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Representations of Liang Emperor Wu as a Buddhist Ruler in Sixth- and Seventh-century Texts

On May 7, 504, a crowd of 20,000 religious and lay people thronged to the main chamber of the Zhongyun Hall 重雲殿 in the Liang imperial palace at Jiankang 建康. The founder of their state and ruler of two years, Liang Emperor Wu 梁武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, 464–549; r. 502–549), had summoned them. When they had assembled, he composed a declaration in which he renounced his family's affiliation to Daoism and declared his belief in Buddhist doctrine.[1] Three days later he restated the terms of his conversion in a second edict. He identified Buddhism in the rhetoric of religious orthodoxy as "the only true way."[2] These were the opening acts of a political drama that would last the rest of the emperor's reign. Over the following forty-five years he appealed to Buddhist doctrine as authority for a series of reforms to imperial and state rituals, which he supported with programmes of temple construction and scholarship. These presented a radical challenge to traditional foundations of imperial legitimacy. Contemporary reactions were mixed. Many members of the court were quick to express support for the emperor and his new beliefs. They urged others

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[1] Daoxuan 道宣, *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集 (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* edn., Tōkyō: Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō kankōkai, rpt. 1962; hereafter *T.*), vol. 52, no. 2103: 4.112A. On doubts over the authenticity of this document and the suppression of Daoism that followed it, see Ōta Teizō 太田悌藏, "Ryō Butei no shadō hōbutsu ni tsuite utagau" 梁武帝の捨道奉佛について疑う, in *Yūki kyōju shōju kinen: Bukkyō shisōshi ronshū* 結城教授頌壽記念: 佛教思想史論集 (Tōkyō: Daizō shuppan, 1964), pp. 417–32; Naitō Tatsuo 內藤龍雄, "Ryō no Butei no shadō no hishijitsusei" 梁の武帝の捨道の非史實性, *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究 5.2, 1957: 162–63; Xiong Qingyuan 熊清元, "Liang Wu di tian jian san nian 'she shi Li Lao dao fa' shi zheng wei" 梁武帝天監三年'捨事李老道法'事證僞, *Huanggang shi zhuan xue bao* 黃岡師專學報 18.2, 1998: 67–70, 74. But Michel Strickmann offers evidence for the suppression of Daoism in "A Taoist Confirmation of Liang Wu Ti's Suppression of Taoism," *JAOS* 98.4, 1978: 467–75.

[2] *Guang hong ming ji*, 4.112A; cf. Falin 法林, *Bian zheng lun* 辯正論, *T.*, vol. 52, no. 2110: 8.549C; *Fa yuan zhu lin* 法苑珠林, Daoshi 道世, *T.*, vol. 53, no. 2122: 55.707A.

to follow his example and convert to Buddhism. Here is testimony to an extraordinary personal charisma and authority. Here too is evidence of the religious fervour that must have pervaded Liang imperial circles. That did not suppress all dissent, though. Warnings also sounded against the effects that Emperor Wu's patronage of the Buddhist church might have on the state and the imperial institution – it would undermine Liang dynastic integrity and legitimacy, they suggested.

Later accounts represented Emperor Wu's reign as one of the most stable and long-lived of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Violence marked its end, though. In 547 a refugee military commander from Eastern Wei, Hou Jing 侯景 (d. 552), launched a rebellion and marched on the Liang capital at Jiankang. He took the city on April 24, 549, and, two months later, Emperor Wu died in captivity in doubtful circumstances. The dynasty did not outlive its founder by long. On November 16, 557, a former Liang general, Chen Baxian 陳霸先 (503–559), seized power and established the state of Chen.

Emperor Wu's downfall, and the subsequent destruction of the dynasty that he had established, attracted close attention from later statesmen and rulers. They needed to understand the lessons that their imperial predecessor afforded them if they were to avoid his fate. Much of the discourse that resulted cast Emperor Wu as a "Buddhist" ruler and focussed above all on the relationship during Liang between the Buddhist church and the imperial state. This relationship had been fraught with tension from at least the fourth century. After Emperor Wu's reign, in the insecure political environment of the late-sixth and seventh centuries, it continued to draw notice in fierce disputes over whether or not members of the Buddhist clergy owed obeisance to their ruler.[3] Yet for all their doctrinal rhetoric these disputes had a practical

[3] Seventh-c. emperors inherited two models for the relationship between the secular state and the Buddhist church. The Northern Dynasties preserved a hierarchy in which the state maintained strict control and dominance over the religious establishment. By the early 5th c. even the Northern Wei monk Faguo 法果 urged the clergy to make obeisance to the imperial throne. He justified his argument by identifying the emperor as a modern-day Buddha; Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1974), 114.3031. In the south, the Buddhist church held parity with secular authorities and at times gained ascendance over them. It resisted attempts at ritual subjugation. In 340, for example, imperial regent Yu Bing 庾冰 issued two edicts that required monks to make obeisance to the emperor; Sengyou 僧祐, *Hong ming ji* 弘明集, *T.*, vol. 52, no. 2102: 12.79B–C. These drew an impassioned response from Buddhist laymen and clergy. The terms of this debate resurfaced in the early 5th-c., when in 402 Huan Xuan 桓玄 again tried to have the Buddhist clergy make obeisance to the imperial throne. Among others, the monk Huiyuan 慧遠 responded with a letter and then his influential "Discourse on Monks' Not Venerating the Sovereign" 沙門不敬王者論, *Hong ming ji*, 5.29C–32B, 12.83C–84B. Seventh-c. contributions to this debate appear in *Guang hong ming ji*, 25.284A–292A; and Yancong 彥悰, *Ji sha men bu ying bai su deng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事, *T.*, vol. 52, no. 2108: 3.454C–6.474C.

focus: they were preoccupied with ritual form and political hierarchy. In this context, representations of Emperor Wu tended to find a place in discussions where concerns of statecraft were uppermost. Political legitimacy was at stake here. Should an emperor experiment with Buddhism? Would it disrupt the foundations of the state's legitimacy? Would it undermine the social and cultural traditions that provided those foundations? Or could it complement native values to secure legitimacy and to produce stability and longevity in governance?

The responses that these questions elicited in connection with Emperor Wu during the sixth and seventh centuries will supply the focus of this paper. It will offer not a reflection of Emperor Wu's actual policies, but an index of the shifting religious and political commitments of those who followed him.[4] It will show first how three broad seams of discourse emerged during the sixth century in response to the emperor's radical reforms to the normative framework of imperial rule. These seams of discourse proceeded from well-established discussions of political legitimacy but they now also had to address the role of Buddhism in the imperial state. Views on this knotty issue were subject to continual challenge and reformulation, and so the three seams of discourse in early representations of Emperor Wu appeared in recycled and refocused forms in different religious and political contexts into the seventh century. The present paper will trace those ideological shifts.

There will also be a basic source-critical point to make. It happens that representations of Emperor Wu show how different, often competing, textual traditions form around an individual and then assume new characteristics. The relation of any one work to its textual ancestry affects the development of its arguments. More importantly, it influences our reading of those arguments. The sample of texts that appears in what follows has been selected to draw out such patterns of relationship and their effects. This paper will therefore analyse the debates on political legitimacy and the role of the Buddhist church in the imperial state that surrounded Emperor Wu's legacy; more simply, though, it will offer a study in the construction and reception of the past in medieval China.

[4] The obvious omission from all this, a precursor to what follows, is Emperor Wu's own representation of his activities. That falls outside the scope of the present paper, which concerns itself with how others manipulated his image to suit their own ideological agendas. It will receive study in its own right elsewhere.

THREE SIXTH-CENTURY REPRESENTATIONS OF EMPEROR WU

Three seams of discourse suggested themselves in early representations of Emperor Wu. They first emerged in the sixth century. Although each was later adapted to suit current political agendas during the seventh century, the basic distinctions between them endured. The three seams may be summarized simply:

1. A negative representation of Emperor Wu that explicitly associated many of his activities with Buddhism and denied him political legitimacy on those grounds. Emperor Wu therefore served as a minatory example of a ruler whose "Buddhist" practices were causally linked to dynastic decline. This discourse rejected the Buddhist church's claims to transcendental power and potential to secure the legitimacy of the imperial state, and it saw in the Buddhist church only a conflict of interests – usually material interests – with secular government. In its extreme form, it argued for the complete exclusion of Buddhism from statecraft.
2. A focus on areas in which Emperor Wu could be shown to have fulfilled his imperial duty in an exemplary manner, while maintaining an overall silence about activities elsewhere ascribed to Buddhism. This discourse avoided the need to explain Buddhism's failure to guard against Liang's violent collapse. Instead it dealt with the emperor's broad conformity to Confucian canonical expectations of statecraft and personal morality. It was on these grounds that Emperor Wu was accorded political legitimacy.
3. An explicitly pro-Buddhist seam of discourse that was, like the second seam, above, sympathetic to Emperor Wu but adopted the opposite tactic to make its point. Far from omitting reference to Buddhism, it emphasised Emperor Wu's activities as having been "Buddhist" and identified them as the vital ingredient in half a century of relative political stability and continuity. The efficacy of Buddhist piety in securing cosmic support for imperial rule; its compatibility with native moral and political values: these were the main arguments produced in its favour.[5]

[5] During the early-8th c. a fourth seam of discourse also took hold: in sum, Emperor Wu received a negative representation but authors working in this seam also sought to divorce his actions from their interpretations of Buddhist canonical orthodoxy. They therefore left a role for Buddhist doctrine in the imperial state if it were practised mindfully – something that Emperor Wu had failed to do. This seam of discourse suited a large range of ideological agendas, since it rested in the first place on the definition of what mindful, orthodox Buddhist practice actually was. It also shifted the terms of earlier representations of Emperor Wu's rule. As we shall see, 7th-c. texts concerned themselves with practical political arguments: their focus was the institutional relationship between church and state. As a result, Emperor Wu's opponents never challenged him at an intellectual or doctrinal level. By contrast, 8th-c. scholars devel-

Three texts from the second half of the sixth century will fill in the outlines of these seams of discourse: *Wei shu* 魏書, *Jin lou zi* 金樓子, and *Li dai san bao ji* 歷代三寶紀. All three texts exerted a direct influence over later representations of Emperor Wu. We will examine specific textual and ideological relationships in what follows. More generally, though, these three texts will serve to establish a framework for later analysis and will afford a first look at some of the textual strategies that successive authors employed in their representations of Emperor Wu.

Wei shu

In 551 Northern Qi's Director of the Secretariat and Editorial Director of the Palace Library, Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572), received an imperial commission to compose a history of the preceding state of Wei. He submitted the annals and biographical sections of his *Wei shu* to the throne in the third lunar month of 554. In the eleventh lunar month he added ten monographs on a well-established selection of topics that were of administrative and ritual importance to the state. The result was a work of 130 *juan*.[6] Despite fierce criticism of Wei Shou's work, Tang Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 627–649) adopted it when he commissioned official accounts of the Southern and Northern Dynasties in 629.[7]

Among the opposition that *Wei shu* faced was a recurring argument that Wei Shou displayed bias towards the interests of his own Northern Qi state and those of its immediate predecessor, Eastern Wei.[8] A similar ideological slant shapes Wei Shou's biography of Liang Emperor

oped a critique of Emperor Wu's understanding of Buddhist doctrine, from which any political and economic arguments proceeded. The roots of this seam of discourse can be traced to texts from the 7th c.: e.g., Wang Tong 王通, *Wen Zhong zi Zhong shuo* 文中子中說 (rpt. of Shide tang edn., Shanghai: You wen she, 1914), 4.7b. It failed to find prominent expression at this time, though, and so will not draw our notice here.

6 *Wei shu*, 104.2326–27; Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Bei shi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1974), 56.2030–31; Li Baiyao 李百藥, *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1972), 37.487–88.

7 Liu Xu 劉昫, *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1975), 73.2598. *Wei shu*'s negative reception attracted attention in the 20th c.: Li Zhengfen 李正奮, "*Wei shu* yuan liu kao" 魏書源流考, *Guo xue ji kan* 國學季刊 2.2, 1929: 378–81; James R. Ware, "Notes on The History of The *Wei Shu*," *JAOS* 52.1, 1932: 40–42; Zhou Yiliang 周一良, "Wei Shou zhi shi xue" 魏收之史學, *Yanjing xue bao* 燕京學報 18, 1935: 139–44; Uchida Ginpū 內田吟風, "*Gisho* no seiritsu ni tsuite" 魏書の成立に就いて, *TSK* 2.6, 1937: 530–40; J. Holgrem, "Northern Wei as a Conquest Dynasty: Current Perceptions; Past Scholarship," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 40, 1989: 3–8; Albert E. Dien, "Wei Tan and the Historiography of the *Wei-shu*," in *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History: In Honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman*, Paul W. Kroll and David R. Knechtges, eds., Provo, UT: T'ang Studies Society, 2003, pp. 399–466.

8 See, for example, the comments of the late-7th/early-8th-c. critic Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 in *Shi tong tong shi* 史通通釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1978), 12.365.

Wu. It appears under the heading of "the island barbarian Xiao Yan" 島夷蕭衍, towards the end of *Wei shu*'s biographical section and sandwiched between biographies of leaders of barbarian states.[9] Emperor Wu is referred to throughout by his personal name, Xiao Yan; it is the Wei rulers who receive the title "emperor", *di* 帝, both in this biography and elsewhere in *Wei shu*. Emperor Wu is seen to have arrogated power for himself and established himself as a false claimant to imperial rule, not as a legitimate ruler. The calendrical system that marks out *Wei shu*'s account of Emperor Wu's rule echoes this by employing the year titles of first Northern and then Eastern Wei, not those of Liang. And Emperor Wu's death is reported with a non-honorific "*si*" 死, not the "*beng*" 崩 or "*cu*" 殂 reserved for contemporary Wei rulers in their biographies.[10]

The contents of Emperor Wu's biography confirm initial impressions. Accounts of successive Liang defeats to Wei armies, of failed diplomatic manoeuvres, and of political defections dominate. These culminate in Hou Jing's defection from Eastern Wei to Liang, his deception of the Liang court, and his overthrow of Emperor Wu. Emperor Wu appears throughout as arrogant and corrupt. He is deluded and detached from reality and attracts ridicule from his contemporaries. His susceptibility to flattery grows particularly serious in his old age, with the result that deception pervades the Liang court.[11] Here is a major cause of Hou Jing's success and, by extension, a factor in Liang's political and social decline.

Two substantial references to Buddhism appear among *Wei shu*'s catalogue of Emperor Wu's personal and political failures. Both are affected by and contribute to the negative tone of the biography. The first is in a long proclamation that the northern commander Murong Shaozong 慕容紹宗 (501–549) issued to the people of Liang in the 540s to forewarn them of their imminent collapse: Emperor Wu was imprudent in his veneration of Buddhist precepts; his widespread programme of monastic construction exploited the common people and exhausted their resources. There are echoes here of a broader anti-Buddhist sen-

9 The term "island barbarian" was used at this time by northerners to denigrate those from rival southern dynasties: for example, *Bei shi*, 93.3061, 100.3343. Its ethnic undertones are particularly suggestive in *Wei shu*, which displaces the Han Chinese regime of Liang from the line of political legitimacy and relegates it to the status of a mere "barbarian" regime. It accords legitimacy instead to the Tuoba state of Wei. In doing so, it undermines ethnic expectations that at this time supplied one of the possible criteria for according political legitimacy.

10 Wei Shou's terminology drew particular criticism from Wei Tan 魏澹 in the late 6th c.; Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1973), 58.1418–19.

11 *Wei shu*, 98.2184.

timent that made itself felt in the north at the same time as Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism in the south.[12]

Second, Emperor Wu's biography in *Wei shu* concludes with a retrospective survey of his patronage of Buddhism. This appears in the authoritative voice of *Wei shu*'s impersonal narrator. It begins with a statement that Emperor Wu "held a reverential faith in the Buddhist Way" even before the outbreak of Hou Jing's rebellion.[13] This opening claim colours what follows with Buddhist overtones and sharpens the focus on the object of criticism. *Wei shu*'s impersonal narrator then supplies concrete evidence for Emperor Wu's generous support of the Buddhist church. In a description of the threat of Hou Jing's rebellion, we are given circumstantial evidence for the extensive wealth of the Liang Buddhist clergy: Emperor Wu collected cash stored in the capital's monasteries to supplement military finances during the rebellion. More direct is *Wei shu*'s account of monastic construction during Liang. The text's impersonal narrator names monasteries erected under imperial commission. All demonstrated exquisite craftsmanship. All resulted in the depletion of the state's resources and manpower, and pricked the suffering and resentment of the common people. Emperor Wu's personal practice of vegetarianism is next to draw notice. We hear too of his worldly renunciation to become a monk at Jiankang's Tongtai Monastery 同泰寺, and of his return to the throne only after court officials presented a ransom for his release. When worshipping the Buddha, he changed into a monk's robe, a *kaṣāya*, marking a sartorial as well as spiritual transition from emperor to monk and from a secular to a religious role. He assumed the epithet of "emperor-bodhisattva," *huang di pu sa* 皇帝菩薩, further merging his secular and religious identities. When sacrificing in the imperial ancestral hall, he did not make live offerings. This last description is not marked out as specifically or exclusively Buddhist in *Wei shu*. From its juxtaposition with other explicitly Buddhist practices and from Wei Shou's inclusion of a general opening statement of Emperor Wu's Buddhist beliefs, though, there is little choice but to infer that the cause of ritual reform is the emperor's observation of Buddhist precepts. The strategy of setting actions of ambiguous religious affiliation in explicitly Buddhist contexts, in order to taint Buddhism through association, recurred in seventh-century representations of Emperor Wu.

[12] See, for example, Wang Cheng's 王澄 memorial of protest against Wei Empress Hu's sponsorship of Buddhism, submitted in the winter of 518: ibid., 114.3044–47.

[13] Ibid., 98.2187.

Textual structure is crucial here as a strategy of representation. *Wei shu*'s most extensive association of Emperor Wu with Buddhism, offered in the voice of the text's impersonal narrator at the conclusion to Emperor Wu's biography, appears among accounts of Liang dynastic decline. It immediately follows a vivid description of Emperor Wu's defeat by Hou Jing. It precedes (and so appears as an implicit cause of) criticisms of the burden of official corruption on the common people, of disloyalty among the military, of the debauchery of the nobility, and of the disintegration of social relationships. An anachronistic setting betrays Wei Shou's manipulation of his text: Emperor Wu's conversion to Buddhism pre-dated the decline of his state by over forty years; it is only forced into this late stage of *Wei shu*'s structure through the use of a telling time marker, "before this," *chu* 初. The result is that the whole analysis is shot through with irony. When we learn at the end of this section that fire razed the Tongtai Monastery and that "those in the know all recognized that [Emperor Wu] would be destroyed,"[14] as readers of *Wei shu* we are also "in the know" – we have the advantage of historical hindsight and we have also just been reminded of the violent circumstances of Emperor Wu's downfall. True, Wei Shou does not offer Buddhism as the only cause of dynastic collapse, and elsewhere in *Wei shu*'s text he accords it more sympathetic treatment,[15] but its practice by an arrogant and deluded Emperor Wu is central to the analysis of his overthrow.

Jin lou zi

As Wei Shou worked on his *Wei shu* between 551 and 554, Liang's Prince of Xiangdong 湘東郡王, Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–555), worked on a collection of essays entitled *Jin lou zi*. Xiao Yi's purported aim was to produce a series of writings that reflected his personal thoughts on a range of issues, what he called "statements of my own," and that cultivated his self-image.[16] Internal textual evidence suggests that Xiao Yi completed this ten-*juan* work in either 554 or 555: it was a close contemporary of *Wei shu*.[17] Its authorship suggests that its sympathies tended in a different direction to those of Wei Shou, though. As Emperor Wu's son and, from 552, his imperial successor, Xiao Yi had a

14 Ibid., 98.2187–88.

15 See, for example, the monograph on Buddhism in *Wei shu*, 114.3025–48.

16 Xiaofei Tian, "The Twilight of the Masters: Masters Literature (*zishu*) in Early Medieval China," *JAOS* 126.4, 2006: 465–86.

