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Pañcavārṣika Assemblies in Liang Wudi's Buddhist Palace Chapel

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XIAO Yan 蕭衍 (464–549), better known as Liang Wudi 梁武帝 or Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (r. 502–549), was an exceptionally competent ruler; yet his image remains complex and controversial. Scholars of Chinese Buddhism are particularly intrigued by his relationship with Buddhism; he was celebrated as no less than a Chinese King Aśoka.¹ Quite surprising, indeed even ironic, is that scholars interested in this aspect of Wudi's rule have overlooked an area where political and monastic forces cooperated

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¹ On Wudi's relationship with Buddhism, see Mori Mikisaburō 森三樹三郎, *Ryō no Butei: Bukkyō ōchō no higeki* 梁の武帝: 仏教王朝の悲劇 (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1956); Suwa Gijun's 諏訪義純 several articles collected in *Chūgoku Nanchō Bukkyōshi no kenkyū* 中国南朝仏教史の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1997), pp. 11–228; Andreas Janousch, *The Reform of Imperial Ritual during the Reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–549)* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 2000), parts of which appear in “The Emperor as Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattva Ordination and Ritual Assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty,” in *State and Court Ritual in China*, edited by Joseph P. McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 112–49. For studies in Chinese, see mainly Zhou Yiliang (Chou Yi-liang) 周一良, “Lun Liang Wudi jiqi shidai” 論梁武帝及其時代, in *Zhonghua xueshu lunwen ji: Zhonghua shuju chengli qishi zhounian jinian* 中華學術論文集: 中華書局成立七十週年紀念 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), pp. 123–54, esp. pp. 140–45; and Yan Shangwen 顏尚文, *Liang Wudi* 梁武帝 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1999).

with each other most directly and intensively—I refer to the institution most commonly known as *neidaochang* 內道場. Translating the Sanskrit *bodhimaṇḍa*, the place beneath the bodhi-tree where Śākya-muni achieved enlightenment, *daochang* 道場 (“ritual precinct” or, more broadly, “field of practice”) denotes a location in which Buddhist observances were carried out; and specifically, a Buddhist temple, monastery, or convent. Since the prefix *nei* 內 commonly means “pertaining to the Palatine City (*gongcheng* 宮城),” the term *neidaochang* would then refer to an area or building within the imperial palaces.

The Buddhist palace chapel provided a means of direct access to the center of imperial power; here Buddhist monks or their female counterparts could interact with members not only of different levels of secular authority, but also of other religious communities. It could be a separate building that was perceived and employed as an actual temple, or simply a part of the imperial palace reserved for certain religious purposes. The chapel itself played multiple roles. It could function as a translation office, as a venue for state-sponsored observances, or the place where bodhisattva-precepts were administered to emperors and their quasi-families, that is, the empresses, imperial concubines, princes, and princesses. It might serve as the central office of the highest level of the national monastic leadership, or a shrine where the Buddha’s relics could be brought for veneration. On occasion it could even be a theater for performances that, though religious in theme, were primarily for the entertainment of the emperors, their entourage, and court officials.²

Although the *neidaochang* institution has received sustained and widespread scholarly attention,³ several aspects of its history have been left unexplored. One perennially vexing question is its origin. Most scholars still follow Chou Yi-liang, who believes that a fully-fledged Buddhist palace chapel did not come into existence until Empress Wu (regency 684–690, r. 690–705).⁴ However, new evidence, both textual and epigraphic, shows that the imperial park of

² Chen Jinhua, “The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 32 (2004): 102.

³ Some of these major studies are listed in Chen, “The Tang Dynasty Buddhist Palace Chapels,” 102 n. 3.

⁴ Chou Yi-liang, “Tantrism in China,” *HJAS* 8 (1944-45): 309-11.

the Later Qin (384–417) and Northern Liang (397–439) had a Buddhist chapel—referred to as *gongsi* 宮寺 (palace temple), which functioned mainly as a translation office and that in 382 Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 of the Eastern Jin (r. 371–396) built within his palace a Buddhist temple (*jingshe* 精舍) and invited some śramaṇas to live there.⁵ Too little is now known about these *gongsi* and *jingshe* within the palace complexes of the Jin, Later Qin, and Northern Liang to determine whether actual Buddhist chapels were involved and, if so, how well and how long they functioned. Nonetheless, at least one of “Buddhist emperor” Liang Wudi’s palaces contained a Buddhist establishment that we might consider a chapel.

Skirting the tricky issue of the origin of the Buddhist palace chapel in medieval China, this paper will focus on major religious events staged in Wudi’s palace chapel. These activities centered on a series of monthly gatherings made up of lectures (some delivered by Liang Wudi himself), which were occasionally accompanied by vegetarian feasts. Both the dharma-lectures and vegetarian feasts were—at least in theory—open to the public, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, social status, or religious affiliation. They represented, therefore, the Chinese version of the *pañcavārsika* (Ch. *Wuzhe fahui* 無遮法會 or *Wuzhe dahui* 無遮大會; “dharma-assemblies without discrimination or hindrance”). They involved a form of relic veneration, attracted waves of lavish and enthusiastic donations, were punctuated by acts of self-immolation, and were believed to have been blessed by a number of miraculous and propitious signs. Being more than purely religious activities, they also show how medieval Chinese rulers used public performance to win and manipulate public opinion. They therefore should be of interest to social and political historians.

The subject of the relic veneration that constituted a centerpiece of Liang Wudi’s *pañcavārsika* assemblies was a huge corpus of Buddhist literature—the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, considered to be a dharma-relic, in contrast to the physical relics left behind by the Buddha. On these occasions, the chanting of and lecturing on Buddhist scriptures were intended not so much to enlighten as to focus and

⁵ *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhongshu shuju, 1975), 9.231; *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, compiled by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al., 100 vols. (Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932) [hereafter T], 49: 36.341a–b.

heighten the religious fervor of the crowd. A majority of those in attendance, being illiterate or poorly educated, did not understand, or care to understand, the contents of these often abstruse lectures. What mattered was the psychological environment created by scripture-chanting and the accompanying rituals, which helped to bring about the other two fundamental elements of a *pañcavārsika* assembly—lavish donations and the appearance of miraculous and propitious signs. The former was a natural expression of the audience's increasingly fervent emotion and the latter, by and large, a result of their religious ecstasy. Research into this aspect of Liang Wudi's *pañcavārsika* assemblies will illuminate the psychology of medieval religious experience, which has been little studied in the context of East Asia.

The people participating in the dharma-assemblies held at Wudi's Buddhist palace chapel and its neighboring precincts gave away not only money or property, but also parts of their bodies. On these occasions, self-immolation, which they understood as a special form of donation, was closely related to certain charitable and financial institutions operating within the *saṃgha*. But offerings of the body in the context of these assemblies were also a key element in bringing down miraculous and propitious signs from the heavens, although in truth such signs were probably no more than the product of mass hallucination in an emotionally charged atmosphere (this does not exclude, of course, the possibility that Wudi and his supporters may also have manufactured them).⁶

Wudi's Buddhist palace chapel was a platform for staging rituals that had multiple religious, political, economical functions, significantly affecting contemporary religious and political life. Even so, the picture is incomplete. The *pañcavārsika* assemblies regularly per-

⁶ Medieval people speak of making miracles with smoke, mirrors, and images. The Avataṃsaka master Fazang 法藏 (643–712), for example, was once engaged in a magic performance aimed at scaring away the rebellious Khitan army. See Chen Jinhua, "More Than a Philosopher: Fazang (643–712) as a Politician and Miracle-worker," *History of Religion* 42.4 (May 2003): 338–41. See also my unpublished manuscript, *History and His Stories: A Biographical and Hagiographical Study of Fazang (643–712)*, Chapter 8. On the possibility that on this occasion Fazang resorted to a special device constructed of mirrors, see Eugene Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), p. 259.

formed in the palace chapel created a politico-religious paradigm that later generations repeatedly emulated. Arguably the most eminent practitioner of this paradigm is Empress Wu, China's only female monarch. Not only did she model her palace chapels on Liang Wudi's, but her religious ideology was also inspired by his conduct of the *pañcavārsika* assemblies. This paper will also re-assess the influence of Liang Wudi's policies toward Buddhism on the contemporary political world.

THE CHONGYUN HALL

If we understand *neidaochang* in the sense of a place within the imperial palace regularly employed for Buddhist observances, such a site can be located in Liang Wudi's imperial park, the Hualinyuan 華林園. It was a hall called Chongyun 重雲, the venue for a lecture that Liang Wudi delivered on a chapter of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*. The Hualin Park and the Chongyun Hall are described in Lu Yungong's 陸雲公 (511–547) preface to a series of imperial Buddhist lectures:⁷

Thus, on the twelfth day of the third month of Datong 7 (April 23, 541) [His Majesty] lectured on a golden-character copy of the *Bore boluomi sanhui jing* 波若波羅蜜三慧經 at the Chongyun Hall of the Hualin Park. The Hualin Park had been the place for entertainment and banquets for the imperial family since the government moved to the “left of the river” [in 317]. . . . After the Supreme Person took the throne, . . . he gave away this heavenly park and established a ritual-precinct (*daochang*). In convening monks and nuns together, [the emperor] had the rituals “established in an august atmosphere” (*zhuangyan* 莊嚴). The awe-inspiring Divine Edifice gathers up the shade of green peaks, and the Multistoried Pavilion towers majestically over the Cinnabar Walls. In breadth and brilliance it exceeds even the [Garden of] Āmavana; in bringing peace and delight to body and mind, it parallels the Nandanavana.⁸

⁷ “Yujiang Bore jing xu” 御講波若經序, or “Xu yujiang Bore xu” 敘御講波若序, preserved in *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集, T 52: 19.235b–36b, where the author is identified as Lu Yun 陸雲 (231b), probably a mistake for Lu Yungong, who served as historiographer for Wudi. See his biography in *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 50.724–26. This title echoes the way in which the author refers to himself at the end of the preface as a court historiographer (職參史載); see “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” T 52: 19.236b.

⁸ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” T 52: 19.235c8–17. Nandanavana is one of the four gardens of Indra's paradise, to the north of his central city.

As stated here, the Hualin Park, a part of the Palatine city,⁹ contained a *daochang*, where the emperor gathered monks for the solemn performance of Buddhist rituals. The keyword *daochang* reveals that Wudi actually constructed at least one building, the Chongyun Hall—referred to here as “Divine Edifice” (*shenyu* 神宇) and “Multistoried Pavilion” (*chongge* 重閣)—that should be recognized as part of a *neidaochang*. The fact that Lu Yungong likens this building to Āmravana and Nandanavana strengthens one’s impression of its religious nature and functions.¹⁰

The passage leaves many questions unanswered. Why is the Chongyun Hall described as a “divine edifice” (*shenyu*), which, literally understood, would mean that it enshrined the image(s) of a deity or deities? Why was this called a “multistoried pavilion” (*chongge*)? Can anything more be learned about the structure of this building and its layout? Finally, in addition to housing dharmalectures such as those delivered by Liang Wudi, what were its other functions, if any? These questions can only be answered by a thorough investigation of the history of this unusual building.

The Structure and Layout of the Chongyun Hall

Both secular and monastic sources affirm that the Chongyun Hall was constructed on the orders of Wudi.¹¹ According to a record in

⁹ In a map in which Zhu Xie 朱偃 has reconstructed the Liang capital, the Hualin Park is situated outside the Palatine City (*taicheng* 臺城). See Zhu, *Jinling guji tu kao* 金陵古蹟圖考 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), p. 104, reproduced in Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, *Liuchao de chengshi yu shehui* 六朝的城市與社會 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1992), p. 68. This is contradicted by the *Jingding Jiankang zhi* 景定建康志, compiled by Zhou Yinghe 周應合 (1213–1280) and the sources on which it was based, according to all of which the Chongyun Hall, located within the Hualin Park, lay within the precincts of the Palatine City (see n. 11).

¹⁰ Both monastic and secular sources attest to the existence of three more halls within the Hualin Park that also had associations with Buddhism: (1) Baoyun Hall 寶雲殿 (an impressive Buddhist Library), (2) Dengjue Hall 等覺殿 (also known as Wu’ai Hall 無礙殿), where Wudi received his bodhisattva-precepts in 517, (3) Huaguang Hall 華光殿 (in some sources miswritten as Guanghua Hall 光華殿), in which (probably also in 517) Wudi issued his famous prohibition of the consumption of meat and alcohol within the sangha and which was abolished sometime between 520 and 527 so that its materials were donated to Caotang si 草堂寺. On these halls, see Chen Jinhua, “Buddhist Establishments within Liang Wudi’s (r. 502–549) Imperial Park,” in *Engaged Buddhism, Its History, Doctrines and Practices: Essays in Memory of Master Yinshun (1906–2005)*, eds. Hsu Mu-chu 許木柱 et al. (Hua-lien: Ciji Daxue chubanshe, 2005), forthcoming.

¹¹ For secular sources, see, for example, Zhou Yinghe, *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, Yingyin

the *Sui shu* 隋書 of a prophecy made by the monk Baozhi 寶誌 (418–514), this happened sometime between April 23, 502, when Wudi founded the dynasty, and July 5, 504, when he delivered a lecture in the Chongyun Hall.¹²

The Chongyun Hall was actually a part of a multistoried building, as is unambiguously asserted by the *Liuchao gongyuan ji* 六朝宮苑記, which is attributed to Xu Song 許嵩 (?–756+):

The Tongtianguan 通天觀 (Observatory for Communicating with the Heavens) was built on the eastern peak of Mount Jingyang 景陽. In front of the observatory was erected a building composed of pavilions that were stacked (*chonglou* 重樓), with the upper part called Chongyun Hall, and the lower part called Guangyan Hall 光嚴殿. Facing the steps of the hall were twin towers, Chaori 朝日 (Morning Sun) on the left and Xiyue 夕月 (Night Moon) on the right, both of unparalleled beauty and ornateness.¹³

Mount Jingyang was an artificial mound constructed within the Hualin Park in 446 by Song Wendi (r. 424–453).¹⁴ In commenting on the Guangyan Hall on another occasion, Zhou Yinghe writes:

Guangyan Hall: located *at the southern foot* of the Eastern Peak of Mount Jingyang, which was six *li* to the northeast of the subprefecture [Shangyuan 上元縣].

Investigation and Verification (*kaozheng* 考證): The Liang [government] erected the Cengchengguan 層城觀 (Observatory of the Multi-leveled Castle)¹⁵ within the Palatine City (Taicheng 臺城), which was renovated and repaired dynasty after dynasty. A multistoried pavilion was added, with the upper part called Chongyun Hall and the lower part Guangyan Hall.¹⁶

Obviously, what Zhou Yinghe calls the Cengchengguan is the

Wenyuange Siku quanshu edition (Tabei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986) [hereafter SKQS], 21.13a, where Zhou Yinghe clearly states that the Guangyan[–Chongyun] Hall was built within the Liang dynasty's Palatine city. For the monastic sources, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, T 50: 30.469b, where a Buddhist monk who commanded Wudi's high respect is quoted as saying that the emperor built the Chongyun Hall.

¹² *Sui shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 22.636–37. Daoxuan seems to confirm that the hall was built before 512 in his *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 6.469b.

¹³ The *Liuchao gongyuan ji* itself is not extant. The passage quoted here is preserved in *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, 21.16a.

¹⁴ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治統鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 124.3927; *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 5.94; *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 2.50. In the same year, a lake called “Xuanwu” 玄武 (Dark Warrior) was also dug behind (to the north of) the Palatine City.

¹⁵ Cengcheng 層城 is a legendary towering castle at the top of Mount Kunlun 崑崙, so named since it was thought to consist of nine levels (*jiuceng* 九層).

¹⁶ *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, 21.14a. Emphases added. See also *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (SKQS edition), 175.10a, where Cengchengguan is miswritten as Luchengguan 魯城觀.

Tongtianguan mentioned by Xu Song. But, according to Zhou, the Guangyan Hall (by which he means the whole complex of the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall) lay at the southern foot of the Eastern Peak of Mount Jingyang, rather than on the peak itself, as stated in the *Liuchao gongyuan ji*.

This information on the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall and the twin pavilions of Chaori and Xiyue is partially verified by a much earlier source, the *Yudi zhi* 輿地志 by Gu Yewang 顧野王 (518–581). Although this work was already lost at the turn of the Song and Yuan dynasties, some passages are preserved in different texts. One passage, quoted in the *Jiankang shilu* 建康實錄 completed in 756 by Xu Song, confirms that Wudi built a multistoried pavilion, the upper part of which was called Chongyun Hall, and the lower part Xingguang 興光 (obviously an error for Guangyan) Hall. This passage also mentions the twin pavilions Chaori and Xiyue, although it does not specify their location or their relationship with the Chongyun-Guangyan complex.¹⁷

That the Chongyun-Guangyan complex stood at the southern foot of the eastern peak of Mount Jingyang is corroborated by Lu Yungong's preface, which describes Guangyan Hall as "gathering up the shade of the green peak" (結翠巘之陰). This makes it clear that the complex was located at the foot, rather than on the top, of a mountain. As the Chongyun-Guangyan complex was in front of the Tongtianguan, the latter must have also been at the southern foot of the same peak.

The *Yudi ji* shows that Wudi was probably responsible only for renovating, rather than constructing, the Cengchengguan, which was already a component of the imperial park of Qi Wudi (r. 482–493). The Cengchengguan had also come to be called "Chuanzhenlou" 穿針樓 (Mansion of Needlework) due to an interesting practice that Qi Wudi was said to have promoted among his palace maidens. On the night of the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, he ordered them to do their needlework in the pavilion in the hope of improving their sewing skills.¹⁸ Other sources date the

¹⁷ See *Jiankang shilu* 建康實錄 (completed 756), collated and annotated by Zhang Chenshi 張忱石 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 12.444.

