



Robes Purple and Gold: Transmission of the Robe in the "Lidai fabao ji" (Record of the Dharma-Jewel through the Ages)

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A word of praise is comparable to bestowing a princely robe; a word of blame is as severe as capital punishment. (KONG YINGDA 孔穎達, *Chunqiu zhengyi*)¹

Even among hagiographers, the *Lidai fabao ji* 曆代法寶記 has been labeled a fabric of self-promoting fictions.² This opinion was first expressed shortly after the work was written in the late eighth century, and negative appraisals continue even now. The sharpest contemporary criticism is to be found in the *Beishan lu* 北山錄 (Record of North Mountain) composed by Shenqing 神清 (died 814), who admittedly had sectarian motivations.³ According to a more recent assessment by historian of Chan John McRae, among texts of early Chan that indulge in “patent fabrications and questionable attributions,” the *Lidai fabao ji* “is undoubtedly the most egregious of all.”⁴ In this article I will argue that at least one of the *Lidai fabao ji*’s false

¹ Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), preface to his *Chunqiu zhengyi* 春秋正義 (Spring and Autumn annals commentary). Quoted in Liansheng Yang, “The Organization of Chinese Official Historiography,” in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 52.

² This article is based on a paper presented at the 1995 Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, in the panel “Topics in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Hagiography.” Regarding the title of the text, it is not clear why the Dunhuang manuscripts of the *Lidai fabao ji* use 曆 rather than the standard 歷. Chan scholar Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 said he once speculated that this was a clue that the text was written during the Dali 大曆 era (766–79), but then he changed his mind and thought it must simply be a Dunhuang variant usage. (From a conversation at the International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism, Kyoto, 1990.)

³ T. 52 (2113) 611b = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 太正新修大藏經, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Daizō shuppan kai, 1922–33), vol. 52 (no. 2113), p. 611b.

⁴ John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch’an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p. 11.

claims faithfully reflects hidden issues involved in Chan polemics of the late eighth century, even though this claim did not necessarily serve the best interests of the school that the text was designed to promote. In other words, I wish to show that the *Lidai fabao ji*'s fabrications should not be discarded lightly.

It is clear that the *Lidai fabao ji*'s divergent account of the Chan transmission of the Dharma was deployed as part of a strategy to claim authority. The question remains, however—what kind of authority? Whose standards of legitimacy were recognized by the author or authors of the text? I believe that this question does not have a single answer and that the *Lidai fabao ji* reveals at least two conflicting forces at work. On the one hand, we can see the growing influence of the newly formulated Chan genealogical discourse; on the other hand, we also discern doctrinal quandaries and succession anxieties unique to the Bao Tang 保唐, the Chan school responsible for the text.⁵

It is beyond the scope of this article to explicate fully either eighth century Chan genealogical issues or the concerns of the Bao Tang “school.” However, to put it in a nutshell, the Bao Tang attempted to establish legitimacy by claiming that the founder of their school, the Chan master Wuzhu 無住 (714–74), was in possession of the key Chan talisman, the robe that the fifth patriarch Hongren 弘忍 (602–75) was said to have conferred upon the sixth patriarch Huineng 慧能 (638–713). The *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) stated that the robe had been given by the Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (reigned 684–705) to a master in the lineage claimed by the Bao Tang school. In contrast, the accepted belief was that the robe was enshrined at Huineng's temple in Shaozhou 韶州, far to the south.⁶ At the same time, in the *Lidai fabao ji* the most prominent of Wuzhu's teachings in anti-institutional antinomianism, and the most prominent of his ordained disciples is a woman. The text ends with no indication of the fate of the robe or the succession at Wuzhu's death.

These matters are dealt with more fully in my dissertation; here, by explicating one of the spurious claims in the *Lidai fabao ji*, I hope to elucidate underlying contradictions in “Southern School” ideology in general

⁵ Use of the term “school” for the loosely defined affiliations of the eighth century is vexed; the designations are usually retrospective and often motivated by later sectarian considerations. Nevertheless, this convention is difficult to avoid entirely.