17 Xiao Yi refers to himself as aged 46 *sui* in Xu Deping 許德平, ed., *Jin lou zi jiao zhu* 金樓子校注, Taibei: Jiaxin shui ni gong si wen hua ji jin hui, 1969, 6.102. This gives a date of 554. He was killed in Jiangling the following year by invading Western Wei troops.

strong personal and political motivation to offer a positive account of his father's rule. That is borne out in his text. A biography of Emperor Wu appears at the end of the opening *juan* of the extant edition, entitled "Sovereigns in the Ascendant" 興王. Unlike in *Wei shu*, where Emperor Wu appears among the biographies of barbarians, he is in illustrious company in *Jin lou zi*. It is clear from elsewhere in Xiao Yi's text that, in fashioning a self-image, he concerned himself with affirming the authority of his descent: he claimed an obligation to produce *Jin lou zi* as part of a tradition that took in the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, and Sima Qian, for example.[18] The same concern with legitimacy also shaped his biography of Emperor Wu, which Xiao Yi placed at the end of a series of biographies stretching back to the sources of sovereignty in China. He thereby established his father's (and, by implied extension, his own) legitimate imperial power and moral rectitude. And more, by according the last and longest biography to Emperor Wu, Xiao Yi represented his father as the culmination of that political and historical lineage.[19]

For an individual whose relationship with the Buddhist church appears elsewhere to have forged an imperial identity, what stands out from *Jin lou zi*'s biography of Emperor Wu is its lack of explicit reference to Buddhism.[20] Mention of the *śramana* Shi Senghui 釋僧輝 focuses on his skill in physiognomy. There is also reference to Emperor Wu's austerity. As we shall see, this appeared in the seventh century juxtaposed with accounts of the emperor's Buddhist beliefs. In *Jin lou zi*, by contrast, an austere lifestyle carries no specific religious overtones: it is a marker of general moral rectitude. With a faint echo of the vegetarian reforms to ritual that drew Wei Shou's notice and endured in later accounts, we hear of Emperor Wu's abstinence in his performance of rituals at the imperial ancestral temple. Xiao Yi makes no explicit association with either vegetarianism or Buddhism, though. Abstinence

[18] *Jin lou zi jiao zhu*, 4.152.

[19] The troubled transmission of *Jin lou zi* makes a structural analysis tentative at best. Extant versions ultimately trace back to the 15th-c. *Yong le da dian* 永樂大典. The fragments contained there possibly derived from a now-lost edition by Ye Sen 葉森 dated March 11, 1343. Zhong Shilun 鐘仕倫, *Jin lou zi yan jiu* 《金樓子》研究 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 2004), pp. 29–43, reviews the evidence. Liu Hongbo 刘洪波 also offers a useful reminder that textual corruptions remain in present versions of the text: "*Jin lou zi* 'Xing wang' jiao du zha ji" 《金樓子•興王》校读札记, *Gu ji zheng li yan jiu xue kan* 古籍整理研究学刊 2008.2: 38–40.

[20] The paucity of explicit references to Buddhism is a general feature of *Jin lou zi*'s text. Zhong Shilun has identified a religious agenda from which an essentially Buddhist Emperor Wu emerges with syncretic sympathies; Zhong, *Jin lou zi yan jiu*, pp. 95–97. Such a reading finds little support in the biography of Emperor Wu. Here, the sole evidence of syncretism lies in the laconic claim that the Liang founder "possessed everything from both inner and outer [traditions]," *Jin lou zi jiao zhu*, 1.47.

serves instead as a demonstration of Emperor Wu's propriety in ritual observance. The construction of monasteries, a target of criticism in *Wei shu* and the focus of much controversy in seventh-century texts, attracts attention here too, but again it lacks any strong Buddhist resonance. Its function in *Jin lou zi* is the opposite – to develop the image of a filial son. Xiao Yi offers us evidence only of the monasteries dedicated to the memory of Emperor Wu's parents, not of the resource-sapping programme of state-wide Buddhist construction that we read about elsewhere.

The omission of explicit references to Buddhism allowed Xiao Yi to establish a traditional framework of legitimacy. This would have been important to a ruler whose grip on power remained insecure in the immediate aftermath of Emperor Wu's reforms to the imperial institution and their traumatic conclusion in Hou Jing's rebellion. Three features therefore dominate *Jin lou zi*'s account of Emperor Wu's rule. The first is a slew of mythopoeic anecdotes that casts Emperor Wu in the role of sage-emperor. Above all, he is seen to evoke a favourable response from the spirit world, which supported many of his endeavours. Xiao Yi's silence on the circumstances of Emperor Wu's downfall is telling, especially when we infer that he produced his biography retrospectively: he writes that Emperor Wu "was on the throne for fifty years," suggesting that he was able to look back over the full span of that reign.[21] Had he offered an account of his father's violent death at the hands of Hou Jing, as did his contemporary Wei Shou, it would have undermined the eulogistic tone of the whole biography and would have called into particular question the spiritual efficacy of Emperor Wu's rule that Xiao Yi was at pains to establish.

Second, Emperor Wu emerges as a patron of culture. His personal dedication to a broad range of scholarship is emphasized.[22] Later authors sympathetic to Emperor Wu revisited this trait and took it as evidence of his syncretism: they cited in support his erudite understanding of specific texts from the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist canons. No such implication makes itself felt in *Jin lou zi*, where Emperor Wu's cultural achievements serve only in a general way to buttress Xiao Yi's account of his father's other prodigious talents.

What stand out above all in *Jin lou zi*'s biography are expressions of Emperor Wu's extreme moral rectitude, especially his filial piety.

21 Ibid., 1.51.

22 This also finds expression in ibid., 8.118, where Emperor Wu appears as an outstanding literary talent, one of eleven lauded as a member of Southern Qi prince Xiao Ziliang's famous "forest of scholars."

On the death of his mother he surpassed in grief that canonical paragon of filial mourning, Gao Chai 高柴.[23] The death of his father sent him into a coma. In the standard contemporary rhetoric of filial piety, his father's burial caused him to "vomit several litres of blood, and no liquids passed his lips for four days."[24] The description of his grief yields further allusions to Gao Chai: we are told with an echo from *Li ji* 禮記 that he "never [laughed] so as to show his teeth."[25] These canonical resonances receive explicit endorsement in the final, hyperbolic phrase of Emperor Wu's biography: "no doubt the only four men in myriad ages who discoursed on filial piety were Shun of Yu, Yu of Xia, Wen of Zhou, and Emperor [Wu] of Liang."[26] We are left with an emperor who stands among the highest echelons of the Confucian pantheon.

Li dai san bao ji

Over forty years after Xiao Yi, Fei Changfang 費長房 (*fl.* late sixth century) did not share the same impulse to avoid mention of Buddhism in his catalogue raisonné and chronicle of Buddhist scholarship, *Li dai san bao ji*.[27] Quite the opposite: he took care to establish a Buddhist identity for much of Liang Emperor Wu's rule. Fraught personal interests were at stake. Fei Changfang served as a Scholar of Canonical Translation in Chang'an's Daxingshan Monastery 大興善寺 in the late 590s, when he sat down to produce *Li dai san bao ji*. Only twenty years earlier, though, he had been a victim of the sweeping anti-Buddhist purges between 574 and 578, when Northern Zhou Emperor Wu (r. 560–578) had defrocked members of the Buddhist clergy, including Fei Changfang himself.[28] *Li dai san bao ji*'s stated purpose was to recommend Buddhism to the contemporary Sui ruler, presumably with the intention of redressing the previous personal wrongs that the imperial state had visited upon Fei Changfang and his beliefs. There were also

[23] Gao Chai, a disciple of Confucius, during the period of mourning for his parents purportedly wept blood for three years and never showed his teeth by laughing; *Li ji zheng yi* 禮記正義 (*Shi san jing zhu shu* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 2003), 7.55A.

[24] Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1973), 47.648, 47.654, uses the same formula in biographies of those of "filial conduct" 孝行.

[25] *Li ji zheng yi*, 7.55A.

[26] *Jin lou zi jiao zhu*, 1.51–52.

[27] *Li dai san bao ji*'s preface is dated February 4, 598; *T.*, vol. 49, no. 2034: 15.120B. Ōuchi Fumio 大内文雄 offers a useful analysis of the work: "*Rekidai sanbōki* no ichi kenkyū" 歴代三宝紀の一研究, *Bukkyō shigaku kenkyū* 佛教史學研究 25.2, 1983: 2–13. Chen Yuan 陳垣 also provides a brief survey in *Zhongguo fo jiao shi ji gai lun* 中國佛教史籍概論 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1962), pp. 5–12.

[28] *Li dai san bao ji*, 15.120A. Daoxuan supplies sketchy biographical details for Fei Changfang in *Da Tang nei dian lu* 大唐內典錄, *T.*, vol. 55, no. 2149: 5.279C; and in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* 續高僧傳, *T.*, vol. 50, no. 2060: 2.436B.

larger issues of political patronage at work. In the memorial that accompanied *Li dai san bao ji*'s presentation to the throne Fei recognized that the welfare of Buddhist doctrine rested on the sympathy of individual emperors and sovereigns. It was therefore crucial to offer a recent example of successful imperial patronage of the Buddhist church, one that would serve as a point of contrast against which to emphasize the fallacy of Northern Zhou Emperor Wu's anti-Buddhist policy. Liang Emperor Wu served that purpose.

Fei Changfang had a further political motivation to offer a favourable characterization of Liang Emperor Wu. He based the annals sections of *Li dai san bao ji* on the year titles of the Southern Dynasties. His choice of nomenclature reflected the same political sympathy: in the annals sections, too, Emperor Wu appears as "emperor," *di* 帝, a title that his imperial rivals do not receive. These editorial choices suggest that Fei Changfang claimed legitimacy for his own Sui dynasty at one remove from Liang (the transmission of power passed from Liang to Northern Zhou to Sui).[29] This marks a contrast with Wei Shou, who upheld the legitimacy of Eastern Wei and Northern Qi. It suggests instead a degree of alignment with the political interests of *Jin lou zi*.

The annals sections of *Li dai san bao ji* offer an overview of Buddhist activity during Liang. There are frequent references to production of *sūtras* and works of textual criticism in the early part of Emperor Wu's reign; *Li dai san bao ji*'s primary function was as a catalogue of Buddhist writings. Those works that appeared from 508 on resulted from imperial commissions, marking Emperor Wu as a prolific patron of Buddhist textual scholarship. Emperor Wu's establishment of the Tongtai Monastery (though not of other monasteries) receives mention, and three of his visits to that monastery, on November 8, 521, in the third lunar month of 527, and on November 1, 529, also find a place in *Li dai san bao ji*'s annals. On the last of these visits, we hear that Emperor Wu renounced his secular duties for fifteen days before returning to the imperial palace at the request of his court officials. Fei Changfang also recorded Hou Jing's defection from Wei and rebellion against Liang – he did not adopt as extreme a textual strategy as Xiao Yi's complete omission of these events – but he afforded them only a terse mention. True, these are annals and there is little space for detail, but there is a contrast all the same with graphic descriptions of the same episode that Wei Shou provided in *Wei shu*.

29 See, too, Fei Changfang's explicit statement on the transmission of political legitimacy in *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.94B. By contrast, Northern Zhou claimed legitimacy as the successor to one of Liang's northern rivals, Western Wei; *Bei shi*, 9.331–32.

Fei Changfang supplied more extensive and focussed representations of Emperor Wu elsewhere in his text. Four themes deserve particular attention here since they were recycled by seventh-century authors, both explicitly Buddhist and apparently secular. First, Emperor Wu appears successful in securing spiritual support for the Liang state. This is familiar stuff: it also appeared in *Jin lou zi*. In *Li dai san bao ji*, though, spiritual support relates directly to Buddhist piety. Emperor Wu believed that the stability of his regime "was based on the *Triratna* above, relied on the four heavens in the middle, and depended on the assistance of the *nāgarājas* and *devas* below. Thus all types of people in the world finally obtained security and happiness."[30] His worldly renunciations caused the ground to shake, evidence of their spiritual efficacy. His acts of filial piety also appear in the context of an attempt to commune with the spirit world. And the constant programme of vegetarian feasts and doctrinal lectures that Emperor Wu instigated to propagate Buddhist teachings emerges as a product of his desire, as he himself put it, to "reach out to the infinite."[31] For Fei Changfang, who hoped to gain favour for Buddhism at the Sui court, this would have been powerful stuff. His representation of Emperor Wu's engagement with the supernatural and his extension of authority beyond the physical realm pointed up the superiority of Buddhism's metaphysical sophistication. More than that, *Li dai san bao ji*'s impersonal narrator suggests that Emperor Wu's ability to control his subjects in this world rested on the efficacy of his Buddhist piety in harnessing supernatural support. Emperor Wu's example showed Fei Changfang's Sui ruler, who in 598 was still relatively insecure in the control of his own state, that Buddhism could be deployed to develop strong, autocratic power.

Second, Fei Changfang describes Emperor Wu's programme of opulent monastic construction. This description immediately follows the assertion of Buddhism's spiritual and political efficacy, and that affects our reading of it. The juxtaposition suggests that Emperor Wu's building projects contributed to his ability to procure divine assistance and, as a corollary, to the longevity of his rule. We are far from the images of futility and wastefulness that emerged from Wei Shou's description of the same policy.

Third, Emperor Wu appears as a patron of scholarship, as he did in *Jin lou zi*. Here, though, Fei Changfang's account diverges from its earlier close focus on Buddhism. Emperor Wu's support for learning

[30] *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.99B.
[31] Ibid.

is seen to have a universal aim as he sought equality of social opportunity for those who lagged behind in their education. A concern with general scholarship also makes itself felt on a personal level. We have heard elsewhere in *Li dai san bao ji* of Emperor Wu's frequent issue of commissions for works of Buddhist textual criticism; his promotion of doctrinal learning profited both clergy and laity alike.[32] We also learn of the emperor's deep knowledge of the past and of past texts, not only Buddhist but of variegated intellectual traditions. Fei Changfang notes Emperor Wu's exegeses on *Li ji*, *Zhou shu*, *Zuo zhuan*, *Zhuang zi*, *Lao zi*, *Lun yu*, *Xiao jing*, and "even that which past thinkers had failed to grasp in detail and former scholars had abandoned."[33] This moves beyond *Jin lou zi*'s vague references to erudition. We now have a sharply focussed representation of a ruler with formidable intellectual talents and syncretic interests.

Fourth, Emperor Wu is marked out by the austerity of his lifestyle and devotion to imperial responsibilities. His early awakening to attend the affairs of state; his liberality and compassion; his abstinence from banqueting and music; the plain dress of imperial consorts; his own coarse clothing and bedding; his personal vegetarianism and the implementation of vegetarian sacrificial offerings: these are the images of Emperor Wu that dominate Fei Changfang's account.[34] They recurred in seventh-century representations of Emperor Wu, but shed their specific religious content when taken in isolation and out of context. In *Li dai san bao ji*, by contrast, they assume an explicitly pro-Buddhist tone. Here is the image of a ruler whose political successes were ultimately linked to his Buddhist piety.

Three texts, in chronological sequence, have drawn out the main seams of discourse that competed for the attention of sixth-century readers. For us, they establish an analytic framework for what follows and suggest some of the major textual strategies that shaped later representations of Emperor Wu. We will now turn to those later representations, from the seventh century. To do that, though, we will first examine a source that spans the sixth and seventh centuries. It will, above all, bring together the major thematic concerns that made themselves felt in representations of Emperor Wu at this time.

[32] Ibid., 11.94B.
[33] Ibid., 11.99C.
[34] Ibid.

AN EARLY CRITIC: XUN JI

In the eighth lunar month of 547 an Attendant-in-ordinary and Imperial Classical Expositor of Eastern Wei, Xun Ji 荀濟 (d. 547), took part in an assassination plot against the chief minister of that state, Gao Cheng 高澄 (521–549). The plot was discovered. Xun Ji was boiled alive with his co-conspirators on September 27, 547.[35] Xun Ji was not originally from Eastern Wei. His family had lived for generations in the lower Yangzi region, in the territories of the Southern Dynasties. Xun Ji had even developed a personal acquaintance with Emperor Wu before the latter's enthronement.[36] Why, then, was he serving as a court official in the northern state of Eastern Wei in 547? An answer lies in Xun Ji's short official biography in *Bei shi* 北史. Two incidents of Xun Ji's life attracted the attention of his biographer. One was his assassination plot and death. The other was his defiant opposition to Emperor Wu's rule. This culminated in a letter to the Liang throne in which we are told that Xun Ji criticized Buddhism and, above all, Emperor Wu's excessive expenditure on the construction of Buddhist buildings.[37] A rift developed between the two men as a result, and Emperor Wu issued an order for Xun Ji's execution. Xun Ji escaped his sentence by fleeing to Eastern Wei.

Despite the apparent importance of Xun Ji's letter, it has not survived in sixth-century sources. We access it only through a series of early Tang textual filters. As we have seen, a sketch of its main themes appears in *Bei shi*, completed in 659. A fuller version of the letter's content is preserved in *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集, a compilation of writings on Buddhist themes completed in 664 by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), abbot of Chang'an's Ximing Monastery 西明寺.[38] It appears there among a selection of anti-Buddhist critiques. Daoxuan intended the letter and the personal commentary that he appended to it as a response to *Gao shi zhuan* 高識傳, an early seventh-century work by the Tang Grand Astrologer Fu Yi 傅奕 (555–639) that "assembled those [writings] since Wei and Jin that had opposed Buddhist doctrine."[39] *Gao shi*

[35] *Bei shi*, 5.196–97, 6.233, 83.2786; *Wei shu*, 12.313–34; Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1956), 160.4959–60; *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.131B.

[36] References to Xun Ji's background appear on *Bei shi*, 83.2786; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 160.4959; *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.128C.

[37] *Bei shi*, 83.2786.

[38] *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.128C–131B. A brief examination of *Guang hong ming ji* appears in Chen Yuan, *Zhongguo fo jiao shi ji gai lun*, pp. 52–59. Daoxuan is discussed below.

[39] *Jiu Tang shu*, 79.2717; the work was in general circulation during Tang but is no longer extant. Daoxuan provides the most complete indication available of its nature and scope. References to *Gao shi zhuan* also appear in: Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tang shu*

zhuan contained a version of Xun Ji's letter, which Fu Yi included in a section under the heading of "People with Superior Knowledge" 高識之人. This was the likely source text for Daoxuan's *Guang hong ming ji* and the extant version of Xun Ji's letter.[40] We are dealing with a text that crosses temporal boundaries: an expression of sixth-century values reframed to suit seventh-century, early Tang agendas.

Xun Ji concerns himself in particular with the economic and political consequences of policies that he attributes to Emperor Wu's Buddhist beliefs. These consequences received brief and scattered attention in non-Buddhist texts from before the Tang, such as Wei Shou's *Wei shu*; they appeared in eulogistic terms in *Li dai san bao ji*, with its pro-Buddhist agenda. Xun Ji's letter acts as a corrective to both. It offers a systematic and critical response to the practical effects of policies identified with Emperor Wu's Buddhism. It emphasizes in explicit terms a causal link between Buddhism and the downfall of the Liang state. It therefore sharpens the broad criticisms of Wei Shou's sixth-century work and moves beyond them. In general, Xun Ji's letter set the tone for much anti-Buddhist criticism of Emperor Wu in the seventh century. As a result, many of Xun Ji's specific concerns will recur in what follows: the vegetarian reforms of imperial ancestral sacrifices; Emperor Wu's personal dedication to Buddhist worship; the Buddhist clergy's failure to contribute to state economic growth; the effects on state resources of imperial donations to the Buddhist clergy and the extensive construction of Buddhist buildings and images; the emperor's practice of convening large assemblies and doctrinal lectures; the Buddhist clergy's subversion of imperial authority and responsibility for political disruption since the fall of the Han dynasty.

