

Identity and Ideology

*Religion and Ethnicity in State Formation
during the Northern Dynasties*

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Religion and Ethnicity
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Qin Zhi Lau

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Respectfully dedicated to my parents, the Venerable
Master Hsuan Hua, and all my family and friends who
have supported me throughout my endeavors.

獻給
我的父親，劉德福
我的母親，鄭玉玲
我的師父，宣公上人
和所有支持我的親戚與朋友

*I have heard of using China [as the standard] to transform
the barbarians, but I have never heard of using the
barbarians [to transform China]. – The Mencius*

「吾聞用夏變夷者，未聞變於夷者也。」 《孟子》

INTRODUCTION

A Novel Time

China has often had a tenuous and uneasy relationship with its neighbors. Early and pre-Tang records of the Chinese *weltanschauung* often portray a multitude of approaches towards dealing with other ethnicities – none of them integrative, and many of them founded on an assumption of cultural superiority. While there were some early state-sponsored missions and policies that sought to create diplomatic ties and engage in trade – Zhang Qian’s 張騫 (200 – 114 BCE) and Ban Chao’s 班超 (32 – 102) under the Han, for example – conservative Confucian officials at court denounced such actions as unnecessary and not conducive to a self-sufficient nation.¹ As such, much of the trade and engagements came via private missions to the Western Regions 西域. Literally meaning the "western frontier," it came to symbolize the realm of the unknown, a region where Chinese culture was unknown and strange traditions flourished.

The fall of the Western Jin Dynasty 西晉 in 316 unleashed a host of social, political, and religious changes that dramatically altered the Chinese cultural landscape. While many of these changes can be witnessed in the relocated dynasties of southern China, the most drastic changes were ultimately seen in the north. The prominence of what the Chinese termed “The

¹ Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 131

Five Barbarians” 五胡 (the Xianbei 鲜卑, Xiongnu 匈奴, Jie 羯, Di 氐, and Qiang 羌) in ruling the north, coupled with an substantial influx of Central Asians into Chinese cities, resulted in foreign regimes that adopted many developments from other cultural entities.

After the initial incursions stabilized the border between the north and the south, northern regimes could no longer base their claims to legitimacy upon military conquest and successes and have “armies with no dynasty.”² As a result, the foreign rulers and their ministers of state began efforts to adjust their system of governance from a tribal, localized, and militarized lifestyle to a sprawling sedentary polity in which power had to be consolidated and centralized.

Such profound changes were to have a powerful influence on the policies these empires enacted with regards to religion and its role in the state. A substantial number of the emperors adopted Chinese norms and standards, including its religions, political philosophies, and cultural norms. The idea of a unified Chinese state remained fresh in the minds of many in the populace,³ and many of these adoptions were intended to help further the rulers’ goal of unification and bolster their claims to legitimacy.

However, one adoption stood out as being particularly different from the others – Buddhism. It was undeniably foreign with its practices, rituals, and leadership largely being derived from Central Asian and North-

² Mark Edward Lewis, *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 73

³ Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 146

ern Indian sources, but it possessed a growing corpus of Chinese literature penned by Chinese converts who took on an increasingly central role in advocating for its usage in popular and courtly circles. Steeped in the ideals of Buddhist universalism, they were armed with a dramatically different view of China's place in the world and how states and rulers in China should build upon it. Yet, these Buddhists empowered by their faith's rapid development in China, came into fierce opposition against nativist Chinese and sinicized foreigners, particularly Daoists. Key among their many arguments was the notion that native Chinese institutions and traditions were far superior to foreign ones, including Buddhism, and that the emperors should adopt those instead while repudiating the inferior and unsuitable foreign elements.

A demarcation developed between nativist elements abiding by many of the simple ethnic stereotypes of the earlier dynasties and the more pluralistic Buddhists who did not view foreign derivations as negative. These dueling views competed for the favor of the foreign emperors, some of whom were eager to portray their land as either a righteous, sacred land imbued with Buddhism and others who desired a renaissance of "native Chinese" morality and ideas.

Indeed, the sheer breadth of political views expressed during this time harkened to a time when Chinese intellectual diversity was at its peak – the Spring and Autumn Era 春秋 during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 – 476 BCE). As it had then, the multiplicity of states and rulers and the chaotic

nature of courtly intrigues proved to be an impressive catalyst for talented scholars, monks, and statesmen. Furthermore, the literature and political stances taken on by the individuals during the Northern Dynasties served as the basis for further religious debates and policies during the great unifying dynasties of the Sui and Tang took towards religion and the idea of foreignness.

In this thesis, I will use Abramson's differentiation between acculturation and assimilation - where the former denotes the adoption of Han cultural behavior while the latter denotes actual ethnic change through intermarriage.⁴ As an example, many of the Xiongnu living at the latter end of the Eastern Han Dynasty 東漢 had adopted Chinese customs and lifestyles and had thus *acculturated* to Chinese norms, but remained ethnically distinct due to marriage within the community. On the other hand, the royal Li 李 family of the Tang was an example of *assimilation*, as they had a mixture of both Xianbei and Han Chinese ancestry.⁵

I further adopt his usage of the terms *sinicization* to refer to acculturation to Chinese culture and *hanicization* to refer to assimilation to the Han ethnicity."⁶ As a result, most policies intended to bring the non-Chinese ethnicities into accord with Han Chinese norms during this period can be termed sinicization (despite its Chinese synonym *hanhua* 漢化, lit. "transforming [into] Han), while the gradual ethnic changes due to intermarriage

⁴ Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 5

⁵ More on these subjects will be found in chapters 2 and 7, respectively.

⁶ Abramson, *Ethnic Identity*, 14

seen across the three hundred years of the period may be seen as long-term trends without huge ramifications for the year-to-year policies enacted by emperors.

I understand that the appellation of the term Han to refer to those in China may seem particularly anachronistic to some, but I believe it is still a relevant means of distinguishing those following Chinese cultural norms from non-followers. Similar troubles arise when attempting to classify the other ethnicities during this time period – Chinese historians often pejoratively referred to them as “barbarian,” a single word in English that in fact encompasses no fewer than five different geographical appellations for foreigners (*di* 狄, *rong* 戎, *yi* 夷, *man* 蠻, *hu* 胡, among others) in Chinese. As this term is overly vague and derogatory, I have elected to use the neutral term “foreign” instead, with ethnic or tribal designations noted if known.

Linguistic standards used by this thesis include the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration for Sanskrit as well as the Hanyu Pinyin system for Chinese. All quotations where previous romanization systems (such as Wade-Giles or Yale) were used have been replaced with their pinyin equivalents. Furthermore, due to its prevalence in Chinese historical records, all Chinese characters will be rendered in Traditional Chinese. Emperors will also generally be referred to by the historical convention by which they are named. For example, Shi Le 石勒 will be referred to by his personal name instead of *Emperor Ming of Later Zhao* 後趙明帝, and Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei 北魏孝文帝 by his posthumous title instead

of *Tuoba Hong* 拓拔宏.

Despite my usage of many Chinese Buddhist historical texts and the close analysis of the debates between Buddhists and Daoists, this thesis is primarily concerned with religious ideas. I do not intend to devote text to a close analysis of religious doctrines or dogma, nor to the metaphysical ramifications of such. Rather, my readings of these sources will focus on their political significance and the reception they received in the context of courtly debates.

Furthermore, I understand that the classification of belief systems such as Buddhism and Daoism as religions in the context of premodern China is an issue fraught with anachronism – Campany notes that the very term in Chinese (*zongjiao* 宗教) itself is a modern invention. Yet, as he puts it, it “does not mean that they lacked some usages that are analogous – ones that do something like the same work, ones invoked in the sorts of contexts in which ‘religions’ would be invoked in modern Western discourses”⁷ and I will continue to refer to the two teachings as religions, despite the very political and temporal nature of their apologists’ arguments.

⁷ Robert Ford Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (May, 2003) 290

CHAPTER ONE

Encounters with the Ethnic Other

The position of the alien ethnicities in the views of Chinese in pre-Han times was rarely positive, primarily due to the ample historical memories of invasions by foreigners. An invasion by the Quanrong 犬戎 in 771 BCE led to the killing of King You of Zhou 周幽王, the destruction of Haojing 鎬京 and the subsequent relocation of the Zhou capital to Luoyi 維邑 (modern Luoyang).

Two hundred years later, Confucius (551 – 479 BCE) would say, “the common people today still receive the benefits of when Guan Zhong 管仲 served as a minister to Duke Huan [of Qi] 齊桓公 and became as a hegemon over the nobles, uniting all under heaven. Were it not for Guan Zhong, we would have unkempt hair and wear our clothes by folding them over the left!”¹ Guan Zhong’s virtues are extolled because of his role in defending the northern state of Qi against another potential “barbarian” takeover – clearly, even the potential adoption of their dress and style was deemed as something especially repugnant to Confucius, not to mention the prospect of living under a barbarian regime. Indeed, Confucius pithily remarked that “barbarians [in the north and west] with their rulers are inferior to Chinese without them.”² Another text attributed to Confucius’ compilation,

¹ *Lun Yu* 論語. Confucius 孔子 Ch. 14, *Xianwen* 《憲問》第十四

² *Lun Yu* 論語. Ch. 3, *Bayi* 《八佾》第三

the *Classic on Rites* 禮記, declares a fundamental incompatibility between the Chinese and other ethnicities, and that “the Chinese, the Rong, the Yi and peoples of the five quarters all have (their own) nature which cannot be moved or altered.”³ While Confucius’ sayings and aphorisms can only reflect the personal feelings of one man, his position towards the ethnic Other do not seem to be particularly out of the ordinary for his time, and can be seen as a strong indicator of an atmosphere that assumed an innate cultural superiority over non-Chinese.

Despite Confucius’ pronouncements of Chinese cultural practices being superior to foreigners, he seemed to postulate a cultural homogeneity among Chinese that simply did not exist in China. There were many differences between regions and the southern dukedoms of Chu 楚, Wu 吳, and Yue 越 in particular, were often seen as semi-barbaric by their peer rulers. The Yue, for example, had a custom of tattooing – a distinctively non-Chinese custom – and all three spoke languages that were unintelligible to those in the Central Plains. Though they frequently rose to become preeminent military powers and were thus subsequently recognized as hegemon by the Central states, there was always a certain disdain by which the South was viewed by others.⁴ Despite these condescending records of interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese, it is impossible to consider inter-ethnic relations a crucial priority of any Warring States-era dukedom

³ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 265

⁴ John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 145

– they were far too preoccupied fighting each other.

With the accession of unified states, however, domestic policies towards non-Chinese and foreign policy became increasingly important. Abramson argues that the Qin and Han, seeing themselves as a uniting state for all “Chinese” peoples sought to expand their territorial governance over areas in which only a comparatively small amount of settlers lived.⁵ As a result, we find policies designed to establish “regular administrative rule” (i.e., military garrisons) and gradually assimilate the non-Chinese culturally.⁶ During these two dynasties, however, control of the frontier regions was subject to the raiding activities of the nomadic tribes (particularly the Xiongnu) that lived on its periphery. Early Chinese foreign policy, then, was predominantly motivated by the need to negotiate peace (as uneasy as it often was) with these tribes.