¹⁸ These *Yudi ji* passages about the Cengchengguan-Chuanzhenlou are quoted in *Liuchao shiji leibian* 六朝事跡類編 (SKQS edition), 1.57b; *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, 22.45a.

existence of a building bearing the name of Tongtianguan within the Hualin Park as far back as the Yuanjia era (424–453) or even to the reign of Xiaowudi of the Eastern Jin (r. 373–376).¹⁹ It remains unclear whether Liang Wudi's Tongtianguan/Cengchengguan was identical to the Tongtianguan of the Jin, Liu Song, and Xiao Qi, although it is clear that these were also within the Hualin Park and had an astrological function. Given that the Cengchengguan of the Liu Song was later abandoned, the establishment known by the same name under the Xiao Qi must have been rebuilt (or, at least, renovated) on the ruins of the Liu Song building. Wudi's Cengchengguan/Tongtianguan may in turn have been reconstructed and expanded on the foundations of the building inherited from the Xiao Qi.

An armillary sphere (*huntian yi* 渾天儀) that was installed in front of the Chongyun Hall should be considered in connection with the Tongtianguan, a tower through which one was allegedly able to communicate with heaven.²⁰ This astronomical device likely stood right in front of the building alternatively known as Cengchengguan, Chuanzhenlou, or Tongtianguan, which was, in each case, an astrological edifice. In addition to proving the geographical proximity between the Chongyun-Guangyan complex and the Tongtianguan, an armillary sphere in front of the Chongyun Hall also suggests that the Chongyun-Guangyan complex and the Tongtianguan probably stood face to face, rather than with one (Tongtianguan) standing behind the other (the complex).

The Chongyun-Guangyan complex was an intricate structure, with over twenty doors so “multiplicitous and elaborate” that they confused even long-serving palace maidens, and its convoluted passageways were described by contemporaries as “a thousand labyrinths.”²¹ Within the Chongyun Hall was installed a special pavilion, called the Sanxiu Pavilion 三休閣, which enshrined two statues of the Buddha, made of gold and silver respectively and of the same height as Wudi. This special piece of architecture likely constituted the topmost part of the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall,

¹⁹ For the former, see *Jiankang gongque bao* 建康宮闕簿, quoted in *Yuhai* 玉海 (SKQS edition), 166.18b; for the latter, see *Jinling gushi* 金陵故事, quoted in *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, 22.43b.

²⁰ *Sui shu*, 19.517–18.

²¹ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 6.470b.

because the word *ge* 閣 usually denotes the upper part of a building.²² It was in this pavilion that Wudi allegedly inscribed a votive text on the occasion of announcing his conversion from Daoism to Buddhism on May 7, 504 (Tianjian 3/4/8), the Buddha's birthday.²³

The Religious Functions of Chongyun Hall

At the Chongyun Hall Liang Wudi granted audiences to eminent monks, including the semi-legendary figure Mahāsattva Fu (Fu Dashi 傅大士, 497–569), Sengda 僧達 (475–556), Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542), and Baozhi. Sometime after February 26, 534, when Wudi preached on the *Sanhui jing* 三慧經 (*Sūtra* of Three Wisdoms) at the Chongyun Hall, he ordered Mahāsattva Fu to sit alone on a slightly elevated couch (*ta* 榻) and discuss Buddhist teachings with him.²⁴ Between 521 and 532,²⁵ Sengda, a disciple of Lenamoti 勒那摩提 (Ratnamati, d. ca. 513) and Huiguang 慧光 (before 491–after 560),

²² *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄, T 52: 2.420a; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 29.693b–c; *Fayuan zhuli* 法苑珠林, T 53: 14.389b–c.

²³ *Fayuan zhulin*, T 53: 55.707a; *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 4.112a; *Ji gujin fodao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡, T 52: 1.370b; *Fozu tongji*, T 49: 37.348c; *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論, T 52: 8.549b; *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, T 49: 9.544c; *Shishi jigu lue* 釋氏稽古略, T 49: 2.794c, 795a. The authenticity of the votive text has been challenged. See Ota Teizo 太田悌藏, “Ryō Butei no shadō hōbutsu ni tsuite utagau” 梁武帝的捨道奉仏について疑う, *Yūki Kyōju shōju kinen: Bukkyō shisōshi ronshū* 結城教授頌壽記念: 仏教思想史論集, ed. Yūki Kyōju Shōju Kinen Ronbunshū Kankōkai 結城教授頌壽記念論文集刊行會 (Daizō Shuppan, 1964), pp. 417–32.

²⁴ Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583), “Dongyang Shuanglinsi Fu Dashi bei” 東陽雙林寺傅大士碑, *Han Wei Liuchao baisanjia ji* 漢魏六朝百三家集 (SKQS edition), 103B.32b–33c. See also *Han'guk Pulgyo chōnsō* 韓國佛教全書, 6 vols., compiled by Tongguk tachakkyo pulchōn kahaeng wiwōnhoe nae Han'guk Pulgyo chōnsō pyōnch'an wiwōn 東國大學校佛典刊行委員會 內韓國佛教全書編纂委員 (Seoul: Tongguk tachakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1979–1984) (hereafter *HPC*), 4: 655b–56a, in which the title of the epitaph is given slightly differently as “Liang Donyangjun Shuanglinsi Fu Dashi bei” 梁東陽郡雙林寺傅大士碑. The *Shanhui Dashi yulu* 善慧大士語錄 has a different version of this story. Sometime in early 535, Wudi visited the Chongyun Hall of the Hualin Park. He invited “people of the four assemblies” (*sizhong* 四眾; i.e., monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) to the hall, where he preached on the *Sanhui jing*. A huge number of high-ranking officials attended the assembly. A special edict was issued to prepare a separate couch for Fu Dashi, who was to be attended by four court attendants. See *Shanhui Dashi yulu*, in *Wan xuzang jing* 續藏經 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1968–1970) [hereafter *XZJ*], 120:1.4b3–8. Xu Ling's version is quoted (with some modifications) in a number of later sources, including *Fozu tongji*, which, following the *Shanhui Dashi yulu*, dates it to Datong 1. See *Fozu tongji*, T 49: 22.244c; repeated in 37.350c.

²⁵ We know these dates because Sengda was then lodged at Tongtai si 同泰寺, which was built in 521, and he was first treated by Yin Jun, who died in 532 (see n. 27). For the date of the construction of Tongtai si, see *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, T 49: 11.99c.

left the north for the Liang capital of Jiankang 建康 (present-day Nanjing) to visit Wudi, whose commitment to Buddhism he admired.²⁶ He was led by Wudi's son-in-law Yin Jun 殷均 (or 殷鈞, 484–532)²⁷ to an audience at the Chongyun Hall. It is said that Wudi kept talking with him for seven consecutive nights and that the week-long interaction culminated in the conferment of the bodhisattva-precepts on the emperor. Sengda was then lodged at Tongtai si 同泰寺. Ten days later, he was summoned to the Chongyun Hall to lecture on the Buddhist teachings. He stayed in Jiankang for a year before returning to the north.²⁸

Some time between 527 and 528, Tanluan, who was then eagerly pursuing Daoist methods of nourishing life in hopes of recovering his health, went to the south in search of the great Daoist priest Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536). He asked for an audience with Wudi, who received him at the Chongyun Hall. Although Wudi took him at first for a practitioner of Daoism, he eventually came to recognize and appreciate Tanluan's deep understanding of Buddhism, especially the teachings on the Buddha-nature. With Wudi's assistance, Tanluan succeeded in locating Tao Hongjing, who gave him ten scrolls of Daoist texts, "scriptures of immortality" (*xianjing* 仙經). On returning to the north, he ran into Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (Bodhiruci, fl. 508–535), who finally convinced him of the superiority of Buddhism over Daoist teachings.²⁹

The Chongyun Hall served not only as a meeting place for Wudi and the Buddhist monks he respected, but also as a lecture-hall for the emperor, who was an avid preacher on Buddhism, especially on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. Official histories note that he often preached Buddhist texts at the Chongyun Hall and Tongtai si. Erudite Buddhist scholars and lay believers alike attended his lectures in

²⁶ On Sengda, see Jinhua Chen, *Monks and Monarchs, Kinship and Kingship: Tanqian in Sui Buddhism and Politics* (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2002), p. 28.

²⁷ Yin Jun's biographies (*Liang shu*, 27.407; *Nan shi*, 60.1488) give his personal name as 鈞, rather than 均. He married Wudi's daughter, Princess Yongxing 永興, who later had an affair with her own uncle, Wudi's younger brother Xiao Hong 蕭宏 (?–526). Yin Jun was a capable administrator and a famed author of Buddhist treatises. He associated with Buddhist monks, wrote a funeral epitaph for one monk, and sponsored the lectures of another. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 6.467b, 21.609b.

²⁸ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.553a.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.470a–c.

tens of thousands.³⁰ Monastic sources substantiate this: Falin 法琳 (572–640) tells us that the emperor gathered one thousand Buddhist monks for Buddhist lectures at the Chongyun Hall,³¹ and Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) further corroborates that the lectures there were delivered on a monthly basis.³²

Both monastic and secular sources provide specific examples of Wudi's Chongyun lectures, which can be listed chronologically as follows:

1. On July 5, 504, as Wudi lectured on Buddhist texts, the monk Baozhi made a prediction that was later borne out in the destruction of the Liang at the hands of Hou Jing 侯景 (503?–552).³³
2. The same source also reports that Baozhi made another prediction in a “Great Assembly” (*dahui* 大會) held on May 20, 511.³⁴ This dharma-assembly probably took place in the Chongyun Hall and was supervised by Wudi.
3. Hongyan 洪偃 (504–564) attended one of Wudi's Chongyun lectures as a young man,³⁵ when Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551), one of Hongyan's admirers, was already heir apparent. Given that Hongyan was born in 504, this lecture was probably held between June 27, 531, the date of Xiao Gang's appointment as the new heir apparent,³⁶ and 534, when Hongyan turned thirty.
4. As mentioned above, sometime between February 18 and March 19, 535, Wudi lectured here on the *Sanhui jing*.
5. Chen Zhijing 岑之敬 (519–579) participated in a dharma-

³⁰ *Nan shi*, 7.223; *Liang shu*, 3.9 (quoted in *Fozu tongji*, T 49: 9.552a); cf. *Zhou shu* 周書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 41.737.

³¹ *Bianzheng lun*, T 52: 3.503a, says, “[Wudi] gathered one thousand monks belonging to the lecturing assembly at the Chongyun Hall.”

³² In *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 15.548b, he writes, “[Wudi] gathered one thousand monks at the Chongyun Hall, who formed a lecturing assembly. Lectures on Buddhist teachings were held every month, to the wide spread of the dharma transformation.”

³³ *Sui shu*, 22.636. The compilers of the *Sui shu* explain that this verse prophesied the demise of the Liang at the hands of Hou Jing. The date of Hou Jing's birth is not provided in secular sources. The date given here is based on a saying in the biography of Baozhi in the *Shenseng zhuan* 神僧傳 that Xiao Gang was born on the same day, month, and year as Hou Jing. See *Shenseng zhuan*, T 49: 4.970c. The date of Xiao Gang's birth is December 2, 503. See *Liang Shu*, 4.103.

³⁴ *Sui shu*, 22.636–37. His verse predicted the rise and downfall of Hou Jing.

³⁵ *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 7.476c.

³⁶ *Zizhi tongjian*, 55.4809.

assembly at the Chongyun Hall at the age of eighteen (in 536) and was greatly appreciated by Wudi, who personally burned the incense at the assembly.³⁷

6. In 539, a dharma-assembly convened at the Chongyun Hall by Wudi and his court officials, was attended by an envoy from the Eastern Wei.³⁸
7. On April 23, 541, Wudi preached on the *Sanhui jing* at the Chongyun Hall to a huge congregation.³⁹
8. In 547, while delivering a lecture at the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall, Wudi announced that he would dedicate the rest of his life to serving the Buddha (*sheshen* 捨身).⁴⁰
9. At an unspecified time: after attending Wudi's lecture on the *Sanhui jing* at the Chongyun Hall, Xiao Zihui 蕭子暉 (dates unknown) composed a rhapsody on the lecture, to the great enjoyment of Wudi.⁴¹

The Chongyun Hall was also the site at which the emperor performed Buddhist rituals under extraordinary circumstances. During an epidemic that ravaged the capital in the summer of 546, Wudi held at the hall a vegetarian feast aimed at alleviating the people's suffering (*jiuku zhai* 救苦齋), and offered his own life to heaven in exchange for theirs.⁴² Another official history mentions a ceremony of "pure offering" (*jinggong* 淨供) performed in the hall.⁴³

The hall sometimes also served as the venue for conferring bodhi-sattva-precepts on members of the imperial family. According to at least one extant record, Xiao Gang received the precepts at this hall.⁴⁴ Such ceremonies could have been a part of the lecture series that Wudi convened and supervised.

³⁷ See Ceng Zhijing's biography in *Chen shu* 陳書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 34.461; cf. *Nan shi*, 72.1788.

³⁸ *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, collated and annotated by Fang Nansheng 方南生 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 3:38; discussed below.

³⁹ "Yujiang Bore jing xu," *T* 52: 19.235b.

⁴⁰ *Nan shi*, 7.224–25; discussed below.

⁴¹ See his biography in *Liang shu*, 35.516; cf. *Nan shi*, 42.1076.

⁴² See *Nan shi*, 7.206; cf. *Fozu tongji*, 37.350b, in which Zhipan 志磐 (?–1269+) gives the year of this event.

⁴³ *Nan shi*, 51.1282.

⁴⁴ See Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (487–551?), "He Taizi Chongyundian shoujie" 和太子重雲殿受戒, in *Han Wei Liuchao baisanjia ji*, 99.23b. Two lines in the poem—"The pavilion with multiple

Another religious function for Chongyun Hall may have been to provide a long-term residence for the monk Baozhi (and his attendants). In his biography of Hongyan, Daoxuan mentions that after being impressed by Hongyan's performance during a lecture at the Chongyun Hall, Wudi had Baozhi installed in a "rear hall" and treated him respectfully.⁴⁵ Baozhi very likely died here in 514 or early 515:

In the winter of Tianjian 13 (514), Baozhi, in the rear hall of the Palatine City,⁴⁶ told his attendants, "The bodhisattva is about to leave." Less than ten days later, he died without showing any symptoms of illness. His body remained soft and smelt fragrant, while his complexion was joyful. Right before passing away, he lit a candle and passed it to Wu Qing 吳慶 (?-514+), the keeper of the "rear pavilion" who reported this [to the emperor]. Sighing, the emperor said, "The Great Master is not going to stay! Does he use this *candle* (*zhu* 燭) to indicate that he has something to *entrust* (*zhu* 屬)⁴⁷ to me?"⁴⁸

Given that Huijiao's 慧皎 (497-554) *Gaoseng zhuan* was compiled around 530, a mere sixteen years after Baozhi's death, his account of Baozhi's death may be taken as close to the truth. Baozhi's funeral epitaph, which Lu Chui 陸倕 (470-526), a friend of Wudi, wrote either in or shortly after 514, states that Baozhi "died in a Buddha-hall at the Hualin Park."⁴⁹ A comparison of Huijiao's and Lu Chui's accounts shows that a rear hall of an imperial hall (*dian* 殿) within

roofs is, unexpectedly, as beautiful as a picture / adorned with clouds, it looks even more real" (連閣翻如畫，圖雲更似真)—emphasize the pavilion (the Sanxiuge) and the name of the hall (Chongyun). A poem, "Jianwen meng Hualin jie" 簡文蒙華林戒 (*Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 30.353b), clearly added by a later editor, has been attributed to Xiao Gang. The content of the poem supports this attribution; for example, the line, "hereby I suspended the gold seal from my waist" 斯焉佩金璽, shows the poet speaking as the heir apparent. Xiao Gang must have written this poem upon receiving the bodhisattva-precepts, an event which was also celebrated by Yu Jianwu.

⁴⁵ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 7.476c.

⁴⁶ For *taicheng* as Wudi's Palatine City and its connections with palatine cities of former dynasties with Jiankang as their capital, see Zhu, *Jinling guji tu kao*, pp. 108-16, 122-24. Since this "rear hall" was located in the Hualin Park, this record implies that the Hualin Park was also within the Palatine City.

⁴⁷ Wudi puns on the homophones *zhu* 燭 and *zhu* 屬 (囑).

⁴⁸ *Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 10.394c. The same story, along with the *Gaoseng zhuan* biography of Baozhi, is reproduced in *Fayuan zhulin*, 31.520a. Cf. Baozhi's biography in *Nan shi*, 76.1901.

⁴⁹ "Zhihong dashi muzhiming" 誌公大師墓誌銘, *HPC* 4: 669b. Lu Chui's biographies in *Liang shu*, 27.401-2. Lu Chui and Xiao Yan were among the eight most talented men of letters mentored by Prince Jingling 竟陵 (Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良, 460-494). See *Liang shu*, 1.2. Huijiao (*Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 10.394c26-27) corroborates that Lu Chui wrote the epitaph for Baozhi at the request of Liang Wudi. Lu Chui was the grandfather of Lu Yungong.

the Palatine City was also known as a “Buddha-hall” in the Hualin Park. Was this the Chongyun Hall? Given that the Sanxiu Pavilion, housing as it did two Buddha statues, could certainly be called a “Buddha-hall,” and that Baozhi frequently participated in the assemblies at the Chongyun Hall, this is not unlikely.⁵⁰

It should be noted, however, that the Chongyun Hall was not dedicated to Buddhism exclusively. Occasionally it was the venue for Wudi’s lectures on the *Laozi*. Although I have so far identified only one record of the Chongyun Hall being used for such a purpose, I am inclined to believe that this is not an isolated case.⁵¹ This function of Wudi’s Buddhist palace chapel may have anticipated the special conferences, the Discussions and Determination of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) (*sanjiao lunheng* 三教論衡), held annually in Buddhist palace chapels on imperial birthdays during the Tang.⁵²

The Fall of a Hall: Two Tales about the Chongyun Hall

Although established in order to emulate some of the most celebrated sacred sites in Indian Buddhism, the Chongyun Hall’s position as an institution within the center of secular power meant that it could not but take on various political roles in the rapidly changing politic of the Six Dynasties. Two accounts narrated by Daoxuan of the Sanxiu Pavilion, and especially of the pair of Buddha statues enshrined in it, show just how closely this special monastic institution was implicated in the machinery of the political and military state. The first tale details the treatment of the two statues in the wake of the Hou Jing revolt that ravaged Southern China; the second how the statues flew away when the Chongyun Hall (including the Sanxiu pavilion) was burnt down.