Xun Ji frames his arguments in a well-worn rhetorical structure. He begins by establishing a broad moral foundation for his criticisms through canonical and historical references. He defines himself as a guardian of the values on which political legitimacy was traditionally based. Reform to canonical rituals occupies much of his attention here,

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新唐書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1975), 58.1483; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 195.6151; Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tong zhi* 通志 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1987), 65.779a; Wang Yinglin 王應麟, *Yu hai* 玉海 (Nanjing: Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she, 1987), 55.19b, 58.15b–16a; Peng Dayi 彭大翼, *Shan tang si kao* 山堂肆考 (*Ying yin Wen yuan ge Si ku quan shu* edn., vol. 976), 123.27b–28a.

[40] *Guang hong ming ji*, 6.123c. The omission of the letter's contents from other surviving sources complicates our critical task by depriving us of a yardstick against which to analyse the text that survives. It is clear from internal evidence that Daoxuan abridged his source text but the extent of his intervention is undetectable in the absence of a comparable version. Despite such critical uncertainties, there is little choice but to follow *Guang hong ming ji*, remaining alert at all times to the possibility of textual manipulation and ideological slanting that may reflect the different chronological layers of the letter's transmission.

though he also notes other violations of prescribed divisions – between Han Chinese and barbarians; between rulers and ministers – that were common in the discourse of political legitimacy by the sixth and seventh centuries. Xun Ji then narrows his focus to deal in close detail with economic and political themes. The greed of the Buddhist clergy and the financial drain that it placed on the state; Buddhism's lack of efficacy in statecraft; the Buddhist church's usurpation of imperial status and power: all draw his critical notice. These themes, then, will shape our present analysis of Xun Ji's letter.[41]

Moral Foundations

The practical concerns of the later sections of Xun Ji's letter are coloured by the ideological agenda of its opening. Xun Ji begins with a complex of canonical allusions to "the writings of the three divine emperors and five sovereigns" and "the four fundamental virtues and six subsidiary social relationships."[42] These phrases ring with the authority of *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, *Guan zi* 管子, and the apocryphal *Li wei* 禮緯.[43] They root Xun Ji's letter in the values of cosmic hierarchy, moral rectitude, and social order that ensure the survival of the state and the efficacy of imperial rule. This canonically-informed order is what Buddhism undermines. With echoes from *Li wei*, Xun Ji suggests that during the period of political division in which Liang arose, Buddhism "caused relations between fathers and sons to grow distant, proper conduct between rulers and subjects to deviate, rifts to develop in the harmony between husbands and wives, and trust between friends to be broken."[44] At the end of the letter, Buddhism's disintegration of these

[41] Sections of Xun Ji's letter appear in translation in: Kenneth Ch'en, "Anti-Buddhist Propaganda During The Nan-ch'ao," *HJAS* 15.1/2, 1952: 184–92; Paul Magnin, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Huisi (515–577)* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1979), pp. 147–51; Andreas E. Janousch, "The Reform of Imperial Ritual during the Reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–549)" (PhD. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1998), pp. 232–37.

[42] *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.128C.

[43] "The writings of the three divine emperors and the five sovereigns" (*san fen wu dian* 三墳五典): *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zheng yi* 春秋左傳正義 (*Shi san jing zhu shu* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 2003), 45.362B. "The four fundamental virtues" (*si wei* 四維): Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳, ed., *Guan zi jiao zhu* 管子校注 (*Xin bian zhu zi ji cheng* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 2004), 1.2–3, 1.11; see also the glosses assembled in Guo Moruo 郭沫若 et al., eds., *Guan zi ji jiao* 管子集校 (Beijing: Ke xue chu ban she, 1956), pp. 5–6, 9. The term appears, too, in Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) sub-commentary on *Shang shu zheng yi* 尚書正義 (*Shi san jing zhu shu* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 2003), 15.104B; *Guan zi* is cited as the *locus classicus.* "The four fundamental virtues" are ritual propriety, righteous behaviour, modesty, and a sense of honour. "The six subsidiary social relationships" (*liu ji* 六紀): *Li wei* 禮緯, ap. *Li ji zheng yi*, 39.312C (cf. Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Jūshū Isho shūsei* 重修緯書集成 [Tōkyō: Meitoku shuppansha, 1971], vol.3, p. 52); Ban Gu 班固, *Bai hu tong shu zheng* 白虎通疏證, Chen Li 陳立, ed. (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 1997), 8.373–74.

[44] *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.128C. cf. *Li wei*, ap. *Li ji zheng yi*, 39.312C: "The six subsidiary

canonical relationships explicitly affects the Liang dynasty itself.[45] The tension between Buddhism and the canonical values with which Xun Ji aligns himself underlies the arguments that follow.

From this broad base, Xun Ji develops a close moral attack on Emperor Wu. He has three main concerns: vegetarian reforms to the ritual of imperial ancestral sacrifices and the neglect of sacrifices prescribed by canonical tradition; the emperor's belief in a barbarian religion; Emperor Wu's subservience to the Buddhist clergy and the disintegration of the canonically-prescribed hierarchy between ruler and minister (ironically, the same hierarchy that Xun Ji is seen to violate in his *Bei shi* biography).[46]

All three concerns received varying degrees of attention in later texts, but one deserves particular mention here. It illustrates how Xun Ji cast Emperor Wu as a Buddhist ruler. Xun Ji claims the vegetarian reforms to imperial ancestral sacrifice as the product of a specifically Buddhist ideology. The implication is that Buddhism destabilized the traditional foundations of political legitimacy. Yet we have seen in *Wei shu* that even Wei Shou did not make the sort of explicit association that Xun Ji draws between Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms and Buddhism; it is left for the reader to infer. That association did not always make itself felt elsewhere in the seventh century either. By casting the reforms as expressly Buddhist, though, Xun Ji is able to represent them as heterodox: they violated the canonical principles that he himself espoused. The use of blood offerings in traditional ritual, including at the imperial ancestral temple, traced to the prescriptions of *Li ji.* For Xun Ji, a vegetarian version of the same rites had no place in discourse on political and ritual legitimacy. He also leaves open to implication the sense of a sacramental as well as a symbolic failing here: Emperor Wu's reforms not only deprived Liang of the sanction conferred by high antiquity, but also threatened the security of the state's protection by celestial powers.[47] There was more than just ritual corruption at stake. The moral values that Emperor Wu violated with his vegetar-

social relationships mean that fathers practise good conduct, uncles conduct themselves righteously, family members observe hierarchies, elder and younger brothers have close relations, teachers and elders receive respect, and friends maintain old acquaintances."

45 *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.131B.

46 Ibid., 7.129A.

47 *Li ji zheng yi*, 24.211A. Terry Kleeman, "Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China,' *AM* 3d ser. 7.1, 1994: 185–211, examines Chinese traditions of blood sacrifice. His focus is the connection between blood sacrifice and the establishment and preservation of social and political hierarchies – the dominant concern of Xun Ji's letter, in fact.

ian reforms were those that made up the fabric of canonical Confucian ideology, preserved celestial relations, and conferred political legitimacy. Compromising those values undermined the hierarchies of Liang society, precipitated social and political turmoil, and even threatened the weal of the human world. Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms, now established as the direct product of his Buddhist beliefs, are seen to subvert his authority as emperor and disqualify him from the established scheme of legitimacy.

Economic Effects

Economic concerns loom large for Xun Ji – that much is clear from *Bei shi*'s terse statement on the content of his letter. In addition to general criticism of Buddhist doctrine, that text picks out Xun Ji's claim that "the cost of construction [of Buddhist buildings] was too great."[48] In the letter itself, Xun Ji claims that the Liang Buddhist clergy was morally corrupt.[49] This corruption had its roots in greed: the doctrine of the Liang Buddhist church was "miserly and avaricious" and occupied with material wealth.[50] The displacement of moral virtue by material concerns is central to Xun Ji's assault on the authority of the Buddhist church, and the same theme reappears in four of five "points of irregularity," *bu jing* 不經, that he identifies in Liang Buddhist practices.[51]

Greed had an impact on the welfare of the state. The Buddhist clergy, Xun Ji argues, wasted state resources and manpower on constructing temples.[52] Its failure to contribute economically to society exacerbated the problem.[53] The fault traces back to Emperor Wu, who appears personally responsible for deploying state resources to supply the demands of the Buddhist church.[54] Once again, the implication is that the Liang emperor forfeited his claim to legitimate power as a result: the obligation of a ruler to secure his state's economy had roots in a well-established political discourse.[55]

48 *Bei shi*, 83.2786.

49 See, e.g., his statement that adherents of Buddhism "practise depraved acts and kill children; monks and nuns all act in this way," *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.129c.

50 Ibid.

51 In the context of the opposition that Xun Ji establishes between the principles of Confucian ritual and Buddhist doctrine, the expression that Xun Ji uses here, "*bu jing* 不經," could translate as "uncanonical."

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 7.129b, 7.130a.

54 Ibid., 7.129c.

55 This ideal rested on canonical authority: the association between virtuous rule and the prosperity of the people suggests itself in, e.g., *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zheng yi*, 28.215b. Even a small handful of examples suggests that the same ideal made itself felt broadly, across a range

Xun Ji's economic arguments find their place in contemporary discussions of Emperor Wu. We have already heard of criticisms in *Wei shu* of Liang's imperially-sponsored programmes of Buddhist construction. The financial and social effects of those programmes also lay at the heart of an anecdote that Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) included in his late sixth-century *Huan yuan ji* 還冤記.[56] We read there of Liang Emperor Wu's orders to procure materials for the construction of a temple in the tomb complex of his father.[57] In Nanjin 南津, in the far south of the country, a local official tries to appropriate from a wealthy merchant materials for the temple's construction in the hope of currying favour with the imperial court; we infer that this is a state-wide problem. The official executes the merchant on spurious charges, confiscates his possessions, and donates them to the imperial construction project. The merchant soon exacts revenge from beyond the grave, though, and the temple is destroyed by fire. For Yan Zhitui (and for the late tenth-century compilers of *Tai ping guang ji*, in which his anecdote survives) the chief interest must have been the homily that suggested itself from the cause and effect of political corruption and ghostly retribution. But, importantly for us, the anecdote's moral lessons grew from a critique of the drain on private economic resources and the social divisiveness created by the building of an imperially

of competing ideological agendas: Wu Yujiang 吳毓江, ed., *Mo zi jiao zhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1993), 6.247, 6.254, 6.262; Wang Xianqian 王先謙, ed., *Xun zi ji jie* 荀子集解 (*Zhu zi ji cheng* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1954), 6.114, 6.115–16, 6.119, 6.123, 6.124, 6.126, 7.149; *Guan zi jiao zhu*, 15.924, 16.960, 17.1015; Liu An 劉安, *Huai nan zi* 淮南子 (*Zhu zi ji cheng* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1954), 9.146, 9.148. Of particular interest to the present paper are recurrent warnings, from the pre-imperial period on, against a ruler's expenditure on extravagant buildings and the potential damage that it might do to the common weal. See, e.g.: *Xun zi ji jie*, 7.148; Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, ed., *Han Fei zi ji shi* 韓非子集釋 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1958), 2.152, 17.887; *Huai nan zi*, 9.138–39, 9.145–46.

56 This anecdote survives in the 10th-c. *Tai ping guang ji* 太平廣記, Li Fang 李昉 et al., eds. (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1961), 120.845. It does not appear in editions of the one-*juan* version of *Huan yuan ji* to which I have had access, where events contained in the anecdotes date no later than the 5th c. It would seem that extant one-*juan* versions of the text have not been transmitted in original form, though. The work appears in three *juan* under the title *Huan yuan zhi* 還冤志 in *Chong wen zong mu* 崇文總目 (*Ying yin Wen yuan ge Si ku quan shu* edn., vol. 674), 6.1a; Tuotuo 脫脫, *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1977), 206.5219. The same title is used in You Mao 尤袤, *Suichu tang shu mu* 遂初堂書目 (Beijing: Xian dai chu ban she, 1987), 33, omitting the number of *juan*. By the mid-13th c. there is already evidence of either textual loss or restructuring. The work recorded in *Zhi zhai shu lu jie ti* 直齋書錄解題 as *Bei Qi Huan yuan zhi* 北齊還冤志 comprises only two *juan*, for example: Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhi zhai shu lu jie ti* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1987), 11.317. Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 reviews the bibliographic evidence in *Si ku ti yao bian zheng* 四庫提要辨證 (Beijing: Ke xue chu ban she, 1958), 18.1139–40.

57 In a parallel version of the anecdote that appears in *Zi zhi tong jian*, 157.4870, Sima Guang names the temple as the Huangji Temple.

sponsored temple.[58] Here, then, is indirect support for the criticisms to which Xun Ji gives vent. Even when, in his *Yan shi jia xun* 顏氏家訓, Yan Zhitui defended Buddhism against charges that it undermined statecraft, he still dismissed the idea of turning over farmland to monasteries and ordaining large numbers of clergy. It was "contrary to the original intention of the great enlightenment," he suggested, and it confused private and public interests.[59]

Another near-contemporary argument demands consideration as we review Xun Ji's letter. It proposed that the Liang court's support of Buddhist temple construction was not pernicious, as Xun Ji claimed or as Yan Zhitui's anecdote implied; it simply lacked political efficacy. For that reason alone, Buddhism did not deserve a place in imperial statecraft. Those were the broad outlines of the case that Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (*fl.* 560s–570s) made in a letter to the Northern Zhou throne in 567, as he weighed up the political merits of Buddhism against a canonical Way of high antiquity. Daoxuan included Wei Yuansong's letter in the same section of *Guang hong ming ji* as Xun Ji's: they were both anti-Buddhist critiques. Yet Wei Yuansong had once been a Buddhist monk and his assessment of Buddhism's role in statecraft was more complex as a result. Like Xun Ji, he took Liang as an example of a state that patronized Buddhism. Like Xun Ji, too, he focussed in particular on Liang's programme of temple construction. True, Liang emerged in broadly negative terms: its imperial legacy was short-lived and it was characterized (in Buddhist rhetoric) by political decline. But, unlike for Xun Ji, for Wei Yuansong Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism was

[58] In *Ming bao ji* 冥報記, composed between 653 and 655, the demand for private resources to fund Emperor Wu's Buddhist practices finds equally threatening expression in a tale of what amounts to cosmic blackmail. The emperor refuses to grant an impoverished scholar a post as county magistrate on the grounds that he had earlier failed to fulfil a pledge to contribute money to one of the emperor's several vegetarian feasts; Tang Lin 唐臨, *Ming bao ji* (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1992), A.13.

[59] Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yan shi jia xun ji jie: zeng bu ben* 顏氏家訓集解: 增補本, Wang Liqi 王利器, ed. (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 1996), 5.391. The slant of the Nanjin anecdote, with its focus on temple construction around the tomb of Emperor Wu's father, also supports Yan Zhitui's injunction to his descendants to provide him with simple burial rites and only to employ Buddhist ceremonials as far as their financial situation allowed – a far remove from the extravagant work of construction suggested in *Huan yuan ji*, see ibid., 7.601–2. Although Yan Zhitui made no specific mention of Liang in his *Yan shi jia xun* defence of Buddhism, his dissociation of orthodox doctrine from misguided practice prefigured a discourse on Emperor Wu that endured through the 7th c. and beyond. In the early 8th c., Yao Chong produced an argument against extravagant funerals of all types. He criticized in particular Buddhist mourning rituals and excessive expenditure on Buddhist construction projects. He cited Emperor Wu as a minatory example of an emperor whose thrall to Buddhism precipitated the loss of his state and the destruction of his family. Yao Chong's argument also served as moral instruction to his descendants and displays rhetorical parallels with Yan Zhitui's text; *Jiu Tang shu*, 96.3027–28.

not the proximate cause. Liang construction had held the commendable aim of "transforming the people"; Emperor Wu's efforts had simply been misdirected and ineffective. Though the temples in themselves had therefore not caused political destruction, Wei Yuansong insisted that successful statecraft did not proceed from policies that supported the Buddhist church either.[60] The exemplary ancient figures of Tang and Yu clinched his argument: they had brought long-term peace and stability to their states by according with a canonically-informed Way, without recourse to Buddhist doctrines and temple construction.[61] We are at some remove from Xun Ji's rhetorical fireworks and the claim that Emperor Wu's construction programme precipitated Liang decline. And yet, Wei Yuansong's argument would find itself echoed by even such a trenchant opponent of Buddhism as Han Yu in the early ninth century.

Political Subversion

For Xun Ji, Liang monastic construction was not merely an impotent political force, as Wei Yuansong had it; it actively usurped imperial prerogatives. His letter points up the Buddha's and Buddhist clergy's lack of filial piety and loyalty to the sovereign. "If the whole world accustoms itself to this," he warns, "then Your Highness [Emperor Wu] will lack the means to maintain your own position."[62] Xun Ji also provides a ten-part list in which he thunders against the practical ways in which the Liang Buddhist clergy "has stolen and appropriated the Chinese canon, and has subverted and wrested away the power of the court."[63] With this list, we plunge into a discourse on the proper social and political hierarchy between church and state. Xun Ji starts with the physical, visual displacement of imperial authority. The construction of Buddhist buildings "imitates in usurpatory fashion the imperial

60 *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.132A.

61 Wei Yuansong's letter has received close critical attention in Yu Jiaxi's 余嘉錫 "Wei Yuansong shi ji kao" 衛元嵩事跡考, in *Yu Jiaxi wen shi lun ji* 余嘉錫文史論集 (Changsha: Yue lu shu she, 1997), pp. 217–44, esp. 222–35; and in Tsukamoto Zenryū's 塚本善隆, *Hokuchō bukkyōshi kenkyū* 北朝仏教史研究 (Tōkyō: Daitō shuppansha, 1974), pp. 490–510.

62 *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.129A–B. Xun Ji's etymological interpretation of the common Chinese term for the Buddha, "*fo*" 佛, supports his claim of the Buddha's political rebelliousness: "One whose greed and deceit was extreme was called '*fo*' 佛. A '*fo*' is a rebel. Some named him '*bo*' 勃. A '*bo*' is an insurgent," ibid., 7.129A. This sense of "*fo*" traces to *Li ji zheng yi*, 2.16A. Xun Ji supports his canonically-rooted claim with examples of rebelliousness and a lack of filial piety from throughout the Buddha's life, *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.129B. There is a contemporary relevance too in Xun Ji's response to the Liang Buddhist clergy's failure to contribute to the economy of the state: "How can this not be rebellion on a vast scale?" he asks rhetorically, ibid., 7.129C.

63 Ibid., 7.130C.

residence;" their iconography is "illicitly comparable to" that found in the major sites of Chinese imperial ritual.[64] Xun Ji restates the charge in his later claim that the Buddhist clergy "hangs banners and awnings from tall spires of the monasteries in imitation of the imperial regalia that fill the court."[65]

The attack on lavish Buddhist construction during Liang, which runs parallel to criticisms of the Buddhist clergy's economic drain on the state, again finds ready support among contemporary accounts.[66] One text, diametrically opposite to Xun Ji's letter in its response to the Liang Buddhist church, stands out for particular comparison. While he was Prince of Jin'an 晉安王, Emperor Wu's third son and the future Emperor Jianwen of Liang, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551), wrote an "Elegy to a Bodhi Tree" (*Puti shu song* 菩提樹頌).[67] In breathless rhetoric, he described the magnificent ornamentation of Liang Buddhist buildings, which he claimed were "unique within the boundaries of the state." He went further in his hyperbole: "Surely not even the Palace for Observing the Spirits of the Han empresses nor [the Yellow Emperor] Xuan Yuan's Belvedere for Attending the Immortals would have been adequately able to imitate the forms of auspicious clouds and other such visual illusions."[68] For Xiao Gang, Liang Buddhist construction not only imitated imperial architecture – a claim that Daoxuan would also make in his later *Xu Gao seng zhuan* 續高僧傳[69] – but it even surpassed the highest symbols of that tradition. Of course, this reference to Buddhist structures built under Emperor Wu's patronage functions as a positive example of the emperor's religious devotion. Paradoxically, though, it also supports Xun Ji's opposing argument – that Buddhist buildings imitated imperial models and offered a visual indication of the subversion of imperial authority.

