534) and Western (535) Wei dynasties, with their capitals respectively in Yecheng and Chang'an.³⁷

Yuwen Tai did not officially replace the Western Wei figurehead emperor, despite the fact that he held the actual power.³⁸ But in 557, almost immediately after his demise, Yuwen Hu 宇文護 (507-572), the powerful nephew of Yuwen Tai,³⁹ enthroned the latter's third son Yuwen Jue 宇文覺 (542-557) as the emperor (Xiaomindi 孝閔帝 *r.* 557), thus founding the (Northern) Zhou 周 dynasty.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, the young emperor reigned in name only, for Yuwen Hu held the keys to political and military authority. Under such circumstances, court politics turned volatile, as two emperors were chosen and died in the next four years.⁴¹ In 560, Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (Emperor Wudi 武帝 *r.* 560-578) assumed the imperial throne of Zhou and in 572, after a planned palace ambush, Yuwen Hu was killed.⁴² Two years later Wudi would launch a new total persecution of Buddhism.

What the Yuwen clan had been for the Western Wei, the Gao clan was for the Eastern Wei. In 550, Gao Yang 高洋 put that dynasty to an end and became the first emperor of the Northern Qi 北齊 (Emperor Wenxuandi 文宣帝 *r.* 550-559), based in Yecheng. The two states were frequently engaged in warfare, with the Northern Zhou usually as the attacker.⁴³ The territories of the Northern Qi were prosperous with some of the most fertile farming land. This economic strength would enable them to withstand the military pressure from their rivals for some time. However, by the 570s the Northern Qi were showing signs of decline.⁴⁴ This coincided with the time when Emperor Zhou Wudi assumed absolute power in 572; from this position, he would finally lead the Northern Zhou to conquer the eastern state and unify the north of China in 577.⁴⁵

Before concluding this section, we shall briefly discuss some significant reforms under the Northern Zhou, some of which started since the foundation of the dynasty. A newly formed

³⁵ Zhang, 1983:554-555. Eisenberg discusses Yuwen Tai and his coming to power in some detail. Eisenberg, 2008:130-140. See also Nomura, 1968:17-26.

³⁶ Wang, 1994:589; Graff, 2002:103.

³⁷ Dien, 1977:139; Lewis, 2009a:83-84; Wang, 1994:583-589; Graff, 2002:100-102.

³⁸ Eisenberg, 2008:132-142. Cf. Nomura, 1968:20.

³⁹ Dien provides an English translation of Yuwen Hu's biography. Dien, 1962:30-63.

⁴⁰ Wang, 1994:607; Lü, 2002:165-174.

⁴¹ Nomura, 1968:33-39.

⁴² Dien, 1962:57-58; Wang, 1994:607-608; Tang, 2002:247-254; Lü, 2002:65-68, 182-199, 210-215.

⁴³ Graff, 2002:104-110; Lü, 1983:743-747; Lü, 1987:99-142.

⁴⁴ Lü, 1983:750-754; Wang, 1994:495-600.

⁴⁵ Wang, 1994:624-630.

military recruitment system was established, which allowed people of different ethnicities to be enlisted.⁴⁶ From this point onwards, people of Chinese ethnicity, which were previously barred entry into the army, could be recruited as military personnel.⁴⁷ According to one source, in 574 Zhou Wudi recruited half of the Chinese households to military service.⁴⁸ As Gu Jiguang points out, this staggering figure probably means that eligible households were transferred from the taxable household registration to the registration of military enlistment, which made them available for recruitment as regular soldiers or logistic staff.⁴⁹ A clear implication of the above is that military conscription was now likely to affect a large part of the Chinese population. Especially in the times of intense military activity leading to the conquest of the Northern Qi, Zhou Wudi would certainly need large numbers of conscripts. The relevance of this background will offer itself when we discuss the social and economic factors of the Northern Zhou persecution.

On the political side, the priority for the imperial elite of the Northern Zhou was the legitimacy of the dynasty. An ideological model was successfully found in the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rites of Zhou*),⁵⁰ a Confucian classic presenting an idealized system of ritual and government.⁵¹ As Scott Pearce points out, the *Zhouli* provided a convenient ideology for social reform and political legitimization. The ideas of this book seem in fact to have assisted Yuwen Tai as he initially encroached upon the ruling power of the last emperor of the Western Wei.⁵² Finally, and most relevant to our discussion, the *Zhouli* would support the idea of state control of the land, advocating a system of strong central government.⁵³ However, although the Northern Zhou modelled their institutions on the *Zhouli*, the emphasis

⁴⁶ Pearce, 2001:153. For the origin and evolution of the military reforms, including discussions of *fubing* 府兵 militia system, see Gu, 2011:8-15; Mao, 2007:278-295; Tang, 2000:239-275; Wang, 1994:614-621. Before this reform, only ethnic groups such as the Tuoba and Yuwen would be recruited as military staff while Han Chinese people were usually not eligible. Gu, 1996a:434-435; Wang, 1994:616-617.

⁴⁷ Chen, 2001c:151; Zhou, 1964:130-131; Graff, 2002:110.

⁴⁸ *SS*, 24.680; *TD*, 7.147. Cf. Nomura, 1968:60-61; Gu, 2011:59-60.

⁴⁹ Gu, 2011:59-69.

⁵⁰ Pearce discusses the history, content and political use of the *Zhouli* in some detail. Pearce, 2001:157-163.

⁵¹ Pearce, 2001:169-172; Dien, 1962:17-18; Tsukamoto, 1974b:477-483. Emphasis on the *Zhouli* and other Confucian classics may have been intended to undermine Buddhism: cf. Goodrich, 1953:9-10; Nomura, 1968:105-123.

⁵² Pearce, 2001:173-177; Tsukamoto, 1974b:481-482; Nomura, 1968:110-114.

⁵³ Pearce, 2001:160, 172-174. According to Pearce, the Northern Wei/Zhou's *Zhouli* reforms operated in three ways: capitalizing the *Zhouli* ideas to consolidate Yuwen Tai's authority as the chancellor, enhancing power at the centre, and seeking ideological inspiration. Pearce, 2001:176.

of the reforms or application of selected ideas would vary from time to time.⁵⁴ Before 572, the Northern Zhou court operated on a dual power system, with the emperors reigning but not ruling. This was the situation when Yuwen Tai held the post as an autocratic chief minister, a role that Yuwen Hu subsequently took for himself under the Northern Zhou.⁵⁵ When Yuwen Hu was executed in 572, however, the position of chief minister was understandably abolished. That aside, Zhou Wudi would consistently exploit the ideas of the *Zhouli* during his reign, both as a unifying ideology to consolidate his power as emperor and to integrate a divided society.⁵⁶

4.2 Religious Policy: Northern Wei and Northern Zhou

Following the restoration of Buddhism after the persecution of 446, a more elaborate religious policy emerged. In 453, Shixian 師賢 (*d.* 460/461), an eminent monk from Kashmir, was appointed as *Daoren tong* 道人統 (monastic convener); Emperor Wencheng personally shaved off his hair as Shixian returned to monastic status after years in hiding.⁵⁷ This gesture was symbolic of the close association between the Northern Wei court and the Buddhist community after the end of the persecution. Such association would be beneficial for Buddhism, but it would also involve its submission to state control. It was around this time, in 454, that Tanyao convinced the emperor to erect five statues of the Buddha in the images of the five deceased Wei rulers.⁵⁸ In this way, Tanyao could reiterate the identification between the Buddha and the emperors previously made by Faguo.⁵⁹ Tanyao was also made a monastic convener after Shixian passed away, but the title was changed to *Shamen tong* 沙門統.⁶⁰ It is unclear whether this had any significance, but during Tanyao's tenure, the emperor and other ruling aristocrats lavishly sponsored some Buddhist establishments.⁶¹

An imperial administrative agency named *Jianfu cao* 監福曹 (Department for the

⁵⁴ Tsukamoto, 1974b:483-486. Cf. Pearce, 2001:177.

⁵⁵ Lü, 2002:199-210; Nomura, 1968:41-49, 114-118.

⁵⁶ Tsukamoto, 1974b:486-489; Nomura, 1968:118-120. One source states that as a result of imperial sponsorship, *Zhouli* studies became fashionable amongst the Zhou intellectuals. Xiong Ansheng 熊安生 (*d.* 578), a Northern Qi expert of *Zhouli* and other classics, was very much respected by Wudi. *ZS*, 45.812-813; cf. Pearce, 2001:163.

⁵⁷ *WS*, 114.3036; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:71; *CFYG*, 51.568a; *GHMJ*, j.2. T.52.2103.103c. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:75; Tang, 1991:497-498. Again in 476 Emperor Xiaowen performed a similar ritual. *WS*, 114.2039.

⁵⁸ *WS*, 114.3037; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72; *CFYG*, 51.568a; *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.355a9-10. Tsukamoto, 1974b:77-78; McNair, 2007:17; Soper, 1966:242; Caswell, 1988:13, 22.

⁵⁹ Soper, 1959:96; 1966:441-442; Wong, 2004:51; Caswell, 1988:22.

⁶⁰ *WS*, 114.3037; *CFYG*, 51.569a. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:82-83.

⁶¹ *WS*, 114.3037-40; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72ff.; cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:85-95.

Inspection of Merits)⁶² is mentioned in this period as operating in connection to the monastic conveners in the oversight of the clergy.⁶³ Exactly when it was established is unknown, but under different names, it would play an important role in the ensuing decades.⁶⁴ The court would promulgate its regulations for the Buddhist monastic community in the first place by means of decrees.⁶⁵ The relevant imperial office would then execute the imperial orders, after consultation with the monastic conveners.⁶⁶ Occasionally, Buddhist monastic conveners would make necessary recommendations or present their own memorials to the emperor.⁶⁷

In 472, a decree called for five people to group together in each village so as to check on the local clergies. A thorough inspection ensued, probably intending to curtail the presence of unregistered monks. Itinerant monks were required to acquire an official document prior to their trip.⁶⁸ This may be viewed as an indication of the large number of vagrant monks in the north at that time.⁶⁹ In 486, another inspection was launched, following official criticism about unregistered monks who were evading taxation. During this inspection, about 1,327 monks and nuns were defrocked.⁷⁰ In 493, the government promulgated a set of forty-seven rules of monastic conduct.⁷¹ Under Xuanwudi's reign (499-515), in 508, the Vinaya rules and imperial penal law were applied jointly. It was established that if a monk committed murder or any more serious crime, he would be tried according to the secular law. All other offenses would be judged based on monastic disciplinary rules.⁷² This decree may have increased the authority of the monastic conveners, for they seem to have had powers of decision in such

⁶² Hucker translates this title as 'Superintendency of Buddhist Happiness' and explains that this department was for foreign Buddhist monks. Hucker, 1985:147. The term *fu* 福 (literally 'fortune' or 'merit') here refers to Buddhist activities in general.

⁶³ WS, 114.3040. Cf. Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:83; Ch'en, 1954:269; Tsukamoto, 1974b:76; Xie, 2009:54-55.

⁶⁴ Xie Chongguang suggests that the *Jianfu cao* was created around the same time when Faguo was first appointed as monastic conducer. Xie, 2009:55-56. The name of the department would later be changed to *Zhaoxuan si* 昭玄寺 (Court for the Manifestation of Profundities). WS, 114.3040. Cf. He, 1978:217; Hucker, 1985:147. On the location of this agency in Luoyang at the end of the Northern Wei see *LYQLJ*, Vol.1.T.51.2092.999c; Jenner (trans.), 1981:147.

⁶⁵ WS, 114.3037-47; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72-101.

⁶⁶ WS, 114.3038. Cf. WS, 114.3040.

⁶⁷ WS, 114.3040-41. Cf. Gernet, 1995:102-103.

⁶⁸ WS, 114.3038; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:76. Cf. Caswell, 1988:23.

⁶⁹ Caswell, 1988:23; Hou, 1998:27-66. Wang suggests a connection with Buddhist-related rebellions, several of which are attested in the following decades. Wang, 1994:463-465.

⁷⁰ WS, 114.3039; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:79-80. Cf. Ch'en, 1954:266; Caswell, 1988:23-24; He, 1986a:8-12.

⁷¹ WS, 114.3039; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:80. Cf. Ch'en, 1954:266; Caswell, 1988:24. See also *CXJ*, 23.558. Zhipan misdates these regulations to 501. *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.355b.

⁷² WS, 114.3040; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:84-85; *GHMJ*, j.2. T.52.2103.104b; *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.355b.

cases.⁷³

In 509, the monastic convener Huishen 惠深 presented a memorial suggesting that there should be a re-evaluation of senior monks holding the roles of deacons (*weina* 維那), elders (*shangzuo* 上坐) and abbots of monasteries (*sizhu* 寺主). If they were not conversant with the monastic discipline, they should be downgraded. Furthermore, he pointed out that monks currently stored eight sorts of impure things (*bu jing zhi wu* 不淨之物)⁷⁴ that violated the monastic rules.⁷⁵ He continued that certain monks and nuns had made profits by loaning their private possessions to others.⁷⁶ Huishen's memorial thus reveals many issues within the monastic community at the time. The political implications of these issues will be discussed below.

Several examples may suffice here. In 481, when the Buddhist monk Faxiu 法秀 (d. 481) led an uprising, a purge of the entire Buddhist monastic community was proposed. But in the end, the Dowager-Empress Feng intervened and no major anti-Buddhist measure was implemented. Only the monks involved in the insurgency were punished.⁷⁷ In fact, there were no less than eight religious-inspired rebellions between 473 and 517,⁷⁸ all of which involved Buddhist monks or self-designated monks, yet none of them stirred up a large-scale persecution, as had been the case with the Gaiwu rebellion in 446.⁷⁹ Around 511, a minister named Gao Zhao 高肇 (?-515) accused several monastic officers of venality in dealing with the monastic charitable grain (*sengqie su* 僧伽粟, 'samgha grain').⁸⁰ In the same year, an imperial decree mentioned cases of exploitation within the monastic office in handling the charitable grain. As a solution, new regulations were laid down and any violation would incur punishment.⁸¹ The problem seems to have been widespread and grave, as in Gao Zhao's memorial it is stated that under duress, some tenants would commit suicide. Gao's recommendations for investigation were endorsed by the court, but the monks involved in the

⁷³ Gernet, 1995:103-104.

⁷⁴ These eight impure things include land, money, slaves, poultry, cattle, sheep and storehouses i.e. anything except the daily necessities. Tang, 1991:517.

⁷⁵ WS, 114.3041. Cf. Tang, 1991:516-517.

⁷⁶ WS, 114.3040-41; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:85-86. Cf. Tang, 1991:517; Caswell, 1988:24; Ch'en, 1973:84.

⁷⁷ WS, 7A.150, 114.3045. Cf. Tang, 1991:519; Lu, 2003:64.

⁷⁸ Tsukamoto, 1974b:146-179; Tang, 1991:518-520; Wang, 1994:563-565.

⁷⁹ Seiwert, 2003:108-116.

⁸⁰ Gernet, 1995:104-105.

⁸¹ WS, 114.3041; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:86.

case were not punished.⁸² In 520, an imperial official denounced abuses among the Buddhist clergy and turned up the rhetoric against the religion, comparing the Buddha to a ghost. This may indicate a sense of frustration about an extensive Buddhist presence, and probably the recurring exploitation of monastic privileges in the society.⁸³ The Dowager-Empress Hu 胡, a patron of Buddhism, ruled in favour of the official. Yet the official had to pay a small piece of gold as a forfeit for comparing the Buddha to a ghost. Here we can see a twofold imperial policy. A system of remonstrance regarding religious matters was in place; yet at the same time, the rule of law had been conceded.⁸⁴ Imperial favouritism would be one of the most important reasons. It may be noted that Huishen, the monastic convener, himself would be subject to criticism for violating imperial regulations.⁸⁵

A decree issued in 517 further attests to the concerns of the court regarding the Buddhist ordination process. The decree ordered a collaboration of monastic conveners and secular officials to check on Buddhist monks and nuns. Moreover, slaves were prohibited from becoming monastics.⁸⁶ The decree specifies many details regarding the procedure and what penalty would apply had any violations taken place.⁸⁷ But in the end, the source implies that due to a lax religious policy, any kind of regulation was impossible to enforce.⁸⁸ In around 518, the Prince of Rencheng 任城, [Yuan] Cheng 元澄 (467-519) observed in a memorial that according to imperial regulations, there should be only the Yongning Monastery (Yongning si 永寧寺) in the inner city of Luoyang and no nunnery inside the city wall. All other monasteries and monastic accommodations should be located outside of the city. However, he warned that by the time of his memorial there was no area of the capital without a monastery or temple. He further highlighted that the equivalent of one-third of the land in the city was occupied by monasteries.⁸⁹ In particular, he pointed out that as a result of the government's laxity, monks were left unchecked and exposed to the secular world, hence influenced by

⁸² WS, 114.3042; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:87-88.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Tang, 1991:531-533.

⁸⁵ Prince Cheng pointed out that a regulation around 500-503 limited the numbers of Buddhist monasteries. But in 506 Huishen suggested that instead of closing the old monasteries, there should be no new ones built. In 509, Huishen and his colleagues amended the regulation, stating that monasteries should not be built if they had less than fifty monks in residence. The prince continued that thereafter Buddhist monasteries increased substantially. WS, 114.3044.

⁸⁶ Caswell, 1988:24; Kamata, 2002c:360.

⁸⁷ Tang, 1991:516.

⁸⁸ WS, 114.3043; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:89-90; Caswell, 1988:24.

⁸⁹ WS, 114.3044-45; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:92-94. Cf. Ho, 1966:71-72.

profane pursuits.⁹⁰ He finally reminded the court of the case of the monk Faxiu, who in 481 had made false prophecies and stirred up a rebellion.⁹¹ At the time, another monk named Faqing 法慶⁹² had also led an uprising aimed at overthrowing the imperial government. The prince therefore recommended that the court needed to regulate the Buddhist monastic community, especially the uncontrolled building of Buddhist temples.⁹³ However, as the political stability of the empire broke down in the subsequent years, the state's religious governance also collapsed.⁹⁴ As Tang Yongtong rightly states, the endless memorials and decrees in the final decades of the Northern Wei may indicate a failure of the imperial control of the clergy, as otherwise such insistence would have been unnecessary.⁹⁵

4.3 The Development of Buddhism: Northern Wei and Northern Zhou

This section will primarily discuss Buddhism in the north along with some brief comments on the situation in the south. But before we start, it is useful to emphasize that during the period of disunion (311/317-589), Buddhism in the north and south developed in different ways. While devotional and meditation practices were popular in the north, a more philosophical understanding of Buddhist ideas prevailed in the south.⁹⁶ It is also worth noting that the making of Buddhist images was far more popular in the north than in the south.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, both northern and southern Buddhism shared to some extent those traits that have prompted some scholars to talk about a “gentry Buddhism”.⁹⁸ This term denotes those areas in which the social elite, including the rulers, would express its interest in and association with Buddhism and Buddhist monks. This interaction would result in deep mutual influences, which would affect the fate of the religion in medieval Chinese society.⁹⁹ In

⁹⁰ Tang, 1991:522.

⁹¹ *WS*, 114.3045.

⁹² *BQS*, 21.301.

⁹³ *WS*, 19.445, 114.3045-47; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:95-99; *BS*, 17.634.

⁹⁴ Caswell, 1988:25; Wang, 1991:560-561. After the 520s, the court seems to have lost track of the monastic establishments in the metropolitan area, not to mention the empire at large. *WS*, 114.3043-44.

⁹⁵ Tang, 1991:513.

⁹⁶ Zürcher, 2007:180-204; Wright, 1959:44-64; Tang, 1991:487.

⁹⁷ Wong, 2004:151.

⁹⁸ The term is employed by Zürcher with some caveats: “not without hesitation we have decided to use the much-debated but conveniently short term ‘gentry’ when speaking about the cultured upper class in medieval Chinese society, and to label the type of Buddhism described above ‘gentry Buddhism’.” Zürcher, 2007:4. Cf. Kamata, 2002c:136-160. A similar approach is advanced by Yamazaki, who extends it to the economic and political aspects of the elite. Yamazaki, 1981:51-55.

⁹⁹ Yamazaki, 1981:51-60. Kamata does not use a concept equivalent to “gentry Buddhism” in his discussion about Buddhism in the north, but he does note the important role played by emperors,

exploring northern Buddhism, we shall firstly discuss Tanyao and his initiative of the monastic charitable system, which can be seen as an early foundation of the medieval monastic economy. Secondly, Northern Wei Buddhism will be viewed via Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之 (*fl. ca.* 528-548) and his record of Buddhist monasteries in Luoyang.¹⁰⁰

To begin with, when Shixian was tonsured by the emperor in 453, Buddhist ordination was also permitted, albeit in very limited numbers. This then officially started the Northern Wei restoration of Buddhism.¹⁰¹ According to the edict issued on that occasion, a large province was allowed to ordain fifty monks, a medium province forty and a small prefecture ten.¹⁰² A general calculation would make the maximum and minimum numbers as 5,650 and 1,130 respectively.¹⁰³ We are in no position to know the exact numbers of the Buddhist clergy, but if the imperial decree was respected, the number had to be small. Importantly, the imperial court in theory assumed total control of the Buddhist monastic community, especially regarding monastic ordination. In 477, the numbers for the Buddhist clergy and monasteries were 77,258 and 6,478 respectively.¹⁰⁴ These numbers can be seen as reasonable if we assume that new ordinations were permitted every year, as the average annual increase would have been of about 3,000 monks between 452 and 477. As mentioned, in 472 the government started to pay attention to the problem of unregistered monks, and from then on criticism of the Buddhist clergy started to grow. Twenty years later, in 492, an imperial decree established that a large province was allowed to maintain no more than one hundred Buddhist monks, a middle province no more than fifty and a small province no more than twenty. These numbers would be officially registered.¹⁰⁵ If such a policy was indeed implemented, it would mean a drastic reduction of both monasteries and monks and nuns. But if we consider the frequent memorials attesting to lapses in the imperial religious governance we have discussed above, in reality the number of monks and monasteries is likely to have increased rather than decreased. Against this background we shall discuss the Buddhist charitable establishment initiated by Tanyao.

empresses and aristocrats. Kamata, 2002c:331-358.

¹⁰⁰ On Yang Xuanzhi and his record of the Buddhist monasteries in Luoyang, see Jenner, 1981:7-15; 273-280; also Fan Xiangyong, 1978:11-14.

¹⁰¹ See above p. 84.

¹⁰² WS, 114.3036; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:69-70. Cf. Liu, 1994:149.

¹⁰³ There were about 113 prefectures (*zhou* 州) during the Northern Wei. WS, 106A.2456-106C.2604. The figures offered here give the maximum and minimum possible number of monks, considering all the prefectures as respectively large or small. The actual figure would have been somewhere in between.

¹⁰⁴ WS, 114.3039. Gernet, 1995:4-8; Liu, 1994:149-151; Xie, 2009:53-54; Tang, 1991:512-513.

¹⁰⁵ Caswell, 1988:24.

Between 469 and 476,¹⁰⁶ Tanyao proposed that households he named as *pingqi hu* 平齊戶,¹⁰⁷ which were able to annually contribute a certain amount of grain to the monastic office, be registered as *sengzhi hu* 僧祇戶 (*samgha* households).¹⁰⁸ The grain contributed by these *samgha* households would be stored for charitable purposes, theoretically to be distributed to the needy in times of famine.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Tanyao commissioned the establishment of the *fotu hu* 佛圖戶 (Buddha households). Convicts would be granted pardon under the condition that they would be at the disposal of Buddhist monasteries. They would work in the monasteries as servants or in the fields that were allocated to monasteries.¹¹⁰ Gernet suggests that the Buddhist monastic community was entrusted with the management of these Buddha households since monasteries were able to finance the necessary agricultural tools. Moreover, Buddhist ideas of merit-making through labour would motivate people to work hard. Thirdly, a close association between the monastic community and the imperial government was essential for the system to succeed.¹¹¹ The last point is crucial, for the cooperation between state and monasteries would be vulnerable to illicit practices if the imperial religious policy was not strictly enforced. As said initially, a portion of the allocated land was permitted to change hands. We also noted cases of abuse of monastic privileges, which may have resulted from the very close association of the clergy with the imperial court.¹¹² Under such circumstances, exploiting monastic privilege towards the accumulation of land was by no means impossible.

When Tanyao was appointed as the monastic convener, he persuaded the emperor to carve five Buddhist grottoes at the pass of Wuzhou 五州, to the west of the capital Pingcheng.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Tsukamoto, 1974b:112-120; Jiang, 1987:1.

¹⁰⁷ Some sources explain that the *pingqi hu* 平齊戶 consisted of ordinary people. *FZTJ*, j.49. T.49.355a15-16. However, Tsukamoto suggests that *pingqi hu* refers specifically to the former inhabitants of the commandery of Pingqi 平齊郡 (present-day Shandong 山東), including the prefectures of Qingzhou 青州 and Qizhou 齊州, who had been earlier forced to migrate to the capital. Tsukamoto, 1974b:104-107. Cf. Gernet, 1995:100-101. During Xianwen's reign (466-471), the Qi (Shandong) region had been conquered, and those who migrated from there were indeed known as *pingqi min* 平齊民 (people of conquered Qi). *WS*, 43.977. That said, it might be the case that people resettled from Qi may have constituted an initial nucleus of the *samgha* households, but gradually it was possible for other people to be registered as such.

¹⁰⁸ *CFYG*, 51.569a. Cf. Tang, 1991:499; Ch'en, 1964:154-155.

¹⁰⁹ Gernet, 1995:100; Ch'en, 1964:154-155; Tsukamoto, 1974b:120-125.

¹¹⁰ *WS*, 114.3036; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72-73; Tsukamoto, 1974b:115-120; Jenner, 1981:27; Lewis, 2009a:207; Gernet, 1995:100-101; Ch'en, 1964:155.

¹¹¹ Gernet, 1995:102; Tsukamoto, 1974b:133-140.

¹¹² Tsukamoto, 1974b:121-125, 128-132.

¹¹³ *WS*, 114.3037; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:72. Cf. Soper, 1959:96-97; Su, 1996:76-88. Caswell, 1988:6-10.

This would mark the beginning of the large complex of rock-cut caves of Yungang 雲岡.¹¹⁴ The other grotto monastery was the famous Lingyan 靈巖 located thirty miles west of Heng'an 恒安 (present-day Shandong). This monastery was in fact a series of connected caves, which could accommodate more than 3,000 people.¹¹⁵ At Wuzhou, the local 'cave temple' (Shiku si 石窟寺) would frequently receive royal visits.¹¹⁶ Emperor Xianwen visited it for the first time on 2 October 467 (Huangxing 皇興 1.8.18).¹¹⁷ Three years later, on 21 January 470 (Huangxing 4.12.15), the emperor was at Shiku si again.¹¹⁸ Emperor Xiaowen attended the cave temple no less than three times.¹¹⁹ Throughout his life, Tanyao built many more Buddhist grottoes in the vicinity of Pingcheng.¹²⁰ This form of Buddhist establishment, along with Buddhist stelaes, became popular at the turn of the sixth century. Liu Shufen gives three reasons for the popularity of Buddhist rock monuments. First, building them came to be seen as a key way of gaining religious merit. Secondly, the caves could be used for large religious gatherings. Thirdly, the erection of stelaes was made by and connected with itinerant monks and nuns.¹²¹ Whatever the reason, stelaes and grottoes manifestly bolstered the social visibility of Buddhism in the society.¹²² By the end of the Northern Wei, the presence of Buddhism seems to have been represented chiefly by Buddhist art works such as niches, Buddha images and stelaes with donation inscriptions everywhere in the north.¹²³

In 493, as we have seen, the imperial capital was relocated to Luoyang, one of the oldest Buddhist centres.¹²⁴ As Luoyang was in ruins after 311, Buddhism too had fallen victim to the subsequent years of anarchy. But from 500 onwards, Luoyang set an impressive example for the development of Buddhism under imperial patronage.¹²⁵ As Tsukamoto observes, the growth of Buddhism in Luoyang can be confined between the beginning and the middle of the sixth century, a relatively short period of fifty years.¹²⁶ The main force behind this

¹¹⁴ For a monograph-length history of the Yungang caves, see Caswell, 1988.

¹¹⁵ XGSZ, j.1. T.50.2060.426c.

¹¹⁶ Sofukawa, 2008:7-9. The first five images erected on Tanyao's suggestion were located in this place.

¹¹⁷ WS, 6.128.

¹¹⁸ WS, 6.130.

¹¹⁹ Caswell, 1988:14.

¹²⁰ XGSZ, j.1. T.50.2060.426c.

¹²¹ Liu, 1997:24-26.

¹²² Shang, 2008:258-270; Tsukamoto, 1974b:304-305.

¹²³ Wong, 2004:71-80.

¹²⁴ On Luoyang under the Northern Wei see Ho, 1966, especially pp. 52-70 on the city's history. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:159.

¹²⁵ Tsukamoto, 1974b:254-274; Kamata, 2002c:344-351; Ho (trans.), 1966:72. .

¹²⁶ Tsukamoto, 1974b:266-304.

expansion was the continuous imperial patronage.¹²⁷ The Yongning monastery and its history are but one typical example.¹²⁸ The monastery was sponsored by the Dowager-Empress Ling, one of the most influential empresses of the Northern Wei dynasty.¹²⁹ The temple's location near the imperial palace, surrounded by important official buildings, suggests its prestigious status.¹³⁰ As it was built under imperial auspices, Yongning si and its magnificence vied with that of the imperial palace.¹³¹ The court frequently organized religious gatherings at Yongning si, which may indicate that it also functioned as an imperial chapel.¹³² But the sheer grandeur of Yongning si also illustrates the importance of the imperial sponsorship for a prosperous Buddhist community. In 533, at a time when the court itself was at its last stage, a fire destroyed the monastery with its iconic pagoda.¹³³ The other major Buddhist establishment in the area of Luoyang was the Buddhist grottoes of Longmen 龍門, which were closely associated to the sponsorship of the elite.¹³⁴ It is worth noting that the Northern Wei Buddhist images markedly resembled those of the Central Asian regions.¹³⁵ When the capital was shifted to Luoyang, the Buddhist artistic style was modified accordingly. Yet similarities have also been noticed between the Buddhist art of Pingcheng with Yungang and that of Luoyang, especially the Longmen grottoes.¹³⁶

Some dowager empresses kept close contact with the monastic community, whilst promoting the faith. Even in the old capital Pingcheng, Dowager-Empress Wenming 文明 (*née* Feng 馮; ?-490) had already started to generously support Buddhist establishments.¹³⁷ In 493, Emperor Xiaowen selected a consort from the Feng 馮 clan, who would be known as Fei huanghou 廢皇后 (Dismissed Empress; *fl.* 493-494). Later on, however, the emperor chose

¹²⁷ Tsukamoto, 1974b:269-289. *LYQLJ*, Fan (ed.), 1978:2. When the court political infighting escalated in the 520s, large-scale construction of Buddhist establishments came to a halt. Tsukamoto, 1974b:289-294.

¹²⁸ For a full history and description of Yongning si, see Jenner, 1981:147-163.

¹²⁹ *WS*, 114.3037; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:74; *LYQLJ*, j.1. *T.51.2092.999c*; Fan (ed.), 1978:1; Zhou (ed.), 2010:1. Jenner, 1981:147; Kamata, 2002c:358.

¹³⁰ *LYQLJ*, j.1. *T.51.2092.999c*; Fan (ed.), 1978:1-4; Zhou (ed.), 2010:1-3; Jenner, 1981:147-148. See also *FZTJ*, j.38. *T.49.2035.355c*.

¹³¹ *WS*, 114.3037. *LYQLJ*, j.1. *T.51.2092.999c-1000a*; Fan (ed.), 1978:4-5. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:163-164. Attesting to the splendor of Yongning si, Yang Xuanzhi cites the legendary Bodhidharma, who exclaimed that from his extensive travelling experience, no monastery would compare to it. *LYQLJ*, j.1. *T.51.2092.1000b*; Fan (ed.), 1978:5; Zhou (ed.), 2010:11; Jenner (trans.), 1981:151.

¹³² *WS*, 114.3039.

¹³³ *LYQLJ*, j.1; Fan, 1978:12; Zhou, 2010:31-32.

¹³⁴ McNair, 2007:31-33; Su, 1996:155-159; Tsukamoto, 1974b:267-289; Caswell, 1988:33-37.

¹³⁵ Wong, 2004:74-75.

¹³⁶ Wong, 2004:77-86.

¹³⁷ Caswell, 1988:10; Chen, 2002:136-139.

Feng's elder sister as his consort. As a result, the junior Empress Feng entered the famous Yaoguang monastery 瑤光寺¹³⁸ as a nun.¹³⁹ Another consort of Emperor Xiaowen, who was from the same clan, was known as Empress You 幽. Due to a skin disease, she was sent home and later became a nun. But shortly afterwards, she was readmitted to the court.¹⁴⁰ Emperor Xuanwu's consort known as Empress Gao 高太后 later resided in the Yaoguang si after the former's demise.¹⁴¹ Emperor Xiaoming's consort, *née* Hu 胡, is also said to have become a nun and passed away there.¹⁴² Empress Ling 靈, due to her aunt who was a nun, was exposed to the Buddhist faith. When her father passed away, she had a nine-story pagoda built by the Yongning si.¹⁴³ All these examples show the close contact between the Buddhist community and the ruling elite in the metropolis.

Some imperial officials were not less eager to support Buddhism. Liu Teng 劉騰 (?-523), an influential eunuch, and some of his colleagues built several splendid monasteries.¹⁴⁴ In fact, most of the grand monasteries recorded by Yang Xuanzhi were either located in the vicinity of the imperial ministries or were sponsored by royal relatives, nobles, and imperial officials. As Yang himself noted, "aristocrats and high officials parted with their horses and elephants as if they were kicking off their sandals; commoners and great families gave their wealth with the ease of leaving footprints".¹⁴⁵ Hence when Prince Yuan Cheng complained that almost one third of the land in the capital was appropriated by monasteries and temples, he was also pointing to the enormous social influence of Buddhism at the capital.¹⁴⁶

It is noticeable that in the north, particularly after the collapse of the Northern Wei, the Buddhist monastic community at the local level was integrated into the local society with the traditional Chinese communal organization known as *sheyi* 社邑.¹⁴⁷ Hao Chunwen points out that such associations would conveniently promote Buddhist ideas in the society.¹⁴⁸ For example, while traditional Chinese sacrificial rites require the slaughtering of animals,

¹³⁸ On the Yaoguang si, see *LYQLJ*, j.1. T.51.2092.1003a; Jenner (trans.), 1981:147-163.

¹³⁹ *WS*, 13.322. Cf. Soper, 1966:246; Wong, 2004:48.

¹⁴⁰ *WS*, 13.332-333.

¹⁴¹ *WS*, 13.336-337.

¹⁴² *WS*, 13.340.

¹⁴³ *WS*, 13.338; *LYQLJ*, j.1. T.51.2092.999c; Jenner (trans.), 1981:147. Cf. Kamata, 2002c:358; Wang, 1984:14; Ch'en, 1964:161.

¹⁴⁴ *LYQLJ*, j.1. T.51.2092.1002, 1003b-c; Jenner (trans.), 1981:165-167, 169-171. Cf. Caswell, 1988:32-33.

¹⁴⁵ Jenner (trans.), 1981:141.

¹⁴⁶ *WS*, 114.3045. Tsukamoto, 1974a:266-269.

¹⁴⁷ Shang, 2008:251-255.

¹⁴⁸ Hao, 2006:144-145; Shang, 2008:255-257.

Buddhists attempted to divert people from such practices.¹⁴⁹ In some inscriptional fragments, it is evident that basic Buddhist teachings such as the doctrine of emptiness and impermanence are expounded.¹⁵⁰ Some inscriptions try to promote the idea of complete abstention from slaughtering animals.¹⁵¹ There are yet other fragmentary notes on the reverse side of some inscriptions revealing many different modes of monks' participation in the communal gatherings.¹⁵² Such instances further attest to the noticeable social presence of Buddhism in the lower strata of the society.

The rich legacy of Northern Wei Buddhism was inherited by its successors in the north. During the initial years of the Northern Zhou, Buddhism continued to develop, especially in the field of canonical translations. According to Fei Zhangfang's 費長房 (*fl.* 562-597) catalogue, two large scriptures totaling twenty-three fascicles were translated under Yuwen Tai's auspices.¹⁵³ Yuwen Tai himself had contact with several Buddhist monks.¹⁵⁴ His close associates, such as Su Chu 蘇綽 and Lu Guang 盧光, were also versed in Buddhist doctrine and literature.¹⁵⁵ Under Yuwen Hu's regency, further Buddhist translations were made at his request or under his auspices.¹⁵⁶ Yuwen Hu had a friendly relationship with some Buddhist monks, such as the obscure Wangming 亡名 (Nameless), the master of Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (d.u.).¹⁵⁷ Most canonical translations were produced before or during the Tianhe 天和 era (566-572), when Yuwen Hu's power was at its zenith. It should be noticed, however, that only a small number of Buddhist monasteries were built or permitted to be built during the Northern Zhou.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ Hao, 2006:144-145; Shang, 2008:255-257.

¹⁵⁰ Cited in Hao, 2006:146, n. 9.

¹⁵¹ Cited in Hao, 2006:146, n. 22.

¹⁵² Hao, 2006:146-147.

¹⁵³ *LDSBJ*, j.11. T.49.2034.100a. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:522-532; Nomura, 1968:75-85.

¹⁵⁴ Tsukamoto, 1974b:527-529; Nomura, 1968:76-81.

¹⁵⁵ Nomura, 1968:146-148; Tsukamoto, 1974b:524-526.

¹⁵⁶ *LDSBJ*, j.11. T.49.2034.100b-c. Tsukamoto, 1974b:534-535; Nomura, 1968:95-102. Some eminent translators of the time were residing in Chang'an and many of them translated texts for Yuwen Hu. See *LDSBJ*, j.11. T.49.2034.100b-c. Cf. Tang, 1991:529; Kamata, 2002c:430-433.

¹⁵⁷ Yuwen Hu sent a letter to Wangming in which he praised the monk and Buddhism; he also extended an invitation, although Wangming did not come to Chang'an. *XGSZ*, j.7. T.50.2060.481b10-482b15; *QHZW*, 4.3900b; *QHZW*, 22.3996a.

¹⁵⁸ Falin mentions 931 monasteries in the Northern Zhou but it is hard to know how many of them were newly built. *BZL*, j.3. T.52.2110.508a-b; Nomura, 1968:75. Nomura points to a document suggesting that around the middle of the Datong era 大統 (535-551) under the Eastern Wei (535-556), a great many Buddhist monasteries were established. Nomura, 1968:75; cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:522-523. A careful reading of the source tells us that the Datong era name should be read as Tiantong 天統 (565-569) under the Northern Qi (550-577). *SS*, 24.675-678. See especially *SS*, n. 7 (p. 693).

As Yan Gengwang has documented in detail, some leading Buddhist monks were in Chang'an when the city was the capital of the Northern Zhou.¹⁵⁹ One of them was *Jñānagupta (She'naquduo 闍那崛多, d.u.), from Gandhāra, who had travelled extensively in Central Asia and northwest India and learned a great deal about Buddhism.¹⁶⁰ Around 559-560 he arrived in Chang'an and not long afterwards was called to court. The emperor commissioned a monastery for him where he started to translate Buddhist scriptures.¹⁶¹ *Jñānagupta's experience is reflective of the high regard in which eminent monks were held under the Northern Zhou before the persecution. Importantly, many of these clerics had access to aristocrats or even to the court, thus seemingly continuing the Northern Wei tradition.¹⁶² When the Northern Zhou religious purge was about to start, Emperor Wudi expressly summoned *Jñānagupta to the court and asked him to disrobe. The monk politely declined the suggestion, but he was granted permission to leave Chang'an. When Emperor Sui Wendi ascended the throne, *Jñānagupta returned to Chang'an and died there.¹⁶³ Another example is Huishan 慧善, a southerner and an expert in Mahāyāna texts, in particular the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*). When he arrived in Chang'an, Yuwen Hu extended support to him.¹⁶⁴ Tanyan 曇延 is yet another example. Because of his deep knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, the emperor (probably Zhou Wudi himself) even asked him to be his preceptor.¹⁶⁵ On the eve of the persecution, Tanyan is said to have tried in vain to persuade the emperor to desist from his plans against the Buddhist clergy.¹⁶⁶

Not much information can be gathered about the monastic economy of the Northern Zhou before the persecution. Nevertheless, there are cases that may shed light on this aspect. For instance, when Daozhen 道臻 was appointed as the monastic convener by Yuwen Tai, he was rewarded with a large portion of farming land in the vicinity of his monastery.¹⁶⁷ Although the evidence is scant, it is certain that as late as the Northern Zhou the court would grant estates to eminent monks. Above we have seen that during the Northern Wei, the Buddhist community collectively possessed lands. Moreover, since the establishment of the *saṃgha*

Zhang, 1997:72. According to Kamata, 19 Buddhist monasteries were built during the Northern Zhou. Kamata, 2002c:429-430.

¹⁵⁹ Yan, 2009:43; Nomura, 1968:77-84.

¹⁶⁰ Chen, 2002a:17; Nomura, 1968:99-100.

¹⁶¹ XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2060.433b-c.

¹⁶² Tsukamoto, 1974b:536-543; Nomura, 1968:77-84.

¹⁶³ XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2060.434-a-b.

¹⁶⁴ XGSZ, j.8. T.50.2060.486c.

¹⁶⁵ XGSZ, j.8. T.50.2060.488c; Tsukamoto, 1974b:540-541.

¹⁶⁶ XGSZ, j.8. T.50.2060.489a; j.23. T.50.2060.626c.

¹⁶⁷ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.631b; Tsukamoto, 1974b:536-537.

and Buddha Households, land appropriated by Buddhist monasteries is likely to have increased considerably. It is an educated guess that the Buddhist monastic economy continued to expand, although the extent to which this happened cannot be ascertained. Regarding the monastic administration, we have already outlined a general framework of the institution and its historical evolution.¹⁶⁸ We have also mentioned a number of leading monks of the time who under the Northern Wei probably acted as mediators between the Buddhist community and the imperial government. Under the Northern Zhou, however, monastic conveners may have played a much smaller role.

4.4 Buddhism in the South: A Brief Excursion

In this section, we shall furnish a short sketch regarding the key areas of Buddhist development in the south. But first we should ask: how was it that the first two persecutions took place in the north, while no such drastic suppression of Buddhism occurred in the south? It has been argued that the southern courts were 'gentrified' to some extent, thus less autocratic and more influenced by the local aristocracy, resulting in a softer approach to the Buddhist community. Other reasons for which the north has been seen as more prone to persecution include competition for patronage between Buddhists and Taoists and historical circumstances, such as the alleged involvement of Buddhist monks in rebellions.¹⁶⁹ A lack of such conditions in the south arguably meant that there would be no necessity for a persecution of Buddhism.¹⁷⁰ The heated debates between Buddhists and Taoists would also have played into the emperor's hands, and prepared the ground for the attacks.¹⁷¹ It has further been observed that the classical culture of the southern rulers would make them more receptive to the Buddhist teachings.¹⁷² By contrast, the emperors in the north were generally either poorly educated or illiterate and their interests were in military matters.¹⁷³ These arguments are unconvincing in various ways. Polemics between Buddhists and Taoists were as heated in the south, but there they did not result into any suppression of Buddhism. More generally, we can observe that in the period of disunion there were more than twenty emperors in the north, yet only two persecutions took place. If militarism was indeed a

¹⁶⁸ On Buddhist monastic conveners during the Northern Zhou, see Tsukamoto, 1974b:536-547; Yamazaki, 1971:508-516.

¹⁶⁹ However, only Faxiu's rebellion in 481 resulted in increased controls on the monastic community. *WS*, 114.3045; *GHMJ*, j.6.T.52.2103.125c.

¹⁷⁰ Zhang, 2004:91.

¹⁷¹ Zhang, 2004:91-93.

¹⁷² Zhang, 2004:91-92.

¹⁷³ Tsukamoto, 1974b:64-65, 635-636.

common trait of those rulers, it still does not explain the exceptional character of these incidents. On the other hand, Emperors Taiwudi of the Northern Wei and Zhou Wudi did not start to persecute Buddhism from the inception of their reigns. Intriguingly, Zhou Wudi frequently lectured on the Confucian classics, which goes against the stereotype of the illiterate northern ruler.

While it is difficult to give a precise reason for the absence of major persecutions in the south, some numbers may shed light on the respective fortunes of Buddhism in the two parts of China. There were about 36,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and 1,913 monasteries in the south from 420 to 479 CE.¹⁷⁴ While the clergy's numbers dropped slightly to 32,500 during 479-502, the number of monasteries increased to 2,015.¹⁷⁵ The numbers for both Buddhist clergy and monasteries reached a peak during 502-557 (82,700/100,000; 2,846), while they dropped again to 32,000 and 1,232 respectively in 557-587.¹⁷⁶ When we turn to the north, the change was always dramatic. Around 476, there were about 2,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and 100 monasteries in the capital, whereas, as we have cited, across the kingdom the figures reached 77,258 and 6,478 respectively in around 477.¹⁷⁷ That was merely a quarter of a century after the Northern Wei persecution. In 534, while the clergy's number is uncertain, the number of monasteries more than doubled, reaching 13,727.¹⁷⁸ From 550 until the second persecution in 574, it is said that Buddhist monks and nuns could have probably reached 2-3 million whereas the number of monasteries reached 30,000-40,000.¹⁷⁹

As Gernet argues, on the surface, the increase and decrease of numbers reflected contemporary political circumstances and religious policy.¹⁸⁰ In fact, the religious policy of the south was more consistent and more thoroughly implemented than in the north. Even as early as the beginning of the Liu Song dynasty, the southern court started to restrict the

¹⁷⁴ *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.503a*. Kamata, 2002c:86.

¹⁷⁵ *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.503a*.

¹⁷⁶ *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.503b-c*. Cf. Gernet, 1995:6; Lagerwey, 2010:30.

¹⁷⁷ *WS*, 114.30439. The *Bianzheng lun* states that Emperor Wencheng ordained 30,000 monks and nuns during his reign. *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.506c*. The same source also tells us that during Emperor Xiaowen's reign (471-500), around 40,000 monks and nuns were officially ordained. See *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.507a*.

¹⁷⁸ *WS*, 114.3042; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:89.

¹⁷⁹ *BZL*, j.3. *T.52.2110.507b*. Cf. Gernet, 1995:6. *WS*, 114.3048. In the *Bianzheng lun*, Falin observes that during the 170 years of the Northern Wei dynasty, there were only 47 state-sponsored monasteries. Another 839 monasteries were supported by aristocrats and members of the elite. All others, more than 30,000 in number, were built by ordinary people. Falin's information suggests that the total number of Buddhist monastics under the Northern Wei was 2 million. We shall discuss this point below when dealing with the Northern Zhou persecution.