⁵⁰ Baozhi passed away at the Chongyun Pavilion, where he must have continued to live for quite some time, judging by the fact that, before he died, he asked his attendant to move some bodhisattva-statues out of his room. Other sources also suggest that Baozhi was actually a resident at the Hualin Park, although they do not tell us whether he had always resided at the Chongyun Hall and, if not, where he stayed before coming to the pavilion and when he moved there. See, for example, Baozhi’s biography in *Nan shi*, 76.1900–1901, where we read that Wudi invited Baozhi into the Hualin Park; and *Fozu tongji* (T 49: 36.347b), which states that Wudi had him lodged at the Hualin Park.

⁵¹ *Nan shi*, 71.1753.

⁵² Chen, “The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels,” pp. 137–39, 141–43, 145–47.

Sanxiu Pavilion and the Hou Jing Revolt. For nearly fifty years, Wudi worshiped the two statues in the Sanxiu Pavilion, until shortly before he died in 549 at the hands of Hou Jing. Day and night, winter or summer, he stood on a stone slab to pay homage to the statues, until his ten toes left their traces in the stone. Although Hou Jing starved Wudi to death and laid waste to the Liang capital, he carried on the veneration of the two Buddha-images, as the following episode suggests.⁵³ Shortly after Hou Jing put Wudi's third son Xiao Gang on the throne as a puppet emperor (Jianwendi, r. 549–551), the two paid homage to the Buddha-statues at the Chongyun Hall, pledging trust and loyalty to each other.⁵⁴

Wang Sengbian 王僧辯 (?–555), the Defender-in-chief who wrested power after killing Hou Jing in 552, had no such respect for Wudi's legacy. Wang Sengbian colluded with the Northern Qi in setting up Xiao Yuanming 蕭淵明 (?–556), the Marquis of Zhenyang 貞陽侯, as the new emperor (r. 500). Wang Sengbian sent Du Kan 杜龕 (?–556), his son-in-law, to guard the gate of the imperial palace. Cruel and ignorant, Du Kan was blind to the consequences of his behavior for his future lives:

Intent on destroying the two statues to make spearheads, [he] first ordered several dozen people to mount the Sanxiu Pavilion and behead the Buddha[–statues]. As the people commissioned [by Du] raised their awls and chisels, the two statues suddenly turned around and stared at them. They felt their arms drop of their own accord and were unable to move them. Struck dumb, they became as if drunk. The same happened to Du Kan, and he did not regain consciousness for a long while. When he did, his men were being beaten, their whole bodies swollen black and blue, as *vajra*-wielding warriors (*Vajrapāṇibalin*) and other terrifying beings rushed upon them. Groaning in pain, lacerated all over, covered with pus and blood, their skin ripped open and their bones exposed, they died. This was a recent event, and is known to both religious and lay people.⁵⁵

⁵³ Hou Jing was known to be an enthusiastic supporter of Buddhism, as is well documented by monastic sources. Lingyu 靈裕 (518–605), who was to distinguish himself as an extremely influential monk under the Northern Qi and Sui dynasties, was ordained on Hou Jing's recommendation in 539 (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.495c). Respecting the monk Tanyin 曇隱, a disciple of the Vinaya master Huiguang, as a “divine immortal” (*shenxian* 神仙), Hou Jing built for him at least two monasteries (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 21.608c). He also built two monasteries for Sengda (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.553a). In 551, Hou Jing invited Paramārtha (Zhendi 真諦, 499–569) to stay in the Liang Palatine City, although Hou Jing later laid waste to it (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 1.429c).

⁵⁴ *Nan shi*, 80.2010; cf. *Zizhi tongjian*, 163.5057.

⁵⁵ *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T 52: 2.420a (cf. *Fayun zhulin*, T 53: 14.389b); *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 29.693b.

This episode happened during a period of social and political chaos, when the ruthless Hou Jing was a key player.⁵⁶ Historians have marked the year 547 as a watershed in Chinese history. Ironically, just when Wudi was adopting a new (somewhat Daoist-sounding) reign-name—*Taiqing* 太清 (“Ultimate Clarity”)—conditions throughout China were deteriorating. In 547, the Western Wei general Hou Jing offered his loyal services to the Liang government. His offer was met with contempt by the officials of the Liang, all of whom, except for Zhu Yi 朱异 (483–549), strongly urged Wudi to reject the offer on the grounds that Hou Jing, though a competent general, was unreliable. Their suspicion was not unfounded. Originally serving under the Northern Wei, Hou Jing gave his allegiance to the Eastern Wei when the Northern Wei was divided into Eastern and Western Wei in 534. In 547, he surrendered to the Western Wei, but then immediately went over to the Liang, the common enemy of the Western and Eastern Wei. Wudi, increasingly under the spell of his ambition to reunify China, embraced the renegade in the hope that Hou Jing would provide the military talent for the accomplishment of his grand plan. This was a fatal mistake. Hou Jing at first helped Wudi by attacking the Eastern Wei army; but to Wudi’s great disappointment, the Eastern Wei forces, led by Murong Shaozong 慕容紹宗 (501–549), rapidly defeated Hou Jing at Woyang 渦陽 in present-day Anhui. Wudi was forced to negotiate a truce with the Eastern Wei. Fearful of being made a scapegoat, Hou Jing rebelled in 548. Within a few months he had occupied Jiankang, putting his former lord at his mercy.

Not all of the Liang forces were defeated. Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–554) (a son of Wudi), for one, successfully held Jiangling 江陵, where he banded together a number of generals loyal to the Liang, headed by Wang Sengbian and Chen Baxian 陳霸先 (503–559), the future founder of the Chen dynasty. In 552, Xiao Yi ordered them to attack Hou Jing, who, after successively deposing Emperor Jianwen and Prince Yuzhang 豫章 (Xiao Dong 蕭棟 [?–552]), with whom he replaced Emperor Jianwen in 551, had taken the throne himself.

⁵⁶ On Hou Jing, see Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, *Kō Kei no ran shimatsu ki: Nanchō kizoku shakai no meion* 侯景の乱始末記—南朝貴族制社会の命運 (Chūō Kōronsha, 1974); Scott Pearce, “Who, and What, was Hou Jing?” *Early Medieval China* 6 (2000): 49–73; and Li Wansheng 李萬生, *Hou Jing zhi luan yu Beichao zhengju* 侯景之亂與北朝政局 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2003).

After eliminating Hou Jing, Xiao Yi proclaimed himself the new Liang emperor, Yuandi, in Jiangling. Only two years later, in 554, he was toppled and killed by the Western Wei army, with the assistance of another Liang prince, Xiao Cha 蕭詧 (519–562). With Jiangling under the occupation of the Western Wei, a puppet government was set up under Xiao Cha. Known as the Later Liang 後梁 (555–587), this regime lasted for thirty-two years under the protection successively of the Western Wei, Northern Zhou, and Sui.

Wang Sengbian and Chen Baxian escorted Yuandi's ninth son, Xiao Fangzhi 蕭方智 (541–557), to Jiankang, where they planned to enthrone him as the new Liang emperor. At this juncture, the Northern Qi (which had replaced the Eastern Wei in the eastern part of North China in 550), eager to set up their own puppet regime in the south, sent back their hostage Xiao Yuanming as a rival claimant to the Liang throne.⁵⁷ The Qi succeeded in coercing and bribing Wang Sengbian to join their conspiracy. But in 555, Chen Baxian attacked and killed Wang Sengbian and, deposing the Emperor Mingdi (Xiao Yuanming), proclaimed Xiao Fangzhi as the new emperor Jingdi (r. 555–557).

Hearing the news, Du Kan rebelled against Chen. Du Kan's father (Du Yi 杜巖) and uncle (Du Ze 杜則 [?-553]) were both distinguished generals under Wudi. During the Taiqing era (547–550), Du Kan and his uncles pledged their loyalty to Xiao Yi. He accumulated brilliant military honors in a series of campaigns under Wang Sengbian, including those against Hou Jing. At the time of Wang's death, Du Kan was the governor of Wuxing 吳興, which subsequently became the base of his separatist force. However, he was soon defeated by Chen Baxian, along with other rival forces. Eventually, Chen forced Jingdi to abdicate and founded his own dynasty in 557.

Placing Daoxuan's account of the desecration of the Sanxiu Pavilion and its statues by Du Kan in the context of the political and military upheaval in the Liang-Chen transition, we find that some parts of his account are supported by the official histories.

⁵⁷ Xiao Yuanming was a son of Wudi's eldest brother Xiao Yi 蕭懿 (?–500). He was detained in the north after being captured by the Eastern Wei during the ill-fated Woyang campaign.

These include: Wang Sengbian's role in defeating Hou Jing and regaining Jiankang, the overthrow of Liang Yuandi in Jiangling, Wang Sengbian's collusion with the Northern Qi, and eventually Du Kan's relationship with Wang Sengbian. That said, we should not fail to note that Daoxuan has Du Kan die in a way quite different from that described in the secular sources.

The historical sources, including Du Kan's biographies, give divergent accounts of the end of his life, although all date his execution to 556.⁵⁸ The discrepancies among these sources are duly noted by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), who further refers the reader to yet another version of Du Kan's death in a much earlier source, the *Xi Wei dianlüe* 西魏典略, which turns out to be the most dramatic of all. Du Kan surrendered to Chen Qian 陳蒨 (?–566), the nephew of Chen Baxian who was to succeed him as the second Chen emperor (Wendi, r. 559–566). One of Chen Qian's subordinates, Zhou Tiehu 周鐵虎 (509–557), then sacrificed Du Kan as an offering to the deified Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 B.C.) on February 7, 556, which, according to later secular sources, was four days after his execution.⁵⁹

Thus, in or before Daoxuan's time, several different accounts of Du Kan's death were already in circulation. Daoxuan merely presents another version that seems to be related to one of these secular accounts. But, whereas in the *Xi Wei dianlüe* account, Du Kan is sacrificed to the spirit of Xiang Yu, a tragic hero, Daoxuan has Du Kan fall victim to his own ignorance and sacrilege.⁶⁰

The destruction of the Chongyun Hall. Although Chen Qian, Du Kan's real killer, does not appear in this account by Daoxuan, he stands out in a second account by Daoxuan about the same statues stored in the Sanxiu Pavilion. After the death of Wudi, Chen Qian succeeded

⁵⁸ *Liang shu*, 6.145, 46.645; *Nan shi*, 8.248, 9.263, 64.1559; *Chen shu*, 1.9.

⁵⁹ *Zizhi tongjian*, 166.5141.

⁶⁰ According to Daoxuan, Du Kan committed his fatal act of sacrilege shortly after Wang Sengbian successfully recaptured Jiankang from Hou Jing on April 28, 552 (*Zizhi tongjian*, 164.5080–81). According to the secular sources reviewed, Du Kan was not killed until 556. His uncle Du Ze, also a subordinate of Wang Sengbian, was responsible for rescuing some halls (including the Chongyun Hall) and other government buildings from conflagration when cohorts of Hou Jing set fire to the Palatine City after Hou Jing fled the capital. See *Nan shi*, 80.2014.

him as Wendi. In the newly founded state, there was not enough time to prepare all the necessary funerary offerings, which included an imperial sedan. Wendi ordered his men to collect the jeweled canopies of the Buddha statues and all the jade and pearls used to decorate the statues in the Chongyun Hall.⁶¹ A miracle then occurred:

Clouds [suddenly] gathered, roiling about the Buddha-hall, while everywhere else the sun shone bright. Hearing of this extraordinary phenomenon, the artisans came out to watch. Shortly afterwards, the rain started to pelt down, with thunderbolts flashing and roaring. The smoke rose from the roof and fire blazed in the clouds. The flames spread from high to low. At the same time, in the shadow of the Chongyun Hall, the two statues stood facing each other and, together with the divine kings of the four directions and all the canopies and trappings, simultaneously rose up and, supported by the smoke and fire, disappeared into the distance. The onlookers were enough to fill the whole capital; and the deepest faith [in Buddhism] was generating in every one of them. After the rain cleared, when people turned to look at the old site [of the hall], only the bases of pillars were left.

Over one month later, someone from Dongzhou 東州 said, “On the day [when the Chongyun Hall and Pavilion were burned down] we saw, in the shadow of the hall, the statues rising up into the air and flying out over the sea.” Now and then, people gazing out over the ocean can see them.⁶²

This account implies that the numinous statues, refusing to be put to desecration, chose to fly from this mundane world and ascend to the heavens. Secular sources corroborate the fact that the hall was burnt down on August 28, 559, a mere twenty days after Chen Baxian died.⁶³ When this conflagration broke out, Hou Andu 侯安都 (520–563), a renowned general under Chen Baxian and Chen Qian who had played a crucial role in enthroning the latter, entered the hall carrying a sword. This greatly annoyed Wendi, who became increasingly suspicious of his loyalty, until he ordered Hou Andu

⁶¹ According to Zhipan (*Fozu tongji*, T 49: 37.352b), this plan was proposed by Chen Wendi's court officials.

⁶² *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志, T 51: 2.972c. This was obviously a favorite story of Daoxuan, who repeats it, in differing amounts of detail, in three of his other works, including *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 15.203a; *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 29.693b (in the greatest detail); and *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T 52: 2.420a.

⁶³ *Chen shu*, 3.47; *Nan shi*, 9.276. The *Sui shu* (22.621) corroborates that the Chongyun Hall was burnt in Yongding 3. There appears to have been a fire at the hall one year earlier. Other dynastic histories record that on May 8, 558, purple smoke shot up into the sky from the roof of the eastern part of Chongyun Hall (*Chen shu*, 2.37; *Nan shi*, 9.273).

to commit suicide in the summer of 563.⁶⁴ Thus the Chongyun Hall was indeed destroyed shortly after the death of Chen Baxian, although probably not under the circumstances described by Daoxuan. However, these records suggest that the Buddhist institutions originally housed in the hall continued to exist and probably also to function under the reign of Chen Baxian. Supporting this conjecture is the fact that, in the summer of Yongding 3 (559), shortly before his death, Chen Baxian summoned the famous Buddhist scholar Baoqiong 寶瓊 (504–584) into the Chongyun Hall complex (Chongyun diange 重雲殿閣) to lecture on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*.⁶⁵ This lecture must have taken place sometime between the beginning of summer of 559 and Chen Baxian's death on August 6, 559.

As part of the Buddhist institution within Wudi's imperial park, the Sanxiu Pavilion and the twin statues enshrined in it are particularly noteworthy in being inextricably entwined with the fates of almost all the key players in the chaotic world of the Liang and Chen, from Wudi and Hou Jing through Wang Sengbian and Du Kan down to Chen Baxian (Chen Wudi), Chen Qian (Chen Wendi), and Hou Andu. With the single exception of Chen Qian, the downfall and death of all of these men were witnessed by the pavilion and the statues.

THE CHONGYUN DHARMA-ASSEMBLIES

If we accept Daoxuan's assertion that Wudi convened the Chongyun lectures on a monthly basis, Wudi must have given many lectures throughout his long reign (502–549). Although eight of these lectures are mentioned in Buddhist and secular sources, only two (one in 541 and the other in 547) are treated at some length. These provide revealing glimpses into the religious and political life of the time.

⁶⁴ *Chen shu*, 8.147; *Nan shi*, 66.1612; *Zizhi tongjian*, 169.5232. These sources do not specify if this conflagration was the one that destroyed the Chongyun Hall or the less devastating fire of the previous year. However, since the context suggests that the Chen ruler at the time was Wendi, rather than Wudi, it could not have been the first one, which occurred under the reign of Wudi.

⁶⁵ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 7.479a.

The Chongyun Assembly of 541

Lu Yungong's preface on the assembly of 541 begins with a long discussion on theoretic issues and then turns to the causes for and circumstances behind this series of lectures by Wudi. Wudi began to write commentaries on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* from 512. From then on, he lectured on the *sūtra* in person. He also decided, because of the abstruseness and profundity of one chapter (Skt. *parivarta*; Ch. *pin* 品) called *Sanhui* 三慧 (Three Wisdoms), to isolate it as an independent text.⁶⁶ The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* that Wudi commented on was very likely the version translated by Kumārajīva (344–413/350–409) as the *Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 (in 27 *juan*), the seventieth *parivarta* of which was the *Mohe bore boluomi jing sanhui pin* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經三慧品. Huiling 慧令 (?–541+), the Great Chief of the Saṃgha (*da sengzheng* 大僧正) at the time, entreated Wudi on behalf of the Buddhist community of Jiankang to lecture on the *Sanhui jing*.⁶⁷ Wudi granted the request and on April 23, 541, started to lecture on the gold-character version of the *Sanhui jing* at the Chongyun Hall.

Next, Lu Yungong introduces Xiao Gang, who, he claims, equals Siddhārtha in wisdom and exceeds him in virtue. Abandoning the ordinary entertainments of an heir apparent, he chose diligently to pursue the Way, in which he was joined by Prince Xuancheng 宣成王 (i.e., Xiao Daqi 蕭大器, 523–551),⁶⁸ and other members of the royal family. They all attended the lecture series, during which Wudi,

⁶⁶ A one-fascicle text titled *Sanhui jing* 三慧經 is still extant (*T* 768), translated by an unknown person probably during the Northern Liang period (397–439). The translation as it stands now looks like a compilation of pieces culled from other scriptures. Given that this text is primarily about practice, it is probably not the one preached about by Wudi, who was most interested in abstract *prajñā* concepts. The note by Xiao Zixian proves that the text that Wudi used for his lectures was actually a chapter of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*.