The rest of Xun Ji's ten-point list addresses the Buddhist clergy's symbolic and actual appropriation of political power from Emperor Wu: its translation of Buddhist texts overrides imperial orders; it un-

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] See, for example, accounts of the construction of Buddhist temples in commemoration of Emperor Wu's deceased parents in the following sources: *Liang ji* 梁記, ap. *Bian zheng lun*, 3.504A; *Liang shu*, 3.96; *Jin lou zi jiao zhu*, 1.51. Emperor Wu also made generous provision for the funerals of such prominent Buddhist monks as Baozhi 保誌; Huijiao 慧皎, *Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳, *T.*, vol. 50, no. 2059: 10.394C. Alexander Soper collates textual references to Buddhist architecture and art during the Liang dynasty in *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (New York: Artibus Asiae, 1959), pp. 64–82.

[67] Xiao Gang received the title of Prince of Jin'an in 506, *Liang shu*, 4.103.

[68] *Guang hong ming ji*, 15.204C.

[69] *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.427A–B.

dermines the capacity of the ruler to issue rewards and punishments by selling blessings and redemption fees;[70] the titles that it accords its members challenge the supremacy of the ruler; temple construction and the ordination of laity create an alternative social and political system to rival the emperor's secular power;[71] the Buddhist calendar offers an alternative to the imperially endorsed lunar system; large doctrinal assemblies serve to recruit people to the Buddhist cause and provide a forum for criticism of the imperial system; these same assemblies degrade popular customs;[72] the clergy acts in a sycophantic manner towards those who support it and slanders its critics. "It is intolerable that even one of these ten should exist," Xun Ji insists. "If there is even the slightest sign of any of these starting to burgeon, then it should be met uniformly with execution. Now, though, [the Buddhist clergy] has free rein to spread and implement [its doctrines] and it rejects our kingly influences and customs."[73] Each of the ten arguments finds corroboration in pre- and early-Tang texts, both non-Buddhist and Buddhist. What is significant is the representational spin that Xun Ji gives to each of them. He is explicit that all are Buddhist practices. And all appear in his letter as potential sources for the usurpation of Emperor Wu's political authority. The Buddhist church has no place in the practice of imperial statecraft here.

70 See also Xun Ji's claim on *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.130c that "in eulogizing meritorious achievements or acts of virtue, [the Buddhist clergy] is comparable to the court supplication scribes who recite invocations."

71 A Liang military administrator, Guo Zushen 郭祖深, offered this description: "In the capital … there are over a hundred thousand monks and nuns whose wealth is abundant. Those in the provinces, meanwhile, are too numerous to mention. Furthermore, these men of the Way have lay adherents, and nuns all raise foster daughters. None of them is a registered inhabitant and so the empire has lost almost half of its registered population"; Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1975), 70.1721–22. Xun's implication that the Liang state supported a large Buddhist community also finds echoes among Buddhist accounts. In his *Bian zheng lun*, the 7th-c. monk Falin claimed a total of 2,846 monasteries and 82,700 monks and nuns in Liang territory; *Bian zheng lun*, 3.503b. When these figures appear alongside the statistics that Falin provided for the southern dynasties that preceded and followed Liang, it is clear that there was a significant growth in the Buddhist clergy during Emperor Wu's reign. Jacques Gernet's comment on this kind of growth is suggestive: "Assuming that the figures in fact correspond to the numbers of religious and of monasteries under each period, the explanation for the considerable fluctuation in the size of the monastic community and the construction of religious houses must be political: the favors granted Buddhism by certain emperors are the only cause for the increase in monasteries and monks …"; *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 7.

72 The appearance of Emperor Wu's Buddhist assemblies in later accounts will receive more detailed treatment below. A contemporary description by scholar Xiao Zixian of one of these imperially-commissioned Buddhist assemblies appears in *Guang hong ming ji*, 19. 236b–238a (translated in part in Janousch, "Reform of Imperial Ritual," pp. 163–64).

73 *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.130c.

To add final weight to his argument, Xun Ji makes an explicit connection between the period of political division in which the Liang dynasty arose and Buddhism's destructive influence on the foundations of imperial rule and legitimacy. At the end of his letter, he draws particular attention to Liang's immediate imperial predecessors, Song and Southern Qi. Here were dynasties that met with premature collapse through the indulgent sponsorship of the Buddhist church, Xun Ji argues. He concludes with a political ultimatum: were Emperor Wu to follow the example of his immediate imperial predecessors, he too would precipitate his own downfall.[74] Xun Ji's letter therefore presents the survival of the Liang dynasty as hinging upon Emperor Wu's relationship with the Buddhist church. As Daoxuan recognized in his commentary on the letter, the bleak picture of dynastic destruction leaves little ambiguity as to the focus of criticism: the emperor himself.[75]

IMPERIAL RESPONSES

Xun Ji's arguments found favour in the early seventh century among the seam of anti-Buddhist discourse that questioned Emperor Wu's legitimacy. As we have seen, they attracted direct attention from Tang Grand Astrologer Fu Yi, who included Xun Ji's letter in his *Gao shi zhuan.* Fu Yi emerged in the 620s as a vocal critic of the Buddhist church. In 621 and 624 he presented two memorials to the Tang throne that demanded a reduction in the number of Buddhist temples and clerics, and even the extirpation of Buddhism in Tang territory.[76] His broad arguments echoed Xun Ji's criticisms from the previous century, and as such the appearance of Xun Ji's letter in *Gao shi zhuan* suggests a direct line of influence. Like in Xun Ji's letter, Emperor Wu appeared in Fu Yi's memorial of 624 as a ruler whose support of the Buddhist church undermined political stability and precipitated the downfall of the Liang state.

The suggestion of a causal link between Emperor Wu's patronage of the Buddhist church and his dynasty's downfall found imperial expression too. Early Tang emperors' attitudes to Buddhism based themselves above all on a nuanced sense of *realpolitik.*[77] They ruled over a

[74] Ibid., 7.131B.

[75] Ibid., 7.129C.

[76] 621 memorial: ibid., 7.134A–135A. Arthur Wright, "Fu I and the Rejection of Buddhism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12.1, 1951: 40–5, examines the arguments of this text. 624 memorial: *Jiu Tang shu*, 79.2715–16; cf. Wang Qinruo 王欽若 and Yang Yi 楊億, eds., *Ce fu yuan gui* 冊府元龜 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1960), 916.6a; *Xin Tang shu*, 107.4060–61; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 191.6001–2 (recorded under the fourth lunar month of 626).

[77] See Stanley Weinstein's overview in *Buddhism under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 3–37.

pluralistic state in which the Buddhist church held significant influence. They frequently criticized Buddhist doctrine – Emperor Gaozu voiced his support for Fu Yi, for example – but they also made displays of support for the Buddhist church to serve personal political agendas. Through both criticism and mollification Emperors Gaozu and Taizong sought to assert the dominance of the imperial state over the Buddhist establishment. The model for church-state relations established by the Northern Dynasties therefore endured in the early seventh century. In this context, Liang Emperor Wu presented a dangerous precedent in which secular authorities were seen to relinquish political control over the clergy. Such extremities of Buddhist patronage and the ultimate collapse of the Liang state therefore attracted particular comment.

In 628, the second year of his reign, Emperor Taizong spoke on the influence that a ruler might have on his subjects. It was something that could be used to good or bad effect: a series of canonical examples established the principle. He then turned his attention to a specific case of imperial influence:

> With Liang Emperor Wu and his son, their priorities were frivolous and insubstantial. They delighted only in the doctrines of the Buddha and Laozi. During Emperor Wu's final years, he repeatedly paid visits to Tongtai Monastery and lectured in person on Buddhist *sūtras*. In their tall hats and high shoes, and mounting their carriages to follow in attendance, officials discussed and debated [concepts of] suffering and unreality all day without ever giving thought to state documents on military affairs and civil governance. When Hou Jing led troops to the imperial palace many, from court attendants in the Imperial Secretariat on down, did not know how to mount a horse and so they fled on foot in disarray. The dead lay head to toe along the roads. Emperors Wu and Jianwen ultimately died having been kept captive in seclusion and oppressed by Hou Jing.[78]

As Wei Shou and Xun Ji had done before him, so Taizong argued that the Liang emperors' self-association with the Buddhist church had been more than a mere matter of personal belief; it had affected the whole Liang court, with devastating political consequences.

Censure of Emperor Wu re-emerged towards the end of Emperor Taizong's reign. In 646, less than three years before his death, the emperor composed in person an edict criticizing Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (575–648),

[78] Wu Jing 吳兢, *Zhen guan zheng yao* 貞觀政要 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1978), 6.195.

the Grand Guardian of the Imperial Crown Prince and one of Taizong's most senior government ministers. Xiao Yu was a strong supporter of Buddhism and had been a prominent critic of Fu Yi during the 620s.[79] Taizong at first showed tolerance of Xiao Yu's religious activities, evidence of the emperor's complex relationship with Buddhism.[80] The dispute in 646 was finally triggered by Xiao Yu's vacillation over whether or not to enter the Buddhist clergy. Taizong responded with a sweeping and emphatic declaration that he himself would never take up Buddhist doctrine. A familiar distrust of metaphysical claims made itself felt. Buddhist adherents had no guarantee of receiving future blessings, Taizong argued. Quite the opposite: they had met with disaster in the past. At the centre of all this were the two Liang emperors:

> With Liang [Emperor] Wu's complete devotion to the Buddha, and [Emperor] Jianwen's total preoccupation with Buddhist doctrines, they turned out the state's coffers to supply the *sāṅghika* and exhausted manpower in providing for *stūpas* and temples.[81]

This had led to their deaths, the overthrow of their descendants, and the downfall of their state. The two Liang emperors did not simply serve here as a general warning against a preoccupation with Buddhist doctrine and the danger of subordinating the state's interests to those of the Buddhist church. Since Xiao Yu claimed descent from the Liang imperial house, their example also had a powerful personal relevance. That was clearly in Taizong's mind. His whole edict draws on the rhetoric of opposition between public duty and private desire, an opposition that recurred in seventh-century intellectual discourse.[82] There is an echo here of his 628 statement, too, in which Emperor Wu's personal veneration of Buddhism had disastrous public consequences for his

[79] For the debate between Xiao Yu and Fu Yi, see *Jiu Tang shu*, 79.2716; *Xin Tang shu*, 107.4061; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 191.6002; Zhipan 志磐, *Fo zu tong ji* 佛祖統紀, *T.*, vol. 49, no. 2035: 39.362C–363A; Liu Mi 劉謐, *San jiao ping xin lun* 三教平心論, *T.*, vol. 52, no. 2117: *j. xia*, 788A. Taizong showed support for Fu Yi's criticism of Buddhism soon after coming to the throne in 626; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 192.6029.

[80] See, e.g., his gift even as late as 643 of an embroidery depicting Xiao Yu standing beside the Buddha; *Jiu Tang shu*, 63.2402.

[81] *Jiu Tang shu*, 63.2403; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 198.6240.

[82] This opposition runs through Howard Wechsler's analysis of 7th-c. imperial ritual and political legitimacy in the antithetical concepts of "the empire is open to all" 天下爲公 and "the empire belongs to one family" 天下爲家 that drew the close attention of early Tang rulers and statesmen; *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), esp. pp. ix–x. For a slightly later example of the same discourse, see also David McMullen's treatment of the emphasis on public interest as the antithesis of private desire in his "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," in S.R. Schram, ed., *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), esp. pp. 74–75.

state. In 646 it is Emperor Wu's descendant, Xiao Yu, who would act against the public good to pursue personal interests and to take up a life as a Buddhist monk.

The two accounts of Taizong's criticisms must be treated with care. The sources in which they appear, *Zhen guan zheng yao* 貞觀政要 and *Jiu Tang shu*, were composed by scholars who had the ideological motivation to portray Taizong as an opponent of the Buddhist church. A lack of alternative accounts prevents an examination for evidence of editorial intervention, though.

Whatever these accounts' relation to Taizong's actual words, they display common features in their characterizations of Emperor Wu. They are also consistent with the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse that we have already established. First, Emperor Wu appears distracted by Buddhism from his imperial duties. This received mention in *Wei shu*, though it was less prominent in Xun Ji's letter. It is a particular focus of Taizong's 628 speech. Here Buddhism connotes other-worldly preoccupations; the insecurity of its metaphysical claims is also a point of concern for Taizong in 646. Its damage is done when the emperor's activities influence senior Liang ministers and draw their attention from "state documents on military affairs or civil governance." We are on familiar ground here: the minatory trope of a ruler distracted from the business of state by worldly pleasures or other-worldly concerns was firmly established by the seventh century and was current in contemporary political discourse.[83] Taizong's representation of Emperor Wu therefore stands in diametric opposition to the seams of discourse that Xiao Yi and Fei Changfang developed in the sixth century. They had argued, in different contexts, that Emperor Wu's spiritual authority supported the pragmatic concerns of statecraft under Liang. For Taizong, though, the emperor's role as moral exemplar and a tight control of court politics were threatened by a preoccupation with Buddhist metaphysics. Yet it was precisely the practical and mundane mechanisms of imperial control that emerged as clear priorities for a man anxious to establish his personal authority.

[83] In 628, the year in which Taizong made his speech on Liang imperial influence, scholar Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648) produced a long discussion at court to oppose a policy of enfeoffing imperial relatives. Towards the end of his discussion, he picked out for particular praise the priority that Taizong gave to affairs of government over metaphysical discourse and literary discussion, *Jiu Tang shu*, 72.2576; *Zhen guan zheng yao*, 3.108–9 (which dates Li Baiyao's discussion to 637). Cf. Du You 杜佑, *Tong dian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1988), 31.867–68; Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1955), 46.824–26; *Zi zhi tong jian*, 193.6089: none contains the passage of praise, but all support *Jiu Tang shu*'s dating.

Second, the economic damage of Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism provides the focus of Taizong's 646 edict. It echoes Wei Shou's and, more strongly, Xun Ji's criticisms. It sets Taizong once more in the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse on Emperor Wu. In the immediate context of an attack on Xiao Yu, Taizong's edict lends pointed support to the economic arguments against Buddhism that Fu Yi had proposed during the 620s.[84] It also voices an argument that would recur throughout the seventh century and beyond.[85] It is ironic that we should hear these economic arguments from Taizong, though. On December 20, 629, he ordered the construction of monasteries and accompanying stelae in memory of war dead who had perished in service of the state, and he had monks offer prayers to them in perpetuity.[86] In 634 he founded the Hongfu Monastery 弘福寺 in memory of his mother and, on June 27, 641, he participated in an emotional ceremony that marked the monastery's completion, during which he offered financial support to the Buddhist church and declared himself a Buddhist disciple.[87] Here is a sense of the malleable relationship between church and state that the early Tang rulers created. More broadly, it is evidence of the flexibility of Buddhism's identity at the time. The construction of monasteries could be framed as a Buddhist practice if it threatened the state's economic interests but, at the same time, it also fulfilled a role in funerary ritual, one that apparently did not present a contradiction with anti-Buddhist views expressed elsewhere. From these ideological ambiguities, Taizong's representations of Emperor Wu emerge above all as an assertion of imperial dominance over the Buddhist church – he would bend it to his own will and would not accommodate its demands as Emperor Wu had done – and as an expression of the shifting pressures of governance at either end of his imperial career.

84 Taizong's edicts against Buddhism of the 630s revisit other criticisms that Fu Yi had presented a decade earlier: in 635 Taizong attacked corruption among the Buddhist clergy, *Guang hong ming ji*, 28.329A–B; in 637 Taizong based an attack on Buddhism on its barbarian origins and inferiority to native ideologies, ibid., 25.283C.

85 One example will make the point: a memorial that the statesman Di Renjie 狄仁傑 (630–700) composed shortly before his death. He argued that extravagant Buddhist construction projects, of the sort that Emperor Wu had supported so lavishly, diverted attention and valuable resources from the fundamental task of governance, the promotion of popular welfare. Emperor Wu's unrestrained spending on Buddhist projects was therefore a source of popular discontent and insurrection. Not only did patronage of the Buddhist church cause social turmoil; it also failed to rescue the state from political collapse; *Jiu Tang shu*, 89.2893–94. An abridged version of the memorial, omitting reference to Emperor Wu, appears in *Tang hui yao*, 49.857.

86 *Tang hui yao*, 48.849–50; *Guang hong ming ji*, 28.328C–329A; *Bian zheng lun*, 4.514A; *Fa yuan zhu lin*, 100.1027A.

87 *Tang hui yao*, 48.845; *Bian zheng lun*, 4.514A (which dates the monastery's founding to 632); *Fa yuan zhu lin*, 100.1027A; Daoxuan 道宣, *Ji gu jin fo dao lun heng* 集古今佛道論衡, *T.*,

DAOXUAN AS APOLOGIST

Against the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse, there emerged in the mid-seventh century a strong apologist for Emperor Wu's rule. This was Daoxuan, who had compiled *Guang hong ming ji* – the text through which we approached Xun Ji's sixth-century letter and also glimpsed the contents of Fu Yi's now-lost *Gao shi zhuan*. Daoxuan's defence of Emperor Wu's legitimacy was a response to these two documents. It also built on the sixth-century arguments of Fei Changfang who, as we will see, directly shaped Daoxuan's representations of Emperor Wu. It is significant that Daoxuan should establish himself as the most prominent opponent of the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse that attached itself to accounts of Emperor Wu's rule during the early and mid-seventh century: he also played a lead role in negotiating the relationship between the secular state and the Buddhist church at this time.[88]

On May 8, 662, Emperor Gaozong (r. 649–683) issued a decree in which he solicited opinions from his officials on the long-standing question of whether or not members of the Buddhist clergy should make obeisance to the throne. Within a week, the decree had attracted a strong response from the Buddhist establishment. Daoxuan headed this opposition by sending letters to members of the imperial family and to senior officials in which he detailed the arguments against the ritual subjugation of church to state. On June 6 he and a fellow spokesman for the clerical opposition, Weixiu 威秀, led three hundred monks to participate in a court debate on the issue. They were ultimately prevented from presenting their case, though. The debate proceeded *in camera*. Court officials voted against the policy of enforcing obeisance and it was subsequently dropped from the imperial agenda.[89]

In such a political climate, it is unsurprising that Daoxuan felt compelled to respond to criticisms of Emperor Wu's patronage of the Buddhist church. He produced two apologias for the Liang emperor. Both were powerful attempts to absolve Buddhism of blame for the

vol. 52, no. 2014: *j. bing*, 385C–386A. In 648, in a secular context, Taizong's construction of an imperial palace outside the capital also attracted criticism for its excessive drain on manpower, *Tang hui yao*, 30.555–56. In 648, while still Crown Prince, Emperor Gaozong also established a monastery, the Ci'en Monastery, in memory of his mother, *Tang hui yao*, 48.845.

[88] Daoxuan's biographical details appear in Zanning 贊寧, *Song Gao seng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, *T.*, vol. 50, no. 2061: 14.790B–791B; Tan Yue 談鑰, *Jia tai Wuxing zhi* 嘉泰吳興志 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1990), 17.19b–20a. A brief survey of Daoxuan's defence of Buddhism appears in Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, pp. 32–4.