¹⁸⁰ Gernet, 1995:7-8.

expansion of Buddhist monastic communities.¹⁸¹ In 420/422, the Buddhist monk Huilin 慧琳 issued a treatise censoring his own religion, eliciting severe criticism from other monks, but significantly receiving emperor Wudi's (Liu Yu) endorsement, which grew into patronage during Wendi's reign.¹⁸² In 435, a regional imperial official memorialized the emperor to regulate the Buddhist monastic community. He made a specific reference to uncontrolled monastic establishments.¹⁸³ In 458, a monk named Tanbiao 曇標 joined a rebel leader in a disturbance against the government. The episode was used to enact even tighter controls on the Buddhist clergy.¹⁸⁴ In 462, it was ordered that Buddhist monks should prostrate to the emperor.¹⁸⁵ These examples suggest that, in the south, even in the presence of patronage, state control over the Buddhist community may have been more consistent, to an extent that may have made a major persecution unnecessary.

A discussion between Emperor Song Wendi and his ministers may be considered revealing of the emperor's attitude towards Buddhism. The emperor was reportedly in agreement with his ministers Fan Tai 範泰 (d.u.) and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433),¹⁸⁶ who remarked that Buddhist sūtras would lead people to a higher spiritual understanding. Wendi commented that such an understanding would lead to a peaceful reign, in other words that Buddhism was beneficial to the society. Some of the officials also echoed the emperor by saying that if people observed the five Buddhist precepts, law and order would prevail across the whole empire.¹⁸⁷ Since Buddhism attracted positive attention from the imperial court and social elite, the condition for its development was favourable. According to Fei Zhangfang's catalogue, some 211 Buddhist scriptures were translated into Chinese during the Liu Song dynasty, more than half of them during Wendi's reign, mainly during the Yuanjia era 元嘉 (424-453).¹⁸⁸

Emperor Wudi 武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, 464-549; r. 502-549) of the Liang 梁 (502-557) dynasty furnishes a further example for understanding southern Buddhism and the state. Although Liang Wudi is best known as the "bodhisattva emperor" and a pious Buddhist, his religious policies and ideas are complex. We should distinguish between his political use of

¹⁸¹ For more on Emperor Song Wudi's (Liu Yu) regulation on Buddhism, see Kamata, 2002c:94-95.

¹⁸² *SoS*, 97.2391.

¹⁸³ *SoS*, 97.2386; *CFYG*, 194.542a. Cf. Tang, 1991:417; Kamata, 2002c:112-114.

¹⁸⁴ *SoS*, 97.2386-2387; *CFYG*, 194.542a.

¹⁸⁵ *SoS*, 97.2387. Cf. Tang, 1991:449.

¹⁸⁶ These two imperial officials played an important role in promoting Buddhism, in which they were both personally involved. Kamata, 2002c:95-96, 151-159.

¹⁸⁷ *LDSBJ*, j.10. T.49.2034.88c. *GHMJ*, j.1. T.52.2103.110a.

¹⁸⁸ *LDSBJ*, j.10. T.49.2034.89b-92c. For a summary of Buddhism during the Yuanjia era, see Tsukamoto, 1975:69-99; Kamata, 2002c:100-107.

Buddhism, his control of the Buddhist community and his personal devotion to Buddhism.¹⁸⁹ His political use of Buddhist ideas is clear from his attempts to outline a coherent religious policy as well as his application of selected Buddhist doctrines in the society to achieve a political end.¹⁹⁰ To pursue this policy, he would select some leading Buddhist monks of the time as advisors.¹⁹¹ Although those monks appeared to be Emperor Wu's personal consultants in Buddhist affairs, their religious opinion seems to have been influenced in turn by the emperor, who would also write his own commentaries to Buddhist scriptures as well as influential prefaces to the work of Buddhist scholars.¹⁹² As an example of this collaboration, in 510, a team of senior monks was commissioned to investigate a controversial Buddhist sutra and its authenticity. After a thorough evaluation, it was determined that it was a fabrication. Hence all copies of the sutra were burned and the author of the text, a monk, was defrocked.¹⁹³

Emperor Wu initiated and successfully organized the bodhisattva ordination, and he was the very first one to be ordained in this new ritual.¹⁹⁴ This seems to have been meant to enhance the emperor's ideological authority over the Buddhist monastic community, and indirectly to further consolidate his imperial power.¹⁹⁵ The most ambitious endeavour of Emperor Liang Wudi's religious policy may well have been his attempt to appoint himself as a Lay Rectifier of the *saṃgha* (*Baiyi sengzheng*), which we have discussed in the first chapter.¹⁹⁶ Although the opposition of the clergy thwarted this attempt, Wudi's control of religious matters was generally successful.¹⁹⁷ Due to his extreme zeal in Buddhist worship and his lavish donations to the Buddhist community, the emperor was accused of prioritizing Buddhism over his court affairs. But perhaps it is fair to argue that for a similar reason, Liang Wudi's reign was the longest in the whole period of north-south division. Beyond specific regulations and initiatives, the success of Liang Wudi's religious policy is likely to have ensued from his very direct engagement with the Buddhist community.¹⁹⁸ This approach, building on an already established tradition of simultaneous control and patronage, may well

¹⁸⁹ De Rauw, 2008:4 and *passim*; Yamazaki, 1971:194-209; Yan, 1999:94-123, 174-261; Kamata, 2002c:198-223.

¹⁹⁰ Ch'en, 1964:124-126; Yamazaki, 1971:194-199; Yan, 1999:109-123, 191-203.

¹⁹¹ Yan, 1988:19-27; Chen, 2006:64-87; Janousch, 1999:117-133.

¹⁹² De Rauw, 2008:191-197; De Rauw and Heirman, 2011:50-54; Ch'en, 1964:125-126.

¹⁹³ *CSZJJ*, j.5. T.55.2145.40b-c. Cf. Zürcher, 1982:167; Yan, 1989:14.

¹⁹⁴ Janousch, 1999:121-133.

¹⁹⁵ De Rauw, 2008:48-56; Janousch, 1999:139-149.

¹⁹⁶ See above, p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Kamata, 2002c:200-203.

¹⁹⁸ For detailed discussions of Liang Wudi and his Buddhist activities, see Yan, 1989; De Rauw, 2008; Janousch, 1999; Chen, 2006.

have been one of the main reasons why no persecution of Buddhism took place in the south in the fifth and sixth centuries, when major attacks against the religion were being launched instead in the north.

CHAPTER FIVE The Persecution of Buddhism under the Northern Zhou

5.1 Religious Debates: Preparation for the Persecution?

It should be mentioned from the outset that although there were frequent religious debates at the Northern Zhou court, it is not clear whether Wudi intentionally convened them to pave the way for the persecution in 574. Such court debates were not altogether uncommon; Xiaowendi, for example, had occasionally summoned Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to discuss religious matters.¹ We know more about one particular debate in 520, thus several decades before the Northern Zhou. The topic was the origins of Taoism and Buddhism, and their respective chronologies.² Taoism was represented by a certain Jiang Bin 姜斌 (d.u.), who quoted a tradition that the Buddha had once attended Laozi when the latter was converting the barbarians.³ When asked about his source, he claimed that it was a scripture entitled *Laozi kaitian jing* 老子開天經 (*Scripture of Laozi's Opening of Heaven*).⁴ A Buddhist monk named Tanwuzui 曇無最 responded that the Buddha was born much earlier than Laozi, around 1029 BCE.⁵ An in-depth official investigation concluded, however, that apart from the 5,000-character text or *Daode jing* 道德經, no further scripture under Laozi's authorship could be substantiated. As a result, Jiang Bin was condemned to death for fabricating documents, only to be saved thanks to the intercession of the Buddhist monk.⁶ To be sure, the two sources cited by Tanwuzui were just as unreliable, although he was not punished.⁷ This may be viewed as a sign of the imperial partiality toward Buddhism, which as we have discussed, was a prevailing phenomenon in the latter decades of the Northern Wei.

Turning to the Northern Zhou, we can find some differences in the religious debates under that dynasty. Tsukamoto suggests that these court discussions may be seen as an attempt to amalgamate Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.⁸ If that was the emperor's intention, however, it did not yield the expected result.⁹ Yet Tsukamoto's assumption has merit, as we

¹ WS, 114.3037; Tang, 1991:501.

² For a detailed discussion of this debate see Kohn, 1995:176-177.

³ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.624c.

⁴ Ch'en points out that there is an extant scripture with this title in Taoist canon, but it does not mention the story Jiang Bin cited. Ch'en, 1964:184-185.

⁵ Ch'en, 1964:185; Kohn, 1995:24.

⁶ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.624.c-625a; FZTJ, j.38. T.49.2035.355c. Cf. Tang, 1991:536; Tsukamoto, 1974b:576-577.

⁷ Tang, 1991:537; Kohn, 1995:24-25.

⁸ Tsukamoto, 1974b:550-572.

⁹ Tsukamoto, 1974b:557-569.

will expound shortly. The first court debate under the Northern Zhou took place in 563, which was four years before Wei Yuansong submitted his memorial against Buddhism.¹⁰ In 569-570, Wudi convened another religious debate.¹¹ In 570, Zhen Luan 甄鸞 (535-?) presented a treatise entitled *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論 (*Laughing at the Dao*) to the emperor.¹² In the treatise, Zhen contested thirty-six alleged Taoist fallacies.¹³ But the treatise was burned under the emperor's orders.¹⁴ Tsukamoto rightly observes that while Wudi may have wanted different religions to converge, Zhen's treatise went in the other direction.¹⁵ We do not know if there was a religious debate immediately before the persecution, but Buddhist sources do hint at more discussions.¹⁶

In a letter apparently written before 574, a monk named Tanji 曇積 appealed on behalf of his fellow monks to the emperor.¹⁷ The following passages from this document suggest that a major purge may have been in the making already before the main incident:

[Your majesty] wishes to announce a solemn decree to order the monks to undergo an evaluation [of their religious status]. [The content of the decree] will then apply to all the imperial provinces so as to examine their religious vocation. But I think that to enter the Dao there would be more than one method. This humble monk will secure a humble life in the Guanyou area for the rest of his life. Thanks to your majesty's compassionate policy, I have been able to continue my religious practice [during the past years]. Therefore I wrote this letter of appeal with a mourning voice and sent it to you with my unfailing loyalty. I fear that I have disturbed your majesty so much and for that I am sincerely and trebly apologizing.¹⁸

Here Tanji, writing at the time when debates were still ongoing, seemingly expresses his anxiety at an upcoming purge. It is important to note, however, that the monk refers to the Buddhist clergy coming under close scrutiny, but no reference is made to a total proscription. This evidence, combined with Wei Yuansong's memorial invoking a purge of Buddhism in 567 (to be further discussed below), suggests that already from the late 560s the likelihood of

¹⁰ *BS*, 10.352; *ZS*, 5.72.

¹¹ *BS*, 45.810; Nomura, 1968:154-155.

¹² *GHMJ*, j.9. *T.52.2103.143c-152c*. For a full translation and study of this text, see Kohn, 1995.

¹³ *GHMJ*, j.9. *T.52.2103.143c-144a*; Kohn, 1995:52.

¹⁴ *GHMJ*, j.9. *T.52.2103.144a*; Kohn, 1995:50-51.

¹⁵ Tsukamoto, 1974b:557-564. For instance, the emperor invited another learned imperial official named Wei Fu 韋負 to comment on the three teachings. Wei replied that despite differences, all the three teachings led to a virtuous outcome. The emperor was satisfied by Wei's response. *BS*, 31.546. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:552-556; Nomura, 1968:155-156. It is noticeable that prior to Zhen Luan's treatise, the emperor had already convened three court debates. Liu, 1992:466.

¹⁶ *XGSZ*, j.23. *T.49.2060.626c*.

¹⁷ According to Tsukamoto's reconstruction, the letter was written during Wudi's reign, probably before 574. Tsukamoto, 1974b:607-610.

¹⁸ *GHMJ*, j. 24. *T.52.2103.279a-b*; *QHZW*, 22.3995a-3996a.

a major action of the state against the monastic community must have been palpable. Furthermore, rumors of a looming persecution may have started to circulate, witness the story of the soothsayer Qianglian 強練: some time before the great crisis he would reportedly climb on a tree every night and loudly chant the Buddha Śākyamuni's name, a bizarre behavior that dynastic historians would see as prophetic.¹⁹ Beyond such anecdotes, we can reasonably assume that tension had been growing in the relationship between the Buddhist community and the state, with anxiety spreading across the former.²⁰

In short, we cannot be sure whether the religious debates of the 560s bear any direct connection to the eventual persecution, but they must have contributed to a general atmosphere where the presence of Buddhism was increasingly questioned. There is also limited evidence that restrictions and controls affecting the Buddhist clergy were on their way in the same period. On the other hand, the final announcement of a total proscription in 574 suggests once more that, whatever their scope, such attempts of the state at restraining Buddhism were seen as insufficient. How this unfolded will be discussed in the next section.

5.2 The Persecution of Buddhism under the Northern Zhou in 574

In 572, Zhou Wudi visited the Xuandu guan 玄都觀 (Abbey of the Mysterious Metropolis), a major Taoist temple in Chang'an, and there delivered a lecture. The contents of the latter are unfortunately unknown, and he may or may not have touched on the status and prospects of religious communities.²¹ Two years later, in 574, the persecution was launched. A Song Taoist chronicle reports in some detail a discussion that would have taken place around the time of the proscription:

On the seventeenth day of the fifth month, the third year of Jiande (21 June 574) of Emperor Zhou Wudi's reign, Buddhism was eliminated (*chu Futu jiao* 除浮屠教) and all the images and scriptures were destroyed. [The emperor] presided over a discussion regarding the possible proscription of Taoism. He summoned the Taoist master Yan Da 嚴達 and asked: "Between Taoism and Buddhism, which one is better?" Da replied: "The host is better than the guest." The emperor said: "How to define the host and the guest?" [Da] replied: "Śākya (*Shi* 釋, i.e. Buddhism)

¹⁹ ZS, 47.851; BS, 89.2946. Different anecdotes are reported in the *Sui shu*, which has Qianglian predicting the end of the Northern Zhou but not the persecution of Buddhism. SS, 23.661. Zhipan changes the name of the soothsayer into Li Lian 李練, and has him wandering around the capital crying his prophecies in 572. FZTJ, j.38. T.49.2035.358b9.

²⁰ James A. Benn argues that already during the 550s and 560s, Buddhist monks felt insecure and braced for the coming of the end of the Dharma, in particular after the disintegration of the Liang dynasty. Benn, 2006:430-438.

²¹ ZS, 5.79. Cf. Nomura, 1968:171.

originated in the Western Regions. Is it not the guest? The Dao (Taoism) emerged in China. Is it not the host?" The emperor said: "Now the guest is about to depart, should not the host courteously bid him farewell?" Da replied: "If the guest returns [home], it will be beneficial to the land of the barbarians, whereas if the host remains in its native land, there will be nothing harmful to China. Hence if those who depart do not return and those who remain guard themselves, is this not a suitable thing to do?" The emperor praised [Yan Da] for his response. However, the course of action had already been established, and both [Buddhism and Taoism] were proscribed.²²

This source seems to imply at first that Taoism was proscribed *after* Buddhism, although the final part of the record refers to the joint abolition of the two religions, something that the dynastic history confirms, as we shall see shortly. Therefore, the emperor's audience with Yan Da must have taken place some time before the persecution, possibly during Wudi's visit to the Xuandu guan in 572. The episode suggests in any case that the proscription was preceded by a search for ideological justifications, as conveyed by the host and guest rhetoric in the conversation between Wudi and Yan Da. As a further instance of such preparations, a Buddhist source states that a monk named Sengwei 僧瑋 was invited to the capital by the emperor in 571. When the emperor was about to persecute Buddhism, another monk named Jing'ai 靜靄, probably together with Sengwei, tried in vain to dissuade the emperor.²³ These monks, then, must have known the emperor's plans some time before they were enacted.

In 572, the emperor removed Yuwen Hu and assumed full power; in the same year he visited the Xuandu guan. A year later, in 573, during a court debate, Confucianism was ranked in the first place, Taoism second and Buddhism last.²⁴ This outcome was followed by the decree issued in 574, in which the proscription of Buddhism and Taoism was finally announced. The following is the summary of the edict in the annals of the *Zhou shu*:

On the *bingzi* [day of the fifth month of Jiande 建德 3, 21 June 574], for the first time Buddhism and Taoism were abolished (*chu duan fo dao er jiao* 初斷佛、道二教). All scriptures and images were destroyed. Buddhist monks and Taoist priests were dismissed, and all of them were ordered to return to [the status of] ordinary people. All excessive cults (*yinsi* 淫祀) were also prohibited. All that was not recorded in the ritual canons (*lidian* 禮典) was eliminated.²⁵

²² See *HYSJ*, j.8. *DZ*, 17.853c; David C. Yu (trans.), 2000:379; also *CFYG*, 51.573b, where, however, the date is mistaken. Cf. Chen, 1975:115; Tsukamoto, 1974b:612; Nomura, 1968:205.

²³ *SSJGL*, j. 2. *T.49.2037.804c*. As we have discussed, several other monks were able to leave the capital before the persecution.

²⁴ *ZS*, 5.78-83. Cf. *XGSZ*, j.23. *T.50.2060.628b*. Nomura, 1968:172; Kohn, 1995:30-32.

²⁵ *ZS*, 5.85. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:616; Nomura, 1968:187. A nearly identical record is in *BS*, 10.360, which in the last part refers to 'canons on sacrifices' (*sidian* 祀典) rather than 'ritual canons'. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:619; Yu, 1977:241.

This edict would be the main official act of the persecution. We have seen above that a number of episodes before 574 can be construed as foreboding the crisis, if only in hindsight. Yet, the order to "abolish" (*duan* 斷) Buddhism and Taoism came suddenly, and unexpected at least in its scope and fierceness. Scriptures and images were destroyed, and all clerics were returned to lay status. It is also noteworthy that the same decree would proscribe "excessive cults" (*yinsi* 淫祀), essentially anything going against the state's ritual regulations.

We shall notice in the imperial decree the word *chu* 初, which I have translated as "for the first time". Its meaning is unclear, but it may refer to an initial proscription, in other words a first step to which further purges would follow. Probably as early as 571, when Sengwei had been summoned by the emperor, restrictions of some sort had already been imposed upon the Buddhist community. Tanji's undated letter may be viewed as another piece of evidence. Therefore, despite its isolated mention in the dynastic history, the total proscription of Buddhism may have marked a peak within a steady series of measures. That aside, some facts concerning the persecution are difficult to ascertain.

Most noticeably, Buddhist sources state that from two to three million monks and nuns were defrocked, while 40,000 monasteries and shrines were closed or destroyed.²⁶ One source even increases the number of monks to four million.²⁷ There is no solid evidence to support these data, which include the effects of the persecution when this was extended to the Northern Qi after the Zhou conquered it. In his letter, Tanji does mention that there were more than 10,000 Buddhist monasteries at the time, presumably in the Northern Zhou territory only.²⁸ Even so, the figure of two or three million Buddhist monks and nuns does seem staggering.

The first to give this indication is Fei Zhangfang 費長房, a former monk who was laicized due to the persecution, and was writing not long after it.²⁹ Elsewhere in his work, Fei Zhangfang states that there were more than two million monks and 30,000 monasteries in the Northern Qi, which seems consistent with his overall count.³⁰ His, however, was a gross estimation, not an accurate report. We have seen above that figures suggested by critics of the Buddhist clergy at the end of the Northern Wei were also based on estimated numbers rather than official census. Moreover, it may be significant that in one place Fei Zhangfang refers to

²⁶ *LDSBJ*, j.11. *T.49.2034.94b*; *XGSZ*, j.23. *T.50.2060.626c*.

²⁷ *GHMJ*, j.6. *T.52.2103.128a*. Cf. Tang, 1991:542.

²⁸ *GHMJ*, j. 24. *T.52.2103.279b*.

²⁹ On Fei Zhangfang former monkhood and laicization, see *FZTJ*, j.39. *T.49.2035.361a*; Jan (trans.), 1966:16.

³⁰ *LDSBJ*, j.9. *T.49.2034.83a*. Cf. Ch'en, 1952:167, n. 2.

those affected by the persecution of the two religions (Buddhism and Taoism) as the "seven assemblies" (*qi zhong* 七眾), an expression including not only monks and nuns but also male and female novices and lay devotees.³¹ One wonders, then, whether his grand total of three million could not be based on such a broad criterion.

In this connection, Gernet's classification of three groups of Buddhist monks and monasteries in medieval China seems relevant. Gernet distinguishes between the privileged court monks residing in imperial monasteries, monks and monasteries supported by wealthy families, and finally the mass of the ordinary monks affiliated to local shrines or temples. Of these three, the first two were few whereas the third type made the overwhelming majority.³² The figure of three million is likely to have taken into account this broader mass of Buddhists, whose ordination status would have been uncertain. In one passage, Daoxuan also implies that those affected by the imperial proscription were not just full monks and nuns:

Three years after the emperor had launched the persecution, Buddhism in the Guan and Long 關隴 areas (Shaanxi) was entirely eliminated. When he conquered the Northern Qi, the persecution was extended there. At that time, under the Wei and then the Qi, Buddhism was flourishing in the Eastern Plain. There were 40,000 monasteries and temples, all of which were converted to mansions for the princes and dukes. The Śākya community of the five assemblies (*wu zhong Shi men* 五眾釋門 i.e. the Buddhist community)³³ was diminished, as three million were all returned to the military population (*junmin* 軍民, i.e. were enlisted) and registered households.³⁴

Here Daoxuan mentions the 'five assemblies' (*wu zhong* 五眾) of Buddhists, including male and female novices and female practitioners between 18 and 20 (*śikṣamāṇā*) apart from full monks and nuns.³⁵ It is difficult to establish how strictly he would refer to this definition, and how the order to disrobe would apply to novices. The latter group may have included a larger portion of lay Buddhists or ordinary people attached to Buddhist monasteries.

It should also be noticed that the *Wei shu* estimates in two million the "great assembly of

³¹ *LDSBJ*, j.12. T.49.2034.104a. On the seven assemblies, see the relevant entry in the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism at: [http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id\('b4e03-8846'\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id('b4e03-8846')).

³² Gernet, 1995: 3-4. Cf. Wang, 1991:564-565.

³³ In one place, Daoxuan refers to four groups of Buddhists (*si zhong* 四眾) as those affected by the persecution, but without any specification. *GHMJ*, j.10. T.52.2103.153b.

³⁴ *GJFDLH*, j.2. T.52.2140.374c; *GHMJ*, j.10. T.52.2103.153c. Cf. Soper, 1959:119. Soper translates *wu zhong Shi men* 五眾釋門 as "the five categories of *śramaṇas*", but the term *shamen* 沙門 (*śramaṇa*) is not in the original source.

³⁵ On *wuzhong* see <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E4%BA%94%E8%A1%86> Daoxuan also used the term *wuzhong* elsewhere: cf. *XGSZ*, j.2. T.50.2060.433c.

monks and nuns" (*sengni dazhong* 僧尼大眾) at the end of the Wei period.³⁶ However, some scholars have understood the expression *da zhong* 大眾 in this source as referring to a third type of Buddhists *apart* from monks and nuns and including lay followers, novices and those who worked in or were attached to the monasteries.³⁷ Hansen may therefore be right in pointing out that the fully ordained Buddhist clergy did not exceed 1% of the Chinese population throughout history.³⁸ Even when the Northern Wei lavishly patronized Buddhism, the number of Buddhist monks and nuns, as noted, was small.³⁹ In line with these observations, we may suggest that a large number of those in the 'greater assembly' were the privately ordained monks, for whom the imperial government had ordered laicization repeatedly, and as late as 517.⁴⁰ Thus, while the social and political conditions may not have permitted a dramatic increase in officially ordained Buddhist monks and nuns, it is possible and even likely that private ordinations were uninterrupted. As Gernet points out, "the number of regular monks and nuns was, generally speaking, inversely proportional to that of unregistered religious. Imperial policy had at any rate less of an effect on the real number of religious than one might think."⁴¹ This remark will explain why a drastic proscription may have been necessary simply to regulate a growingly chaotic monastic community.

5.3 Northern Qi: Expansion of the Persecution

In 577, Emperor Zhou Wudi waged a long-prepared war against the Northern Qi, and shortly after the latter was defeated.⁴² What happened to Northern Qi Buddhism after its fall is not recorded in the dynastic histories, so the following is based chiefly on Buddhist sources. However, it is certain that as the eastern state fell, the persecution was extended there.⁴³ The impact of the war was immediately felt on the Buddhist community. For example, when two defecting military commanders escorted the invading army to the Northern Qi capital, Yecheng, some monasteries were set ablaze.⁴⁴ On 23 February 577 (Jiande 7.1.20) Zhou

³⁶ WS, 114.3048; Hurvitz (trans.), 1956:103.

³⁷ Zhang Hequan, 2010:293-294; He, 1986a:10. Jiang Boqin also notes that servants in the Buddhist monastery or those who were registered for the monastic households were initiated in Buddhism and observed the five basic precepts. Jiang, 1987:116-117.

³⁸ Hansen, 2000:180.

³⁹ Cf. the numbers provided above.

⁴⁰ In 517, Dowager Empress Ling reiterated the importance of restrictions on and strict checking of the candidates before ordination took place. WS, 114.3042-43.

⁴¹ Gernet, 1995:11.

⁴² Lü, 1987:229.

⁴³ *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.358c; cf. Chen, 2002a:15.

⁴⁴ *BS*, 88.1882; *BQS*, 11.150.

Wudi was in the Qi capital, where the imperial seal of the defeated was ritually handed over to him.⁴⁵ Wudi left Yecheng on 16 March,⁴⁶ and it seems plausible that the order to extend the proscription of Buddhism to the newly conquered territories was given before that date.⁴⁷ General Yang Jian (541-604), a pious Buddhist, was present when Wudi entered the Qi capital. Although no contemporary record is left of the general's response toward the persecution,⁴⁸ he would later claim to have opposed it.⁴⁹ On 8 March, Yang Jian was sent to quell a rebellion in Jizhou 冀州.⁵⁰ If really his presence could have acted as a deterrent on Wudi, we may speculate that the extension of the persecution was decided between 8 and 16 March 577.⁵¹ There is no clear indication that in Yecheng the persecution also involved Taoism, as this time it seems to have applied to Buddhism only.⁵²

According to some Buddhist sources, soon after conquering the Northern Qi, Zhou Wudi summoned some five hundred leading Buddhist monks and notified them of the persecution. All those present reportedly remained silent except for the monk Huiyuan 惠遠 (523-592),⁵³ who challenged the emperor and protested:

At that time, there were more than 500 monks including the Grand Convener of Śramaṇa [in the assembly]. Since they were all familiar with the emperor's fearful reputation, they knew that any remonstrance would hardly be followed. It was not an isolated incident, for [Buddhism] had already been abolished in Guannei (Inner Side of the Frontier; i.e. Chang'an areas). They therefore all kept silent, but the emperor pressed for an answer. They looked at the pale face of each other and then lowered

⁴⁵ *ZS*, 6.100; *ZZTJ*, 173.5370. Suwa only mentions that after the fall of the Northern Qi capital in 577, Buddhism was purged. Suwa, 1988:36. In another place Suwa notices that an imperial decree called for the destruction of some imperial gardens and pavilions on 1 March 577 (Chengguang 承光 1.1.27); for the text of the decree, see *QHZZ*, 3.3895b. Suwa argues that the likely presence of monasteries in these areas suggests that the persecution was launched on the same occasion. Suwa, 1988:313-314. This is possible, for the Northern Qi emperors sometimes donated imperial properties to Buddhist monasteries; see e.g. *BQS*, 8.102. Moreover, even during the war, the Northern Qi rulers were refurbishing some Buddhist monasteries. See *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.358a; Nomura, 1968:348.

⁴⁶ *ZS*, 6.103.

⁴⁷ Cf. *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.358c.

⁴⁸ Nomura, 1972:122; Yamazaki, 1971:283-296.

⁴⁹ In a letter he wrote to the Tiantai monk Zhiyi 智顓 (538-597), Yang Jian expressed his regret about the persecution. But by then he was emperor of the Sui dynasty. *GQBL*, j.2. T.46.1934.802c11-26.

⁵⁰ *ZS*, 6.101.

⁵¹ When Zhou Wudi sacked Yecheng, several royal princes of the Northern Qi tried to resist in Xindu 信都, and one of them attempted to raise a mercenary army. Several thousand Buddhist monks reportedly asked to be enlisted. *ZS*, 12.193. Their motivations may have been purely economic, but it would be no surprise if they were driven by the frustration of the persecution.

⁵² See *SS*, 35.1094; *GHMJ*, j.4. T.52.2103.112c-113b; *XGSZ*, j.23. T.50.2060.625b-c; *FZTJ*, j.38. T.49.2035.352a, 357b. Cf. the discussion in Liu, 2011:250-263.

⁵³ On Huiyuan, a prominent figure in Pure Land Buddhism in China, see Tanaka, 1990.

their heads while tears were running from their eyes.⁵⁴

We can see Wudi here starkly addressing the monastic leaders. But the source then states that Huiyuan fiercely protested, and from the exchanges between the monk and the emperor several interesting points can be surmised. Wudi emphasized that the true meaning of Buddhism was not in scriptures and images, which could accordingly be destroyed.⁵⁵ Secondly, the emperor used the classic cultural rhetoric, arguing that the ascetic lifestyle of monks was not in accordance with the Confucian requirement of filial piety. For that reason, they should be returned home. Although Huiyuan is said to have threatened the emperor with the karmic retribution of hell, his warning was not heeded; intriguingly, Wudi would have replied that he did not fear hell as long as he could make the people happy (但令百姓得樂, 朕亦不辭地獄諸苦).⁵⁶ Judging from this episode, then, a rhetoric of general welfare and defense of tradition seems to have supported the persecution as it was extended to the former Northern Qi territories. We can see a hint here at the economic and cultural aspects of the proscription, which I will discuss in the next section.

5.4 Reasons for the Persecution

In general, the causes of the persecution can be explored from two perspectives. First is the information we gather from relevant documents, and secondly, with the benefit of hindsight, the persecution can be analyzed from its outcome.⁵⁷ We may never know why a total persecution took place at a time when attacks on Buddhism as a foreign religion were not frequent. On the contrary, some imperial officials such as Wei Fu 韋負 and Yan Zhitui 顏之推 even favoured it. The architects of the Northern Zhou ruling ideology such as Su Chuo 蘇綽 and Lu Bian 盧弁, not to mention general Yang Jian, all knew Buddhism and its doctrines well.⁵⁸ Yet, in our analysis of the Northern Wei persecution, we have seen that extreme

⁵⁴ *GHMJ*, j.10. *T.52.2103.153a*; *XGSZ*, j.8. *T.50.2060.490a* (trans. in Tanaka, 1990:25-27). Cf. Tang, 1991:543-544; Soper, 1959:119; Nomura, 1968:229-231.

⁵⁵ *GHMJ*, j.10. *T.52.2103.153b*; *XGSZ*, j.8. *T.50.2060.490b*.

⁵⁶ *GHMJ*, j.10. *T.52.2103.153b*; *XGSZ*, j.2. *T.50.2060.490c*. Cf. Soper, 1959:119-120; Tanaka, 1990:27.

⁵⁷ In commenting on the reasons of the suppressions of the Sect of the Three Stages (*san jie jiao* 三階教), Hubbard observes that “in pondering the arguments presented by these scholars, I was struck first of all by their *a priori* nature – that is, these arguments can be put forth without investigating the actual, particular circumstances of the suppressions.” Hubbard, 2001:192. When we understand the Northern Zhou persecution, it is not necessarily wrong to view the persecution from its outcome, but at the same time we should consider it in its full complexity.

⁵⁸ *ZS*, 23.395; *BS*, 63.2243. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:524; Nomura, 1968:110; 1974b:524-526;

measures against the Buddhist community can be understood as a last resort to restore a preferred relationship between that community and the state. The Northern Zhou persecution appears to have followed the same pattern. Let us start from the social factor, which suggests that the persecution was meant to uproot monastic corruption.⁵⁹ Such a reason is not without substance.⁶⁰ Unrelated to the persecution, allegations against monks for inappropriate conduct, including sexual intercourse between senior monastics and aristocratic women, are occasionally recorded in the dynastic histories.⁶¹ In some Taoist sources, the persecution was simply attributed to the low moral standards among the Buddhist monastic community.⁶² Buddhist monks were remiss in their religious practice, and the Taoist priesthood would have been undeservedly embroiled in their punishment.⁶³

On the other hand, in Buddhist sources, such as Tanji's letter, one reads that even a misbehaving monk was better than a layperson.⁶⁴ Tanji obviously did not deny the existence of unworthy monks, nor indeed were such problems new. In 517, under the Northern Wei, Prince Yuan Cheng had already complained as follows:

In ancient time when the Buddha expounded his teaching, he normally resided by the mountains and forests. But nowadays monks are fond of cities and metropolitan areas. Is not the narrow brook the suitable place for practice of chanting and walking around? Is not the quiet surrounding the best environs for residing and meditating? If one's mind is driven by material gains, then it would not automatically stop. Those who stayed [in luxurious places] would lose their sincerity whereas those who built the places would lose their merit. They are the disgrace of the Śākya clan (Buddhism), like house rats for the dharma. The internal discipline (i.e. the monastic rules) cannot tolerate them and the kingly laws should chase them. This is not merely the situation in the capital but elsewhere under heaven, such as in the prefectural and town monasteries. They encroach upon the poor and rob them, occupying extensive plots of farming land.⁶⁵

The document shows that already at the beginning of the sixth century, the corruption of the Buddhist clergy was the target of vehement criticism. Considering the deteriorating social and political conditions thereafter, further decadence in the Buddhist community could only

Goodrich, 1953:12.

⁵⁹ See e.g. the summary in *SS*, 35.1099. Cf. Tang, 1991:538.

⁶⁰ Gimello cites texts by Huisi and Yan Zhitui (to be discussed below) to argue that large number of monks were involved in practices other than meditation and scripture learning. Gimello, 1976:100-115.

⁶¹ *BQS*, 21.308. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974a:262-283. We have seen above that similar allegations had been made at the time of the first persecution.

⁶² *YJQJ*, j.85. Li (ed.), 2003:1922. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:631; Yamazaki, 1981:99.

⁶³ *LSZXTDTJ*, j.29.30. Nomura, 1968:202; Tsukamoto, 1974b:632; Tang, 1991:807-811.

⁶⁴ *GHMJ*, j.7. T.52.2103.131c.

⁶⁵ *WS*, 114.3045; cf. Hurvitz(trans.), 1956:96.

be expected. Daoxuan significantly left the strongest censures of the monastic community in his excerpt of this text. Wei Yuansong's memorial, which was also collected by Daoxuan, refers to many instances of alleged monastic malfeasance.⁶⁶ In his *Erjiao lun* 二教論 (ca. 570), the monk Dao'an 道安, whilst attacking the Taoist clergy, would likewise admit to widespread venalities amongst Buddhist monks such as engaging in farming, lending money and pawn broking.⁶⁷

Another internal witness to the moral decline of the clergy is the famous Buddhist master Huisi 慧思 (515-577), who in a document written in 558 tells of the bitter sectarian strife in his community, and of how his fellow monks would let him starve or even attempt to poison him on several occasions.⁶⁸ Modern scholars have therefore seen in his testimony a reflection of the monastic degeneration at the time.⁶⁹ A similar background can also be read in Yan Zhitui's 顏之推 (531-ca.590/1) *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*), probably compiled during the late sixth century in Chang'an.⁷⁰ One section of the book discusses Buddhism, which Yan defends against its critics. The latter would object to such issues as the misconduct of certain monks or the size of monastic establishments.⁷¹ Yan admits that bad monks existed, but contends that they were still better than many rogue imperial officials were. He further points out that monks in their majority were well-behaving, and that Buddhism was beneficial to the society.⁷² As for the large monastic estates, Yan imputes them to the flawed imperial religious policy.⁷³ Yet his very defensive arguments disclose the actual existence of such issues, confirming that critiques against the corruption of the clergy were not mere allegations. One is thus tempted to agree with Jamie Hubbard that "the wholesale suppression of 574-577 was a culmination of reaction against the abuse of privilege that seems to have characterized much of Buddhism during the Northern dynasties."⁷⁴

Nevertheless, a direct link between monastic corruption and the persecution must be carefully weighed. The rhetoric of corruption was often deployed to regulate or laicize

⁶⁶ More details will be provided below in the case study of Wei Yuansong.

⁶⁷ *EJL*, j.12. T.52.2103.143a. Cf. He, 1986a:33.

⁶⁸ *NYSDCSLSYW*, j.1. T.46.1933:787a-c; *XGSZ*, j.17. T.50.2060.563a.17-18. Magnin, 1979:37; Chen, 2001b:240-245.

⁶⁹ Weinstein, 1973:274.

⁷⁰ Teng, 1968:xxv; Yu Jiayi, 1980:849-852.

⁷¹ Teng, 1968:139.

⁷² Teng, 1968:146.

⁷³ Teng, 1968:147

⁷⁴ Hubbard, 2001:64.

Buddhist monks. Lapses in the moral standards within the Buddhist monastic community may have acted as a catalyst. Yet the total and deliberate suppression of Buddhism was something of a rarity, and must have resulted from some other, more direct factors.

The other classical explanation for the persecution is a religious motivation. It has been argued that Emperor Zhou Wudi's favour was with Taoism, and that accordingly he persecuted Buddhism.⁷⁵ The Taoist priest Zhang Bin 張賓 (*fl. ca. 560-590*), whom I discuss in detail below, was considered a chief partaker of the persecution.⁷⁶ What is puzzling in this scenario is that Taoism was also persecuted. However, and bearing in mind the theory of religious competition, it is true that intense polemical exchanges between Buddhists and Taoists existed throughout this period, reaching a climax around the time of the persecution. Just before the purge, a Buddhist monk compiled two treatises counterattacking the Taoist legend of Laozi and his 'conversion of the barbarians'.⁷⁷ Although both treatises are lost, extant fragments suggest that their stance was comparable to what we read in the *Xiaodao lun* and the *Erjiao lun*.⁷⁸

When reckoning with the religious factor, we may approach it from a different perspective. The frequent court debates may suggest that Zhou Wudi needed to redress the issue of an intense religious sectarianism.⁷⁹ We shall remember here Grim's and Finke's theory that a balanced religious competition can stave off persecution.⁸⁰ This may well have been the imperial government's objective initially. The reform based on the *Zhouli* may have shared a similar inspiration, although the emperor seems to have taken a different approach afterwards. We have noted that during the court debates, the *Zhouli* was one of the most discussed texts. This may explain why just over one month after the persecution, Zhou Wudi started to reorganize religious groups in a newly established academy called Tongdao guan 通道觀, based on a specifically prescribed curriculum.⁸¹ The Tongdao guan was founded on 2 August 574 with the following edict:

The Dao is immense and abyssal and it came into existence from chaos. It is therefore

⁷⁵ Zhang, 2001:43-44; Ch'en, 1954:272; Tokiwa, 1930:617-618.

⁷⁶ Weinstein, 1987:7; Qing, 1996a:454-459.

⁷⁷ *LDSBJ*, j.11. T.49.2034.100a.

⁷⁸ See *GHMJ*, j.8. T.52.2103.140a-141a; j.9. T.52.2103.143c-144a.

⁷⁹ Tang, 1991:539-542; Liu, 2011:223-232. Kamata counted eight religious debates before the ultimate religious persecution. Kamata, 2002d:439-442. Cf. Nomura, 1968:176.

⁸⁰ Grim and Finke, 2011, especially pp. 8-9. Cf. Grim and Finke, 2007.

⁸¹ Tang, 1991:542-543; Tsukamoto, 1974b:625-634; Yamazaki, 1981:94-108; Kamata, 2002c:443-446; Chen Guofu, 1975:115-117.

immeasurable. Its embodiment encompasses emptiness and existence, whereas its principle is extremely profound and abstruse. Yet since the paths have parted, its origins are infinitely distant. Therefore purity and integrity were separated, form (*xing* 形) and pneuma (*qi* 氣) mutually diverged, hence causing the strife of the three Mohist and eight Confucian schools, just like the contrast between the vermilion and the purple. Accordingly, sundry schools proliferated. It has been a long time since the Dao retreated and the attainment is insignificant. If there is no convergence (*bu you hui gui* 不有會歸), then the contention will not cease. Hence a College for Understanding the Dao (Tongdao guan 通道觀) should be instituted where the teachings of the sages and ancient philosophers, the golden principles and jade scriptures, and secret scrolls and sacred words will be collected. Those teachings that can benefit common people and supplement the conventional ethics will also be spread and expounded.⁸²

The edict thus provides the reasons and objectives for the institution of the Tongdao guan.⁸³ Its main explicit aim was putting an end to doctrinal heterogeneity and religious disputation. Could the same objective be achieved without the drastic extirpation of Buddhism? Considering this question, the fiscal reason, which we shall explore in due course, might be just as important. But the relevant point regarding the Tongdao guan is that its foundation came after the start of the persecution. Proscribing religious communities would have certainly served the goal of ideological uniformity, imposing by force a clean slate. The persecution then seems to have not only tamed religious sectarianism, but also consolidated the religio-political ideology.⁸⁴ This finds corroboration in the edict of 21 June 574, which, while banning Buddhism and Taoism, would also forbid all unorthodox rituals.⁸⁵ Below we shall see how Wei Yuansong's suggestion to establish a centralized church headed by the emperor, based in temples called Pingyan dasi 平延大寺 (Great Universal Monastery), would also be consistent with the same project.⁸⁶ The institution of the Tongdao guan may have at the same time served the purpose of appeasing doctrinal and religious controversy in the upper social echelon and fortified the anti-Buddhist stance in a somewhat divided imperial court.

Some Buddhist sources suggest a political background for the persecution, which they link

⁸² ZS, 5.85; BS, 12.360-361. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:625; Yamazaki, 1981:95.

⁸³ There are different opinions regarding the aims of the Tongdao guan, such as the appeasement of Taoism and an attempt at fusing religious ideas. See Tsukamoto, 1974b:625-634; Yamazaki, 1981:100-105. In a Taoist chronicle, the Tongdao guan is presented as a large Taoist temple that the emperor erected out of fear and remorse after having decreed the persecution of Taoism. HYSJ, j.8. DZ, 17.853c.

⁸⁴ Barrett, 1996:17-18; Tsukamoto, 1974b:625-626; Nomura, 1968:192-200.

⁸⁵ ZS, 5.85; BS, 10.360.

⁸⁶ Wei Yuansong and his opinions will be discussed in the case studies.

to a rumor concerning ‘black-robed’ usurpers that was circulating at the capital at the time of the edict. The ‘black-robed’ being a common reference to Buddhist monks, the rumor would point the finger at them as preparing some sort of sedition.⁸⁷ The Tang Buddhist historian and monastic leader Daoxuan was among those proposing this scenario.⁸⁸ There is, however, not much to substantiate it.⁸⁹ It is also hard to know why such a rumor occurred in the first place. Its existence is first attested in the *Bei Qi shu*, according to which the Northern Qi emperors would have taken it seriously enough to avoid seeing Buddhist monks.⁹⁰ In medieval China, prophetic ditties and rumors were frequently used in politics to gain power, plot rebellions or legitimize usurpation.⁹¹ As such, it is not impossible that at a time when Buddhism was in the spotlight, its rivals would have used such a rumor to discredit it.⁹² It is also true that there were many cases in which Buddhist monks or self-styled monks either started or were involved in rebellions.⁹³ However, no such rebellions are on record under the Northern Zhou, and there is no evidence confirming that the clergy was the object of political suspicion. This therefore may not have been a main reason for the persecution.⁹⁴

One of the most obvious motivations for the Northern Zhou proscription of Buddhism would have been the improvement of the imperial economy and administration by regulating those of the monasteries, something that can indeed be seen from the outcome of the persecution.⁹⁵ Already Tanji’s letter alludes to the emperor’s wish to enlarge his army by laicizing Buddhist monks.⁹⁶ Moreover, Nomura suggests that the flourishing Buddhist

⁸⁷ *BSL*, j.5. *T.52.2113*. Cf. *GHMJ*, j.6. *T.52.2103*; j.8. *T.52.2103.135c*. Tsukamoto gathered all the information regarding the black usurpers in Daoxuan’s writings. Tsukamoto, 1974b:585-588. See also Liu, 2011:140-142. Tang Yongtong suggests that monastic robes were black at the time. He cites Yuwen Hu’s invitation letter to Wangming in which he addresses the monk as *ziyi* 緇衣 (black robe). Tang, 1991:540 (for the letter itself, see *XGSZ*, j.7. *T.50.2060.481c*). According to Yu, instead, monastic robes would have been yellow in the sixth century. Yu, 1997:224. Kieschnick suggests that the epithet *ziyi* for Buddhist monks became common from the Tang dynasty onwards. Kieschnick, 1999:11-12

⁸⁸ Especially in the *Guang hongming ji* (see the previous note). In some sources, the Taoist Zhang Bin is said to have been behind the rumor. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:585-591; Tang, 1991:540.

⁸⁹ Yu, 1977:241-243. Kenneth Ch’en gave some credit to this story in his 1954 article, but he dismissed it as baseless in his book ten years later. See Ch’en, 1954:271; and cf. Ch’en, 1964:187.

⁹⁰ *BQS*, 10.136. *BSL* provides a slight different but more confused version. *BSL*, Vol.3. *T.52.2113.591b*. Cf. Tang, 1991:540. Yu, 1977:242-243. Tsukamoto, 1974b:589.

⁹¹ We note that in 557, the Northern Zhou enthroned Yuwen Jue as emperor. Thereafter it was decreed that the colour of the imperial robe would be black in accordance with an auspicious omen and prophecy. *BS*, 9.332. *ZS*, 3.46. Tsukamoto, 1974b:590. Lu, 2003:99-100.

⁹² Tang, 1991:540; Ch’en, 1954:272.

⁹³ See among others Ch’en, 1954:271; Tsukamoto, 1974b:146-179.

⁹⁴ Liu, 2011:142.

⁹⁵ Nomura, 1968:190-192; Tsukamoto, 1974b:622-623; Kamata, 2002c:443

⁹⁶ *GHMJ*, j.24. *T.52.2013.279b*.

establishments in the Northern Qi would have been one of Wudi's objectives as he attacked and conquered the rival state.⁹⁷ However, we should remember that the persecution had already been launched in Chang'an several years before the Northern Zhou conquest of the Northern Qi. It is nevertheless likely that after the conquest, the Northern Zhou economically benefited from the extension of the proscription of Buddhism.