⁶⁷ The monastic position of Grand Rector under the Liang dynasty is discussed by Antonino Forte in “Daisōjō 大僧正 (Grand Rector of the Saṃgha),” in *Hōbōgirin: dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d’après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, compiled by Paul Demiéville, Anna Seidel, Hubert Durt, et al. (Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1929–), 8:1057ff.

⁶⁸ Xiao Daqi, the Prince of Xuancheng Commandery 宣成郡王, was the sixth son of Xiao Gang, then Wudi's heir apparent. He was enfeoffed to Xuancheng Commandery in 531 (*Liang shu*, 8.172). Two years after becoming heir apparent in 549, he was killed by Hou Jing.

donning a set of robes for pure dwelling (*jingju* 淨居) (i.e., dharma-robes), ascended the seat of Sumeru. With eight kinds of wondrous tones, [His Majesty] spoke fluently. [People from] the ten directions came to attend the lectures, each attaining understanding in accordance with his level [of comprehension]. The profound meanings that flowed out [of his lecture] were hard to exhaust; the joyful eloquence of his disquisitions, sharpened by questions and counter-questions, appeared ever new. As for the aged and prestigious scholar-monks, stuck in one-sided opinions and single-mindedly promoting disparate theories, they failed to comprehend true meaning of the text of the *sūtras*. [His Majesty] converted the small intent of [their Hinayāna] intentions to accord with the [Mahāyāna's] great scope; [they] looked up to [His Majesty] and asked [him] questions. Thus [His Majesty] wielded the blade of wisdom and freed them from the snares of doubt. By showing them where they had gone astray, he brought them back to the right track. For each and every one, doubts melted like ice in springtime, and joyfully they all bowed [to His Majesty's instructions]. As a lotus flower opens and the crescent moon waxes, so their understanding grew.⁶⁹

According to Lu Yungong, in addition to the heir apparent, princes, marquises, and imperial relatives, this assembly was also attended by the Director of the Department of State Affairs (*shangshuling* 尚書令) He Jingrong 何敬容 (?–549), military and civil officials, the “barbarian” (i.e., Eastern Wei) chief envoy Cui Changqian 崔長謙 (514–541)⁷⁰ along with his associate Yang Xiuzhi 陽休之 (509–582),⁷¹ and one thousand three hundred and sixty envoys of various missions from foreign regions—all of whom had traversed great distances to come to this dharma-assembly. These foreigners, “yearning to receive the kingly instruction, have raced here in chariots, and jumped for joy on hearing that [the sermons by Wudi] brought down the heavenly flowers. Touching their heads and faces [on the ground], [they] prostrated their whole bodies before him. They exclaimed their praises from below [the throne].”⁷² At the same time,

⁶⁹ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” *T* 52: 19.235c–36a.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.236a. A member of the prestigious Cui 崔 clan of Qinghe 清河, Cui Min 崔慙 (*zi* Changqian) was a nephew of the high-ranking Eastern Wei official Cui Xiu 崔休 (472–523), who has an official biography in the *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 69.1525–27.

⁷¹ Yang Xiuzhi (*zi* Zilie 子烈) (509–582) served under the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi. As a confidant of the Prime Minister Gao Huan 高歡 (496–547), he became an important court official after the Northern Qi was established. When the Northern Qi was annexed by the Northern Zhou in 572, he gave his allegiance to the latter.

⁷² “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” *T* 52: 19.236a6–8. *Huanghua* 皇化 here may be read in two senses: “royal instruction” and “kingly transformation.”

Wudi also invited one thousand outstanding scholar-monks to gather at Tongtai si to discuss the Buddhist teaching at night.

The presence of Cui Changqian and Yang Xiuzhi as the envoy and vice-envoy of the Eastern Wei to the Liang at this time is corroborated by secular sources. On November 17, 540, Wudi's envoy arrived in the Eastern Wei capital. On January 24, 541, Emperor Xiaojing (r. 534–550) of the Eastern Wei delegated Cui Changqian as an envoy to the Liang.⁷³ He arrived in Jiankang on May 17, 541,⁷⁴ twenty-four days after Wudi started to lecture on April 23, 541. According to Lu Yungong, the lecture series lasted for twenty-three days.⁷⁵ Thus Cui Changqian and his delegation arrived in Jiankang just in time to attend the closing ceremony of the lecture series.

Among those attending the assembly was an obscure Buddhist monk from the north called Falong 法隆, allegedly almost one hundred years old and of outstanding learning and prestige. Lu Yungong claims that, even before Huiling formally entreated Liang Wudi to lecture on the *Sanhui jing*, Falong had already learned through mysterious channels that there was to be such a lecture series. Excited by this prospect, he set out for Jiankang.⁷⁶ Also attending the assembly were a host of foreign monks, unknown to the local secular and religious communities and therefore of “mysterious origin”—by which Lu Yungong might have meant to suggest that they were actually celestial beings.⁷⁷

Lu Yungong focuses the spotlight on a remarkable ascetic who performed self-immolation at the assembly:

⁷³ *Wei shu*, 12.304. See also *Bei shi*, 5.189. Yang Xiuzhi's official biography confirms that in 540 he acted as Cui Qianzhi's aide when the latter was commissioned as the Wei envoy to the Liang. See *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 42.562.

⁷⁴ Both the *Liang shu* (3.85) and the *Nan shi* (7.215) report the arrival of the Eastern Wei envoy on this day. Although he is not named, he must be Cui Changqian, who was one of two Eastern Wei envoys (*Liang shu*, 3.87; *Nan shi*, 7.215). Cui Changqian's mission to the Liang is not mentioned in the *Zizhi tongjian*, which, however, reports that in the fifth month of Datong 7 (June 10–July 8, 541) Wudi dispatched Ming Shaoxia 明少遐 (?–560/561) (see Ming Shaoxia's biography in *Bei shi*, 83.2809) and others to the Eastern Wei. See *Zizhi tongjian*, 158.4907. This was obviously in response to the mission from the Eastern Wei that arrived one month previously.

⁷⁵ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” *T* 52: 19.236a.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Shi Faxian 釋法顯 of Ayuwang si 阿育王寺 of Maoxian 鄆縣 in Kuaiji 會稽 practiced austerities and was intent on seeking the understanding of wisdom. Equaling Uttara⁷⁸ in thoughts, he paralleled Sadāpralāpa (Ch. Satuobolun 薩陀波崙, or simply Polun 波崙)⁷⁹ in his passionate sincerity. Hence, on the site of the lecture, demonstrating the power of his will, he cut his body and let his blood flow to the ground as a way to demonstrate his sincerity.⁸⁰

Lu Yungong compares this extraordinary act with the actions of bodhisattvas extolled in the scriptures: “In the past, [the bodhisattvas] carved their flesh as offerings, and broke their bones to serve as pens to copy the texts. [They] did not grudge their own lives in pursuing the true dharma. Looking back to the past from the present, [we find] that these are not empty stories!”⁸¹

From the day the dharma-assembly was convened until it was dissolved, universal feasts (*biangong* 遍供) were widely offered (*pushi* 普施) on a daily basis to people in the capital. Lu Yungong notes that these were made possible by the frugality and self-restraint that Wudi had maintained during his reign of over four decades.⁸² In the course of this lecture series, numerous miracles happened, which Lu Yungong has divided into ten categories:

1. The Buddha images within the imperial palaces all shone with light.
2. The ground trembled as if beings were about to spring up or sink down into it, fully demonstrating the propitious signs of beings springing up from under the earth and others sinking into the ground.⁸³
3. It always rained in the nighttime and turned fair and clear in the daytime. Perfumed air and beautiful flowers prevented dust from rising.

⁷⁸ When he was born as a Brahmanic sage (*xianren* 仙人) named Uttara in one of his previous lives, Śākyamuni peeled off his skin to be used as paper, broke his bones and mixed his blood with ink in order to copy the verses recited by a *brahmin*. See *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, T 4: 1.351b.

⁷⁹ Also known as “ever-bewailing,” this bodhisattva wept while searching for truth.

⁸⁰ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” T 52: 19.236a.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ This refers to a story in the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮花經 (Chapter 15), T 9: 5.39c–42a; for English translation, see Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 225–36.

4. When the ringing of the bell (Skt. *ghanṭā*; Ch. *jianzhui* 鍵椎) signaled the close of the dharma-assembly, the participants, pressing forward shoulder-to-shoulder or leaving in a string of carriages, filled the four gates. However, on foot or on horseback, all went peacefully, and did not disturb each other.⁸⁴
5. Although dharma-seats had only been prepared for ten thousand people, attendants of the dharma-assembly, who were as numerous as the sands in the Ganges, did not feel pressed for space.
6. The members of the four divisions of the Buddhist community (i.e., monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) who lived in remote areas could all hear the wonderful lectures; the preaching could be heard even more clearly outside the bounds of the pavilion.
7. The pure meals (i.e., vegetarian feasts) were widely served, even though the cooks did not prepare them on purpose. The wondrous food, appropriate to the season, was replete with all flavors.
8. Extraordinary fragrances filled the air and spread everywhere with the wind.
9. Resounding and elegant music played of its own accord.
10. Praises in unison were heard everywhere in the empty air.⁸⁵

Lu Yungong comments that all these different kinds of miracles, originating in the sympathetic resonance (*ganying* 感應) between human beings and devas, have been witnessed and verified by Buddhas of the past, and that they surpass other “propitious signs” ([*xiang*]*ruì* [祥瑞]), such as precious objects emerging from under the ground and flowers raining down from the heavens.⁸⁶ At the time, people all over the land were filled with exultation, and sentient beings were happy. “Wishing to join the merit-field, they vied with each other in joyfully making donations” and Wudi made vows in their behalf in accordance with their different wishes. This suggests

⁸⁴ This is quite remarkable compared to the dharma-assembly held at Tongtai si in 533, when an elephant sent in as a tribute from India was startled by the crowds and ran amok. See *Liang shu*, 42.600; *Nan shi*, 18.512; Suwa, *Chūgoku Nanchō Bukkyōshi no kenkyū*, p. 63.

⁸⁵ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” *T* 52: 19.236a–b.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.236b.

that the dharma-assembly succeeded in attracting a great number of lay donations.

Several features in Lu Yungong's account of the Chongyun dharma-assembly deserve note. First, his use of several meaningful expressions implies that this assembly was a *pañcavārsika*, which was open to all the people, both lay and religious, native and foreign. For example, Lu refers to a "universal feast" (*biangong* 遍供) that was offered to all the people in the capital, and he uses the familiar metaphor of the sands of the River Ganges (*hengsha* 恆沙) to describe the huge attendance.⁸⁷

Second, Lu Yungong highlights a "sutra," the *Sanhui jing*, as the focus of this dharma-assembly. This shows that the assembly could also be treated as a case of relic veneration. In any religion founded by a historical person, enthusiasm for relics may be aroused by the followers' desire to decrease, if not erase, the distance separating them from their deceased patriarch—the more remote the patriarch's death becomes, the more keenly the distance will be felt and the more passionately the relics will be sought. In Buddhism, "sacred relics" (Skt. *Śarīra*; Ch. *sheli* 舍利) fall into two categories: physical and spiritual, the latter denoting the Buddha's teachings, as incorporated in Buddhist scriptures, the so-called *dharmaśarīra*.

Lu Yungong attributes to the dharma-assembly two more closely related components. Not only did it attract waves of donations (the third component of this assembly), but it also witnessed at least one act of self-immolation (the fourth component), which can be understood as a special form of donation. Finally, we come to the last and

⁸⁷ On the origin of this practice in India and its development in Central Asia and China, see Max Deeg, "Origins and Development of the Buddhist *Pañcavārsika*—Part I: India and Central Asia," *Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism—Sambhāṣā* 16 (1995): 67–90; and "Origins and Development of the Buddhist *Pañcavārsika*—Part II: China, *Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism—Sambhāṣā* 18 (1997): 63–96. Scholars have noted the frequency with which Wudi enacted his version of *Pañcavārsika* in this period. Funayama Tōru 船山徹, in particular, has rightly remarked that Wudi did not observe the normal five-year gap between two *Pañcavārsikas*. See his "Shashin no shisō: Rikuchō bukkyō-shi ichi no danmen" 捨身の思想: 六朝佛教史一の断面, *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 74 (2002): 318 n. 133. In addition, Funayama has convincingly argued that the Sanskrit equivalent for the Chinese *wuzhe* 無遮 (literally, "no-hindrance," "no-obstacle," hence, "unlimited [donation]") is *nirargala* and that accordingly, the corresponding Sanskrit for *wuzhe dahui* is probably *nirargala-maha*. He is also of the opinion that the Chinese translation for *pañcavārsika*[-*maha*] is *wunian dahui* 五年大會. See Funayama, "Shashin no shisō," 318 nn. 132, 133.

fifth component: that the assembly is presented as being graced by a number of miraculous and propitious signs.

The Chongyun Assembly of 547

Almost all of these components appear in a more truncated description of another dharma-assembly held in the same hall several years later. As opposed to the assembly, the account of which, though written by a layman, appears in a monastic collection, the assembly of 547 is described in an official history, the *Nan shi*.⁸⁸ According to this source, in 547 at the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall, Wudi announced once again his intention to dedicate himself to serving the Buddha.⁸⁹ Although no specific date is given here, it can be found in Wudi's Basic Annals. The same source also makes it clear that Wudi actually prefaced this self-renunciation with a lecture on the *Sanhui jing*:

On the *gengzi* day of the third month [of Taiqing 1] (April 8, 547), the emperor visited Tongtai si, where he held a *pañcavarṣikā*. Ridding himself of the imperial robe, the emperor put on a set of dharma-ropes, performing with great dedication to clarity and purity a ceremony called *jiemo* 羯磨 (Skt. *karman*) in which one vows to observe the precepts. He took up residence in the Wuming Hall 五明殿,⁹⁰ where he set up a bed made of undecorated timbers, erected a canopy of arrowroot cloth, spread out earthenware containers, and rode only a small carriage. He denied himself all personal attendants, carriages, and robes. . . . On April 13, 547 (Taiqing 1.3.8), the emperor ascended the lecture-hall in the Guangyan Hall, where, sitting on the lion-seat, he lectured on the gold-character *Sanhui jing*, and announced his determination to devote the rest of his life to the Buddha.⁹¹

Thus, the *Nan shi* makes it clear that Wudi first dedicated himself to Buddhism at Tongtai si on April 8, 547, and that five days later, he started to preach on the *Sanhui jing* in the Guangyan Hall, which was followed by another act of self-renunciation.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Nan shi*, 7.224–25.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.224.

⁹⁰ Like the Chongyun Hall, the Wuming Hall also stood within the Hualin Park. See *Jingding Jiankang zhi*, 21.13a.

⁹¹ *Nan shi*, 7.218–19. Cf. *Liang shu*, 3.92, which gives a much sketchier account, stating only that when Wudi sequestered himself at Tongtai si, he was “ransomed” by his court officials with one hundred million cash. See also *Zizhi tongjian*, 160.4951, which only mentions Wudi's self-sequestration on April 8, 547 (Taiqing 1.3.3 [*gengzi*]).

⁹² Several passages later, the authors of the *Nan shi* give a slightly different version, in which Wudi renounced himself to Buddhism in the Guangyan and Chongyun halls. However, as the two halls were part of the same building, this discrepancy is negligible.

As the emperor was announcing his dedication, a mysterious commissioner arrived with an extraordinary gift—a red mat. He identified himself as a member of a Daoist group based on an island mountain called Fuhu 浮鵠, about one thousand miles from Yuyao 餘姚 (in present-day Zhejiang). The group was composed of four to five hundred male and female Daoist priests, all of whom were older than one hundred *sui* (one, a Daoist nun and apparently their leader, was aged three hundred *sui*). The mat was called “red” as it was made of grass under which some red birds often perched. Several *luan* 鸞 (a kind of phoenix) were pictured on the mat.⁹³ This story, which must have been taken as a propitious sign often associated with this kind of event, also suggests that the lecture was a part of a *pañcavārṣika*, open even to Daoist priests.

Like the dharma-assembly of 541, this too was accompanied by a series of miraculous and propitious signs. The most remarkable of these was an earthquake,⁹⁴ which at the time received conflicting interpretations. Some people took it as a propitious sign. Others believed that it presaged a catastrophe; they had in mind the chapter “Hongfan” 洪範⁹⁵ in the *Shangshu* 尚書, likening it to a similar event that happened shortly before the violent death of Shi Hu 石虎 (295–349), when the heads of the people portrayed in the murals shrank into the surface of the wall.⁹⁶ On the day the lecture series was inaugurated, another miraculous sign was in the form of a three-legged bird seen perching on the east gate of the hall, whence it flew to the hanging lintels in the southwest part of the hall. It flew away and returned three times. Also recognized as auspicious signs were a white sparrow resting in the twin trees in front of the Chongyun Hall and five-colored clouds floating above Lake Kunming 昆明 in the Hualin Park.

Another parallel between the dharma-assembly of 541 and that of 547 was the acts of self-immolation associated with them. Among

⁹³ *Nan shi*, 7.225.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* *Nan shi* (7.217) reports that an earthquake, lasting several quarters of a Chinese hour, shook the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall in the first month of Datong 11 (January 28, 545–February 15, 546), twelve years before this assembly. At the time, the emperor reproached himself publicly and apologized to heaven.

⁹⁵ So cited in the *Nan shi*.

⁹⁶ *Nan shi*, 7.225. The episode related to Shi Hu is reported in his biography at *Jin shu*, 106.2773.

those attending the assembly of 547 was a man of unknown origin, who cut off his own flesh to feed hungry birds. Although blood poured out all over his body, his complexion remained unchanged. Another self-immolator, śramaṇa Zhiquan 智泉 (otherwise unknown) appeared even more remarkable. He suspended one thousand lighted lamps to hooks in his body, but for a whole day and night, and without moving, he continued to sit upright.

Given its secular nature, the source for the 547 assembly in the *Nan shi* appears limited, probably because it is a secular text. Nevertheless, it gives enough information to prove that the 547 and 541 assemblies shared four characteristics: both can be described as *pañcavārsika*, involved relic-veneration and self-immolation, and were associated with miraculous and propitious signs. Although the account of the 541 assembly does not mention the fifth major characteristic—waves of huge donations—it may be inferred that such a prominent religious activity could not have closed without them.