[89] *Guang hong ming ji*, 25.284A (Gaozong's edict), 25.284C–286C, 25.290B–C (Daoxuan's responses); *Ji sha men bu ying bai su deng shi*, 6.472B (Gaozong's edict), 6.473A–B (Daoxuan's response).

collapse of political integrity. Both stood in close intertextual relationships with voices that have already sounded in the present paper. Our reading of Daoxuan is affected by those relationships.

The first apologia is the commentary that Daoxuan appended to Xun Ji's letter in his *Guang hong ming ji* of 664 (and that, as a corollary, presented an indirect rejoinder to Fu Yi's *Gao shi zhuan*). It is openly polemical. It seeks to discredit Xun Ji's motives in producing his letter as well as his understanding of Buddhist doctrine. In doing so, it directly addresses the practical consequences of Emperor Wu's connection with the Buddhist church and, in particular, the influence on his authority as ruler.

The second apologia appears in *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, probably completed in 665.[90] The opening chapter of that work contains a biography of the Liang monk Baochang 寶唱. It serves as a textual vehicle for an assessment of Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism.[91] Daoxuan lifted much of his material for *Xu Gao seng zhuan* directly from other texts.[92] The main source for his representation of Emperor Wu seems to be *Li dai san bao ji*: large sections of *Xu Gao seng zhuan* are textually identical to the sixth-century work.[93] The choice of source is important. The prestige of Fei Changfang's text was well established by the time Daoxuan produced his apologias. In 648, for example, *Li dai san bao ji* served as the basis for a mural commemorating past and present Buddhist translation activities in China, painted by imperial order at the translation centre at the Daci'en Monastery 大慈恩寺.[94] Daoxuan would have benefited from the authority of his source. There were also

[90] On internal evidence for the dating of this text, see Chen, *Zhongguo fo jiao shi ji gai lun*, p. 29.

[91] The most extended representation of Emperor Wu, and the focus of the present study, appears on *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.426B–427B.

[92] Critics since at least the Song dynasty have noted that Daoxuan compiled his biographies by transcribing directly from his sources: see, e.g., the comments of the monk Huihong 惠洪 (1071–1128) in his *Shi men wen zi chan* 石門文字禪 (*Si bu cong kan* edn.), 26.4a. John Kieschnick has also observed that "very few accounts in the *Biographies* [including *Xu Gao seng zhuan*] were composed by the compilers of the three collections; most are instead taken directly, word-for-word, or with additions and deletions, from sources available to them"; *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 10. A study of Daoxuan's use of sources in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* appears in Shi Guodeng 釋果燈, *Tang Daoxuan Xu Gao seng zhuan pi pan si xiang chu tan* 唐道宣«續高僧傳»批判思想初探 (Taibei: Dong chu chu ban she, 1992), pp. 47–91.

[93] Daoxuan's familiarity with *Li dai san bao ji* suggests itself from his verbatim transcriptions of large sections into his *Da Tang nei dian lu*, a bibliographic work dated to 664 (on Emperor Wu, see *Da Tang nei dian lu*, 4.266C–267A), as well as occasional citations in *Guang hong ming ji*; see Shi, *Tang Daoxuan Xu Gao seng zhuan*, pp. 64–65. The material on Emperor Wu that Daoxuan uses for *Xu Gao seng zhuan* comes from *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.99B–C.

[94] Zhisheng 智昇, *Kai yuan shi jiao lu* 開元釋教錄, *T.*, vol. 55, no. 2154: 10.578C.

more concrete reasons for Daoxuan to have drawn on *Li dai san bao ji.* As we have seen, Fei Changfang offered a favourable characterization of Emperor Wu: his stated intent in producing *Li dai san bao ji* was to promote the imperial patronage of Buddhism in the aftermath of destructive religious purges. Writing *Xu Gao seng zhuan* half a century later, Daoxuan would have found a text well suited to his defence of the Liang emperor against the onslaught of an anti-Buddhist seam of discourse and, more generally, to his negotiation of the relationship between the early Tang imperial state and the Buddhist church.

Four themes stand out in Daoxuan's representation of Emperor Wu. The first is the suggestion that his patronage of Buddhism actively benefited the Liang state and its people. This argument appears in its fullest form in *Xu Gao seng zhuan.* It bases itself on *Li dai san bao ji*'s claim that Emperor Wu attributed the prosperity of his state to "the *Triratna* above, [it] relied on the four heavens in the middle, and depended on the *devas* and *nāgas* below." Like Fei Changfang too, Daoxuan includes a claim in the voice of his text's impersonal narrator that "the reason why, for fifty odd years, the lower Yangzi region was without incident and the common people remained dependent [on the emperor] was due to the power of all this."[95] Here is a response to one of the main attacks on Buddhism – and especially on those activities of Emperor Wu's ascribed to Buddhism – that had developed by the mid-seventh century: that a ruler's preoccupation with Buddhism would distract him from the tasks of governance and precipitate the downfall of his state. Taizong had given it particularly forceful expression at the beginning of his reign. Daoxuan draws on *Li dai san bao ji* to suggest the opposite. Buddhist piety could be a positive social and political force, and had been so during Emperor Wu's reign. To lend his argument authority, Daoxuan mobilizes two levels of his text in support of his claims. He offers an insight into Emperor Wu's personal association between successful governance and support of the Buddhist pantheon. He gives the emperor an indirect voice ("the emperor believed that it was surely based on the *Triratna* above …"), which casts Emperor Wu's motivation for adopting practices identified as Buddhist as part of a broader concern for the welfare of his state.[96] Emperor Wu's belief in the efficacy of Buddhism in governance then receives endorsement from the impersonal narrator of *Xu Gao seng zhuan.* Here Daoxuan

[95] *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.426B–C; *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.99B.

[96] See a similar suggestion in *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.130A: "At the time Liang was in government, humane fostering [of the people] came first. The emperor therefore cut off [his] desires and ate a vegetarian diet."

makes a minor but telling change to his source. He inserts into *Li dai san bao ji*'s original phrasing the claim that "the lower Yangzi region was without incident" during Emperor Wu's reign. Devotion to Buddhism is a means of enforcing autocratic control over a population, of ensuring that "the common people remained dependent" on the emperor – a particularly attractive prospect for Fei Changfang's Sui ruler in 598 in his struggle to assert unified control over a newly united territory. But in an environment of greater political self-confidence that had developed by the mid-seventh century, it now also appears as a means to protect that already-established control against the threat of insurrection and to ensure long-term security. Daoxuan's account resists contemporary scepticism of Buddhism's transcendental, metaphysical power. It offers instead corroboration that the Emperor Wu's devotional activities had sacramental force in serving the state's spiritual and material interests, and more, that they ensured his own political stability and longevity.[97]

The second theme in Daoxuan's response to Emperor Wu's critics places into a broad ideological context activities that are elsewhere ascribed specifically to Buddhism. *Xu Gao seng zhuan* refers to the emperor's Buddhist scholarship.[98] It focuses on the translation of *sūtras* during Liang and lists examples of the Buddhist writings that Emperor Wu commissioned from members of the clergy. Daoxuan suggests that this programme of canonical translation formed only part of the emperor's general patronage of scholarship, though. That patronage extended beyond a narrow focus on Buddhist texts to include documents from what Daoxuan calls the "inner and outer ways" – Buddhism and Confucianism. He again draws on *Li dai san bao ji* to note Emperor Wu's exegeses on *Li ji*, *Zhou shu*, *Zuo zhuan*, *Zhuang zi*, *Lao zi*, *Lun yu*, *Xiao jing*, and "even that which past thinkers had failed to grasp in detail." "As a result," Daoxuan writes, emphasizing what Fei Changfang had only left implicit, "he caused the two schools of Confucianism and Buddhism to proliferate and stand tall, side by side."[99] Several contemporary accounts contain references to the emperor's scholarship. The fullest is *Bian zheng lun* 辯正論, which cites the now-lost *Liang ji* 梁記.[100]

97 As well as the antecedents for this argument that we have already encountered in *Jin lou zi* and *Li dai san bao ji*, a similar claim for the spiritual efficacy of Emperor Wu's rule appears in Huijiao's 6th-c. *Gao seng zhuan*. There, the emperor successfully puts an end to a drought early in his reign by ordering the recital of a Buddhist *sūtra*; *Gao seng zhuan*, 10.394c. This is indirect and anecdotal stuff; Daoxuan puts the case directly.

98 *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.427a.

99 Ibid., 1.427b; cf. *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.99c.

100 *Bian zheng lun*, 3.504a; also *Ji gu jin fo dao lun heng*, *j. jia*, 370a; *Guang hong ming ji*,

Though it displays parallels with *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, this text does not list the specific Confucian and Daoist works for which Emperor Wu wrote commentaries. Daoxuan's account, by contrast, insists on its association of the emperor with non-Buddhist scholarly traditions, in addition to the Buddhist commissions that feature prominently in *Xu Gao seng zhuan*. This representation is a product of its time. It hints at a pluralism that made itself felt in seventh-century exegetical scholarship.[101] Daoxuan has Emperor Wu fit contemporary intellectual trends and serve as a catalyst for ideological reconciliation.

Third, Daoxuan represents Emperor Wu as an exemplar of filial piety. He thereby answers one of the main criticisms that appeared both in Xun Ji's letter and during the seventh century: that Buddhism distracted from fundamental rituals of state, and so undermined claims to moral and political legitimacy. In *Guang hong ming ji*, for example, Daoxuan records Xun Ji's accusation that Emperor Wu "has never made offerings in person at the seasonal *di* and *xia* sacrifices. [Replicas of] dried meat offerings made from bamboo and of live sacrificial victims made from dough deceive the imperial ancestral temple. This violates the dignity of the imperial house, and conforms to the doings of blue-

4.111c; *Fa yuan zhu lin*, 55.706c.

101 On early Tang pluralism, see David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 71–82. There is other evidence that Emperor Wu was respected during the early Tang for his scholarship outside a narrowly Buddhist sphere, which lends support to Daoxuan's characterization. A representation similar to that in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* appears in *Liang shu*, 3.96. We might also cite in support of Daoxuan's claims the appearance of a technical treatise attributed to Emperor Wu on the cosmological "canopy-heavens" theory in the first *juan* of Qutan Xida's 瞿曇悉達 8th-c. *Tang Kai yuan zhan jing* 唐開元占經 (*Ying yin Wen yuan ge Si ku quan shu* edn., vol. 807), 1.22b–23a. Chen Yinque has examined this treatise; Wan Shengnan 萬繩楠, ed., *Chen Yinque Wei Jin Nan Bei Chao shi jiang yan lu* 陳寅恪魏晉南北朝史講演錄 (Hefei: Huangshan shu she, rpt. 2000), pp. 353–55. All this fits well with an environment in which Liang scholarship in general was highly valued; e.g., the anthology *Wen xuan* 文選, attributed to Liang Crown Prince Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), enjoyed great prestige throughout the 7th c. (McMullen, *State and Scholars*, pp. 223–25). And in an imperial order of 640 Taizong included the writings of two Liang scholars in a select list of those worthy of particular study and respect (*Zhen guan zheng yao*, 7.216–17; *Jiu Tang shu*, 3.51, 189A.4941–42). Set against all this, though, is the picture painted by 7th-c. scholar Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰. Contrary to claims in *Liang shu* that Emperor Wu had disliked a contemporary theory of the four tones that informed poetic rhyme and so had rejected it on grounds of aesthetic judgement, Lu Zhaolin suggested that the Liang emperor had simply failed to understand the theory: compare *Liang shu*, 13.243 (cf. *Nan shi*, 57.1414) with *Lu Zhaolin ji jiao zhu* 盧照鄰集校注, Li Yunyi 李雲逸, ed. (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1998), 6.321. The Japanese monk Kūkai 空海 (774–835) also bemoaned Emperor Wu's ignorance of tonal theory and failure to grasp the implications of a subtle elucidation given to him on the subject; Kūkai, *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡祕府論, photographic rpt. (Tōkyō: Tōhō bunka gakuin, 1930; unpaginated), *ten* 天, p. 57 (I have supplied pagination that takes as the first page the reproduction of the frontispiece). See also two critical editions of this work: *Bunkyō hifuron kō: kōbunhen* 文鏡祕府論考: 攻文篇, Konishi Jinichi 小西甚一, ed. (Kyoto: Dai Nihon yūbenkai

turbaned menials."[102] Fundamental Confucian state and family values are at stake. There is also, as we have seen, room for the implication that Emperor Wu's ritual reforms were inadequate on a sacramental level, since they wronged the imperial ancestors on whom the fate of the human world depended and therefore risked fearful consequences for humankind. Daoxuan responds by detailing Emperor Wu's strict observance of ritual sacrifices, especially those for his dead parents. He even suggests that these displays of filial piety moved the emperor and his subjects to tears and prompted Emperor Wu to compose a rhapsody on filial longing (a copy of which appears elsewhere in *Guang hong ming ji*). Xun Ji's claim that Emperor Wu neglected his Confucian sacrificial duties now appears as the product of a wilful neglect of the facts and a result of the personal feud between the two men.

Fourth, Daoxuan answers the criticism that Liang construction of Buddhist temples drained state finances. Emperor Wu's use of state funds for temple construction appeared as a recurrent target for criticism in the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse that we have identified so far. Daoxuan gives this programme of construction a different textual and ideological slant. It forms part of the ritual of filial piety. He offers extensive and elaborate descriptions of the temples that Emperor Wu had built to commemorate his parents. By creating associations in his text with the highest traditions of Confucian filial behaviour, Daoxuan dislodges his representation of Emperor Wu's programme of temple construction from an exclusively Buddhist context. It would have been a powerful argument to make in 664, at the time of *Guang hong ming ji*'s composition. As we have seen, Taizong and Gaozong had monasteries constructed in memory of their mothers despite expressions of opposition to Buddhism elsewhere; funerary ritual and, above all, expressions of filial piety were fluid in their symbolism and ambiguous in their ideological identity at the time.

This ambiguity is confirmed by Daoxuan's decision to draw authority for his argument not from a Buddhist tradition, but rather from Confucian canonical texts: his words resonate with moral and textual echoes from *Shi jing* and *Li ji*. In *Xu Gao seng zhuan* he also cites Xiao Yi's claim in *Jin lou zi* that "no doubt the only four men in myriad ages who discoursed on filial piety were Shun of Yu, Yu of Xia, Wen of Zhou, and Emperor [Wu] of Liang," and so draws on a seam of discourse no-

kōdansha, 1953), p. 45; Wang Liqi 王利器, ed., *Wen jing bi fu lun jiao zhu* 文鏡祕府論校注 (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 1983), pp. 100–1.

102 *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.129A.

table for its omission of explicit reference to Buddhism.[103] Xiao Yi's account is the clear product of hyperbole and based, as we have seen, on personal and political bias. Yet it finds support from Daoxuan, both through direct quotation and through the approving introduction that he supplies to accompany it. The result is that Emperor Wu again finds himself in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* among the highest echelons of the Confucian pantheon. All this negates much of the vitriol directed against Emperor Wu as a *Buddhist* ruler and the negative effects of policies that his critics attributed to his *Buddhist* beliefs. His syncretism of Buddhism and Confucianism is seen to serve the interests of his state. The discrete identity of medieval Chinese Buddhism is called into question: activities elsewhere attributed to Buddhism here find themselves in the hands of a Buddhist monk written into a normative Confucian intellectual discourse; a radical attempt at Buddhist-inspired reform of the imperial institution is domesticated.

Everywhere in his two apologias, Daoxuan faces the problem of historical irony. Both he and his seventh-century readers would have had Emperor Wu's political downfall fresh in their minds. At best, Emperor Wu's devotion to Buddhism failed to guarantee the survival of his state; at worst, it was directly responsible for Liang dynastic decline. Daoxuan's characterization of a magnanimous and sagely ruler therefore hangs on a single textual strategy, one that had already been adopted in Daoxuan's pro-Liang sources of the sixth century: the omission of Emperor Wu's violent fall from power during Hou Jing's rebellion. Daoxuan achieves this through the way he contextualizes his two apologias for Emperor Wu. With his commentary on Xun Ji's letter in *Guang hong ming ji*, Daoxuan is limited by the dating of his source: Xun Ji wrote his letter before Hou Jing's siege of the Liang capital at Jiankang started on December 10, 548.[104] Daoxuan's characterization of Emperor Wu in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* appears in the biography of the Liang monk Baochang, who flourished in the first two decades of the

103 *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.427B; cf. *Jin lou zi jiao zhu*, 1.51–52.

104 Xun Ji's official biography placed him in the northern state of Eastern Wei by the eighth lunar month of 547. His letter had certainly reached Emperor Wu before then. Internal evidence even suggests a date before 527: Xun Ji does not refer in his letter to the worldly renunciations that receive close attention in later sources (only Daoxuan makes reference to worldly renunciation in his commentary; *Guang hong ming ji*, 7.129C–130A). Buddhist and non-Buddhist accounts agree that Emperor Wu renounced the world at the Tongtai Monastery for the first time on April 24, 527: *Liang shu*, 3.71; *Nan shi*, 7.205; *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.99C; *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.427B. When compared with Xun Ji's other criticisms of Emperor Wu's Buddhism, there is little ideological reason for this omission. It may therefore indicate a limit for the dating of Xun Ji's letter, although this must remain conjectural.

sixth century.[105] As a result, the events of Hou Jing's rebellion and the collapse of Emperor Wu's imperial power do not appear there either. By placing his apologias for Emperor Wu in textual settings that predate Liang's destruction, Daoxuan avoids an ironic tension between a favourable representation of Emperor Wu's policies and the historical reality of their devastating effects.

ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS

A picture of a discourse centred solely on Buddhism is too simple. We have seen that already in the sixth century from the seam of discourse represented in the present paper by *Jin lou zi*. In the seventh century, too, assessments of Emperor Wu did not confine themselves to activities identified as explicitly religious. A sample of two texts from either end of the century will suggest a basic continuity. In both we will revisit a textual strategy familiar from *Jin lou zi*: the omission of reference to Emperor Wu's patronage of the Buddhist church.

In the late sixth century He Zhiyuan 何之元 (d. 593) analysed Emperor Wu's rule in his now-lost compendium *Liang dian* 梁典. He brought to the fore the image of a dedicated and scholarly ruler, an image familiar from the pro-Liang seams of discourse in *Jin lou zi* and its near-contemporary *Li dai san bao ji*. The main cause of Emperor Wu's downfall in *Liang dian*'s favourable characterization is his inability to keep in check a process of social and political decay exacerbated by those around him. There was economic imbalance in which consumption outweighed production. Internecine conflict among the Liang elite undermined social order. Corruption and negligence among court officials went unchecked. Political structures stagnated. Popular customs collapsed. Emperor Wu appears to stand largely powerless against (and therefore absolved of some of the responsibility for) the downfall of his state. There was an ideological motivation behind this attempt to deflect blame from the emperor's personal shortcomings: He Zhiyuan had served under Liang during the early stages of his official career. Yet it is still significant that, as in the case of Xiao Yi's *Jin lou zi*, He omits mention of Buddhism and so draws out those characteristics of Emperor Wu's rule that would have appealed to Confucian sensibilities.[106]

105 Baochang became abbot of Jiankang's Xin'an Monastery in 505; *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 1.426B. The latest chronological reference that survives is 519; *Li dai san bao ji*, 11.94B.