Two edicts issued in February 574, four months before the one against Buddhism and Taoism, may be relevant to the economic background of the persecution. Their summary reads:

“From this time onwards, males who are more than fifteen years old and females who are above the age of thirteen years, and the bachelors and widows all should get married without delay. The wedding should be thrifty. [Another] edict: “Since the annual harvest of the past year was not sufficient, many people are destitute and without [food]. Whether public and private, monk or commoner, everyone should only retain a proportionate amount of grain for maintenance. All surplus grain must be sold”.⁹⁸

These edicts suggest a situation of economic difficulty for the Northern Zhou on the eve of the persecution. Preparations for the war against the Northern Qi are likely to have deepened economic deprivation. But when the persecution was launched, many monastic properties were confiscated, not to mention the considerable number of monks, nuns and taxable farmers registered in the imperial household system.⁹⁹ Lu Sidao's 盧思道 (531-582) summary of the proscription is perhaps the most explicit in pointing to this economic factor: “Buddhism was established on the principle of purity and detachment. But currently it costs enormous imperial revenue. [The emperor therefore] issued an imperial decree and curbed it”.¹⁰⁰ The Song historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) shared Lu Sidao's opinion by pointing out that thanks to the persecution, the Northern Zhou eventually conquered the much stronger Northern Qi.¹⁰¹ Wudi himself claimed more or less as much as he pointed out that proscribing Buddhism enabled him to pacify the Northern Qi and drive out the frontier invaders.¹⁰² If we believe a Buddhist source, the Northern Zhou ruler admitted outright that

⁹⁷ Nomura, 1968:347-349. In 563, a palatial residence of the Northern Qi was converted to the Da xingsheng si 大興聖寺. *BS*, 8.283. In 566, the Northern Qi emperor (Gao Wei 高緯 *r.* 565-577) decreed the further expansion of this monastery on imperial estate. *BS*, 8.288.

⁹⁸ *ZS*, 5.83. The *Bei shi* gives the same information with some slight variation. *BS*, 10.359.

⁹⁹ *CFYG*, 194.544a.

¹⁰⁰ *WYYH*, 751.3930b; *QSW*, 16.4112b; *GHMJ*, j. 24. *T.52.2103.133a*. Cf. Tsukamoto, 197b:594.

¹⁰¹ Daoxuan cites Lu Sidao's opinion unapprovingly, and puts instead the blame on Zhou Wudi. *GHMJ*, j. 24. *T.52.2103.133b*. *GHMJ*, j.6. *T.52.2103.125.c*.

¹⁰² *QHZW*, 24.4099b. Cf. Daoxuan's *GHMJ*, j.7. *T.52.2103.125c*.

his reason for persecuting Buddhism was to increase the imperial coffers and strengthen the army with a wave of fresh conscripts.¹⁰³

Considering the political aspects of the persecution, the timing of the latter may not have been fortuitous. The great purge took place two years after the murder of Yuwen Hu, a patron of Buddhism. His removal gave Wudi free rein in every aspect of court politics.¹⁰⁴ Extending the emperor's grip on religious groups would only consolidate Wudi's power on the eve of a military conquest.¹⁰⁵

The previous discussion has highlighted the economic factor as playing a central role from the very start of the persecution.¹⁰⁶ This is perhaps the main difference we can start to notice in comparison to the Northern Wei suppression in 446: by the end of the sixth century, the monastic economy in northern China had reached massive proportions, of which the repeated allegations of venality among monks can be seen as a reflection. Political anxieties such as those echoed in the 'black usurper' rumor may or may not have accompanied a primary concern of the state with the sheer scale of the social and economic presence of Buddhism.

5.5 Case Studies: Three Individuals

Although Buddhist sources lay the blame for the persecution of 574 squarely with three named instigators – Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩, Zhang Bin 張賓, and of course Zhou Wudi – their roles and mutual connections are difficult to establish. It is uncertain, for example, whether Wei Yuansong ever met the emperor in person. After he submitted his memorial against Buddhism to the throne, his whereabouts cannot be ascertained. As for Zhang Bin, his ostensible political and religious influence did not secure him a prestigious place at Wudi's court, and there certainly were other eminent Taoist priests in the same period.¹⁰⁷ If Zhang did play some role in the persecution, he must not have lobbied successfully for his own religion, which was also hit by the proscription. In retrospect, however, some patterns do emerge. For example, although Wei Yuansong's name is inconsistently mentioned in the historical record, we know that the emperor conferred an official title on him after he had presented his memorial.¹⁰⁸ Some points in that document indeed match Wudi's decisions

¹⁰³ *GHMJ*, j.10. T.52.2013.153c. Cf. Tanaka (trans.), 1990:24.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Nomura, 1968:188; Tsukamoto, 1974b:597-599.

¹⁰⁵ Kohn, 1995:30-32; Wright, 1951:33-47.

¹⁰⁶ Gu Jiguang further discusses the connection between the state's regulation of the formerly chaotic household registry and the improvement of the military recruitment system. Gu, 1996a:476-486.

¹⁰⁷ Nomura, 1968:202-206.

¹⁰⁸ Tang, 1991:539; Ch'en, 1964:190.

during the persecution. By examining these three individuals, we shall attempt to assess the place of individual agency in the making of the persecution. This will cast further light on the relationship between the Buddhist community and the imperial court during the crisis.

5.5.1 Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (d.u.)

Buddhist historians singled out Wei Yuansong as a crucial player in the persecution.¹⁰⁹ Yet the contours of this figure are so shadowy that his role in the crisis seems also uncertain.¹¹⁰ Daoxuan forgave him, whilst condemning the emperor to the torments of hell.¹¹¹ Ironically, he even considered Wei Yuansong as a protector of Buddhism, but later Buddhist writers would hold different views.¹¹² Whatever role he played, at least some Buddhist sources tend to cover up his apostasy; he had been in fact a Buddhist monk.¹¹³

A native of Sichuan 四川, Wei came from a very humble background.¹¹⁴ He was ordained at a young age by a monk simply known as Wangming 亡名 (Nameless), who was respected by Yuwen Hu.¹¹⁵ In his memorial to the emperor, Wei Yuansong reveals himself as a man of literary skills. He also seems to have been versed in mantic techniques.¹¹⁶ His teacher is said to have taught him that if he wanted to be famous, he should behave unconventionally.¹¹⁷ This may perhaps account for his rising as a critic of his own religion in a famous memorial that he submitted to the throne in 567.¹¹⁸ We do not know whether he ever met the emperor, although, as noticed, he did receive imperial recognition. Daoxuan claims that he schemed in secret with the Taoist priest Zhang Bin.¹¹⁹ However, there is no further evidence that the agendas of these two characters actually converged, and it is worth observing that Wei's

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. *GHMJ*, j.10. *T.52.2103.157a*; *FYZL*, j.79. *T.53.2122.875c*. Zhou, et al, 2003:2312-20. *BSL*, j.3. *T.52.2113.592b*.

¹¹⁰ Nomura, 1968:135-136.

¹¹¹ *XGSZ*, j.25. *T.50.2060.658a*. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:192-194.

¹¹² *GHMJ*, j.7. *T.52.2103.132b*. Cf. Sato, 1986:311-312. The Tang monk Zhanran 湛然 (711-782) depicts instead Wei Yuansong as a devil and blames him for the ruin of Buddhism. *T.46.1912.211a-b, 324b*. See also *T.38.1779.714a*.

¹¹³ In the *Fozu tongji*, Zhipan downplays Wei Yuansong's role, whilst accusing Zhang Bin as the main instigator of the persecution of Buddhism. *FZTJ*, j.38. *T.49.2035.358a*.

¹¹⁴ *XGSZ*, j.25. *T.50.2060.657c*; *QHZW*, 24.4008a. Cf. Yu, 1977:237; Tang, 1991:539.

¹¹⁵ Wangming's biography can be found in *XGSZ*, j.7. *T.50.2060.481b-c*; see also *LDSBJ*, j.11. *T.49.2034.101a*. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:498, and especially Benn, 2006:414-421.

¹¹⁶ *DTCYQJZ*, 3:56-57. Tsukamoto, 1974b:507-509; Fujiyoshi, 1995:66-68. Some works attributed to Wei Yuansong may have dealt with prognostication, for example the *Bao yuan shu* 包元數 (or *Bao yuan* 包元); see *QHZW*, 24.4008a; *XTS*, 57.1426. Cf. Yu, 1977:258-264.

¹¹⁷ *XGSZ*, Vol.25. *T.50.2060.657c*. Yu Jiayi, 1977:237. Kamata, 2002c:434-435.

¹¹⁸ *GHMJ*, j.7. *T.52.2103.131c*; *SS*, 35.1099. Wei Yuansong's memorial can be found in *QHZW*, 24.4008a. Cf. Yu, 1977:239-240; Liu, 1992:464-465; Kohn, 1995:29; Kamata, 2002c:435.

¹¹⁹ *GHMJ*, j.7. *T.52.2103.131c*; *XGSZ*, j.25. *T.50.2060.657c*. Cf. Yu, 1977:238.

memorial advocated a state ideology largely based on Buddhism, not Taoism. The final part of Wei's life is shrouded in obscurity. According to Yu Jiayi, he might have died already by 579.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Daoxuan reports a miracle story suggesting that he may have been still alive in 588, and he is also said to have predicted the rise of the Tang dynasty.¹²¹

Wei Yuansong's main connection with the persecution is his unprecedented memorial. In this document, Wei advocated in the first place a purge of the extensive monastic community.¹²² He argued that the true meaning of Buddhism is compassion, whereas the maintenance of the lavish Buddhist establishments would only inflict toil and suffering upon ordinary people.¹²³ Wei further advised that rich and corrupt monks should be taxed heavily, whilst honest poor monks should be exempted from imperial taxation.¹²⁴ Such remarks were not new and certainly did not amount to a request to eradicate Buddhism. However, and most importantly, Wei Yuansong also proposed the creation of a new kind of reformed religious establishment called Pingyan dasi (Great Universal Monastery), which should be staffed by lay Buddhists and headed by the emperor.¹²⁵ Since the implementation of such a radical reform would have compromised the very existence of the *samgha* as a community of renunciants, Wei's memorial can be seen at least in this respect as a blueprint for its abolition. We do not know whether the emperor received a full version of Wei Yuansong's memorial. Wudi seems to have been receptive to at least some of its ideas, for example when he emphasized that the true meaning of Buddhism was not in its outwardly expressions such as statues and scriptures.¹²⁶ On the other hand, the persecution that Wudi enforced several years after the memorial was more than a reform, however radical, and it also targeted Taoism, even though Wei had made no mention of it.¹²⁷

It is in any case certain that Wei Yuansong's criticism of Buddhism was presented to an emperor who then proscribed that very religion, and this was enough to many historians to implicate him in the persecution. This, for example, is what one reads in the *Sui shu*:

At the time of Zhou Wudi, Wei Yuansong, a *śramaṇa* from the Shu 蜀 commandery, presented a memorial [to the emperor], saying that Buddhist monks were too low [in

¹²⁰ Yu, 1977:240.

¹²¹ XGSZ, j.25. T.50.2060.657c. Cf. Yu, 1977:239. DTCYQJZ, 3.56-57.

¹²² Yu, 1977:244.

¹²³ QHWW, 24.4008a. Yu Jiayi, 1977:244.

¹²⁴ QHWW, 24.4008a. Nomura, 1968:125-129.

¹²⁵ Yu, 1977:245; Sato, 1986:311-313; Kamata, 2002c:436-438.

¹²⁶ XGSZ, j.8. T.50.2060.490a; cf. Tanaka, 1990:26-27; FZLDTZ, j.10. T.49.2036.557a.

¹²⁷ With respect to this, Daoxuan might be right when he reiterated that Wei's intention was to reform or even protect Buddhism but not persecute it. GHMJ, Vol.7. T.52.2103.132b.

their standards] and too many. [Thereafter] Wudi issued an edict [ordering] that everything be abolished and destroyed (*yiqie fehui* 一切廢毀).”¹²⁸

As mentioned, Buddhist sources go beyond the memorial to implicate Wei Yuansong with the Taoist Zhang Bin.¹²⁹ The truth of the matter is that very little evidence points to any direct involvement of Wei in the persecution, apart from his influential memorial censuring the Buddhist community and calling for a radical religious reform. This much is nevertheless certain, and a degree of ideological continuity is discernible between that memorial and Emperor Zhou Wudi’s religious persecution. Probably this was the premier reason why the Tiantai master Zhiyi 智顓 (538-597) left a damning verdict for Wei Yuansong:

If Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (i.e. Wudi) destroyed [Buddhism], it was because of the deeds of Māra (*moye* 魔業) carried out by [Wei] Yuansong. That was the monster (*yaoguai* 妖怪) which caused the destruction of the Law of the Buddha, the monster of our age.”¹³⁰

However, while Wei Yuansong was clearly responsible in the eyes of a prominent contemporary Buddhist, the modern historian can only stress that this claim remains difficult to substantiate.

5.5.2 Zhang Bin 張賓 (fl. ca. 560-590)

In some Buddhist sources, Zhang Bin is the evil Taoist who was behind Zhou Wudi fomenting the persecution.¹³¹ However, he seems to have been a somewhat more complex figure. The *Sui shu* presents Zhang Bin chiefly as an astrologer at the time when Yang Jian, the future founder of the Sui dynasty, was still a general of the Northern Zhou, and only mentions in passing that he was a Taoist priest (*daoshi* 道士). Having fathomed Yang’s ambition for imperial power, Zhang presented him with prophecies and calendrical calculations encouraging the general to seize the throne. When Yang Jian eventually did become the emperor in 581, Zhang was rewarded with the governorship of Hua prefecture 華州.¹³² It seems certain that the Taoist astrologer Zhang Bin in the *Sui shu* and his namesake

¹²⁸ *SS*, 35.1099. The *Zhou shu* stops short of making such a claim, and while noticing Wei’s divinatory skills, it merely says that he disliked Buddhism and submitted a memorial to attack it. *ZS*, 47.851.

¹²⁹ See above, and cf. Yu, 1977:255.

¹³⁰ *MHZG*, j.2b. T.46.1911.19a. Cf. Sato, 1986:311.

¹³¹ See e.g. *XGSZ*, j.23. T.2060.626b, 631b.

¹³² *SS*, 17.420, 78.1774. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:581; Lu, 2003:101; Xiong, 2006:144.

that Buddhist sources blame for the persecution were one and the same person.¹³³ Shortly after his accession as emperor of the Sui dynasty, Yang Jian (Wendi, *r.* 581-604), commissioned Zhang with the compilation of the new imperial calendar.¹³⁴ When this was completed in 583, the emperor praised it and sanctioned its application.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the calendar was soon criticized as inaccurate, and Zhang came under heavy criticism.¹³⁶ Since Zhang enjoyed the emperor's confidence, his opponents were dismissed.¹³⁷ After Zhang's demise, his critics made one more attempt to discredit him, but the surviving members of Zhang's team were able to defend his legacy.¹³⁸ However, in 597, Zhang's calendar was eventually replaced with a new one.¹³⁹ In none of these incidents was Zhang's status as a Taoist priest in the foreground.

Buddhist sources, on the other hand, only mention Zhang Bin as a member of the Taoist clergy. In one he is the forger or collector of a number of Taoist scriptures.¹⁴⁰ He is also said to have represented the Taoist side in a court debate shortly before the persecution. Zhang reportedly attacked Buddhism and its followers as superstitious. He notably exposed the foreignness of Buddhism, which he denounced as not suitable for China.¹⁴¹ Wudi seems to have been annoyed at part of Zhang's rhetoric as the priest implied that even previous emperors had been fooled by Buddhism.¹⁴² Yet, in one place, Daoxuan expressly states that Zhou Wudi adopted Zhang Bin's "disingenuous arguments" (*ningbian* 佞辯) when he proscribed the "two teachings" (Buddhism and Taoism), although he fails to explain how Zhang would have sought the abolition of his own religion.¹⁴³ The general picture emerging from these sources is therefore uncertain: Zhang Bin was somehow involved in the persecution, but what role he had and how significant it was, we do not know.

It may be relevant here to cite James A. Benn regarding the value of Daoxuan's testimony:

[A]round 630, Daoxuan withdrew into Mt. Zhongnan in response to the anti-Buddhist policies adopted by the Emperor Tang Taizong (*r.* 626-649). That period in his life, as well as a continued sense of disquiet at the emperor's policies toward Buddhism, may

¹³³ Tsukamoto, 1974b:582.

¹³⁴ *SS*, 17.421. Cf. Nomura, 1968:175-176; Tsukamoto, 1974b:581-583.

¹³⁵ *SS*, 17.421.

¹³⁶ *SS*, 17.423-426.

¹³⁷ *SS*, 17.428. Tsukamoto, 1974b:581-582.

¹³⁸ *SS*, 17.429.

¹³⁹ *SS*, 17.435.

¹⁴⁰ *FYZL*, j.55. *T.53.2122.703a-b*. Zhou, et al, 2003:1059-1060; Tsukamoto, 1974b:582.

¹⁴¹ *XGSZ*, j.23. *T.50.2060.631b-c*.

¹⁴² *XGSZ*, j.23. *T.50.2060.631c*.

¹⁴³ *GHMJ*, j.7. *T.52.2103.125c*. Cf. Xiong, 2006:152; Li, 1978:89. Tokiwa links Zhang Bin to the anti-Buddhist rumours on 'black-clad' usurpers. Tokiwa, 1930:617.

have been on his mind as he was compiling these biographies ten years later.¹⁴⁴

Daoxuan's present concerns probably made him passionate about the memory of the persecution of Buddhism, in what was still a relatively recent past. Even so, his records do not offer a consistent narrative, notably regarding Zhang Bin's role. Most of his information does, however, confirm Zhang's presence at court when the persecution was about to take place. On one occasion, the Taoist priest would have been in league with Wei Yuansong to slander the Buddhist clergy, prompting the emperor to invite a number of monks to the palace and observe them and their activity in person. Although he found the monks' conduct unassailable, Wudi ordered the persecution nonetheless.¹⁴⁵ This seems once again an inconsistent outcome for the story, and all of Daoxuan's anecdotes ultimately fail to directly embroil Zhang Bin in the persecution.¹⁴⁶

In summary, in Buddhist sources Zhang Bin chiefly plays an accessory role because of his possible association with Wei Yuansong or Emperor Zhou Wudi.¹⁴⁷ Moot points remain. It is difficult to follow Daoxuan when he says that Wei Yuansong's intention was to protect Buddhism, whereas at the same time his accomplice Zhang Bin wanted to destroy it.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, Wei's crucial memorial to the throne hardly mentions Taoism. If Zhang Bin really had any influence on Wudi's decision to proscribe Buddhism, that influence could not spare Taoism itself from the proscription. Significantly, well before the persecution, the emperor had already organized numerous religious debates that may have paved the way for the final action. We shall note that after the persecution, Zhang Bin would enjoy the support of Emperor Sui Wendi, who was a patron of Buddhism. If Zhang was indeed a sworn enemy of Buddhism, he successfully kept his abhorrence of that religion to himself during Sui Wendi's reign.

5.5.3 Emperor Zhou Wudi 周武帝 (543-578; r. 560-578)

As Gernet rightly pointed out, imperial patronage was the foremost factor for the growth of

¹⁴⁴ Benn, 2007:239.

¹⁴⁵ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.626b-c.

¹⁴⁶ Daoxuan only mentions once Zhang Bin in connection to his activities after the persecution: in 583, Sui Wendi saw on the walls of a Taoist temple paintings depicting the controversial story of Laozi's conversion of the barbarians; he then called for an official debate including a number Taoist priests, and Zhang Bin was one of them. XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2060.436c.

¹⁴⁷ Before Daoxuan and his ambiguous narratives, Falin had mentioned in passing that initially Zhou Wudi was supportive of Buddhism, but would have turned against the religion after meeting Zhang Bin. BZL, j.3. T.52.2110.508b.

¹⁴⁸ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.626b-c; j.25.657c. Cf. Ren, 1990:227.

monasteries and monks as much as persecution would be the only cause for their decrease.¹⁴⁹ Zhou Wudi's role in the persecution substantiates such an observation. However, caution is necessary when considering some Buddhist sources, as the emperor's picture was very much tainted therein.¹⁵⁰ For example, Daoxuan depicts Wudi as a ruthless murderer when reporting the elimination of Yuwen Hu and his faction.¹⁵¹ This picture would feed into a more broadly negative appraisal of Wudi's figure due to his role in the persecution. Yuwen Hu, on the other hand, is lavishly praised for his support of Buddhism, although he too orchestrated the killing of two emperors.¹⁵² Our discussion of Zhou Wudi will attempt to balance between secular and Buddhist sources.

Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (Emperor Wudi 武帝 *r.* 560-578) was the fourth son of Yuwen Tai, and the younger cousin of Yuwen Hu.¹⁵³ He was enthroned as the third emperor of the Northern Zhou on 31 May 560, after two of his predecessors had been killed.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps cautioned by such circumstances, Wudi maintained an amicable relation with Yuwen Hu.¹⁵⁵ However, in 572 he managed to remove this overlord of the Zhou court and assumed full imperial power.¹⁵⁶ The persecution took place two years thereafter. Against this background, we shall notice that when Wei Yuansong presented his memorial to the emperor in 567, Yuwen Hu extended a friendly invitation to Wei's master, Wangming.¹⁵⁷ A connection between the removal of Yuwen Hu and the subsequent persecution is not certain, but the close proximity between these two events cannot be purely fortuitous. Wudi's initiative seems, in fact, to have gained momentum from 572. In February that year, he visited a major Taoist temple, the Xuandu guan, and there delivered a public lecture where he probably disclosed for the first time his plans for radical action in the sphere of religion.¹⁵⁸ Three months later, Yuwen Hu and his relatives were massacred.¹⁵⁹ On 9 January 573 (Jiande 2.12.2), Buddhism was ranked in the last place at the end of a court debate.¹⁶⁰ On 21 June 574, the persecution was finally launched.

¹⁴⁹ Gernet, 1995:7.

¹⁵⁰ Tsukamoto, 1974b:474-475; Ch'en, 1964:186-187.

¹⁵¹ *GHMJ*, j.7. T.52.2103.125c. Cf. Kohn, 1995:25; Yoshikawa, et al, 1988:848.

¹⁵² Nomura notes this bias in Daoxuan's account of Yuwen Hu. Nomura, 1968:149. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:532-535; Kamata, 2002c:421-433.

¹⁵³ *BS*, 10.347; *ZS*, 5.63.

¹⁵⁴ *BS*, 9.330-340. Pearce, 2001:173.

¹⁵⁵ *BS*, 10.383-384; *QHZW*, 2.3891a. Tsukamoto, 1974b:483-486.

¹⁵⁶ Wang, 1994:608.

¹⁵⁷ Benn, 2006:429-430.

¹⁵⁸ *ZS*, 5.79. Cf. Kamata, 2002c:441, and the discussion above.

¹⁵⁹ *ZS*, 5.80.

¹⁶⁰ *ZS*, 5.83. *BS*, 10.359.

Further episodes and circumstances, both before and after the proscription, suggest that this acceleration came after long-held plans. On 15 August 575 (Jiande 4.7.24), Wudi summoned his military chiefs to the court and delivered a speech. He uttered a condemnation of the past Northern Qi emperors, but particularly laid emphasis on his current counterpart.¹⁶¹ He continued that after assuming full power, he had been carefully pondering plans to defeat the eastern state. In preparation, he had adopted an austere lifestyle and expanded military recruitment.¹⁶² The following day, with an edict the emperor officially launched the campaign against the Northern Qi.¹⁶³ It may be and indeed has been hypothesized that the persecution was part, probably a large part of, that preparation.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, between 566 and 574, the court hosted no less than five debates on religious and doctrinal issues.¹⁶⁵ Two of them were discussions on the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*), in accordance with the growing ideological prominence that Wudi's court would give to the classical ritual tradition, resulting in its reforms based on the *Zhouli*. Early in 561, only few months after his accession, Wudi decreed an inspection of people's customs in the empire.¹⁶⁶ These steps suggests that from the outset, the emperor was oriented towards ideological and social reform in the interest of a consolidation of imperial authority, and may have been considering tackling Buddhism as part of this vision early on; the removal of Yuwen Hu may have finally granted him freedom of action to execute his plans.

Secular histories do not give us any entry into the ideological motivations of the persecution, which can only be gleaned from religious sources. In the exchange between Wudi and the Taoist priest Yan Da reported in a Taoist chronicle,¹⁶⁷ Buddhism was likened to a guest, with an obviously implied criticism of its foreignness. This cultural hostility may have contributed to the case for the persecution.¹⁶⁸ Wudi's disdain for Buddhism's exotic origin is also mentioned in Buddhist sources.¹⁶⁹ In another episode, the emperor criticized the

¹⁶¹ *QHZW*, 2.3893b-3894a. Tsukamoto, 1974b:602-60; Nomura, 1968:220.

¹⁶² *ZS*, 6.92; *BS*, 10.362.

¹⁶³ *ZS*, 6.92-93; *BS*, 10.362-363; *ZZTJ*, 172.5344-5345.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Liu, 1986:373-374.

¹⁶⁵ Tsukamoto, 1974b:483-489.

¹⁶⁶ *BS*, 10.348. A few months later, in the seventh month, a new coinage was issued (*buquan* 布泉), at five times the nominal value of the previous currency. *ZS*, 5.65; *BS*, 10.384. In 562, a ban on alcohol across an area of 30 miles around the capital was implemented. *ZS*, 5.66; *BS*, 10.385.

¹⁶⁷ See above pp.103-104, footnote 22. Cf. Daoxuan's information in *JGJFDLH*, j.1. T.52.2104.377c-378a.

¹⁶⁸ In a memorial by the official Ren Daolin's 任道林 (*fl.* 577), Wudi is said to have criticised the Buddha as a foreigner and argued for a purge of Buddhism on this basis Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:595-597.

¹⁶⁹ *XGSZ*, j.23. T.50.2060.631c.

Buddhist religion as being tainted by three types of impurity. He pointed out that the Buddha had had a wife and a son before he became an ascetic, which was the impurity of the founder (*zhu bujing* 主不淨). Secondly, Vinaya rules would allow monks to eat meat, and this he branded as an impurity of the teaching (*jiao bujing* 教不淨). Finally, many monks would commit crimes or engage in fornication, what he called the impurity of the community or *samgha* (*zhong bujing* 眾不淨).¹⁷⁰ Such a stark criticism of Buddhism in its entirety would evidently be more than enough to justify its proscription.

Last but not least is the question of Zhou Wudi's relationship with the Taoist religion and its significance for the persecution. The emperor continued the Northern Wei tradition in receiving Taoist registers of initiation and paying occasional visits to Taoist temples, but there is no solid evidence that such acts involved his full commitment to Taoism.¹⁷¹ Nor can this be evinced from another important initiative on the emperor's order, the compilation of the Taoist encyclopedia *Wushang biyao* 無上秘要.¹⁷² Even though Wudi did not grant any exclusive support to Taoism, Zhang Bin and other Taoist priests did have some influence at the Zhou court.¹⁷³ The establishment of the Tongdao guan and the large number of Taoist priests in it can also be seen as an expression of relative favour.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the hybrid nature of the Tongdao guan, part temple and part academy, should be borne in mind, and we should not forget that laicized Buddhist monks were also admitted to it.¹⁷⁵ It may be relevant that, despite his overt condemnation of Wudi, even Daoxuan does not deny that the Zhou emperor had friendly relationships with a number of Buddhist monks.¹⁷⁶ When the proscription of Buddhism was announced, these monks, failing to dissuade the emperor, were

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ SS, 35.1094; WS, 114.3053. Cf. Tsukamoto, 1974b:547; Seidel, 1983:358-360.

¹⁷² On the *Wushang biyao* (DZ 768-769 no. 1138) see Schipper – Verellen (eds.), 2004:118-119; Yoshioka, 1959:76-77; Yamazaki, 1981:105-106; Ren, 1991:888-891. John Lagerwey seems to suggest that the text was compiled in 580 under the imperial order. Lagerwey, 1987:26-36. See also Benn, in *EoT-2*, pp.1062-1066.

¹⁷³ Tsukamoto, 1974b:581-585.

¹⁷⁴ We have seen above that the Tongdao guan was established several weeks after the persecution edict. The *Wushang biyao* may have been compiled or at least completed in the new temple-academy. XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2061.436c. One significant fact is that Taoist priests were in the majority amongst those who enrolled in the Tongdao guan. Tsukamoto, 1974b:629-634; Yamazaki, 1981:104-105.

¹⁷⁵ Yancong 彦琮 (557-610) was ordained as a novice when he was ten years old. After the persecution, he was readmitted to the newly established Tongdao guan as a learned religious scholar rather than a Buddhist monk. Since Yancong was only seventeen years by the time of the persecution, his case shows how the proscription would affect novices and not just fully ordained monks. XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2061.436b-c.

¹⁷⁶ XGSZ, j.23. T.50.2060.629b-c, 631b-632a.

all able to flee or go into hiding.¹⁷⁷ None of them shared the ill fate of monks like Xuangao more than one century earlier. Indeed, the most remarkable trait of the Northern Zhou persecution in comparison to the one of 446 under the Northern Wei is the absence, in the former, of any substantial rhetoric and especially practice of violence against the Buddhist clergy.

From this brief analysis, it seems clear that Emperor Zhou Wudi was the single most important agent in the making of the persecution, of course with the support of his court and power basis, which figures such as Wei Yuansong and Zhang Bin may have entered on occasion. His motivations seem to have been manifold, and in assessing the obvious significance of the ideological component we should bear in mind that this is chiefly reflected in public statements that the emperor may have issued to justify his initiative more than to disclose his intentions and vision. The evidence appears to show that Wudi probably launched the persecution out of a long-term plan, in which the disproportionate monastic economy, the desperate imperial fiscal situation, and the necessity to fund the conquest of the Northern Qi were at least as significant factors as the no doubt important religious and ideological considerations.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Some patterns emerge at the end of this section. In our discussion of the aftermath of the first persecution, it became clear that in the latter decades of the Northern Wei, far from being self-regulating, the Buddhist community was closely monitored by the state through a mixture of patronage and control, as reflected in the various decrees we have cited. Periodical criticism of the clergy's illicit practices suggests both an official awareness of such problems and a lack of will or urgency to deal with them on the part of the government. As political conditions deteriorated, however, the state also lost its grip on the Buddhist community. From the 520s until the establishment of the Northern Zhou, there is no trace of imperial decrees concerning the regulation of the clergy. In hindsight, this regulatory vacuum may have brought about a state of things that by the 570s made a total proscription of Buddhism expedient, if not inevitable.

In this perspective, a significant similarity can be noted between the first and the second persecution. In both cases, the proscriptions of the monastic community came after the state's failure to regulate it, and, as it will be even more apparent in the next section, were followed

¹⁷⁷ XGSZ, j.8.488a-b, j.23. T.50.2060.626c, 627b, 631a.

by a strengthening of the imperial control of the clergy.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, one goes away with the impression that the Northern Wei crisis was more closely dependent on volatile social and political circumstances, which may have added further strain to the fragile relationship between the Buddhist community and the court. In the case of the Northern Zhou, instead, several indicators led us to the conclusion that Wudi and his entourage may have been preparing the proscription for Buddhism for some time before taking action in 574, and responding to economic, political and military calculations that are less evident in the fifth-century incident.

Be that as it may, both the Northern Wei and the Northern Zhou persecutions draw attention on a fundamental issue in the relationship between the Buddhist clergy and the state. Clearly, when the imperial government was in a position to regulate the monastic community, control mechanisms and occasionally limited purges were deployed without bringing the presence of Buddhism in China into question; the persecutions did as much, but then they would also create the conditions to restore that presence on new grounds. It would be interesting to establish how the memory of the Northern Wei persecution played in the second crisis. No direct evidence is available in this respect, but the general lack of violence and several indications of planning suggest that Zhou Wudi's edict was less of a reaction to a perceived threat and more an expression of a long-term vision. Very little is known about the Buddhist reaction to the proscription, and although some leading monks are said to have attempted to dissuade the emperor, one senses some hesitation in their initiative, at least as reported in Buddhist sources. The main Buddhist monk standing up to the emperor, Huiyuan, made a passionate case about the legitimacy of his religion in China and even threatened Wudi with the torments of hell, but significantly made no claim for the independence of the *samgha*. More than anything else, then, the Northern Zhou persecution may have dealt a further, powerful blow to the ideal of a self-regulating monastic community in China. The long-term development after the persecution will reveal a Buddhist clergy coming to terms with the inevitability of imperial control. At the same time, the second total persecution was there to show that mutual accommodation between Buddhism and the state still had a long way to go. In the next part we shall explore in detail the third and final major persecution, the circumstances leading to it and its consequences, before drawing some final implications concerning the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China.

¹⁷⁸ Kamata notes the Northern Zhou attempts to enact limited purges before the final persecution. Kamata, 2002c:451-452.

PART THREE
Buddhism and its Persecution under the Tang 唐 (618-907)

CHAPTER SIX
The Sui Dynasty 隋 (581-618) and Buddhism

Economic gains from the Northern Zhou religious persecution had contributed to the improvement of the fiscal system and a rebalance of the imperial economy.¹ The emperor's direct involvement in the enactment of the proscription brought visible results. Within three years, the Buddhist monastic community had been practically disintegrated.² When the persecution was extended to the Northern Qi in 577, the presence of the clergy was all but cancelled from the whole of northern China. Nevertheless, when Zhou Wudi died one year later, his religious policy collapsed and the revival of Buddhism was again a possibility. In 579, a new emperor would readily consent to suggestions of a relaxation.³ In 580, an edict encouraged Buddhists and Taoists to resume the practice of their respective religions.⁴ This happened within a three-year period, from 578 to 581, when court intrigue and political machinations were rampant. The fate of Buddhism was not clear until Yang Jian became emperor of the newly established Sui dynasty (Wendi, *r.* 581-604).

This chapter will discuss the period of about four decades including the aftermath of the Northern Zhou crisis and the Sui dynasty. During most of this interval, China was once again unified after centuries of division, and important developments took place that would bear on the further history of the Buddhist community under the Tang, when the third great persecution would eventually take place.

6.1 Historical Background

After Emperor Zhou Wudi's demise, his son Yuwen Bin 宇文贇 (Xuandi 宣帝 *r.* 578-579) was enthroned. The new emperor, however, abdicated in 579 and his son Yuwen Yan 宇文衍 was his chosen successor (Jingdi 靜帝 *r.* 580-581).⁵ This plain transition was meant to

¹ Wright, 2007:58.

² *LDSBJ*, j.12. *T.*49.2034.94b, 107b.

³ *GHMJ*, j.10. *T.*52.2103.156c; *FZTJ*, j.38. *T.*49.2035.39a. Cf. Nomura, 1968:235-248; Kamata, 2002a:5-6; Wright, 1967:94-95; Michihata, 1985:85-86; Yamazaki, 1971:285-286.

⁴ *ZS*, 3.132; *ZZTJ*, 174.5413. Nomura, 1968:249-251.

⁵ *ZS*, 8.131. Wright, 1967:79; Wright, 1978:58.

standardize the father-son succession system and thus rule out the chance of usurpation.⁶ But it did not yield the expected result, for when Yuwen Bin tried to replace Yang Jian's daughter with another consort, the relationship between the emperor and his leading general became strained. The situation was further complicated by the competition amongst the families of the imperial empresses.⁷ When Yuwen Bin suddenly died in 580, Yang Jian's position at court became crucial.⁸ He was promptly elevated as the imperial regent, which made him the de facto ruler. But he went one step further in 581, as he proclaimed himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Sui.⁹ Eight years later Yang Jian conquered the Chen 陳 (557-589) dynasty in the south and thus put an end to the political division of China.¹⁰ Yang Jian was born in a Buddhist nunnery and was given the Buddhist name Naluoyan 那羅延 (Nārāyana), attesting to his clan's close association with Buddhism.¹¹ He was also raised in the nunnery until he was thirteen,¹² when he was enrolled in the prestigious Taixue 太學 (Supreme College), a school for the sons of the highest aristocracy.¹³ Also significant in Yang's background was his wife, who was a daughter of the influential Dugu 獨孤 clan and also a devoted Buddhist.¹⁴ The Sui emperor's profile was therefore a typical reflection of the amicable relationship between the Buddhist community and the social elite that prevailed for most of the medieval period. This will be borne in mind in the following discussion of Sui Buddhism and its relation with the court.

6.2 Buddhism, Imperial Politics and Religious Policy

The Sui dynasty may well have been one of the best times for Buddhism in China.¹⁵ Since Yang Jian was the most influential figure at the Northern Zhou court in its last years, the credit for the Buddhist revival following the persecution is generally attributed to him.¹⁶ This is true to a good extent, although the religious initiatives of the first Sui emperor are

⁶ Eisenberg, 2008:163-164.

⁷ *SS*, 1.2-3. Wang, 1986:4.

⁸ *ZS*, 7.131; *SS*, 1.3.

⁹ *ZZTJ*, 174.5410. Cf. Wright, 1967:79-80; Wright, 1978:58-64.

¹⁰ Wright, 1967:99.

¹¹ *SS*, 1.1; *BS*, 11.395. Wright, 1973:241; Yamazaki, 1971:283.

¹² *SS*, 1.1; *JGJFDLH*, j.2. T.52.2104.339a; *BZL*, j.4. T.52.2110.508b. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:10-11; Tang, 2008:5; Ogawa, 1972:79; Nomura, 1972:120; Wright, 2007:57; Wright, 1967:77.

¹³ *SS*, 1.1-2. Wright, 1967:77-78; Wright, 1978:54-56; Wright, 2007:57.

¹⁴ *SS*, 36.1108-09. Wright, 1978:71-73; Wright, 2007:63-66; Wang, 1986:2.

¹⁵ Wright, 1967:95.

¹⁶ *JSCB*, 38.6b-10a; *LDSBJ*, j.12. T.49.2034.101c-102a. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:4-5; Yamazaki, 1971:283-287; Nomura, 1968:248-255; Tang, 2008:1-2.

sufficiently complex to warrant a more nuanced consideration. For instance, around 590, Yang Jian sent several letters to the Tiantai master Zhiyi, and in one of them he advised the monk to stay out of politics and lead an exemplary monastic life.¹⁷ In 600 he decreed that damaging Buddhist and Taoist images would be considered a major offense, especially if committed by religious people.¹⁸ His empire-wide distribution of Buddhist relics during the Renshou 仁壽 era (601-604) was probably inspired by more than devotion, as it was a means to use Buddhism in order to assert the imperial presence across a newly unified China.¹⁹ These examples suggest that patronage, control and political exploitation of Buddhism were overlapping under the new dynasty.

Another case in point is the Sect of Three Stages (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教) and its dramatic downfall.²⁰ The sect was initially tolerated by the court and it was even sponsored by members of the aristocracy.²¹ But its emphasis on the decline of the Dharma in its last stage (*mofa* 末法),²² and especially its amassing of material wealth in charitable deposits known as ‘Inexhaustible Storehouses’ (*wujin zang* 無盡藏), were bound to arouse suspicion.²³ We shall remember that one of the main targets of the Northern Zhou persecution had been the gigantic expansion of the monastic economy.²⁴ Moreover, compared with the mainstream clergy, who commonly aligned with the court, the stance of the Sect of Three Stages toward the state could be construed as disobedient. As such, in 600 the texts of the sect and all its establishments were banned.²⁵ There might be another relevant reason for the ban, which is again related to imperial politics. As mentioned, the sect enjoyed support from members of the elite and one of them was Gao Jiong 高穎, a senior official who was a disciple of Xinxing

¹⁷ *GQBL*, j.2. T.46.1934.802c; *GHMJ*, j.27. T.52.2103.306a. Orzech, 1998:130; Weinstein, 1973:280.

¹⁸ *SS*, 2.45-46, 25.715; *ZZTJ*, 179.5586.

¹⁹ Yamazaki, 1971:331-346; Kamata, 2002e:19-28.

²⁰ On the history and teaching of this sect, see Yabuki, 1927:34-136, 193-198; Ch'en, 1964:297-300; Tsukamoto, 1975:193-205; Tang, 1991:817-821; Hubbard, 2001:17-30 and *passim*.

²¹ Tsukamoto, 1975:198; Michihata, 1985:152.

²² On the notion of the end of the dharma and its development in medieval China, see Yabuki, 1927:199-210; Nattier, 1991:62-64, 90-118; De Rauw, 2008:61-69. Writing in 558, Huisi in his *Li shiyuan wen* believed that he was in the 125th year of the *mofa*. T.46.1933.786b-7887b. Cf. Lewis, 1990:208-210; Hubbard, 2001:36-54.

²³ See the detailed discussion in Hubbard, 2001:190-195.

²⁴ As Wright points out, “while this persecution (under the Northern Zhou) had created sufficient discontent to make a reversal of policy appealing to one who sought power, Wen-ti must have been well aware of the abuses of clerical privilege that were in part responsible for the persecution.” Wright, 1967:93. Cf. Wright, 2007:75.

²⁵ *LDSBJ*, j.12. T.49.2034.105b. Yabuki, 1927:49-53. Various reasons for the proscription are discussed in Ch'en, 1964:300; Wright, 1967:95-96; Lewis, 1990:207-238; Hubbard, 2001:195-197.

信行 (540-594), the founder of the sect.²⁶ Gao was stripped of all his official titles and privileges in 599, one year before the sect was suppressed, which suggests a connection between these two events.²⁷ A concern that Buddhism was still to find its safety may have inspired the letter that Zhiyi wrote shortly before dying to Yang Guang 楊廣, the future emperor of the Sui dynasty, entrusting the religion to him for protection.²⁸

The religious policy of the Sui dynasty should be assessed against this background. One of its main aims seems to have been the peaceful coexistence of the main religious traditions, and it is significant that at this time the rhetoric of the harmony of the ‘Three Teachings’ of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism makes its first appearance.²⁹ Yang Jian (Wendi) certainly extended his support to Taoism, albeit with balance.³⁰ On one occasion he is said to have censured the Taoists on their anti-Buddhist story of Laozi’s conversion of the barbarians.³¹ On the other hand, he confided in the Taoist priest Zhang Bin, the alleged instigator of the Northern Zhou persecution.³² Zhang’s expertise in calendrics and prognostics were highly valued at Wendi’s court.³³ Another Taoist priest, Wang Shao 王邵 (*fl.* 543-608), was consulted for the same reason.³⁴ Significantly, the Taoist temple Xuandu guan was restored under Wendi’s auspices.³⁵ The court also sponsored other Taoist establishments in the capital.³⁶ Emperor Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 (Yang Guang 楊廣 *r.* 605-617) took similar initiatives, and in 612, when he offered sacrifices at Hengyu 衡獄, the ritual was conducted by Taoist priests.³⁷ As Victor Xiong remarks, such support of Taoism and its clergy illustrates the breadth of the Sui religious policy.³⁸

²⁶ On Xinxing see Yabuki, 1927:1-30, 141-154; Hubbard, 2001:4-17.

²⁷ Tsukamoto, 1975:198. Kamata, 2002f:616. Wright, 2007:65. With respect to Gao Jiong’s dismissal, see *SS*, 41.1182-1183. *ZZTJ*, 178.5565-5568. Nomura, 1972:123. *SS*, 23.655-656. Hubbard suggests that “it seems quite plausible that the prohibition of San-chieh texts in 600 is related to the ‘rustification’ of Kao Chiung the year before.” Hubbard, 2001:197.

²⁸ Weinstein, 1973:282.

²⁹ We have cited Li Shiqian 李士謙 (523-588), who in the 580s commented that Buddhism is like the sun, Taoism the moon, and Confucianism the five stars. See above, Introduction footnote 5.

³⁰ *SS*, 35.1095. Cf. Wright, 1957b:85-86; Yamazaki, 1981:25.

³¹ *XGSZ*, j.2. T.50.2060.436c.

³² *SS*, 17.420, 38.1142, 78.1774. Yamazaki, 1980:25-26.

³³ Lu, 2003:68-70, 100-102; Bokenkamp, 1994:72-73. A Taoist temple named Qingdu guan 清都觀 was built in Chang’an in 587 to accommodate the Taoist priest Sun Ang 孫昂, who was respected by the emperor. Yang, 1999:57-58.

³⁴ Wright, 1957:85; Lu, 2003:68-69.

³⁵ Xiong, 2000:250; Wright, 1957b:86; Tsukamoto, 1974b:668-669; Yamazaki, 1981:65-76.

³⁶ Xiong, 2000:243; Yamazaki, 1981:24; Tsukamoto, 1974b:669-670.

³⁷ *SS*, 7.140.

³⁸ Xiong, 2000:244. Cf. Wright, 2007:77-78; Tsukamoto, 1974b:666-668.

As for Buddhism, we have noted Yang Jian's role in its restoration, and more generally the patronage that Buddhism received under the Sui dynasty. Nevertheless, this should not be construed as a relaxation in the state's regulation of the Buddhist clergy. We have seen that, until the Northern Zhou, monastic administrators were appointed to monitor the clergy. During the Sui, some monks were granted special appointments, although they seem to have differed from the monastic convenors.³⁹ A 'Group of Twenty-five' (*er'shiwu zhong* 二十五眾) leading monks was charged with the dissemination of Buddhist teachings. They were flanked by a 'Group of Five' (*wu zhong* 五眾) as assistants.⁴⁰ Another important committee was the group of the 'Ten [Masters of] Great Virtue' (*shi da de* 十大德), eminent monks whose main task seems to have been the supervision of Buddhist translations.⁴¹ This should be seen in conjunction with the imperial sponsorship of the collection, cataloguing and classification of Buddhist scriptures.⁴² Three catalogues of Buddhist scriptures were compiled during the Sui and all were supported by the imperial court.⁴³

Under the Sui, and certainly remembering its recent scars, the Buddhist monastic community inherited the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou tradition that regarded the emperor as the ultimate protector of Buddhism. In a Buddhist apocryphal scripture translated by Narendrayaśas (Naliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍, 490-589), the *Dehu zhangzhe jing* 佛說德護長者經 (*Sūtra of Elder Dehu*), the Sui emperor was depicted as being destined to spread Buddhism in the world.⁴⁴ Following the example of Faguo under the Northern Wei, the eminent monk Tanqian 曇遷 (542-607), one of the 'Ten [Masters of] Great Virtue', would frequently compare the emperor with the Buddha.⁴⁵ Wendi himself is said on one occasion to have referred to one eminent cleric as the 'Son of Heaven for the monks' (*daoren tianzi* 道人

³⁹ For instance, Emperor Wendi appointed six eminent monks in the *Da xingshan si* as his religious advisors. Chen, 2001:19-28.