Even if one might question whether these assemblies were truly blessed by all the miraculous and propitious signs, the other four components—*pañcavārsika*, relic-veneration, self-immolation, and donation—are highly plausible, for they are also associated with the dharma-assemblies supervised by Wudi in another important location, Tongtai si. The most meticulous depiction of an assembly at Tongtai si, held between April 5 and 18, 533, comes from a document composed by another Liang author, Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489–537).⁹⁷

The Tongtai Si Assembly of 533

A comparison of the documents by Xiao Zixian and Lu Yungong reveals similarities so striking and numerous as to suggest that Lu Yungong relied on Xiao Zixian's text (written eight years before his) in writing his own preface. Of the similarities, the following seven deserve note:

First, like Lu Yungong, Xiao Zixian explicitly states that the Tongtai si assembly was envisioned and performed as a *pañcavārsika*,

⁹⁷ Xiao Zixian, a member of the Xiao Qi royal family, was a capable bureaucrat and learned scholar. The histories he compiled include the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, *Qi Shu* 齊書, and *Putong beifa ji* 普通北伐記.

open to both the lay and the religious (*daosu wuzhe dahui* 道俗無遮大會).⁹⁸ Xiao Zixian also gives a specific figure—319,642 participants—to show the universal nature of this assembly.⁹⁹

Second, both texts similarly portray how Wudi put the confused scholar-monks back on the right track. The following passage echoes the analogous one by Lu:

Glorifying his quick and sweeping eloquence, [His Majesty] unleashed [the power of] his fearless words. As inexhaustible as “oil in an axle,”¹⁰⁰ his wisdom makes the “linked chains” dissolve of themselves.¹⁰¹ [His Majesty] allowed those present to ask whatever questions they wished, which he explicated as smoothly as ice melting. All obstructions were banished and the snares of doubt destroyed.¹⁰²

Third, the northern monk Falong in Lu Yungong's preface closely parallels the foreign monk Shaheyeshe 沙呵耶奢 (Skt. Sahayaśika?) featured by Xiao Zixian. The same phrase—*nian jiang baisui* 年將百歲—is used to describe the two monks' ages.¹⁰³ Both are well-versed in meditation. Falong's “understanding penetrated eight levels of dhyāna,” while Shaheyeshe practiced meditation on Mount Tante 檀特 (Skt. Dantaloka).¹⁰⁴ They also both knew about the assembly before it was made public.¹⁰⁵

Fourth, both texts mention the attendance of a number of foreign monks “of mysterious origin,” thus hinting at their celestial

⁹⁸ “Yujiang jinzi Mohe bore boluomiduo jing xu” 御講金字摩訶般若波羅蜜多經序, *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 19.236c.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.236c-37a.

¹⁰⁰ The *zhiguo* (gu) 炙輶 (轂) is a metaphor that Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 B.C.) uses of the resourcefulness of Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 (ca. 386–310 B.C.). See *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 74.2348.

¹⁰¹ This refers to one of the eleven paradoxes attributed to Hui Shi 惠施 in the *Zhuangzi*: 連環可解 (“linked chains are broken up [automatically]”). See *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, annotated by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p. 1102.

¹⁰² “Yujiang jinzi,” T 52: 19.236c.

¹⁰³ “Yujiang Bore jing xu,” T 52: 19.236a; cf. “Yujiang jinzi,” T 52: 19.237a.

¹⁰⁴ “Yujiang jinzi,” T 52: 19.237a. Dantaloka was a mountain near Varucha, with a cavern (now called Kashmiri-Ghār) where Sudāna lived (or, as another tradition has it, the place where the young Siddhārtha, the future Buddha Śākyamuni, underwent his ascetic sufferings before achieving his enlightenment).

¹⁰⁵ Xiao Zixian is ambiguous on this. On the one hand, he states that Sahayaśika, hearing that a great lecture was to be held in the Central Kingdom, arrived from afar, which might suggest that someone broke the news to him. But right after this, he tells us that Sahayaśika had the mysterious faculty of prescience, so that something that happened ten thousand *li* away was within arm's reach to him. See “Yujiang jinzi,” T 52: 19.237a.

identity. Xiao Zixian is more emphatic about the supernatural nature of some foreigners in the 533 assembly:

Furthermore, [of] monks from foreign countries . . . some inquired about their doubts after chanting some verses; some asked their questions first before uttering praises and vows; some, known to none of those present, returned to their seats after speaking; some simply left after consulting [His Majesty], no one knows where. All were possessed of extraordinary complexions and clothes, making it difficult to conjecture whether they were human beings or sages.¹⁰⁶

Fifth, like the 541 assembly, the 533 assembly was also attended by numerous envoys from foreign regions, including Persia and Khotan. Xiao Zixian gives the name of the Persian envoy, Anjuyue 安拘越, who, prostrating himself in front of the emperor, received with joy teachings of which he had never heard.¹⁰⁷

Sixth, the two texts resemble each other in featuring Wudi's efforts to maintain and expand Buddhist charitable funds (such as his own frugality, his skilful and prudent use of natural resources). Lu Yungong writes:

It has been over forty years since His Majesty came to rule the world. He has practiced frugality in person, and imposed simple and straitened conditions on his own body. He lives in a small palace, enough only to shelter him from the wind and rain, and occupies a chamber big enough for him only if he keeps his knees bent. Outside [the palace], [His Majesty] abstains from the rites that accompany the royal hunts; and within, he has denied himself banquets of one thousand goblets. [His Majesty] annually saves ten thousand [taels] of gold out of the royal meals.¹⁰⁸ Also every year are deducted ten million from the expenses of the imperial household. Further, he has widely collected the profits from the land, and brought in the treasures from the stormy seas; interest overflows, feeding spring-like into the treasury, which may be likened to the self-producing gold given by the dragon-girl.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, without adding to the burdens of the populace or depleting government reserves, [His Majesty] has conferred both material wealth and the benefits of the dharma upon the people by distributing them widely without exhaustion.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ "Yujiang jinzi," *T* 52: 19.237b.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.237a. I have found no mention of this envoy in other sources.

¹⁰⁸ Literally, "what was under the control of the imperial cooks."

¹⁰⁹ This refers to a story in the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, *T* 22: 32.488c8ff. A merchant who saved the daughter of the dragon-king was offered a piece of gold, which could reproduce itself inexhaustibly.

¹¹⁰ "Yujiang Bore jing xu," *T* 52: 19.236a.

The same theme receives a more detailed and vivid treatment in Xiao Zixian's text:

Personally attending to [the needs of] myriads of people, His Majesty has lived a frugal life. Except on state occasions, the Master of the Wardrobe and the Imperial Cooks purvey only the most basic needs of life. [In preparing for the meals in the palace or court] the Provisioner¹¹¹ is allowed to expend one hundred thousand mushrooms and weeds a day and one thousand [taels] of gold a year—all of these [His Majesty] refrains from using; instead, he makes provision from his own purse. Wearing coarse and worn robes and using earthenware eating bowls, [His Majesty] takes only one vegetarian meal every day and does not eat after noon. Winter and summer, he covers himself only with hempen cloth. The residence he normally occupies is less than one square *zhang* in size. The material from his canopies and seat-covers, when worn out, is reused for bed linen. No attendants wait upon him, and there are no toys and ornaments within his sight. To left and right are only scriptures and other scrolls, and, looking round, he sees only incense-burners and monks' staffs. Beginning with morning audience before dawn, [His Majesty] does not rest until late at night. He searches for the dharma-treasure at night, [often] staying up till daylight. Seeking only to benefit others, His Majesty is hard only on himself. These are the constant patterns of his life and they are reported in the daily records of [life in] the Imperial Palaces. As for the tens of thousands normally set aside every year for the upkeep of palace residents, His Majesty has ceased to visit them, and so has not kept a single one.¹¹²

In constructing monasteries and stupas and convening vegetarian feasts and dharma-assemblies, [His Majesty] does not enlist the [labor of] people “who come [to help the king] as sons”;¹¹³ nor does he take from the state-sponsored drinking ceremony (*dapu* 大酺).¹¹⁴ All of these were achieved by using the natural resources

¹¹¹ The original has *taigong* 太宮, which is obviously an error for *taiguan* 太官 (Provisioner), “one of the major subordinates of the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues . . . responsible for preparing meals for the palace and the court”; see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 479.

¹¹² “Yujiang jinzi,” *T* 52: 19.237b–c. In the last sentence, the author seems to be saying that tens of thousands used to be set aside for the upkeep of the imperial harem, but now that Wudi has taken vows and clearly has no use for palace women, he has sent them all home and so it follows naturally that the budget has also been cut. My thanks to Alice Cheang for this suggestion.

¹¹³ This refers to the *Shijing* (Book of odes). For the *Shijing* as the locus classicus of this expression (*zilai* 子來) to convey the enthusiasm of the people in participating in government-sponsored construction projects, and the importance of this kind of symbolism under the rule of Empress Wu, see Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock: The Tower, Statue and Armillary Sphere Constructed by Empress Wu* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente; and Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), p. 103ff.

¹¹⁴ The expenses of the *dapu* ceremony were borne by the government. See Edward H. Schafer, “Notes on T'ang Culture II,” *Monumenta Serica* 24 (1965): 130–54.

from the mountains and marshes, and by collecting pure money in accordance with the dharma. Budgeting expenses to match income, he never overspends. The labor for every project was contributed strictly from the *corvée*. Thereby, [His Majesty] has been able to construct [Buddhist] edifices to rival the heavenly palaces and to prepare feasts comparable to those in the Land of Fragrance (Skt. Gandhālaya; Ch. Xiangji 香積).¹¹⁵

Lastly, both texts refer to two kinds of miraculous and propitious signs: throughout the assembly, it was always sunny in the daytime no matter how heavily it had rained in the night; and divine lights emanated from the statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.¹¹⁶

These similarities and coincidences strongly suggest that both the Chongyun assemblies and those at Tongtai si were governed by an identical format. It is therefore both feasible and necessary to read Lu Yungong's and Xiao Zixian's texts side by side to illuminate what is unclear in the one by referring to the corresponding portions in the other.

THE CHONGYUN ASSEMBLIES:

RELIGIOUS, SOCIOPOLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

There were some political propaganda underlying these assemblies as *pañcavārsika*, which functioned to legitimate and consolidate Wudi's rule by fostering and enhancing a sense of solidarity among his people. Wudi was too pragmatic and shrewd to think that constructing a shared sense of identity would be sufficient to win over his subjects. Understanding that material benefits should follow ideological promises, he set up a unique welfare and financial system, the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury) (*shi wujinzang* 十無盡藏).¹¹⁷ In connection with this economic, political, and religious institution,

¹¹⁵ "Yujiang jinzi," *T* 52: 19.237c. Xiangji indicates the Land of the Buddha of the Fragrance, whose inhabitants live on the odor of incense, which surpasses that of all other lands, as described in a chapter named after this Buddha in the *Vimilakīrtinirdeśa sūtra*. See "Xiangjifo pin" 香積佛品, Chapter 10 of the *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經, *T* 14: 2.552a ff. *Xiangji* was later used when speaking of the kitchen and food of a monastery.

¹¹⁶ These two miraculous signs, listed first and second in Lu Yungong's list of ten kinds of miracles, also appear in "Yujiang jinzi," *T* 52: 19.237a.

¹¹⁷ The original has "Thirteen-division Inexhaustible Treasury" (*Shisanzhong wujinzang* 十三種無盡藏), but this seems to be an error for *Shizhong wujinzang* 十種無盡藏. Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518) *Chu sanzang jijì* 出三藏記集 (*T* 55: 12.9329) records a text with the title "Huangdi zao shi wujinzang jì" 皇帝造十無盡藏記.

the remarkable cases of self-immolation at the dharma-assemblies can now be considered as having a fund-raising function, which Wudi and his ideologues cleverly integrated into his ambitious charitable program. Given that self-immolation played a role in contributing to Wudi's Inexhaustible Treasury, it may be worthwhile to examine other cases of self-immolation in order to discover what financial motives, if any, lay behind promoting them. Finally, I will study the miraculous and propitious signs, a major element of the Chongyun assemblies, against their ideological and sociopolitical background.

Pañcavārsika: Political Legitimation and Buddhist Pacifism

Although the Chongyun assemblies stood out because of their status as *pañcavārsika*, Wudi sponsored many similar events during his protracted reign. Nearly twenty such assemblies are recorded in the sources.¹¹⁸ Wudi evidently convened these assemblies as part of his program of emulating the Indian Buddhist king Aśoka. His endeavors are amply documented. Under his patronage, Sengqiepoluo 僧伽婆羅 (Saṃghapala, 456–520) translated the *Aśokāvādāna* into Chinese in 512.¹¹⁹ In 528, relics unearthed during the renovation of an old pagoda in Maoxian were identified as some of those distributed through Aśoka's supernatural agents. They were then escorted to Wudi's court for veneration before being re-enshrined beneath a new pagoda on the old site.¹²⁰ The monastery in which the pagoda was located was then renamed Ayuwang si (which was, significantly, the home of the monk Faxian, who would immolate himself at the 541 Chongyun Assembly). On September 18, 537, Wudi went to Ayuwang si to pay homage to the relics again. To celebrate the event, he had a universal vegetarian feast (very likely a *pañcavārsika*) held and a grand amnesty proclaimed.¹²¹ Also in 537, the monk

¹¹⁸ A convenient list of these *pañcavārsika* assemblies, which are referred to by a variety of terms (including *wuzhe dahui* 無遮大會, *wuzhe dazhai* 無遮大齋, *pingdeng hui* 平等會, *pingdeng fahui* 平等法會, *sibu dahui* 四部大會, *wuai hui* 無礙會, *wuai dahui* 無礙大會, *wuai fahui* 無礙法會, *wuai faxishi* 無礙法喜食, or probably simply *fahui* 法會 or *dahui* 大會) can be found in Suwa, *Chūgoku Nanchō Bukkyōshi no kenkyū*, pp. 59–76.

¹¹⁹ *Lidai sanbao ji*, T 49: 3.98b. On the *Aśokāvādāna*, see John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvādāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹²⁰ *Liang shu*, 54.790–92; *Nan shi*, 78.1954–56.

¹²¹ *Liang shu*, 3.81, 54.792; *Nan shi*, 7.213, 78.1956.

Tansu 曇俗 (?–537+) brought some relics back from India, where he had been sent by Wudi, to Baozhuangyan si 寶莊嚴寺 in Guangzhou 廣州.¹²² On August 16, 538, another grand amnesty was decreed because six more relics had been discovered by Li Yinzhi 李胤之, a native of Dongye 東冶 (present-day Shaoxing 紹興, Zhejiang).¹²³ On October 23 of the same year, Wudi went to Changgan si 長干寺, where a ceremony was conducted to re-enshrine the relics that had been discovered there earlier.¹²⁴ In 539, after he was assured by an envoy from Funan 扶南 (Siam, home of Saṃghapala) that his home country had some relics of the Buddha's hair, Wudi dispatched the monk Yunbao 雲寶 (otherwise unknown)¹²⁵ to go there in search of them.¹²⁶

The extraordinary frequency with which Wudi reenacted the *pañcavārsika* can be understood as evidence of his eagerness to embody Aśokan ideals. But these *pañcavārsika* had two more specific purposes. One was to legitimate and strengthen his rule, the other to manifest a commitment to pacifism that served to supplement military aggression in coping with Wudi's rivals in the north and other regions, whether nearby or remote, friendly or hostile.

Wudi had seized supreme power from one of his kinsmen, Xiao Baorong 蕭寶融 (488–502), posthumously known as Emperor He of

¹²² See Wang Bo 王勃 (650–675), “Guangzhou Baozhuangyansi sheli-ta bei” 廣州寶莊嚴寺舍利塔碑, in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Taipei: Hualian chubanshe, 1965), 184.4b–13a, esp. 5b. Wang Bo refers to Tansu as a “palace priest” (*neidaochang shamen* 內道場沙門). This suggests that Tansu was from the capital and traveled to India on Wudi's orders. It is uncertain, however, whether an actual temple was located within Wudi's palace chapel. Wang Bo was writing almost one and a half centuries after Tansu's time, and it is unknown whether Tansu was already known as a “palace priest” among his contemporaries or whether Wang Bo is applying the title retrospectively.

¹²³ *Liang shu*, 3.82; *Nan shi*, 7.213; *Zizhi tongjian*, 158.4893; *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 15.203c–4a.

¹²⁴ *Liang shu*, 54.792–793; *Nan shi*, 78.1956–57; cf. *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 16.209a. On the formation of the Changgansi relic veneration, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), p. 279.

¹²⁵ Probably an error for Baoyun 寶雲, as suggested by Paul Pelliot, “Le Fou-Nan,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 3 (1903): 671–72. I have found no further information on this monk, who should not be confused with the Buddhist pilgrim and translator bearing the same name (fl. 376–449). Another monk (Tansu) whom Wudi had already ordered to go to India to search for the Buddha's relics returned to Guangzhou in 537 or early 538.

¹²⁶ *Liang shu*, 54.790; *Nan shi*, 78.1954. On relics of the Buddha's hair, see John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 75–81.

the Qi (r. 501–502).¹²⁷ As such, he should have been perceived as a usurper. In traditional Chinese political theory, the challenger to the incumbent ruler—who lays a rival claim to the “heavenly mandate” (*tianming* 天命)—normally came from outside the imperial family. Therefore, Wudi must have felt the need to justify his actions with traditional beliefs about kingship. One possible way for him to avoid the stigma of “usurper” was to use the Buddhist ideal of *cakravartin*, recasting a sovereign as a universal king entitled to rule not only China, but also the whole world. This would also relieve him of the obligation of abiding by the ethics governing traditional Chinese notions about political succession, which, after all, were local and therefore insignificant when compared to the *cakravartin* ideal.¹²⁸ The miracles associated with the Chongyun assemblies may also be construed as having a legitimizing function. Medieval Chinese rulers—especially those who had come to power by irregular means (the so-called “usurpers”)—were obsessed with collecting and manufacturing “propitious signs,” which were invariably interpreted as divine approval of their rule.