106 He Zhiyuan's evaluation of Emperor Wu is preserved in Li Fang 李昉 et al., eds., *Wen yuan ying hua* 文苑英華 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 1966), 754.8a–11b. The author's name appears incorrectly as "He Yuanzhi" 何元之

Despite a crystallization of Emperor Wu's image as the epitome of a Buddhist ruler during the seventh century, by the end of the century scholar-minister Zhu Jingze 朱敬則 (635–709) could still mute Buddhism's role in Liang's political collapse. In one of a series of historiographic essays on rulers of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, he traced Emperor Wu's downfall not to religious but to political causes. He initially cast the Liang emperor in the familiar, positive role of a scholar and a patron of culture. Yet unlike He Zhiyuan, Zhu Jingze also pointed up a tolerance of flattery and corruption, the disintegration of the legal system, political divisions among Liang elites, and the acceptance of Hou Jing into Liang territory: these were the causes of Emperor Wu's downfall. The only role that Zhu accorded Buddhism echoed criticisms of Liang economic mismanagement, namely that taxes raised from the common people provided for monks' clothing, while their hardships were aggravated by extravagant Buddhist construction.[107] Operating in a pro-Buddhist environment created by Tang Empress Wu, it is unsurprising that Zhu Jingze afforded little space to criticism of Liang Emperor Wu's religious patronage and focussed instead on social and political themes.

EARLY TANG HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The three seams of discourse that we have established so far come under strain when we turn to historiographic works that appeared in the mid-seventh century. Sharp divides in content and ideological filiations grow subtler as we move from the clear-cut rhetoric of short polemics to longer historical narratives, which drew on multiple sources and were often the products of collective authorship. Yet strong differences do still make themselves felt among the three works to which we now turn: *Liang shu* 梁書 and *Nan shi* 南史 – two texts, adopted as official histories, that have done most to shape our impression of Emperor Wu's rule – and the privately produced *Di wang lüe lun* 帝王略論. Our scheme of three seams of discourse will therefore continue to play a role in what follows. The relationships of these seventh-century historiographic works with their antecedents will affect how we read them. The editorial decisions that individual historians made in selecting and shaping their sources will hint at their underlying ideological commitments in representing Emperor Wu's reign.

In the eleventh lunar month of 621/622, the same year that Fu Yi presented to Tang Emperor Gaozu his first attack on the Buddhist

107 *Wen yuan ying hua*, 753.1a–3a. Zhu Jingze's essay is undated. His biography appears in *Jiu Tang shu*, 90.2912–18.

church, Assistant Director of the Palace Library Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (583–666) advised the emperor to commission histories of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. There was a sense of urgency about this business: the official account should be produced while people with personal experience of the period still survived and before extant textual evidence from those dynasties was lost. On February 1, 623, Emperor Gaozu therefore ordered work to begin on histories in the annals-biography form for the Qi, Liang, and Chen dynasties in the south, and for Wei, Northern Zhou, and Sui in the north. Three scholars worked on the Liang history: Cui Shanwei 崔善爲, Kong Shaoan 孔紹安 (577-?), and Xiao Deyan 蕭德言 (558–654).[108] Their work stopped after several years, though, and the histories remained uncompleted.[109] Emperor Taizong later revived the compilation project of his predecessor. Except for the Wei history, for which Wei Shou's *Wei shu* was used, the other histories were completed in 636 under the editorship of ministers Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648) and Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) in the Inner Department of the Palace Library.[110] Two decades later, in 656, they were supplemented by a series of monographs on institutional topics concerning Qi, Liang, Chen, Northern Zhou, and Sui. These were later incorporated into *Sui shu* 隋書.[111]

A history of the Liang dynasty, *Liang shu*, was among those presented to the throne in 636. It bears the name of Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557–637), the Editorial Director of the Palace Library, but he inherited much of the material for his work from his father, Yao Cha 姚察 (533–606), who had started work on a Liang history under the Chen dynasty and died before its completion. The early eighth-century historian and critic Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) claimed that Yao Silian

108 Kong and Xiao were of southern descent. The former's father was Minister of Personnel for the Chen dynasty; *Jiu Tang shu*, 190A.4982–83; Lin Bao 林寶, *Yuan he xing zuan* 元和姓纂 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1994), 6.805. Xiao Deyan's grandfather served as Palace Attendant and Director of the Section for Justice under Liang, and his father was Vice Minister of Personnel during the Chen dynasty; *Jiu Tang shu*, 189A.4952; see also Shi Mijian 史彌堅, *Jia ding Zhenjiang zhi* 嘉定鎮江志 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1990), 18.42a.

109 Linghu Defen's request and the contents of Emperor Gaozu's edict appear in *Jiu Tang shu*, 73.2597–8. Emperor Gaozu's edict is also preserved in Song Shou 宋綬 and Song Minqiu 宋敏求, eds., *Tang da zhao ling ji* 唐大詔令集 (Beijing: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1959), 81.466–67. Dates for this sequence of events appear in *Tang hui yao*, 63.1090–91.

110 *Jiu Tang shu*, 3.45, 73.2598; *Tang hui yao*, 63.1091. Denis Twitchett reviews the process of compilation of these official histories in *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 20–22. See also William Hung, "The T'ang Bureau of Historiography Before 708," *HJAS* 23, 1960–1: 93–107.

111 The title of the original work containing the monographs was the thirty-*juan Liang Sui Qi Zhou Chen Wu dai zhi* 梁隋齊周陳五代志: *Jiu Tang shu*, 4.75; *Ce fu yuan gui*, 556.11b. *Tang hui yao*, 63.1092, carries a textual variant of the title. On the composition of these monographs, see *Shi tong tong shi*, 12.372–73.

based himself on his father's drafts and supplemented them with new material.[112] These pre-Tang origins of *Liang shu* reveal themselves in twenty-six historian's comments that are attributed to "the Chen Minister of Personnel, Yao Cha."[113] Pertinently for the present paper, the Yaos were from the south. Yao Silian's grandfather, Yao Sengyuan 姚僧垣 (499–583), served as Director of Palace Physicians under Liang. Yao Cha was acquainted with the Liang imperial family in his youth and later had an official career under the Chen dynasty.[114] The significance of these southern roots will suggest itself from *Liang shu*'s ideological slant.

The importance of understanding the Southern and Northern Dynasties also made itself felt outside the official record. In 659 Li Yanshou 李延壽 (died before 680), who worked on three of the four official commissions under Emperors Gaozu and Taizong, presented to the throne *Nan shi* and *Bei shi* 北史, histories of the southern and the northern dynasties respectively.[115] He based himself on the existing official record but also added material gathered from over a thousand *juan* of miscellaneous histories.[116] Like Yao Silian's *Liang shu*, Li Yanshou's works built on foundations laid by his father, Li Dashi 李大師 (570–628).[117] In contrast to the Yaos, the Lis were from the north.[118]

112 Ibid., 12.356. A seven-*juan* work by Yao Cha entitled *Liang shu di ji* 梁書帝紀 is recorded in *Sui shu*, 33.956. Liu Zhiji suggests that Yao Cha's original work bore the title *Liang lüe* 梁略 (*Shi tong tong shi*, 4.94), although *Shi tong tong shi*'s 18th-c. commentary notes that Liu's is the only surviving reference to such a title. Wang Shumin 王樹民 reviews *Liang shu*'s composition in *Shi bu yao ji jie ti* 史部要籍解題 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1981), pp. 67–70.

113 Ibid., p. 68, n. 2. David McMullen suggests that these remaining references to Yao Cha are intentional, "in clear imitation of the *Han shu*, in which the name of Pan Ku's father Pan Piao, the originator of the work, was left in the text"; *State and Scholars*, p. 166.

114 Yao Sengyuan's biography appears in Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 et al., *Zhou shu* 周書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1971), 47.839–44. On Yao Cha's acquaintance with Liang Emperors Wu and Jianwen, see Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Chen shu* 陳書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1972), 27.348. The Yaos were originally from Wukang 吳康 in Wuxing 吳興 (south of modern Fengxian, Jiangsu) and only moved north after the fall of the Chen dynasty; *Chen shu*, 27.349, and supported in *Jiu Tang shu*, 73.2592.

115 *Bei shi*, 100.3344–45, preserves the memorial that accompanied Li Yanshou's presentation of his two histories to the throne in 659. Li must have finished work on *Nan shi* and *Bei shi* before this date, though; ibid., 100.3344, suggests that Linghu Defen read the histories before their submission.

116 Ibid. On the compilation of *Nan shi*, see Wang, *Shi bu yao ji jie ti*, pp. 84–88.

117 *Bei shi*, 100.3343, where Li Yanshou claims that Li Dashi conceived of his work as a chronological history along the lines of *Wu Yue chun qiu* 吳越春秋. Li Dashi began research for his history in the library of the Sui Director of the Chancellery and Duke of Guan, Yang Gongren 楊恭仁, while Yang was serving in Liangzhou 涼州. Between 626 and 628 Li Dashi edited his earlier findings after consulting materials in his own library. After his father's death Li Yanshou supplemented his research and rearranged it from its original chronological form into the annals-biography structure around which he formed the work that he presented to the emperor.

118 Ibid., 100.3313–43.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, other private historians produced accounts of Liang. Most of these works were lost during the Song dynasty, but some survive in either full or fragmentary form. One such private history falls within the seventh-century scope of the present paper. It is *Di wang lüe lun*, written in the early years of Taizong's reign by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638), whom Taizong regarded as one of the leading scholars of the early Tang. He was a southerner, whose grandfather had served under Liang; the family had moved north after Sui's conquest of Chen.[119]

We will now turn to the three histories themselves, where the suggestive regional and political biases of their authors play out in the textual fabric of their representations of Emperor Wu.

Vegetarianism

Of the features of Emperor Wu's rule that have drawn our notice so far, it was his personal vegetarianism that elicited the earliest chronological references in the three seventh-century histories. As we have already seen, it had been a particular concern for sixth- and seventh-century authors, and it now attracted close attention too from the mid-seventh century historians.

Emperor Wu's vegetarianism traces in *Liang shu* and *Nan shi* to the year 502.[120] We must treat these early chronological references with care, though. They do not appear in the emperor's *ben ji* 本紀 biography but preface the biographies of competent government functionar-

[119] *Jiu Tang shu*, 72.2565–66. Two integral though incomplete editions of *Di wang lüe lun* are extant. One is a Dunhuang ms. held in the Pelliot collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (P.2636). Unfortunately, the fourth *juan*, which contains an account of Emperor Wu's reign, is missing. The other is a ms. from the late Kamakura period held in the Tōyō bunko; *Tōyō bunko shozō kanseki bunrui mokuroku: shibu* 東洋文庫所藏漢籍分類目錄: 史部 (Tōkyō: Tōyō bunko, 1986), p.71. I am grateful to Charles Aylmer, Joe McDermott, and the Tōyō bunko for having helped me to gain access to a copy of this edition. It contains the fourth *juan*, with both a chronological sketch and an analysis of Emperor Wu's reign, but its textual sequence is confused and discrete sections of *Di wang lüe lun* have been spliced together out of order. The correct sequence can be reinstated in several ways. First, through reference to excerpts preserved in: Ma Zong 馬摠, *Tong li* 通歷 (Ye shi meng zhuan lou edn., 1915), 7.54B–55A; Lu Xinyuan 陸心源, *Tang wen shi yi* 唐文拾遺 (Taibei: Wen hai chu ban she, 1962), 13.10A–11A; Dong Gao 董誥 et al., eds., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1983), *shi yi* 拾遺 13.10A–11A. Second, through use of the text's internal chronology. Third, through the pattern of worm marks on the original manuscript. A useful study of *Di wang lüe lun* in general and of the Tōyō bunko edition in particular appears in Ozaki Yasushi 尾崎康, "Gu Seinan no *Teiō ryakuron* ni tsuite" 虞世南の帝王略論について, *Shidō bunko ronshū* 斯道文庫論集 5, 1967: 185–224 (on the sequence of this edition, see especially pp. 193–94); see also Jin Chengyu 金程宇, *Xi jian Tang Song wen xian cong kao* 稀見唐宋文獻叢考 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 2009), pp. 3–11.

[120] *Liang shu*, 53.765; *Nan shi*, 70.1697. Suwa Gijun 諏訪義純, *Chūgoku chūsei bukkyō shi kenkyū* 中国中世仏教史研究 (Kyōto: Daitō shuppansha, 1988), pp. 79–90, esp. pp. 81–84, examines Emperor Wu's vegetarianism.

ies. They are therefore at a textual distance from these histories' main characterizations of Emperor Wu. Notably, too, these early chronological references to vegetarianism make no explicit mention of Emperor Wu's Buddhist beliefs. As usual, we should be wary of imposing such a reading. There was an ambiguous relationship between vegetarianism and Buddhism in the seventh-century environment in which *Liang shu* and *Nan shi* were composed. A shift towards a vegetarian diet among monastic communities had only occurred late in the fifth century; Emperor Wu's prohibitions on the clergy's consumption of meat were an important stimulus for the establishment of widespread monastic vegetarianism. Even after that time, though, there were cases of meat-eating among members of the clergy.[121] Although vegetarian ideals were linked to Buddhism throughout the Tang, the association was not an exclusive one. Vegetarianism appears often as a mark of an individual's filial piety in both *Liang shu* and in the official histories of the other southern and northern dynasties, also produced during the early seventh century.[122] In the now-lost *Dao xue zhuan* 道學傳, a pre-Tang work, Emperor Wu's vegetarian practices are juxtaposed with his syncretic beliefs, suggesting a connection between the two; it is a Daoist practitioner who upholds the Liang emperor's vegetarian ordinances with greatest zeal.[123] There is a sense in all this of the negotiations that must have taken place over the symbolic significance of a vegetarian diet in medieval China. A stark contrast makes itself felt between such symbolic ambiguity, evident too in representations of Emperor Wu's vegetarianism in *Liang shu* and *Nan shi*, and the emphatic and exclusive associations with Buddhism that emerged from polemics in the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse.

Emperor Wu's vegetarianism remains ambiguous in the analyses of his reign at the end of his *ben ji* biographies in the official histories. In *Liang shu* vegetarianism appears as part of an ascetic lifestyle but still resists easy interpretation. For convenient analysis and intertex-

[121] John Kieschnick traces these developments in "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," in Roel Sterckx, ed., *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan Press, 2005), pp. 186–212; see especially pp. 198–201 for his treatment of Emperor Wu's attempts to enforce vegetarianism among Liang monastic communities.

[122] A random sample will make the point: Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1972), 55.958 (Xue Tiansheng 薛天生), 55.962 (He Boyu 何伯璵; Wang Wenshu 王文殊), 55.965 (Jiang Mi 江泌); *Liang shu*, 47.648 (Teng Tangong 滕曇恭), 47.655 (Yu Shami 庾沙彌); *Chen shu*, 32.430 (Zhang Zhao 張昭).

[123] Cited in Wang Xuanhe 王懸河, *San dong zhu nang* 三洞珠囊 (in *Dao zang* 道藏, 1445 edn., rpt. Beijing: Wen wu chu ban she; Shanghai: Shanghai shu dian; Tianjin: Tianjin gu ji chu ban she, 1988, vol. 25), 5.323c–324a. *Dao xue zhuan* is recorded in *Sui shu* as a work in 20-*juan*, but without an author. It is a common source of citation in later collectanea, especially the 10th-c. *Tai ping yu lan*.

tual comparison, we might divide *Liang shu*'s text into three structural sections:

> [1] In his dedication to the tasks of government, [Emperor Wu] was assiduous and tireless.[124] Each time the winter months came around, after the fourth watch had been completed, he would order a candle to be held and would review his affairs. Since he held his writing brush exposed to the cold, his hands would chap. …
>
> [2] He only ate once a day. There was no fish or meat in his diet, but only broths made from pulses and coarse grains. As his business piled up, when the sun had moved to noontime, he would rinse out his mouth to make it through the day.
>
> [3] He wore clothes made of plain cloth and had coarse black bed netting made of kapok. He wore a single hat for three years, and used a single bed cover for two years. The frugal measures that he constantly imposed upon himself were all of this sort. He gave up sex after the age of fifty. Neither the dresses of official members of the rear palaces, from the Honoured Consort down, nor the ritual garments of the Empress [were long enough to] trail along the ground or had embroidery around the hems. [The emperor] neither drank alcohol nor listened to music. Except for sacrificial ceremonies at the imperial ancestral temple, large assemblies and banquets, and matters of *dharma*, he did not have ritual music made.[125]

Emperor Wu's asceticism, including his vegetarianism, has no explicit associations with Buddhism here; the reference to "matters of *dharma*" serves as an example – one of several – when he sees fit to break his strict ascetic habits for a higher ritual purpose. True, *Liang shu* echoes links between vegetarianism and extreme austerity (which often included reference to monks' coarse robes) that appeared in Buddhist hagiography at this time. But it evokes just as strongly a broad association between the consumption of meat and luxury: vegetarianism here serves to reinforce claims of an ascetic lifestyle, not to mark religious beliefs. The dominant image in this reading is one of filial piety. Those in the early stages of mourning for their parents were expected to abstain both from meat and from all displays of ostentation, which

124 The phrase "*zi zi wu dai*" 孜孜無怠 appears in a canonical setting in Kong Yingda's sub-commentary to *Shi jing* in *Mao shi zheng yi* 毛詩正義 (*Shi san jing zhu shu* edn., Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 2003), 16.2.240c.

125 *Liang shu*, 3.97.

included also fine clothing and entertainment; all three appear in *Liang shu*'s account.[126]

In *Liang shu* Emperor Wu's vegetarianism also folds into a eulogistic account of his dedication to governance, which ends with the claim that "looking in turn at rulers of former times, it is rare to find one of such a respectful, frugal, and stern temperament and of such artistic ability and erudite learning."[127] These are values of leadership that emerge readily from the Confucian canon, as those of an ideal ruler.

All this is familiar stuff. It recalls the hyperbolic descriptions of Emperor Wu's expressions of filial piety in pro-Liang seams of discourse of the sixth-century; *Liang shu* bears a close textual resemblance to *Li dai san bao ji*.[128] It also foreshadows Daoxuan's *Xu Gao seng zhuan*. It is telling that these texts, though explicitly Buddhist in their commitments, freely crossed sectarian boundaries to secure support for their larger ideological aims – as Yao Silian also does here, in fact. Such intertextual relationships suggest that the southern, pro-Liang Yao Silian used for his account sources sympathetic to Emperor Wu, regardless of their ideological identities. His editorial decision urges our reading of *Liang shu* in favour of Emperor Wu.

It is striking, then, that there is divergence within the tradition of official historiography. *Nan shi*, the product of the northern Li family, offers a different slant on the characterization of Emperor Wu as an ascetic. Its wording presents a near parallel to *Liang shu*, but it follows a different sequence and establishes an explicitly Buddhist context for the Liang emperor's conduct. Of *Liang shu*'s original text, the claim that Emperor Wu "only ate once a day. There was no fish or meat in his diet, but only broths made from pulses and coarse grains" (in section 2 of the text, above) appears first. In *Nan shi*, though, this statement is prefaced by the claim that "in his later years, he became mired [*ni* 溺] in his faith in the Buddhist Way."[129] Evidence of the emperor's Buddhist scholarship follows: his commentaries on Buddhist *sūtras*, his doctrinal lectures, and his Buddhist assemblies. These appear elsewhere

126 See, e.g., the prescriptions in *Li ji zheng yi*, 57.432c. Kang Le 康樂, "Jie jing, shen fen yu su shi" 潔淨、身分與素食, *Da lu za zhi* 大陸雜誌 102.1, 2001: 15–46, examines the prescriptions for vegetarianism, and their implications for an individual's identity.

127 *Liang shu*, 3.97.

128 We must proceed with care here, though. When we trace clear intertextual relationships between *Liang shu* and *Li dai san bao ji*, it is not possible to make firm claims that Yao Silian drew directly from Fei Changfang's work, in the same way that Daoxuan certainly did. *Li dai san bao ji*'s representation of Emperor Wu in turn reveals textual similarities with the now-lost *Liang ji* 梁記. Yao Silian could have just as easily used that text, or a common ancestor, as his source for *Liang shu*.