⁴⁰ Kamata, 2002e:28-29. Yamazaki provides a detailed survey of the twenty-five and five monks and their assigned task. Yamazaki, 1971:298-326; Yamazaki, 1981:30. Xie, 2009:91-96.

⁴¹ XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2060.434b. Cf. Chen, 2001:28.

⁴² SS, 35.1099; FZTJ, j.39. T.49.2035.359b.

⁴³ Wright, 1978:133. One was the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 (T.55.2146), compiled by Fajing 法經 and other monks in a very short time in 594. See Tokuno, 1990:40-43. The second catalogue, also entitled *Zhongjing mulu* (T.55.2147), was compiled under Yancong's 彥琮 editorship in 602. T.55.2147.150a; XGSZ, j.2. T.50.2060.437c. The third catalogue is Fei Zhangfang's *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, which combines an often problematic bibliography with a comprehensive chronology of Buddhism in China. On this catalogue, see Tokuno, 1990:43-47.

⁴⁴ Yamazaki, 1971:347-351; Kamata, 2002e:12; Zürcher, 1982:25-26.

⁴⁵ Yamazaki, 1971:348-349. On Tanqian see Lai, 1983:65-89; and especially Chen, 2002a.

天子), while he was the 'Son of Heaven of the common people' (*suren tianzi* 俗人天子).⁴⁶ However, canonical models were available to sanction the idea that the ruler himself should be the custodian of the dharma. This is what one reads in the *Renwang banruo boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅密經 (*Prajñāpāramitā Scripture for Humane Kings*), a sutra composed in China some time after the Northern Wei persecution.⁴⁷ One passage in this scripture notably states:

The Buddha said to King Prasenajit: “After my extinction, when the Dharma will be about to perish, you shall keep this *Prajñāpāramitā* [scripture] and make a great service to the Buddha. Peace and stability in all the realms, happiness for all the families, will all depend on this *Prajñāpāramitā* [scripture]. Therefore I entrust it to the kings, I do not entrust it to the *bhikṣus*, nor to the *bhikṣunis* or the men and women of pure faith (i.e. *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*). Why? Because they do not have the power of the king, therefore I do not entrust it [to them]. You shall keep it and recite it, and explain its meaning and principles.”⁴⁸

There is no direct evidence to discern the Sui emperors' stance toward the scripture.⁴⁹ However, both Wendi and Buddhist monks under him referred several times to the notion that the ruler is entrusted with the preservation of the Buddhist religion.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the emperor would have had good reasons not to accept the scripture's message in its entirety. As Orzech points out, the *Renwang jing*'s rejection of the idea of appointments of monastic chiefs, control of monastic ordination and other proscriptive measures would be directly contradicting the Sui religious policy.⁵¹ Indeed, the scripture also alludes to ungodly kings who would cause the decline of Buddhism.⁵² Even less appealing would have been its threats of karmic retribution on such kings.⁵³ Despite his generosity towards the clergy, Wendi, who

⁴⁶ The monk was the Vinaya master Lingzang 靈藏 (519-589). *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.359c; Jan (trans.), 1966:12.

⁴⁷ On the *Renwang jing* see Orzech, 1998, especially pp. 68-82, 107-121. Cf. Swanson, 1989:47-48.

⁴⁸ *FSRWBRBLMJ*, j.2. T.8.245.832b (fifth-century version). Cf. Orzech's English translation, which is based on the Tang version of the scripture (T.246). Orzech, 1998:287.

⁴⁹ Zhiyi lectured on the *Renwang jing* during the Chen dynasty, but no evidence suggests that he did it after Chen was annexed by Sui. *STZZTSBZ*. T.50.2050.193a; *XGSZ*, j.17. T.50.2060.565c-566a. Yamazaki, 1981:120. However, Zhiyi refers to the scripture's idea that the the Dharma should be entrusted to the ruler in his letter to Yang Guang. *GQBL*, j.2. T.46.1934.807b; Orzech, 1998:131-132.

⁵⁰ Yamazaki, 1971:284.

⁵¹ Orzech, 1998:114-115. Cf. *FSRWBRBLMJ*, j.2. T.8.245.833b.

⁵² *FSRWBRBLMJ*, j.2. T.8.245.833c. Orzech, 1998:287-288.

⁵³ *FSRWBRBLMJ*, j.2. T.8.245.833b-c.

would interfere with the monastic community to keep it under close control, could not fully subscribe to such messages.⁵⁴ This would not prevent him from extracting from the scripture certain useful ideas that could serve his vision of Buddhism within the imperial order.

In 606, Emperor Yangdi attempted unsuccessfully to impose on monks that they should prostrate to the emperor.⁵⁵ His failure was due to the vehement protests of a number of monastic leaders.⁵⁶ In spite of that, as discussed above, the Buddhist clergy was virtually under the dominance of the imperial court. Significantly, in 595 Emperor Sui Wendi had already ordered the imperial officials to draft a series of monastic regulations.⁵⁷ More importantly, an imperial administration was in place to oversee the monastic community. According to the *Tongdian* 通典 (ca. 801), a Tang political encyclopaedia, during the Sui a department named Chongxuan shu 崇玄署 (Office for the Veneration of Profundity), placed under the jurisdiction of the Honglu si 鴻臚寺 (Court of State Ceremonies),⁵⁸ was charged with the oversight of Buddhist and Taoist temples.⁵⁹ Under Yangdi, Buddhist monasteries were renamed as *daochang* 道場 (Sites of the Way) and Taoist shrines as *xuantan* 玄壇 (Platforms of Profundity).⁶⁰ Alongside this change in nomenclature, more power seems to have been assigned to imperial officials called *jianchen* 監臣 (Inspectors), as they were charged with the task of inspecting Buddhist monasteries.⁶¹ The Sui government would also officially sanction certain monasteries with the conferral of an imperial plaque.⁶² All this evidence suggests the picture of a Buddhist clergy closely regulated by the state.

Further indications of this can be inferred from the numbers of Buddhist monks and monastic establishments. As usual, precise figures are difficult to determine, but one source states that in 597 there were about 200,000 monks residing in approximately 4,000 monasteries and small temples.⁶³ From 601 onwards, the number of monks increased to

⁵⁴ Yamazaki, 1971:541-557.

⁵⁵ Guisso, 1978:31. Ch'en, 1973:78.

⁵⁶ *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.361c. Jan (trans.), 1966:18.

⁵⁷ *LDSBJ*, j.12. T.49.2034.107c.

⁵⁸ On the Honglu si, which would normally oversee diplomatic ceremonial, see Hucker, 1985:264.

⁵⁹ *TD*, 25.704; *SS*, 28.777. Yamazaki, 1971:539-540; Kamata, 2002e:150, 215; Xie and Bei, 1990:85; Zhang, 2002:104.

⁶⁰ *TD*, 25.704; *SS*, 28.777; *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.360a. Jan (trans.), 1966:19. The term *daochang* 道場, here rendered literally, occurs in Buddhist translations as rendition of Skt. *bodhimaṇḍa*, the ground where the Buddha achieved enlightenment. See the relevant entry in the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism at: <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E9%81%93%E5%A0%B4>.

⁶¹ Xie, 2009:97-99.

⁶² Zhang, 2002:105; Xie, 2009:97.

⁶³ *LDSBJ*, j.12. T.49.2034.102a. Gernet, 1995:6-8.

230,000, whereas the number of monasteries diminished to 3,792.⁶⁴ The latter decrease may have been related to the closure of a number of minor temples across the empire. A Song Buddhist history, the *Fozu tongji*, states that there were as many as half a million monks in 590, under Wendi's reign.⁶⁵ Considering the broad historical context of the Northern Zhou persecution and the Sui restoration of Buddhism, this figure would not be impossible. In fact, in that year Wendi decreed that privately ordained monks would be allowed to go forth as regular monks, which may well have suddenly swollen monastic ranks. This came shortly after the permission to ordain monks that Wendi had accorded to the Vinaya master Lingzang 靈藏 (519-589).⁶⁶ In spite of that, a more likely figure for regular monks and nuns would have been between 200,000 and 300,000, with a further, unknown number of privately ordained clerics.⁶⁷ This size for the clergy will find corroboration in the data relating to the beginning of the Tang period, which we shall discuss shortly.

⁶⁴ *BZL*, j.4. *T.52.2110.509b*. In his *Fozu lidai tongzai*, Changnian 常念 mentions around 300,000 Buddhist monks and nuns by the end of Emperor Sui Wendi's reign. *FZLDTZ*, j.10, *T.49.2036.558c*. Weinstein, 1987:5; Kamata, 2002e:147-148.

⁶⁵ *FZTJ*, j.39. *T.49.2035.360a*. Jan Jun-hua translates "fifty thousand." Jan (trans.), 1966:13. But the source clearly says 500,000 (*wushi wan* 五十萬). Cf. Xie and Bei, 1990:85; Xie, 2009:88; Nomura, 1972:121, 127-128.

⁶⁶ *XGSZ*, j.18. *T.50.2060.573a*. Yamazaki, 1971:290-291; Kamata, 2002e:10-15; Chen, 2002a:18.

⁶⁷ According to the *Fayuan zhulin*, there were 230,000 monks and nuns under Wendi's reign and another 6,200 were ordained under Yangdi's reign. *FYZL*, j.100. *T.2122.1026b*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Tang Dynasty: Historical and Social Contexts

It will be noted at the outset that the first two persecutions occurred around 130 years apart, whereas the third one took place 270 years after the second one.¹ The longer interval may be seen as a reflection of a more functional relationship between the Buddhist community and the imperial state, developing after the Northern Wei and the Northern Zhou proscriptions. The latter, in particular, had dramatically curbed the dynamic monastic economy, on which the clergy had built its base of power within Chinese society. After the advent of the Sui dynasty and the unification of China, however, the monastic community was able once again to recover its economic strength, due mainly to its close association with the court and the aristocracy.

Yet, this was not simply a return to the past. While the first two proscriptions occurred in northern China during a time of political division, the final stage of the confrontation between the Buddhist community and the imperial state, climaxing in the Huichang persecution, happened in fact under a unified empire, where both contenders had grown in size and complexity. This simple observation bears on our initial hypothesis that the third great persecution may have brought about, no doubt traumatically, the last fixation in the evolving relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China. We should expect therefore an incident of greater scope and significance, with long-lasting consequences. These assumptions will be tested in the following discussion.

7.1 The Historical Background

When Emperor Sui Yangdi ascended the throne in 604, he inherited an empire that was vast and prosperous. A stable territorial unity, however, was still to be perfected at the institutional and economic level. Wright points out that initially, the emperor proceeded with caution towards the consolidation of his power and the reintegration of a divided society.² But shortly thereafter, Yangdi turned to a number of ambitious projects, potentially beneficial but also costly, such as the building of the Grand Canal (*da yunhe* 大運河) for tribute transportation from the Yangzi area.³ In 611, the Sui emperor launched a campaign to subdue

¹ These figures take as starting points the main edicts in the three persecutions, respectively in 446, 574 and 845. Cf. Nomura, 1968:370.

² Wright, 2007:128-130.

³ Bingham, 1970:11-21; Wright, 2007:134-138.

the Koguryō kingdom in the northeast.⁴ The cumulative burden of these ventures inflicted enormous suffering on an already exhausted population, triggering massive social unrest.⁵

In 613, Yang Xuangan 楊玄感, a senior imperial official, led a mutiny against the Sui court.⁶ The insurgency was put to an end without difficulty and Yang was killed two months later. In 617, however, a group of generals and senior officials defected and assaulted the emperor's summer palace. On 16 April 617 (Daye 大業 13.3.6), Yangdi fell victim to a regicide plotted by his general, Yuwen Huaji 宇文化及 (*d.* 619).⁷ Using this as a pretext, Li Yuan 李淵 (566-635) mobilised his army and launched a military expedition to restore law and order.⁸ A year later, Li Yuan marched on Chang'an and ascended the imperial throne as the first emperor of the Tang 唐 dynasty (Gaozu 高祖 *r.* 618-626), which thus replaced the Sui.⁹ In the following years, his son Li Shimin 李世民 (Emperor Taizong 太宗 *r.* 626-649) consolidated the power of the Tang by two means. Internally he repressed the various contenders for emperorship, while externally he was able to integrate or subdue the nomadic neighbours, especially the Northern Turks, into the Tang state.¹⁰

The Tang dynasty is often regarded as the “golden age” of Chinese imperial history. This view lays emphasis on its continuity, but it overlooks a number of crucial dynastic breakdowns.¹¹ The two most obvious hallmarks of Tang political transition are the ascension of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (Wu Zhao 武曩 *r.* 684-705) in 690 and the An Lushan 安祿山 (703-757) rebellion (An Shi zhi luan 安史之亂) between 755 and 763. In the following discussion, we shall view the An Lushan rebellion as the watershed transition and divide the Tang dynasty as the time before and after that crisis. As Gernet observes, “it was the middle of the T'ang age and the end of the eighth century that saw the start of the great changes which were to give birth in the eleventh century to a world even more different from that of the sixth and seventh centuries than Renaissance Europe was from medieval Europe”.¹²

⁴ Wechsler, 2007a:153-161; Wright, 1978:192-195; Wang, 1985:59-66; Fitzgerald, 1933:31-49; Bingham, 1970:75-114; Graff, 2002:161-164; Yuan, 2001:530-565.

⁵ SS, 4.95-96. Cf. Twitchett, 2007a:6-7; Wright, 2007:143-146; Adshead, 2004:39-40.

⁶ SS, 70.1616-18. Wechsler, 2007a:152; Wang, 1985:67-69; Bingham, 1970:43-46; Yuan, 2001:565-572.

⁷ SS, 4.93, 5.101; *JTS*, 1.5. Wright, 2007:148.

⁸ Gernet, 2002:238; Mao, 1992; Barfield, 1992:140-141; Graff, 1992; Adshead, 2004:40-41; Wechsler, 2007a:155-156; Wright, 1973:243.

⁹ Lewis, 2009b:31.

¹⁰ Gernet, 2002:238; Adshead, 2004:40-41.

¹¹ For some important remarks on the periodization of Tang history, see Benn, 2002:1-18.

¹² Gernet, 2002:236. Cf. Twitchett, 1968:64.

7.1.1 Before the An Lushan Rebellion

Traditional historiography presents Li Shimin as the real founder of the Tang, the formidable personality who urged his reluctant father Li Yuan to seize power.¹³ More recent scholarship has established that Li Yuan and his sons, particularly Li Jiancheng 李建成 (589-626), were all competent military and political leaders.¹⁴ Political infighting under the new dynasty arose in fact when the new dynasty had all but eliminated its external opponents.¹⁵ The internal struggle came to an end in 626, with Li Shimin murdering two of his brothers and emerging as the undisputed overlord.¹⁶ Shortly after, his father abdicated, and he became the Tang emperor.¹⁷ This succession crisis would be repeated many times in the history of the dynasty as one of its crucial weaknesses.¹⁸ One important aspect of Taizong's reign was the integration of frontier people into the Tang system. As Jonathan Skaff notes, this was a thorny issue in the court, divided between upholders of assimilation or exclusion of the empire's nomadic neighbours.¹⁹ Skaff points out that Taizong decisively favoured assimilation.²⁰

In 649 Taizong died and his son Li Zhi 李治 (Emperor Gaozong 高宗 *r.* 649-683) succeeded to the throne. He would be a diligent but somewhat indecisive ruler. Many of his court officials were seasoned politicians, which required a strong leadership.²¹ Crucially, Li Zhi's poor health may also have compromised his authority, which left room for political intrigue. Under such circumstances, Wu Zhao was virtually in control of court affairs during the latter part of Gaozong's reign.²² Upon the latter's demise, she swiftly enthroned and then dethroned two of her sons, finally assuming the emperorship for herself, the only woman to do so in Chinese history.²³

Empress Wu established her own Zhou 周 dynasty (690-705) in 690, although her influence in court politics dated from much earlier. This made no less difficult for her to be the absolute ruler in a conservative patriarchal society such as medieval China. As a

¹³ Fitzgerald, 1933:31-38; Hucker, 1975:140; Adshead, 2004:41; Eisenberg, 2008:167-168.

¹⁴ Eisenberg, 1994:229-230; Wechsler, 2007a:155-156.

¹⁵ Eisenberg, 1994:230.

¹⁶ *JTS*, 2.29.

¹⁷ Wechsler, 2007a:186.

¹⁸ Wang, 1986:111-113; Eisenberg, 1994-224.

¹⁹ Skaff, 2012:53-58.

²⁰ Skaff, 2012:57-58.

²¹ Twitchett and Wechsler, 2007b:243; Wang, 1986:125-130.

²² Wang, 1986:131-140; Lei, 2001:139-160.

²³ Hucker, 1975:142; Guisso, 1978:35-50.

consequence, factionalism plagued her court politics. An unsettled system of imperial succession would worsen things further.²⁴ Somewhat expectedly, Empress Wu's reign was ended by a palace coup, but her immediate successors did not hold power for long.²⁵ This volatile situation continued until Li Longji 李隆基 (Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 *r.* 712-756) became emperor.²⁶ The first period of Xuanzong's reign, known as Kaiyuan 開元 (713-741), not only restored the Tang imperial majesty but also closed up the loopholes in the political institution and fiscal system.²⁷ Notable achievements were the improvement of the household registration and a substantial increase of tax revenue.²⁸ The court also curbed the power of the aristocratic clans and the monastic elite, whose enormous wealth had been gained at the expense of the central economy.²⁹ But while traditionally influential clans were purged, a new elite would replace the old one, of which An Lushan might be but one of the many examples. In fact, the An Lushan crisis uncovered problems that the court would prove unable to resolve.³⁰

7.2.2 An Lushan Rebellion and Aftermath

After the Tang, the official history of a dynasty was compiled after its downfall by its successors, who would thus authenticate its legitimacy. Historical rhetoric routinely blamed previous rulers for certain shortcomings in their administration, especially during the later years of their reign.³¹ Xuanzong was no exception. He was generally praised for his brilliant policies of the Kaiyuan period.³² But from the Tianbao 天寶 era (742-756), Xuanzong's reign declined rapidly until the empire descended into civil war in 755.³³ In that year, An Lushan,³⁴ the military governor of three regions³⁵ declared war against Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (*d.*756),

²⁴ Twitchett, 1994:19-28.

²⁵ Guisso, 2007:320-332.

²⁶ Hucker, 1975:143.

²⁷ Twitchett, 2007b:348-387.

²⁸ Dong, 1993:101-103; Yang, 1992:543-549.

²⁹ Twitchett, 2007b:361-362; Weinstein, 1987:51-54.

³⁰ Pulleyblank discusses in detail the court politics under Li Linfu's 李林甫 (683-753) chief-ministership and the political intrigues amongst the influential civil officials and military governors. Pulleyblank, 1982:85-103.

³¹ Cf. the remarks in Twitchett, 2007b:461-463.

³² Hucker, 1975:143-144; Twitchett, 2007b:348-370; Peterson, 2007:364-370; Adshead, 2004:48; Wang, 1986:163-166.

³³ Twitchett, 2007a:453; Peterson, 2007:470.

³⁴ For biographies of An Lushan, see *JTS*, 199.5367-74; *XTS*, 225.6417-6421. For a critical review of the materials regarding An's life, see Pulleyblank, 1976:7-23.

³⁵ Xue, 1995:249; Wang, 1986:217; Gernet, 2002:259-260. An Lushan was appointed military governor of Pinglu 平盧 and Fanyang 范陽 in 742 and 744 respectively. By 751 he was the military

a senior imperial official and a cousin of Xuanzong's favourite consort, Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719-756). The occasion for An's rebellion is said to have been a rumour that Yang Guozhong plotted to remove An from his post.³⁶ Within a period of slightly more than a month, An swiftly occupied the eastern capital Luoyang.³⁷ After a failed attempt to retrieve Luoyang from the rebels, the western capital Chang'an became difficult to defend. The emperor then fled south and eventually found sanctuary in Sichuan.³⁸ Some of the emperor's entourage mutinied en route and forced the emperor to dismiss Yang Guozhong's faction.³⁹

Meanwhile, the heir designate, Li Heng 李亨 (Emperor Suzong 肅宗 *r.* 756-762) plotted a coup which forced the emperor into abdication.⁴⁰ This power reshuffle stirred up the Tang army's morale and in 757 An Lushan was murdered by his subordinates, prompted by his son An Qingxu 安慶緒 (*d.* 759) who thence became the rebel leader.⁴¹ An Qingxu, however, did not command the same authority as his father. He would be murdered by one of An Lushan's senior generals, Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761), who in turn was eliminated by his own son Shi Chaoyi 史朝義 (*d.* 763).⁴² Such a treacherous situation fatally weakened the rebels, and in 763 the crisis was over.⁴³ But the An Lushan rebellion had a lasting impact on the Tang dynasty. Under Xuanzong, aristocrats and social elite controlled much wealth and landholdings via varied means, such as selling the imperial officials posts, and often colluding with the Buddhist and Taoist clerical elite.⁴⁴ As mentioned, Xuanzong's government initially restrained these trends, but the rebellion rendered further reforms impossible. Certain issues may have even worsened,⁴⁵ notably in that the court sanctioned the sale of monastic certificates at the start of the rebellion.⁴⁶ The main fallout from the crisis was the collapse of the central authority of the Tang empire, with the parallel rise of a number of powerful regional military governors.⁴⁷

In the dynastic history, the An Lushan rebellion crisis was pinned on An Lushan himself,

governor of Hedong 河東; as Peterson rightly observes, this means that An was virtually the governor of the entire northeast region. Peterson, 2007:469.

³⁶ *JTS*, 200.5369-70; *XTS*, 225.6416. Cf. Twitchett, 2007b:452-459.

³⁷ Pulleyblank, 1976:41; Peterson, 2007:474-476; Hucker, 1975:144; Graff, 2002:217-219.

³⁸ Pulleyblank, 1976:42-43; Twitchett, 2007b:461; Peterson, 2007: 477-478; Graff, 2002:220.

³⁹ Twitchett, 2007b:459-460.

⁴⁰ Pulleyblank, 1976:43; Peterson, 2007:478.

⁴¹ *JTS*, 199.5371-72; *XTS*, 225.6420-21.

⁴² *JTS*, 200.5373-74, 5381-82; *XTS*, 225.6426, 6431-32. Cf. Graff, 2002:221-222.

⁴³ Graff, 2002:223.

⁴⁴ Pulleyblank, 1982:26-27.

⁴⁵ Balazs, 1964:117-119.

⁴⁶ *XTS*, 51.1347. Ch'en, 1956:80.

⁴⁷ Chen, 1992:7-8; Peterson, 2007:484-486.

especially laying emphasis on his “barbaric background” in view of his Turco-Sogdian origins.⁴⁸ To what degree this perception was prevalent before the rebellion is difficult to discern. The extent of the impact this exerted on the elite’s perception of foreign cultures is likewise a matter of speculation.⁴⁹ But it is noticeable that when An Lushan revolted, the court had to rely on the Uighurs and other foreign mercenaries.⁵⁰ When the crisis was over, these Uighur soldiers marched in great numbers to Luoyang, which they looted and plundered. The city’s riches were not their only target, for two famous Buddhist monasteries were set ablaze.⁵¹ It is said that more than 10,000 people, who had taken sanctuary on the monasteries’ ground, were killed during the incident.⁵² This would certainly arouse xenophobic feelings, regardless of ethnicities. However, we are not implying that this would have any direct connection to the persecution of Buddhism a century later. Importantly, Buddhism was by then largely embedded in Chinese society as well as people’s mentality,⁵³ so that it would be far-fetched to assume that xenophobia was a main factor for the persecution.⁵⁴ The rise of xenophobic discourse after the mid-eight century is nevertheless significant, as it would provide a convenient cultural rhetoric for the critics of Buddhism in the following decades.

In April 762 (Baoying 寶應 1.3), Suzong was gravely ill and a Buddhist ritual was arranged to propitiate his healing.⁵⁵ On 16 May 762 (Baoying 4.18), however, the emperor passed away, during a time when the crisis was still not over.⁵⁶ In 763, the crown prince Li Yu 李豫 ascended the throne (Emperor Daizong 代宗 *r.* 763-779),⁵⁷ but his reign was still overshadowed by the ravages of the An Lushan rebellion. The restoration of the Tang dynasty was not complete until Emperor Li Shi’s 李適 rule (Emperor Dezong 德宗 *r.* 780-804).⁵⁸ Dezong’s reign lasted for a quarter of a century and enabled the Tang dynasty to recover from the crisis, although occasional revolts launched by the regional military governors continued.⁵⁹

⁴⁸ Chen, 2001c:217-219; Peterson, 2007:470-471; Abramson, 2008:4; 89.

⁴⁹ Abramson, 2008:19-20. Cf. Peterson, 2007:471-472.

⁵⁰ *JTS*, 195.5198; *XTS*, 217.6115. Twitchett, 2007b:461; Mackerras, 1972:15-18 and his translation of the original Chinese, *ibid.* p. 55.

⁵¹ *JTS*, 195.5199; *XTS*, 217.6115. Drompp, 2005:24-25; Mackerras, 1972:59 (trans.).

⁵² *XTS*, 217.6119.

⁵³ Yang, 1998:165-167; Boucher, 2000:24.

⁵⁴ Lin Wushu is among those suggesting that xenophobic feeling may have played some role in the religious persecution during the 840s. Lin, 1998:11-12.

⁵⁵ *JTS*, 10.260-262.

⁵⁶ *JTS*, 10.263; *XTS*, 6.165.

⁵⁷ *JTS*, 10.264; *XTS*, 6.167.

⁵⁸ Peterson, 2007:497-507.

⁵⁹ Lü, 1984:273-333.

During Xuanzong's reign, but particularly after the An Lushan rebellion, the eunuchs steadily extended their influence upon court politics.⁶⁰ Initially, this special group held low ranks in imperial officialdom, acting primarily as chamberlains of the inner palace.⁶¹ However, from the beginning of the eighth century their role at court started to gain weight.⁶² In the ninth century, they could depose one emperor and enthrone another of their own choice.⁶³ Moreover, as the eunuchs' power grew, they could exert their influence over imperial appointments, occasionally even of chief ministers.⁶⁴ What is relevant here is that from the turn of the ninth century, these court eunuchs were usually charged with administering Buddhist related issues.⁶⁵ Although it is often difficult to know the eunuchs' religious proclivities, some of them certainly held Buddhism in special favour.⁶⁶ Gao Lishi 高力士 (683-762), an influential eunuch, is said to have had a private Buddhist chapel built in his residence. He also sponsored a magnificent Buddhist monastery and a Taoist shrine.⁶⁷ Li Fuguo 李輔國 (d. 763) was instrumental in urging Prince Li Heng to orchestrate the coup which enabled the latter to become emperor.⁶⁸ As expected, Li Fuguo became the most influential eunuch under Suzong's reign. He is said to have always held a rosary in his hand

⁶⁰ Twitchett, 2007b:395.

⁶¹ Chen, 2001c:207-208; Sun, 2002:213-214; Dalby, 2007:571. For a general survey of the origin of the institution of eunuchs and their role in early Chinese history, see Dettenhofer, 2009:87-92; Rideout, 1949:54-55; Wang, 1992:5-6; Feng, 1974:473-474; Benn, 2002:27-28; Hansen, 2000:231-232. Cf. *JTS*, 184.4753-54; *XTS*, 207.5855-56; *TLD*, 12.355-357.

⁶² Dai, 2007:33; Dalby, 2007:571-574; Feng, 1974:274-279; Zhao, 1997:52-57. On the court eunuchs, their social background and their association in Chang'an, see Chen, 2009:177-198.

⁶³ *XTS*, 6.167. Dalby, 2007:635-636; Wang, 1992:21-52; Twitchett, 1976:11-12; Twitchett, 1994:30-32; Feng Chengye, 1974:479-483.

⁶⁴ Dai, 2007:33-41; Dalby, 2007:572.

⁶⁵ Liu, 2008:59; Sun, 2002:219-220; Yan, 2004:65-66. The post of Commissioners of Meritorious Works (*gongde shi* 功德使) was created in 807, but in 774 a similar post had already been set up to oversee religious affairs. *JTS*, 14.420; *DSSSL*, j.2. T.2126.245c. Tsukamoto remarks that the post itself involved three stages of development. 774 was the starting point and its function was to assist leading Buddhist monks in translating Buddhist texts. Tsukamoto, 1975:255-258. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:155-156. The second stage started in 788 when some influential eunuchs or imperial officials were appointed to the post, which substantially increased its authority. It was then dissolved at the end of eighth century. Tsukamoto, 1975:259-276. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:157-158. From Emperor Li Chun 李純 (Emperor Xianzong 憲宗; r. 806-820) onwards until the persecution of Buddhism in the 840s, the post was commonly held by eunuchs. For instance, Tutu Chengcui 吐突承璀 (d. 821) was appointed as the Commissioner of Meritorious Works for the Left Street by Emperor Xianzong. Tsukamoto, 1975:276-284. Cf. *JTS*, 184.4768; *XTS*, 207.5869. Weinstein, 1987:100; Kamata, 2002e:159-161.

⁶⁶ Rideout, 1949:54; Sun, 2002:215-228; Yan, 2004:66-70.

⁶⁷ *JTS*, 184.4758; *XTS*, 207.5858. Sun, 2002:215. Gao's devotion to Buddhism would often bring him in contrast with the Taoist priest and courtier Wu Yun 吳筠 (d. 778). *JTS*, 192.5130; *XTS*, 196.5605. Cf. *TCZZ*, 1.152-153.

⁶⁸ *JTS*, 184.4759.

and he was a vegetarian, just like a Buddhist monk.⁶⁹ Another eighth-century eunuch, Yu Chao'en 魚朝恩 (721-770), is recorded to have converted a mansion into a Buddhist monastery in commemoration of the late Empress Zhangjing 章敬 in 767.⁷⁰

In the dynastic history, we read that as a result of gifts given to the eunuchs during Xuanzong's reign, they accumulated considerable wealth as well as political influence.⁷¹ It is said that during the heyday of their power, half of the farming land in the area of the capital was owned by eunuchs and their associates.⁷² This may account for the frequent mention, in epigraphic sources, of donations made to Buddhist monasteries by imperial eunuchs.⁷³ Two episodes will tell a long story. When Gao Lishi donated a bell to a monastery at the capital, many senior officials attended the ceremony. They were invited to toll the bell, and a single strike was auctioned for ten thousand strings of cash.⁷⁴ On another occasion, when Yu Chaoen converted his mansion to a monastery, he instructed the craftsmen to use timbers from houses that belonged to disgraced imperial officials.⁷⁵ We have noted that the Buddhist clergy had been accused from time to time of possessing large quantity of farming fields.⁷⁶ How much eunuchs contributed to the monastic economy cannot be said for sure.⁷⁷ The connection itself, however, is undisputed, and it may have been to the advantage of both sides.⁷⁸ This will be relevant when we discuss the background of the Huichang persecution in due course.

Chen Yinke argues that one of the Tang reforms that yielded far-reaching effects was the official recruitment by way of state examination.⁷⁹ Not all scholars agree: Howard Wechsler, for example, points out that recruitment through examination was largely ineffective in the early part of the dynasty.⁸⁰ Aristocratic pedigree continued to be decisive to rise through the ranks of the imperial bureaucracy. However, as Denis Twitchett has noted, state examinations,

⁶⁹ *JTS*, 184.4759.

⁷⁰ *JTS*, 184.4764; *XTS*, 207.5865. Benn, 2002:29.

⁷¹ Feng, 1974:479. Shortly after Xuanzong's times, the eunuch Gao Lishi not only owned huge extensions of land, often bestowed on him by the court, but also engaged in watermill industries. *JTS*, 4757-59; *XTS*, 207:5859-60.

⁷² *JTS*, 184.4757; *XTS*, 107.5865. According to the *Xin Tang shu*, the eunuchs and their associates owned six tenths of the land.

⁷³ Yan, 2004:65-57; Liu, 2008:49-53; 59-63.

⁷⁴ *JTS*, 184.4757; *XTS*, 107.5865.

⁷⁵ *JTS*, 184.4764; *XTS*, 207:5865.

⁷⁶ Yang, 1992:540-542.

⁷⁷ See the discussion in Gernet, 1995:290-291.

⁷⁸ Liu Shufen speculates that the Commissioner of Good Works, often a eunuch, could exploit his position from the sale of ordination certificates. Liu, 2008:66.

⁷⁹ Chen, 2001:205-207. Cf. Elman, 2000:12; Kracke, 1968:5-7.

⁸⁰ Wechsler, 1973:89-90. Cf. Twitchett, 2007a:10-11.

regardless of their impact on social mobility, played an important role in drawing increasing numbers of candidates from all social strata to the culture of officialdom.⁸¹ The influence of Buddhism on this 'new class' of aspiring officials should not be underestimated. It is true that candidates had to be familiar with Confucian classics in the first place, and to a lesser extent with Taoist texts that were also included in parts of the curriculum.⁸² Buddhism, however, played an important part in the life of the candidate community. For example, Buddhist rituals seem to have inspired the ceremonies held on passing examination.⁸³ During the eighth and ninth centuries, it was common for many candidates to prepare their exams in Buddhist monasteries, also in order to access the often extensive monastic libraries.⁸⁴ While such practices would not necessarily entail a devotion to Buddhism, they were certainly instrumental in bringing the monastic community and the growing body of imperial officialdom closer to each other. This is yet another point we shall bear in mind when we discuss the Huichang persecution later on.

Tax reform was another important change after the An Lushan rebellion. Twitchett divides the financial administration of the Tang dynasty into three phases. The first phase continued from the early years until 720, whereas the second started from then until the rebellion in 755. The third phase covers the remaining part of the dynasty.⁸⁵ Initially, under the 'equal field' (*juntian* 均田) system,⁸⁶ the imperial tax would consist of three parts, including a tax of grain for the allotted land, silk or cotton for the levies, and the labour service for the corvée.⁸⁷ We have seen that the *juntian* system of land allocation started at the end of the fifth century, and was applied during the subsequent centuries. Although the purchase or sale of land was permitted from its inception, all types of dealings were strictly regulated.⁸⁸ There were nevertheless flaws in the system, and infringement occurred all the time.⁸⁹ By the Tang period, some areas where land was scarce could not offer tenants their due share, resulting in

⁸¹ Twitchett, 1976:7; Gregory and Ebrey, 1993:5-6.

⁸² *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.369a. Wu, 1992:35-36.

⁸³ Moore, 1999:214-220; Moore, 2004:190-198.

⁸⁴ Zürcher, 2013:318-330. Zürcher points out the importance of monasteries in elementary education as well. Cf. Yan, 1992:5-9.

⁸⁵ Twitchett, 1970:97.

⁸⁶ Balazs, 1974:115; Twitchett, 1970:124-139.

⁸⁷ New regulations on land allotment had been introduced in 616. *JTS*, 48.2088-89. The *Tang liudian*, apart from the three types, also mentions a miscellaneous levy (*zayao* 雜徭). *TLD*, 3.75-76. Cf. Twitchett, 1970:24-25, interpreting this additional levy as a kind of labour service.

⁸⁸ At first, people were only allowed to sell the surplus portion to those whose allotment were deemed insufficient. *TD*, 1.18. In the 730s, people could only sell land if they needed money for funeral expenses. *TD*, 1.30.

⁸⁹ Chiu-Duke, 2000:131-133.

widespread impoverishment.⁹⁰ Concurrently, the elite accumulation of landholding would exploit vulnerable farmers, making them dependent on the landowners.

In 780, a new dual-tax system was introduced, which basically replaced the tax in kind with an annual monetary taxation.⁹¹ As scholars have observed, this tax reform aimed to regulate the disarray in household registration and consolidate the imperial fiscal revenue after the An Lushan rebellion.⁹² Registration had in fact dropped dramatically from slightly less than 9 million households at the peak of An Lushan rebellion to about 2.8 million in 764, a more than threefold decrease.⁹³ The situation worsened by the middle of the Dali era (766-779) when the record shows that there were only some 1.3 million registered households.⁹⁴ The chaos of the rebellion was certainly one of the reasons for such a dramatic drop, as the crisis made the registration system ineffective.⁹⁵ In the next few decades, registration expanded and by 840, there were slightly less than 5 million households.⁹⁶ According to one source, there was a marked increase in households between 840 and 846, from 2,114,960 to 4,955,151. The former figure, however, probably results from miscalculation or an error in the source.⁹⁷ Several factors, of course, were at play, and political and military instability would inevitably reflect on demographic fluctuation.⁹⁸ This information will be in any case relevant to our discussion, because it was during the first half of the 840s that the third persecution of Buddhism took place.

7.2 The Development of Buddhism

The development of Buddhism under the Tang dynasty can be viewed from several perspectives, including doctrinal, institutional and economic aspects among others. This section will offer a general overview, focusing on the demographics of the clergy, the activity of translation and the expansion of monastic establishments.

When Fu Yi submitted a series of memorials in the 620s asking for the proscription of Buddhism, he mentioned that there were some 200,000 monks at the time.⁹⁹ Another calculation suggests the much lower figure of about 50,000 Buddhist monks and nuns during

⁹⁰ Graff, 2002:208; Gernet, 2002:262-263.

⁹¹ Elvin, 1973:147-148; Twitchett, 1970:41-40; Cen, 2000:328-335; Gernet, 2002:263.

⁹² Peterson, 2007:497-498; Gernet, 2002:264-265; Chiu-Duke, 2000:120-124.

⁹³ Bielenstein, 1947:126; Yang, 1992:536-537.

⁹⁴ Dong, 1993:104; Bielenstein, 1947:147.

⁹⁵ Dong, 1993:105-106.

⁹⁶ Dong, 1993:106-109.

⁹⁷ Yang, 1992:574; Dong, 1993:109.

⁹⁸ Dalby, 2007:664-666.

⁹⁹ *GHMJ*, j.7. T.52.2013.134b.

the same period.¹⁰⁰ Fu Yi's estimate may have been based on his recollection of the situation during the Sui dynasty, in which case it would have been understandably higher. In the first half of the seventh century, Buddhist ordination was in fact limited through a system of quotas. For example, the famous Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) had to obtain a special permission for his own ordination because of the limited number allowed at that time.¹⁰¹ A more reliable census carried out between 650 and 683 reveals that there were 60,000 monks and nuns and around 4,000 between monasteries, shrines and small chapels.¹⁰² The time is significant, for in the late 640s Taizong had given his support to Xuanzang and notably granted permission for the ordination of more than 18,500 monks and nuns.¹⁰³ The Buddhist community enjoyed great favour under Gaozong, and particularly during Empress Wu's reign. Gaozong notably decreed that offenses committed by monks should be tried separately.¹⁰⁴ With Empress Wu's massive support, the Buddhist community finally recovered from the setback of the war-torn years during the Sui-Tang transition, and could even expand considerably.¹⁰⁵ Some uncertainty, however, remains on the actual size of the clergy at the end of the seventh century.

On the other hand, we have precise numbers for the Buddhist clergy and monasteries as 126,100 and 5,358 respectively during Emperor Xuanzong's reign (712-756).¹⁰⁶ This suggests a twofold increase in the number of monks and nuns between the latter half of the seventh and the middle of the eighth centuries. Compared with previous dynasties such as the Northern Wei and Sui, these numbers do not seem particularly impressive. Yet the doubling in the size of the clergy since the 680s is noteworthy. It is not possible to know exactly when such an increase occurred, but we know that during the first part of Xuanzong's reign, well before the An Lushan rebellion, there were repeated measures to curb the activities and freedoms of the monastic community.¹⁰⁷ It seems therefore reasonable to assume that the

¹⁰⁰ *GHMJ*, j.7. T.52.2013.134b. Cf. Gernet, 1995:6, 318 n. 21 and n. 22.

¹⁰¹ *DTDCESSZFSZ*, 1.5.

¹⁰² Gernet, 1995:6-8.

¹⁰³ *DTDCESSZFSZ*, 7.153.

¹⁰⁴ *QW*, 14.164a-b. Devahuti, 2001:10.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Yinke offers a good analysis of Empress Wu and her association with the Buddhist community. Chen, 2001:161-169. On Wu Zetian's use of Buddhist propaganda, see Forte, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ *TLD*, 4.125. Gernet, 1995:6; Ch'en, 1964:259. One source mentions the slightly different figures of 75,524 monks, 50,576 nuns (126,100 in total) and 5,380 monasteries, but no date is given. *THYJZ*, 49.735. Ch'en, 1973:85.

¹⁰⁷ For example, with an edict of 9 March 714 (Kaiyuan 開元 2.2.19), the building of new monasteries was forbidden whereas an imperial permission was requested for repairing old ones. On 27 August 714 (Kaiyuan 2.7.13), contacts between monks and officials were restricted. On 12 September (Kaiyuan 2.7.29), another decree again restricted the construction of monasteries and the copying of

greatest expansion of the clergy took place under Empress Wu and her immediate successors. Such extensive patronage may have compromised for some time the state's regulation of the monastic community. We shall expand on this aspect in the next section.

Buddhist translations continued during the Tang dynasty, with the first half of the seventh century dominated by Xuanzang and his projects.¹⁰⁸ Xuanzang's journey to India was motivated by doctrinal arguments that could not be settled without reference to a particular text.¹⁰⁹ This reflects the crucial importance that the translation of Indian Buddhist texts still had at that time. There is in fact a sharp contrast between Xuanzang's age and the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion, which coincided with the emergence of Chan Buddhism¹¹⁰ and the Confucian revival amongst Tang intellectuals.¹¹¹ Xuanzang's Buddhist translations marked the high tide of Indian influence on Chinese Buddhism during the Tang dynasty.¹¹² After Xuanzang, Yijing 義淨 (635-713) played an important role as a translation team leader, in particular with his rendition of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* (*Genben shuo yiqieyoubu lū* 根本說一切有部律), the last major Vinaya to be translated into Chinese.¹¹³

The second phase started roughly under Emperor Xuanzong's reign and shifted its focus to esoteric texts.¹¹⁴ Although Xuanzong was not enthusiastic about Buddhist translations,¹¹⁵ he was supportive of several esoteric Buddhist masters such as Shanwuwei 善無畏 (Śubhākarasiṃha 637-735) and Jin'gangzhi 金剛智 (Vajrabodhi 671-741).¹¹⁶ These Indian esoteric experts and their activities were not interrupted by the An Lushan rebellion.¹¹⁷ One attraction of the esoteric texts may have been their supposed magic power of blessing and protection.¹¹⁸ It may be relevant to note that Buddhist translations ceased around 806-821 and were not revived for the rest of the dynasty, with the possible exception of a couple of texts in

Buddhist scriptures. On 20 July 724 (Kaiyuan 12.7.26), monks and nuns were scrutinized and those failing the test were laicized. *THYJZ*, j.49 (Niu, ed.), 2012:732-733.

¹⁰⁸ Michihata, 1985:166-168; Ch'en, 1964:236-238, 368-369; Kamata, 2002f:282-309.

¹⁰⁹ Kamata, 2002f:261-262.

¹¹⁰ Yamazaki, 1981:229-237.

¹¹¹ McMullen, 1988:51-66; Chen, 1992:24-31.

¹¹² Weinstein, 1987:24-31.

¹¹³ Ch'en, 1964:239; Heirman, 2007:177-178.

¹¹⁴ Weinstein, 1987:54-57; Ch'en, 1964:332-333.

¹¹⁵ According to Weinstein, only two scriptures were translated under Xuanzong's sponsorship. Weinstein, 1987:55. Cf. *SGSZ*, j.1. T.50.2061.712a, j.2.715b. Orzech, 2011:276-280.

¹¹⁶ Chou, 1945:263-267, 281-282; Michihata, 1985:178-179; Weinstein, 1987:54-55; Orzech, 2011:275-279; Ch'en, 1964:334-335.

¹¹⁷ *KYSJL*, j.10. T.55.2154. Cf. Orzech, 2011:280-281.

¹¹⁸ Ch'en, 1964:335-337; Ch'en, 1973:109-110; Twitchett, 2007b:412; Orzech, 2011:263.

the 830s.¹¹⁹ Apparently, translation of Indian texts was no longer a major consideration for Chinese Buddhist monks.¹²⁰ This is the time when a xenophobic rhetoric also aimed at Buddhism was emerging in the poems of influential literati such as Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824).¹²¹ The end of the eighth century can be seen as a time of transition towards new intellectual orientations, in which the perception of Buddhism amongst the cultured elite was rapidly changing. The lack of official patronage to translation activity and the rise of varieties of Buddhism that laid more emphasis on ritual and practice than on doctrinal elaboration may have weighed in this process.

Imperial sponsorship in the building or refurbishing of Buddhist monasteries was an important indication of the close tie between the Buddhist community and the secular authority. This form of patronage was evidently of vital importance for the development of Buddhism and the Buddhist community. According to the *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (961), a collection of excerpts from Tang official documents, during this dynasty more than three dozen monasteries were built either under imperial auspices or at the expense of imperial revenues in the vicinity of Chang'an.¹²² The practice of converting imperial estates into monasteries had started already with the first two rulers, Gaozu and Taizong.¹²³ In the following period it would be actively pursued by the aristocratic elite, and, as we have seen, especially the eunuchs would play a leading role as donors from the mid-eighth century. The religious motivation behind such munificence was to gain or transfer religious merits.¹²⁴ Yet the scale of profane dealings in religious donations was substantial.¹²⁵ Indeed, the association between the monastic economy and the interests of the aristocratic clans was a complex variable in the relationship between the clergy and the state in the latter part of the Tang period.¹²⁶ As Stanley Weinstein observes, the massive issue of monastic certificates after the An Lushan rebellion would only add further to the uncontrolled expansion of the Buddhist monastic community and its economic acquisition.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ *DSSSL*, j.1. T.2126.240b. Sen, 2003:110. Zhang Qiong dates the last Tang translation in 810. Zhang, 1993:839. According to the biography of the monk Prajñā (Banruo 般若 *fl.* 780-810), in that year, Emperor Xianzong decreed that a Buddhist scripture be translated into Chinese. *SGSZ*, j.3. T.2061.722a-b.

¹²⁰ For more on the last Tang translations, see *SGZZ*, j.3. T.2061.722c-723a. Xie, 1978:160-161.

¹²¹ See e.g. *QTS*, 345.3872.

¹²² *THYJZ*, 48.720-724.

¹²³ *JTS*, 2.37.

¹²⁴ Ho, 2003:40.

¹²⁵ Gernet, 1995:119-124, 129-134, 138-141; Ch'en, 1964:268-269; He, 1986a:15-18.

¹²⁶ Ch'en, 1964:272-273.

¹²⁷ Weinstein, 1987:60-61.