The diplomatic aspect of the Chongyun assemblies is seen in the presence of numerous foreign envoys, ambassadors, and ordinary immigrants. The following record left by a witness from the Eastern Wei¹²⁹ shows how a foreign envoy became involved in a Chongyun assembly:

¹²⁷ Xiao Yan (Wudi) was a sixth-generation grandson of Xiao Zheng 蕭整; see *Liang shu*, 1.1; *Nan shi*, 6.167; and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 11B.2279. Xiao Zheng was, in turn, the fifth-generation ancestor of Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成 (427–483), the founding emperor of the Qi (*Nan shi*, 4.97). Xiao Baorong was the eighth son of Xiao Luan 蕭鸞 (452–498) (i.e., Qi Mingdi, r. 494–498); see *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 8.111; *Nan shi*, 5.158. Xiao Luan was the second son of Xiao Daosheng 蕭道生; see *Nan Qi shu*, 8.111, 6.83, 45.788; *Nan shi*, 5.140, 5.158, 41.1039. Xiao Daosheng was an older brother of Xiao Daocheng; see *Nan Qi shu*, 45.788, 1.1; *Nan shi*, 41.1039, 4.97. Thus, Xiao Baorong must be a seventh-generation descendant of Xiao Daozheng and hence a *zuzi* 族子 of Xiao Yan, meaning he belonged to the same clan as Xiao Yan and was his junior by one generation.

¹²⁸ The same strategy was also adopted by Sui Wendi (r. 581–604) and Empress Wu, both “usurpers” in the eyes of orthodox Confucian historiographers. See Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, pp. 113–15.

¹²⁹ This is suggested by the expressions *Liangwang* 梁王 (King of the Liang) and *Liang zhu* 梁主 (the lord of the Liang). Both are far removed from grander expressions such as *liangdi* 梁帝 (Emperor of the Liang), which would have been the proper title for Wudi from the viewpoint of a northern Chinese during his reign.

When the [Eastern] Wei envoy Lu Cao 陸操 (d. ca. 555)¹³⁰ arrived in the [capital of the] Liang, [he found] the Liang king seated in a small carriage. The envoy prostrated himself twice. [The Liang ruler] commissioned secretariat drafter (*zhong-shu sheren* 中書舍人) Yin Jiong 殷琰 (also known as Yin Ling 殷靈, otherwise unknown) to draft an edict expressing regards [to the envoy]. Arriving at the Chongyun Hall, the envoy was led forward to ascend it. The Liang ruler, wearing a set of bodhisattva-robles, faced north. The heir apparent and all the court officials below him, also in bodhisattva-robles, waited upon the emperor in observance of the protocols. Facing west, [Lu] Cao stood his place in accordance with the [proper] order. All present stood on the west side [of the court], facing east. A Buddhist monk [literally, “a man of the Way”—*daoren* 道人] recited a text in three scrolls in praise of the Buddha. The eulogy (*zan* 贊) in the third scroll said, “For the benefit of the Lord of the Wei and the Wei Prime Minister Gao [Huan], the men and women in the regions to the north and south.”¹³¹ After the ceremony of paying homage to the Buddha, the envoy and all the court officials prostrated themselves twice again.¹³²

Historical sources put Lu Cao’s mission as an Eastern Wei envoy to the Liang some time in 539.¹³³ Of this first-hand report two points

¹³⁰ Lu Cao was from a warrior family based in Dai 代 (in present-day Datong 大同, Shanxi), which produced celebrated generals like his great-uncle Lu Si 陸侯 (392–458). For an extensive biography of Lu Si and his kinsmen, see *Wei shu*, 40.901–18. Lu Cao was highly respected by his contemporaries for his erudition and integrity. He died during the Tianbao era (550–559). His biographical note is in *Bei shi*, 28.1022.

¹³¹ Gao Huan held the reins of power in the Eastern Wei as Prime Minister from 534, when the Northern Wei was split into Eastern and Western Wei, until his death in 547.

¹³² *Youyang zazu*, 3:38.

¹³³ On Lu Cao’s mission to the Liang, *Wei shu* (12.303) reports that he was dispatched by Emperor Jing of the Eastern Wei on the *gengyin* day of the eleventh month of Yuanxiang 1. This is contradicted by *Bei shi* (5.188), which dates it to Yuanxiang 1.12.5 (January 10, 539). Since the eleventh month of Yuanxiang 1 did not have the *gengyin* day, the date given by the *Bei shi* is to be preferred. Quoting a report in the *Liang shu* (3.82) that the Northern Wei envoy arrived in Jiankang on the *yihai* day (the twentieth) of the eleventh month of Datong 4 (i.e., Yuanxiang 1, or December 26, 538), clearly a reference to Lu Cao’s mission, the editors of the Zhonghua shuju edition of the *Wei shu* argue that the date given by the *Bei shi* is also not tenable because Lu Cao, who was not dispatched from the Eastern Wei until January 10, 539, could not have arrived in the Liang thirteen days earlier. See *Wei shu*, 12.318, n. 14. However, they have mistaken the date Datong 5.11.20 (December 15, 539) for Datong 4.11.20 (December 26, 538); see *Liang shu*, 3.83; cf. *Zizhi tongjian*, 158.4903, which provides the names of the Eastern Wei envoys—Wang Yuanjing 王元景 and Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572). The date December 15, 539, could have referred to a mission other than Lu Cao’s (as suggested by *Zizhi tongjian*, which tells us that the mission was led by two Eastern Wei officials, neither of whom was Lu Cao). Thus the *Bei shi* record is not contradicted by the *Liang shu*. On the evidence, Lu Cao was indeed dispatched by the Eastern Wei on January 10, 539, as recorded in the *Bei shi*, which means that he probably arrived in Jiankang some weeks or even months later.

warrant particular notice. First, Wudi and his court officials wore bodhisattva-ropes, meaning that they all presented themselves as bodhisattvas and, in this regard, as equals. This may explain why on the occasion normal court etiquette was inverted: Wudi sat facing north, not south, the opposite position to the one normally occupied by the ruler. In other words, he was presenting himself as an ordinary subject, to whom the Buddha himself was lord. The “egalitarian” nature of this Chongyun assembly is also seen in the assembly described by Xu Ling in his epitaph for Mahāsattva Fu, where, in violation of social status and protocol, a servant sat with his lord and a low-ranking aide stood shoulder to shoulder with a court official.¹³⁴ Second, the religious text chanted during the assembly explicitly included non-Chinese rulers and their subjects among the beneficiaries of the merit garnered from this religious event. This speaks convincingly of the pacifist nature and intentions of this Chongyun assembly.

Self-immolation, Donations, and the Inexhaustible Treasury

It was probably more than a coincidence that related with a major religious institution (Ayuwang si) named after King Aśoka, whose ideals set the keynote of Wudi's universalistic and pacific endeavors, was a remarkable monk (Faxian), known to us only as a self-immolator in the 541 Chongyun assembly. The period of Wudi's reign was marked by an upsurge of self-immolations, as seen in the actions of Mahāsattva Fu and his followers. As early as 534, when Fu Heng 傅恆, a fellow villager (and possibly also a kinsman) and disciple of Mahāsattva Fu, came to Jiankang as his envoy, he vowed to burn his left hand on the highway in the capital.¹³⁵ On May 1, 548, the Buddha's birthday, several of Mahāsattva Fu's disciples, including Liu Jianyi 留堅意 and Fan Nantuo 范難陀, volunteered to burn themselves as an offering to the “Three Treasures.” Zhu Jiangu 朱堅固 burned one finger “as a lamp.” The next day, Liu Hemu 留和睦 and Zhou Jiangu 周堅固 burned a finger each. The “veritable orgy of blood and fire,” as James Benn unforgettably called it, rapidly reaches a climax:

¹³⁴ “Dongyang Shuanglinsi Fu Dashi bei,” *Han Wei Liuchao baisanja ji*, 103B.32b8–33a1 (*HPC* 4: 656a2–10).

¹³⁵ *Shanhui Dashi yulu*, *XZJ* 120: 1.4b–c.

In 548, during the disorder of the Hou Jing rebellion, Fu, regarded by many of his contemporaries as an incarnation of the Buddha Maitreya, vowed to burn himself as a living candle. Rather than allow him to do so, many of his disciples burned themselves, others burned off fingers, cut off their ears, and fasted. Convinced that the period of counterfeit dharma (*xiangfa* 像法) was at an end, they wanted their leader to remain in the world in order to save sentient beings. In 555 the situation had not improved and the people of the Liang were faced with constant warfare, banditry, disease, and starvation. Fu appealed to his followers to offer their bodies “in order to atone for the sins of sentient beings and pray for the coming of the savior.” Three more of his disciples burned themselves to death, suspending themselves as flaming lamps from metal lantern frames. In 557, with the Liang on its last legs, Fu asked his disciples to burn off their fingers “to invoke the buddhas to save this world.” In 587, long after Fu’s death in 569, one of his sons burned himself to death.¹³⁶

Liang society was in the firm grip of a terrifying eschatological crisis, which may have been precipitated and heightened by certain changes in global weather patterns. Some scholars have suggested that these abnormalities were triggered by a massive volcanic eruption in what is now Indonesia.¹³⁷ Abnormal weather may have caused a series of disasters that people were prone to explain as heavenly punishments and presages of even graver catastrophes. Tongtai si, which was no less than his ideological breeding-ground and the most essential symbol for Wudi’s religious and political supremacy,¹³⁸ was burnt down at this tricky moment (i.e., in the early summer of 546). Wudi’s psychological reaction to, and theological construal of, this conflagration, as well as his administrative and religious responses to the crises caused by this disaster, illumi-

¹³⁶ *Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), pp. 376–77; footnotes omitted here. For Benn’s sources, see *XZJ* 120.4b–d, translated and discussed in Bea-hui Hsiao, *Two Images of Maitreya: Fu Hsi and Pu-tai Ho-shang* (Ph. D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1995), pp. 103, 105.

¹³⁷ See, for example, David Keys, *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of the Modern World* (London: Century, 1999). T. H. Barrett remarks on this phenomenon in connection with its possible impact on Chinese religion in *The Rise and Spread of Printing: A New Account of Religious Factors* (School of Oriental and African Studies Working Papers in the Study of Religions, London, 2001), pp. 5–7. James Benn has attempted to place a well-known case of self-immolation in Sichuan in the context of this larger background (see n. 167 below).

¹³⁸ The importance, political and religious, of Tongtai si for Wudi’s rule has been studied in Yamada Keiji 山田慶兒, “Ryōbu no gaiten-setsu” 梁武の蓋天, *Tōhō gaku* 48 (1975): 99–134.

nate the sociopolitical and religious background for the self-immolation boom.

The Tongtai si conflagration reminded Wudi of the prophetic verse uttered by Baozhi in the Tianjian era (502–520):

昔年三十八，今年八十三。四中復有四，城北火酣酣。

Thirty-eight [years old] in the past
 eighty-three [years old] in the present
 One more four implied in a four
 fire burning hard in the north of the city.¹³⁹

Unaware of the verse's meaning, Wudi ordered his confidant Zhou She 周捨 (469–524)¹⁴⁰ to write it down and have it sealed. It was not until that very moment that he was brought home to the full meanings of this verse. Wudi was thirty-eight when he occupied Jiankang in 501, one year before he established his own dynasty; the Tongtai si conflagration occurred in the year *bingyin* 丙寅 (546), when he was eighty-three. Thus, the first two lines in the verse accurately predicted these two critical moments in his life. The fire broke out on the fourteenth day of the fourth month [of Zhongdatong 1] (May 29, 546), starting from the third story [of the pagoda], and Wudi stood third among his [male] siblings. These facts are echoed in the last two lines of the verse.¹⁴¹

Perplexed by these oddities, Wudi summoned his grand astrologer Yu Lü 虞履 to take divination with yarrow stalks. He obtained the hexagram *kun* 坤 (earth; second of the sixty-four hexagrams).¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Nan shi*, 7.224. *Sui shu* (22.636–37) also attributes to Baozhi two prophecy-verses, one delivered on July 5, 504, and the other on May 20, 511.

¹⁴⁰ Like Zhu Yi, Zhou She was one of the most trusted confidants of Wudi. His biography is in *Liang shu* 25.375. His father was the famous Buddhist layman Zhou Yu 周顒. Zhou Yu was an uncle of Zhou Hongzheng 周弘正 (496–574), whom he raised, along with Hongzheng's brothers, following the early death of their father Zhou Baoshi 周寶始. Zhou Hongzheng was a renowned expert on Daoism and Confucianism who was also knowledgeable in Buddhism. The eminent monks associated with him included Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) (*Sui Tiantai zhizhe dashi biezhuàn* 隋天台智者大師別傳, T 50: 192c03), Baoqiong (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 7.478c), Zhiju 智聚 (538–609) (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 52: 10.502c), and most noticeably Tanyan 曇延 (516–588) (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 52: 8.488b), the probable author of the apocryphal *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, with whom Zhou Hongzheng had a chance to converse during his trip as a Chen envoy to the northern Zhou.

¹⁴¹ *Nan shi*, 7.224.

¹⁴² The original character was an ancient form of 坤 (☷). The Zhonghua shuju edition of

Trying to appease the troubled emperor, Yu Lü suggested the following reading: “No harm is to issue. The *yao* 繇 (i.e., the explanatory note on the hexagram) says, ‘gaining friends in the southwest and losing friends in the northeast. Peaceful, stable and propitious.’ The *wenyan* 文言 (one of the ten appendices [*shiyi* 十翼] of the *Yijing* 易經) says, ‘though losing friends in the northeast, you will come to a lucky end.’”¹⁴³

His interpretation did not entirely mollify Wudi’s perturbations. Wudi claims, “This is the work of a devil. The *you* 酉 will see *mao* 卯, and metal will come to conquer wood. The *mao* represents the thief of *yin*. How could a ghost accompanied by a thief be other than a devil? What has incurred all this? *You* is the time of day *most strongly associated with* mouth and tongue, and corresponds to the position of *shuo* 說. *Shuo* represents *yan* 言 plus *dui* 兌.¹⁴⁴ Therefore one understands that the mouths that speak good words should be advanced to promote the dharma-affairs.” (斯魔鬼也。酉應見卯，金來剋木，卯為陰賊。鬼而帶賊，非魔何也。孰為致之？酉為口舌，當乎說位。說言乎兌，故知善言之口，宜前為法事。)¹⁴⁵

The authors of the *Nan shi* continue to report the results of this religious campaign so vehemently promoted by Wudi. “For this reason, everyone [within the Liang territory] began to praise the good. There was none who did not flock to follow this practice as if blown by the wind. Some incised their bodies, letting their blood shed onto the ground; some drew their blood to copy scriptures; [some] had their hearts pierced and had lighted lamps [attached to them by means of hooks]; and [some] became so preoccupied with sitting in meditation that they neglected to eat.”

Both the verses attributed to Baozhi and Wudi’s own theories interpreted these natural and social disasters as a kind of predestined doom which the emperor nonetheless attempted to forestall by praying for the grace of the Buddha. His efforts took two forms,

the *Nan shi* has wrongly presented the character as 𠄎 (see *Nan shi* 7.224), which is an ancient form of *chuan* 川. None of the sixty-four hexagrams is named *chuan*. Judging by the *yao* and *wenyan* that the *Nan shi* provides for this hexagram, it must have been *kun*.

¹⁴³ *Nan shi*, 7.224–25.

¹⁴⁴ Wudi here is talking about the compass points governed by different hexagrams, here the direction associated with the hexagram *dui* (*shuo* = *yue* = *dui*). This reading was suggested to me by Alice W. Cheang.

¹⁴⁵ *Nan shi*, 7.225; cf. *Zizhi tongjian*, 159.4937.

one positive (such as reciting the Buddhist scriptures and chanting the Buddha's names, summarized by the authors of the *Nan shi* in the amorphous term *zanshan* 讚善, "to praise the good"),¹⁴⁶ and the other negative, mainly the practices of self-immolation, which, in its broad sense, included Wudi's own self-renunciation.

Wudi's flamboyant acts of self-renunciation involved a complex political and religious agenda, of which a major component was fund-raising.¹⁴⁷ The emperor sequestered himself in Tongtai si no less than four times, and each time his court officials paid a huge "ransom" to bring him out. These activities, once publicized, must have attracted even larger amounts of donations from the public, their enthusiasm heightened by the emperor's unprecedented sacrifice. Inspired by his example, Buddhist monks and ordinary lay people enacted self-mutilation practices in the assemblies, and these too must have helped to elicit huge donations, a major part of which would certainly have found its way into the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury.

Two of the ten divisions of this treasury were "setting free animals and fish" (*fangsheng* 放生) and alms-giving (Skt. *dāna*; Ch. *bushi* 布施). The benefits derived from this treasury were believed to have been unlimited. To bring more merit to this program, offerings of monies and food were also made in various temples during the monthly vegetarian feasts.¹⁴⁸

Historical sources suggest that, like other religious activities and institutions under his reign, the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury was most likely maintained not only by the funds raised publicly, but also by the considerable funds that Wudi managed to save, thanks to his own highly frugal, or even ascetic, life-style. The following comments in Xiao Zixian's preface provide some intriguing hints at the major venues through which these funds were raised:

As for this assembly, its expenses were covered by pure (sacred) funds (*jingcai* 淨財). Commoners coming from near and far are willing to hold similar festivals in

¹⁴⁶ Note that this term (in a modified form, 讚善) also appears in Lu Yungong's preface. "Yujiang Bore jing xu," *T* 52: 19.236b.

¹⁴⁷ Some scholars have noted the fund-raising functions of Wudi's unusual acts of self-renunciation. See, for example, Yamazaki Hiroshi 山崎宏, *Shina chūsei bukkō no tenkai* 支那中世佛教の展開 (Shimizu shoten, 1942), p. 214.