What is quite clear, however, is that the deeply-held defensive posture that had been historically held by the pre-Qin states that composed Northern China (Zhao 趙, Yan 燕, and Qin 秦) was inherited by its unified successor. General Li Mu’s 李牧 of Zhao’s initial conservative strategies against the Xiongnu during the Warring States Period in the 3rd century BCE⁷ served as an example for future engagements with them. Emperor Qin Shihuang’s momentous construction of the Great Wall can be seen as particularly salient indicators of a Chinese fear of the marauder, and an

⁵ Abramson, *Ethnic Identity*, 121

⁶ John E. Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome* (Charleston: BookSurge Publishing, 2009), 3

⁷ *Shi Ji* 史記. Sima Qian 司馬遷 Roll 81. 卷八十一

overall antagonistic depiction of non-Chinese. Military expeditions against the Xiongnu were rarely successful, with the First Emperor's own efforts ending in miserable failure.

The successor Han Dynasty's own dealings with the Xiongnu did not fair much better. Repeated military defeats under founder Liu Bang 劉邦 (247 – 195 BCE) resulted in the establishment of a nominally coequal relationship with the nomads, albeit one that was far more damaging to the Han. Under the *heqin* 和親 policy, the Chinese were effectively in a tributary relationship with their adversary. The fact that the agreement of this treaty came only after military losses strongly suggests that a negotiated peace was hardly the preferred option for the Han.⁸ Ironically, their distaste for being subservient to a foreign state led to later Han emperors to consider engaging other tribes in diplomacy in an attempt to secure allies for a military expedition to “renegotiate” terms with the Xiongnu. In what was perhaps the beginning of regional geopolitics in Chinese statecraft, Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (156 – 87 BCE) attempted to send Zhang Qian⁹ on a mission to propose a military alliance with the Yuezhi 月支/月氏 (possibly the Tocharians), who were also having military conflicts with the Xiongnu. While Zhang Qian's primary mission ended in abject failure, the information he received and his chronicles were said to be well-received by the emperor.

Despite the emerging contacts with neighboring nations, a memorial

⁸ Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 146

⁹ Hill, *Through the Jade Gate*, xi

submitted by the Imperial Secretary Chen Zhong 陳忠 in 123 and recorded in the official *Chronicle of the Western Regions* in the *Book of Later Han* 後漢書 continues to demonstrate a condescending tone in Chinese descriptions of other ethnicities. In it, Chen disparaged the Xiongnu as “scoundrels” 虜 and paternalistically described the Rong and Di as being able to be “subdued by force, but... difficult to transform” and almost in complete veneration of the Chinese Han.¹⁰ Even a century later, a diplomatic mission from Khotan was received by a decree of Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝 stating, “the Western barbarian kings who have come, in admiration of Kingly Transformation, from the [Di] and the [Qiang] praise the *Odes* and *Documents* of the Sages as things of beauty,”¹¹ continuing the perception that foreign rulers greatly adored the ways of the Chinese and constantly sought to emulate them.

Following the decisive defeat of the Xiongnu by Ban Chao in the Eastern Han¹², however, they posed little threat to the Chinese state for the next several decades. Instead, the Xiongnu fractured into various regional tribes and were consumed by infighting. The once-powerful Xiongnu leadership position of *chanyu* 單于 became little more than a figurehead position, its occupant’s power limited to a few allied tribesmen and the title was abolished altogether in 216.¹³ Many Xiongnu remained in the commanderies and prefectures established by the Han (and later, the Wei),

¹⁰ Ibid., 11

¹¹ Zenryū Tsukamoto, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, trans. Leon Hurvitz (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1985), 124

¹² Hill, *Through the Jade Gate*, 5

¹³ David B. Honey, *The Rise of the Medieval Hsiung-nu: The Biography of Liu Yuan* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), 2-4

and Honey estimates that there were over a hundred thousand living in the northern prefectures at the time of the abolition of the chanyu. Despite attempts to divide the Xiongnu into factions under firm Han control, they gradually began to re-coalesce around Liu Bao 劉豹, a descendant of previous chanyus and a high official in the Wei military government.

A key development that foreshadowed similar societal trends for future non-Chinese who came in close contact with Chinese was that the Xiongnu were no longer the nomadic marauders so feared by the Han Dynasty. In the two centuries that had elapsed since Ban Chao's campaigns, many Xiongnu had served in the Chinese governmental bureaucracy and military and were well acquainted with Chinese customs and government. Nevertheless, they still retained their potent military capabilities, especially their legions of cavalry.

While the Wei and Jin Dynasties remained a strong state, it was hardly an attractive target for attacks by the Xiongnu and other barbarians at the periphery of their territory. But the weak leadership of later Jin emperors bred factionalism, and war broke out under Emperor Hui of Jin (259 – 307) as a combination of consort clan intrigues and regional ambitions resulted in the princes of the Sima clan unleashing their private armies upon each other in a bid to seize the throne. This conflict, termed the War of the Eight Princes 八王之亂 (291 – 306), marked a turning point for the relationship between barbarians and Chinese, with the latter employing copious numbers of foreigners in those private armies. The heir-apparent Sima Ying

司馬穎 employed Xiongnu troops (reputedly 20,000 strong), while Prince Sima Yue 司馬越 actively utilized Xianbei and Wuhuan 烏桓 cavalry in order to gain a military advantage.¹⁴

It was amid these internal chaos that the Xiongnu re-invaded China in 304 CE with well-armed and mobile cavalry. The invasion was led by a sinicized Xiongnu – Liu Bao’s son Liu Yuan 劉淵 (251 – 310), whose family name was based upon a claim that he was descended from the Liu house of the Han Dynasty. His invasion though, presaged another important change from the invasions by his ancestors a few hundred years previous: This time, foreign regimes had full intention of staying. As a man reputedly well-versed in the Chinese classics and histories (the *Records of the Historian* 史記 and the *Book of Han* 漢書, among others), he was employed in Luoyang as the Commander of the Left Section under Emperor Wen of Jin 晉文帝.¹⁵ His biography in the *Book of Jin* 晉書 records his subordinate officials presenting a perplexing mixture of tribal and Chinese justifications to him for his proclamation as the King of Han 漢王:

- The Jin Dynasty had become brutal and had lost the Mandate of Heaven 天命. Furthermore, the vicious destruction between members of the imperial Sima clan only served as further proof of their lack of virtue and benevolence.

- The Xiongnu tribes needed to be lifted out of their predicament of

¹⁴ Nicola Di Cosmo, *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 134-135

¹⁵ Honey, *The Rise of the Medieval Hsiung-nu*, 20-21

subservience, and the noble lineage of the chanyus restored to power.

- Many people yearned for the stability of the Han Dynasty in years past, and the restoration of the Han ruling house would help satiate the wishes of the people.

- Yu the Great 大禹 and King Wen of Zhou 周文王 were both from barbaric tribes (the Rong and the Yi, respectively) – his subordinates argue that “[The Mandate of Heaven], then, is given to the virtuous, with no other consideration.”¹⁶ As a result, there was no restriction against Heaven bestowing upon barbarians the right to rule.

Several conclusions may be derived from these pronouncements. Firstly, Liu Yuan was simultaneously attempting to assert himself as the rightful heir to an extra-Chinese lineage (the chanyus) and to the most prominent of Chinese lineages (the Han), in a clear effort to present himself as the leader of two compatible, yet very dissimilar groups. No attempt at explaining the contradiction of being the leader of two groups are made, nor to account for the possibility of presenting himself as a leader ethnic groups other than these two. Also of note is Liu’s refusal to acknowledge his emperorship as a successor to the Jin Dynasty – rather, he portrayed himself as assuming the throne of Han, speaking towards a wish of assuming the mantle of a successful dynasty. Furthermore, his citation of Yu the Great and King Wen demonstrate a keen awareness on the part of his strategists about the prevailing cultural uncertainty towards the prospect of a foreign

¹⁶ Ibid., 20-21

leader, and sought to neutralize those doubts by pointing out that two of the most esteemed rulers in Chinese history had come from areas that were not the Central Plains.

How Liu Yuan would have continued to formulate his justifications for leadership is uncertain – his troops repeatedly failed in their attempts to conquer Luoyang (the historical capital of the Han) and he died due to illness in 310, just six years after the invasion. Though his death of illness briefly halted the Xiongnu offensive, troops under his son, Liu Cong 劉聰 (? – 318) and general Shi Le 石勒 (274 – 333) captured and sacked the capital of Luoyang – proving the formidable advances the foreign tribes had made in military organization power, especially compared against the hapless Jin. Ruling the conquered territory proved to be a far more difficult endeavor for the Xiongnu, however, and the state that Liu Yuan had founded split into two warring factions – one under the Liu family, and the other under Shi Le. Despite the fracturing of his legacy, the positions Liu and his advisors identified as being of paramount importance in order to “sell” his reign to reluctant Chinese proved to be enduring questions for other foreigners that followed, seeking to establish kingdoms in China.

For as the War of the Eight Princes proved, the Xiongnu were hardly the only major foreigners with interest in Chinese affairs or territory: the Xianbei and other “barbarians” also soon found themselves not content to merely to act as mercenaries, but as active participants in the scene. The Xianbei were substantially different from the Xiongnu in several substantial

ways: They were semi-sedentary, with a history of established settlements on the northern periphery of Chinese civilization. They also lacked the extensive negative historical baggage that the Xiongnu carried with them; as such they were able to coordinate military and political actions with the Jin princes to an extent that may not have been possible with the former. The sacking of Luoyang, for example, saw Xianbei troops fighting to defend the capital alongside the Chinese.¹⁷ Within a century (by 396), the Xianbei faction led by the Tuoba/Tabgatch 拓拔 tribe had also taken advantage of the chaotic situation in the north to defeat most of the other non-Chinese polities and began to lay the infrastructure for establishing a much more stable dynasty than its predecessors.

The events of the fourth century proved that areas that were traditionally deemed the heartland of China were no longer solely inhabited by Chinese – the bewildering number of different ethnicities that were militarily and politically active then in the area are numerous. Old assumptions of cultural superiority could no longer work; not when Chinese ministers now served under foreign emperors and Chinese citizens were drafted into foreign militaries. There now became a need for reexamining of ethnic stereotypes and to reevaluate inter-ethnic ties – a need which Buddhism’s proponents, steeped in a religion that combined elements from both cultures were determined to fill. Hosts of armies and their rulers were not the only foreigners in China – Buddhist missionaries were active too.

¹⁷ Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 176

CHAPTER TWO

Buddhism and its Appeal

Amid all the chaos that engulfed China, one development progressed much more peacefully – the rapid adoption of Buddhism by an immense swath of Chinese society. What made the popularity of the faith among Chinese all the more surprising was that Buddhism was an unabashedly foreign religion. In the land where cultural superiority was assumed, why did it become popular?

That Buddhism was a fundamentally different religion from the myriad of local practices in China may not have been particularly clear to its first recorded Chinese practitioners during the Han Dynasty. The *Book of Later Han* records Prince Liu Ying 劉英 (?-71) as having “observed fasting and performed sacrifices to the Buddha”¹ along with other rituals dedicated to Huang-lao 黃老 – a coupling which has led Zürcher to argue that the “‘Buddhist’ ceremonies of fasting and sacrifice were probably no more than a variation of existing Daoist practices.”² Would Liu Ying have continued to perform his ceremonies with such fervor if he had known of the extensive dogma, literature, and religious practices behind Buddhism, or that they originated from a land even beyond the Western Regions? This ambiguous position of Buddhism continued for several decades thereafter – Zürcher

¹ Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 26

² *Ibid.*, 27

notes that culture during the Wei Dynasty (220-265) that followed demonstrated little evidence of a cultured, elite, and Chinese following for Buddhism, and that “the doctrine [of Buddhism]... was still so closely affiliated with Daoism.”³

During the Western Jin, however, Buddhists in China became increasingly aware of their own foreignness as new sutras and missionaries arrived – in part due to frequent embassy exchanges between the Jin and Central Asian kingdoms. China was becoming less insular; trading caravans and merchants provided a means by which many Buddhist scriptures, items, and missionaries arrived.⁴ The increasing number of Buddhist foreigners in urban areas quickly led to temples and congregations which were able to widely disseminate teachings and attract Chinese converts. While the number of converts that entered the sangha (monastic community) may have remained small, the existence of Chinese men and women willing to accept foreign monks as their spiritual masters – and several, out of respect, even adopted their masters’ foreign appellations (such as 竺 for India, or 安 for Arsacid/Parthia) as surnames.⁵ This was hardly an inconsequential practice for people deeply steeped in a culture that valued ancestral traditions and the continuation of the family line.