129 *Nan shi*, 7.223.

in *Liang shu*'s assessment, but in a separate context of the emperor's general erudition and without specific ideological implications.[130] *Nan shi*'s characterization then resumes *Liang shu*'s account of Emperor Wu's frugality (section 3, above). At this point in the account's structure, though, examples of Emperor Wu's ascetic lifestyle are already coloured by Buddhist overtones. The omission of *Liang shu*'s statement that "the frugal measures that he constantly imposed upon himself were all of this sort" and description of Emperor Wu's exceptionally "respectful, frugal, and stern temperament" also detaches *Nan shi*'s text from possible Confucian connotations and enables it to sit effectively in a Buddhist context. It is only after this that *Nan shi* finally refers to Emperor Wu's dedication in governance with the phrase that opens this section of *Liang shu*'s assessment (see above, section 1). But here, too, *Nan shi* qualifies its account: it suggests that Emperor Wu's compassionate treatment of those close to him blinded him to corruption at court, a suggestion that does not appear in *Liang shu*. *Nan shi* displays little textual variation from *Liang shu*, but its reordering and recontextualization of *Liang shu*'s account slants the latter's positive and ideologically indeterminate portrayal of Emperor Wu's vegetarianism and asceticism to offer a representation of an emperor whose Buddhist-inspired actions jeopardized Liang political stability.

Yu Shinan, writing as a private historian, also had something to say on all this. Having outlined the major events of Emperor Wu's reign in *Di wang lüe lun*, he opens an overview of Emperor Wu's qualities as a ruler with a statement of the Liang emperor's exceptional filial piety. Here is the promise of support for the implications of *Liang shu*'s account. But Yu Shinan at once throws this reading into doubt by offering a second possible interpretation: he points up the Liang emperor's devout belief in Buddhism. A list of examples of Emperor Wu's asceticism follows: vegetarian diet; coarse clothing; abstention from sex after the age of fifty; refusal to drink wine; rejection of music; prohibition on the use of bloody food in imperial ancestral sacrifice, about which more below; and propriety even when living in seclusion. All this confirms *Liang shu*'s account and even displays textual overlaps with it. As with *Nan shi*, though, we now have the sense that this is a programme of conduct inspired by Buddhist values. Yu Shinan stops short of Li Yanshou's causal link between Emperor Wu's lifestyle and Liang cor-

[130] *Liang shu*'s account of Emperor Wu's scholarship on Buddhist as well as Confucian and Daoist texts (3.96) finds echoes in Daoxuan's representation in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* of what this paper has already called the emperor's "ideological reconciliation" between competing ideologies.

ruption, but he forces our reading of his account with an anti-Buddhist slant that does not appear in *Liang shu*.[131]

Emperor Wu's personal vegetarianism relates to his ritual reforms of imperial ancestral sacrifice; as we have seen, the two appear together among Yu Shinan's examples of Emperor Wu's asceticism. These ritual reforms featured in Xun Ji's letter as a product of a specifically Buddhist ideology. As usual, the treatment that they receive in the extant histories from the mid-seventh century is not so clear-cut: Buddhism receives no explicit mention. But variations between *Liang shu* and *Nan shi*'s accounts of the reforms do still confirm our initial reading of their relative ideological positions.

Both histories suggest that a transition from the use of live sacrificial victims to fruit and vegetables in imperial ancestral offerings occurred in the tenth lunar month of 517.[132] *Nan shi* puts it like this:

> On the *bing zi* day of the third month [April 26, 517], [the emperor] issued a decree forbidding the Palace Physician to use living things to make medicine. Furthermore, none of the decorations on the patterned brocades [produced by] the officials in charge of weaving at court were to take the forms of deities, people, or wild beasts in making inner clothing, since cutting them out was an abuse of humanity and compassion. Consequently, he offered prayers to Heaven and Earth and at the imperial ancestral temple for the abolition of the principles of killing. He wished to apply this to all sentient beings. Live sacrificial victims at the suburban altars and the ancestral temples were all replaced by dough [replicas]. The sacrifices to mountains and rivers did not [adopt this], though. At this time, since live sacrificial victims were excluded from the imperial ancestral temple, no more bloody food was used. Although the nobility and senior officials adopted a contrary view in their discussions, and those both inside and outside the court created uproar, [the emperor] ultimately did not heed them. In the tenth month, in winter, the food offerings at the imperial ancestral temple made use of vegetables and fruit for the first time.[133]

Compare that with *Liang shu*:

> On the *jia zi* day of the fourth month [June 13, 517], in summer, [the emperor] abolished for the first time live sacrificial victims

131 *Di wang lüe lun*, *j.* 4; cf. *Tong li*, 7.54a.

132 There is a discrepancy in the dating of this event between secular and Buddhist accounts. The ideological implications of such variations in dating will be considered when we turn below to competing representations of Emperor Wu's worldly renunciations.

133 *Nan shi*, 6.196. This account finds textual parallels in Emperor Wu's "Ordinance for

> in the imperial ancestral temple. … In the tenth month, [the emperor] abolished sacrificial offerings of dried meat in the imperial ancestral temple, and made use of vegetables and fruit for the first time.[134]

The wide-ranging extent of Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms fails to emerge in *Liang shu*. Its brevity accords them little narrative weight or political significance. This might be explained by the fragmented construction of the official account of Liang. Details of the vegetarian reforms appeared in the monograph section of *Sui shu*, where the incremental changes that Emperor Wu introduced to imperial sacrifices receive even closer attention than in *Nan shi*.[135] But this explanation fails to account for one difference. *Nan shi* points up both ministerial and popular opposition to the vegetarian reforms. *Liang shu* omits all reference to such opposition. *Sui shu*'s account, by contrast, suggests that Emperor Wu introduced the reforms to imperial ancestral sacrifices on the advice of his senior ministers. The reforms no longer appear controversial in *Sui shu*, and responsibility for them no longer lies solely with the emperor. Instead, it rests with the whole imperial court.[136]

These variations are suggestive when we restore them to the early seventh-century context in which the official histories were produced. The prohibition on slaughter came to the fore of imperial business just over six months after the founding of the Tang state. On February 13, 619, Emperor Gaozu issued a prohibition on slaughter during specified periods of the year.[137] Two further decrees followed over the course of the following year.[138] All three echoed Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms to sacrificial ritual a century earlier and, as we shall see, both the decrees' Buddhist undertones and Liang's ideological precedent would

the cessation of killing and the termination of live sacrifices in the imperial ancestral temple," *Guang hong ming ji*, 26.293c.

[134] *Liang shu*, 2.57.

[135] *Sui shu*, 7.134. Emperor Wu's edicts to the Palace Physician and official weavers do not appear in *Sui shu*'s account, though. It is tempting to read a personal motivation into *Liang shu*'s omission of Emperor Wu's edict to the Palace Physician. As this study has noted, Yao Silian's grandfather, Yao Sengyuan, was Director of Palace Physicians in the Liang court (although not until after Emperor Wu's 517 edict).

[136] When Du You 杜佑 (735–812) mentioned Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms in his *Tong dian* 通典, he chose to follow *Sui shu*'s account over *Nan shi*'s; *Tong dian*, 49.1370.

[137] *Xin Tang shu*, 1.8, 56.1408; *Tang hui yao*, 41.731. Liu Shufen 劉淑芬 offers a close study of the edict of February 13, 619, in "Nian san yue shi: zhong gu hou qi de duan tu yu zhai jie (shang)" 「年三月十」–中古後期的斷屠與齋戒(上), *Da lu za zhi* 104.1, 2002: 15–33. She demonstrates that the "ten days" mentioned in the edict originated in Daoism, though it later came to be considered a Buddhist tradition – a further indication of fluid ideological identities.

[138] *Tang da zhao ling ji*, 108.561–62.

have been felt at the time. Yet all this came from Emperor Gaozu, a man who elsewhere voiced explicit criticism of the Buddhist church and who showed himself receptive to Fu Yi's extreme anti-Buddhist critiques. As usual, the intellectual pluralism of the early seventh century produced a high degree of nuance, belied by the clear-cut terms of fiery polemics that appeared in the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse.

It happens that we have a clear statement of how such prohibitions on slaughter – both Liang Emperor Wu's and Tang Emperor Gaozu's – might have been interpreted in the early seventh century. In the fourth lunar month of 844, members of the combined Secretariat and Chancellery issued a memorial. They noted that "the prohibition on slaughter during fasting months proceeds from Buddhism. If we investigate the prevailing customs at the start of our dynasty, they were still close to Liang and Chen, and chief ministers and senior officials largely observed this doctrine."[139] There are two points to make here. Prohibitions on slaughter could still bear association with Buddhism during the early Tang and on into at least the mid-ninth century.[140] Seventh-century representations of Emperor Wu's vegetarian reforms to imperial ancestral sacrifice must also have been produced and read in this light. In this context, *Nan shi*'s account of the sixth-century controversy that surrounded the reforms, though free of explicit ideological associations in the text itself, is consistent with criticisms of Emperor Wu's patronage of Buddhism that Li Yanshou expressed elsewhere. We should guard against taking this reading too far, though. Both seventh-century historians avoided ascribing a specifically Buddhist reading to Emperor Wu's reform; Buddhism was not their main focus. For that, we must return to the 844 memorial. Precedent seems to have played a key role in determining individuals' ritual and religious identities in the early seventh century.[141] We hear that court officials followed practices associated with Buddhism because they inherited the intellectual influence of the Southern Dynasties; the prohibition on slaughter was one such inherited practice. *Liang shu* and *Sui shu* uphold the authority of the early Tang court's southern heritage. By pointing up the con-

[139] *Tang hui yao*, 41.733; cf. *Jiu Tang shu*, 18A.599. I take the reference to the observations of ministers and officials as an indication of both public policy and private practice.

[140] See also the comments above on Yu Shinan's structuring of his survey of Emperor Wu's reign in *Di wang lüe lun*, which forges a particular interpretation of the Liang emperor's policy of prohibiting the use of bloody food in the imperial ancestral temple. There is circumstantial evidence, too, in the continuing need for Tang Emperor Wenzong to emphasize in a decree of 837 that the prohibition against slaughter on his birthday was *not* an act of Buddhist piety or an attempt to attract religious blessings; *Jiu Tang shu* 17B.571.

[141] On the intense interest in ritual forms during the early Tang, see McMullen, *State and Scholars*, pp. 118–23.

tested nature of the Liang prohibition on ritual slaughter, the northern Li Yanshou implicitly challenges it.

Worldly Renunciations

References to vegetarianism elude a clear and exclusive association with Buddhism, as we have seen. The seventh-century historians wait until a little over halfway through Emperor Wu's reign before supplying the first unambiguous accounts of his association with Buddhist ritual.[142] *Liang shu* and *Nan shi* agree that on April 24, 527, Emperor Wu convened at the capital's newly constructed Tongtai Monastery the first in a series of doctrinal assemblies that would punctuate the rest of his reign. In this public setting he also performed a worldly renunciation (*she shen* 捨身). From this date on, references to Emperor Wu's personal role in Buddhist ritual become increasingly common in these two works.

The result is a muted account of Emperor Wu's relationship with Buddhism early in his imperial career, and a sense of his increasing religiosity from 527 on. Both historiographic custom and the personal ideological agendas of the seventh-century historians take effect here. Since Liang essentially rose and fell with Emperor Wu, a textual structure that pivoted on his close involvement with Buddhism enabled historians to fit their characterizations of the emperor into a traditional model of dynastic flux. Buddhism emerged as Emperor Wu's central hubristic trait and the implicit cause of political downfall. This strategy marks a notable point of divergence with the pro-Buddhist seam of discourse, which presented Emperor Wu's reign as marked throughout by patronage of the Buddhist church.

There is little textual variation in *Liang shu* and *Nan shi*'s accounts of the 527 doctrinal assembly and worldly renunciation.[143] But there is divergence between these two histories over the number of subsequent assemblies that Emperor Wu convened and renunciations that he performed. *Liang shu* records seven Buddhist assemblies and a total of three renunciations – on November 1, 529, and August 4, 547, as

[142] The exception is *Nan shi*'s terse mention of the fact that, two years after his vegetarian reforms of imperial ancestral sacrifice, Emperor Wu received Buddhist precepts in the Wuai Hall on May 22, 519; *Nan shi*, 6.197. The ordination ceremony is well documented in Buddhist sources, most completely in *Xu Gao seng zhuan*, 6.469B–C. Janousch, "Reform of Imperial Ritual," pp. 173–91, examines the ritual features of the ceremony that appear in Buddhist sources. No details of Emperor Wu's ordination ceremony appear in either of the other two mid-7th-c. histories under study here.

[143] *Liang shu*, 3.71; *Nan shi*, 7.205. Emperor Wu's worldly renunciations receive examination in Mori Mikisaburō 森三树三郎, *Ryō no Butei: Bukkyō ōchō no higeki* 梁の武帝: 佛教王朝の悲劇 (Kyōto: Heirakuji shoten, 1956), pp. 141–49.

well as 527.[144] *Nan shi* supplies accounts of four worldly renunciations. It also records a greater number of doctrinal assemblies – seventeen in total. It agrees with the dates that *Liang shu* supplies for its three references to Emperor Wu's worldly renunciations. The extra, fourth renunciation appears on April 23, 546, where *Liang shu* records only a grand Buddhist assembly and an imperial lecture, but no renunciation ritual.[145]

In addition to discrepancies in the number of occurrences, there are also significant differences in the ways that these texts represent the rituals of renunciation that Emperor Wu performed in 529 and 547. We have already seen examples in which *Nan shi*'s narrative detail is absent from *Liang shu*. The same holds here. The following table shows how the two texts represent Emperor Wu's renunciation on November 1, 529:

144 November 1, 529: *Liang shu*, 3.73; August 4, 547: ibid., 3.92.

145 *Nan shi*, 7.206–7 (November 1, 529), 7.218–19 (August 4, 547). For the renunciation on April 23, 546, see ibid., 7.218; compare *Liang shu*, 3.90. (Note, though, the citation of a *Liang shu* in Li Fang 李昉 et al., eds., *Tai ping yu lan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, rpt. 1998), 654.4a: "In the third lunar month of 546, [the emperor] paid a visit to Tongtai Monastery. He lectured on the *San hui jing* and performed a worldly renunciation, becoming a slave." This citation does not appear in the version of Yao Silian's *Liang shu* that has been transmitted independently. Several other citations attributed to *Liang shu* in this section of *Tai ping yu lan* are also absent from Yao Silian's work; those that do appear in Yao Silian's work display evidence of textual variation. Either the compilers of *Tai ping yu lan* have misattributed their material here, or the *Liang shu* in question is not the same as Yao Silian's *Liang shu*. If the latter holds, then the authors of the Harvard-Yenching index have failed to notice the discrepancy; Hong Ye 洪業, Nie Chongqi 聶崇岐 et al., eds., *Tai ping yu lan yin de* 太平御覽引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, Index no. 23 (Beijing: Yanjing da xue tu shu guan, 1935), p. 118. It is a problem that deserves further study.) There is support for Li Yanshou's inclusion in *Nan shi* of a fourth renunciation ritual in a fragment from Qiu Yue's 丘悅 late seventh/early 8th-c. chronicle, *San guo dian lüe* 三國典略, which survives in the *kao yi* commentary to *Zi zhi tong jian*. It cites an imperial ordinance of April 16, 546, in which Emperor Wu declared his intention to hold a Buddhist assembly and perform a worldly renunciation on April 23 of that year; *San guo dian lüe*, ap. *Zi zhi tong jian*, 159.4937. Xu Song's 許嵩 *Jiankang shi lu* 建康實錄, which modern editors have dated to 756, also records a fourth renunciation; *Jiankang shi lu* (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1986), 17.689.

LIANG SHU 3.73	*NAN SHI* 7.206–7
On the *gui si* day [November 1, 529], [the emperor] mounted his carriage and	On the *gui si* day [November 1, 529], [the emperor]
paid a visit to Tongtai Monastery, where he convened a *pañca*[*varṣikā*]*pariṣad* for the four classes of practitioner.	paid a visit to Tongtai Monastery, where he convened a *pañca*[*varṣikā*]*pariṣad* for the four classes of practitioner. The emperor removed his imperial clothing and put on *dharma* robes;
He used this to perform a worldly renunciation.	he performed a purifying great worldly renunciation. He took the [monastery's] resting chambers for his quarters, using a plain bed and earthenware vessels. He rode in a small cart and performed his own menial tasks. On the *jia wu* day [November 2], he ascended the *dharma* seat in the lecture chamber and took the *Nīrvāṇa sūtra* as his theme for the large crowd that comprised the four classes of practitioner. On the *gui mao* day [November 11],
The nobility and senior officials on down made a redemption offering of one billion cash.	the ministers made an offering of one billion cash
	to redeem the emperor-bodhisattva from his large worldly renunciation. The monks tacitly consented. On the *yi si* day [November 13], all the officials went to the east gate of the monastery to submit petitions requesting that [the emperor] return to oversee imperial duties. Only after three requests did he consent. The emperor wrote three letters of reply, beginning and ending each letter with the phrase 'I kowtow to you.'
On the *ji you* day of the tenth month [November 17], in winter,	On the *ji you* day of the tenth month [November 17], in winter, [the emperor] again convened a *pañca*[*varṣikā*]*pariṣad* for the four classes of practitioner; over 50,000 religious and laypersons attended. When the assembly had finished,
[the emperor] mounted his carriage and returned to the palace.	the emperor rode in a golden coach back to the palace. He rode to the Taiji Hall, where
He proclaimed a general amnesty and changed the year title.	he proclaimed a general amnesty and changed the year title.

A similar pattern of omissions emerges when we set *Liang shu*'s account of Emperor Wu's renunciation of 547 against *Nan shi.* The latter makes reference to Emperor Wu's divestment of imperial regalia and temporary donning of *dharma* robes; the purification ritual that accompanies his worldly renunciation; the scale of the renunciation; his stay in monastic accommodation and his ascetic lifestyle while at the monastery; his doctrinal lectures; use of the epithet "emperor-bodhisattva"; the monks' tacit agreement to release Emperor Wu; ministerial petitions

for his release; and the coronation ceremony that the emperor performs on his return to the palace.[146] None of these appears in *Liang shu*.

The most powerful effect of this catalogue of omissions from *Liang shu*'s accounts of the 529 and 549 worldly renunciations is to mute its representation of Emperor Wu's participation in activities identified elsewhere as Buddhist. The discrepancies have other ideological implications too. First, Emperor Wu's change of clothes in both years appears in *Nan shi* as a symbolic as well as a physical divestment of political authority that marks his transition from emperor to servant of the Buddhist clergy. The symbolic renunciation of political power to the Buddhist church had earlier provided a focus for much of Xun Ji's ten-part criticism in his letter to Emperor Wu. *Nan shi*'s inclusion of this detail sets it in the same seam of discourse as Xun Ji's letter – both are anti-Buddhist and both are critical of the legitimacy of Emperor Wu's rule. Conversely, *Liang shu*'s omission of such symbolic acts upholds Emperor Wu's authority as a secular ruler.

Second, the repeated use of the nomenclature "emperor-bodhisattva" in *Nan shi* further undermines the distinction between Emperor Wu's secular and religious roles, as it had done a century earlier in *Wei shu*.[147] *Nan shi* again joins a seam of discourse that denied Emperor Wu legitimacy on the grounds of his incorporation into the imperial institution symbolism and practices identified as Buddhist. *Liang shu*'s omission of the term "emperor-bodhisattva" preserves a divide between the realms of secular and religious authority.

Third, the ministerial petitions and the Buddhist clergy's power in determining the emperor's release point to an inversion of power relations between the Liang state and church. It recalls once more Xun Ji's claims that the Buddhist clergy had usurped imperial power under Emperor Wu. *Nan shi* hints at a similar usurpation of power; *Liang shu* suppresses such implications.

Economic Effects

Common to both *Liang shu* and *Nan shi*'s accounts of Emperor Wu's worldly renunciations are the large redemption offerings that Liang ministers made to the Buddhist clergy, ostensibly to entice the emperor back to court.[148] As we have seen, the drain that the Buddhist church placed on state economic resources formed an integral part of several

146 Compare *Liang shu*, 3.92, with *Nan shi*, 7.218–19.

147 *Wei shu*, 98.2187.