7.3 The Religious Policy of the Tang

7.3.1 Religion and Politics

It is necessary that we understand the religious policy and the political use of religious ideas in two different ways. These two issues are interwoven but they are not the same. Political legitimation through religious ideas was not new, nor was it alien to the Tang rulers.¹²⁸ The two most popular religions that were drawn to the medieval imperial politics were Buddhism and Taoism.¹²⁹ Emperor Sui Wendi used Buddhism in his ruling ideology whereas the Tang often preferred Taoism, except during Empress Wu's reign.¹³⁰ Emperor Gaozu pointed out that the imperial house shared its surname, Li 李, with the professed Taoist founder Laozi, whose name was Li Dan 李聃.¹³¹ He could thus establish the claim that Laozi was the ancestor of the Tang.¹³² Furthermore, the prophecy that a Li clan would come into power was recurrently referred during the time of the Sui-Tang transition. Intriguingly, there was at least one other formidable rebel leader whose surname was also Li (Li Mi 李密, 582-619).¹³³ In time, the connection between the Tang and Laozi would form a main element of the dynasty's ideology.

Buddhist monks were also involved in the political use of prophecies during the Sui-Tang transition. A monk named Jinghui 景輝 (*d. ca.* 627-630s) is said to have predicted the establishment of the Tang dynasty. Emperor Gaozu honoured him by building a monastery in Chang'an.¹³⁴ At the end of the Sui dynasty, a monk named Huangye 黃葉 (*d.u.*) is said to have foreseen the downfall of the Sui and the coming of the Tang. We do not know how his prophecies were received by the emperor, but the monk's tomb inscription was written by Tang imperial official Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 (592-672), whereas the calligrapher was Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641).¹³⁵ In 617, a monk surnamed Li approached Li Yuan with a white sparrow. The next day another white sparrow appeared in front of Li's window, which was

¹²⁸ Before the rise of Buddhism and Taoism, Han monarchs had already made use of the prophetic literature of the apocrypha (*chenwei* 讖緯). Seiwert, 2003:17-19.

¹²⁹ Seidel, 1983:367; Lippiello, 2001:165-173, 218-223.

¹³⁰ Guisso, 1978:27, 30; Wright, 1957:85-104; Lippiello, 2001:171-173; Huang, 2006:436.

¹³¹ *THYJZ*, 50.737. Hucker, 1975:140; Weinstein, 1973:6, 265-266; Benn, 1987:128.

¹³² Guisso, 1978:30; Yu (trans.), 2000:379.

¹³³ Li Shimin used this popular prophecy to urge his father to usurp the imperial throne. Fitzgerald, 1933:32. The prophecy of the Li clan's coming to power had been present for a long time in medieval China. Lu, 2003:70; Barrett, 1996:20; Kohn, 1998:44.

¹³⁴ *XGSZ*, j.26. T.50.2060.671b.6-10.

¹³⁵ *TDMZHB*, No.2, pp.1-2.

then followed by further auspicious signs, encouraging Li Yuan as the predestined ruler.¹³⁶ In 689, a group of monks famously presented Empress Wu with a commentary on the *Da yun jing* 大雲經 (Skt. *Mahāmegha sūtra*), a Mahāyāna scripture, endorsing her unprecedented assumption of emperorship. Wu Zetian ordered that the commentary be circulated across the empire. Several other state initiatives of Buddhist propaganda followed, including the establishment of a Dayun Monastery in every prefecture, and perhaps more significantly, mass ordinations of Buddhist monks.¹³⁷ Empress Wu also decreed that Buddhism should be ranked ahead of Taoism in court ceremonial.¹³⁸

The above examples illustrate the persistent political use of religion by the early Tang rulers. Those rulers, however, were also aware that their rivals could do likewise; it was therefore their recurrent concern to repress the exploitation of religion and prophecies to political ends. For instance, Taizong banned all prognostic practices and prophetic texts, a decision that finds its rationale in several religious-related rebellions in that period.¹³⁹ In 618, the Buddhist monk Tancheng 曇成 broke into a Buddhist assembly convened by a county prefect, killing the latter and his military chief. Afterward, Tancheng claimed himself Emperor Dasheng 大乘 (Great Vehicle, the Mahāyāna), and selected the Buddhist nun Jingxuan 靜玄 as his empress. Tancheng converted a rebel leader named Gao Kaidao 高開道 (d.u.)¹⁴⁰ to his side, but he was assassinated by Gao shortly thereafter.¹⁴¹ In 619, another monk called Daocheng 道成 helped another chieftain to break through the city gates of the prefectural city of Jiezhou 介州, previously held by the Tang army.¹⁴² The clerical status of these and other rebel monks is uncertain, and many of them may not have received a regular ordination. On the other hand, not only Buddhist monks were involved in political sedition. In 619, the Taoist priest Huan Fasi 桓法嗣 presented Wang Shichong 王世充 (d. 621), one of Li Yuan's rivals,¹⁴³ with a prophetic text foreboding Wang's advent to power, and was

¹³⁶ *DTCYQJZ*, 1.13. Another monk named Faya 法雅 was honoured due to a similar reason. Zheng, 2001:23

¹³⁷ *JTS*, 6.121; *ZZTJ*, 240.6466. Weinstein, 1987:41; Tang, 2008:21-23; Feng, 1974:536; Zheng, 2001:34-35. Antonino Forte has demonstrated that the text presented to the throne was a commentary to the sutra rather than a forged version of the same. Forte, 2005:44-61. Cf. Yabuki, 1927:716-734; Chen, 2001:165-168. Forte's magisterial study offers an in-depth of Wu Zetian's Buddhist propaganda and its context. Forte, 2005, especially pp. 108-169, 190-234.

¹³⁸ *JTS*, 6.121. Weinstein, 1987:43; Chen, 2001:169.

¹³⁹ Barrett, 1996:24-25.

¹⁴⁰ Wang, 1986:96; Wechsler, 2007a:168.

¹⁴¹ *ZZTJ*, 186.5833-34.

¹⁴² *ZZTJ*, 187.5858.

¹⁴³ On Wang Shichong see Wechsler, 2007a:165-167.

rewarded with an official title.¹⁴⁴

Other political incidents in the same period involved Buddhist monks. In 621, Zheng Ting 鄭頌 (*d.* 621), a political advisor to Wang Shichong, asked him permission to become a monk. Failing to obtain Wang's consent, Zheng shaved his head and wore monastic robes, but was then executed in public for his disobedience.¹⁴⁵ In the same year, the Buddhist monk Zhijue 至覺 was involved in the failed conspiracy of the Tang nobleman Li Zhongwen 李仲文 (?-621) against Li Yuan.¹⁴⁶ In 649, the talented monk Bianji 辯機 (619?-649), a disciple of Xuanzang, was implicated in a secret liaison with Emperor Taizong's daughter, Princess Gaoyang 高陽公主 (627-653). Bianji was brutally executed as a common criminal.¹⁴⁷ Several monastic associates of the princess were involved on the same occasion.¹⁴⁸

In 629, the Buddhist monk Falin 法琳 caused Taizong's outrage with his vehement attacks on Taoism, the religion of the dynasty.¹⁴⁹ He was then exiled to Yizhou 益州 (Sichuan).¹⁵⁰ In 646, Taizong also demoted his chancellor Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (575-648), who at one point had requested permission to become a monk, accusing him of being deluded by his Buddhist faith.¹⁵¹ It may be significant that when Xuanzang requested that the emperor compile a preface for his newly translated texts, Taizong declined three times. Only when the emperor's health deteriorated did he extend his support to Xuanzang's activities.¹⁵² Beyond their rhetoric, in their political use of religion, the Tang rulers would generally hold a pragmatic attitude. For example, Empress Wu's massive support to Buddhism did not prevent her from seeking religious support from Taoist priests on several occasions.¹⁵³

The emperors' religious commitment could have different motivations, both personal and political. Taizong built a monastery, the Dengci si 等慈寺, at the site of his victorious battle against Wang Shichong.¹⁵⁴ His father Li Yuan erected another monastery as an *ex-voto* when

¹⁴⁴ *ZZTJ*, 187.5850.

¹⁴⁵ *ZZTJ*, 188.5903-04.

¹⁴⁶ *ZZTJ*, 188.5904.

¹⁴⁷ *ZZTJ*, 199.6279; *XTS*, 83.3647.

¹⁴⁸ *ZZTJ*, 199.6279-80; *XTS*, 83.3646-47.

¹⁴⁹ *BZL*, j.2. *T.52.2110.499b-c*. Cf. *XGSZ*, j.24. *T.50.2060.637c*.

¹⁵⁰ *XGSZ*, j.24. *T.50.2060.638b-c*; *BZL*, j.1. *T.52.2110.496b*. *QTW*, 6.77a-b. Wright, 1973:259-260.

¹⁵¹ *JTS*, 63.2403; *XTS*, 101.3952.

¹⁵² *XGSZ*, j.4. *T.50.2060.445b-446a*; *DTDCESSZFSZ*, 6.136-142, 139-140. It is interesting to note that in 648, one year before his death, Taizong praised Xuanzang's translation of the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (*Yujia shi di lun* 瑜伽師地論), going so far as saying that no Confucian or Taoist texts could compare with Buddhist scriptures. *DTDCESSZFSZ*, 6.141.

¹⁵³ *DTXY*, 2.24.

¹⁵⁴ *ZZJSK*, 1.13676b.

he recovered from an illness.¹⁵⁵ When his own health was impaired, Taizong sought advice from Xuanzang about Buddhist merit-making. Under Emperor Daizong's reign, Buddhist monks would be assigned to state-sponsored monasteries to recite particular Buddhist scriptures for the protection of the empire.¹⁵⁶ Chief among these scriptures was the *Renwang jing*, a new redaction of which was produced in 766 on imperial order by the Esoteric Buddhist master Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705-774).¹⁵⁷

On the surface, these and many other episodes may present themselves as cases of imperial patronage of Buddhism. In practice, they were often the product of contingencies, to which one and the same ruler could respond in seemingly contradictory ways. Taizong is one example. Arthur Wright described his reign as a time when “the elite and all classes of society were suffused with Buddhism.”¹⁵⁸ In fact, this ruler's attitude to religion (as well as other matters) was often inspired by expediency.¹⁵⁹ On one occasion, he could dismiss both Buddhism and Taoism as superstition.¹⁶⁰ But that did not prevent him, and his successors, from claiming that the Taoist god Laozi was their ancestor. In his last years, Taizong took a special interest in the Indian Brahmin Nārāyaṇasvāmin, who was neither Buddhist nor Taoist, but claimed to hold powerful drugs of longevity.¹⁶¹ When these proved ineffective, he turned to the religion that he had disliked for most of his life – Buddhism – for consolation.¹⁶² Taizong is but one example of a more general issue that will bear on some parts of our discussion: the personal religious options of the Tang emperors could be, and often were, simply incoherent. Their religious policy, on the other hand, was a different matter, as we are going to see.

7.3.2 Religious Policy of the Tang

Religious beliefs, texts and rituals could be advantageous to the court in various ways, even though, as we have seen, they could often be double-edged weapons.¹⁶³ The regulation

¹⁵⁵ ZZJSK, 1.13675a-b. Zheng, 2001:28.

¹⁵⁶ Birnbaum, 1983:31-33.

¹⁵⁷ Orzech, 1998:135-136. Amoghavajra's version includes the words *huguo* 護國 (state protection) in its title (*Renwang huguo banruo poluomi jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經, T.246).

¹⁵⁸ Wright, 1973:21.

¹⁵⁹ Skaff, 2012:58.

¹⁶⁰ JTS, 2.33.

¹⁶¹ JTS, 84.2799, 198.5308; XTS, 221.6238-39. Cf. Sen, 2003:42.

¹⁶² Weinstein, 1987:26-27. Due to his deteriorating health, the emperor ordered five ordinations in every of the 3,716 monasteries throughout the empire, with 500 ordinations exclusively at the Hongfu si 弘福寺, where Xuanzang was residing. DTSCSSZFSZ, 7.153; XGSZ, j.4. T.50.2060. 457b7-8.

¹⁶³ Cf. the remarks in Abramson, 2008:54.

of religious groups, on the other hand, was an area where the Tang government never failed to impose its direct control.¹⁶⁴ Although occasionally senior monks could be appointed as supervisors of monastic affairs, following the model of the Northern dynasties, they did not play any important role in making or implementing religious policy. It is evident that that was the sole responsibility of the imperial authority.¹⁶⁵ In metropolitan areas, a censor was charged with monitoring monastic ordination. At the prefectural and provincial levels, a register of ordination was updated every three years and three copies of it would be made. While the prefecture and province would maintain a copy each, a third copy would be submitted to the central government. In theory, monks could not travel around without receiving permission from the relevant offices.¹⁶⁶

T. H. Barrett has noted the use of religion in Tang diplomatic relations. For instance, Gaozu and Taizong dispatched Taoist priests and scriptures to other countries, although the results seem to have been marginal.¹⁶⁷ Occasionally, Korean and Japanese students were sponsored by their respective governments to learn Taoism in Chang'an.¹⁶⁸ Buddhism was also visible in the Tang diplomacy.¹⁶⁹ Especially from 641 onwards, Buddhism played an important role in the diplomatic exchanges between India and China. Tang envoys such as Wang Xuance 王玄策 visited sacred Buddhist sites in India, whereas monks from India on official missions carried Buddhist scriptures to the Tang court.¹⁷⁰ To a lesser degree, the same can be seen from the Sino-Tibetan exchanges between the seventh and ninth centuries.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ Barrett, 1996:23. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:6-12.

¹⁶⁵ For instance, in every monastery there would be an Elder (*shangzuo* 上座), an Abbot (*sizhu* 寺主), and a Deacon (*duweina* 都維那). These monastics were chosen as senior monks to manage the daily affairs of a monastery, but their authority did not extend to all religious matters, let alone to influencing imperial regulation. *TLD*, 4.125-126. Michihata, 1986:130-139; Xie, 2009:97-100.

¹⁶⁶ *XTS*, 48.1252; *TLD*, 4.126. The Taoist clergy was administered by the Chongxuan shu 崇玄署 (Office for the Veneration of Profundity), which was a subordinate office of the Zongzheng si 宗正寺 (Court for Lineage Certification). *FZTJ*, j.39. *T*,49.2035.369a. The Buddhist community was assigned to the jurisdiction of the Cibu 祠部 (Ministry of Sacrifices), but there would be shifts between this Ministry and the Honglu si 鴻臚寺 (Court of State Ceremonies) throughout the Tang dynasty. *TLD*, 4.120, 16.467; *TD*, 25.704. Michihata, 1986:139-142.

¹⁶⁷ Barrett, 1996:22-23.

¹⁶⁸ Xie, 1978:140-141. During Xuanzong's reign, Japanese students came to study Taoism in Chang'an. *TDHSDZZ*. *T*.51.2089.992c15-17.

¹⁶⁹ Japanese monks were frequently sent to China to study Buddhism. See e.g. *FZTJ*, j.39. *T*.49.2035.367a; 367b. Cf. Bielenstein, 2005:105.

¹⁷⁰ Sen, 2003:37-44. Bokshchanin, 1981:121-128.

¹⁷¹ In 641, Princess Wencheng 文成公主 (623?-680), a royal relative, was betrothed to the Tibetan King Srong-brtsan sgam-po (*r. ca.* 620-649) and she brought some Buddhist items as part of her dowry. She may have brought the first significant knowledge of Buddhism at the Tibetan court. Zhao and Xu, 1984:261-264. Lu, et al, 2007:296. Cf. Bielenstein, 2005:228. Hoffman assumes that Srong-

Here it is useful to briefly discuss Fu Yi and his attacks on Buddhism.¹⁷² In the early 620s,¹⁷³ Fu, a former Taoist priest, presented a number of memorials to the throne in which he not only criticised Buddhism but called for its total eradication. Racially, Buddhism was denounced as a religion of barbarians. Politically, the Han Emperor Mingdi was blamed for allowing Buddhism to enter China. Ideologically, Buddhism represented an inferior culture. Socially, Buddhist monks and nuns violated the ethical code of filial piety, thus endangering traditional family values. Finally, the Buddhist clergy were not productive, for they consumed without engaging in labour.¹⁷⁴ Fu's opposition to Buddhism bordered on fanaticism, and he also collected writings of Buddhist critics of previous generations.¹⁷⁵ His requests were dismissed, but he did spark considerable controversy. In the eighth century, an echo of Fu Yi's attacks resonated in the writings of the Taoist priest and poet Wu Yun 吳筠 (*d.* 778). Since his figure has been the object of Jan de Meyer's detailed study, including Wu Yun's criticism of Buddhism, a brief summary will suffice here. As de Meyer observes, Wu Yun expressly relied on Fu Yi's precedent. Yet Wu took a slightly different approach, advocating that if Confucianism and Taoism were jointly deployed, Chinese culture would maintain its vitality without Buddhism.¹⁷⁶ It is difficult, however, to agree with de Meyer who suggests that Wu Yun's attacks on Buddhism were an early preparation for the Buddhist persecution in 845.¹⁷⁷ This will be clarified in due course.

Fu Yi's attacks of Buddhism exerted little influence on the imperial religious policy, as can be seen from the responses of the emperors.¹⁷⁸ Of the officials that Gaozu convened to deliberate on the memorials, only one endorsed Fu Yi, whereas his opponents, led by Xiao

brtsan sgam-po's two consorts from Nepal and China might have contributed to the establishment of first Buddhist temples in Tibet. Hoffman, 1994:379. Lu, et al, 2007:294.

¹⁷² On Fu Yi and his memorials see Wright, 1951. Fu Yi's biographies are in *JTS*, 79.2714-17; *XTS*, 107.4059-62.

¹⁷³ Wright, 1951:40. The *Tang huiyao* dates one of Fu Yi's memorials on 3 August 624 (Wude 7.7.14). *THY*, 47.835. Jan Yun-hua points out that Fu Yi had produced several memorials at different times. Jan, 1966:21, esp. n. 56. Kamata, however, assumes that his main memorial was presented to the emperor in 621. Kamata, 2002e.55-56. There may have been two main documents respectively in 621 and 624. Wright, 1951:40, 45-46.

¹⁷⁴ *THY*, 47.835-836; *JTS*, 79.2715-16; *XTS*, 107.4060-61; *ZZTJ*, 191.6001-03; *DTXY*, 10.149. Cf. Wright, 1951:41-45. Wright divides Fu Yi's attacks on Buddhism into five broad categories: economic, political, nationalistic (xenophobic), social-psychological, and intellectual. Cf. Ch'en, 1964:215; Tang, 2008:8-9; Wang, 2009:132-133.

¹⁷⁵ *XTS*, 107.4061-4062; *STJH*, 2.20-22.

¹⁷⁶ de Meyer, 2006:143-146.

¹⁷⁷ de Meyer, 2006:124-131.

¹⁷⁸ On the reasons for the failure of Fu Yi's attacks of Buddhism, see Wright, 1951:46-47.

Yu, were in the majority.¹⁷⁹ Taizong reprimanded Fu Yi for not understanding the way of the Buddha, whose manifestations and doctrines, notably karmic retribution, were yet obvious.¹⁸⁰ Taizong himself would express different and not always favourable views on Buddhism on later occasions.¹⁸¹ It is clear, however, that Fu Yi's pleas to eradicate the Buddhist presence from China were dismissed by the Tang court.

Another well-known episode of criticism levelled against Buddhism occurred in 819, when a pagoda containing the Buddha's relics was opened. At the emperor's invitation, the relics were stored in the imperial palace for three days. On behalf of the emperor, an imperial emissary was sent to pay homage to the relics.¹⁸² The episode prompted the scholar Han Yu to write a trenchant memorial to the throne against Buddhism.¹⁸³ In the document, Han Yu echoed some of Fu Yi's positions, attacking Buddhism on several counts.¹⁸⁴ Somewhat imprudently, however, he also argued that the worship of the Buddha would shorten the emperor's life.¹⁸⁵ Han's memorial was thus construed as an offence of *lèse-majesté*, and resulted in his demotion to a post far away from the capital.¹⁸⁶ Han Yu's criticism does not seem to have swayed the policy towards Buddhism in any significant way.¹⁸⁷ However, as Albert Welter suggests, "while Han Yu's proposals had no immediate effect, they did contribute to rising anti-Buddhist sentiments at court, culminating in the Huichang proscription of Buddhism in the early 840s".¹⁸⁸ Viewed in perspective, one can agree that Han Yu's criticism gave voice to a perceived divergence between Buddhism and court ideology that would finally find full expression in the Huichang persecution.

Another area of deep-seated contrast between the Buddhist community and the imperial institution was the issue of monastic compliance with ceremonial reverence to their parents

¹⁷⁹ *XTS*, 101.3951-52. Wright, 1951:46.

¹⁸⁰ Taizong was reportedly bewildered when Fu Yi argued his case that Buddhism was an imposture of barbarian "fortune-tellers and wonder-workers", plagiarizing Taoist ideas to disguise themselves. *XTS*, 107.4061. Cf. Wright, 1951:45.

¹⁸¹ On Taizong's attacks against Xiao Yu and Buddhism, see *JTS*, 63.2403-04. Zheng, 2001:26. On the codes for the regulation of the clergy (*Daoseng ge* 道僧格) issued under him, see Weinstein, 1987:17-18; Ch'en, 1973:95. The code is no longer extant, but its contents can be evinced from a similar set of rules used in medieval Japan. Sansom, 1934:127-134; Ch'en, 1973:95-104; Kamata, 2002e:191.

¹⁸² *JTS*, 160.4198; *XTS*, 176.5258-59.

¹⁸³ Kamata, 2002f:198-199; Tang, 2008:29-31. For a complete translation of Han Yu's memorial, see Reischauer, 1955b:221-224.

¹⁸⁴ *FZTJ*, j.41. T.49.2035.381c; Jan (trans.), 1966:81-82. Manley, 1986:151-152; Feng, 1974:539. For a comparison of Han Yu's and Fu Yi's criticism of Buddhism, see Chen, 2001:41-42. On the memorials' arguments against Buddhism, see Reischauer, 1955b:218-221.

¹⁸⁵ Manley, 1986:153.

¹⁸⁶ *JTS*, 160.4201; *XTS*, 176.5260-61.

¹⁸⁷ Ch'en, 1964:226; Dalby, 2007:668.

¹⁸⁸ Welter, 2006:36.

and rulers. On 24 July 657 (Xianqing 顯慶 2.6.8), Gaozong decreed that it was inappropriate for parents of Buddhist monks and nuns to pay reverence to their children. He therefore ordered that the practice be abolished.¹⁸⁹ On 8 May 662, the emperor issued another decree ordering clergies to prostrate to their parents and the emperor.¹⁹⁰ This decree appears to have caused a flurry of heated protests from the Buddhist monks at the capital.¹⁹¹ Important religious and political issues were at stake.¹⁹² A group of monks led by Weixiu 威秀 (d.u.) soon asked that the order be revoked.¹⁹³ Shortly afterwards, senior figures in the Buddhist clergy at the capital stepped into the debate, including Daoxuan, mobilizing their patrons in the imperial family.¹⁹⁴ The outcome of the controversy is unclear, but at least one source indicates that the order for the Buddhist and Taoist clergy to prostrate to the emperor was confirmed.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps due to Empress Wu's favourable attitude toward Buddhism, this policy was somewhat less strictly enforced. This much can be inferred from the fact that after ascending the throne, Xuanzong once again ordered monks to prostrate to their parents.¹⁹⁶ This would be the last time such an issue arose in medieval China; as we shall see, the Huichang persecution one century later would prevent its further reoccurrence.

Tang religious policy may have become more complex due to the arrival of new religious communities from abroad. In 635, for example, Nestorian Christians entered China.¹⁹⁷ An imperial decree gave them official recognition in 638.¹⁹⁸ As the followers of this religion were mostly travelling merchants, they would have been small in number. What we can gather is that there were a few Nestorian churches at the capital, and Xuanzong is said to have granted them some support.¹⁹⁹ In 694, a Manichaeian²⁰⁰ bishop presented a scripture of his religion to the throne, which thus was also given imperial approval.²⁰¹ During the subsequent

¹⁸⁹ *THY*, 47.836; *JTS*, 4.83; *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.364a-b. Cf. Tonami, 1988:27-37; Guisso, 1978:31-32; Weinstein, 1987:32; Fujii, 2005:462-563.

¹⁹⁰ *GHMJ*, j.25. T.52.2103.284b. Ch'en, 1973:78; Guisso, 1978:32; Weinstein, 1987:32.

¹⁹¹ *GHMJ*, j.25. T.52.2103.284b-c. Ch'en, 1973:79-80.

¹⁹² Cf. Weinstein, 1987:32-34.

¹⁹³ *GHMJ*, j.25. T.52.2103.284b. Weinstein, 1987:32.

¹⁹⁴ *GHMJ*, j.25. T.52.2103.284c. Weinstein, 1987:32-33.

¹⁹⁵ *XTS*, 48.1252. "Taoist male and female priests, monks and nuns must prostrate when they see the son of the heaven (the emperor)". One Buddhist source claims instead that Buddhist monks were not required to kowtow to the emperor, only revere their parents, and even this would have been abolished some time later. *SGSZ*, j.17. T.50.5061.812b. Cf. Fujii, 2005:466.

¹⁹⁶ *CYQZ*, 3.13.

¹⁹⁷ Chen, 1982:96; Lin, 2011:115.

¹⁹⁸ Lieu, 2012:26; Luo, 1966:10-11; Lin, 2011:116-137

¹⁹⁹ Chen, 1982:97; Lin, 2003:51-57.

²⁰⁰ On the origin and development of Manichaeism, see Lin, 1997:12-43; Wang, 2012:19-114.

²⁰¹ Wang, 2012:116-117. On Manichaeism in medieval China, see Liu, 1976:30-55; Lin, 1997:44-57.

centuries until the Huichang persecution, Manichaeism would continuously develop²⁰² although Xuanzong limited its practice only to foreign residents.²⁰³ After the An Lushan rebellion, the Uighurs, who had decisively contributed to its suppression, adopted Manichaeism and forced the Tang court to support its communities.²⁰⁴ These Iranian religions, including Zoroastrianism,²⁰⁵ were collectively known as *san yi jiao* 三夷教 (the 'three barbarian teachings'). They did not expand beyond small foreign communities, especially of merchants, but they were explicitly exposed as unwelcome when the Huichang persecution targeted them along with Buddhism.²⁰⁶

To sum up, at the inception of the Tang dynasty, the founding rulers tended to use Taoism to legitimize their rule. At the same time, both the Buddhist and Taoist clergies were placed under close state regulation. The prominence of the central government in the management of religious communities is in fact a distinctive trait of the Tang. Religious policy was implemented with unequal effectiveness from one emperor to another, but its nature – strict state regulation – did not change throughout the dynasty. The government's interference in monastic affairs is eloquently seen in the imposition of the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (*Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*) as the standard rules for the Buddhist monastic community.²⁰⁷ As Ann Heirman rightly observes, the state intervention in this area marked a new peak in the state's control of the clergy.²⁰⁸ In the next chapter, it will be important to establish whether or not the Huichang persecution ensued from a crisis in the imperial sway over the monastic community.

7.4 Reception of Buddhism: Literati and Imperial Officials

As mentioned above, a new class of scholars came to play an important role in the late Tang government, especially when the state examination system gained momentum as a means of selecting imperial officials.²⁰⁹ Their ideological views were mixed. Steeped in the Confucian classics, these literati would naturally advocate the traditional cultural values. It is therefore to be expected that some of them could develop hostile attitudes towards a foreign

²⁰² Wang, 2012:127-174.

²⁰³ According to Lin Wushu, Manichaeism, Eastern Christianity and Zoroastrianism were largely tolerated before the persecution of the 840s. Lin, 1998:1-9. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:120.

²⁰⁴ Wang, 2012:138-159.

²⁰⁵ On Zoroastrianism in medieval China, see Liu, 1976:12-29.

²⁰⁶ See below, Chapter Eight. Manichaeism was occasionally attacked by the Buddhists, although this does not seem to have gone beyond polemical debates at the court. Wang, 2012:116-117.

²⁰⁷ Sato, 1986:223; Heirman, 2007:194-195; Jorgensen, 2005:371-372. *SGSZ*, j.14. *T.50.2061.793c.26-27. DSSSL*, j.1. *T.54.2126.237c.8-9*.

²⁰⁸ Heirman, 2002:421-422.

²⁰⁹ Moore, 2004. Cf. the remarks in Vita, 1988:97.

religion, which was hardly part of that tradition.²¹⁰ On the other hand, it was not infrequent for the literati to sympathize with or even expressly endorse Buddhist ideas and practices.²¹¹ The attitude of the Tang literati alone was not a decisive factor in the relationship between Buddhism and the state, but it did play a role that warrants some discussion.²¹² The An Lushan rebellion crisis shall be borne in mind, as it also exerted considerable influence upon the literati society, and different orientations can be discerned before and after the mid-eighth century.²¹³

In broad outline, three common attitudes towards Buddhism can be seen among Tang scholars. A first position was negative. In its extreme form, typically represented by Fu Yi, it would call for the total eradication of Buddhism. A larger group of literati would frequently express their criticism of the monastic community, without, however, mounting a frontal attack against it.²¹⁴ This group also included some Taoist priests who, as de Meyer notes, could form “a united front” with Confucianism “against the formidable power of Buddhism”.²¹⁵ The second position, while appreciating certain aspects of Buddhism, was nonetheless wary of its social threat to the traditional establishment and the imperial fiscal system.²¹⁶ Economic concerns were particularly high on the agenda of this group, which would exert considerable influence on the state religious policy.²¹⁷ Finally, due to their family background or personal choice, many members of the officialdom were supportive of Buddhism, and often closely adhered to its teachings in their way of life.

Fu Yi was markedly influenced by Taoist ideas, although his opinions on Buddhism were distinctive in their extremism.²¹⁸ As discussed, he denounced Buddhism in every aspect – from its monastic lifestyle to its exotic origins. The inflammatory rhetoric of his memorials made no concessions to the usual restraint of official communications to the throne.²¹⁹ Han

²¹⁰ Guo, 2006:150-186; Kamata, 2002f:190-207.

²¹¹ Guo, 2006:1-34. Kamata, 2002f:207-223.

²¹² Barrett briefly discusses the connection between some leading Tang intellectuals and Buddhism. Barrett, 1992:16-26.

²¹³ Chen, 1992:35.

²¹⁴ Kamata, 2002e:190-207. For example, Yao Chong, a senior official under Empress Wu and Xuanzong, criticised on several occasions the massive wealth of the Buddhist clergy. Ch'en, 1973:92-93; Feng, 1974:537. Han Yu had been a Minister of Justice and held a post in the Censorate, so his concern was of a more ideological nature. On Han Yu's official career and roles, see Hartman, 1986:34-84, 84-93. Han Yu's political ideas are discussed in Solomon, 1955:xiii-xxxi; Inaba, 2006:367-415.

²¹⁵ de Meyer, 2006:119.

²¹⁶ Chen, 1992:24.

²¹⁷ Kieschnick, 2003:200, and the discussion in the next chapter.

²¹⁸ Abramson, 2008:61.

²¹⁹ It may be relevant that Fu Yi had been a Taoist priest under the Northern Zhou, when Buddhist

Yu and his criticism of Buddhism are reminiscent of Fu Yi, even though occasionally he showed a less negative interest in Buddhist ideas.²²⁰ Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-850), another high profile official, can be viewed as representing our second group.²²¹ A telling example of detached feelings is the famous scholar and calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-785), who once commented that he did not believe in Buddhism, yet was rather fond of Buddhist monasteries and interested in Buddhist ideas.²²² Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) are other very well known examples of literati who, while strongly interested in Buddhism, were not committed to it.²²³ Xiao Yu can be seen instead as a typical illustration of the Buddhist scholar-official. When Fu Yi presented his memorials, Xiao vocally defended Buddhism and even threatened Fu Yi with karmic retribution.²²⁴ Prominent literati in the mid-eight century were also close to Buddhism. Li Hua 李華 (715-766) and Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) were both Confucian scholars as well as senior imperial officials, and had strong connections with the Buddhist clergy.²²⁵ Another example of such Buddhists is Pei Xiu 裴休 (791-860). The son of a senior official, Pei passed the state examination at a young age and then held several appointments in the imperial administration.²²⁶ In 852, he was selected as the chief-minister and held that post for the next five years.²²⁷ Although a competent official and well versed in Confucian classics, Pei Xiu was a devoted Buddhist, who adopted a vegetarian diet and whose Buddhist practice was even scorned by some his colleagues.²²⁸ He also befriended several eminent Chan Buddhist monks and wrote down some of their sermons.²²⁹

At the end of this overview, it should be pointed that radical opposition to Buddhism, as exemplified by Fu Yi and Han Yu, remained exceptional among the literati throughout the Tang period, and never earned recognition from the emperors before the Huichang persecution. The xenophobic rhetoric that condemned Buddhism as a barbarian religion was

monks or scholars such as Zhen Luan and Dao'an would attack Taoism in a similar brusque style.

²²⁰ One of his earliest senior associates, Liang Su 梁肅 (752-793), was in fact close to Buddhism and Taoism. Owen, 1975:34-35.

²²¹ Sun, 1995:100-106. Cf. *JTS*, 116.4445.

²²² *QTW*, 337.3419a. Cf. Yan, 1992:7-8.

²²³ Bai Juyi would also champion the Confucian side in court debates between representatives of the 'Three Teachings', involving Taoist priests and Buddhist monks. *JTS*, 116.4353. Weinstein, 1987:117.

²²⁴ Guo, 2006:4.

²²⁵ Vita, 1988:118-124.

²²⁶ Welter, 2006:36.

²²⁷ *JTS*, 177.4593-94; *XTS*, 182.5371-72.

²²⁸ *JTS*, 177.4594; *XTS*, 182.5372.

²²⁹ Guo, 2006:245-246.

instead in contrast with the imperial position, which, as we said, generally favoured the inclusion of foreign peoples and cultures in the Tang order. Moreover, although some rulers tried to undermine the Buddhist monastic community, the Tang religious policy towards Buddhism was generally receptive and supportive through the early ninth century.²³⁰ Most importantly, as Guo Shaolin points out, scholar-officials who held either a neutral or a positive attitude towards Buddhism outnumbered the Buddhist critics by far.²³¹

7.5 Integration of the Monastic Economy

Under the northern dynasties, the Buddhist monastic economy had already reached substantial proportions, although state persecution had dealt severe blows to it twice. At the end of the Northern Wei period, in particular, the system of the *samgha* households had laid important foundations for its future development. Under the Sui, the material growth of the Buddhist community was more subdued, also due to growing state regulation, even though a significant number of new monasteries were built with imperial support at the capital. Land allocations to monasteries were at first occasional in the early part of the Tang dynasty.²³² At the beginning of the eighth century, however, it was officially decreed that Buddhist monks and nuns would be allotted a portion of land for cultivation.²³³ It may be therefore assumed that possession of land by monastics was officially legalised by then.²³⁴ This laid the basis for the further accumulation of land and other material possessions acquired by the Buddhist clergy in the following decades.²³⁵

Material possessions within the monastic community were strictly regulated in the vinaya, with further rules laid down in commentaries.²³⁶ From the seventh century, Chinese commentarial literature on the original Buddhist Vinaya rules became increasingly influential.²³⁷ Daoxuan, who is also well known as a Buddhist leader and historian, is regarded as the foremost Tang exegete of monastic discipline; his commentaries on the

²³⁰ Weinstein, 1987, especially pp. 77-105.

²³¹ Guo, 2006:2-27. Cf. Chen, 1992:14.

²³² A famous example is Taizong's donation of land to the Shaolin Monastery 少林寺. *JSCB*, 77.18a-b. Cf. Tang, 2008:8; Ch'en, 1954:268; Tonami, 1990:21-28.

²³³ *TLD*, 3.74. Ch'en, 1973:132; Michihata, 1985:212. Ch'en speculates that such land allocations were in fact intended to regulate the considerable accumulation of estates owned by Buddhist monasteries. Ch'en, 1973:133-135. Ch'en's thesis is supported by an imperial decree of 722, which sets the limit of land that can be owned by private institutions such as monasteries. *THY*, 59.1028. Cf. Ch'en, 1973:133-134; Yamazaki, 1971:583-584.

²³⁴ Cf. Gernet, 1995:139.

²³⁵ Twitchett, 1955:125-145; Twitchett, 1957:526-549; Ch'en, 1973:134-135.

²³⁶ Walsh, 2010:56.

²³⁷ Sato, 1986:82-102.

Dharmaguptaka vinaya, which he brought to prominence, are of great importance in understanding the Buddhist monastic economy.²³⁸ According to these commentaries, monastic property is generally divided into three broad categories as the possessions of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Buddhist monastic community. All were managed by Buddhist monks in different capacities, but the largest proportion was held by the properties of the *samgha*.²³⁹

Monastic possessions were subdivided into permanent (1) and temporary (2), with the former being subdivided into those with limitation (1.1) and that of the ten directions (1.2); whereas temporary possessions were subdivided into those of the ten directions (2.1) and present possessions (2.2).²⁴⁰ Possessions 1.1 belonged to a specific monastery or temple which could not be shared, such as the real estate, landholding and monastic servants,²⁴¹ while possession 1.2 were the donations made specifically to monks and nuns. This form of possessions/resources theoretically should be shared amongst the monastics, and not limited to a specific monastery but available to every ordained monk of the ten directions who would be present at the time of partition of the possessions.²⁴²

Possessions 2.1 consisted of donations offered to monks in a particular monastery, which in principle would belong to the monastery and again in theory should be shared by its monks. Possessions 2.2 consisted of the belongings of a deceased monk, whose partition would have been admissible.²⁴³ However, the procedure for such a partition was so delicate that without the deceased leaving a will, the belongings would usually go directly to the first category.²⁴⁴ Against this background, the swift accumulation of substantial monastic property can be understood at least in part.²⁴⁵ It is difficult to summarise all the points in Daoxuan's detailed commentaries about the monastic economy.²⁴⁶ Yet from the above, we notice that generally the real estate such as monasteries and the possessions that could not be divided or shared

²³⁸ Ch'en, 1964:301; He, 1986b:141-142; Sato, 1986:222-224; Chen, 2007:134-135. On Daoxuan's Vinaya School, see Yan, 1980:111-138.

²³⁹ Gernet, 1995:66-73.

²⁴⁰ *SFLSFBQXSC*, j.2. T.40.1804.55c-56a. He, 1986b:143.

²⁴¹ Gernet, 1995:67-68.

²⁴² *SFLSFBQXSC*, j.2. T.40.1804.55c-56a. He, 1986b:143-144. According to different Vinaya texts, the monastic community was allowed to own material possessions in different ways. The Sarvāstivāda Vinaya required laymen as property brokers, whereas other Vinaya texts directly assigned certain monks as the managers of monastic properties. See Bareau, 1961:444-445; Gernet, 1995:68-69.

²⁴³ *SFLSFBQXSC*, j.2. T.40.1804.56a. He, 1986c:144.

²⁴⁴ He, 1986c:143-149.

²⁴⁵ Bai, 1986:258-265.

²⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of Daoxuan's commentaries on vinaya regulations concerning monastic property, see Chen, 2007:138-148.

would form the largest proportion of monastic property. It is also important to notice that such detailed commentaries were there precisely to solve a large number of legal issues arising from monastic property.²⁴⁷

It is difficult to track accurately the expansion of the monastic economy in the Tang period, but an indirect witness to its growth is the increasing criticism of the wealth of the clergy from the early eighth century onwards. Between 707 and 710, Xin Tifu 辛替否 (*fl.* 710) memorialised the throne that the monastic community should be curbed because of its uncontrolled expansion.²⁴⁸ When Xuanzong allocated farming land to Buddhist monks and nuns, one of his aims was to regulate the disorderly land allocation to monasteries.²⁴⁹ Around 752, a decree noted the increasing number of landless tenants resulting from the accumulation of land by the wealthy social elite.²⁵⁰ We do not know to what extent the Buddhist community was involved in this process. However, in 755, immediately after the outbreak of the An Lushan rebellion, huge numbers of monastic certificates were sold for cash, thus revealing the prominence of economic considerations behind monastic life.²⁵¹ In the late 770s, again, Peng Yan 彭偃 (*fl.* 770) criticized the excessive possessions of the clergy in a memorial to the emperor.²⁵² All the above suggests that from the beginning and especially after the middle of the eighth century, there was a sustained and considerable growth in the monastic economy.²⁵³ Additional evidence shows that, during the Tang dynasty, the Buddhist economy expanded to other industries whilst consolidating its provision of financial services, including loans and broker shops, which dated back to the Northern Wei dynasty.²⁵⁴

This also brings us to another relevant point about the monastic economy. We do not know whether or not it was a permanent policy that monasteries and monks should be exempted from taxation. Gernet points out that “in principle, monks and nuns were exempted from all taxes; in no case did they provide *corvée* services”.²⁵⁵ Yet he also cautioned that, in fact, monastic tax exemption was neither absolute nor consistent throughout medieval China.

²⁴⁷ Sato, 1986:70-73.

²⁴⁸ *JTS*, 101.3155-62.

²⁴⁹ Ch'en, 1973:133-134.

²⁵⁰ Balazs, 1974:118-119.

²⁵¹ Weinstein, 1987:59-61. Kamata, 2002e:101-102. Noboru cites a source suggesting that around 737, slaves and other dependents needed special permission if they wanted to be ordained as monks. In another source, slaves could be admitted to the monastic community with permission from their masters. Noboru, 1964:454-455.

²⁵² *JTS*, 127.3579-81. Feng, 1974:538.

²⁵³ Cf. Gernet, 1995:13-14.

²⁵⁴ Ch'en, 1973:151-178.

²⁵⁵ Gernet, 1995:30. Cf. Ch'en, 1973:135-136.

Sometimes full exemption from *corvée* was granted to certain monks ordained under imperial auspices, while all other monks were required to pay a special tax covering the labour or military *corvées*.²⁵⁶ During the Tang dynasty, the general impression we can draw is that lands held by monasteries were liable for normal taxation.²⁵⁷ On the other hand, Buddhist monks and nuns were registered separately from the rest of the population, which should imply that they did not incur the fiscal burden involved in household registration and accordingly did not pay tax or *corvées* in full.²⁵⁸

In conclusion, by the Tang, both from the religious perspective and from that of the imperial government, it was acceptable for the monastic community to possess land and engage in other normal economic activities. In fact, it can be reasonably established that from the middle of the eighth century onwards, the monastic economy enjoyed constant growth and expansion, which enabled its complete recovery from the collapse following the Northern Zhou persecution and the civil war during the Sui-Tang transition. Although some uncertainty remains as regards the tax status of the monastic community, the very width of the monastic economy suggests that taxation, if not altogether absent, was either applied only partially or even conveniently evaded.

This chapter has attempted to highlight the scope and complexity of the Buddhist community under the Tang in its social, cultural, political and economic aspects. With this background in mind, the next chapter will finally discuss the third and most significant crisis in the relationship between Buddhism and the state in medieval China: the Huichang persecution.

²⁵⁶ Gernet, 1995:31-34. Ch'en also provides some examples from the Northern Qi and Song dynasties, but such instances were temporary. Ch'en, 1973:136.

²⁵⁷ Twitchett, 1970:20-21; Ch'en, 1973:138-139; Gernet, 1995:119-124.

²⁵⁸ Ch'en, 1973:136-137; Balazs, 1974:117; Gernet, 1995:33-34.

CHAPTER EIGHT Religious Persecution during the Huichang Era 會昌 (840-846)

8.1 Warning Signs?

We shall start from some interesting episodes, which may or may not be retrospectively viewed as the starting point of the Huichang persecution. In 841, on the emperor's birthday, two Buddhist monks and two Taoist priests were summoned to a court debate. After the event, the Taoist priests were awarded purple robes, but none was conferred on the Buddhist monks. In July 842 (Huichang 2.6), Taoists were conferred the purple robes again, while eminent monks who had been granted the honours in the past could not even wear their own.¹ The same situation was repeated one year later, in 843.² These incidents have been construed as foreboding the attack on Buddhism that was to follow in about two years.³

According to Zanning, the conferral of the purple robe, the highest imperial honours for monks in Tang China, started with Empress Wu as a prestigious reward to those who rendered assistance to the empress personally.⁴ There was no established standard for its award, whose decision was only for the ruler to make.⁵ Conferring the purple robe was therefore not a routine act, rather a rare expression of imperial favour.⁶ At first sight, the episodes mentioned above present us with the picture of a ruler who was openly partial to Taoism and seemingly dismissive of Buddhism.⁷ While we should not read too much into them only from hindsight, the purple robe incidents do raise some important preliminary questions. Was Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840-846) bent on attacking Buddhism ever since his ascension? Was the persecution chiefly due to his individual agency and religious bias? What about the broader political, ideological and economic agenda? The following sections will attempt to address all these points.

¹ Ono, 1989c:456; Reischauer, 1955a:320.

² Ono, 1989d:5; Reischauer, 1955a:330; Barrett, 1996:86.

³ Weinstein, 1987:117.

⁴ *DSSSL*, j.3. T.54.2126.248c; *SSYL*, j.1. T.54.2127.268c; *JTS*, 183.4742. Cf. Kieschnick, 1999:24; Adamek, 2000:71.

⁵ *DSSSL*, j.3. T.54.2126.248c-249a. For a detailed study, see Forte, 2003:156-162.

⁶ One of Liu Xuanjing's (on whom see below, 8.5.1) honorary titles was "grantee of the purple [robe]". *THY*, 50.869. Lingyan's 靈晏 tomb epitaph mentions his monastic title of *senglu* 僧錄 – monastic recorder – along with his award of the purple robe. *QTBWY*, 2nd Series, p.64a-b. In 836, there was a court religious debate, but no purple robe was conferred to any participants. *FZTJ*, j.49. T.49.2035.385b.

⁷ Reischauer reads the incidents as more revealing of Wuzong's preference for Taoism than of his hostility towards Buddhism. Reischauer, 1955a:228-229. In fact, occasionally even when a Taoist priest lost a debate, he would be rewarded with presents. *FZTJ*, j.39. T.49.2035.367b.

8.2 A Minor Purge under Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827-840)

Let us take a step back to consider the rule of Wuzong's predecessor, Emperor Wenzong. Under his reign, very significant restrictions on the clergy had been introduced, although they did not climax into a persecution. Wenzong's religious policy will thus offer a convenient foil for the Huichang crisis.

On 9 January 827 (Baoli 寶歷 2.12.8), Emperor Jingzong 敬宗 (Li Zhan 李湛 r. 825-827) died in suspicious circumstances, probably murdered. Two days later, Emperor Wenzong (Li Ang 李昂 r. 827-840) succeeded to the throne. The following day, and ahead of his ascension ceremony on 13 January, he expelled from the court some Buddhist monks along with the Taoist priest Zhao Guizhen.⁸ The emperor is said to have commented on the occasion that the Buddhist community was now a heavy burden on the peasantry.⁹ It was a powerful message to the clergies, announcing that some strict religious policy was in sight.