It is thus evident that Chinese converts to Buddhism proved the existence of a growing feeling that the adoption of foreign practices was hardly

³ Ibid., 57

⁴ Ibid., 59

⁵ Kathryn Ann Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 17-19

reprehensible, and provided a firsthand demonstration of Buddhism's egalitarian ideals, which began to stand in stark contrast to the staunch ethnocentrism commonly associated with China. Chinese Buddhists could not take an ethnocentric stance, not when many of the most esteemed masters were foreign, or that Śākyamuni Buddha had chosen to live and teach in India, a land far removed from China spatially and mentally. But the presence of Chinese disdain for other cultures was still ever-present, and reconciliation of Chinese cultural practices with Buddhist ones was obviously a chief concern for the early Buddhists in order to defend themselves against charges that the religion and its practices were fundamentally inferior and incompatible with Chinese people and their traditions.

Buddhist apologists thus began a long process by which Chinese practices (such as filial piety, or *xiao* 孝) were explained as being compatible with Buddhist teachings and lifestyles – a process which took decades to accomplish.⁶ It was a conscious effort to narrow any apparent cultural differences and convince literati and plebeians alike that one could be both Chinese and Buddhist, and that it was not contradictory to identify oneself as being both. It was at the start a fundamentally defensive action: Buddhist apologists almost never criticized Chinese customs as being immoral or inappropriate in the context of Buddhism, but rather works like *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts* 牟子理惑論 (a work likely of third-century Chinese provenance) frame their arguments for Buddhism as responses to

⁶ Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 19

unnamed Confucian or Daoist critics. “It seems that the Way of which you speak is empty, confused, inconceivable, and ephemeral,” stated one hypothetical question from a Confucian standpoint. “How can you speak so differently from [Confucius]?”⁷ Mouzi’s responses quote profusely from the Chinese classics, providing examples in both Buddhist and Chinese doctrines in an attempt to demonstrate compatibility.

While it is accurate to say that the nascent Buddhist community in China frequently compared Buddhism to native ancestral and Daoist traditions in order to make the religion more accommodating to Chinese cultural norms,⁸ the increasing amount of knowledge about formal Buddhism served only to distinguish it further from indigenous doctrines. The sūtras were written in foreign scripts, most of the translators were from faraway lands, and much of the vocabulary could not be translated but could only be approximated through transliteration and commentary. However, the sheer amount of foreign material and personnel that were now sacred forced a reexamination of Chinese perceptions of the foreign “other” – crude stereotypes would find it much more difficult to persist among Chinese Buddhists under these conditions. Dharmarakṣa’s school in Chang’an counted Indians, Kuchians, Yuezhi, Khotanese, as well as Chinese among the staff – a multiculturalism that demonstrates the power of Buddhist universalism in fostering an environment in which ethnic origin was de-emphasized.

⁷ John P. Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 70

⁸ Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 161

That this multiculturalism was established among a relatively small Buddhist community in the Western Jin and prior to the large-scale migration of foreign ethnicities that occurred immediately after this period is all the more remarkable. The years that followed marked the true expansion of the religion, so much so that Zürcher termed the time around 300 (the fall of the Western Jin) “the turning point par excellence” of Buddhism’s development as part of Chinese culture.⁹ It was during this time many Chinese literati adopted the religion for their philosophical musings, and Buddhist discussions became something of a hobby for disaffected scholars and gentry. Under the practices of qingtan, foreign teachings lost much of their stigma and rather provided fresh perspectives for many of the literati, especially compared to Confucianism.

But philosophical musings are hardly a substitute for concrete political power, and by the end of the fourth century a rather large amount of Buddhists began to play powerful roles in the many new regimes set up by foreigners in North China – roles which they would not have proven so attractive for the Chinese regimes previous. Among these were foreign monks from India and Central Asia, who would have clearly have been unable to fill any official role under the Han or the Jin. Wright postulates several reasons for their powerful role in the foreign regimes, especially related to warfare, rain-making and medicine.¹⁰ Perhaps a shamanic penchant

⁹ Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 73

¹⁰ Arthur F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, edit. Robert M. Somers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 38-39

for miracles and wonders drove the popularity these monks received, as Buddhist stories of their role in court invariably mention powerful event-changing supernatural powers supposedly possessed by foreign monks. As rulers of kingdoms in which military expeditions were commonplace, Wright writes that “rulers expected Buddhism to give them an advantage in war.”¹¹

Fotudeng 佛圖澄 was a key example of the newfound power of Buddhists in court – a monk from Kucha who arrived in China in 310 CE (right before the sacking of Luoyang), he was an integral component of the politics in the (Later) Zhao 後趙 state founded by Shi Le. His biography in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 describes him as a diviner of events, one whose “prophecies were never once unfulfilled,”¹² and a converter of Shi Le from a life filled with murder and violence (à la Aśoka, whose presence in the narrative is also seen in the alleged discovery of one of his stupas in China) into a pious (though deeply flawed) ruler. Though the evidence for miracle-working may be scarce outside of the Buddhist histories, even the perception of it is clearly enough to convert rulers. Fotudeng is seen as a highly influential court strategist, with ties to many influential statesmen. He provided the impetus for many donations to the community in Luoyang, and sometimes even serves a role akin to that of a military strategist for the Zhao court, cautioning the ruler on which competing states were too

¹¹ Ibid., 55. Rulers such as Shi Hu were recorded as being skeptical of religion when it did not help their cause. “I worship the Buddha and contribute to the monks; in spite of this I still draw foreign invaders. Buddha has no divine power!”

¹² Ibid., 47

strong to conquer.

Similar pronouncements of political intimacy can be seen in the other biographies by the Buddhist monk and historiographer Huijiao 慧皎 of other foreign monks living around the early Northern Dynasties, including Dharmakṣema 曇摩讖 and Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什. Of Dharmakṣema, it is said that upon “encountering the person with divine understanding and enlightening knowledge (Dharmakṣema), the King of Hexi [Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜] invited him to the “prefecture” and placed [him] in [the palace chapel within] the inner [imperial] park.”¹³ So fearful was the king of losing Dharmakṣema’s immense talents to the Northern Wei Dynasty, it is related, that he ordered his assassination rather than have him leave his court.¹⁴ Even Kumārajīva, the eminent translator of the fifth century, is described as having been the primary focus of a military dispatch by the ruler of the Former Qin 前秦, Fu Jian 苻堅 (337–385) and a desired talent and astrologer of many subsequent rulers.¹⁵ Even accounting for embellishments typical of Chinese religious histories, the level of imperial support can be witnessed in the copious funding for the translation projects undertaken by monks such as these.

Another key attribute of these foreign monks emphasized in the Buddhist records are the descriptions of many as members of the royalty or nobility of the countries they came from, attributes which undoubtedly raised

¹³ Jinhua Chen, “The Indian Buddhist Missionary Dharmakṣema (385-433),” *T’oung Pao* Second Series, Vol. 90, Fasc. 4/5 (2004), 219

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 223

¹⁵ *Gaoseng Zhuan* 高僧傳. Huijiao 慧皎 Taishō no. 2059, Roll 2. 卷二

their prestige among the rulers that employed them, but also served a key role for the Chinese audience. The early 2nd century translator An Shigao 安世高 was recorded to be the crown prince of Parthia¹⁶ and Kumārajīva was said to be the son of a Kucuan princess¹⁷ while many more not from a royal family were noted as being members of the Brahmin caste in India. By presenting the clergy as high-born and learned, Huijiao certainly helped his objective of depicting “Buddhism was intellectually respectable” and presenting the clergy as “[leading] useful, creative and well-disciplined lives.”¹⁸ Huijiao’s emphasis of these points were particularly salient, for his records of the foreign monks serve to counter widespread stereotypes of foreigners as “illiterate”, “animalistic”, and ultimately “uncivilized,” stereotypes that continued to persist even two hundred years later during the Tang.¹⁹

Overall, it can even be said that the biographies of Fotudeng and other foreign monks are filled with far more political and literary anecdotes than spiritual or religious ones – indicative of the deep level of integration between state and religion that was forming in the Northern regimes. Religion, then, was not particularly valued for its eschatological or inspirational value, but instead for the political opportunities it could offer to the state, whether temporal or supernatural. It was a powerful relationship that increasingly came to different terms as Buddhists attempted to argue for a

¹⁶ Ibid., 卷一

¹⁷ Ibid., 卷二

¹⁸ Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 47

¹⁹ Abramson, *Ethnic Identity*, 28-46

different role of the religion in the state.

The Need for State Ideology

The first rulers who hosted the many Buddhist monks like Fotudeng and others were often the founders of short-lived regimes and as a result had little consistency in their claims to legitimacy, typically basing it upon a patchwork of both foreign and native traditions. We have already discussed Liu Yuan's claims to both the *chanyu* title of the Xiongnu as well as the title of prince in the Chinese tradition; similar patterns can be seen in the early Northern Wei's continued use of *qaghan* 可汗 as an appellation to their rulers' titles and the Former Qin and Northern Zhou's exclusive use of the title *tianwang* 天王.¹ In short, these regimes initially all continued to exercise their rule as an outgrowth of their foreign traditions, and the Chinese title of *wang* (prince/king) or *huangdi* (emperor) were ancillary to that purpose.

As the establishment of foreign regimes in China became the norm rather than the exception, they began to adopt many of the qualities that native Chinese regimes possessed, including native titles. These were clear attempts to outdo the others in order to cement their reputation as the legitimate successor to the Chinese dynasties of antiquity, and they were particularly conscious of the fact that a large state (successively, the Eastern

¹ Sanping Chen, "Son of Heaven and Son of God: Interactions among Ancient Asiatic Cultures regarding Sacral Kingship and Theophoric Names," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Nov., 2002), 310

Jin, Song 宋, Qi 齊, Liang 梁, and Chen 陳) south of the Yangzi River still proclaimed itself as the “proper” Chinese dynasty. As a result, they generally adopted many far-reaching changes that set the foundations for a state ideology.

The adoption of a state ideology was hardly new, and had been a common practice among Chinese polities – especially polities that had gained some measure of stability after a prolonged period of instability. It served as a way of defining the people, principles, as well as the very nature of the state itself, and often defined the ruler’s role and what he represented within this framework. While Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 certainly fulfilled all those roles with his adoption of his advisor Li Si’s “Legalist” theories – theories which certainly helped solidify his control of governmental apparatus and ascribed an almost too-mythical status to the imperial person – the short duration of the dynasty he founded meant that there was little in its official ideology to emulate by later dynasties. The complete excoriation of Qin by its successor dynasty likely did not help improve its image either; as a result, we should look to see how the Han adopted its preeminent ideology (Confucianism 儒家) in order to better understand how emperors utilized it.