148 *Liang shu*, 3.73, 3.92; *Nan shi*, 7.206, 7.218, 7.219.

contributions to the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse. By contrast, the official histories subdue evidence of Buddhism's financial relationship with the state. Of the two, though, *Nan shi* is again the more vocal, confirming that it is more closely aligned than *Liang shu* to the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse: it quotes the Liang military administrator Guo Zushen's 郭組深 claim that "in the capital there are over 500 Buddhist temples of the utmost magnificence," for example.[149] The construction and renovation of only two of these monasteries draw notice in either work. The construction of Tongtai Monastery, central to all accounts as the site of much of Emperor Wu's public Buddhist activity, appears in *Nan shi* but not in *Liang shu*. The renovation of King Aśoka Monastery in 537 appears in both works, but only in sections on "barbarians" (*zhu yi* 諸夷): it is at a formal remove from the *ben ji* accounts of Emperor Wu's reign and from Han Chinese political practice more generally.[150] The result is to downplay Emperor Wu's personal responsibility for Buddhist construction, and even to overlook its existence entirely.[151] Here, more than anywhere, is a sense of these histories' complex response to Buddhism. Despite Taizong's critical reference in 646 to the Liang policy of Buddhist construction, and Daoxuan's concern to furnish it with a moral justification, it seems from this evidence that Buddhist construction was not perceived as a particularly pressing threat to the state in the early and mid-seventh century. It was not until the early eighth century, after a sustained period of lavish imperial patronage of the Buddhist church, that the issue presented itself once more as a point of real concern, both in general court discourse and specifically in representations of Emperor Wu.[152]

149 *Nan shi*, 70.1721. But neither *Nan shi* nor *Liang shu* cites the petition that the rebel Hou Jing 侯景 presented to the Liang throne in 549, in which he made reference to Emperor Wu's commission of Buddhist images and indulgence in "every degree of extravagance" at the expense of the popular welfare; compare *Liang shu*, 56.846–50 and *Nan shi*, 80.2006, with *Zi zhi tong jian*, 162.5007.

150 Tongtai Monastery: *Nan shi*, 7.205. *Nan shi,* 7.211 records Emperor Wu's casting of a silver statue at Tongtai in the first year of *da tong*, on the *ren xu* day of the fourth month; no *ren xu* day occurs in that month, leading the modern commentators of *Nan shi* to suggest that the casting took place on the *ren xu* day of the fifth month (July 2, 535). *Nan shi*, 7.212 also claims that the emperor had a second statue cast at Tongtai in gold and bronze in the third year of *da tong*, on the *gui wei* day of the fifth month. Again, there is a problem of chronology; the *gui wei* day of the fourth month (May 13, 537) would be a possible alternative. King Aśoka Monastery: *Liang shu*, 54.790; *Nan shi*, 78.1954.

151 The only official history that preserved something of the fierce critical response to this policy was Wei Shou's 6th-c. *Wei shu*. As we have seen, a critical account of Buddhism's economic effects on the state dominates the retrospective survey of Emperor Wu's religious activities supplied by its impersonal narrator, *Wei shu*, 98.2187–88.

152 See, e.g,, comments on Emperor Wu's rule that low-ranking scholar-official Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (*ca.* 658-*ca.*730) supplied to accompany his collection of anecdotes titled *Chao ye qian zai* 朝野僉載 (*Baoyan tang bi ji* edn.), 5.14a; elsewhere in his text Zhang Zhuo offered anecdotal

Historians' Judgements

What we have examined so far is indirect evidence of the seventh-century historians' various ideologies, evidence that derives from a close reading of the ways in which the Yaos, the Lis, and Yu Shinan manipulated their texts. The voices of these narrator-historians also sound openly in characterizations of Emperor Wu at the end of each account. *Liang shu* and *Nan shi* both contain analyses of Emperor Wu that correspond closely to the views of each account's implied narrator, which we have already established; they will represent opposite ends of the ideological spectrum.[153] In these two histories the correspondence between narrative and discursive sections of text is underlined by a separate assessment of Emperor Wu's reign marked off by the formulaic "your subject, the historian, states ..." (*shi chen yue* 史臣曰: *Liang shu*) or "the discussion states ..." (*lun yue* 論曰: *Nan shi*). In his *Di wang lüe lun*, Yu Shinan also offers a personal assessment of Emperor Wu's reign. A similar formula opens his comment – "the Duke states ..." (*gong zi yue* 公子曰) – and points up structural, as well as thematic, parallels with the comments in the two official histories.

The historians' comments in both *Liang shu* and *Nan shi* acknowledge what we might loosely call the Confucian canonical features of Emperor Wu's rule: filial piety on the death of his parents, literary talent and erudition, dedication to government, an ascetic lifestyle, and observance of propriety. In *Liang shu*'s analysis this moral setting subsumes any activities that elsewhere attract associations with Buddhism. They appear with little explicit ideological character of their own. Emperor Wu's vegetarianism and ascetic lifestyle are used to show his frugality and filial piety. His commentaries on Buddhist *sūtras* epitomize the breadth of his scholarship.[154] And none of the more controversial policies that drew fire from Wei Shou, Xun Ji, and others writing in

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evidence of extravagant Buddhist construction, which placed a burden on state finances (3.18a–b). In 767 Gao Ying 高郢, a young scholar from Weizhou, wrote a letter of remonstrance that criticized Tang Emperor Daizong's opulent and wasteful construction of a temple outside the Tonghua gate of the imperial city. He cited Emperor Wu as a minatory precedent; *Xin Tang shu*, 165.5071 (cf. *Zi zhi tong jian*, 224.7195–96). Emperor Wu's programme of temple construction also appeared as a central concern in 8th-c. Chan accounts of a purported encounter between Emperor Wu and Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Chan sect in China: *Puti damo Nan zong ding shi fei lun* 菩提達摩南宗定是非論 (pref. 733), Dugu Pei 獨孤沛, ap. Hu Shi 胡適, *Shenhui he shang yi ji* 神會和尙遺集 (Taibei: Hu Shi ji nian guan, 1968), pp. 261–62; *Li dai fa bao ji* 曆代法寶記, *T.*, vol.51, no. 2075: 180c (compiled between 774 and 781); and Zhiju 智炬, *Bao lin zhuan* 寶林傳 (compiled 801, *Song cang yi zhen* edn.), 8.1b–3b.

153 *Liang shu*, 3.95–98; *Nan shi*, 7.222–26.

154 This resonates with Daoxuan's characterization in *Xu Gao seng zhuan* of Emperor Wu's patronage of scholarship that reached beyond the scope of Buddhist learning.

the anti-Buddhist seam of discourse – the vegetarian reform of the imperial ancestral sacrifices, the worldly renunciations and religious assemblies, the financial donations to the Buddhist clergy – receives mention either in the analysis by *Liang shu*'s impersonal narrator or in Yao Silian's explicit assessment as historian. In short, Buddhism has little part to play here in the collapse of Liang imperial power. Instead, Emperor Wu's downfall is seen to proceed from old age and a subsequent inability to control court corruption – causes that the pro-Liang He Zhiyuan had already placed in the foreground of the discussion of Emperor Wu in his sixth-century *Liang dian.*[155] *Liang shu* therefore confirms itself as, above all, part of a seam of discourse that we first identified with *Jin lou zi*, a seam that sought to establish Emperor Wu's legitimacy by excising explicit reference to Buddhism and by pointing up other aspects of his rule.

There is an internal tension in *Liang shu*'s characterisation of Emperor Wu, though. It results from a collective authorship and the inclusion of a comment by the work's co-editor, Wei Zheng. There is a conflict of family political interests: Yao Silian, a southerner with family connections to the Liang court, had the ideological motivation to cast Emperor Wu in a favourable light; Wei Zheng's father had served under Liang's rival state of Northern Qi. Unlike Yao Silian's muted representation of Buddhism's role in the downfall of the Liang state, Wei Zheng gives it prominence. Emperor Wu, he claims, initially showed ability as a civil and military leader. "But," Wei Zheng changes direction, "he was neither able to abandon an interest in the periphery and focus on the fundamental, nor able to rid himself of ornamentation in favour of simplicity. He yearned for reputation and delighted in [worldly] affairs. He venerated and honoured the frivolous and the insubstantial. He belittled Confucius and Mozi, and he dallied with the Buddha and Laozi."[156] This claim marks a shift in Wei Zheng's characterization of Emperor Wu. The contrastive "but," *ran* 然, points up the transition from eulogy to criticism. From here on, the emperor's moral and political shortcomings emerge in rhetoric that bristles with allusions to the Confucian canon. They find representation, too, in negative imagery of activities now explicitly associated with metaphysical beliefs: a professed renunciation of possessions and desires masks material greed; degeneration in moral integrity allows the development of corruption and sycophancy at court; delusion produces a failure to distin-

[155] *Liang shu*, 3.97; cf. *Wen yuan ying hua*, 754.8a–11b.
[156] *Liang shu*, 6.150.

guish between allies and enemies.[157] The implication is that Emperor Wu precipitated his own downfall through actions and attitudes that were debilitated by his belief in Buddhism.[158] It sits uncomfortably with Yao Silian's broadly sympathetic representation of the emperor in the same text.

In *Nan shi* Li Yanshou represents similar qualities of Emperor Wu as those in the eulogistic account of *Liang shu*, but he accords a specific place to Buddhism and casts it as a malign influence on Emperor Wu's personality and rule. The language that frames *Nan shi*'s analysis is more obviously negative than that in *Liang shu*: the emperor is "mired in" his Buddhist beliefs, for example (though old age is offered as a reason for this delusion).[159] *Nan shi* also offers an implicitly critical slant on Emperor Wu's worldly renunciations, in which those in the know are able to recognize their effects as demonic.[160] Similar negative undercurrents shape Li Yanshou's explicit assessment as historian, where a causal relationship between Buddhism and imperial decline surfaces in unambiguous terms. Textual repetition – Emperor Wu again appears "mired in" his beliefs – restates the pernicious influence that Buddhism has on him. It causes him to neglect the administration of laws and punishments. That in turn precipitates insurrection and undermines imperial authority. The result of this chain of cause and effect is the destruction of the state.[161] And this is consonant with Wei Zheng's comment, which concludes *Nan shi*'s *ben ji* section. Li Yanshou draws his citation of Wei Zheng directly from *Liang shu*, but it is more consistent with *Nan shi*'s ideology than with its original textual setting. Unlike *Liang shu*, which accords little discrete role to the imperial patronage of Buddhism, *Nan*

157 Several of these charges against Emperor Wu recur in a statement that Wei Zheng made to Emperor Taizong in 628; *Zhen guan zheng yao*, 1.2.

158 The same point appears in *Sui shu*'s monograph on the five phases, written by an aide in the Bureau of Astrology, Li Chunfeng 李淳風. A causal connection is made there between meteorological omens of political collapse and Emperor Wu's personal misconduct. The Liang emperor's arrogance as well as his veneration of Buddhist *dharma*, in particular his worldly renunciation and adoption of a life of monastic servitude, are seen to precipitate these inauspicious natural phenomena; the text's impersonal narrator echoes the words of a Liang minister to suggest that they are penalties for "breaking with the Way and corrupting worthiness"; *Sui shu*, 23.659.

159 *Nan shi*, 7.223. Li Yanshou's phrasing echoes that of Wang Tong, *Wen Zhong zi Zhong shuo*, 4.7b, a work that may also date to the mid-seventh century. On the problems surrounding this work's composition, see Howard J. Wechsler, "The Confucian Teacher Wang T'ung 王通 (584?–617): One Thousand Years of Controversy," *TP* 63.4–5, 1977: 252–59.

160 *Nan shi*, 7.225. Earlier, in *Wei shu*, 98.2187–88, the interpretation of negative omens by "those in the know" (as opposed to the deluded emperor, who sees them as auspicious) had served a similar function as an indictment of Emperor Wu's Buddhist activities and as a narrative signal of his imminent downfall.

161 *Nan shi*, 7.226.

shi identifies it as the root cause of Liang's decline. Li Yanshou aligns his text with the overarching arguments of a well-established seam of anti-Buddhist discourse that withheld political legitimacy from Emperor Wu on the grounds of his religious activities.

Buddhism also emerges as the catalyst for Emperor Wu's violent downfall in Yu Shinan's assessment of his reign. He deploys a familiar rhetorical technique. Like Wei Zheng in *Liang shu*, Yu Shinan opens his comment as "the Duke" (*gong zi* 公子) with a brief description of Emperor Wu's admirable qualities as a competent and compassionate ruler. At the same time, though, he undermines his praise by hinting at its insecurity. The particle "probable," *gai* 蓋, does the job here: "it is probable that he had both the civil and the military way in him," Yu Shinan suggests. That element of doubt paves the way for the criticism that he unleashes next. The expected change of tone from qualified praise to censure follows. Yu Shinan notes the emperor's study of Buddhist doctrine and close association with the Buddhist clergy. There is an explicit incongruity here between Emperor Wu's status as "the ruler of a state of ten thousand chariots" and his actions – "the good deeds of the common man." The inversion of social hierarchies (there are faint echoes of Xun Ji) also blurs the fundamental moral distinction between good and bad. It marks the beginning of Emperor Wu's political decline. Through a thematic about-turn Yu Shinan suggests that Buddhism, in particular the divergence that it forced from the proper moral and political Way, brought a reversal in Liang imperial fortunes.[162] Again, we are dealing with arguments and textual strategies familiar from an anti-Buddhist seam of discourse.

From the discrepancies among these seventh-century histories, a picture emerges in which no single official or non-Buddhist characterization of Emperor Wu suggests itself. Instead, a complex of textual manipulations and ideological tensions brings out the personal, regional, and political sympathies of the texts' various authors.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Emperor Wu's recasting of the foundations of imperial statecraft was a contentious political act: that much is clear from the tense debates that it sparked in the sixth and seventh centuries. Rulers and scholars who looked back to Emperor Wu's reign had to address (even if only by omission) his attempt to reconcile personal patronage of the Bud-

[162] *Di wang lüe lun*, *j.* 4. Cf. *Tong li*, 7.54b–55a; *Tang wen shi yi*, 13.10a–11a; *Quan Tang wen*, *shi yi* 13.10a–11a.

dhist church with a secular role as emperor – an attempt more radical than anything before it. What stands out in this is the malleability and versatility of Emperor Wu's image, and particularly of his image as a "Buddhist" ruler. The representations of him produced in the sixth and seventh centuries were closely contingent upon the contexts from which they emerged, and so Emperor Wu's significance shifted continually. The sharp reflection that these representations offer of the historical circumstances from which they emerged has been a particular point of interest for the present paper.

At the same time, though, there is also a sense in which the intertextual relationships and common ideologies that made themselves felt among representations of Emperor Wu transcended local time and place. That enabled authors to endow their texts with wider resonances and to add weight to their immediate political and religious concerns. Patterns of intertextual relationship have suggested three seams of discourse in representations of Emperor Wu during the sixth and seventh centuries. As we have seen, each of these three seams not only found itself shaped to fit contemporary ideological agendas but also fed into long-running debates on how best to negotiate the relationship between the secular state and the Buddhist church.

The picture grows particularly complex with historiographic works of the mid-seventh century. Even here, though, close reading shows the importance of intertextual relationships in shaping a work's ideology and in giving it persuasive force in both local contexts and larger debates. Most importantly, these intertextual relationships guide us in the business of interpretation. That perhaps makes itself felt most strongly with Yao Silian's *Liang shu*: written within the parameters of traditional dynastic historiography, his text resonates with the pro-Buddhist seam of discourse on Emperor Wu to produce a sympathetic representation of the Liang ruler. That is not to say that Yao Silian advocated a role for Buddhism in imperial statecraft or in according political legitimacy; it simply suggests that Yao Silian found his immediate political and geographical allegiances best served by his pro-Buddhist sources and that, for pragmatic purposes as a pro-Liang historian, he stepped outside his conventional ideological tradition to construct his version of the past. Works such as Yao Silian's therefore yield a fuller richness and more nuanced significance when considered from a longer, intertextual perspective. They shed valuable light on the subtle handling of ideological spin and textual manipulation in medieval China.

Yao Silian's example makes a further point: throughout this paper, representations of Emperor Wu have offered a sharp sense of what was at stake politically, as much as religiously, for sixth- and seventh-century authors and readers. For the men who operated in the insecure political environments of the sixth and seventh centuries, Emperor Wu's reign remained near enough to offer vivid lessons for their own times. As in Yao Silian's case, Buddhist doctrine therefore tended to find itself subordinated to political concerns. The powerful intellectual arguments that informed Emperor Wu's support for Buddhist doctrine passed largely unchallenged during this period. He served instead as a model, both minatory and exemplary, for the practice of statecraft and the acquisition of political legitimacy. As a result, representations of Emperor Wu acquired their greatest sense of urgency when personal political ideologies were under threat and when successive regimes felt their own legitimacy called into question.

That the identity of a "Buddhist" ruler might serve fundamentally opposed political commitments suggests too the flexibility of the very concept of "Buddhism" in sixth- and seventh-century China. It is a reminder, among several that have received attention in recent scholarship, that many of the activities labelled as "Buddhist" at this time had in fact already lost much of their distinctive religious identity and had become integrated into larger political and ritual programmes.[163] Even with activities of Emperor Wu's that received the label of "Buddhist" across all three of the competing seams of discourse identified in the present paper, the interpretations and value accorded those activities varied substantially. In many cases it will therefore not serve for religious historians to treat Emperor Wu as distinctively and exclusively "Buddhist," since a Buddhist filiation made itself felt less strongly in his original motivations and actual practices than in their later reception and representation. Ultimately, the image of Emperor Wu as a Buddhist ruler – an image that continues to prevail in modern scholarship – distracts from the real point of interest here: in the discourse that surrounded Emperor Wu the sharply defined label of "Buddhist" often attempted to mask (and, for precisely that reason, should draw our attention to) complex ritual and institutional realities, and deep political agendas.[164] By looking beyond such an epithet, we gain a more

163 Robert Sharf offers a useful discussion of this issue in *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 1–27.

164 The enduring image of a "Buddhist" ruler suggests itself from, e.g., the title chosen by Mori for his 1956 study of Emperor Wu; see n. 143, above.

nuanced basis for assessing both Emperor Wu's reign and the many forms and functions of Buddhism in medieval China.

The textual and ideological manipulations of Emperor Wu's image that have concerned us here continued beyond the chronological scope of the present paper. Already by the early eighth century, representations of Emperor Wu had crystallized and assumed many of the broad characteristics that would endure in later years. It was therefore possible to produce Emperor Wu as the trope of a Buddhist ruler, one that satisfied the conventions of parallel prose; his bare name was enough to evoke a whole character type.[165] But also in the eighth century, the emergence of Chan sectarian debates produced a new reworking of the traits that had established themselves in the earlier seams of discourse. These debates introduced doctrinal concerns. The issue of belief, which had failed to take a prominent place among the practical political concerns of the sixth and seventh centuries, now took a foreground role: Emperor Wu's belief in and interpretation of Buddhist doctrines and practices were measured against competing Chan orthodoxies. Beyond that too, after Tang fell in 907, parallels between that dynasty and Emperor Wu's Liang grew more acute. In a newly destabilized polity, scholars resumed their search for patterns of dynastic decline and fall. Representations of Emperor Wu in texts of the sixth and seventh centuries were refashioned once more to suit new historical circumstances.

[165] See, e.g, the memorials of Yao Chong 姚崇 (650–721), chief minister in the early years of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, in *Jiu Tang shu*, 96.3023, 96.3027–28; and of the scholar and calligrapher Li Yong 李邕 (678–747); ibid., 190B.5040.