In the late 820s,¹⁰ an official named Shen Chuanshi 沈傳師 (769-827) requested imperial permission for some Buddhist ordinations. He was dismissed on the ground that monastic ordination had already been banned.¹¹ Therefore, he was forfeited a month's salary for making an inappropriate request.¹² On 11 August 835 (Dahe 大和 7.7.14), an edict reiterated that no monastic ordination was permitted.¹³ Prior to that, Li Xun 李訓 (?-835) had requested the emperor to ban any monastic ordination as well as revoking monastic status to privately ordained monks and nuns.¹⁴ The implementation of Li's memorial may have fallen through as he was executed shortly after the failed coup known as Ganlu zhi bian 甘露之變 (Sweet Dew Incident).¹⁵ However, the ban on ordination remained in place throughout Wenzong's reign.¹⁶ There were other major restrictions: for example, monks' movements outside monasteries

⁸ *JTS*, 17.522-524. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:107.

⁹ *QTW*, 753.7810a; *DMJXNJZ*, 3.793. Tang, 1991:31; Gernet, 1995:13.

¹⁰ The source says that the memorial was submitted in 829. Yet Shen Chuanshi was dead by then, so the exact date of the document remains uncertain. *JTS*, 17.533.

¹¹ The ban had been imposed in 807, so the memorial discussed above should have been presented after this year. On the ban of Buddhist ordination in 807, see Weinstein, 1987:102.

¹² *JTS*, 17.533; *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.385a. Jan (trans.), 1966:91.

¹³ *JTS*, 17.559.

¹⁴ *ZZTJ*, 245.7906; *XTS*, 179.5311; *XTS*, 179.5313-14; *JTS*, 169.4398.

¹⁵ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.385b. The 'Sweet Dew Incident' was a plot to eliminate the persistent influence held by eunuchs and their faction at court. In short, the emperor ordered the eunuchs to inspect reports of an auspicious occurrence of sweet dew outside the palace. An ambush was set en route to arrest the leading eunuchs, but before they arrived, the plot was leaked. Alerted in time, the eunuchs took the emperor hostage and massacred all the conspirators, including their leader Li Xun. Feng, 1974:489-496; Dalby, 2007:654-659.

¹⁶ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.385b. Weinstein, 1987:108-114.

were strictly confined within a limited area during a limited time of the day.¹⁷

This scenario begs one question: if monastic ordinations and activities had been restrained so severely under Wenzong, why were there still so many monks and monasteries during the Huichang persecution? First, the Sweet Dew incident and the death of Li Xun are likely to have compromised the effectiveness of the state's religious policy, and some further measures to curb the monastic community had to be abandoned.¹⁸ Secondly, the initial purges were chiefly aimed at privately ordained monks, but the vast majority of them seem to have been left untouched.¹⁹ One of the possible reasons here was that, by then, a monastic certificate could be easily obtained.²⁰ If Ennin's information is reliable, the burning of monastic certificates and monastic robes during the Huichang persecution may have been intended to prevent future abuses.²¹ Finally, although Wenzong was aware of the problems caused by or related to the Buddhist monastic community, he generally demonstrated a receptive attitude towards Buddhism,²² which at least some of his officials shared.²³ Incidentally, it was under Wenzong's reign that the eminent scholar-monk Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) was conferred the purple robe.²⁴ That reign, therefore, sent mixed messages to the Buddhist community. Severe restrictions in principle were often accompanied by a far more liberal approach on the ground. Briefly, Wenzong's religious policy did not succeed in enforcing the strict control of the clergy that it was meant to produce. This failure will have been significant in the background of Wuzong's radical action in the Huichang era. In this respect, Stanley Weinstein may correctly point out that by the time of his demise, Wenzong had laid the basis for the persecution in the years to come.²⁵ This major crisis, the third and in many respects conclusive persecution of Buddhism in medieval China, will be explored in detail in the next section.

¹⁷ *TDZLJ*, 113.542; *QTW*, 74.778a. Kamata, 2002e:124.

¹⁸ Weinstein, 1987:106-114.

¹⁹ Twitchett, 1970:20-21. The main decree of the Huichang persecution in 845 would expressly acknowledge previous restrictions on the Buddhist clergy, notably those issued in the Zhenguan and Kaiyuan eras, but stresses that they had failed to produce any effect. *JTS*, 18A.606, and the discussion below.

²⁰ Ch'en, 1956:69, 80-81. Weinstein points out that expired monastic certificates (demise or laicization of a monk) were to be returned to the imperial offices for invalidation. Weinstein, 1987:109. It is likely, however, that many certificates were not returned so as to be sold privately.

²¹ Ono, 1989d:234; Reischauer, 1955a:384-385.

²² *SGSZ*, j.6. T.50.2061.742a12. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:112-113.

²³ For example, Bai Juyi and Pei Xiu, who both befriended the eminent Buddhist monk Zongmi. Welter, 2006:34-37.

²⁴ Jan, 1972:16-17.

²⁵ Weinstein, 1987:114.

8.3 The Persecution of Buddhism under Wuzong 武宗 (814-846; *r.* 840-846)

Before proceeding, I would like to comment on Ennin's diary, which has been used as the main source of information on the Huichang persecution. Ennin 圓仁 (794-864) was a Japanese monk who accompanied a Japanese mission to the Tang court in 838. His extensive travels from 838 to 846 covered many parts of China, and he was in Chang'an when the persecution was underway. Most importantly, he kept a detailed record that, along with his itinerary, sheds some valuable light on the state of Buddhism during the persecution.²⁶ Although Ennin self-identified as a Buddhist monk in search of Buddhist scriptures, Wang Zhenping suggests that he may have been instructed to gather intelligence for the Japanese court. Some of Ennin's detailed recording of secular matters indeed would attract suspicion.²⁷ However it may have been, it will be stressed that he was, after all, a Buddhist monk who shared the plight of his fellow Buddhists in China during a time when their religion was under attack.²⁸ Ennin's suffering and personal crisis in the midst of an extreme predicament have all the appearance of genuineness.

Ono Katsutoshi and Edwin Reischauer have written illuminating studies of Ennin's diary, which are essential for our understanding of that testimony. Ennin's information is sometimes difficult to verify. Therefore, both scholars utilised any available source to substantiate Ennin's record and place it in its context, although they never questioned that record as such. One obvious point about Ennin's account is that it often blends references to official documents with the monk's personal comments.²⁹ Ennin may have reported accurately what he heard, but he is unlikely to have seen the decrees personally.³⁰ Occasionally, his hearsay can be partially verified.³¹ These comments aside, Ennin's diary is unquestionably important, for it gives us a valuable perspective on the general situation at the time of the persecution.

On 14 April 842 (Huichang 2.3.3), according to Ennin, in response to Chief Minister Li's

²⁶ Teiser, 1988:96.

²⁷ Wang, 2005:184.

²⁸ See the perceptive remarks on this point in Barrett, 2004:175-185. Cf. Reischauer, 1955b:249.

²⁹ For an overview of Ennin and the Buddhist situation during his stay in China, see Makita, 1981:315-329.

³⁰ One particularly controversial point is Ennin's testimony concerning the total destruction of Buddhist establishments, which some evidence appears to be disputable. See the discussion in Yan, 2007b:226-232.

³¹ Fu, 2001:453; Michihata, 1986:207-208. Ennin records the persecution in areas such as Hebei, although he could not have been there at the time. For Ennin's return route, see Okada, 1921:469-470. Ennin mentions that the governors of four prefectures (Zhen 鎮, You 幽, Lu 路, and We 魏) defied the imperial orders of persecution. But the governor of Luzhou 路州 was in fact removed in 844, and after that time the persecution may well have been imposed there. Cf. Fang, 2006:321.

(Deyu) memorial, Wuzong decreed that a process of laicization of Buddhist clergy would take place.³² It intended to root out privately ordained monks, including novices.³³ Seven months later, another decree was issued, calling for further steps to regulate Buddhist monks and nuns. We are informed that more than 3,000 monks in the capital chose to disrobe in exchange for retaining their material possessions.³⁴ On 19 February 843 (Huichang 3.1.17), the Commissioner of Meritorious Works posted the names of monks and nuns who were going to be defrocked. The following day, more than 3,000 of them were said to have left the monasteries.³⁵ Several days later, selected representatives of foreign monks were summoned to the military headquarters, and the military inspector Qiu Shiliang 仇士良 (*d.* 843) personally assured them for their safety.³⁶ The following month, the Commissioner's office ordered that laicized monks and nuns were prohibited from entering monasteries or residing near the capital.³⁷ So far, Wuzong's initiatives would not have differed remarkably from similar restrictions under Wenzong's reign. In the fourth month, however, a violent persecution was launched against Manichaeism, and for this, there was no recent precedent.³⁸

According to Ennin, when the purge started, Manichaean priests were executed, after shaving their heads and having them donning Buddhist monastic robes so that they would look like Buddhist monks.³⁹ Considering that the Tang court had just recovered their military positions at the frontiers against the collapsing Uighur forces,⁴⁰ and that Princess Taihe 太和 (*d.u.*), who was espoused to the Uighur qaghan, had been safely rescued from the Uighur controlled territories (29 March 843),⁴¹ the execution and humiliation of the Manichaean priests may have been a late retaliation after decades of Uighur extortions.⁴² The relevant point here is that Manichaeism was highly revered by the Uighurs.⁴³ Drompp points out that during a time of war, it might be feared that the Uighurs living in the Chinese cities would

³² *QTBWBY*, 3rd Series, pp.3b-4b. This episode will be discussed in the section on Li Deyu.

³³ Ono, 1989c:420; Reischauer, 1955a:311. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:117-118; Kamata, 2002e:126; Zheng, 2001:154.

³⁴ Ono, 1989c:459; Reischauer, 1955a:312. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:119; Zhang, 2001:77; Kamata, 2002e:126.

³⁵ Ono, 1989c:477-478; Reischauer, 1955a:325; Kamata, 2002e:127.

³⁶ Ono, 1989c:477-480; Kamata, 2002e:127; Reischauer, 1955a:325.

³⁷ Ono, 1989c:477-484; Reischauer, 1955a:325.

³⁸ *JTS*, 18A.594; *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.385c. Cf. Lieu, 1998:86; Ono, 1989c:491; Reischauer, 1955a:327; Lin, 1998:405-406; Lin, 1998:9-10; Wang, 2012:177.

³⁹ Reischauer, 1955a:327; Ono, 1989c:491.

⁴⁰ On these developments, see Pan, 1997:315-321; Dalby, 2007:664-666. The Uighur empire in Mongolia was breaking down in those years under the military pressure of the Kyrgyz.

⁴¹ Drompp, 2005:113-123. Cf. Ono, 1989c:485-490; Reischauer, 1955a:326-327.

⁴² Weinstein, 1987:120-121.

⁴³ Lin, 1997:83-95; Lin, 1998:385-387. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:120.

pass vital intelligence to their country.⁴⁴ However, the macabre makeup of Manichaean priests as Buddhist monks before their execution had an unequivocal xenophobic message, and could only bode evil days for Buddhism itself.⁴⁵

Regarding the above incident recorded by Ennin, it may be relevant to mention a related episode. Some two months before the proscription of Manichaeism, an edict outlined the imperial policy concerning the ongoing Uighur crisis. The decree specified that those Uighurs who lived in the capital should adopt Chinese customs. Furthermore, they were required to register their possessions and properties, including the Manichaean temples and Uighur shops. The Manichaean clergy was specifically required to provide some basic personal information to the imperial authority.⁴⁶ It is possible that Ennin had heard of this decree somewhere, and that the graphic delineation in his diary was mixing fact and fiction. However, considering the ongoing showdown between the Tang and the Uighurs, an attack against the latter's religion and its followers would be more than expected.

In the fifth month (May-June 843), all foreign monks in the capital were required to register their details.⁴⁷ Suspicion was rising about religious people of foreign countries.⁴⁸ Yet, restrictions seem to have been contained, as suggested by two circumstances. First, eminent Buddhist monks were still invited to participate in the court religious debates.⁴⁹ Moreover, Ennin tells us that on 13 July 843 (Huichang 3.6.13), an imperial official named Wei Zongqing 韋宗卿 presented a commentary on the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* to the emperor.⁵⁰ Although it is said that Wei was demoted as a result,⁵¹ we should think that the general atmosphere at court would still allow an official to take such an unwise initiative.⁵² Wei, and others, may not have seen things coming. From April 844 (Huichang 4.3), Ennin's records become generally longer and more detailed, with frequent graphic depictions.⁵³

⁴⁴ Drompp, 2005:215.

⁴⁵ Wang, 2012:177-179. Gernet suggests that xenophobia played an important role in the Huichang persecution, notably pointing out that in 836 a decree forbade Chinese to have any relation with foreigners. Gernet, 2002:294.

⁴⁶ *HCYPJ*, 3.15; *JTS*, 18A.594; *TDZLJ*, 130.707; *QTW*, 698.7077a. Cf. Drompp, 2005:285.

⁴⁷ Ono, 1989c:496-497; Reischauer, 1955a:327-328.

⁴⁸ Drompp, 2005:115.

⁴⁹ Ono, 1989d:5-7; Reischauer, 1955a:330.

⁵⁰ Some detailed comments about Wei Zongqing can be found in Ono and Reischauer. Ono, 1989d:10. Reischauer, 1955a:330-332, n. 1264-1271.

⁵¹ Ono, 1989d:7-8. Reischauer, 1955a:330-332.

⁵² Wei Zongqing is also credited with a commentary on the *Renwang jing*. *T.55.2184.1170c29*. The *Quan Tang wen* biographical notice on Wei mentions that he held a middle-ranking post in the middle of Yuanhe (806-821), but was subsequently demoted to prefect of Yizhou 益州. *QTW*, 695.7134b. Cf. Fu, 2001:375.

⁵³ Ono, 1989d:55-88.

Almost all of the events we have discussed so far are based on Ennin's diary. Despite its sometimes uncertain veracity, we have at least acquired some useful information about the general background of the early 840s, leading up to the persecution of Buddhism in 845.

In 843, Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803-863) visited some famous Buddhist monasteries in Chang'an. Duan started from the well-known Da xingshan si 大興善寺 and extended his itinerary to Ci'en si 慈恩寺, where Xuanzang once lodged.⁵⁴ Duan states that as a result of the purge, Ci'en Monastery was going to close, and there he met with some very anxious monks who could barely respond to his queries.⁵⁵ Duan's information should be clarified, for in fact the Ci'en si was permitted to remain, even at the apex of the persecution.⁵⁶ It may be that the drastic reduction of Buddhist monks in the monastery made it look like an abandoned place. In fact, the persecution unfolded gradually, as no decree announced a total proscription until the process was completed. We shall come to this important point shortly.

Two poems composed by Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852) shed further light on the scale of the persecution. The first poem depicts a deserted monastery full of withered bamboos, cracked bricks and rubble. The second poem tells us of a defrocked old monk who was wandering in the mountains in a windy autumn.⁵⁷ The poet asks in the end where could he return as his sanctuary in the evening.⁵⁸ No date of the poem is given but from internal evidence, scholars assume that it was written in the autumn of 845.⁵⁹ If this is correct, Du's poetic delineation of the bleak survival of a former monk is yet another testimony of the destruction of the monastic community. In numeric terms, the scale of the persecution can be viewed from its outcome. Based on the dynastic history, 4,600 monasteries, plus 40,000 small shrines and local temples were closed, while 260,500 monks and nuns⁶⁰ were forced to disrobe.⁶¹ In

⁵⁴ *T.51.2094.1024a*. Under the Tang dynasty, Buddhist monastic establishments endorsed or recognized by the imperial authority were called *si* 寺 (usually translated as 'monastery' or 'temple'). The small ones were called shrines (*ci* 祠) or communal altars (*she* 社), and their existence was tolerated but not officially registered. Ono, 1989e:3; Yang, 1999:335.

⁵⁵ *YYZZ*, part 3, 5.245. See also *T.51.2093.1022b-c*. Cf. Soper, 1960:19; Ditter, 2011:62-64.

⁵⁶ *YYZZ*, part 3, 5.245.

⁵⁷ In the poem, the monk's hair is said to be as white as snow. Wu, 2008:445-446. Beyond metaphor, this may suggest the scale of the purge. A white-haired monk would have been old, but initially (fourth month of 845), only monks under forty and then fifty were laicised. The next month, the measure was extended to most monks and nuns, and only very few remained. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:131.

⁵⁸ *QTS*, 522.5974.

⁵⁹ Wu, 2008:445-447.

⁶⁰ One stone inscription states that more than 5,000 big monasteries and more than 30,000 small shrines were shuttered. The number of monks and nuns was 260,700, roughly consistent with the indication in the dynastic histories. *JSCP*, 114.19b.

⁶¹ Zhang, 2001:109; Ono, 1989e:416; Nomura, 1968:370-371.

addition, around 150,000 monastery servants were registered as taxable households.⁶²

The Huichang persecution took place under a unified empire, and its implementation was expectedly comprehensive.⁶³ Yet some areas were less affected.⁶⁴ On one occasion, Li Deyu asked the border guards to prevent monks from escaping from Shanxi to Youzhou 幽州 (present-day Beijing).⁶⁵ This order itself implies a situation in which the proscription, at least in the monks' perception, was less severe in one region than in another. The area of Dunhuang, where the Tibetan domination was in its last days, was also largely spared by the persecution.⁶⁶ Some regional governors, whose authority had grown after the An Lushan rebellion, were reluctant to enforce the proscription or even able to defy the imperial order.⁶⁷

In numeric terms, some facts, as noted above, can be fairly well established. One moot point is the fate of Buddhist scriptures. In the imperial decrees there is no categorical order to destroy them.⁶⁸ However, as Fang Guangchang rightly suggests, the government may have taken for granted that Buddhist texts should be included in the general destruction.⁶⁹ For that reason alone, it would be logical to assume that burning the scriptures was but one part of the persecution.⁷⁰ We shall remember that according to Ennin, a Buddhist commentary submitted by Wei Zongqing was burned on the emperor's orders. On that occasion, Wuzong reproached Wei for promoting a barbarian religion, thus revealing his abhorrence of Buddhism.⁷¹ This precedent feeds into the assumption that Buddhist scriptures, whether or not as a result of an explicit order, could not be spared in the general attempt to eradicate Buddhism.

Moreover, as Fu Xuanzong has noticed, when a monastery was closed or destroyed, items

⁶² *JTS*, 18A.606; *QW*, 76.802b, 753.7810; *THY*, 47.841, 49.864. *ZZTJ*, 248.8017; *TDZLJ*, 113.543; *FZTJ*, j.42. *T.49.2035.386a*. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:132-133; Tang, 2008:44.

⁶³ In Fujian province, some monks tried to escape by hiding in mountain caves. Wang, 1997:55-62.

⁶⁴ Ono, 1989d:245; Reischauer, 1955a:388; Kamata, 2002e:136; Zhang, 2001:99-100.

⁶⁵ *XTS*, 180.534. A monk named Rizhao 日照 hid in the caves somewhere in present-day Wuhan, Hubei province, accompanied by 60 disciples. *SGSZ*, j.12. *T.50.2061.778b*. For other stories of successful fugitives, see *SGSZ*, j.12. *T.50.2061.778a, 779b-c, 780a*; j.17. *T.50.2061.817c*.

⁶⁶ Tsukamoto, 1975:352-356; Kamata, 2002e:228-235, 306-308.

⁶⁷ Li Deyu asked the border guards between Wutai shan and Youzhou to be vigilant of monks who were attempting to escape. Zhang mentions that the governors of Hesu 河朔 (Fanyang 范陽, Chengde 成德 and Weibo 魏博) could challenge the central authority. Zhang, 2009:21-30. Okada cites Ennin's source to confirm that in the areas of Hebei and its vicinity, the persecution was not as strict. Okada, 1921:185-186. Ennin may have heard such news from some of his contacts, but he could not have been an eyewitness, for as noted elsewhere, some of the places he mentions do not tally with his itinerary. He never passed through Hebei either on his inbound or outbound journey.

⁶⁸ *XTS*, 54.1390-91; *JTS*, 48.2106. Cf. Twitchett, 1970:69.

⁶⁹ Fang, 2006:319.

⁷⁰ Fang, 2006:317-324; Ono, 1989d:19-21, 56. See also some detailed considerations regarding the fate of Buddhist scriptures during the persecution in Zacchetti, 2005:90-91, especially p.90, n. 57.

⁷¹ Reischauer, 1955a:330-332; Ono, 1989d:7-12; Miyakawa, 1992:177.

of religious art or any valuables stored in it would often be targeted. In some cases, even very precious paintings in the monasteries faced ruin.⁷² On occasion, imperial officials would take advantage of the persecution, and either vandalise or steal monastic items.⁷³ The burning of Buddhist scriptures, which were eminently fragile items, should also be understood against these circumstances.⁷⁴ More importantly, since the advent of the Tang, the production and preservation of Buddhist manuscripts had relied to a large extent on the sponsorship of the imperial court.⁷⁵ Now that the same court was bent on symbolically destroying any presence of Buddhism, as eloquently shown in Wei Zongqing's case, one may assume that the destruction of Buddhist scriptures would have been massive.⁷⁶

On the other hand, we are informed that in 854, less than a decade after the persecution, several Buddhist monks went to Taiyuan 太原 to retrieve some lost scriptures. In fact, they were able to collect a large number of manuscripts with the assistance of the regional military governor.⁷⁷ Close to Taiyuan was the Wutai shan 五臺山 district, a holy mountain area that, also due to its distance from the centre, may have offered sanctuary to both Buddhist monks and books.⁷⁸ The episode suggests in any case that Buddhist libraries had survived in certain areas, where the persecution had presumably been less severe.⁷⁹ Moreover, material destruction may have been aimed chiefly at valuable items, as indirectly suggested in a document according to which in 845, at the apex of the persecution, clay and wooden statues would be exempted.⁸⁰ If manuscripts were viewed as less valuable in practical terms, while gold and bronze were the main prize, they may have been spared from total destruction.

As mentioned, the Huichang persecution is best seen as a process, but the edict issued in August 845 (Huichang 5.7) can be seen as its conclusion.⁸¹ It ordered that all Buddhist monasteries should be closed, save for only very few.⁸² Moreover, Buddhism was no longer

⁷² Fang, 2006:418-420; Barrett, 2012:68-69; Yan, 2007:233.

⁷³ Fu, 2001:450-453.

⁷⁴ Fang, 2006:318-320; Zacchetti, 2005:91.

⁷⁵ Kamata, 2002d:370-428; Zürcher, 1982:163-164.

⁷⁶ See especially the analysis in Fang, 2006:321-324.

⁷⁷ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.387c14. Wang Xiang also notes that in 847, a monk from Zhejiang province went to Chang'an in order to request a copy of the Buddhist canon. Wang, 2009:518.

⁷⁸ Yan, 2007b:233-234.

⁷⁹ Buddhist manuscripts could have survived the persecution in a variety of ways. The best would have been hiding them in a secret place, as a Chinese associate of Ennin successfully did with some of the copies that the Japanese monk was bringing. Cf. Fang, 2006:320. Another possible reason was that manuscripts could be spared if they were regarded, as Zacchetti suggests, as "belonging to secondary collections". Zacchetti, 2005:91.

⁸⁰ *THY*, 49.861.

⁸¹ Weinstein, 1987:128-129. Cf. *JTS*, 18A.604-605.

⁸² *JTS*, 18A.605. Dean and Zheng, 2010:289-290; Twitchett, 1970:69.

regarded as Chinese, so it was reassigned to the Honglu si (Court of State Ceremonies), the government's diplomatic agency.⁸³ The next month, another imperial decree stated that the proscription was in accordance with the Tang imperial policy, which Emperor Wuzong was at last implementing.⁸⁴ This claim of continuity suggests an attempt to tone down the obviously radical nature of the proscription.⁸⁵ Soon the awareness must have arisen that, if the Buddhist monastic community could be all but erased, its social presence was more difficult to dispense with, as suggested by the following decree of 3 December 845:

Due to the laicization of Buddhist monks and nuns, the compassionate fields and the hospitals are left without anyone to manage them.⁸⁶ We are concerned lest sick people be not provided for. In the two capitals (Chang'an and Luoyang), proportioned support shall be given as relief aid to monastic fields. As for the provinces and prefectures, plots between 7 *qing* 頃 (*ca.* 46.7 hectares) and 10 *qing* (60.7 hectares) will be allocated. A virtuous elder from the locals should be selected to distribute soups and [other] food.⁸⁷

This edict reveals that the proscription had left Buddhist charitable institutions unmanned, but also that the state was aware of their importance. A document by Li Deyu confirms that all monks at the regional level had returned home. Although he does not directly say that there were no monks in the two capitals, he also suggests that respected elders should be appointed to manage the charitable institutions there.⁸⁸ However, a small number of Buddhist monks and monasteries had been left at the conclusion of the persecution.⁸⁹ The two most important Buddhist monasteries in Chang'an, respectively on the left and right side (lit. 'street', *jie* 街) of the city, were retained.⁹⁰ Presumably, there were also monks in these

⁸³ *JTS*, 18A.605; *ZZTJ*, 248.8017.

⁸⁴ *JTS*, 18A.605-606; *ZZTJ*, 248.8015-19; *THY*, 47.840-841; *QTW*, 76.802a-b; *TDZLJ*, 113.543. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:131-138; Weinstein, 1987:131-135.

⁸⁵ As Weinstein points out, before the Huichang persecution, Wenzong had not refrained from the same virulent rhetoric that Wuzong would deploy, denouncing Buddhism as a barbarian religion. Weinstein, 1987:111-114.

⁸⁶ These charitable wards sponsored by the Buddhist community were initiated prior to the Tang dynasty, and developed especially under Empress Wu's reign. Lai, 1992:10-12.

⁸⁷ *JTS*, 18A.607; *XTS*, 52.1361. Cf. Feng, 1974:557-558.

⁸⁸ *HCYPJ*, 12.100. In 716, Xuanzong was advised to hand over these charities entirely to the monastic community, but he rejected the idea. In 744, homeless children were admitted to the charitable wards. From then on, these charities were managed by Buddhist monasteries.

⁸⁹ *THY*, 48.853. In this document, two monasteries were allowed to remain on each side of the capital (left and right), with 30 monks in each. When Buddhism was restored, some 16 monasteries were selected and repaired, and four of them were assigned to Buddhist nuns. *THY*, 48.853-854. On the number of permitted monks and monasteries, see Gernet, 1995:304; Dalby, 2007:666.

⁹⁰ On the left street, Ci'en and Jianfu 薦福寺 monasteries remained, while on the right street, Ximing 西明寺 and Zhuangyan 莊嚴寺 were maintained. *ZZTJ*, 248.8024; *TDZLJBB*, 30.1403; *THY*, 48.854. In 845 Ennin met a monk who lived in the Jianfu si, and who was to be escorted to Korea as he

monasteries.⁹¹ Moreover, two months after Wuzong's demise, an edict of the new emperor ordered that "apart from the previously retained four monasteries in the two streets of the upper capital", another eight monasteries should be restored.⁹² The expression "previously retained four monasteries" (*jiu liu si si* 舊留四寺) seems to confirm that at the capital, a small number of major Buddhist establishments had been kept in existence even at the apex of the persecution. The reference to a shortage of personnel managing the metropolitan charitable wards may be explained with the fact that the remaining monks would have been too few, and probably could not be reassigned to any task other than looking after the maintenance of their own monasteries.⁹³

8.4 Reasons for the Persecution

We have suggested above that the persecution may have been a last resort after the failure of Wuzong's predecessors to enforce restrictions that would have brought the Buddhist community under control. Its implementation, however, must have proven complex enough to need as complex a set of justifications. Different reasons, by no means equally credible, were adduced to attack the Buddhist community, which I will discuss in some detail in this section. The role of Taoism may seem an obvious starting point. Wuzong's preference for it was plain, and Taoist priests were accused as instigators, leading several scholars to see this conjunction as one of the main causes for the persecution.⁹⁴ As we shall see, this is far from straightforward.⁹⁵ The economic factor, and the state's willingness to tackle ever larger numbers of monks, monasteries and even monastic servants, will no doubt have weighed considerably.⁹⁶ In fact, the monastic economy was arguably the most urgent concern of the imperial religious policy, even before the persecution.⁹⁷ In the edicts, Buddhism was once again derogated as a barbarian religion, a key theme in the ideological background of the crisis. Several elements, however, suggest that this was an *ex post facto* rhetoric, serving to

pretended to be a Korean monk. Ono, 1989d:160-162; Reischauer, 1955a:368-369; Ch'en, 1956:68-69; Nomura, 1968:373.

⁹¹ Du Mu wrote an inscription for a pavilion, mentioning that small numbers of monks and monasteries were allowed to stay in the two capitals and some specific provinces. *QTW*, 753.7810.

⁹² *JTS*, 18A.615.

⁹³ In the first month of 846, a Buddhist pagoda was erected and the famous calligrapher Liu Gongquan compiled an inscription for it. *TDMZHB*, p. 2244. Emperor Wuzong was still alive by then, so the persecution was still effective.

⁹⁴ Feng, 1974:540, 545-547, 552; Nomura, 1968:371-372.

⁹⁵ Cf. Dalby, 2007:667-668.

⁹⁶ Kamata, 2002e:123; Feng, 1974:542-544; Dalby, 2007:666-667.

⁹⁷ Zheng, 2001:152-154; Zhang, 2001:66-68; Tao and Ju, 1936:62-63; Dalby, 2007:667.

motivate the anti-Buddhist sentiment and justify the imperial initiative against Buddhism.⁹⁸ There were other reasons of a political, social and cultural nature that will be discussed and analysed in what follows.⁹⁹

According to the dynastic histories, two leading Taoist priests, who deeply loathed Buddhism, persuaded the emperor to launch the persecution.¹⁰⁰ Buddhist ecclesiastic historians seem to have closely followed this narrative in accusing the said Taoist priests.¹⁰¹ Ennin's diary tells us that while Wuzong demanded elixirs of longevity, the Taoists told the emperor that for the concoction to be effective, Buddhism should be eliminated.¹⁰² We notice that the proscription was enforced around the same time when reports that the potions were ready were recorded by Ennin and by the court diarists.¹⁰³ Wuzong's profound interest in Taoist elixirs of longevity can be assumed with some certainty, as even Li Deyu urged him to keep aloof of such skulduggery.¹⁰⁴ These are the incidents that more directly implicate Taoism or Taoist priests in the immediate background of the persecution. In citing Ennin's account, Weinstein notes that as soon as he ascended the throne, Wuzong sanctioned Laozi's birthday as a national holiday.¹⁰⁵ In fact that is not surprising, for Wuzong was interested in Taoism when he was still a prince.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the Tang had an already long tradition of venerating Laozi as their ancestor. It seems therefore logical to view Taoism as a factor, which may have wielded some influence in the emperor's action against Buddhism.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, we shall note that Zhao Guizhen was summoned to the court in 840 but not until 843 did he resurface as an instigator of the persecution.¹⁰⁸ Barrett points out that it was only in 844 that Ennin mentioned this Taoist priest's name in his diary.¹⁰⁹ We shall return to this part of the discussion in the section below dealing with Zhao Guizhen.

From an economic perspective, the imperial court benefited enormously from the

⁹⁸ Cf. Weinstein, 1987:133-134, and the discussion below in this section.

⁹⁹ Tang, 2008:38-47; Kamata, 2002e:137-138; Fu, 2001:446-450. Ono distinguishes between indirect and direct reasons for the persecution. The former include monastic corruption, the uncontrolled monastic ordinations, the extensive monastic economy and the increasing criticism against Buddhism. The direct reasons are the increasing power gained by Taoist priests and Emperor Wuzong's Taoist interest, as well as his attempt at consolidating the imperial authority. Ono, 1989e:418-422.

¹⁰⁰ *JTS*, 18A.603; *ZZTJ*, 248.8015. Cf. De Groot, 1903:61-62.

¹⁰¹ *FZTJ*, j.42. *T.49.2035.386a*; *SGSZ*, j.17. *T.50.2061.819b-c*; *FZLDTZ*, j.16. *T.49.2036.637b-c*. Cf. Nogami, 1964:508; Qing, 1996a:360-366; Ren, 1990:285-286; Luo, 1977:182-183.

¹⁰² Weinstein, 1987:135.

¹⁰³ Ono, 1989d:111-129.

¹⁰⁴ *HCYPJWJ*, 3.275.

¹⁰⁵ Weinstein, 1987:113-114. The decree can be found in *THY*, 50.868.

¹⁰⁶ *JTS*, 18A.585.

¹⁰⁷ Weinstein, 1987:116-119.

¹⁰⁸ *THY*, 50.868.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, 1996:86. Cf. Ono, 1989d:95, 111, 118; Reischauer, 1955a:351, 354, 356-357.

persecution of Buddhism.¹¹⁰ This included the laicization of Buddhist clergies, the reintegration of monastic servants and the confiscation of monastic land, properties, monasteries and Buddhist images of precious metals.¹¹¹ The persecution also ended tax evasion and commercial dealings among the clergy.¹¹² In the imperial decrees and Li Deyu's memorials, economic considerations were of paramount importance.¹¹³ Following this line of analysis, Kenneth Ch'en made some interesting calculations based on Ennin's account to show the burden that Buddhist monks had on the imperial economy.¹¹⁴ But a close look at the source would reveal that Ennin merely recorded the cost of some ceremonial robes of fine silk, which should not be confused with ordinary monks' robes. At least according to the Vinaya rules, monks were allowed to have one set of robes and occasionally another set, but accumulation of robes was prohibited.¹¹⁵ Daoxuan's commentaries on the Vinaya insist that monastic garments should be made of coarse fabric.¹¹⁶ We are, of course, well aware of the gap between the monastic ideal and the social reality: monks may have possessed more clothes than needed and some of them were made of fine silk. We do not know whether or not the monasteries or the state provided clothing for Buddhist monks and nuns, but in some cases, monks had to support themselves, including clothing.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Ennin himself noticed that ordinary monks in Tang China were poor and they had no means of supporting themselves after the persecution.¹¹⁸ Above all, Ennin's fellow monks paid for their robes rather than receiving free robes from the monasteries or imperial court. Another strategy used by scholars is to calculate the acquisition of the properties after the persecution.¹¹⁹ We should note that daily consumptions and accumulation of wealth are two different matters. In the persecution, the main target will have been the huge monastic properties rather than the individual possessions of monks, however wealthy.¹²⁰ As Gernet rightly observes, the most obvious burden inflicted upon the state economy by the Buddhist community had been the

¹¹⁰ Li, 1986:172-173; Kamata, 2002e:137-138; Ch'en, 1956:68-69, 104-105.

¹¹¹ Feng, 1974:553-556; Cen, 2000:390-391; Kamata, 2002e:137-138. Twitchett notes that portions of monastery land were reallocated to the former dependents of the monasteries. Twitchett, 1970:23.

¹¹² Yang, 1992:538-543; Gernet, 1995:29-48.

¹¹³ Feng, 1974:542-548; Kamekawa, 1942:48-51. Kamekawa notes the cost of Buddhist monasteries and charts the evolution of state regulation, the relaxation of which was directly proportional to the expansion of the monastic economy. Kamekawa, 1942:52-55. The persecution can be seen as a consequence of this state of things. Kamekawa, 1942:56-59.

¹¹⁴ Ch'en, 1956:82-85.

¹¹⁵ *SFLBQHZJB*, j.1. T.40.1806.436c22-437a13. Cf. Wang, 2005:241-245.

¹¹⁶ *SFLSFBQXSC*, j.3. T.40.1804.105b19-105c18.

¹¹⁷ Tao, 1973:6.

¹¹⁸ Ono, 1989d:234; Reischauer, 1955a:386; Kamata, 2002e:136.

¹¹⁹ Zhang, 2006:60-63; Ch'en, 1956:104-105.

¹²⁰ Ch'en, 1956:105.

constant constructions of monasteries and other Buddhist establishments, and the abuse of monastic privileges, such as tax evasion.¹²¹ There was no mention of monastic corruption during the Huichang persecution. But we may recall that the persecution started from the laicization of irregular monks, and seems then to have been progressively extended to the rest of the clergy.¹²²

As with any social and political crisis, longstanding factors and occasional triggers could converge. According to Ennin, around 843, the old rumour of the black-robed usurper resurfaced, with some variants. This time the prophecy was that after eighteen generations in power, the Li imperial house would be deposed by black-clad people. As under the Northern Zhou, Buddhist monks were the primary suspects, for they wore black robes.¹²³ Feng Chengye notes that the gravest concern arose from the fact that the Buddhist clergy outnumbered the imperial army.¹²⁴ Yet, whatever its origins, the rumour lent itself to different interpretations. Several categories of people wore black robes, including groups of commoners.¹²⁵ On the other hand, although Buddhist monks were indeed sometimes referred to as *ziyi* 緇衣 (black robes), the colour of monastic garments could vary.¹²⁶ Nor was it clear that Wuzong was the eighteenth Tang emperor (he should have been the sixteenth).¹²⁷ A similar prophecy, to be sure, was already in a book ascribed to two Taoist recluses who had lived at the end of the Sui dynasty.¹²⁸ The book, entitled *Tuibei tu* 推背圖 (*Drawings Pushed and Backed*), included a large number of prophetic verses, accompanied by drawings.¹²⁹ One of its predictions was that the Tang imperial rule would terminate after eighteen generations, although no word was made of black-robed usurpers.¹³⁰ The strength of such

¹²¹ Gernet, 1995:14-25.

¹²² Okada, 1921:149.

¹²³ Weinstein, 1987:125; Ono, 1989d:56-58; Reischauer, 1955a:342-343; Kamata, 2002e:129-130.

¹²⁴ Feng, 1974:541-542.

¹²⁵ Feng, 1974:542. As early as the Northern Zhou and certainly under the Tang, junior officials and low-ranking police constables wore black coloured clothes. Civilians were required to wear plain or light yellow clothes, but butchers and some merchants wore black clothes. Huang, 2003:65-68. Cf. SS, 11.247.

¹²⁶ Sometimes the term *zisu* 緇素 (black and white) was used to denote the Buddhist clergy and lay followers. WS, 114.3040, 3045; GSZ, j.14. T.50.2059.422c25; XGSZ, j.3. T.50.2060.443a21. In Chinese Buddhist writings, *zisu* is one of the most frequently used terms to refer to Buddhist monastics and laity. But according to the Vinaya rules, only mixed colours were accepted. SFLSFBQXSC, j.3. T.40.1804.105b26-105c11.

¹²⁷ Ono, 1989d:67-68. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:125; Reischauer, 1955a:342-343, n. 1312.

¹²⁸ Li, 1992:1-3.

¹²⁹ Li, 1992:6-7.

¹³⁰ Li, 1992:14-15. Prophecies on eighteen generations of rulers are already mentioned in the *Datang chuanyue qiju zhu* (ca. 618), and must have had currency during the Sui-Tang transition. DTCYQJZ, 3.56-57. We should note that the three characters for 'eighteen sons (=descendants)' 十八子 together

rumours, however, must have been limited. They may only have fomented the anti-Buddhist sentiment within the Tang elite and served the purpose of abetting the emperor's suspicion of Buddhism.¹³¹

In 843, the once influential court eunuch Qiu Shiliang 仇士良 died shortly after resigning from his post. He had played a crucial role in enthroning Wuzong, but had then fallen foul of the emperor and retired one year earlier.¹³² After his demise, he was posthumously stripped of all honours and personal belongings.¹³³ Qiu, who had been in charge of religious affairs,¹³⁴ is said to have been reluctant to execute the emperor's orders against the Buddhist community in 842.¹³⁵ This may have been the reason why Wuzong lashed out against him on several occasions in that period, accusing him of arrogance.¹³⁶ Like many notable Tang eunuchs before him, Qiu had been a supporter of Buddhism, though inconsistently.¹³⁷ Soon after his death, in the sixth month of 843, the proscription of Buddhism took a turn for the worse.¹³⁸

It is uncertain whether Qiu Shiliang would take risks to openly defy the imperial orders on the persecution. If he did step in, we should consider his imperial post. Since Qiu was the imperial commissioner of religious affairs, it is obvious that his political influence would be clipped, had the Buddhist clergy been purged. Further, there were possible economic gains

formed the single character *li* 李, which was the surname of the Tang imperial house.

¹³¹ According to Ennin, the Taoist priest Zhao Guizhen cited a booklet entitled *Kongzi shuo* 孔子說 or *Confucius' Sayings*, which again predicted that after eighteen generations, the Tang/Li dynasty would be replaced by a black-clad emperor. Ennin continues that according to Zhao, this would have been a Buddhist monk. Ono, 1989d:58. The association between Confucius and prognostics was an established tradition by the Tang time. For example, in 485, a *Kongzi bifang ji* 孔子閉房記 (*Confucius' Closed Door Records*) is mentioned in an edict banning prophetic texts. *WS*, 7.155. Lu, 2003:63. At the end of the Sui, the Taoist priest Huan Fasi used this very book to encourage Wang Shichong to seize the throne. *SS*, 84.1898. Lu, 2003:65. For other similar texts under the name of Confucius, see Yasui, 1966:152-170.

¹³² *JTS*, 207.5872-75. Ch'en suggests that "factional strife within the imperial court appears to have played a role in the suppression, with the scholar-bureaucrats allied with the emperor on the one side opposed to the foreign religion, and the eunuchs on the other supporting it". Ch'en, 1964:226-227. Okada provides a detailed discussion of Wuzong's confrontation with the eunuch's faction. Okada, 1921:18-26.

¹³³ *ZZTJ*, 248.7983. Cf. Kamata, 2002e:128; Ono, 1989d:14; Reischauer, 1955a:332-333; Wang, 1995:42-44.

¹³⁴ *JTS*, 207.5873.

¹³⁵ Ono, 1989c:480.

¹³⁶ *JTS*, 207:2874.

¹³⁷ After the failed Sweet Dew coup, one of the chief conspirators, Li Xun, was offered some assistance by the eminent Buddhist monk Zongmi. This frustrated Qiu so much that he ordered Zongmi's execution. Zongmi was only saved by the intervention of Yu Hongzhi 魚弘志 (*fl.* 830s). *JTS*, 169.4399; *XTS*, 179.5314-15; *SGSZ*, j.6. T.50.2061.741c-742a.

¹³⁷ Yu, 1991:55-60.

¹³⁸ Liu, 2008:59-66.

for him if the monastic community prospered.¹³⁹ With this background in mind, we may understand why, when Qiu convened the foreign monks in 842, he assured them that they would not be affected. That may have been the official statement he was instructed to convey, but he may have not been privy to the full scale of the emperor's plans. Prior to his resignation, he probably had been already isolated from the inner circles of the court. Hence Qiu's demise and the mounting of the persecution may have been more than a coincidence.

Another mystery of the Huichang persecution is related to the imperial succession. Yu Furen draws attention on a rumour that Wuzong's arch-competitor for the imperial throne, his uncle Li Chen 李忱 (the future Emperor Xuānzong 宣宗, *b.* 810, *r.* 846-859), was hidden in a monastery, disguised as a Buddhist monk.¹⁴⁰ Hence a (the?) secret agenda behind the persecution would have been to locate Li Chen's whereabouts.¹⁴¹ Niu Zhigong points out that Yu may have misread his sources.¹⁴² Guo Shaolin also finds little corroboration for this story, and notes that Li Chen was probably not in Chang'an at the time of the persecution.¹⁴³ He cites Sun Guangxian's 孫光憲 (896-971) *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言, which mentions in passing that Li Chen wandered somewhere in the south during the Huichang era (840-846) where he also befriended many Buddhist monks.¹⁴⁴ The *Zizhi tongjian*, however, confirms that Prince Li Chen was still in Chang'an in 843, and that he disguised himself as a Buddhist monk until Emperor Wuzong's demise.¹⁴⁵ The story is there, then, but everything else is probably speculation. An all-out persecution only to ferret Li Chen out of his Buddhist sanctuary does seem implausible, and if this was the objective, it did not yield the intended result: no sooner had Wuzong passed away than Li Chen reappeared.¹⁴⁶ Be that as it may, Li Chen's connections with the Buddhist clergy may have played a role in the persecution, but

¹³⁹ Cf. Weinstein, 1987:121.

¹⁴⁰ The main source for this story is Zanning's biography of the monk Qi'an 齊安, who shortly before his death on 25 January 843 predicted (or announced) to his fellow monks that the prince would come to stay in their monastery. *SGSZ*, j.11. *T.*50.2061.776c. Ennin has a similar episode: after a failed revolt, a regional official named Liu Zhen 劉稹 (*d.* 844) disguised as a Buddhist monk, resulting in the execution of several monks who had been implicated. Ono, 1989d:34-49; Reischauer, 1955a:336-338. Weinstein (1987:122) trusts the story. Reischauer, however, points out that the *Zizhi tongjian* contradicts Ennin on this incident. Reischauer, 1955a:337, n. 1290. Cf. *ZZTJ*, 247.7987-8009.

¹⁴¹ Yu, 1991:55-60.

¹⁴² Niu, 1998:46-54.

¹⁴³ Guo, 2005:106-109. Guo dismisses Zanning's information as contradictory.

¹⁴⁴ *BMSY*, 1.19-20.

¹⁴⁵ *ZZTJ*, 248.8022-23.

¹⁴⁶ The commentator of *ZZTJ*, Hu Sanxing, preserves three versions of the story, but he rules out the plausibility of the source. *ZZTJ*, 248.8023.

they are unlikely to have been its driving factor.¹⁴⁷

We have mentioned that occasionally, Buddhism was deployed in Tang diplomacy. We do not know whether this was still significant when the persecution took place, but some probably relevant events will be chronicled here. In 821-822, the Tang negotiated a peace treaty with the Tibetans, who had been harassing the Chinese frontier for some time.¹⁴⁸ In 821, a truce between the two sides was agreed in a Buddhist monastery in Chang'an, and a year later an official treaty was signed in Migu 麩谷, not far from Lhasa. The ceremony of Migu is reported to have taken place in a Buddhist monastery, with Buddhist monks as witnesses.¹⁴⁹ Further, the treaty was in place until hostility broke anew in 847, a year after the persecution.¹⁵⁰ Apart from the involvement of monks in the signing of the treaty, no further evidence allows us to discern what role Buddhism played in that negotiation. There had been signs that Sino-Tibetan relations had worsened around the 830s, which coincided with a period of political instability amongst the Tibetans themselves.¹⁵¹ On the Tibetan side, Buddhist monks had started to play a formidable role in the imperial politics from 810 onwards. Furthermore, under King Ral-pa-can's reign (*r.* 815-838), Buddhism in Tibet attained one of its best times.¹⁵² It has been suggested that the peace treaty between the Tang court and the Tibetans was even initiated and avidly endorsed by the Buddhist "Great Minister".¹⁵³ But that situation changed between 838 and 842 under King Glang-dar-ma (*r.* 838-842), who manoeuvred a coup that temporarily terminated the Buddhist influence in the court.¹⁵⁴ Buddhism itself was undermined by a wholesale religious persecution in 842.¹⁵⁵ It cannot be ascertained how this persecution was received by the Tang court and to what extent it influenced Wuzong's edicts of proscription. One thing we are certain is that the Tang court

¹⁴⁷ Liu Zeliang suggests that Prince Li Chen did pay frequent visits to Buddhist monasteries and monks, and that this habit probably engendered the story of his hiding in a monastery during the persecution. Liu, 1997:32-33.