Ideology during the Han Dynasty was hardly an important goal when the empire was still struggling with infighting and external threats, but under the stable rule of Emperor Wu, we find it following the pattern set forth earlier and the minister Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179 – 104 BCE)

successfully lobbying for the adoption of Confucianism as a state ideology. Policies which had incorporated some measure of Confucian ideas had already been adopted during the previous reigns of Emperor Wen and Jing, but under Emperor Wu Confucius himself became an object of adulation and worship, Confucian texts were widely circulated and their scholars employed at court. "Having secured the kingdom by war he could not keep it by war," writes Lu Simian, "and [he] summoned the scholars to secure peace."² Securing peace, in this case, took the form of several reasons and motivations behind Emperor Wu's decision to patronize Confucianism, with Shryock including suggestions that the emperor did so in order to a) calm the country in the face of administrative problems and omens, b) out of a "love for ceremony and ritual," and c) as a repudiation of Qin Legalism and an assertion of a superior system of governance.³ The brand of Confucianism cultivated during the Han also featured a strong sense of nostalgia for the traditions and rituals of the past - particularly those of the Zhou - and much Confucian activity was dedicated to the preservation and elucidation of Zhou rituals.^{4 5}

We find that similar sentiments drove the need for ideology in the foreign regimes of the Northern Dynasties, but with additional consider-

² John K. Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius* (New York: Paragon Book, 1966), 45

³ *Ibid.*, 36-38

⁴ Denis Crispin Twitchett et al., *The Cambridge History of China: The Ch'in and Han Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 755

⁵ Nostalgia for the ways of the ancients would also prove to be one of the main arguments later produced by the Daoists in the polemical debates - as Buddhism was not a component of Chinese life in the past, it could not be deemed sagely.

ations not present during the Han that needed to be taken into account.

Firstly, the Northern empires all controlled lands that included not only members of their own ethnicity and Han Chinese, but also varying populations of Jie, Qiang, and numerous other ethnic minorities. The ruling house was also invariably an ethnic minority, too. Consequently, the state had to devise a stance that included all of its ethnicities, and not set itself in direct opposition to any particular one. This inclusiveness was a later development – early Northern states with a focus on military might had hardly been kind to those of other ethnicities. As an example, the Later Zhao ruler Ran Min 冉閔 was well-known for his genocidal xenophobia, and massacred some two hundred thousand foreigners living in Yecheng in 350.⁶ Rulers could no longer take the same stance as the Jie ruler Shi Hu 石虎 (Shi Le's nephew and eventual heir), who ruled that Buddhism was an excellent religion to patronize, rejecting an argument by his minister Wang Du 王度 that the Buddha “having been born in the Western Regions, is a foreign god... and he is not one whom the emperor and the Chinese should sacrificially worship [to].” “We were born out of the marches, and though we are unworthy,” Shi Hu wrote, “we have complied with our appointed destiny and govern the Chinese as their prince. As to sacrifices, we should follow our own customs... Buddha being a barbarian god is precisely one we should worship.”⁷ Foreigners would no longer feel inferior in their religious and moral practices to the Chinese – not when they were of the same

⁶ Lewis, *China Between Empires*, 146

⁷ Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 58-59

faith.

Secondly, they needed to establish a fixed capital for the administration of the empire – a crucial development in establishing the permanency of the regime. This was not an easy transition of course; trading an ever-moving tent city for the trappings of grand wooden halls and lofty pavilions was oftentimes seen as a betrayal of the roots of the ruling ethnicity. However, pragmatic considerations won out in the end, and the longer-lived dynasties after the Later Han/ Zhao all chose varying cities – many of which had significance to preceding Chinese dynasties – to be their seats of government. An immediate consequence of this establishment was the role of ideological buildings in the new capital – temples, academies, pagodas, and other symbols of state. Their construction (and the financing thereof) was very important given the utter devastation many key Chinese cities were found in, and building them would have represented the authority and stability of the new state, in addition to the religion and teachings they served for.

Finally, the Northern empires were keenly aware that they did not rule over a unified whole, but instead controlled half of a once great empire. The aspiration to completely unify China drove many of the emperors to favor ideologies which possessed some measure by which they could display themselves exemplar for a sagely ruler that was divinely inspired to rule the country. They hoped to portray their rule as one endowed with benevolence and morality and as such far more deserving of acceptance those of

other rulers.

While Confucianism remained a mainstay of imperial legitimation in Northern China, the debates and memorials at court do not, in my opinion, demonstrate a substantial Confucian faction that was arguing for their governing ideology. Wright termed it at this point in history “discredited in the fall of the Han... [and] remarkably sterile and anachronistic,” though he notes its indispensability to the idea of a unified Chinese state.⁸ I believe Wright’s assessment of it as “discredited” to be overly harsh, as the ideas and principles of Confucius were often incorporated into both Buddhist and anti-Buddhist rhetoric, as neither side questioned the basic morals and tenets that Confucius had set up. Instead, each declared their own religion to be the most appropriate means of fulfilling Confucian morals.

Given their propensity for political involvement, Northern Buddhists had gradually developed answers grounded in their religion to many of these questions about the role of ideology.⁹ Their arguments for their religion’s suitability were composed of several arguments which tried to reconcile a fundamentally foreign worldview with Chinese traditions – a fact which can be distinctly seen in apologetic works as well as biographies of the foreign missionaries in China.

Firstly, Buddhists tended not to emphasize the traditions of China

⁸ Ibid., 113

⁹ It is also worth noting that Buddhists in the north never really developed the independent streak that was observed in the south, where the institution was gradually seen as separate from the state itself. The intertwining of church and state was always a given in the North, and as a result we find Buddhists working within the framework of the state rather than defining their role in opposition to it. A comparative analysis will be covered in Chapter 7.

as being innately superior to those of other cultures, nor did they see the Chinese as a people uniquely qualified to follow Buddhism. Fotudeng, for example, is recorded in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* as a teacher of Buddhism to the Rong and Mo 貊 peoples as well as Chinese,¹⁰ though a hint of Chinese paternalism on the part of Huijiao can still be noted in his conclusion that Fotudeng caused “the barbarians to come to him like sons.”¹¹ Even more drastically, many Buddhists rejected the idea that China was the center locus of civilization – a cultural view most evident in the self-appellation of China as the “Middle Kingdom,” and classifying all other peoples based upon their geographical location relative to China, the center. Mouzi argues that “the Han country is certainly not in the middle of the heavens,” and that “all kinds of living beings... converge around Buddha.”¹² Zürcher considered this re-centering of the Chinese worldview to be “a novum in Chinese history,” and quotes apologetics who considered India as the “center of Heaven and Earth,” and the entire universe.¹³ The foreign was no longer something to be abhorred or to be kept distant, but rather, a quality which might even be of greater importance than indigenous ideas.

As Confucianism was the last ideology which had been able to unify the country, Buddhists also sought to co-opt their own religion’s compatibility with the teachings of Confucius, positioning Buddhism as a logical successor to its morals and ideas. Thus, Buddhist texts were said to include

¹⁰ Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 57

¹¹ *Gaoseng Zhuan* 高僧傳. Roll 10. 卷十

¹² Keenan, *Master Mou*, 102-103

¹³ Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 266

more extensive explanations of Confucius' ideas¹⁴, and Sun Chuo 孫綽 (300 – 380) argued in his *A Clarification of the Way* 喻道論 that Confucians had merely “grasped the letter but not the spirit of the [Duke of Zhou's and Confucius'] teachings,”¹⁵ and that Buddhists were ultimately living up to the spirit of Confucius' exhortations to be filial, albeit by alternative means to Confucian norms. Indeed, Sun argues that fundamentally “[the teachings of] the Duke of Zhou and Confucius are [the teachings of] Buddha... There is no more than a nominal difference between the exoteric [teachings of Confucianism] and the esoteric [doctrine of Buddhism].”¹⁶

However, the Buddhists were hardly the only faction positioning their beliefs as uniquely suited to governance. Several other factions existed as well, striving for power among the court and gentry of the Northern empires. The most prominent of these were the Daoists 道家, who portrayed themselves as the champions of a strong and revitalized Chinese state, as well as a nativism in opposition to what they deemed undesirable practices and traditions adopted from the “barbarians” – especially Buddhism. Daoism as a social force had a comparably shorter history than those of the Buddhists. Buddhists possessed a tradition of political involvement from its presence in India and Central Asia, and could draw upon the records of numerous influential monks who had served the courts of those rulers as tradition for its present-day advocates. Contrastingly, the tenuously Daoist

¹⁴ Keenan, *Master Mou*, 77

¹⁵ Arthur E. Link and Tim Lee, “Sun Ch' o's Yu-tao-lun: A Clarification of the Way,” *Monumenta Serica* (1966), 182

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184

(in that the line between local cult and organized religion is often blurry) movements of the late Han and early Wei were militant movements with little lasting political power. The Yellow Turban Rebellion (184 – 205) 黃巾之亂 as well as Zhang Daoling's 張道陵 organization (the "Way of Five Pecks of Rice" 五斗米道) in Sichuan¹⁷ serve as two of the most apparent manifestations of early "Daoism." The next two centuries saw the diverse practitioners of Chinese traditional religion (particularly those following the "Celestial Master" sect 天師道) making changes and adaptations to its canon and doctrines in order to formulate continuity and consistency within itself as well as to engender a greater appeal to the populace.

During these years, Daoists had also changed from the millenarianism that had characterized so many of their early leadership and instead began being politically active, in large part due to its attractiveness to the intellectual and political elite of the Northern Dynasties, especially those that became increasingly sinicized. Like the Buddhists, they also possessed institutional clout in the form of numerous monasteries and facilities, though Barrett notes there was always a certain degree of autonomy among them that prevented the Daoist "church" from being as integrated as its Buddhist counterpart.¹⁸ One of the key figures in Northern Daoism was Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365-448), an adept who wrote rules and regulations modeled after the Buddhist vinaya to govern the conduct of the clergy, and is noted for his efforts to "purify" Daoism. Wang notes him as being particularly ob-

¹⁷ T. H. Barrett, *Taoism under the T'ang* (London: Wellsweep Press, 1996), 14

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16

sessed with purging the religion of the Zhang brothers' influence, and even sought to make his own stamp on Northern Wei Daoist doctrines by forging several "classics" of his own.¹⁹ Large-scale exchange and borrowing of Buddhist ideas in classics such as these was common-place at this time²⁰, but the end-result was that by the end of the fifth century, Daoists had begun to assert their religion as the "Chinese alternative to Buddhism".²¹ Some began actively campaigning against the Buddhists, arming themselves with a litany of reasons grounded in their own liturgy as well as Chinese traditions against them.

A standard list of Daoist accusations of Buddhism's foreignness typically included:

- Buddhism was a foreign religion founded by an emanation of Laozi specifically for foreigners (as popularized in the *Classic on Laozi Transforming the Barbarians* 老子化胡經 and its derivative scriptures) and consequently inferior to his original teaching, embodied in Daoism.