¹⁴⁸ "Yujiang jinzi," *T* 52: 19.237c.

their home towns. With joy, they sought to donate, vying with each other in participating in the merit-field, without being encouraged or ordered to do so or needing to be given quotas. The fragrance of foods made from rice and wheat arrived as promised in portions sufficient to feed tens of thousands. By this we know that this has been brought about by the transforming power of His Majesty, and the germs of goodness in the commoners coming to fruition. As for the fixed budgets for the military and the state and the regular revenues in the national treasury, they remain the public possession of the state and not even an iota has been touched.¹⁴⁹

However, it should be noted that a dharma-assembly held at the Chongyun Hall or Tongtai si was not merely an occasion to spend donations. It also served as a whirlpool that inexorably drew in donations. The 533 Tongtai si assembly, for example, attracted from court officials and commoners donations of 11,114,000 cash, in addition to the 10,966,000 cash from Wudi himself, 3,430,000 cash from the heir apparent, and 2,700,000 cash from the queen, royal consorts, and concubines. In accordance with the purposes designated by the donors, Wudi divided their donations into ten categories:

1. Those who donated to sponsor the dharma-activities during the assembly.
2. Those who donated to make offerings (*gongyang* 供養) [to the Three Jewels].
3. Those who donated to perform acts of mercy and compassion (*cibei* 慈悲).
4. Those who donated to ask for chanting the *sūtras* (*songjing* 誦經).
5. Those who donated monies to be included in [the division of the Inexhaustible Treasury] to pay for offerings made in the festivals (*jiegong* 節供).
6. Those who donated monies to be included in [the division of the Inexhaustible Treasury] to support the setting free of animals and fish.
7. Those who donated monies to be included in [the division of the Inexhaustible Treasury] for the distribution of alms.
8. Those who renounced themselves (*sheshen* 捨身) to serve the masses.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 19.237c.

9. Those who burned their fingers (*shaozhi* 燒指) to make offerings to the Three Jewels.
10. Those who, hearing the lectures, entreated permission to take monastic vows (*chujia* 出家).¹⁵⁰

Although neither Lu Yungong's preface nor the *Nan shi* mentions how the public funds were raised and whether they were deposited to the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury, both of the Chongyun assemblies probably yielded equally large amounts of donations, most (if not all) of which were also absorbed into the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury. Not all of the donations were material. The text clearly reveals that many acts of self-immolation took place at the dharma-assemblies. On these occasions, self-immolation seems to have acquired a close association with the institution of the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury.

*Miraculous and Propitious Signs Interpreted
As the Result of Human and Heavenly Interaction*

Offerings of the body in the Chongyun assemblies constituted an important part of the well-orchestrated effort to bring down miraculous and propitious signs, which were, in turn, enthusiastically exploited for different religious and political purposes. Several accounts examined so far impress the reader with efficacy attributed to acts of self-immolation in conjuring up propitious signs as a response from the heavens (and the Buddha), thus justifying self-immolation as a pious act. Wudi and his ideologues, using the traditional Chinese belief in "stimulus-response," or "sympathetic resonance,"¹⁵¹ ingeniously recast conventional and indigenous propitious signs in terms of Buddhist ideas, or simply merged them with those with strong Buddhist connotations.

Examples of indigenous objects and signs appearing in the accounts of the Chongyun assemblies are the red mat with the *luan* birds presented by the Daoist group, the three-legged bird, the five-colored clouds, the white sparrow, and a tree made up of two intertwining trunks, all of which are associated with the 547 Chongyun

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.237c-238a.

¹⁵¹ This translation comes from Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), p. 82ff.

assembly. These are, of course, only a few of the many propitious signs that must have been recorded in such works as *Huangdi pusa qingjing dashe ji* 皇帝菩薩清淨大捨記, which, unfortunately not extant now, was an account of the ceremonies of self-renunciation that Wudi performed at the Chongyun Hall and Tongtai si.¹⁵² The white sparrow is well-known as a “numinous bird” (*lingniao* 靈鳥) frequently associated with Daoist mountains.¹⁵³ Likewise, Daoist paradises seem always to have three-legged birds.¹⁵⁴ The *feng* 鳳 and its female counterpart *luan* has strong associations with firmiana trees (*wutong* 梧桐), the rarest and most propitious of which would grow as two intertwined trees. The intertwined tree is an excellent example of how an indigenous object can become so closely implicated with Buddhist beliefs and practices that what was once a purely Buddhist motif (the Buddha dying under the twin *śāla* tree) gradually comes to dominate the presentation of the object altogether. In Chinese Buddhist iconography, the symbol of twin *śāla* trees was also accordingly turned into a somehow paradoxical bidirectional process—of “Buddhifying” a Chinese image with Buddhist ideas on the one hand and simultaneously sinifying a Buddhist motif with an indigenous Chinese image on the other.¹⁵⁵

A similarly fascinating transformation can be seen in the perception about earthquakes, generally taken as an ominous sign in traditional Chinese belief. The 547 Chongyun assembly was interrupted by an earthquake that immediately resulted in two conflicting interpretations. Some, referring to the *Shangshu*, construed it as an omen of calamity, while others, perhaps inspired by Buddhist beliefs, saw it as an auspice. This is supported by Lu Yungong, who took the earthquake at the 541 assembly as a propitious sign, cor-

¹⁵² This text, attributed to Wudi’s official historiographer Xie Wu 謝吳, had already been out of circulation by the time Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) and his colleagues compiled the *Sui shu* between 636 and 656. See *Sui shu*, 34.1010.

¹⁵³ Qing Xitai 卿希泰 and others, in *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Zhishi chubanshe, 1994), p. 131.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (SKQS edition), 20.22b.

¹⁵⁵ See Yan Juanying (Yen Chuan-ying) 顏娟英, “The Double Tree Motif in Chinese Buddhist Iconography,” *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 14/6 (1980): 1–14 and 14/7 (1980): 1–13. Several of these “auspicious” images are discussed in Tiziana Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties* (Sankt Augustin; Nettetal; Steyler Verlag: Monumenta Serica Institute, 2001).

relating it with the movement of the ground described in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The *Lotus Sūtra* is not the only Buddhist text in which earthquakes presage the advent of something positive. The *Avataṃsaka sūtra* refers to a “seaquake” in the Lotus Embryo World (*huazang shijie* 華藏世界); later, the famous Chinese *Avataṃsaka* master Fazang is said to have caused an earthquake when he lectured on the Lotus Embryo World, a sign of divine approval of his superior preaching skills.¹⁵⁶

In the documents devoted to Wudi's Chongyun and Tongtai si assemblies, the propitious signs and images, irrespective of their sources, are depicted as manifestations of the power of the supplicants—Wudi or those acting for him—in evoking sympathetic responses from the Buddha and the heavens. As Robert Sharf has pointed out, the soteriological mechanism of grace in the interactions of supplicants with Buddha, was understood in China in terms of the indigenous notion of sympathetic resonance (*ganying*).¹⁵⁷ Influenced by Buddhism, the theory of *ganying* had come to be applied to at least three levels of interaction: (1) within human society, the interaction between the subordinate and the superior, most typically the rulers and the ruled; (2) between the human realm and heaven, human action and feeling could and did affect the operations of the cosmic order. The more sincere an act, such as self-immolation, the more likely it was to move heaven to intervene in a way favorable to the petitioner (e.g., the abatement of human suffering); and (3) between the mundane and the sacred—the interaction between the human realm and that of the Buddha. Many self-immolators seemed to believe that the extremity of their acts would be effective in stimulating (*gan*) some kind of response (*ying*) from the object of their supplication.

Some hoped that their sacrifice would move the ruler to effect desired changes in his attitude or plans; some believed that they would invite heavenly intervention; some immolated themselves simply as a general plea for grace. They hoped that divine grace would help overcome the crises that they and their religion faced.

¹⁵⁶ See *Xu Huayan jing lüeshu kanding ji* 續華嚴經略疏刊定記, *XZJ* 5: 1.25b-c, discussed in Chen, “More than a Philosopher,” pp. 332–33.

¹⁵⁷ Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, p. 119.

As crises escalated, threatening the Liang empire with extinction, Buddhist believers became increasingly passionate in carrying out such radical acts as self-immolation; this was their desperate way of appealing to the Buddha and the heavens.

A worldview so heavily influenced by the theory of *ganying* could not fail to ascribe extraneous functions to such mechanical objects as an observatory or an armillary sphere. As tellingly suggested by the name of the observatory in the Hualin Park, the Tongtian-guan 通天觀—a building “through (or in) which man was able to communicate with the heavens”—the *raison d'être* of such a building is the maintenance and perfection of the interaction between the human and natural realms. This explains why in the Hualin Park an observatory equipped with an armillary sphere was placed in such proximity to the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall: in the worldview of Wudi and his ideologues, whether Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist, there was only one cosmos, watched over by the Buddha and the heavens ideally in response to the plea of human beings.

THE IMPACT OF THE CHONGYUN ASSEMBLIES:
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EMPRESS WU

Wudi's palace chapel had an important impact on later religious and political life, and may also have influenced Empress Wu's politico-religious ideals. Like Wudi, Empress Wu was a deeply pious Buddhist. Like Wudi, she was also perceived by Confucian historians to be a usurper. Both used Buddhism extensively for personal, religious, and political purposes. I shall limit my discussion to comparing them with regard to the Buddhist institutions installed within their Palatine Cities, the Chongyun Hall for Wudi and the Luminous Hall (*mingtang* 明堂) complex for Empress Wu. For this comparison, a brief review of Empress Wu's *mingtang* complex is necessary.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ The following review of the Luminous Hall complex is based on Forte, *Mingtang*, *passim*. Forte also provides a Chinese summary of his book in “Zhongguo mingtang yu tianwenzhong” 中國明堂與天文鐘, in *Wu Zetian yanjiu lunwen ji* 武則天研究論文集 (edited by Zhao Wenrun 趙文潤 and Li Yuming 李玉明, Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 17–28.

Empress Wu's Mingtang Complex

From 684, when she started to act as regent after deposing her son, Emperor Zhongzong 中宗, to February 21, 705, when she was forced to reinstate Zhongzong, Empress Wu made three attempts to build and rebuild the complex of Luminous Hall, in different forms and for different purposes. Planned at the beginning of 685, the first Luminous Hall complex was finished on January 23, 689, with the completion of the Heavenly Hall (*tiantang* 天堂). Inside the Luminous Hall was a huge dry-lacquer statue of Buddha. The Great Regulator (*dayi* 大儀), an important astronomic device, was annexed to the Heavenly Hall. The *tiantang-dayi* integrated structure was meant to be a “Numinous Terrace” (*lingtai* 靈臺), the sacred tower celebrated in the *Book of Odes*. The *tiantang-dayi* was named “Divine Palace of the Myriad Images” (*wanxiang shengong* 萬象神宮), presumably because its astronomical equipment included images or representations of the heavenly bodies. This name was extended to cover the whole of the tripartite Luminous Hall complex—the Heavenly Hall proper, intended as a government hall and located to the south of Heavenly Hall, a hall with a circular moat to the north of Heavenly Hall, and the Numinous Terrace (made up of the Heavenly Hall together with the Great Regulator, the latter probably situated on the eastern side of the Heavenly Hall). This Heavenly Hall complex was destroyed by a windstorm sometime between October 16, 690, and April 3, 691.

Shortly after the first Luminous Hall complex was burnt down, Empress Wu decided to reconstruct it in its entirety, exactly as it had stood when completed on January 23, 689. Unfortunately, on the night of December 8, 694, a big fire—apparently set off by a brazier in the Heavenly Hall—destroyed the Heavenly Hall before spreading to, and completely burning down, the Luminous Hall proper. At this time the Heavenly Hall was only half-finished, but the Luminous Hall proper had probably already been completed, judging by the fact that a grand *pañcavārṣika* feast was held there the night before the fire.

In the third month of Zhengsheng 1 (April 1–May 18, 695), the order to build a reduced-scale Luminous Hall was given by Empress Wu. The reconstruction of the Heavenly Hall was abandoned and it was replaced by Foguang si 佛光寺, to be situated outside the

Heavenly Hall complex. On April 22, 696, the newly completed Luminous Hall was given the name Tongtiangong 通天宮. Surrounded by a circular moat, it had three stories, the third being a Buddhist pagoda with a central pillar. On top there was an iron phoenix plated with gold two *zhang* (6 meters) high.

Of the three attempts that Empress Wu made to build the Luminous Hall, only two succeeded. The first Luminous Hall complex was composed of three parts: the Luminous Hall proper (as the government hall), a hall with the circular moat (to the north of the Heavenly Hall), and a bipartite building (the Numinous Terrace) composed of the Heavenly Hall and an immense astronomical device (the Great Regulator). According to Antonino Forte, the Heavenly Hall was located between the Luminous Hall in the south and the circular moat in the north. Whereas the second Luminous Hall had been planned as a faithful copy of the first, the third, the “Palace to Communicate with Heaven,” was a much modified version. While the first story of this three-storied building was the government hall, the third story was actually a pagoda.

*Wudi's Chongyun Hall and Empress Wu's
Luminous Hall Complex: A Comparison*

All three key components of Wudi's palace chapel—the Chongyun Hall, the Sanxiu Pavilion, and the astronomical edifice (called Cengchengguan, Chuanzhenlou, or Tongtianguan)—have their counterparts in Empress Wu's *mingtang* complex. In the first *mingtang* complex, the Chongyun-Guangyan hall roughly corresponded to the *mingtang* (as government hall), the Chongyun Pavilion to the Heavenly Hall, and the Tongtianguan, especially the armillary sphere that it contained, to the Great Regulator. The Heavenly Hall enshrined a lacquer statue, just as the Sanxiu Pavilion housed a pair of metal statues of the Buddha, although the former was an independent building while the latter was not. The same parallels are visible in Wudi's palace chapel and Empress Wu's third Luminous Hall, especially when we consider that, like the Sanxiu Pavilion, which probably constituted the highest part of the Chongyun-Guangyan Hall, the highest part of the third Luminous Hall was a pagoda. Note also that the new name that Empress Wu assigned to her Luminous Hall complex—the Tongtiangong 通天宮—was almost

identical with one of the names for Wudi's observatory, the Tongtianguan 通天觀.

Empress Wu intended her Luminous Hall complex for a variety of purposes, a major one being to hold *pañcavārsika* assemblies—reminiscent of Wudi's Chongyun assemblies. Like Wudi, Empress Wu was eager to open her Luminous Hall complex to the public. When the first *mingtang* was completed, she invited both Chinese and foreign people to enter the magnificent building to enjoy its brilliance and, of course, to appreciate (or be “educated” in) its profound politico-religious symbolism.¹⁵⁹ Most likely a *pañcavārsika* assembly was then held there, just as happened when a major part of the second Luminous Hall complex—the Luminous Hall proper (which served as the government hall)—was completed at the end of 694:

On December 7, 694, a *pañcavārsika* assembly was convened at the Luminous Hall, where a pit five *zhang* deep was dug and silk festoons were hung up to create a makeshift palace. The Buddha-images were carried out of the pit, and this was likened to the phenomenon of pagodas emerging from underneath the earth [as described in the *Lotus Sūtra*]. Next, oxen were killed and their blood used to paint a great portrait of the Buddha, whose head was two hundred *chi* high, and it was said that Huaiyi 懷義 (?-695) had pricked his own knees for blood which was used to paint this portrait. On the day *bingshen* of this month (Tiancewansui 1. *zheng*.21—December 2, 695), the portrait was put up to the south of the Tianjin Bridge, where a vegetarian feast was offered [for all the people].¹⁶⁰

Huaiyi was no less than the chief ideologue and political advisor of Empress Wu. More particularly, he was the architect of the first two Luminous Hall complexes. This was not the only *pañcavārsika* assembly that Huaiyi organized in the name of Empress Wu. In the passage preceding this, Sima Guang tells us that ten thousand strings of cash were squandered at each of these *pañcavārsika* assemblies, during which Huaiyi had many¹⁶¹ cartfuls of cash scattered to the crowds. Some fought for the cash so violently that casualties and deaths were reported.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ *Zizhi tongjian*, 204.6454–55.

¹⁶⁰ *Zizhi tongjian*, 205.6498.

¹⁶¹ The original has it as *shiche* 十車 (“ten cartfuls”), which I believe should be understood figuratively.

¹⁶² *Zizhi tongjian*, 205.6498, quoted in Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 296.

Even a hasty comparison of this brief (and certainly biased) report of Empress Wu's *pañcavārsika* assemblies with those of Wudi's Chongyun and Tongtai si assemblies reveals their similarities. The five key factors that I have identified in the reports of Wudi's dharma-assemblies—being a *pañcavārsika*, relic-veneration, self-immolation, lavish donations, miraculous and propitious signs—are also implied in this account of Empress Wu's *pañcavārsika*. The first two characteristics—*pañcavārsika* and veneration of dharma-relics manifested in dharma lectures¹⁶³—are so obvious as to require no further explanation.

As to the other functions, both involved huge donations of money. At Wudi's dharma-assemblies, the donations derived from the emperor, his family members, his court officials, and the commoners; in the case of Empress Wu (or her agent Huaiyi), donations were collected and given away in quite a different way. Huaiyi, a monk, seems to have secured the monies from the government (and other sources, both public and private), and distributed them to the masses during the *pañcavārsika* assembly in an apparently non-discriminating (and therefore bodhisattva-like) way, although, in the eyes of the witnesses unfriendly to Huaiyi and his religion, this stirred up too much turmoil and violence.

Self-immolation, so conspicuous in Wudi's assemblies, also had its place in Empress Wu's assemblies. Huaiyi was, however, represented as a fake self-immolator by Sima Guang. Instead of painting the Buddha's portrait with his own blood in a typical act of piety, he resorted to the blood of an animal and attempted to pass it off as his own.