¹⁴⁸ Li, 1956:6-20; Pan, 1992:143-152; Bielenstein, 2005:243-244.

¹⁴⁹ *XTS*, 216b.6103. Cf. Pan, 1992a:144-147; Pan, 1997:337-339; Wang, 2013:186-187. Several years after the peace treaty, on one occasion Tibetan envoys to the Tang court asked for a painting of Wutai shan, due to its Buddhist significance for the cult of Mañjuśrī. Bielenstein, 2005:244.

¹⁵⁰ Pan, 1992a:147; Wang, 2013:188-189, 299-300.

¹⁵¹ As Wang Zhenping points out, during Wuzong's reign, Tibet's power was beset by internal political intrigues as well as natural disasters. The Tang took advantage from them to recapture the territories lost during previous Tibetan raids. Wang, 2013:187-188.

¹⁵² Hoffman, 1994:386-387.

¹⁵³ Hoffman, 1994:387.

¹⁵⁴ Wylie, 1981:82.

¹⁵⁵ Zhang, 2001:100; Yang, 2000:94-99; Hoffman, 1994:387-388; Waddle, 1910:1274-75; Lu, et al, 2007:350-351; Wylie, 1981:82-83.

received updated information from Lhasa.¹⁵⁶ The persecution in Tibet would not have passed unnoticed, although we are only informed that King Glang-dar-ma was known as a cruel and debauched ruler, whose death in 842 was duly reported to the Tang court.¹⁵⁷ It is worth pointing out that shortly after the persecution, King Glang-dar-ma was assassinated, possibly by pro-Buddhist rivals. If the persecution and the death of the persecutor were known to the Tang court, it is not impossible that the progressive mounting of the Tang proscription was to some extent influenced, and possibly cautioned, by the awkward developments in Tibet.

The role of xenophobia in the Tang persecution has been debated.¹⁵⁸ It is true that in the main edict of 845, Buddhism was attacked as a foreign religion, and it was symbolically put under the jurisdiction of the imperial court for diplomacy.¹⁵⁹ That edict, however, was released about one month after the actual measures of proscription had been concluded. It was obviously intended to justify the persecution, and it may also have been aimed at consolidating official opinions in the court.¹⁶⁰ Edward H. Schafer observes that,

The decline of the Uighurs left their religion, Manichaeism, defenceless in China, and in 845 it suffered with Buddhism during the great persecution of foreign faiths, aimed at the secularization of the clerical classes for tax purposes, and at the conversion of a multitude of holy bronze images into copper coins. These economic motives could only be effective in a generation of fear and attendant xenophobia.¹⁶¹

Schafer is right in saying that xenophobic feeling may have been used as political dressing for the economic motivation of the persecution. As Marc Abramson points out, although the Tang rhetoric against the foreignness of Buddhism had limited impact on the state religious policy when it was used by critics such as Fu Yi and Han Yu, its practical significance should not be underestimated.¹⁶² Indeed, we may suggest that as Wenzong had failed to bring the

¹⁵⁶ Hans Bielenstein presents all the sources concerning the diplomatic exchanges between the Tang and Tibetan courts during the Tang dynasty. Bielenstein, 2005:227-245.

¹⁵⁷ The persecution was not mentioned but the death of King Damo 達磨 (Glang-dar-ma) was reported to Tang court. A Tang official named Li Jing 李璟 (d.u.) was sent to pay condolences to the new king. *JTS*, 196B.5226; *XTS*, 216b.6014. Cf. Lee, 1981:162; Bielenstein, 2005:245; Waddle, 1910:1273.

¹⁵⁸ Liu T'sun-yan, for example, points out that "no plausible ideological reason was given to justify the lack of tolerance towards the exotic teaching." Liu, 1984:9.

¹⁵⁹ In September 845, all the remaining Buddhist monks were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of Host and Guest (Zhuke 主客). *ZZTJ*, 248.8017-18.

¹⁶⁰ For example, the decree says, "[as the emperor] I have widely consulted previous precedents as well as inquired different opinions from various sources. [I have come to the conclusion] that without any doubts the vices [of Buddhism] should be purged. Moreover, the honourable imperial officials within the court and outside must earnestly coordinate [to implement the imperial policy]. [They all agreed that] the purge was appropriate and necessary". *JTS*, 18A.606.

¹⁶¹ Schafer, 1985:10

¹⁶² Abramson, 2008:80-81.

Buddhist community under state control, Wuzong's ideological attack on Buddhism would give the imperial state an additional weapon to reach the same goal. Drawing on traditionalist views of ideological orthodoxy and cultural purity, the emperor could establish a united ideological front whereby dissenting views, in particular amongst his senior officials and the upper social echelon, would be silenced. Importantly, many members of the elite would have seen their interests affected by the persecution and would accordingly resist it. Yet the edict's straight rhetoric, pitting a traditional 'us' against 'the foreign Buddhist other', was something that was hard to counter.

Of course, xenophobia is a broad attitude that could vary in its ways and targets. There was a difference between the persecution of Buddhism and the punishment inflicted on the followers of Manichaeism. Apart from the fact that Buddhism had been embedded into Chinese society and culture for quite a long time when the persecution took place, all those Buddhist monks and nuns, save for a very few, were in fact Chinese.¹⁶³ Wuzong's edict duly made a separate mention of the purge of Buddhism and eradication of other religions such as Zoroastrianism and Nestorian Christianity.¹⁶⁴ Suffice it to say that the ideological attacks on Buddhism in the imperial decree may reflect a situation where xenophobic feeling, or rather, the exotic origin of Buddhism, had been drawn to play into the state's hands. Or as some scholar rightly observes, the ideological attack on Buddhism was made to disguise and support the economic motivation behind the persecution.¹⁶⁵ In other words, anti-Buddhist xenophobia may have been more important as a justification for the persecution than as its cause. On the other hand, the destructive aspects of the persecution, including the smashing of holy statues and the burning of scriptures, cannot be fully explained without taking such ideological motivations into account. However, we shall reiterate that the ideological element of the Huichang persecution was present more in its language than in its actual objectives.

8.5 Case Studies: Three Individuals

As can be seen from the previous discussion, the reasons for the persecution are varied, but economic motivations may have been dominant. Yet, the dynastic histories stress the role of some Taoist priests, who would have swayed Wuzong towards their religion. We shall return to them shortly. Installed as the most powerful chief minister by the emperor, Li Deyu

¹⁶³ Abramson, 2008:52. Monks of Central Asian or Indian origins were more active in translating Buddhist texts, whereas some Japanese and Korean monks studied Buddhism in Chang'an. Zhang, 1993:837-839.

¹⁶⁴ *JTS*, 18A.606.

¹⁶⁵ de Bary and Bloom, 1999:585. Cf. Schafer 1985:10.

undoubtedly played a paramount role in the persecution, even though it is implausible to believe that his motivation was to replace Buddhism with his preferred Taoism. Beyond the political rhetoric, the emperor would have had many reasons to undermine the Buddhist community, ranging from his economic concerns to his political commitment to an ideological purification. More simply perhaps, Wuzong may have wanted to achieve emphatically that submission of the vast Buddhist community that his predecessor had been unable to bring to fruition. We are left to wonder how this complex of events operated and how the different motivations were linked to one another. By focusing on the best known historical actors in the persecution, we may catch a glimpse of a number of aspects that are not immediately apparent, and thus gain further insights into the confrontation between Buddhism and the state in the late Tang.

8.5.1 Zhao Guizhen 趙歸真 (d. 846) and the Taoists

During the persecution of Buddhism, Zhao Guizhen and his fellow priest Liu Xuanjing 劉玄靜 (*a.k.a.* Liu Yuanjing 劉元靖 d. 851) were at the apex of their religious career and close to the centre of Tang politics.¹⁶⁶ How did they exactly wield this influence? The dynastic history states that, in April 844 (Huichang 4.3) and thereafter, whenever Zhao Guizhen had an opportunity to talk with the emperor, he would attack Buddhism as a foreign religion, and that he had done this before already. Zhao emphasized the burden that Buddhism placed on the population and the necessity to extirpate it. Wuzong is said to have agreed with him.¹⁶⁷ Shortly afterwards, when he came in turn under criticism, Zhao introduced Deng Yuanqi 鄧元起 (d.u.), a Taoist recluse, to the emperor. The joint lobbying of these three leading Taoists is said to have set the proscription in motion.¹⁶⁸ After Wuzong's demise, Zhao Guizhen and other Taoist priests were indeed executed for instigating the persecution, which seems to sanction their role beyond doubt.¹⁶⁹ When one remembers that the first measures against Buddhism started in the spring of 842, but were expanded considerably two years later, it seems plausible to assume Zhao's influence on the emperor behind the escalation. There are, however, important aspects to be noticed in the trajectory of Zhao's activities.

As we mentioned, Zhao Guizhen had been in the court once, before he was expelled by

¹⁶⁶ Wang, 1995:128-131.

¹⁶⁷ *JTS*, 18A.600. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:124.

¹⁶⁸ *JTS*, 18A.603. Buddhist sources, as we shall see, implicate not only Zhao Guizhen but also Li Deyu among the chief instigators. *FZTJ*, j.54. T.49.2035.471b11-12.

¹⁶⁹ *JTS*, 18B.615; *FZTJ*, j.54. T.49.2035.471b14.

Emperor Wenzong. In the autumn 840, nine months after his ascension, Wuzong recalled Zhao Guizhen to the palace, together with an impressive retinue of eighty-one Taoist priests. They resided in specially designed palace chapels to perform Taoist rituals. Wuzong visited there once and was conferred Taoist registers of initiation.¹⁷⁰ This is said to have alarmed his entourage of officials, but no action was taken. In the sixth month, Liu Xuanjing was rewarded with an official title and was appointed a fellow of the Chongwen guan 崇文館 (Academy of Literary Works). He was instructed to perform rituals in the inner palace with Zhao Guizhen. This made soon the object of another remonstrance, which remained unheeded, while the official who had submitted it was demoted to a regional post.¹⁷¹ On 11 February 845 (Huichang 5.1.1), a Taoist altar was erected in the southern suburb. No remonstrance is recorded, but it is said that due to Zhao's influence, all memorials against him were concealed from the emperor. Li Deyu discreetly reminded Wuzong of Zhao's previous disgrace, but the emperor emphatically rejected his warnings.¹⁷² Li's caution may also have reflected the delicate political situation at court. At about that time, Zhao was awarded the title of Daomen xiansheng 道門先生 (Master of the Taoist Church).¹⁷³

The above seems to suggest that Zhao Guizhen and some of his associates were at odds with many of the court officials. Every time Zhao is mentioned in the dynastic histories, it is in connection to some remonstrance against him. Li Deyu himself reported to the emperor that as Zhao's influence increased, his acolytes were swarming around at court.¹⁷⁴ Can we assume that Zhao Guizhen and his colleagues were framed by Confucian historians? It is rather hypothetical but not entirely impossible. We have seen that significant restrictions on the Buddhist clergy had already started before the first hint of Zhao Guizhen's involvement in imperial politics. Importantly, it was the chief minister who initiated the first purge of Buddhism that set in motion the chain of events leading to the eventual persecution. Nevertheless, in the dynastic histories, the blame is laid squarely at the feet of these Taoist priests, and this is echoed in Ennin's diary.¹⁷⁵ Briefly, Zhao and his colleagues did possess the opportunity as well as the motive to see Buddhism entirely eradicated, although their responsibility may have been magnified in Confucian historiography.

¹⁷⁰ *JTS*, 18A.585.

¹⁷¹ *JTS*, 18A.587.

¹⁷² *JTS*, 18A.603.

¹⁷³ *ZZTJ*, 247.8000. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:124.

¹⁷⁴ *ZZTJ*, 247.8000.

¹⁷⁵ Michihata observes that these two sources would have been independent from each other. Michihata, 1986:198-199.

Looking into Zhao Guizhen's past, one wonders why he did not lobby against Buddhism when he was serving under Jingzong (r. 825-827). We know, instead, that as soon as Emperor Wenzong ascended the throne, he expelled all Buddhist monks and Zhao Guizhen from the palace for misleading his predecessor. Wenzong was thus equally suspicious of Zhao as he was of the Buddhists. At that time, there seems to have been no ground for a wholesale proscription of the clergy. Even with a stigma against him, Zhao was recalled to the court, a fact that well attests to the importance attached to him by Wuzong. The latter, as mentioned, had been inclined to the Taoist religion since he was a prince, and Zhao was there to cater to the emperor's vision. With exclusive access to the ruler, Zhao would have acquired the most updated information on religious affairs. Thus, while Zhao's privileged position would consolidate, the Buddhist clergy was locked out of any significant influence at the palace.¹⁷⁶ Yet, Zhao Guizhen may have been the man of one season, for he even failed to earn a good name within the Taoist community itself. Indeed, in one late Taoist source, Zhao was depicted as a negative model, a priest whose behaviour was distastefully opportunist.¹⁷⁷ Zhao is compared with another Taoist priest, Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (a.k.a. Lin Lingwu 林靈壘, 1075-1119),¹⁷⁸ who persuaded Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (Zhao Ji 趙佶 r. 1101-1127) of the Song to purge Buddhism.¹⁷⁹ Taoist historical memory, then, would remember and condemn Zhao Guizhen's agency in the persecution, although it may have been influenced by mainstream Confucian historiography.

Liu Xuanjing's figure is somewhat different. In a Taoist hagiography, we read that when Emperor Jingzong asked how to achieve longevity, Liu replied by saying that restraining desire is essential. The emperor was not satisfied by such an answer, so Liu retired to his

¹⁷⁶ *ZZTJ*, 245.8015.

¹⁷⁷ A Ming source tells us that “with regard to fellows such as Zhao Guizhen and Lin Lingsu, they were occasionally trusted and respected by the masters of the empire (i.e. emperors). [They] then became insolent as a result of the luxury and honour; and [they] disregarded the etiquette between sovereign and commoner. [They] imparted boasting words whereas [they] did not preserve compassion and thrift; and they did not cultivate themselves. [They] attracted criticism when they were still alive and there were more criticism against them thereafter. Therefore this should be taken as a warning precedent”. *DMSG*, 1.11.

¹⁷⁸ Lin was a Taoist priest born in 1075 in Wenzhou 温州, Zhejiang 浙江 province. He studied under the famous Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) as a young acolyte. *LSZXTDTJ*, 53.1079-1080. He was initially a Buddhist monk, but then converted to Taoism. *SS*, 462.13528. At the end of the Zhenghe 政和 era (1111-1118), Emperor Huizong searched for Taoist priests so Lin was invited to the capital. Thereafter, Lin was involved in court politics, attracting criticism. He was eventually dismissed and returned to his original place, where he later died. *SSH*, 462.13529-30. Cf. Strickmann, 1978:336-337. See also *EoT-I*, pp. 657-659.

¹⁷⁹ Strickmann, 1978:346-350; Ebrey and Gregory, 1993:4.

original place.¹⁸⁰ When Liu was serving under Wuzong, there is no mention about his taking part into the emperor's alchemical experiments with Zhao Guizhen, and he probably did not share his commitment to such practices. Shortly after the conclusion of the persecution, the emperor's health continued to deteriorate. However, Zhao spun this as a sign of incipient transformation.¹⁸¹ Probably aware of the rising tensions at court and that the life-prolonging elixirs could never be delivered, in November 845 Liu politely declined the emperor's offers to stay; instead, he convinced Wuzong to let him leave.¹⁸² Liu thus showed greater foresight than Zhao. We shall keep these circumstances in mind when considering the role of religious sectarianism in the persecution.

8.5.2 Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-850), the Chief-Minister

On several occasions, Li Deyu had suppressed certain religious practices that he deemed unorthodox. For instance, when he heard that some Buddhists, probably monks, were selling holy water, he had the source of the spring drained.¹⁸³ In a village in Sichuan, some people claimed to be monks, but led a married family life. Li Deyu ordered them defrocked.¹⁸⁴ Even with Taoism, Li once urged Jingzong to distance himself from the Taoist priest Zhou Xiyuan 周息元 (d.u.), particularly dissuading the emperor from taking life-prolonging drugs.¹⁸⁵ According to Ennin, it was a Chief Minister Li who initiated a series of restrictions against the Buddhist clergy in 842 that would end in the general persecution three years later. Without giving a reason, Ono identifies Chief Minister Li as Li Deyu.¹⁸⁶ Reischauer argues that this may have been instead another official that Ennin mentions – Li Shen 李紳.¹⁸⁷ This

¹⁸⁰ *LDZXTDTJ*, 40.806.

¹⁸¹ *ZZTJ*, 248.8021.

¹⁸² *ZZTJ*, 248.8020; *LDZXTDTJ*, 40.5-6; *JTS*, 18B.615.

¹⁸³ *JTS*, 174.4516; *XTS*, 180.5330; *HCYPJBJ*, 5.210-211. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:118.

¹⁸⁴ *XTS*, 180.5332. Li Deyu successfully blocked Wang Zhixing's request of permission for Buddhist ordinations, on the ground that such ordinations were already excessive. *JTS*, 174.4514; *XTS*, 180.5329; *HCYPJBJ*, 5.211. For other cases of Li Deyu's involvement in restrictions on the clergy, see *JTS*, 174.4511; *XTS*, 180.5328. Cf. Zhang, 2001:153.

¹⁸⁵ *XTS*, 180.5330-31; *ZZTJ*, 248.8019.

¹⁸⁶ Ono, 1989c:321. He follows the chain of events in the biographies of Li Deyu concerning his strict policies regarding uncontrolled religious ordinations and superstitious practices. Ono, 1989c:421-423. Cf. Michihata, 1986:199; Weinstein, 1987:118.

¹⁸⁷ Reischauer, 1955a:229-230; Okada, 1923:151. Reischauer suggests that Li Deyu was not "the prime instigator of the persecution as a whole". Reischauer, 1955a:230. This is difficult to accept, as we are going to argue. Ennin only had one or two casual encounters with Li Shen, which do not seem to warrant the role Reischauer assigns to the latter. Cf. Reischauer, 1955b: 374-375, 393; Ono, 1989d:195, 201, 274-275.

is not impossible, for both of them held the title of chief minister by 842.¹⁸⁸ Cen Zhongmian points out that Li Shen was appointed chief minister on 8 March 842 (Huichang 5.1.23).¹⁸⁹ Dates aside, Li Deyu rather than Li Shen was arguably the most powerful chief minister under Emperor Wuzong's reign.¹⁹⁰ Reischauer's second point argues that Li Deyu once intervened in favour of the Buddhist community during the persecution.¹⁹¹ But what he actually did - saving some precious Buddhist icons from destruction - suggests that he may have been more interested in the value of those items than in their religious significance, let alone the entire Buddhist community.¹⁹² It seems certain that Li Deyu would not personally dislike Buddhism as a religion.¹⁹³ Rather, and in line with many others in court circles, his concerns were aimed at the gigantic size of the monastic economy.¹⁹⁴

The Song scholar Chen Shan 陳善 (*fl.* 1147) argued that Li Deyu was indeed a fervent Taoist.¹⁹⁵ He suspected the integrity of Li Deyu's critical memorials concerning Zhao

¹⁸⁸ Li Deyu was conferred the title of chief minister in October 840 (Kaicheng 開成 5.9). *JTS*, 173:4521. Li Shen was conferred the title several months later, in 841. *JTS*, 173:4500. But modern scholars disagree with that date. Cf. Fu, 2000a:46-47. Nothing about Li Shen and his association with Buddhism can be found in his official biographies. One anecdotal source informs us that Li Shen was maltreated in a certain Huishan Monastery 惠山寺 in Wuxi 無錫 (Jiangsu 江蘇 province) when he read books there. When he was appointed the magistrate of Kuaiji 會稽 (near Wuxi), any monk that committed an offence would be punished with the most severe penalty by Li, regardless of the offence. Yet, Li erected a pagoda for a deceased monk of the same monastery, who had offered assistance to him. *YXY*, 1.66a. Yan, 1992:7-8.

¹⁸⁹ Cen, 1979:186-187.

¹⁹⁰ Dalby, 2007:659-663.

¹⁹¹ Reischauer, 1955a:230.

¹⁹² *LDMHJ*, j.3, in Lan, 1983:85.

¹⁹³ There are several occasions demonstrating Li Deyu's friendly attitude towards the Buddhist community. *CFYG*, 52.580; *LDYWJ*, Fu and Zhou, 2000:716-717; Moore, 1999:223-224.

¹⁹⁴ Feng, 1974:542-544; 548. Fu Xuanzong observes that Li Deyu esteemed and occasionally supported eminent Buddhist monks on a personal basis, although this would not bear on his political concerns towards the clergy in general. Fu, 2001:159-160.

¹⁹⁵ Okada cites some of Li Deyu's writings and argues that he had been initiated into the Taoist religion. Okada, 1923:150-151. Wang provides evidence that Li Deyu, his father and grandfather were interested in Taoist longevity drugs, which Li himself would have frequently taken. Wang, 2000:69-70. He further suggests that Li wrote poems in praise of Taoist priests. Wang points out that some family members of Li Deyu, such as his wife (*née* Liu 劉), one concubine and his daughter-in-law were all initiated into Taoism; he further notes that Li Deyu reserved a harsh treatment to Buddhist monks on several occasions. Wang, 2000:70-72. Some of the above is not new, for Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) already noticed that Li Deyu addressed himself as a disciple of the Taoist religion. Feng, 1974:547. On some occasions, Li Deyu composed and dedicated several poems to a certain Master Sun Zhiqing 孫智清 (*fl.* 830-840s), which yet do not disclose his religious ideas. *LDYWJ*, Fu and Zhou, 2000:471-472, 493-495. In an inscription, Li Deyu addressed himself as the disciple of three paths (*sandao* 三道), which may indicate his interest in Taoism. Chen, 2001b:49-50. Also, Li sponsored the building of a shrine and a statue for Laozi, a statue for Yin Xi and a statue for Confucius in commemoration of his own ancestors. *LDYWJ*, in Fu and Zhou, 2000:544-547. Still, Li seems to have disliked Zhao Guizhen and his version of Taoism. If there ever was a link between

Guizhen, and assumed that Li may have tampered with them to extricate himself from the responsibility of persecuting Buddhism. Chen further pointed out that occasionally Emperor Wuzong and Li Deyu addressed themselves as disciples of Taoism. Chen then concluded that both of them persecuted Buddhism partially because of their devotion to Taoism.¹⁹⁶ Although Chen's only piece of evidence is circumstantial, his contention is interesting nonetheless. Li Deyu was certainly an eager promoter of the persecution, but, as mentioned, he was not radically opposed to Buddhism.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, we have noted that in 826, Li already memorialised the emperor to shun the Taoist Zhou Xiyuan. On that particular occasion, he failed to mention Buddhist monks, although they were also in the palace.¹⁹⁸ This of course would be conceivable if we consider the historical context of the time. Seven years earlier, Han Yu's cursory criticism of Buddhism had disastrously backfired. Such an episode would be in the living memory of a shrewd politician such as Li Deyu. A similar caution may have restrained Li's criticism of Zhao Guizhen. Overall, Chen Shan's assumption that Buddhism was persecuted because Li Deyu favoured Taoism seems highly implausible, as other scholars have also concluded.¹⁹⁹

However, Chen's insinuation that Li Deyu may have been somehow anxious about an exposure of his role in the persecution is worth considering. If that were the case, there would be several reasons. First of all, it has been suggested that Li owed several of his promotions, including the post of chief minister, to the then still influential eunuchs. One of them was Yang Qinyi 楊欽義, who was a Commissioner of Good Works in 843.²⁰⁰ Yang would become a dual Commissioner of Good Works (of the 'Right and Left Streets') immediately after the persecution, and in this role, he would be instructed to arrest Zhao Guizhen.²⁰¹ Personally, Yang showed considerable interest in Buddhism and befriended some Buddhist

these two figures in the Huichang persecution, it will have been dictated by political opportunity.

¹⁹⁶ *MSXH*, 2.14-15. Cf. *MSZ*, 12.95a-b, 12.99a; *DZ*, 5.603a-b.

¹⁹⁷ Feng Chengye notices that Li Deyu respected some Buddhist monks as his masters. Feng, 1974:547-548. Cf. *TPYL*, 98.651-652; *QTWBY*, 1st series, pp.5b-6a.

¹⁹⁸ In the third year of Dahe, Li Deyu sponsored a Buddhist pagoda for the Chan Buddhist monk Farong 法融 (594-657) and asked Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842) to contribute an inscription. Li compiled a short eulogy for the Buddha's chief disciple Mahākāśyapa. See *LDYWJ*, in Fu and Zhou, 2000:566; *LYXJJZ*, p.114-115. Elsewhere in his writings, Li challenged the mainstream opinion that Emperor Liang Wudi (r. 502-549) had lost his empire as a result of his commitment to Buddhism. *LDYWJ*, in Fu and Zhou, 2000:708-709. He would also quote approvingly from Chan masters. *LDYWJ*, p.660-661.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Ono, 1989e:419-420; Dalby, 2007:667-668.

²⁰⁰ Dalby, 2007:660; Feng, 1974:129-135; Okada, 1921:21-22; Dai, 2007:35;. When Li Deyu was appointed chief minister for the first time, the decision was influenced by the then influential eunuch, Wang Jianyan's 王踐言 intervention. Wang, 1995:44-46.

²⁰¹ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.386b.

monks.²⁰² Although Wuzong, with Li Deyu's help, had been able to curtail the influence of the eunuchs in court politics, Yang Qinyi constantly held important posts throughout his reign.²⁰³ As Dalby noticed, Li Deyu dealt with the eunuchs' faction with caution and restraint.²⁰⁴ This may be one of the reasons why Li did not want to be seen as an enthusiastic advocator of the total destruction of a religion that the eunuchs had been supporting. Interestingly, almost at the time of the persecution, criticism of Li Deyu's arrogance and abuse of power started to circulate in court circles. Such criticism even reached the emperor, who seems to have been well aware of Li's autocratic style. Most of Li's critics were eunuchs.²⁰⁵

Secondly, in 845, Zhao Guizhen built a Taoist altar in the southern suburb, a place for important imperial ceremonies.²⁰⁶ This caused some controversy amongst the imperial officials, including Li Deyu, who memorialised the emperor. Li Deyu's document once again was carefully worded. Two years earlier, the Buddhist monk Zhixuan 知玄 (810-882) had raised criticism regarding the longevity-seeking activities of the Taoists.²⁰⁷ It would be no surprise if Li Deyu shared Zhixuan's criticism, although understandably their motivation would not be the same. Thirdly, Li may also have isolated himself from some of his colleagues, whose Buddhist affiliation could not be ignored.²⁰⁸ In 843/844, Pei Xiu compiled a tomb inscription for the Buddhist monk Mingyan 明演,²⁰⁹ who had been a well-connected middle ranking imperial official before his ordination.²¹⁰ Almost at the same time, Bai Juyi resigned from his imperial post (around 843-844) and established a Buddhist sodality in Xiangshan 香山 with the monk Ruman 如滿.²¹¹ Bai's profound interest in Buddhism was not unknown in imperial circles.²¹² Considering all this, and the dramatic impact of the persecution, Li Deyu would have little need to boast his involvement in the execution of such

²⁰² *SGSZ*, j.6. T.50.2061.743c25-26. This contrasts with Weinstein's sketch of Yang as an irreligious man. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:121.

²⁰³ Feng, 1974:510-521.

²⁰⁴ Dalby, 2007:663-664.

²⁰⁵ *ZZTJ*, 248.8020-21; *DTJL*, 26.939-940.

²⁰⁶ Xiong, 2000:129-164, particularly in p.133, discusses in detail the sacrifices that took place in the southern suburb. *JTS*, 21.819-845.

²⁰⁷ *SGSZ*, j.6. T.50.2061.743c23-25. Nogami, 1964:506-507.

²⁰⁸ Moore's discussion of political factionalism in the 840s considers the role of coteries of state examination graduates, including Li Deyu, and the role of Buddhism in it. Moore, 1999:220-32.

²⁰⁹ The year of Mingyan's death is difficult to determine. Chen Ruoshui calculated it as 801, but the tomb inscription states that he died in 843. Cf. Chen, 2009:174. *TDMZHB*, p.2236. In any case, the inscription seems to have been erected in or around 844.

²¹⁰ *TDMZHB*, p.2235-36. Liu Gongquan commanded the calligraphy.

²¹¹ *JTS*, 166.4356.

²¹² *JTS*, 166.4345; *XTS*, 119-4304. Cf. Welter, 2006:35.

a radical religious policy, which is well likely to have been deeply unpopular amongst some of his colleagues in the imperial court.

Hu Rulei suggests that the political infighting known as the 'Struggle of the Niu and Li Factions' (Niu Li dang zheng 牛李黨爭) through the 830s may have something to do with the persecution.²¹³ The purported leaders of these two factions were Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (779-848) and Li Deyu respectively. Niu's clique, in particular, seems to have consisted of many officials who had passed the state examination, whereas Li Deyu's group is supposed to have included mainly the sons of senior imperial officials.²¹⁴ In terms of foreign policy, the Niu faction preferred diplomacy and negotiation, whereas the Li faction would push for military action.²¹⁵ Hu briefly touches upon a possible connection between the Huichang persecution and Niu-Li political infighting.²¹⁶ To what extent the persecution of foreign faiths and Li Deyu's foreign policy can be linked is hard to ascertain, and Hu himself does not elaborate on this important point. It is arguable that if Li's faction wanted to outline an assertive foreign policy, then Buddhism and its exotic origin would be an issue for them. Endorsing the emperor's proscription of Buddhism, in this sense, may have been functional to a more generally aggressive attitude on things foreign. Apart from the lack of direct evidence, however, such an argument would not give due consideration to the inevitable discrepancy between the religious options of the members of the factions, with many Buddhists on both sides, and their political lines.

About a year after Wuzong's demise, Li Deyu was demoted, and shortly afterwards was exiled to a frontier region where he died.²¹⁷ The Buddhist chronicler Jue'an 覺岸 (1286-?) appears to link such a misfortune to Li's active role in the persecution.²¹⁸ But leaving aside any religious judgment, Li Deyu's political disgrace only unfolded some time after the persecution, not immediately.²¹⁹ On the other hand, if Emperor Xuānzong decried his

²¹³ On this factional struggle, see Dalby, 2007:639-654.

²¹⁴ Chen, 2001c:272-284; Zhou, 1992-1993:84-85. Some scholars point out that membership in these two factions was more complex than assumed, and some members of the Niu clique were in fact sons of prestigious official families. Hu, 1979:18; Wang, 1986:354-357; Dalby, 2007:648-654. Cen Zhongmian elaborates at length on the 'rogue' elements in the Niu faction. Cen, 2000:392-417.

²¹⁵ Chen, 2001c:288-291. Hu, 1979:18-20. Wang, 1986:350-353.

²¹⁶ Hu, 1979:27.

²¹⁷ Chen, 2001b:13-26.

²¹⁸ *FZLDTZ*, j.16. T.49.2036.637c.

²¹⁹ Chen, 2001b:9-13.

predecessor Wuzong's policy, he may well have distrusted Li Deyu as well.²²⁰ A distancing from the recent past is also reflected in Xuānzong's appointment of Pei Xiu, a pious Buddhist, as his chief minister.²²¹ Without exceeding in speculation, it is plausible to assume that both the new emperor and his chief minister would agree on fundamental political and ideological issues.²²² At the end of the day, the persecution of Buddhism may have played into the hands of Li Deyu's rivals to terminate his political influence.²²³ Yet, it is not even certain that the disgraced former minister had endorsed every act of the proscription, whose full responsibility, in the end, could only be borne by the emperor.²²⁴ It is to Wuzong, then, that we finally turn to assess the role of individual actors in the crisis.

8.5.3 Emperor Wuzong (Li Chan)

On 31 March 846 (Huichang 6.3.1), as a result of persistent illness, Emperor Wuzong changed his name to Li Yan 李炎.²²⁵ It is unclear whether Taoist priests had pressed this choice as well, but it seems that the emperor started to take more of their elixirs.²²⁶ Instead of improving, however, the emperor's condition worsened over the next few days. It is reported that for a while he was not able to speak and his temper was short. Merely three weeks later, on 22 April (Huichang 6.3.22), Wuzong died.²²⁷ Several sources imply that his death was

²²⁰ Feng, 1974:596. Already Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) had claimed that Buddhism was restored chiefly as a result of Emperor Xuānzong's dislike of his predecessor. *DTJL*, 25.937. Guo Shaolin questions such an opinion. Guo, 2005:106.

²²¹ Miyakawa, 1992:261-264.

²²² Miyakawa provides a detailed discussion of Xuānzong's connection with the Buddhist community before his enthronement. Some of the Buddhist monks who had been formerly close to the future emperor were also strictly associated with Pei Xiu. Miyakawa, 1992:212-223. It may be noted that the first victim of the Huichang persecution, Zhixuan, played a crucial role in persuading Emperor Xuānzong to restore Buddhism. The emperor treated him with great respect, and in turn one of Zhixuan's associates was Pei Xiu. Nogami, 1964:510-511.

²²³ As Moore points out, almost as soon as Emperor Xuānzong assumed the throne, Li Deyu's influence in the court was effectively over. Many of his policies were either abolished outright or slowly abandoned. Moore, 2004:216-217.

²²⁴ Feng Ye suggests that when the final persecution took place, Li Deyu was not attending government affairs due to illness. Moreover, Li's relationship with Wuzong had grown strained since several months before the persecution, so that his actual role in the proscription may have ultimately been less central than hitherto assumed. Feng, 1998:133-136.

²²⁵ *JTS*, 18A.610; *THY*, 2.13. The *Zizhi tongjian* explains that according to the Chinese theory of the Five Agents, the Tang were under the ascendancy of Earth, but part of the emperor's name contained the Water radical. Since Water conflicted with Earth and the latter can overpower the former, the emperor adopted a new name, which contained the Fire element. Since Fire supports Earth, it was hoped that this would extend the emperor's reign. *ZZTJ*, 248.8022. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:136.

²²⁶ *ZZTJ*, 248.8020. Fu, 2001:454. It is Wang Dezhong's assumption that the Taoist priests persuaded the emperor to change his name. Wang, 1995:154-155.

²²⁷ *JTS*, 18A.610; *ZZTJ*, 248.8022; *FZLDTZ*, j.16. T.49.2036.637c. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:136.

caused by the very alchemical concoctions of the Taoists.²²⁸ Wuzong may have started to consume such elixirs soon after Zhao Guizhen arrived at court in 840.²²⁹ His fondness for Taoism is certain,²³⁰ and as we said, he frequently rewarded Taoist priests with purple robes, while stripping their Buddhist counterparts of such honour. Yet Buddhist monks were invited to the court as late as 843. Thereafter the restrictions were upgraded, and a veritable persecution escalated dramatically around 844 and 845. Considering his deteriorating health and the tone of his last edict,²³¹ can we assume that Wuzong had been mentally unstable for some time before his eventual demise?²³²

This can only be the subject of speculation, of course.²³³ At the very least, though, the sustained consumption of elixirs may have reasonably affected the emperor's balance and judgment.²³⁴ To what extent this was the case, it is impossible to say. But if the drugs and potions of the Taoists did impact on the emperor's physical and mental health, we can only be certain of his "potential madness" during his last three weeks of life, as there is no clear prior record of his illness. On 13 April 845 (Huichang 5.3.3), Ennin reports that Wuzong had commanded that Buddhist monks' heads be chopped off and their remains be stuffed into a big pit. The Japanese monk adds that a Privy Councillor was able to dissuade the emperor, so that in the end no execution took place.²³⁵ The total inhumanity of the alleged imperial order disturbingly indicates a "barbaric madness" of the emperor, but accepting his officials' plea on humane ground would suggest a lingering rational side to his person.²³⁶ Looking at the dynastic history, no record from the period around this episode corroborates a descent of Wuzong's mind into darkness.²³⁷ Nor do we have any evidence of summary executions during the persecution. It is difficult to know how a confidential proposal made by the emperor to his close subordinates could be leaked out, and it seems more likely that what Ennin reported was some frenzied hearsay.²³⁸ The persecution itself climaxed in the edict

²²⁸ *JTS*, 18A.610; *ZZTJ*, 248.8023. Cf. Weinstein, 1987:136.

²²⁹ No information about Taoist drugs or elixirs can be found at this time, but it is mentioned that the emperor received talismans from a Taoist priest. *JTS*, 18A.585. Wang, 1995:128.

²³⁰ *JTS*, 18A. *passim*. Michihata, 1986:215-216, n. 1; Feng, 1974:545-546.

²³¹ *JTS*, 18A.605-606.

²³² The cause of Wuzong's death is debatable, as no explicit information can be found in the dynastic history. For some brief comments on this issue, see Needham, 1970:319.

²³³ Barrett discusses Ennin's record of Emperor Wuzong and his alleged bizarre behaviour. He convincingly argues that Ennin may have simply reported rumours. Barrett, 2004:175, 182-186.

²³⁴ *JTS*, 18A.610. Cf. Barrett, 2004:185-186.

²³⁵ Ono, 1989d:119; Reischauer, 1955a:358-359.

²³⁶ Reischauer, 1955a:359.

²³⁷ *JTS*, 18A.604. The *Xin Tang shu* only mentions an ongoing draught. *XTS*, 8.244.

²³⁸ Dalby mentions that many Buddhist monks and nuns were killed or injured during the persecution.

issued in the eighth month of 845, after which no further relevant decree is known; the situation would remain the same until the emperor's death the next year.

As the ruler of the state and the recipient of continuous briefing and advice from his ministers, Wuzong cannot have failed to see the economic and ideological implications of his edicts. This is seen in the edicts themselves, as they mention economic acquisition among the main intended achievements of the purge. At the same time, the ideological layer of the edicts may have served as a necessary political rhetoric during a time when xenophobic feelings could be easily mobilised. Therefore, the chroniclers of the dynastic histories praised the emperor's decisive religious policy as it enhanced the imperial fiscal system. Yet, the same historians criticized the radical proscription of Buddhism for some of its aspects and consequences. Wuzong had seen the mistakes of pro-Buddhist sovereigns like Liang Wudi and Yao Xing (*r.* 394-416), but he had fallen again in the delusions about immortality of the First Emperor and Han Wudi. Above all, he was strongly rebuked for the violence of his purge of Buddhism, which aroused fear and anxiety within a society that had long revered that religion.²³⁹ Another source says,

Wuzong from beginning to end employed Li Deyu [as chief minister], which resulted in splendid achievements. But his strenuous abolition of the teaching of the Buddha was exceedingly severe, and yet he personally received the registers of Taoism, and swallowed their drugs in order to prolong his life. This then proves that he was not an enlightened and wise person, who cannot be deluded. It merely indicates that he had things he especially liked or disliked.²⁴⁰

Since Wuzong was an autocratic ruler, one might expect him to have planned and implemented the persecution alone. But as Charles Holcombe rightly observes, in pre-modern China, “for even the most autocratic of emperors, the idea of total power was always an illusion”.²⁴¹ Hence it is not plausible to attribute the persecution to an isolated decision made by a seemingly “mad emperor”. We have seen above that in 842, Li Deyu had urged the emperor to regulate the Buddhist community, at the same time advising him to stand clear of the likes of Zhao Guizhen. Wuzong's reply is revealing:

I just talk with him [Zhao Guizhen] to wash away my low spirits. As for the military matters and political affairs, [I] would only discuss them with you and your peers. Why should I consult a Taoist priest! Never mind a single [Zhao] Guizhen, even if

He does not provide any source for this statement. Dalby, 2007:666.

²³⁹ See the historian's comments in *JTS*, 18A.611.

²⁴⁰ *XTS*, 8.253.

²⁴¹ Holcombe, 1995:3.

there were a hundred Guizhens, they could not confuse [my mind].²⁴²

The emperor's response clearly establishes that politics, and this would have included religious policy, was a business he would only attend with Li Deyu and other imperial officials. True, it does not entirely dispel the suspicion that his association with Taoist priests could influence his decisions somehow. It is equally evident that those decisions would need the advice, scrutiny and support of the emperor's ministers, and it does seem doubtful that an initiative having the magnitude of the Huichang persecution of Buddhism could have been delivered solely by the joint effort of Wuzong and some Taoist priests. But in the end, the pivotal role remained the emperor's prerogative, and even if just proceeding from institutional rather than personal authority, his agency was crucial to coordinate different inputs and agendas emanating from as different characters as Zhao Guizhen and Li Deyu were. Several actors and several motivations - religious, ideological, political, and most clearly economic - thus converged through him to result in the largest persecution of Buddhism in medieval China.

8.6 Concluding Considerations

In this chapter, I have focused on the Huichang persecution and have critically examined its reasons and relevant factors. This part of the discussion has revealed a rather unique situation. As we noticed, when the first two persecutions took place, Buddhist monks in the north seemed to have accepted the inevitability of the power of the state. Accordingly, the claim of a self-regulating Buddhist community had been enfeebled. During the Tang dynasty, however, the confrontation arose once again. While the long-term situation is not entirely clear, the issue of whether monks should prostrate to the emperor was periodically raised during the Tang, and occasionally the outcome of the debate seems to have been favourable to the clergy. From the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (712-756), however, monks had once again to pay homage to their parents and ruler, in what may be seen as a symbolic gesture of subordination. But at least it seems clear that especially during the first part of the Tang dynasty, the Buddhist clergy was still in a position to dispute, through its leaders, the repeated attempts of coercion emanating from the state. On the other hand, the imperial court had either generously sponsored the Buddhist community or, at least, generally showed restraint in its regulatory initiative. Through most of the Tang dynasty, even when purges and

²⁴² *JTS*, 18A.603. In Sima Guang's narrative, it was already Wuzong's intention to curb Buddhism, and the Taoist priests only incited him to pursue his plans. Cf. *ZZTJ*, 248.8015.

restrictions were implemented, a generally tolerant religious policy allowed the Buddhist community to develop.

The Huichang persecution breaks this pattern in the first place through its ideologically and racially loaded rhetoric, which strikes us as an explosion of intolerance when compared to the previous part of the dynasty. However, such rhetoric was by no means new, as one should only remember the inflammatory arguments of Fu Yi and Han Yu, which yet had failed to produce any effect in their own times. This paradox seems to suggest that as long as Buddhism enjoyed the endorsement of the state, the cultural and social challenge it posed through its foreignness could be put to one side. When Buddhism was eventually persecuted, its un-Chineseness was resurrected less as a primary cause than as an argument to justify the state's initiative against the clergy. It will be noticed that this aspect of cultural rhetoric is characteristically present in all the three persecutions. Yet, the real challenge that the imperial state could never accept was the disproportionate growth of the monastic community, of its economy and of its privileges, which meant an expanding asymmetry and unbalance in the relationship between the two parties. By closing Buddhist establishments, confiscating monastic property, and drastically curbing the number of monks, nuns and attendants, that relationship could be scaled back to a format that the state could accept.

We have seen that the problem posed by the size, both economic and numerical, of the Buddhist community presented itself several times throughout the medieval period, and the state repeatedly attempted to tackle it. In the period leading to the Huichang persecution, and notably under Emperor Wenzong's reign, very significant restrictions on the Buddhist clergy had already been imposed, and remained in place at least in name for the duration of that reign. On the other hand, we have learned that political intrigue dealt a fatal blow to this emperor's authority. One wonders whether a more aggressive regulation of the clergy or even a total proscription could have ensued, if only Wenzong had successfully eliminated the eunuchs and restored his power. Such an event seems unlikely. In spite of the repeated purges of the clergy, the relationship between the Buddhist community and the state under Wenzong was distinctly different from what followed during the Huichang era. However, the very failure to enforce the proposed restrictions under Wenzong may have prompted the radicalization of the conflict in the reign of his successor, which escalated until a total proscription was eventually declared in 845. The involvement of Zhao Guizhen and his associates in the persecution may have further fomented the emperor's determination to undermine the Buddhist community. In that regard, the resurfacing of ideological slander and old rumours alleging Buddhist plans for political sedition has all the appearance of

mudslinging that some people, whether those very Taoist priests or others, introduced to precipitate the situation towards a point of no return. It is then possible that the emperor and Li Deyu exploited this conjuncture in order to thoroughly erode the basis of the monastic community and reinstate the full dominance of the state. Although the persecutor died shortly after the persecution, what at least some may have seen from the start as a desirable outcome of the great purge can be surmised from certain events under Xuānzong's reign.

On 2 June 846 (Huichang 6.5.5), shortly after ascending the throne, Emperor Xuānzong ordered the restoration of a number of Buddhist monasteries in Chang'an, in what amounted to a first major departure from the orders of the proscription. The restoration gave priority to the reopening of sixteen imperially sponsored establishments in the two parts of the capital. Of these monasteries, all but four received new names under the emperor's special instructions. At the same time, twelve Taoist priests, including Zhao Guizhen, were executed on the charge of deceiving Wuzong and instigating the persecution. This was a political rather than religious punishment: the Taoist religion and its clergy as such were left untouched.²⁴³ These highly symbolic initial measures reveal the new emperor's attempt, from the outset, to mend the rift between Buddhism and the state. However, it would still take about one year to extend the restoration to the entire Buddhist community. An edict issued in April-May 847 (Dazhong 1.3bis) stated what follows:

In the last years of the Huichang era, [Buddhist] monasteries were comprehensively eliminated. Although [Buddhism] is said to be the teaching of a foreign land, it does no harm to the source of the supreme principle. The people of the Middle Kingdom (China) have practiced this Way for a long time. If management and reform exceed what is appropriate, its affairs will never spread. As for the monasteries that in the fourth month of the fifth year Huichang were abolished in the provinces of the empire, in the sacred mountains and magnificent domains, if formerly eminent monks are able again to repair them and run them, the authorities shall not forbid it.²⁴⁴

The edict covers many points, but three of them are relevant here. The recent persecution was presented as an act of "management and reform" (*lige* 釐革), essentially part of the imperial religious policy, which had nevertheless gone beyond measure. This same expression had in fact been used in Wuzong's edicts with reference to the (unsuccessful) regulation of the Buddhist clergy under previous Tang emperors.²⁴⁵ Moreover, despite its

²⁴³ *JTS*, 18B.615; *ZZTJ*, 248.8024; *THYJZ*, j.49 (Niu, ed.), 2012:733. Cf. Dalby, 2007:669. In the same edict, the emperor ordered that Buddhist monks and nuns would be reassigned to the Commissioners of Good Works (*gongde shi* 功德使) of the Two Streets.