- Buddhism's ideals ran counter to those of long-established Chinese traditions, and would be detrimental to the establishment of an orderly society. Buddhism exacted a toll on the economy in the form of its clergy removing themselves from productive society and popular funding of temples was far too extravagant.²²

¹⁹ Wang Zhongluo 王仲犛, *Weijin Nanbeichao Shi* 魏晉南北朝史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), 746-747

²⁰ Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 66, Livr. 1/3 (1980)

²¹ Barrett, *Taoism*, 15

²² Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 261

- Buddhism has no intrinsic utilitarian value and is “unable to ensure the prosperity of the state or the happiness of the individual.”²³ Furthermore, it brought disaster upon any country in which it was revered.²⁴

As such, the stage was set for Buddhists and Daoists to have conflicting interests in the popular and courtly spheres. Political influence would mean greater state contributions for religious endeavors like the building of temples or the widespread printing of sacred texts, which in turn would help propagation efforts geared towards the populace. Religious efforts to influence emperors, then, arose not out of a benign desire to spread the “gospel” of their faith, but rather out of a need to fight for worldly benefits. These efforts took shape in the form of numerous memorials and petitions to the emperors over four dynasties and two hundred years, and the perception of foreign influence was paramount in these debates.

Mitigating the effect of these factions’ influence on the emperors of the northern regimes was their overall autocratic rule of the monarchs themselves. While the emperors of the south were frequently reined in by the power of the aristocratic families there, those in the north had no such inhibitions; the ministers and monks served at the whim of the emperor. It is a view echoed by Huijiao’s commentary on the biographies of “miracle-worker” monks – though the rulers Shi Le and Shi Hu had employed the advice of Fotudeng and other eminent monks, they were nevertheless not “righteous” Buddhist rulers and instead described as “usurpatious and

²³ Ibid., 262

²⁴ Keenan, *Master Mou*, 21

cruel"²⁵ and the monks were credited with preventing further excesses of despotic rule.

It was a peculiar aspect of political rule that nevertheless carried on to the Northern Wei and its successor states. Chen argues, in particular that all religious institutions in the North (both Buddhist and Daoist) were hesitant to articulate a political view against that of the state due to their outsize dependence on state appropriations relative to independent sources of income and support. Buddhism did not possess any "extraterritorial privileges that the church did in the south," he writes, and that by "staking their hopes of propagating the faith on this reliance and dependence on the ruling princes, the Buddhist monks compromised their own as well as the Church's position, and permitted themselves to become subservient to the wishes and desires of the ruling princes."²⁶ Daoists were subject to the aegis of the rulers as well – as we shall see, many Daoist advisors encountered severe hardships once the winds of imperial opinion changed.

These are considerations we must take into account in putting the debates between Buddhists and Daoists in the north into perspective. Ultimately, they were not seeking institutional independence but rather greater integration with the state. Their debates, though long fought over the span of two centuries, were very situational and served in large part to influence the actions the current emperor took, but did not contest the effects of the

²⁵ Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 67

²⁶ Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, "On Some Factors Responsible for The Antibuddhist Persecution Under The Pei-Ch'ao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 17, No. ½ (Jun., 1954), 267-268

actions taken, whether they were positive or negative for their faction. With the knowledge that could be highly inconsistent from one emperor to the next, the debates would continue as the factions tried to influence his successor to rescind policies unfavorable to them.

I want to specifically focus on the state-building projects during two of these empires – the Northern Wei, and the Northern Zhou, with some short analyses of events in the other regimes. The former was decidedly the most stable and dominant of the Northern dynasties, with a rule spanning over a century and over ten emperors. Furthermore, its sinicization policies and its institutions remained a substantial influence on the states that remained after its eventual breakup. The Northern Zhou was a product of the breakup, and its existence, though short, directly preceded the unifying Sui Dynasty. As a result, the actions taken by Northern Zhou emperors towards ideology and religion had a disproportionately large influence on Sui policy, and indirectly, Tang policy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ideology in the Northern Wei

The early years of the Northern Wei were remarkably conventional and did not see the establishment of any distinct ideology as a foundation of the state, though an attempt at providing both a foreign and Chinese background for his dynasty's legitimation can be seen in his selection of the name "Wei." Du notes that this was likely based upon an attempt to claim the mantle of both the Wei dukedom during the Warring States Period as well as the regime that was founded by Cao Pi 曹丕 (187 – 226).¹ The founding ruler Emperor Daowu's 北魏道武帝 (371 – 409) concrete policy efforts were mostly concentrated on resettling the nomadic Tuoba tribe to districts in the newly established capital of Pingcheng 平城 (modern Datong 大同) in 398.² Overt sinicization was not a priority or widespread occurrence – in fact, Dien records the Xianbei as distinctively keeping their style and manner of dress³, perhaps as a sign of differentiation between the rulers and the ruled. As an indication of the imperial family's indecision between a nomadic and sedentary lifestyle, the empire initially did not make concrete provisions for the food supply of the three hundred thousand residents of

¹ Du Shiduo 杜士鐸, *Beiwei Shi* 北魏史 (Taiyuan: Shanxi Gaoxiao Lianhe Chubanshe, 1992), 104-105

² Wang Zhongluo 王仲犛, *Weijin Nanbeichao Shi* 魏晉南北朝史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), 484-486

³ Albert E. Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 319

Pingcheng. The Northern Wei continued to rule the empire like previous ones had by means of military might, only allowing for non-Chinese to be administrators of the military garrisons that governed the empire.⁴

Despite the uncertainty between the old and new ways, religion soon began to play an important role in the new regime even in conjunction with the old spirits and gods of the steppes, particularly Buddhism as it had already become well-established under the missionary efforts of Fotudeng and Dao'an.⁵ The *Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism* 釋老志 in the *Book of Wei* describes the Tuoba as “from the Western Regions they were cut off... Therefore they had not heard of the doctrine of [the] Buddha, or, if they had heard of it, they did not yet believe in it.”⁶ Consistent with the lack of description of large-scale religious activities undertaken by Daowu described by Wang and Du, the *Treatise* attributes his early inactivity to the “multitudinous affairs of state,” and despite the initial lack of “building reliquaries or inviting of the clergy” describes him as a man who was somewhat familiar with both Buddhism and Daoism.⁷ Daowu, however, seems to have been more amenable to Buddhism – an edict was issued in 398 that praised Buddhism, saying, “its saving and beneficent powers mysteriously

⁴ Lewis, *China Between Empires*, 81

⁵ Leon Hurvitz, *Wei Shou: Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism* (Kyoto: Jimbungaku Kenkyusho, 1956), 51. Please note that there are two similar but different copies of the treatise – one in the *Book of Wei* and one in the *Guang Hongming Ji*. Citations of the *Treatise* will generally be from the *Book of Wei* unless otherwise noted. Ware and Hurvitz have both published translations of a large portion of the *Treatise*, but the latter one-third has oddly been left untranslated by both.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 50

⁷ *Ibid.*, 51

reach to life and death. Its divine traces and the models it has bequeathed may indeed be trusted.”⁸

This predominant attitude towards supporting Buddhism in the Northern Wei could potentially be a result of the preferential treatment accorded to the religion by the other regimes it had displaced. Hurvitz proposes that the personal friendly relations between Daowu and a Buddhist ruler such as Yao Xing 姚興 (366 – 416) (chief patron of Kumārajīva during this time) could have led to a large influx of Buddhists from Yao’s Later Qin 後秦.⁹ Perhaps the large number of Buddhists helped transfer many of the courtly Buddhist activity formerly active under Kumārajīva to the Northern Wei, and with that, their political and cultural influence as well. With the regime not yet determined as one based on Chinese traditions, the emperors after Daowu did not shy away from Buddhism’s foreign traditions. For example, Emperor Taiwu 北魏太武帝 (408 – 452) prior to his conversion by Kou Qianzhi and Cui Hao into an ardent Daoist, was recorded as a follower of his predecessors in participating in a large-scale celebration of the Buddha’s birthday – a distinctively foreign practice imported from India and Central Asia that had been celebrated by distinctively foreign rulers such as Shi Le.¹⁰ Such practices also reflected the prevailing Northern interpretation of Buddhism since Shi Le – as a power that could protect the state and the ruling family. The celebration of the Buddha’s birthday was, after

⁸ Ibid., 52

⁹ Ibid., 54

¹⁰ Ibid., 56-57

all, a ritual with symbolic and practical meaning, rather than a stringent doctrinal discussion that reflected a keen interest by the emperors on the nuances of Buddhism.

Further evidence for the Tuoba's approach to Buddhism as something with practical (rather than spiritual) uses can be seen in Daowu's restructuring of the Buddhist institutions under the government. He established the office of the "chief of monks" 道人統 with the Buddhist institutions clearly subordinate to the state – Chen notes that the chief of monks "became a member of the imperial bureaucracy and was obliged to carry out all the orders of the government. Furthermore, he was obliged to comply with all the necessary ceremonies of a subordinate official toward his sovereign."¹¹

Prominent Buddhists in the north by and large acquiesced to this treatment by the authorities – indeed, it was hardly a novel approach among most Northern states. What was unusual, however, was the association of the emperor with a religiously important figure; in Buddhism's case it was the Buddha. Statements by the chief of monks during Daowu's reign, Faguo 法果, are particularly notable. "[Emperor] Taizu (Daowu) is wise and is fond of the path of the Buddha," he said, "indeed, he is the Tathāgata (*ru-lai* 如來) of the present, and śramaṇas ought to thoroughly reverence him." He also explained his reverent bows to the emperor by asserting that "he who can propagate the Way is the lord of humanity – I am not bowing to the

¹¹ Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, "On Some Factors Responsible for The Antibuddhist Persecution," 269

Son of Heaven, but to the Buddha!”¹²

Coupled with the preservation of Xianbei language and customs noted earlier, such religious pronouncements indicated that the early stances of the Northern Wei was to preserve – perhaps even celebrate – non-Chinese customs while adopting new means of legitimation. While administrative changes were modeled after Chinese bureaucracy, the very nature of the regime continued to be foreign.

However, the balance between Chinese and foreign would be called into question as the Northern Wei consolidated its rule under Emperor Taiwu, grandson of Daowu. The ruling Tuoba clan were fully aware and cautious of any potential threat posed by the heterogeneous groups residing in their empire – Liu quotes Taiwu complaining to the southern Emperor Wen of Song 宋文帝 in 451 about social unrest caused by several ethnicities.

“If the Dingling were to die, this would reduce the number of bandits in the Changshan and Zhao commanderies. If the Hu were to die, this would reduce the number of bandits in Binzhou,” wrote Emperor Taiwu. “If the Di and Qiang were to die, this would reduce the number of bandits in Guanzhong. If you were to kill some of the Dingling and Hu, that would be no great loss.”¹³

¹² Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王 (Beijing: Tuanji Chubanshe, 1995), 174-175

¹³ Shufen Liu, “Ethnicity and the Suppression of Buddhism in Fifth-Century North China,” *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, Academia Sinica (2001), 5

Taiwu's sentiments demonstrated a severe mistrust of many of the diverse and disparate groups in his empire, an attitude likely born of not just of the Gaiwu Rebellion that Liu cites, but also several other reasons: Firstly, the empire's establishment at the end of the fourth century had still left it just one state in the north among many other states, and both Emperors Daowu and his predecessor Mingyuan 北魏明元帝 (392 – 423) continued to engage in bloody military campaigns against the remaining kingdoms in the north, almost all of which were ruled by foreigners. These campaigns were partly due to the fact that the establishment Wei state itself was still precarious – the Rouran 柔然 khan invaded in 415 and an attempt to counterattack them resulted in the loss of many soldiers to the harsh winter.¹⁴ Another vicious second invasion by the Rouran was launched in 424 with sixty thousand mounted warriors – with this event coming right before the accession of Taiwu to the throne, Zhengxiang Chen concludes that it likely had an immense effect on the heir and would have motivated him to seek retaliation.¹⁵

This hostility toward other ethnicities was coupled with the increasing acceptance of Chinese advisors into the Wei court, an occurrence that was inevitable given the adoption of Chinese institutions required talented individuals to staff them. Most Han officials during the early Wei were engaged in occupations such as explaining the classics and histories or strate-

¹⁴ Chen Zhengxiang 陳正祥, *Caoyuan Digu: Tuoba Wei Wangchao Zhi Xingshuai* 草原帝國：拓拔魏王朝之興衰 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1991), 56

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61

gizing for the emperor.¹⁶ However, the legacy of the Han Dynasty's patronage of Confucianism as state ideology ran deep among these officials, and we find this early exchange between the official Li Xian 李先 and Emperor Daowu, quoted by Zhang from the *Book of Wei*:

“Taizu (Emperor Daowu) asked [Li] Xian: ‘In all under heaven, which books are of the utmost good, and can benefit man’s spiritual wisdom?’