Finally, Huaiyi's reenactment of the legend in the *Lotus Sūtra*—about the Buddha's statues, images, and pagodas emerging from beneath the ground—presents a perfect footnote to these lines in Lu Yungong's preface about the shaking of the earth, where Lu, using rhetorical ambiguity, suggests that a similar phenomenon had taken place at the Chongyun assembly. Without any doubt, Huaiyi staged this dramatic scene as a climax to a series of miraculous and propitious signs, which were meant to be interpreted as divine approval

¹⁶³ Although the *Zizhi tongjian* account makes no mention of any dharma lectures, it is unlikely that such a high-profile religious activity would have omitted them.

of this event and hence conferred politico-religious legitimacy on its sponsors.

The similarities do not end here. Wudi and Empress Wu convened their *pañcavārṣika* assemblies in places that were either at the heart of supreme power (in the case of the Luminous Hall), or very close to it (in the case of the Chongyun Hall). Moreover, like Wudi, Empress Wu also sought to achieve both political legitimation and a reputation for pacifism from these *pañcavārṣika* assemblies. For this purpose, both enthusiastically embraced foreigners (particularly envoys from foreign regions) along with their subjects at their *pañcavārṣika* assemblies.

*Wudi's Chongyun Assemblies Viewed in a Larger Context:
A Politico-Religious Paradigm?*

The similarities between Wudi's and Empress Wu's *pañcavārṣika* assemblies lead one to conclude that Empress Wu—or, to be more accurate, her ideologues, such as Huaiyi—had taken Wudi as their model. However, Empress Wu was neither the first nor the last to emulate Wudi in this regard. Wudi's *pañcavārṣika* assemblies appear to have created a universal paradigm for later rulers to follow. Let me give three more examples.

The first took place at the orders of Empress Wu herself, around one decade after the murder of Huaiyi on February 22, 695. Early in 705, at the instigation of Fazang, Empress Wu decided to bring the finger-bone enshrined in a pagoda at Famen si 法門寺 to her palace in Luoyang for veneration. The finger-bone was believed to have been Śākyamuni's. Before unsealing the pagoda, Fazang and nine other eminent monks, leading the imperial emissaries and their entourage, performed a seven-day observance, probably in front of the pagoda. The relic emitted dazzling rays of light as it was brought out. Fazang, who had burnt off a finger here forty-seven years ago to show his determination to pursue a religious career, destroyed his liver at this moment. Holding his votive text, he read it aloud to the people present there. The relic shone in the palm of his hand, lighting up places both near and far. In accordance with the power of the merit accumulated in past lives, the people on the spot saw different divine phenomena. Inflamed by religious passion, they competed with each other in performing acts of self-immolation.

People zealously immolated themselves and rushed to make donations.¹⁶⁴

The focus of this event was the veneration of the Famen si relic. The seven-day observance was only a prelude to the relic's exhumation. It was conducted as a *pañcavārsika* assembly, which attracted a huge number of attendants, including donors as well as self-immolators, who, by offering their bodies to the Buddha, were recognized as special donors. The activity was also punctuated by a series of miracles. What is most intriguing about this event is the vividness of some of the acts of self-immolation, most of all that performed by Fazang himself.

This account ends with a pair of strictly parallel phrases, "competing to be first to set fire to the crown of their heads, or burn off their fingers" (頂釭指炬者爭先) and "fearing lagging behind in offering donations" (捨寶投財者恥後),¹⁶⁵ which, respectively, feature self-mutilation and material donations in the course of this relic veneration. Fazang brought people's emotions to a climax by his own startling act of self-mutilation. This account, especially Fazang's role in it, is strongly reminiscent of one in which Fazang's contemporary Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (660–733) describes how a Zoroastrian lord (*xianzhu* 祆主) cut into his belly at a carnival to the accompaniment of numerous singers and players of various instruments. The frenzied participants made huge donations, even though the slitting of the man's abdomen turned out to be a hoax.¹⁶⁶ A comparison of these two accounts reveals several similarities. First, the two occasions were both religious, one Buddhist and the other Zoroastrian. Second, each consisted of a grand assembly that can be easily identified with *pañcavārsika*. Third, both involved fund-raising. Fourth, both seem to have culminated in belly-slitting, which, in the case of Fazang, was depicted by the expression *huigan* 隳肝 ("destroying one's liver"). Finally, in both cases such acts of self-immolation seem to have been employed as a means to raise money. If the belly-slitting

¹⁶⁴ Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn 崔致遠 (857–904+), *Tang Tae Ch'ŏnboksa kosaju pŏn'gyŏng taedŏk Pŏpjang hwasang chŏn* 唐大薦福寺故寺主翻經大德法藏和尚傳, T 50: 283c–84a.

¹⁶⁵ *Tang Tae Ch'ŏnboksa kosaju pŏn'gyŏng taedŏk Pŏpjang hwasang chŏn*, T 50: 241a5–6.

¹⁶⁶ *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載, in *Sui Tang jiahua Chaoye qianzai* 隋唐嘉話 朝野僉載, collated and annotated by Cheng Yizhong 程毅中 and Zhao Shouyan 趙守儼 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 3.64–65.

performed at the Zoroastrian carnival was, according to Zhang Zhuo, no more than a magic trick, then can the same be said of Fazang's self-mutilation? This seems highly likely, when we consider that he lived for seven more years after allegedly "destroying" his liver. His self-mutilation was, at least in part, only staged. The following two facts are suggestive. First, Fazang was a third-generation Sogdian immigrant, who would certainly have been familiar with the Central Asian magical traditions of which fake abdominal slitting was a component. Second, as I have shown elsewhere, Fazang demonstrated his aptitude for conjuring on other occasions. In other words, like other Central Asians, Fazang was an adroit magician and used his talent to manipulate people's emotions and raise monies for religious purposes.¹⁶⁷

One century earlier, the beginning of the seventh century witnessed other examples of the practice of relic veneration. As Empress Wu's relative, Sui Wendi 隋文帝 (r. 581–604), was approaching the end of his life, he ordered three successive campaigns to honor relics, in 601, 602, and 604; and had them supervised by the monk Tanqian 曇遷 (542–607). During these three campaigns, 107 Buddhist relics were distributed to the same number of prefectures, where pagodas were set up to enshrine them, to emulate the legend that, with divine assistance, King Aśoka simultaneously had 84,000 pagodas erected all over the world to house the same number of the Buddha's physical relics. Despite their apparent political and religious importance, this series of relic campaigns received only a passing mention in the official histories. Fortunately, monastic sources are of more help. In addition to the biographies that he wrote for some of the 107 eminent monks who conducted the relics to their shrines, Daoxuan also records a document, entitled *Sheli ganying ji* 舍利感應記 (Account on the stimuli and responses of relics), comprised of several important documents related to the campaigns, including an edict issued by

¹⁶⁷ Chen, *History and His Stories*, Chapter 7. For a similar example in which fund-raising purposes are strongly emphasized, see the account in *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 of Sengyai's 僧崖 (488?–559?) self-cremation to raise money to build a monastery or monasteries. The same event is recorded in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, which highlights its edifying effects (while duly noting that Sengyai intended to raise funds for copying Buddhist texts and so on). See, respectively, *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, T 51: 5.25a–b, and *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 27.678b–80b. Sengyai is discussed in Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, Chapter 6.

Wendi, a congratulatory memorial presented by his court officials, and a collection recording various miracles that allegedly appeared in the prefectures before or during the enshrinement of the relics. This collection was compiled by Wendi's court historiographer Wang Shao 王劼 (?–610?), who also supervised the campaigns. According to the *Sheli ganying ji*, in each of the “relic-prefectures,” a seven-day observance was held before the relic was enshrined. The observance was celebrated by the “four Great assemblies,” which refers to all the male and female priests, laymen and laywomen in the locality. An essential part of this weeklong observance was a “Great Vegetarian Feast” (*dazhai* 大齋), the description of which compellingly proves the gathering to be a *pañcavārsika* assembly.

Wang Shao states that countless people made lavish donations, including property and clothing. Some even cut off their hair, indicating their intention of entering the Saṃgha. Day after day, as part of the Great Vegetarian Feast, they paid homage to the relics, repented their crimes, and received the bodhisattva-precepts. It is said that, as soon as those present were exposed to the relics, they immediately set their minds on the dharma. All the participants, regardless of age, race, or profession (including butchers and hunters whose livelihoods depended on harming living creatures), vowed to devote themselves to Buddhism so that they could be reborn as subjects of the Sui lifetime after lifetime.¹⁶⁸ In addition to attracting huge donations, this *pañcavārsika* assembly was also blessed by numerous propitious and miraculous signs, as is shown by both the content of the text and the use of *ganying* in its title.

The third—and by far the most famous—example of relic veneration is described by Su E 蘇鶚 (fl. 876–886). This vivid firsthand account is worth quoting in its entirety:

On the eighth day of the fourth month of 873, the bone of the Buddha was welcomed into Chang'an. Starting from the Anfu Tower at the Kaiyuan Gate, all along the way on both sides, cries of invocation to the Buddha shook the earth. Men and women watched the ceremonial procession of the relic, while monks and nuns followed in its wake. The emperor went to Anfu si and, as he personally paid his respects, tears dropped down to moisten his breast. He thereupon summoned the palace chaplains of two halves of the street (i.e., in the capital) and bestowed gifts of varying quantities. On those still alive of the venerable old men of the cap-

¹⁶⁸ Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, p. 97.

ital who had participated in welcoming the bone during the Yuanhe era (806–820) he bestowed silver bowls, brocades, and colored silks.

The prominent families of Chang'an all vied with one another in ornamenting their riding carriages for this occasion. Streets in every direction were filled with people supporting the old and carrying the young. Those who came to see the spectacle all fasted beforehand in order that they might receive the blessings of the Buddha.

At this time, a soldier cut off his left arm in front of the Buddha's relic, and holding it with his other hand, he revered the relic with step, his blood sprinkling the ground all the while. As for those who went on their elbows and knees, biting off their fingers or cutting off their hair, their numbers could not be counted. There was also a monk who covered his head with artemisia, a practice known as "purifying the head." When the artemisia was ignited, the pain caused the monk to shake his head and cry out, but young men in the market place held him tight so that he could not move. When the pain became unbearable, he cried out and fell prostrate on the ground. With his head scorched and his conduct in disarray, he was the object of laughter of all the spectators.

The emperor welcomed the bone into the palace chapel, where he had prepared a comfortable couch with curtains made of golden flowers, a mat made of dragon scales, a mattress made of phoenix feathers; . . . At the time, evil rumors were circulated that the incense pillars swayed and Buddha-lights and auspicious clouds appeared on the roads. People who reported [on these signs] all took them as miraculous.

Within the city the rich families one after another sponsored preaching assemblies, and along the streets they tied together silks to form pavilions and halls, poured mercury to form pools, made trees out of gold and jade, and competed against each other to assemble the monks or to establish Buddha images. Blowing on conch-shells and striking cymbals, they kept lamps and candles burning without interruption. Bare-footed children, adorned with jade girdles and golden headgear, were told to sing and shout and disport themselves as they pleased. They also tied brocades and embroideries to decorate the small cars on which the singers and dancers were conveyed. In this fashion, they filled the imperial capital with their fun and gaiety, with the inhabitants of Yanshou Lane 延壽里 putting on the most gorgeous show.¹⁶⁹

The tone in which Su E describes this religious festival is sarcastic and negative throughout, particularly in his treatment of the self-immolators and their onlookers. He also harshly denounces those who claimed to have seen propitious and miraculous signs in

¹⁶⁹ *Duyang zhibian* 杜陽雜編, in *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀, annotated by Ding Ruming 丁如明 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 2: 1398; translations are from Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 280–82, with slight modifications.

connection with the relic as “evil.” Nevertheless, it is clear that all of the five key elements present in Wudi and Empress Wu’s dharma-assemblies also made their appearance in this excessively dramatic (even vulgarized) portrayal of celebrating the Buddha’s relic. Were all these occurrences due to pure coincidence? I will consider this question in my conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The fact that these dharma-assemblies were all *pañcavārsika* is their most important commonality. Relic veneration was a normal part of a *pañcavārsika* assembly, which was, ideally, a festival to honor the sages and bring them into close contact with the masses. By helping the masses to overcome the temporal and spatial distance between themselves and the Buddha, relics—whether in the form of physical remnants or Buddhist scriptures—were perceived and used as a powerful device for eliciting propitious and miraculous signs from the Buddha and the heavens (the worshiped) on the one hand, and donations (both material and physical) from the participants (the worshipers) on the other. The most fascinating aspect of this *pañcavārsika* assembly was its psychology. Such a psychological mechanism worked not only between relic veneration and the other two or three elements (depending on whether we count self-immolation as a special form of donation), but also between each pair of these elements. The power of the relics charged those present with emotions of such intensity that they were ready to see miraculous signs as well as to offer their property or bodies. The passions to give and to create powerfully reinforced each other. As people saw signs and infected one another with their emotions, one gift invited another, and the showering of gifts in turn generated greater transports of ecstasy that induced them to see even more propitious and miraculous signs.

Thus, the different elements discernible in the Chongyun assemblies (and possibly in other *pañcavārsika* assemblies performed in medieval East Asia), incongruent as they might appear at first, actually worked together to make a coherent and dynamic entity. The assembly became a special trading center in which different groups of people with varying (sometimes even conflicting) agendas could

obtain what they wanted. As the principal agent in these interactions, Wudi (and later Empress Wu or any other East Asian monarch inspired by the *cakravartin* ideal) relinquished political power (though only symbolically and briefly) in order to gain religious legitimacy and the support and loyalty of people from all different walks of society. The Buddhist monks could “trade” their charisma for government patronage and generous donations. Of the common people, some successfully turned their “unclean money” (*bujingcai* 不淨財) into pure and sacred funds (*jingcai* 淨財), which would bring them spiritual merit to convey them to the “other shore” of religious enlightenment; others became the main consumers of the “sacred funds.” Furthermore, by participating in these assemblies, these commoners pledged, either avowedly or in silence, their loyalty to the sponsors of these programs (in our case, Wudi).

Thus, underneath this series of activities, to all appearances purely religious in nature, lay a dynamic market, a stage in which different forces and interests were transformed and traded. The institution of the dharma-assembly was driven by the need for multidimensional and complex exchanges and interchanges between different classes in commodities that were both material and spiritual. This market is mediated and maintained by special agents—charismatic priests who acted as middlemen between the realm of the secular (lay people) and the sacred (the Buddha). The lay people were persuaded to participate in these exchanges by the credibility of these agents—their status as the devoted servants of the Buddha and their capacity for brokering transactions between the mundane and sacred domains. The market could function only if the donors continued to believe that their investment would be duly repaid in an accumulation of spiritual merit; in other words, they must remain confident in the prudence and incorruptibility of their agents in handling their donations. According to this criterion, no agent in a faith market would be more credible than a self-cremator, who sacrifices himself for his faith. Self-cremation thus gives the strongest buttress to one’s credibility in a faith-market and immediately creates a “frenzied market” of trading money for merit. By the same token, because of its reliance on the credibility of the agent, the market thus created would also burst if the agent turns out to be a fake and the act of self-cremation is exposed as staged. In a few known cases

of self-immolation for fund-raising that were revealed to be a hoax, donations soon ceased to be made.¹⁷⁰

Wudi's activities at his palace chapel not only provide a common paradigm that was widely imitated in the later history of Buddhism; they also reveal important aspects of the complicated religious and political life of his day, in particular, the spread of eschatological anxiety in southern China, certain hidden agendas in the extraordinary practice of self-immolation, and the charitable and financial system known as the Tenfold Inexhaustible Treasury. This study emphasizes the complexity and subtlety of Wudi's intellectual life and of the practice of Buddhism under his reign.

In this essay I have also attempted to rethink the intricate and often-misunderstood state-samgha relationship under Wudi's reign. The dramatic downfall of the once-prosperous Liang dynasty has been blamed on what has been derogatorily called Wudi's "excessive indulgence in Buddhism" (*ningfo* 佞佛) at the expense of the state. Government revenues were allegedly drained by the numerous large-scale Buddhist projects that captured his imagination. However, several scholars have recently challenged the justice of these accusations,¹⁷¹ which I have subjected to further critical scrutiny in this essay. Traditional Confucian historians—chiefly, Sima Guang—have exaggerated the amount of government funds that Wudi is supposed to have invested in his Buddhist programs. On the other hand, it would not do to accept without question the accounts made by Wudi's officials, such as Xiao Zixian and Lu Yungong, who wish to convince us that Wudi created and maintained his ambitious

¹⁷⁰ A Tang monk once colluded with the renowned general Li Baozhen 李抱真 (734–794) in staging a fake self-cremation to raise money. The monk was to escape through a tunnel underneath the stacks of firewood while the general collected donations from the onlookers, but the tunnel was sealed up so that the general did not have to share the spoils with his accomplice. See *Shangshu gushi* 尚書故實 (SKQS edition), 1.18b–19a; summarized in Daniel Jerome MacGowan, *Papers on Self-immolation by Fire, and on the Avenging Habits of the Cobra* (Shanghai, San Francisco: Kelly and Walsh, Bancroft, 1889), pp. 9–10, although he does not identify the source. A similar, more nuanced story is found in the *Shaseki shū* 沙石集, a Japanese collection of edifying tales from 1279 to 1283. See Robert E. Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1985), pp. 279–80, summarized by Benn in *Burning for the Buddha*, p. 195 n. 157.

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Yan Yaozhong 嚴曜中, *Jiangnan fojiao shi* 江南佛教史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 98–108, and the relevant studies quoted there.

politico-religious programs by means of private rather than public funds. However, these documents, along with the testimony left by Wudi himself, show that publicly raised donations from various levels of society did account for the greater part of the funding for these activities. More attention should also be paid to the role of social welfare and relief that these religious programs played. In some respects, Wudi's careful orchestration of his extravagant dharma-assemblies can be seen as a hidden (and far more effective) system of levying taxes on the wealthy and religious to fund a series of charitable programs, thereby immensely contributing to the stability and harmony of his society. I hope that evidence that has emerged in the course of this study will persuade scholars to go beyond Wudi's efforts to promote Buddhism in seeking the reasons for the fall of the Liang.