²⁴⁴ *JTS*, 18B.617.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *JTS*, 18A.605-606.

foreign origin, the legitimate right of existence of Buddhism in China was recognised by the state. Finally, although the edict does acknowledge that the measures of the Huichang era had been excessive, it does not question them as such, nor does it blame the Taoists or anyone else for the persecution. The latter would evidently have gone ahead even without those Taoist priests, as it was essentially legitimate for the state to "manage and reform" Buddhism as long as limits of severity were not exceeded, just as it was legitimate for Buddhism to stay in China as long as it would abide by the rules of the state. We shall notice that a not too dissimilar argument had been already deployed in the edict of restoration that the Northern Wei emperor Wencheng issued in 453.²⁴⁶ However, this time the scope of the government's action encompassed the whole territory of a unified empire, with lasting consequences.

The Huichang persecution came at the end of a confrontation that the state had already won, or started to win, in at least two important areas, redefining thereby its relationship with the Buddhist community. One was the successful imposition on the clergy of the obligation to revere parents and emperor. The dispute in the middle of the seventh century had been the Buddhist monks' last stand on this issue, for when it was raised again in the eighth century, any resistance from the Buddhist side seemed to have faded away. The other significant achievement of the early Tang religious policy was to deflate the mediating power of monastic convenors, eventually replacing them with an administration of the monastic community entirely in imperial hands. The symbolic significance of the fact that when the Huichang persecution was complete, Buddhism was deliberately assigned to the Court of Diplomatic Ceremonies (to stress its foreignness) should not obscure the more important fact that, both before and after the proscription, the Buddhist community was under the regulatory agency of some branch of the imperial government. The aftermath of the third persecution sanctioned these new orientations on a durable basis, and, with them, the emergence of a stable relationship between the Buddhist community and the Chinese imperial state.

The impact of the Huichang crisis and the long-term significance of the three great persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China will be finally discussed in the conclusive chapter of this dissertation.

²⁴⁶ See above relevant discussion in pp. 78; 127.

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER NINE

Buddhism and the State in Medieval China

9.1 The Impact of the Huichang Persecution

In his classic historical overview of Buddhism in pre-modern China, Kenneth Ch'en states that the Huichang persecution "supplied the crippling blow" to a monastic community that was already sliding into a downward moral and social trajectory, thus "marking the end of the apogee and the beginning of the decline of the religion".¹ This narrative has been widely shared, as many authoritative scholars have seen the crisis of 845 as a turning point after which Chinese Buddhism would never fully recover.² Is this view accurate? More generally, what was the real impact of the Tang persecution? In connection to the perspective of this dissertation, it will be especially important for us to establish whether that persecution was really the last one, at least on a comparable scale, and whether it actually marked a watershed in the relationship between Buddhism and the state. Addressing this question will in turn prompt us to assess in what respects the various proscriptions can be seen as comparable events, making room for a number of final considerations on the long-term significance of the three great persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the proscription of the Buddhist clergy and establishments in the Huichang era was revoked within one year from the death of Wuzong. The actual recovery of the community will have taken time, and the social and political instability that came with the collapse of the Tang dynasty may have both helped and restrained monastic activity with the absence of a strong central power. At least in terms of size, however, the recovery of the clergy seems to have been swift and substantial. By the mid-tenth century, after a major purge that we shall discuss shortly, there were still more than 60,000 monks and nuns left in northern China only, thus roughly one fourth of the total number of those who had been forcibly defrocked during the Huichang era.³ In 1021, at the beginning of the Song dynasty, an impressive 397,615 monks and 61,240 nuns were counted in the whole of China.⁴

Ch'en and others would argue that this revival was only numerical, for Buddhism in China

¹ Ch'en, 1964:232.

² Cf. e.g. Wright, 1959:82; Gernet, 1995:307-311.

³ See above pp. 169-170.

⁴ *FZTJ*, j.44. T.49.2035.406c.

had lost its spiritual force by then.⁵ Recent scholarship, however, has considerably revised the perception of a Buddhist decline after the alleged "golden age" of the Tang, pointing instead to a substantial development in the Song dynasty that indirectly refutes the view of an inexorable crisis after the persecutions.⁶ For instance, imperial patronage of Buddhism under the Song rulers was no less significant than under their predecessors.⁷ Court sponsorship even resulted in unprecedented achievements, such as the first printing of the Buddhist canon and the establishment of an imperial bureau for canonical translations.⁸ It is true that certain areas and translation activity in particular, would not reach back to the exploits of the seventh and early eighth centuries, although this may depend on the doctrinal self-sufficiency that Chinese Buddhism had achieved by then, as Sen Tansen has suggested.⁹ However, it is increasingly clear that Song Buddhism was distinguished by a remarkable intellectual vitality. This was especially reflected in the internal and international appeal of certain schools, such as Chan.¹⁰ As significantly, the Buddhist community at large could certainly thrive in its material conditions under the Song political order, as its economy reached new heights of expansion and prosperity.¹¹

If our current understanding of the development of Buddhism in China after the Tang does not warrant a narrative of decline, however, this is not to say that the Huichang persecution made no difference. There are in fact many indications that the proscription under Wuzong turned a decisive page in the confrontation between Buddhism and the Chinese state, and probably the most important of them is the fact that no wholesale official rejection of the Buddhist religion was to be repeated in the following centuries.

9.2 The Suppression of Buddhism under the Later Zhou (955)

To test this claim, we shall briefly discuss here what many scholars consider the fourth and final great persecution of Buddhism in the tenth century. This will enable us to discern those

⁵ Ch'en, 1964:389.

⁶ A collective volume on Song Buddhism edited by Peter Gregory and including a dozen essays has been a seminal incentive to this revision. In the introductory essay, Gregory expressly challenges the received idea of a Tang "golden age", followed by a declining Buddhism in the Song and beyond. Gregory, 2002:1-20.

⁷ Huang, 1989:5-8.

⁸ On the first carving and subsequent printing of the Buddhist canon during the Kaibao 開寶 era (968-975) of the Song, see Zacchetti, 2005:96-99; on the Song translation bureau, see Huang, 1989:6-8; Sen, 2002:31-43.

⁹ Sen, 2002:66-73.

¹⁰ Apart from Gregory, 2002, see also Foulk, 1993; Welter, 2006; Morrison, 2010.

¹¹ Huang, 1989; Walsh, 2010.

aspects that would highlight the significance of the Tang persecution as a watershed in the relationship between Buddhism and the state. On 30 May 955 (Xiande 顯德 2.5.7), under the Later Zhou dynasty (951-960) then ruling in most of Northern China, an edict called for a thorough scrutiny of the Buddhist community.¹² In reading this document, it is transparent that Emperor Shizong's (Chai Rong *r.* 954-959) objective was the wealth of the monastic network and the disorderly state of the monastic community, which was suspected of giving shelter in its ranks to those escaping military conscription.¹³ Such goals were no novelty in themselves, but compared to the first three persecutions, the Later Zhou episode indeed stands out for its rational focus on the laicization of monks and nuns and the appropriation of monastic possessions, notably the precious metals in Buddhist statues.¹⁴ It is striking, instead, that no ideological attack on Buddhism accompanied the edict, nor was there any declared intention to eradicate the Buddhist religion.¹⁵ On the contrary, the legitimacy of Buddhism and of its presence in China as well as its moral contribution to the society were duly acknowledged. In fact, the opening words of Shizong's edict stress that Buddhism was a doctrine of integrity, the sublime path of a sage, which assisted the world by promoting virtue and was therefore extremely beneficial.¹⁶

This large-scale purge, while lacking the ideological violence of the previous incidents, resulted in a considerable downsizing of the Buddhist presence in northern China, but it neither achieved nor indeed appears to have been aimed at the total suppression of Buddhism. By the end of the year, a report was presented to the Later Zhou court that some 30,336 monasteries had been closed, whereas 2,694 establishments were allowed to stay in operation. It was further stated that there were 61,200 Buddhist monks and nuns officially registered, although the number of those who had been defrocked as a result of the purge was not disclosed.¹⁷ Out of this number, we are informed that 42,444 were monks and 18,756 were

¹² *JWDS*, 115.1529; *XWDS*, 12.119. Cf. Davis, 2004:109; Li, 1995:41.

¹³ Shizong's edict denounces privately ordained monk, who tarnished the reputation of the monastic community, and the more alarming fact that monasteries had been used as sanctuaries for deserting soldiers and other fugitives. The closure of monasteries started with the ones that did not possess the imperial plaques of recognition. *JWDS*, 115.1529-30. Cf. Nomura, 1968:375-376; and especially Makita Tairyō's detailed analysis in Makita, 1951:214-219.

¹⁴ Shizong expressly stated his intention to convert the bronze and copper of Buddhist statues into coins for the benefit of the economy and the population. Monastery bells and other metal items were exempted from the confiscation. *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.392b. Cf. Luo, 1977:186-187; Gernet, 1995:22.

¹⁵ Zacchetti points out this aspect, noting that the Later Zhou purge of Buddhism was accordingly very different from the Huichang persecution. See Zacchetti, 2005:91 n. 61.

¹⁶ (釋氏貞宗，聖人妙道，助世勸善，其利甚優). *JWDS*, 115.1529.

¹⁷ *JWDS*, 115.1531; *ZZTJ*, 292.9527.

nuns.¹⁸ These figures then convey the great restraint shown on the occasion by the imperial government, something that stands in obvious contrast with the previous three persecutions, but is reminiscent of the many minor purges we have discussed throughout this research.¹⁹ Moreover, the lack of any rhetoric of destruction, whether on xenophobic or other grounds, and the very unreserved recognition of Buddhism and its religious significance mark an unequivocal departure from the three great crises that have made the object of this study.

Why, then, have historians been referring to *four* great persecutions of Buddhism in China, lumping the Later Zhou episode with its somewhat different antecedents? As discussed in the introduction, this grouping goes back to the Song Buddhist historian Zhipan (*ca.* 1195-1274). Zhipan was no doubt aware of the scope and nature of the different incidents, and he does acknowledge at one point that Shizong's anti-Buddhist initiative had failed to reach the destructiveness of the 'Three Wus', also due to a lack of political support.²⁰ However, he may have been interested less in providing an accurate picture of the confrontation between his religion and the state, and more in presenting instead an exemplary set of four evil rulers from the past that would stand as a moral foil to those of the present. Drawing on a book called *Tanyuan* 談苑 (*Garden of Talks*), probably one of several anecdotal miscellanies (*biji* 筆記) under this title in the Song period, Zhipan reports that after personally demolishing a Buddha statue, Emperor Zhou Shizong died from a strange illness, and was finally punished with the torments of hell.²¹ Here was a powerful connection, too good to be missed by a moralizing historian: for the other three emperors who had attacked Buddhism had also died rather suddenly and shortly after the persecutions, and for all of them tales of terrible karmic retribution had been duly circulating. Zhou Shizong presented the further advantage of having lived and ruled just on the eve of Zhipan's own Song dynasty, which had been established in 960. In fact, immediately after recounting the four persecutions and the sudden death of the persecutors, Zhipan elegantly praises the Song founding emperor and his generous patronage of Buddhism.²² His point was to make a contrast between a past in which a handful of wicked personalities had threatened the Buddhist religion, only to fail and eventually meet a formidable retribution, and a present in which the ruler would lavish his protection and support to the faith.

Zhipan's narrative, then, rather seems to sanction the closure of the confrontation between

¹⁸ *ZZTJ*, 292.9527.

¹⁹ Cf. Nomura, 1968:378.

²⁰ See the discussion above, p. 67

²¹ *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.392c. Cf. Liu, 2005:3-4.

²² *FZTJ*, j.42. T.49.2035.393a.

Buddhism and the state, and its rhetorical artifice and moral tale do not hide the decisive character and long-term significance of the three major persecutions in medieval China, which I shall discuss in the final remarks of this dissertation.

9.3 The Persecutions of Buddhism in Medieval China: The Long-Term View

A first observation that we can draw at the end of this study is relatively straightforward. For three times in the history of medieval China, the imperial state called for and tried to enforce the complete eradication of Buddhism from Chinese society. This extreme attempt was occasionally echoed in the positions of bitter adversaries of the Buddhist religion, such as Cui Hao under the Northern Wei or Fu Yi and Han Yu in the Tang period, and found its chief ideological argument in the notion that Buddhism was foreign and incompatible with Chinese traditional values.²³ However, such a radical approach was never dominant in the medieval period, and it was significantly abandoned after the Huichang persecution. As we have seen, when a major purge of the clergy was launched in northern China in the tenth century, Emperor Zhou Shizong was keen on stressing the moral merits and cultural legitimacy of Buddhism. The extent to which Buddhism had been accommodated in China may also be viewed from the case of the famous Song Neo-Confucianist Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and his criticism of Buddhism. As James Liu's detailed research has shown, Ouyang Xiu flatly rebuffed the idea of a complete eradication of Buddhism. Instead, he argued for what Liu calls "a positive program of reform".²⁴ Ouyang Xiu's argument was that Buddhism had breached into the crisis of Chinese traditional values, and its popularity was deep-seated in society, so that the only way to contrast it was not a persecution but the social and cultural renovation of China.²⁵ We have seen above that according to Zhipan, Ouyang Xiu was an enemy of Buddhism who simply could not find a ruler to put his persecutory ideas into practice.²⁶ But the truth is that by the Song dynasty, after many centuries of conflict

²³ Both Taiwudi of the Northern Wei and Tang Wuzong held this view in their anti-Buddhist edicts. See above, pp. 55-57 and pp. 171-172; 180-181. The full text of the edicts of Emperor Wudi of the Northern Zhou is not extant, but he also embraced the anti-foreign argument when he extended the persecution to the Northern Qi territories. XGSZ, j.8. T.50.2060.490b. We have also seen the report of a debate between Zhou Wudi and the Taoist priest Yan Da, in which the latter, apparently with the emperor's endorsement, would refer to the proscription of Buddhism as the repatriation of a guest, thus stressing the tension between issues of Chineseness and foreignness. Cf. above discussions in pp. 103-104.

²⁴ Liu, 1967:163-164.

²⁵ Liu, 1967:165-172.

²⁶ See above, p. 66.

and accommodation, even the strongest adversaries of Buddhism could not see either the utility or the necessity of a persecution.

The dominant rhetorical theme of the three medieval proscriptions, the notion that Buddhism was foreign and essentially bad, thus fades away after the Huichang crisis. Apart from the ethnic and cultural attacks on Buddhism as a foreign religion, a secondary theme that also links the three great persecutions, although unevenly attested, is a recurrent political allegation whereby the Buddhist community was accused of subversive activities. Under the Northern Wei, we saw that Buddhist monks were implicated first with various troublemakers producing prognostics and then in particular with the rebel Gai Wu, whereas under the Northern Zhou and the Tang they were targeted through the rumour of the "black-robed usurper". It is difficult to say to what extent these accusations reflected genuine concerns about the potentially destabilizing force of the vast Buddhist community, or were instead only instrumental to carry out attacks driven by other motivations.

What seems certain is that the three great persecutions in medieval China, no doubt with a different emphasis, shared their key stated objective - the elimination of Buddhism - as well as central elements of their ideological justifications. However, the present research has also shown a number of important differences between the three incidents, which reveal themselves in a comparative perspective.

As we have seen, the Northern Wei persecution had been particularly violent, as executions of monks were certainly ordered, and took place on an unknown scale.²⁷ No significant violence against monks is attested instead with the Northern Zhou episode, despite its severity.²⁸ Under the Tang, although Manichaean priests were killed, and the Japanese monk Ennin reported occasional rumours of atrocities, the Buddhist community at large seems again to have been spared from physical attacks (not so, of course, with monastic properties). The element of violence in the Northern Wei persecution should be probably seen as a result of critical political contingencies and the perceived connection between the Buddhist community and rebel movements at the southern borders of the Tuoba state. We have also noted that when the Tuoba Wei attacked Buddhism, they were engaged in a war against their southern foe, the Liu Song state. This factor is likely to have played an important role.²⁹ More generally, the fact that the proscription of 446 took place against a tense

²⁷ See above, Chapter 3, Section 2, pp. 56-57.

²⁸ Cases of self-immolation are known, in which monks committed suicide in protest against the proscription. See e.g. *FZTJ*, j.37. T.49.2035.358c. Cf. Gernet, 1995:304; Benn, 2007b. But these, of course, were not executions.

²⁹ Cf. some relevant discussion in pp. 53-55; 61-65.

background of external war and internal rebellion may account for its ruthlessness, in contrast to the following two incidents. Monks were probably killed on political rather than religious grounds. However, it is also worth noting that the Northern Wei persecution was the very first major proscription of Buddhism, during a time when the imperial religious policy was still in its inception, so that its violence may have been increased by the lack of an adequate structure for the political control of the Buddhist clergy. We shall consider this point again shortly.

The Northern Zhou persecution, on the other hand, shows considerably more planning than violence, certainly related both to its more immediate practical concerns (especially economic and military) and to its ideological agenda of state-sponsored syncretism, resulting among other things in the institution of the *Tongdao guan*. It is unclear to what extent Zhou Wudi was receptive to Wei Yuansong's plans for a state religion abolishing the distinction between monks and laity, although the *Tongdao guan* seems indeed to have promoted some sort of secularized religious discourse against any form of sectarianism. It is in any case significant that on that occasion the Taoist clergy was also proscribed.³⁰ This is an important difference compared to the persecutions under the Northern Wei and the Tang, for both in the former and especially in the latter, the emperor's preference for Taoism seems to have played a role of some consequence. On the other hand, when we focused on the specific agency of Taoist priests in the three persecutions through our case studies, in no single instance was their role revealed as decisive.³¹ The same can be said largely of the leading imperial officials involved in the incidents, such as Cui Hao and Li Deyu. They most certainly played their part in ensuring that Buddhism was undermined, but they appear to have done so as individuals rather than as representatives of coherent social and religious groups. A general observation in this respect is that our research does not warrant an understanding of the persecutions of Buddhism in medieval China in terms of religious or ideological competition, at least not as a primary factor.

As we have seen, the social and economic aspects of the persecutions were consistently present in medieval China, but it was chiefly during the great proscriptions of Buddhism that they were fully exposed and conveniently deployed to justify the state's initiative or mobilise the public opinion. Economic considerations were prominent especially in the Northern Zhou and Tang proscriptions, whereas we have suggested that the monastic economy was not an

³⁰ See above, p. 104. Regarding *Tongdao guan* and its establishment, cf. pp.112-113.

³¹ See above relevant discussions of the role played by the Taoist priests in the three persecutions in pp. 70-72; 119-121; 182-185.

explicitly visible target during the first persecution. Notwithstanding, we shall recall that the incident that sparked that persecution in 446 disclosed a strict association between the monastic community and the social elite in Chang'an. As James Caswell observes, the growing social presence of Buddhism would have kindled Emperor Taiwudi's suspicions and increased his frustration on the eve of the persecution.³² Thus, while no direct concern seems to have been aimed in this case at the size of monastic wealth, there may have been apprehension in the Tuoba elite at the link between the wealthy and the Buddhists. Economic considerations may also have been present in the frequent association made between Buddhist monks and artisans, especially smiths, in the minor decrees of 438 and 444.³³

The social and political ramifications of the Buddhist community are indeed another recurring element in the background of the persecutions. Even during the Northern Wei crisis, we saw that the crown prince intervened in favour of the clergy and delayed the enforcement of the edicts. Prior to that, at least two eminent monks had been executed as a probable result of their involvement in court politics and factionalism.³⁴ During the Northern Zhou persecution, the elimination of Yuwen Hu and the escalation of anti-Buddhist measures were probably connected, and a similar scenario suggested itself when we explored the disgrace of Qiu Shiliang and the following climax of the Huichang persecution.³⁵ In both cases, a powerful patron of the Buddhist community was removed before the persecution took place. Such initiatives may have been taken not only to thwart potential political opposition to the impending attacks on Buddhism, but also to undermine the entrenched economic interests linking sectors of the political and monastic elite.

Some scholars have drawn attention on a common geographical factor behind the persecutions, notably on the political symbolism of Chang'an as the city where the events unfolded in all three cases.³⁶ It must be noted, however, that although the incident that triggered the Northern Wei persecution took place in Chang'an, and it was from there that Taiwudi issued the proscription edict, the main political decisions were taken at the capital Pingcheng. The geographical aspect is nevertheless important, and we have discussed the significance of the fact that it was generally in northern China that policies attacking the Buddhist community were conceived and implemented.³⁷

³² Caswell, 1988:21-22.

³³ See above, pp. 51-52.

³⁴ See above, pp. 52; 59-60.

³⁵ Regarding Yuwen Hu, cf. above p. 116 and with respect to Qiu Shiliang, cf. above pp. 177-178.

³⁶ Guo, 2006:38-72.

³⁷ Cf. above relevant discussions in pp. 96-98.

The single most important aspect that this dissertation has attempted to highlight in the confrontation between Buddhism and the state is the long-term connection between religious policy and persecution. It is clear that the imperial regulation of the clergy was not consistent during the medieval period, nor was the relationship between the court and the Buddhist monastic community a coherent one. Indeed, even some of those emperors who persecuted Buddhism (for example, Taiwudi of the Northern Wei) had initially supported the religion before turning against it. Certain patterns, however, have emerged.

The most obvious perhaps is that each of the three great proscriptions ended with the death of the emperor who had launched it, followed shortly thereafter by a full restoration that sanctioned the right of Buddhism to stay in China. As we have seen, after the Huichang crisis that right was never questioned again, even when the clergy was massively purged. After the first two persecutions in particular, the Buddhist community experienced a spectacular expansion in the size of the clergy, of its clients and servants, and more generally of monastic estates and properties across the empire. Paradoxically, it was the court and the imperial elite that to a large extent favoured such an impetuous growth with their sustained patronage. The Buddhist community could be dragged into court politics as a consequence, and this was not always to its benefit. This circle of purge, patronage, growth and new purges is indeed one of the most striking features in the trajectory of Buddhism in medieval China. The resilient appeal of the religion echoes in the testimony of Yang Xuanzhi, who was writing in northern China in the middle of the sixth century, in the generation before the second persecution. He thus describes the success of Buddhism in Luoyang at the end of the Northern Wei:

Aristocrats and high officials parted with their horses and elephants as if they were kicking off their sandals; commoners and great families gave their wealth with the ease of leaving footprints. As a result, monasteries and pagodas were packed closely together. Men competed in drawing the heavenly beauty of the Buddha, and in copying the image he left in the mountains.³⁸

Although this success and expansion often meant the slipping of the clergy out of the state's control, and considerable levels of corruption that prompted periodical remonstrance in court circles, it was also an occasion for the state to introduce, test and develop a number of regulatory policies and agencies. In fact, in at least two of our three cases, the necessity of state regulation was confirmed in the very edicts of restoration following the Northern Wei and Tang persecutions, in which the latter were retrospectively rationalized as reformatory

³⁸ Jenner (trans.), 1981:141.

initiatives that had only strayed beyond measure.³⁹ Introducing and enforcing state control was a trial-and-error process, in which the relationship between the clergy and the imperial government periodically went through a radical restructuring.

The foregoing considerations bring us to the second and arguably most important pattern emerging from our long-term view of the confrontation between court and clergy: the persecutions of Buddhism, regardless of their stated motivations, always erupted in contexts where the state had failed to implement an effective regulatory policy. Thus, the Northern Wei proscription came several decades after an initial and radically new attempt to subordinate the clergy to the emperor through the intermediary of a state-appointed monastic convenor had been abandoned. Moreover, the Northern Wei government was apparently caught unprepared by the sudden increase in the numbers of the Buddhist clergy after the conquest of the Northern Liang in 439 and the internal migrations of large Buddhist communities.⁴⁰ Similarly, before the Northern Zhou persecution in 574-577, more than half a century had passed without any attempt of the imperial powers in the north to regulate the clergy, a situation to which the political and military chaos following the collapse of the Northern Wei no doubt added decisively.⁴¹ The Tang case is even more telling. After the An Lushan rebellion, the state's fiscal and regulatory grip on the clergy had largely collapsed, also due to such factors as the role of the eunuchs and the sale of monastic certificates.⁴² Emperor Wenzong finally attempted to re-establish state control on ordinations and monastic revenue through the traditional practice of step-by-step purges. However, Wenzong's political downturn, especially after the Sweet Dew incident, undermined any prospect to carry out effective restrictions on the clergy.⁴³ It seems likely that this failure weighed considerably on the radicalization of the religious policy during the following Huichang era. Although both the method and the outcome of Wenzong's and Wuzong's respective initiatives against the clergy differed dramatically, they are likely to have shared the same fundamental concerns and assumptions, also in view of the fact that key figures in the government such as Li Deyu had been the same under both emperors.

The Huichang proscription of Buddhism thus emerged at the end of a long series of attempts of the state to impose significant restrictions on the Buddhist clergy; in this respect, we can read a considerable degree of long-term rationality, if not planning, in its background.

³⁹ See above, pp. 78; 195-196.

⁴⁰ See above, pp. 44-45.

⁴¹ Cf. Chapter 4, Section 2, especially pp.87-88.

⁴² Cf. Chapter 7, Section 3.2 and Section 5.

⁴³ See above Chapter 8, Section 2, pp.164-165.

As Jacques Gernet rightly noted, the Huichang crisis was by no means sudden, as it was rather "arrived at only by a series of progressions".⁴⁴ Moreover, despite conflicting records, several indications of relative restraint suggest that a total eradication of Buddhism may not really have been the objective, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the edicts. We have seen that a small group of monasteries, and presumably their resident communities, had been left in place even when the proscription reached its peak. Entire provinces were seemingly spared from the destruction of Buddhist icons and scriptures. Finally, it seems certain that just as under the Northern Zhou, no executions of monks or physical violence against them took place on any significant scale. The upshot is that beyond its draconian tones and its no doubt ruthless implementation in several areas, the Huichang persecution shows sufficient signs of continuity with past attempts to regulate the clergy, which would eventually make room for a more effective and less traumatic application of religious policy in its aftermath. In this, we can probably see the results of a century-long process of accommodation between the Buddhist community and the imperial government.

It seems therefore justified to conclude this study by observing that the Huichang persecution represents indeed a watershed in the history of Buddhism in China - not, however, as the inception of its fatal decline, but as the conclusion of the prolonged confrontation between the monastic community and the imperial state in the medieval period. At the end of this long process, as illustrated by a number of significant developments under the Song dynasty, the state was finally able to establish its power and implement its regulatory agency on the Buddhist clergy without any need of resorting to persecution. As for the community of monks and nuns, it had long abandoned the claims to independence from secular obligations that monks like Huiyuan had raised at the beginning of the confrontation; its legitimate presence as an integral part of Chinese society and culture, however, would no longer be challenged.

⁴⁴ Gernet, 2002:295.

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DMJXNJZ = *Du Mu ji xinian jiaozhu* 杜牧集繫年校注 (*Dates and Annotations on the Collected Works of Du Mu*), 4 Vols. Critical edition with date and annotations by Wu, Zaiqing 吳在慶 (see Secondary References). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2008.

DMSG = *Daomen shigui* 道門十規 (*Ten Guides for the Church of the Tao*), 1 juan, compiled (ca. 1406-1410) by Zhang Yuchu 張宇初 (1359-1410). DZ 988, no. 1232.

DTCYQJZ = *Da Tang chuangye qiju zhu* 大唐創業起居注 (*Diary of Activity and Repose of the Foundation of the Great Tang*), 3 juan, compiled (618) by Wen Daya 溫大雅 (572-629). Critical modern edition by Li Jiping 李季平 and Li Xihou 李錫厚. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1983.

DTDCESSZFSZ = *Da Tang Daci'en si sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (*Biography of the Master of the Three Storehouses of the Daci'en Monastery of the Great Tang*), 10 juan, compiled (664-688) by Huili 慧立 (fl. 629-664) and Yancong 彥悰 (fl. 640s-688). T.50.2053.221-280a. Critical edition in Sun Yutang 孫毓棠 and Xie Fang 謝方 (see Secondary References), 1983.

DTJL = *Du tongjian lung* 讀通鑒論 (*Reading Comments on the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*), 30 juan, compiled (ca. 1691) by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1975.

DTXY = *Da Tang xinyu* 大唐新語 (*New Tales of the Great Tang*), 13 juan, compiled (ca. 807) by Liu Su 劉肅. Modern edition annotated and edited by Xu Denan 許德楠 and Li Dingxia 李鼎霞. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2010.

DSSSL = *Da Song sengshi lue* 大宋僧史略 (*Historical Summary of the Saṃgha of the Great Song*), 3 juan, compiled by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001). T.54.2126.

FBNHJ = Fo bannihuan jing 佛般泥洹經 (*Scripture of the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa*), 2 juan, trans. (ca. 266-316) by Bo Fazu 白法祖 (d.u). T.1.5.160b-175c.

FSDHZZJ = Foshuo Dehu zhangzhe jing 佛說德護長者經 (*Scripture of Elder Dehu Spoken by the Buddha*), 2 juan, translated by Naliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍 (Narendrayāsas, 490-589) in 583. T.14.545.

FSRWBRBLMJ = Foshuo renwang banruo boluomi jing 佛說仁王般若波羅密經 (*Prajñāpāramitā Scripture of the Humane King Spoken by the Buddha*), 2 juan, translation attributed to Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什). T.8.245.825a-834a.

FYZL = Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林 (*Pearl Grove from the Garden of the Law*), 100 juan, compiled (668 CE) by Daoshi 道世 (597-683). T.53.2122.269b-1030a. Critical edition in Zhou and Su (see Secondary References), 2003.

FZLDTZ = Fozu lidai tong zai 佛祖歷代通載 (*Comprehensive Genealogical Record of the Buddha and Patriarchs*), 22 juan, compiled (1341) by Nianchang 念常 (1281-1341). T.49.2036.477a-735b

FZTJ = Fozu tongji 佛祖統記 (*Comprehensive Chronicle of the Buddha and Patriarchs*), 54 juan, compiled (1258-1269) by Zhipan 智磐 (1200-1275). T.49.2035.129a-475c.

GSZ = Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) 14 juan, compiled (519) by Huijiao 慧皎 (d.554). T. 50. 2059.322c-423c. Critical edition in Tang (see Secondary References), 1992.

GHMJ = Guang hongming ji 廣弘明集 (*Expanded Collection to Spread and Illuminate [Buddhism]*), 30 juan, compiled (664 CE) by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667 CE). T. 52.2103.97a-361a.

GQBL = Guoqing bailu 國清百錄 (*One Hundred Records of Guoqing [Monastery]*), 4 juan, compiled by Guanding 灌頂 (561-632). T.46.1934.793a.-823c.

HCYPJ = Huichang yipin ji 會昌一品集 (*A Collection of the Huichang Era*), 35 juan, compiled by Li Deyu. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, reprint, 1935.

HFL = Hufa lun 護法論 (*Treatise in Defence of the Law*), 1 juan, compiled by Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1042-1122). T.52.2114.637a-646c.

HHS = Hou Han shu 後漢書 (*Book of the Later Han*), 120 juan, compiled (ca. 445) by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-446). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1971.

HMJ = Hongming ji 弘明集 (*Collection to Spread and Illuminate [Buddhism]*), 14 juan, compiled (ca. 510-518) by Sengyou 僧佑 (445-518 CE). T. 52.2102.1a-96b.

HYSJ = Hunyuan shengji 混元聖記 (*Holy Records of Chaotic Prime*), 9 *juan*, compiled (ca. 1191) by Xie Shouhao 謝守灝 (d.u.). In *DZ* 551-553 no. 770, 17-779a-884a.

JGJFDLH-D = Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng 集古今佛道論衡 (*Collection of Past and Present Debates between Buddhism and Taoism*), 4 *juan*, compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667). *T.* 52.2104.363a-397b.

JGJFDLH-Z = Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng 集古今佛道論衡 (*Collection of Past and Present Debates between Buddhism and Taoism*), 1 *juan*, compiled (730) by Zhisheng 智昇. *T.* 52.2104.397b-404a.

JKSL = Jiankang shilu 建康實錄, 20 *juan*, compiled by Xu Song 許嵩 (ca.712-763). Critically edited with annotations by Zhang Chenshi 張忱石 (2 vols.). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1990.

JS = Jin shu 晉書 (*Book of the Jin*), 130 *juan*, compiled (ca. 646-648) by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648) et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1974.

JSCB = Jinshi cuibian 金石萃編 (*Collections of Stone Inscriptions*), 160 *juan*, collected by Wang Chang 王昶 (1725-1806). Zhu, Wenzao, Qian Tong, eds.

JSMBYBSDS = Ji shamen bu ying baisu deng shi 集沙門不應拜俗等事 (*Collection [of documents on whether] śramaṇas Should Not Pay Homage to Laypeople and Other Issues*), 6 *juan*, compiled (ca. 649) by Yan Cong 彥棕 (fl. 627-661). *T.* 52.2108.443b-474c.

JTS = Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書 (*Old Book of the Tang*), 200 *juan*, compiled (940-945) by Liu Xun 劉昫 (887-946), et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1975.

JWDS = Jiu wudai shi 舊五代史 (*Old History of the Five Dynasties*), 150 *juan*, compiled (ca. 973-974) by Xue Juzheng 薛居正 (912-981) et al. eds. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1976.

LDMHJ = Lidai ming hua ji 歷代名畫記 (*Records of Famous Paintings through the Ages*), 10 *juan*, compiled (847) by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815-875). Some selections relevant to Buddhism in Lan, 1983.

LDSBJ = Lidai sanbao ji 歷代三寶紀 (*Chronicle of the Three Gems through the Ages*), 15 *juan*, compiled (598) by Fei Zhangfang 費長房 (fl. 562-598). *T.*49.2034.22c-127.

LDYWJ = Li Deyu wenji jiaojian 李德裕文集校箋 (*Annotated and Collected Works of Li Deyu*). Critical edition in Fu and Zhou (see Secondary References), 2000.

LDZXTDTJ = Lidai zhenxian tidao tongjian 歷代真仙體道通鑒 (*A Comprehensive Mirror of Perfected and Transcendents Embodying the Tao through the Ages*), 53 *juan*, compiled (1294) by Zhao Daoyi 趙道一 (d.u.). In *DZ* 139-148, no. 296, 5.99a-414a.

LS = Liang shu 梁書 (*Book of the Liang*), 56 *juan*, compiled by Yao Silian 姚思廉 (d. 637) and Yao Cha 姚察 (533-606). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1973.

LYQLJ = Luoyang qielan ji 洛陽伽藍記 (*Record of Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang*), 5 *juan*, compiled (ca. 550) by Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之. T.51.2092.999a-1022b. Critical editions in Fan, 1978 (see Secondary References)

LYXJJZ = Liu Yuxi ji jianzheng 劉禹錫集箋證 (*Annotated Edition of Collected Works of Liu Yuxi*), Vol.1. Critical edition by Zhai Tuiyuan 翟蛻園. Shanghai: Shanghaiguji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1989.

MBJ = Mingbao ji 冥報記 (*Records of Retribution from the Netherworld*), 3 *juan*, compiled by Tang Lin 唐臨 (600-659). T.51.2082.787b-802a.

MHZG = Mohe zhiguan 摩訶止觀 (*The Grand Treatise of Calming and Contemplation*), 10 *juan*, compiled (ca. 594-596) by Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597) and Guanding 灌頂 (561-623), et al. T.46.1911.1a-140c.

MSXH = Meng shi xinhua 捫虱新話 (*New Tales of Leisure Time*), 4 *juan*, compiled (1149-1157) by Chen Shan 陳善 (d.u.). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 商務印書館, 1939.

MSZ = Maoshan zhi 茅山志 (*Record of Maoshan*), 33 *juan*, compiled (ca. 1324-1329) by Liu Dabin 劉大彬 (d.u.). In *DZ* 153-158, no. 304, 5.548c-703b.

NESZJ = Nian'er shi zhaji 廿二史札記 (*Notes on the Twenty-Two [Dynastic] Histories*), 100 *juan*, compiled by Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1927-1814). Critical edition by Wang Shumin 王樹民. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1984.

NQS = Nan Qi shu 南齊書 (*Book of the Northern Qi*), 59 *juan*, compiled (ca. 514-526) by Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489-537). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1975.

NS = Nan shi 南史 (*History of the Southern [Dynasties]*), 80 *juan*, compiled by (ca. 659 CE) Li Yanshou 李延壽 (d. 629 CE). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1975.

NYSDCSLSYW = Nanyue Si dachanshi li shiyuan wen 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文 (*Prayers of Upholding the Grand Vows of Master [Hui]si of the Nanyue*), 1 *juan*, compiled (558) by Huisi 慧思 (515-577). T.46.1933:787a-c.

PXL = Poxie lun 破邪論 (*Treatise on Dispelling the Heresies*), 2 *juan*, compiled by Falin 法琳 (572-640). T. 52.2109.474c-489c.

QBQW = Quan Bei Qi wen 全北齊文 (*Complete Prose of the Northern Qi*), 10 *juan*, in *QSGSDQHSGLCW*, 4th Vol., pp. 3823a-3883b.

QHWW = Quan Hou Wei wen 全後魏文 (*Complete Prose of the Later Wei*), 60 *juan*, in *QSGSDQHSGLCW*, 4th Vol., pp. 3507a-3821a.

QHZW = *Quan Hou Zhou wen* 全後周文 (*Complete Prose of the Later Zhou*), 24 *juan*, in *QSGSDQHSGLCW*, 4th Vol., pp. 3885a-4012b.

QSW = *Quan Sui wen* 全隋文 (*Complete Prose of the Sui*), 36, in *QSGSDQHSGLCW*, 4th Vol., pp. 4013-4237.

QSGSDQHSGLCW = *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 4 Vols. (*Complete Prose of High Antiquity, Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms and the Six Dynasties*), collected by Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843). (Reprint) Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, (1958), 1987.

QTW = *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, 1000 *juan* (*Complete Prose of the Tang*), collected by Dong Hao 董浩 (1740-1818). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1974.

QTWBY = *Quan Tang wen buyi* 全唐文補遺 (*Additions to the Complete Prose of the Tang*), 7 Series, edited by Wu, Gang, 吳鋼 et al. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe 三秦出版社, 1994.

RTQFXLXJJZ = *Rutang qiufa xunli xingji jiaozhu* 入唐求法巡禮行記校注, 4 *juan*.) Annotated text of *Nittō guhō junrei kōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記, compiled (838-846) by Ennin 圓仁 (794-864), edited by Bai, Huwen 白化文, Li Dingxia 李鼎霞, Xu Denan 許德楠 on the basis of Ono Katsutoshi's 小野勝年 critical edition. Hebei: Huashan wenyi chubanshe 花山文艺出版社, 2007.

RWHGBRBLMDJ = *Renwang huguo banruo boluomi jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經 (*Prajñapāramitā Scripture of the Humane King Who Protects the State*), 2 *juan*, compiled by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空 704-774). T.8.246.834c-844c.

SFLBQHZJB = *Sifen lü biqiu hanzhu jieben* 四分律比丘含注戒本 (*Vinaya Rules with Commentaries for Bhikṣus from the Dharmaguptaka vinaya*), 3 *juan*, edited and compiled (ca. 651) by Daoxuan (596-667). T.40.1806.429-463a,

SFLSFBQXSC = *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (*Commentary, Revision and Supplementary on the Dharmaguptaka vinaya*), 12 *juan*, compiled (ca. 626-630) by Daoxuan (596-667). T.40.1804.1a-156c.

SGSZ = *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (*Song Dynasty's Biographies of Eminent Monks*), 30 *juan*, compiled by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001 CE) T. 50.2061.709a-900a. Critical edition in Fan, 1987 (see Secondary References).

SGZ = *San guo zhi* 三國志 (*Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*), 65 *juan*, compiled by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297). Commentaries and annotations added and completed (ca. 429) by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 (1959), 1962.

SLGCQ = *Shiliu guo chunqiu* 十六國春秋 (*Springs and Autumns of the Sixteen Kingdoms*), 100 *juan*, compiled (ca. 522) by Cui Hong 崔鴻. Critical edition by Tang Qiu 湯毬, *Shiliuguo*

chunqiu jibu (SLGCQJB) 十六國春秋輯補. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1936.

SMBJWZL = *Shamen bu jing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 (A Treatise on Śramaṇas's Exemption from Paying Homage to the Kings), 1 juan, compiled (402) by Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416). T.52.2102.29c-32b.

SQ = *Shi que* 史闕 (Additions to History), 30 juan, compiled by Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1684). Taipei: Huashi chubanshe 華世出版社, 1977.

SSh = *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song), 496 juan, compiled (1343-1345) by Tuotuo 脫脫 (Toqto'a 1314-1356) and Alutu 阿魯圖 (d.u.). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1977.

SoS = *Song shu* 宋書 (Book of the Song), 100 juan, compiled (487-502) by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1974.

SS = *Sui shu* 隋書 (Book of the Sui), 114 juan, compiled (ca. 622-656 CE) by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-663), et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1973.

SSJGL = *Shishi jigu lue* 釋氏稽古略 (Survey of Ancient History of the Śākya Clan), 4 juan, compiled (ca. 1341-1367) by Jue'an 覺岸 (1286-?). T.49.2037.902c.

SSYL = *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽 (Essential Readings of the Śākya Clan), 3 juan, compiled (1024) by Daocheng 道誠 (d.u.). T.54.2127.257b-310b.

STJ = *Sita ji* 寺塔記 (Record of Temples and Pagodas), 1 juan, compiled by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (?-863). T.49.2093.1022b-1024a.

STJH = *Sui Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話 (Fine Tales of the Sui and Tang Dynasties), 3 juan, compiled by Liu Su 劉餗 (d.u.). Modern annotated edition used in this research is published in *Sui Tang shiliao biji* 隋唐史料筆記. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2012.

TD = *Tong dian* 通典 (Comprehensive Encyclopaedia), 200 juan, compiled (801) by Du You 杜佑 (735-812). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1988.

TCZZ = *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳 (Biographies of the Exam Passers), 10 juan, compiled (ca. 1304) by Xin Wenfang 辛文房 (1300-1324). Critical edition in Fu (see Secondary References), 1987-1995 (reprint 1987-2000).

TDHSDZZ = *Tang Da heshang dongzheng zhuan* 唐大和尚東征傳 (Record of A Monk's Eastward Journey during the Tang Dynasty; Jap. *Tōdai washō tōseiden*) 1 juan, compiled (779) by Yuankai 元開 (Jap. aka. Ōmino Mifune 淡海三船; 722-785). T.51.2089.988b-994b.

TDMZHB = *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編 (Collected Tomb Inscriptions of the Tang Dynasty), 2 Vols. Collected and edited by Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 et al. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1992.

TDZLJ = *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (*Collection of Major Decrees and Edicts of the Tang*), 130 juan, compiled (1070) by Song Minqiu 宋敏求. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1959.

TDZLJ = *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (*Collection of Major Decrees and Edicts of the Tang*), 130 juan, compiled (1070) by Song Minqiu 宋敏求. Critical edition by Hong Pimo 洪丕謨 et al. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe 學林出版社, 1992.

TDZLJBB = *Tang da zhaoling ji bubian* 唐大詔令集補編 (*Additions to the Collection of Major Decrees and Edicts of the Tang*), 34 juan. Additions to the TDZLJ, edited by Li, Xibi, et al. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2003.

THY = *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (*Collected Essentials of the Tang*), 100 juan, compiled by Wang Pu 王溥 (Song dynasty). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1955.

THYJZ = *Tang huiyao jiaozheng* 唐會要校證 (*Corrected and Edited Version of the Collected Essentials of the Tang*), 2 Vols. Critical edition in Niu (see Secondary Reference), 2012.

TLD = *Tang liu dian* 唐六典 (*Six Classics of Official Titles of Tang Dynasty*), 30 juan, compiled (738) by Li Linfu 李林甫 (683-753). Critical modern edition by Chen Zhongfu 陳仲夫, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1992.

TPYL = *Taiping yulan* 太平禦覽 (*The Emperor's Readings of the Taiping Era*), 1000 juan, compiled (977-983) by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, reprint, 1960.

TYL = *Tang yulin* 唐語林 (*Forest of Talks of the Tang*), 8 juan, compiled by Wang Dang 王讜 (fl. 1140-1150). Annotated edition with corrections by Zhou, Xunchu 周勳初. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局.

WS = *Wei shu* 魏書 (*Book of the Wei*), 130 juan, compiled (551-554) by Wei Shou 魏收 (506-572). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1974.

WYYH = *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (*Essentials of Literary Garden*), 1000 juan, compiled (987-1201) by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, reprint, 1982.

XDL = *Xiao dao lun* 笑道論 (*Laughing at the Dao*), 3 juan, compiled (570) by Zhen Luan 甄鸞. T.52.2103.

XGSZ = *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*), 30 juan, compiled (ca. 645) by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) T. 50.2060.425a-707a.

XTS = *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New Book of the Tang*), 225 juan, compiled (1043-1060) by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1974.

XWDS = *Xin wudai shi* 新五代史 (*New History of the Five Dynasties*), 74 juan, compiled (1053) by Ouyang Xiu. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 1974.

YHJXTZ = *Yuanhe junxian tu zhi* 元和郡縣圖志 (*Charts and Records of Prefectures and Counties in the Yuanhe Era*), 34 juan, compiled (813) by Li Jifu 李吉. (Annotated edition with corrections by He Cijun 賀次君). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1983.

YJQJ = *Yunji qijian* 雲笈七籤 (*Seven Slips from the Cloudy Satchel*) 120 juan, compiled (1027) by Zhang Junfang 張君房 (d.u.). In *DZ*. Critical edition in Li Yongcheng 李永晟, 2003 (see Secondary References)

YWLJ = *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Encyclopaedia of Arts and Literature*), 100 juan, compiled (624) by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (577-641) et al. Critical edition in Wang (Secondary References), 1985.

YXYX = *Yun xi you yi* 雲溪友議 (*Tales Heard from Friends in the Clouds and Brooks*), 10 juan, compiled by Fan Shu 范攄 (f. 877), in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀, Vol. 1. Yangzhou: Jiangsu guangling guji keyinshe 江蘇廣陵古籍刻印社.

YYZZ = *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (*Miscellaneous Record of Youyang*), 10 juan, compiled by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (?-864). Critical edition in Fang, Nansheng 方南生 (see Secondary References), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1981.

ZAHJ = *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (*Madhyama Āgama*), 60 juan, trans. by Sengqietipo 僧伽提婆 (Samghadeva; d.u.), et al., ca. 397-398. T.1.26.421a-809a.

ZAHJ = *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 (*Samyukta Āgama*), 50 juan, trans. by Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅 (396-468; Gunabhadra), ca. 435-443. T.2.99.1a.-371b.

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