Li Xian replied: ‘Only the classics and the books. [These are] the canon of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors, and may bolster the spiritual wisdom of kings.’”¹⁷

Apart from chronicling efforts by court officials to acclimate the Wei emperors to Confucianism, this passage also reveals another development in ideology – the explicit linking of Confucianism to a Chinese identity. The Three Sovereigns 三皇 include Fuxi 伏羲 and Shennong 神農, both unique cultural heroes to the Chinese and in the case of the former, attributed to be the writer for the Confucian-emphasized *Classic of Changes* 易經. The Five Emperors, on the other hand, included the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, Yao 堯, and Shun 舜 – all reputed to be ancestral rulers of the Chinese. Li Xian was not merely suggesting Confucianism as a means to govern the empire – he

¹⁶ Zhang Jinlong 張金龍, *Beiwei Zhengzhishi Yanjiu* 北魏政治史研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996), 47

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47

was suggesting Emperor Daowu implicitly take on the mantle of a Chinese monarch, and rule according to uniquely Chinese ways.

While Emperor Daowu did not explicitly invoke Confucianism in his edicts as he did Buddhism, he did set up an Imperial Academy for the study of the classics with up to three thousand students.¹⁸ However, his grandson proved to be far more susceptible to Confucian cajoling than Daowu, particularly by the Daoist adept Kou Qianzhi (365 – 448). As noted before, Daoists too had argued that they were representatives of China’s intellectual tradition, and Kou was a clear example of the Daoist appropriation of Confucianism.

Kou was by all accounts an extremely quixotic personality. Apart from the aforementioned self-authoring of Daoist texts, he later claimed to have personally received the title of “Heavenly Teacher” from the cosmic Laozi (the Grand Supreme Elder Lord 太上老君) himself in 415 and received a mandate to “assist the True Lord of Peace in the North.”¹⁹ However, his views were not limited to doctrinal issues, and a key stance of his was that Daoism should be used to support the governance of China, thus drawing the patronage of the highly influential (and ethnic Han) prime minister Cui Hao 崔浩 (381 – 450). Cui in turn introduced Kou to Emperor Taiwu, who the *Book of Wei* describes as having an extremely positive response to Kou’s teachings, stating that “the emperor felt that it was pure and quiescent and that it had proof of the supramundane (immortals). He then professed and

¹⁸ Ibid., 48

¹⁹ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 179

practiced these arts.”²⁰ Indeed, Taiwu appears to have been so enamored of Daoism that he changed his era name (*nianhao* 年號) to parallel the epithet *taiping zhenjun* 太平真君 in Kou’s “mandate”, or “True Lord of Peace” in 440. He also provided funds for Kou to build a center (*daochang* 道場) in the southeast of the capital staffed by a hundred and twenty priests and with rituals taking place throughout the day and night.²¹

However, Kou did not stop once he had received official state support of the Daoist center, and continued to advise Taiwu in a role that was not unlike that of Fotudeng at the Later Zhao court. Kou imbued his statements to the emperor with a substantial amount of spiritual terms – in a response to an imperial inquiry about an impending military campaign, Kou replied: “Victory is certain. Your Majesty is spiritually entrusted with martial might and is compliant with [Heaven’s] plan, and should use military means to secure the Nine Provinces (China). By first using martial and later using cultural means, [you] may become the True Lord of Peace.”[23] At the suggestion of Kou and upon his unification of the north, Taiwu further went on to officially receive Daoist talismans at that center in 442, thus cementing his role as a Daoist ruler.²² The *Treatise* records that all the flags and banners used at these events were green, “following the color of the Daoists.”

Kou’s ability to influence the emperor to see himself as a divinely

²⁰ Hurvitz, *Wei Shou*, 64

²¹ *Wei Shu* 魏書. Wei Shou 魏收. Roll 114. 卷一百一十四

²² Zenryū Tsukamoto 塚本善隆, trans. Lin Baoyao 譯: 林保堯, *Weishu Shilaozhi Yanjiu* 魏書釋老志研究 (Taipei: Juefeng Fojiao Yishu Wenhua Jijinhui, 2006), 190

inspired Daoist rule was greatly facilitated by the sponsorship of Cui, but Cui seems to have been the actual instigator of Taiwu's increasing hatred of Buddhism, not Kou²³. Apart from his angry remonstrations in court to Taiwu that Buddhism was "vain and false and... a drain upon the world," [26] it was an intensely personal hostility: Cui's biography in the *Book of Wei* records his wife Guo as being particularly fond of reading and reciting the sūtras, but Cui angrily torched the texts and dumped the ashes in the toilet.²⁴ In another occasion, he laughed heartily at his devoutly Buddhist brother Cui Mo 崔模, who would "reverence and bow to an image [of the Buddha], even if he was standing in excrement and dirt," telling him that "he was placing his head in such a filthy place to kneel to a barbarian deity."²⁵ There may be many reasons for his hostility, but a deep-seated derision of "barbarian" adoptions seems to have been one of the causes.

Taiwu's infatuation with Daoism and his trust in Cui eventually became policies in the form of several edicts proscribing Buddhism. Two of them were recorded in the *Treatise*, each referring to Buddhism as a false doctrine of the Western barbarians. The first, promulgated in 444, restricted private sponsorship of Buddhist monks. "Those śramaṇa persons borrow the vain falsehoods of the Western barbarians and recklessly create disaster and calamity," it read, "Theirs is not the way to make uniform the effects of government or to spread earnest virtue through the world."²⁶ However, the

²³ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 184

²⁴ *Wei Shu* 魏書. Roll 35

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hurvitz, *Wei Shou*, 66

second edict (issued in 446) was far more severe and was sparked by the discovery of weapons in a Buddhist monastery during an imperial expedition to put down a rebellion led by Gai Wu 蓋吳. The edict proclaimed:

Formerly, a reckless sovereign of the Latter Han (Emperor Ming of Han) believed in and was led astray by evil and deceit. On the false pretext that he had dreamt of them, he served the malignant demons of the barbarians and thereby disturbed Heaven's order. From of old the Nine Provinces had never had such a thing in their midst... The way of the demons prospered, and looked upon the law of kings as it were nought. Since then each age has passed through disorder and calamity...

...We have received the Heavenly line, as it has chanced, amid the evils of exhausted fortune. We desire to remove the false, establish the true, and restore the rule of [Fu] Xi and [Shen]Nong. We will completely shake off the barbarian gods and annihilate their vestiges, and thereby, We hope, have no occasion to beg forgiveness of the clan of Feng (Fuxi's clan name). If from now on there be any who dare serve the barbarian gods or make images, statues, or figures in clay or bronze, they shall be executed with their whole households.

Although one speaks of the "barbarian gods," when

one questions the barbarians of today, they all say that they do not have such. They are all the work of followers of men of the former age of Han, two unreliable youths, Liu Yuanchen and Lu Bojiang, who sought the false words of the barbarians, used the emptiness of Lao and Zhuang, and arbitrarily grafted them together and added to the product; they are completely untrue.

...When there are extraordinary men, only then can there be extraordinary acts. Were it not for Us, who could do away with this age-old counterfeit? Let the officials proclaim to the generals of garrisons and the governors that all Buddhist reliquaries, images, and barbarian scriptures are to be completely destroyed and burnt, and that the śramaṇas, without distinction of youth or age, be buried alive.²⁷

Taiwu was now seeing himself not as a foreign ruler of an alien land but as a Chinese ruler no more alien than the Han emperors – and certainly in his own eyes more righteous than they were. The emperor in the edict seems almost apologetic to the ancestral founder Fuxi, as if it was Taiwu's own fault that an abomination such as Buddhism could ever exist in China. In order to rectify this grievous mistake and placate the ancestors, Buddhism had to be eradicated. Taiwu's anger was further stoked by his

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67

perception that Buddhism was not merely a religion of the “barbarians,” but rather a heathen Chinese perversion of the true teaching of Daoism – as such, its offenses were even higher than if it was just a foreign faith. It speaks to a need on the part of Taiwu to maintain a religious orthodoxy which citizens had to adhere to or suffer the consequences. It is also notably a persecution that was not launched out of an economic need, unlike those initiated by Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou and Emperor Wuzong of Tang.

While Cui Hao was the catalyst behind the persecution, Liu conjectures that Taiwu’s broader negativity towards all things that were foreign was in part due to the ethnic background of the rebels participating in the rebellion in 445, one year before the persecution. Xiongnu, Di, and Qiang were among those in rebellion, and many of them were devout Buddhists. Furthermore, Buddhist monks had been among those impressed into resistance against Taiwu during his campaign in the Northern Liang.²⁸ Liu paints a picture of an emperor who began to equate all things foreign as hostile to his rule, including Buddhism. “It would appear that Taiwudi’s suppression of Buddhism resulted from a complex combination of political, religious, and ethnic factors,” Liu writes, “that prompted the emperor’s decision to destroy enemies from a rival ethnic group by crushing the religion that had helped nurture their ambitions.”²⁹ The immediate effects of the edict was mitigated by the Buddhist crown prince Tuoba Huang 拓拔晃, who while powerless to stop the edict was able to delay its implementa-

²⁸ Shufen Liu, “Ethnicity and the Suppression of Buddhism,” 15

²⁹ Ibid., 19-20

tion long enough so that many monks could go into hiding – some to the southern regime, others to Central Asian kingdoms such as Kucha.^{30 31}

Though devastating, the persecution quickly ended after Taiwu was assassinated in 452 by the eunuch Zong Ai 宗愛. Tuoba Huang's son Tuoba Jun 拓拔濬 took the throne as Emperor Wencheng 北魏文成帝 and immediately rescinded the proscription edict. Wencheng was a generous patron of Buddhism, and his efforts at rehabilitating the religion greatly broadened the spread of the religion to levels even greater than before the persecution. Just thirty years later, Wei Shou estimated that there were two million monks and nuns in the country during the reign of the sinicizing Emperor Xiaowen, the dynasty had “47 great state monasteries, 839 monasteries of [the noble families], and 30,000 or more monasteries built by commoners.”

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Despite these visible signs of success by a foreign faith, the debate on the position of foreign practices was hardly over and would be revisited under the successor dynasties of the Northern Wei.

³⁰ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 185

³¹ It is worth noting the circumstances of Cui Hao's death a few years later. As a compiler of the Tuoba family's ancestral histories, he apparently made derogatory comments about several of the ancestors and was executed for *lèse majesté*. Might it have occurred because his prejudices against “barbarians” had extended to the ancestors of the royal family? Unfortunately, we have no record of the offending statements.