⁶ The earliest extant text claiming that Huineng received the robe is the *Putidamou nanzong ding shifei lun* 菩提達摩南宗定是非論 (Treatise determining the true and false about the Southern School of Bodhidharma), a record of Shenhui's 神會 (684–758) 732 debate, written by Dugu Pei 獨子佩沛. In this text, Shenhui states that it was not necessary to transmit the robe after Huineng and that the robe was in Shaozhou. See Hu Shi 胡適, *Shenhui heshang yizhi* 神會和尚遺集 (Surviving works of Master Shenhui) (Taipei: Hu Shi jinian guan, 1930; reprint, 1970), pp. 280–81.

and the *Lidai fabao ji* in particular.⁷ These contradictions or fissures reveal the depth of resonance between Chan sectarian politics and Tang imperial theurgy. In both of the examples examined here, the *Lidai fabao ji* appropriation of Chan genealogical symbolism and Empress Wu Zetian's manipulation of Buddhist symbolism, I will analyze the ways in which the given discourse of authority is used to bend that discourse in a direction antithetical to its constitutive principles.

THE *Lidai fabao ji* IN CONTEXT

The *Lidai fabao ji* (ca. 780) was composed somewhere near Chengdu by an anonymous disciple or disciples of the above-mentioned Bao Tang founder, Wuzhu. Wuzhu claimed Dharma descent from the charismatic Korean Chan master Wuxiang 無相 (684–762), who was well known as the founder of the Jingzhong 淨眾 “school,” but the Bao Tang cannot be traced as an independent line beyond the generation of Wuzhu's immediate disciples. The *Lidai fabao ji* was preserved in three nearly complete manuscripts and five smaller fragments among the Stein, Pelliot, and Ishii collections of Dunhuang materials.⁸ Except in one instance there is no way to know the circumstances in which the text survived until the eleventh century, when the cave-temple cache was sealed.⁹ The manuscripts and fragments are not substantially different, which suggests that they may be relatively faithful to the original. The *Lidai fabao ji* thus provides a rare opportunity to shed light on the ways in which historical contingencies shape sectarian identity. The fact that the Bao Tang school was so short-lived and that its remains were hermetically sealed makes it, for all its fabrications, a more accurate reflection of the Buddhist world of the eighth and ninth centuries, the so-called golden age of Chan, than the au-

⁷ For a fuller discussion of these issues, see my dissertation, “Issues in Chinese Buddhist Transmission as Seen through the *Lidai fabao ji* 曆代法寶記 (Record of the Dharma-Jewel Through the Ages)” (Stanford University, 1997), or my forthcoming book, *Transmission and Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*.

⁸ Among the manuscripts of the *Lidai fabao ji*, P. 2125, P. 3717 (P. = Dunhuang manuscripts in the Pelliot collection in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale) and S. 516 (S. = Dunhuang manuscripts in the Stein collection in London, British Library) are nearly complete; P. 3727, S. 5916, S. 1611, S. 1776, and the text from the Ishii collection are fragments. For my translations I used (1) the *Taishō* edition, T. 51 (2075) 179a–196b, based on S. 516 with notes on the variations found in P. 2125, and (2) Yanagida Seizan's edition of the text based on P. 2125, with his annotated Japanese translation: Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki no zenshi II: Rekidai hōbōki 初期の禪史—歴代法寶記* (Early Chan history II: *Lidai fabao ji*) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1976). I was recently alerted to the existence of a previously unknown copy of the *Lidai fabao ji* that has turned up in the collection of the Tianjin art museum, but I have not yet had a chance to examine this manuscript.

⁹ The exception is the listing of the *Lidao fabao ji* in a catalog of the library of the Sanjie 三界 monastery at Dunhuang, the *Jian yiqie ruzangjing mulu* 見一切入藏經目錄, written by the monk Daozhen 道真 in 934. The catalog is now in the Beijing Library collection; see published edition by Oda Yoshihisa 小田義久, “Tonkō Sankaiji no ‘Ken issai nyūzōkyō mokuroku’ 敦煌三界寺の「見一切入藏經目錄」,” *Ryūkoku Daigaku ronshū* 龍谷大学論集, no. 434–35 (1989): 555–76; the entry of the title “*Lidai fabao ji*” occurs on p. 560.

thoritative eleventh- and twelfth-century accounts. Indeed, the canonical accounts may be no more truthful than the *Lidai fabao ji*, merely more successful.