³² Jacques Gernet, trans. Franciscus Verellen, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History From the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 4

CHAPTER FIVE

Further Northern Developments

Due to imperial neglect and abuse of the frontier garrisons of the empire, widespread rebellions began in 524 against the Northern Wei court. By enlisting the help of the Jie under Erzhu Rong 爾朱榮, however, the court unwittingly sealed their own demise. After the quelling of the rebels, Erzhu Rong quickly entered Luoyang in 528 and executed much of the court, but was then murdered himself by the puppet emperor Xiaozhuang 北魏孝莊帝 that he had installed on the throne. What ensued was a decade of struggle as two generals of the Northern Wei, Gao Huan 高歡 in the east and Yuwen Tai 宇文泰 in the west, set up rival regimes nominally under the Wei state and emperors of the Tuoba (now Yuan) clan.¹ While these generals were content to rule behind the scenes, their sons Gao Yang 高洋 (Emperor Wenxuan 北齊文宣帝) and Yuwen Jue 宇文覺 soon took over control of their respective states, creating the Northern Qi 北齊 and Northern Zhou 北周 regimes. Lewis notes that both states “exemplified military dynasticism,” and continued to maintain large armies in preparation for campaigns against each other. It was a far cry from the stability that had characterized the Northern Wei under emperors such as Xiaowen, and heralded an era similar to that of the Sixteen Kingdoms period, with the mutual competition

¹ Lewis, *China Between Empires*, 82-84

driving many of the decisions made at court. Both states continued, at least initially, in the mold of the Northern Wei in that most power was centralized in the ruler and the court was merely ancillary to him.

However, several large changes had taken place in the eight decades that had elapsed since Emperor Xiaowen's sinicization efforts. Chief among these was the aftermath of the sinicization effort itself: In mandating the Xianbei to adopt Chinese customs, language, and culture (as well as promoting *hanicization* via intermarriage), the Northern Wei court had created a dichotomy between the Xianbei elite in the capital, who had become almost Chinese in habit, and those in the frontier and border provinces who had not heeded the edict. As a result, foreigners espousing Chinese ideals of governance was no longer as novel as it had seemed during Taiwu's reign. As both of the generals who founded the two successor dynasties to the Northern Wei came from the frontier outposts, they were not particularly Chinese in their outlook, though many of the officials they employed were certainly so.

Another key change was the emergence of Buddhist-Daoist debates where representatives from both factions would engage in discussion of the relative merits of their religions. These debates were rarely substantive in nature and frequently devolved into debates over whether Laozi had manifested as the Buddha, or vice versa, and reports of the participants descending into puerile name-calling are not uncommon. Despite the seeming pointlessness of these debates, they provided a forum in which Buddhists

and Daoists could express their differences and allow for the emperor to observe as well. As Kohn puts it, “[the debates] were, in fact, power struggles disguised as doctrinal disputes yet often became hard-core polemics.”² A major example of these debates was the exchange between the Daoist Jiang Bin 姜斌 and the Buddhist monk Tanmozui 曇謨最 in 520 which was moderated by Emperor Xiaoming of the Northern Wei 北魏孝明帝. The emperor opened the debate with a question asking if the Buddha and Laozi had lived contemporaneously.

“Jiang smiled and replied: ‘Laozi entered the West and transformed the barbarians...They were obviously contemporaneous.’

The Dharma Master [Tanmozui] asked: ‘How do you know this?’

Jiang Bin replied: ‘According to the *Classic on Laozi Opening the Heavens*, I know this.’

The Dharma Master asked: ‘In what year and during [the reign of] which Zhou king was Laozi born? And during which Zhou king’s [reign] did he enter the West?’

Jiang Bin said: “In the *yinmao* year, the third year after King Ding of Zhou’s assumption of the throne [he was born]... In the *gengchen* year, the first year of King Jing of

² Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Dao* (Magdalena: Three Pines Press, 2008), 7

Zhou's assumption of the throne (1030 BCE³), he was 85... and thereafter went with the commander of the San pass, Yi Xi, to enter the West and transform the barbarians. This is sufficient [information] to understand.'"⁴

This was a direct move to counter Tanmozui, who had dated the Buddha's birth to the twenty-fourth year of King Zhao of Zhou (Kohn estimates this to be 1029 BCE), thus making it plausible that Laozi had almost immediately been reincarnated as the Buddha in India. However, the emperor was ultimately unconvinced by Jiang's arguments. The *Classic on Laozi Opening the Heavens* was declared "unfounded and false" and Jiang charged with the crime of "confusing the multitudes" and Xiaoming declared his offenses worthy of "extreme torture and consignment to prison for execution." The emperor seems to have genuinely wanted to execute Jiang, attempting to justify his action by quoting from a story of one of the Buddha's lives: "This disciple [of the Buddha] (the Emperor) cautiously refers to the sūtras which state: 'When the Buddha was a king in past lives, [he had] executed five hundred Brahmins and did not violate the precepts.' Jiang Bin's *Opening the Heavens* is a devious book to confuse and cause chaos in the court. If he is not executed now, the number of mistakes in the future will not be small." However, the Indian monk Bodhiruci 菩提流支 interceded on

³ Ibid., 7

⁴ *Ji Gujin Fodao Lunheng Xu* 集古今佛道論衡序. Daoxuan 道宣 Taishō no. 2104, Roll 1. 卷一

Jiang's behalf and he was ultimately spared the death penalty.⁵ Another loss by the Daoists in a debate sponsored by Emperor Wenxuan of Northern Qi 北齊文宣帝 in 555 resulted in the emperor ordering "that the hair of Daoists be shaved off so that they might become śramaṇa."⁶

Emperor Xiaoming's actions were an example of a growing familiarity with Buddhism among the imperial house and the gentry. His quotation of anecdotes on the Buddha lives from the sūtras indicate an emerging trend of emperors who were genuinely interested in the doctrines of Buddhism. Emperor Xiaojing of the Eastern Wei 東魏孝靜帝 held a series of discussions in court with his ministers discussing Buddhists ideas, including such questions as "Is the Buddha-nature and the nature of the Dharma one and the same principle in Buddhism, or are they mutually exclusive?"⁷ Emperor Wen of the Western Wei, on the other hand, would recite the *Lotus Sutra* and had even received the Buddhist precepts.⁸

The exchange also reveal that Daoists continued to press the issue of foreignness as a political tactic of devaluing Buddhism. However, instead of simply lambasting it as a foreign perversion, they took on a different tactic. Daoist rhetoric now continually emphasized the idea that Buddha was just Laozi under a different name and attempted to reinforce the notion that though the teachings he taught were similar to those of Daoism,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 119

⁷ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 212

⁸ Ibid., 213

they were ultimately for a completely different (and inferior) audience. As noted by Zürcher, some Daoists began to take the view that Buddhism was in fact a teaching preached by Laozi for the extermination of the barbarians, and “what then could be greater folly than to introduce this deadly weapon into China?”⁹ To bolster their claims, Daoists relied on a multitude of texts, including the *Classic on Laozi Opening the Heavens* mentioned earlier as well as the *Classic on Transforming the Barbarians*, quoted ad infinitum by Daoist apologists. The latter read, in part:

“Buddhism arose in a barbarian region. In the West the metallic fluid prevails; therefore (people of that quarter) are hard and without decorum. The gentlemen of Shenzhou (China) have imitated their manners as a model and have erected Buddhist temples... As a result, the world suffers from floods or drought, the weapons are (incessantly) used in mutual attacks... That the transforming influence of royal (government) has not been peacefully (realized) is in all respects the result of the disorder (brought about by) Buddhism.”¹⁰

When he came to the throne, Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou’s 北周武帝 position was extremely similar to that of Emperor Taiwu over a century earlier. Both faced a fragmented and divided north and harbored an

⁹ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 305

¹⁰ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 213

ambition to unify it, and both had Daoist advisors with whom they were very close. Also like Taizu, Wu saw the need for an orthodox ideology by which to govern and unite the country. Unlike Taiwu, however, Wu seems to have favored Confucianism early on – Zhang notes that he would often gather a meeting of his ministers to court to hear him lecture on the *Book of Rites*.¹¹

Though Wu was favorable to Confucianism, he did not seem to possess the cool rationalism that so exemplified many of that school – rather, he showed a penchant for believing in prophecies. Worried about a prophecy that foretold that “black would win,” he began distrusting the black-clad Buddhist monks and began taking steps to adopt Daoism, “even receiv[ing] Daoist talismans and registers and dressed in their ceremonial robe and cap.”¹² He seems to have become most influenced by the Daoist priest Zhang Bin and the former monk Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩, the latter of which submitted a memorial in 567 suggesting that a universal church be established with the emperor as head, due to the toll monks, nuns, and temples exacted upon the national economy.¹³

As a result, Wu called for a national debate in 569 involving representatives from all three schools – Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. The emperor’s anti-Buddhist bent appeared early on when he commented that while “Confucianism and Daoism have been venerated in this country

¹¹ Ibid., 221

¹² Kohn, *Laughing at the Dao*, 27

¹³ Li Guorong 李國榮, *Foguang Xia De Diwang* 佛光下的帝王, 221

for a long time,” Buddhism was more recent and “cannot be placed [along with the other two].”¹⁴ Surprisingly, however, the emperor’s desire to place Daoism to the same exalted position as Confucianism was thwarted by Zhen Luan’s 甄鸞 *Laughing at the Dao* 笑道論, which managed to point out numerous flaws and inconsistencies in Daoist teachings. Zhen pointed out that the foreign nature of Buddhism could not have been the cause of disasters in China as numerous disasters had occurred in antiquity before Buddhism’s introduction.¹⁵

Wu treated the debates with perhaps greater importance than did his predecessors; he declared Confucianism in 573 to be the most exalted, with Daoism following and Buddhism last. An official edict authorizing the persecution came in 574 over the protests of Huiyuan and others who warned the emperor that the penalty for destroying the Triple Jewel was the Avīci Hells, “which do not discriminate between the noble and the lowly.”¹⁶ Compared to Taiwu’s persecution, however, it was relatively bloodless – monks and nuns were defrocked instead of executed, but large numbers of temples and associated properties were appropriated by the state.

That serves as a defining moment for imperial resentment of Buddhism – while Emperor Taiwu did not take economic principles into account when he suppressed the religion, Wu may have been motivated by the need for resources in any upcoming conflict against the Northern Qi.

¹⁴ Kohn, *Laughing at the Dao*, 27

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111

¹⁶ Wang Zhongluo 王仲榮, *Weijin Nanbeichao Shi* 魏晉南北朝史, 815

The elimination of Buddhism due to its foreignness, then, had become a means to an end rather than the sole goal of uprooting all that was alien. His pragmatic approach can also be observed in his desegregation of the imperial armies from foreign and Han division into an integrated unit – integration greatly improved the military performance of the army.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lei Yiqun 雷依群, *Beizhou Shi* 北周史 (Xi'an: Shaanxi Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1999), 101

CHAPTER SIX

The Challenges of Unity

The interaction between religion and the state in Northern China proved to be a major point of divergence from that of the south. There, Daoism never reached the level of courtly acceptance that it did in the north – certainly never to the point where it could persuade rulers to take punitive action against Buddhism. Furthermore, southern Buddhism developed an independent streak divorced from imperial control, resulting in an institution that did not see itself as closely intertwined with the fortunes of the state. The submission of Huiyuan's *Treatise On Why Śramaṇas Do Not Reverence Kings* 沙門不敬王者論 to the emperor would not have been possible in the autocratic north, and stood in stark contrast to Faguo's assertion that the ruler was the "Tathāgata."

The establishment of a consistent state ideology based on ethnicity seems to also played a far less prominent role in the south, perhaps a result of its unique claim to Chinese-ness – it did not have to struggle with its own ethnic position in China as much as the ruling families of the Northern Wei and Zhou did. Despite this, polemical debates nevertheless persisted in the south, with many treatises and letters exchanged between apologists on both sides. Prominent among these was the furious debate over the Daoist Gu Huan's (420 - 483) 顧歡 *Treatise on Barbarians and Chinese* 夷夏論. Though

the treatise stressed that Daoism and Buddhism ultimately shared identical eschatological goals, it argued that Buddhism was fundamentally inferior due to its barbarian origins and "abstruse and strange" practices.¹ It was widely criticized by Buddhist monks and ministers alike and was not adopted by the Song dynasty.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the northern and southern Buddhism can perhaps be seen in Emperor Wu of Liang's (464 - 549) 梁武帝 religious experience – a series of events in which he not only illustrated a deep personal faith in Buddhism, but also a doctrinal interest in the tenets of the religion. Few of the Northern emperors demonstrated similar levels of dedication to the faith, especially faith that was not solely motivated by political aims. Apart from donating stupendous amounts of money to Buddhist temples in his empire, Emperor Wu also attempted to ordain himself as a bodhisattva according to a ritual he personally developed,

In the process of composing the ritual, Emperor Wu was consciously "attempt[ing] to be as faithful as possible to the original intent of the Indian texts."² That meant that his ritual included the emperor himself prostrating himself in reverence before the Buddha and the Saṃgha, meditating, and following many other conventions of Indian religion - all actions of (outward) humility that would have been unthinkable for a northern ruler.

The issue of Buddhism's foreignness that so bothered Emperors Tai-

¹ Kohn, *Laughing at the Dao*, 162

² Andreas Janousch, "The Emperor as Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattva Ordination and Ritual Assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty," in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 116

wu and Wu of the major Northern dynasties, and so alluring to Emperor Wu of Liang, reemerged as a major issue in the Tang Dynasty though it was never a particularly relevant issue during the short-lived Sui. However, the memory of the Buddhist persecutions had a large impact on how Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 envisioned the role of religion in his empire, and the legacy of foreign influence continued to play an enormous role for him.

A key distinction between Sui rule and those of the northern dynasties that preceded him was the willingness of the Buddhist institutions to assert their independence – certainly a development acquired from southern Buddhism, and one that presaged the formation of a new generation of Buddhists who combined characteristics of both north and south in their political activity. Coupled with the Yang's family personal faith in the religion, Buddhists were able to exert a considerable amount of influence on state policy, and Emperor Wen enacted many policies that distinguished China as a "Buddhist" nation rather than a Chinese one.

Some of these policies did not depart from the traditions of Northern support for Buddhism, such as the large-scale construction of state-sponsored temples and relaxed restrictions on the ordination of monks. Others, however, clearly indicate an approach to religion adopted from the south. For example, monks did not have to reverence the emperor, and he seems to have believed in the equality between "the secular power of the Sui court and the religious authority of the Buddhist church."³ Another indication

³ Victor Cunrui Xiong, *Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 154

that Emperor Wen had thrown much of his support to the Buddhists can be seen in an edict proclaimed shortly after his enthronement, where a Buddhist monastery was ordered to be built at the base of each of the Five Sacred Mountains 五嶽 of Confucianism and Daoism. Wright views this as a huge coup for the Buddhists, noting that it demonstrated “what tremendous inroads a once-foreign religion had made into the Chinese realm of things sacred.”⁴ Emperor Wen’s edicts also frequently alluded to Buddhist universalist ideals along with frequent mentions of unity in an attempt to unite the disparate units of his empire under a singular ideology. However, the greatest indicator of Emperor Wen’s comfort with foreign ideals can be witnessed in his relic-distribution campaign of 601-603, an event which I had touched upon in my fall junior paper. In the course of this campaign, the Sui government built thirty grand stupas throughout the country and enshrined relics of the Buddha in each of them, evoking King Aśoka’s putative efforts throughout India. Furthermore, Chen Jinhua notes that the “procedures by which the Buddha’s relics were welcomed into the cities” were based off of the ceremonies practiced in the city of Kuśhinagara.⁵ The reliquaries were also based off of Aśoka’s standards. By the time Emperor Wen had died and his son Yang Guang 楊廣 taken the throne (as Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝), 3,792 monasteries had been built during his reign – an unprecedented number.⁶ While Emperor Yang continued to patronize Bud-

⁴ Arthur F. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), 129

⁵ Jinhua Chen, *Monks and Monarchs, Kinship and Kingship* (Kyoto: Scuola Italiana di Studi sull’Asia Orientale, 2002)

⁶ *Ibid.*, 155

dhism, he frequently made attempts to limit the monks' and monasteries' power, including an effort to compel the saṃgha to reverence the emperor, wishing to revert to a Northern-style system.⁷

While the Sui emperors made little compunction about adopting non-Chinese practices, the Li clan that founded the Tang Dynasty was particularly insecure about their non-Chinese origins, a fact that certainly factored into the ideological adoptions that they made for their regime. According to Sanping Chen, the Lis were definitely of partial foreign descent on both sides - he identifies another contemporary Li with the same ancestry as "of unmistakable Tuoba Xianbei descent" and notes that the Xianbei language was likely the first language of the early Tang emperors.⁸ Like many other northerners, the family was fairly Buddhist - Wright notes that "several of their children had Buddhist childhood names," and one even became a monk.⁹ However the Li's family ancestry and background was the subject of much doctoring in the dynastic histories, especially as they attempted to demonstrate their nobility to be equivalent to the entrenched aristocratic families of China.

As part of this ennobling attempt, the Li family declared themselves descendants of Laozi (whose common name was held to be Li Er 李耳) and subsequently pronounced Daoism and Confucianism "to be the twin pillars

⁷ Ibid., 167

⁸ Sanping Chen, "Succession Struggle and the Ethnic Identity of the Tang Imperial House," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Nov. 1996), 381

⁹ Arthur F. Wright, "Tang Tai-tsung and Buddhism," in *Perspectives on the Tang*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 241

of the state, whereas Buddhism was to be relegated to the status of a foreign religion."¹⁰ The demotion of Buddhism was largely a result of the incessant memorials of the Daoist Fu Yi (554 – 639) 傅奕, the grand astrologer to Emperor Gaozu 唐高祖. Fu Yi's arguments hardly broke new ground and included both economic and nationalistic sentiments. Wright summarized the latter as an argument "for the superiority of Chinese thought and institutions mainly by simple assertions that they are untainted by foreignisms."¹¹ Fu proposed the emperor to "proclaim the non-doing (*wuwei* 無為) of Laozi (lit., *lilao* 李老, "the elder of the Lis") and [cause] the common people to self-change, and to enforce Confucius' rites of love and respect to [cause] all under heaven to be filial and compassionate," and also included an earnest request for the emperor to "request the barbaric and deviant teaching of the Buddha to return to India."¹²

Though none of Fu Yi's proposals were ever adopted in their entirety, they demonstrate the sheer persistence of nativist ideals almost three hundred years after Buddhism had begun to be adopted by rulers. As emperors from a foreign background, the first two Tang emperors had a decidedly important political motive to distance themselves from all things foreign, including Buddhism. To do otherwise would be to provide fodder for critics of their legitimacy and skeptics of the imperial clan's position of power. Small wonder, then, that Taizong 唐太宗 emphatically agreed with Fu Yi's

¹⁰ Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8

¹¹ Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 120

¹² *Guang Hongming Ji* 廣弘明集. Daoxuan 道宣 Taishō no. 2103, Roll 11.

description of the Buddha as a “crafty barbarian who succeeded in deluding his own countrymen.”¹³ Gaozu and Taizong both enacted measures to limit the size of monasteries and the number of monks and nuns, and this became standard policy for the early Tang until Taizong’s later patronage of the great pilgrim and monk Xuanzang 玄奘.

Ultimately, neither the Buddhists nor the Daoists decisively won the battle to serve as a chief source of ideology for the imperial court. Confucian rituals - without Buddhist or Daoist elements - became the chief source of rituals for the Tang and subsequent dynasties, and adaptations were made to emphasize the universality of Heaven and Confucian ethics.¹⁴ Though Buddhism and Daoism continued to receive imperial patronage, their role became increasingly limited to the personal faith of the emperor rather than a source of political legitimation for a dynasty. However, the issue of Buddhism's foreign origins remained contentious, and the zealously Daoist Emperor Wuzong 唐武宗 would use it as an excuse to launch the third persecution of Buddhism in 845. Despite Wuzong's efforts, Buddhism *had* become an integral part of Chinese society, and its revival after the persecution demonstrated its assimilation to Chinese culture.

¹³ Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the Tang*, 12

¹⁴ Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 226

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

The frequent changes of emperors during the Northern Dynasties meant that the utilization of Buddhism as state ideology was highly inconsistent. Nevertheless, its popularity among many foreign rulers demonstrated that its mixture of both Chinese and non-Chinese elements was appealing for those who wished to reconcile their own non-Chinese identity with the cultural practices with the people they governed. Subsequent rulers of China who found themselves outside of mainstream Confucian ideals - rulers such as Wu Zetian 武則天 or the Mongol and Manchu emperors - would also be drawn to Buddhism because of this attribute. For them, Buddhism served as an alternate means of legitimation as it had for many of the northern emperors.

For even as Buddhism made changes to its doctrines to respond to assimilating pressures, the stigma of being foreign become increasingly irrelevant - Indigenous schools like the Chan possessed doctrines that placed less emphasis on the foreign rituals and practices of Buddhism so roundly criticized by Daoist polemicists. Furthermore, the growing familiarity that Chinese had of other ethnicities that had begun during the Northern Dynasties reached its zenith in the Tang, making foreign sculpture, music, and even language popular among Chinese. Though crude stereotypes still per-

sisted, I have no doubt that this contact helped foster cooperative engagement between China and its neighbors; an accomplishment of the Tang that the Han despite all its glory was always unable to achieve.

DYNASTIES MENTIONED

Dynasty	Founder (Ethnicity)	Dates
Zhou 周		1027 – 256 BCE
Western Zhou 西周		1027 – 771 BCE
Eastern Zhou 東周		771 – 256 BCE
Qin 秦		221 – 206 BCE
Han 漢		206 BCE – 220 CE
Three Kingdoms 三國		220 – 280
Western Jin 西晉		265 – 317
Northern Dynasties 北朝		317 – 589
Former Zhao 前趙	Liu Yuan (Xiongnu) 劉淵	304 – 329
Later Zhao 後趙	Shi Le (Jie) 石勒	319 – 351
Former Qin 前秦	Fu Jian (Di) 苻堅	351 – 394
Later Qin 後秦	Yao Chang (Qiang) 姚萇	384 – 417
Northern Wei 北魏	Tuoba Gui (Xianbei) 拓拔珪	386 – 535
Eastern Wei 東魏	Gao Huan (Han) 高歡	534 – 550
Western Wei 西魏	Yuwen Tai (Xianbei) 宇文泰	535 – 557
Northern Qi 北齊	Gao Yang (Han) 高洋	550 – 577
Northern Zhou 北周	Yuwen Jue (Xianbei) 宇文覺	557 – 581
Sui 隋	Yang Jian (Han) 楊堅	581 – 618
Tang 唐	Li Yuan (Mixed) 李淵	618 – 907

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