The *Lidai fabao ji* is one of a scant handful of Chan texts from roughly the same period, each possessing unique features that were absorbed and/or superseded by the official Chan genealogy, the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Record of the transmission of the lamp compiled in the Jingde era) compiled in 1004.¹⁰ The lore of the Chan patriarchy was re-worked in numerous iterations over the course of several centuries, such that most traces of the particular historical valuations and tensions from which it had originally emerged were erased or submerged. The historicity of the biographies and lineages of renowned Chan masters has been undermined not only by Dunhuang finds but also by scholarly recognition that these biographical genealogies are by and large products of a period when Chan enjoyed the prestige of an established religious and cultural institution and the privilege of canonizing a romanticized view of its origins.¹¹ Examination of the Dunhuang cache and subsequent re-examination of earlier materials have given scholars a glimpse of lost sketches and a few of the cruder attempts, such as the *Lidai fabao ji*, that nevertheless contributed to the polished and confident style of Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279) Chan literature.

The *Lidai fabao ji* authors' romanticized view of the origins of their school retains many traces of the historical tensions from which it emerged, traces that perhaps contributed to its relegation to "the deposit of sacred waste" at Dunhuang and certainly contribute to its interest for scholars today.¹² Provisionally assigned a role as representative of Chan's golden

¹⁰ T. 51 (2076). This and other Song dynasty Chan texts drew from the following eighth- and ninth-century Chan sectarian histories: (1) the *Baolin zhuan* 寶林傳 (Transmission of the Baolin [temple] of 801, Yanagida Seizan, ed., *Sōzō ichin Hōrinden, Dentō gyokuei shū* 宋藏遺珍寶林傳、傳燈玉英集 (Tokyo: Chūbun shuppansha, 1975); (2) the above-mentioned *Beishan lu*; (3) the *Caoqi dashi bie zhuan* 曹溪大師別傳 (Separate biography of the great master at Caoqi) of 781, Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧, ed., *Dai Nippon zokuzōkyō* 大日本統藏經 (hereafter ZZ.) (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905–12), 146:483–88; and (4) early versions of the *Liu zu tan jing* 六祖壇經 (*Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*), ca. late eighth century. See Philip Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

¹¹ For Yanagida Seizan's extensive work on this and related topics, I refer the reader to Bernard Faure's "Bibliographie succincte de Yanagida Seizan," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1994): 45–50. For relevant works in Western languages, see Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), *Le bouddhisme Ch'an en mal d'histoire: Genèse d'une tradition religieuse dans le Chine des T'ang* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1989), and *La volonté d'orthodoxie dans le bouddhisme chinois* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1988), now translated and updated as *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997); McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*; T. Griffith Foulk, "The Ch'an School and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987).

¹² "Deposit of sacred waste" is a phrase of Aurel Stein's, quoted in Faure, *La volonté d'orthodoxie dans le bouddhisme chinois*, p. 16, n. 19.

age that never was, the *Lidai fabao ji* displays a distinctly hybrid character. Themes and texts associated with disparate modes of Buddhist discourse are juxtaposed within the *Lidai fabao ji*, and I suggest that this in part reflects a broader social and religious transition.

This transition was signaled most dramatically by the 755 rebellion of the general An Lushan 安祿山 against the Tang ruling clans but is discernible even before this critical turning point. Warring agendas in the *Lidai fabao ji* can be seen as a reflection in microcosm of a more extensive crisis of faith in the religious and secular structures of authority inherited from the early Tang. Rhetoric regarding patriarchal robes thus becomes a window on the complex relationship between Tang politics and Chan sectarian rivalries in the latter half of the eighth century.

During the century preceding the An Lushan rebellion, the Buddhist monastic establishments, clustered in and around the two Tang capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang, had grown into a collective force to be reckoned with. The power of the Buddhist church was maintained through relations of sometimes strained interdependence with the imperial court in a milieu of rivalry with court Daoism, and successive emperors struggled to co-opt and/or control its increasingly pervasive influence. This kind of institutional, esoteric-scholastic Buddhism reached the height of its power under the Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (reigned 684–705), who created a network of monasteries to promulgate Buddhist teachings in support of her reign and continually invited exemplary monks to court in order to pay her respects to them. After Empress Wu, the next ruler to have a significant impact on institutional Buddhism was Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (reigned 712–56), whose reign effectively ended with the An Lushan rebellion. Even though the Tang forces subsequently rallied, the war effort resulted in the strengthening of the peripheries at the expense of the center.¹³

Politically as well as culturally, the eighth century saw a great deal of oscillation between the time-honored and the experimental. In particular, the nonhereditary bureaucratic class fostered by the exam system began to make inroads into the labyrinth of privilege previously negotiated by the imperial household, Buddhist and/or Daoist monastic institutions, and aristocratic factions. More significant, with the disintegration of periphery-center tribute relations, decrease in central control of the military, and greater freedom for interprovince commerce, the middle-level officials and military governors became increasingly independent administrators in the provinces. Before the end of the dynasty in 907 there were several attempts to reinforce imperial authority, but some provincial centers such as Chengdu, the birthplace of the *Lidai fabao ji*, became nearly autonomous. There was also a trend toward secularization of social values with-

¹³ For an excellent overview of institutional Buddhism in the Tang, see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

in the newly powerful and increasingly competitive bureaucratic class. These factors all contributed to create a milieu in which received genres and cultural paradigms were seen as inadequate or decadent.¹⁴

The shifting of the balance of power from center to peripheries also weakened the influence of the Buddhist monastic complexes of the capitals that were heavily implicated in Tang imperial politics. Decrease in resources for the older institutions of the central region, combined with new opportunities for patronage in the provinces, clearly had much to do with the development of the so-called Southern School of Chan to which the *Lidao fabao ji* claimed allegiance. Discussion of “sudden awakening” (*dunwu* 頓悟) in Chinese Buddhist texts predates the appropriation of this soteriology as the hallmark “Southern School” doctrine. However, the polemical context that gave birth to the “Southern School” has been linked to the Chan master Shenhui’s 神會 (684–758) attacks, beginning in 730, against the successors of the Chan master Shenxiu 神秀 (died 706), who had been highly revered by Empress Wu and the entire Chang’an/Luoyang establishment.¹⁵

Shenhui had a decisive role in creating the symbolism and the narratives that were to change what it meant to be a Chan master (Chanshi 禪師) in the eighth century. Claiming to represent the teachings of Hui-neng, Shenhui advocated direct realization of the truth of one’s own Buddha-Nature and (falsely) contended that the teachings of Shenxiu’s followers were “gradualist” and nurtured the delusion that awakening was a condition to be achieved, rather than one’s inherent reality. Implicated in Shenhui’s claims was the centuries-old struggle over Buddhist elitism, an elitism that engendered and was engendered by imperial and popular enchantment with the mystique of the adept who gained numinous power through asceticism, ritual worship, and scriptural recitation.

Although Shenhui himself did not go so far as to disavow any form of Buddhist activity whatsoever, he and subsequent Chan masters became increasingly attentive to the contradiction involved in teaching and practicing (which are inherently gradualistic) according to the orthodoxy of

¹⁴ See Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, *Sui and T’ang China*, 589–906 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pt. 1; Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the Tang* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973); Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the T’ang Search for Unity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ See Hu Shi 胡適, “The Development of Zen Buddhism in China,” *Chinese and Political Science Review* 15, no. 4 (1932): 475–505; Jacques Gernet, *Entretiens du maître dhyāna Chen-houei du Ho-tsü (668–760)* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1949; reprint, 1977); John McRae, “Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch’an Buddhism,” in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987) pp. 232–37. The dates for Shenhui are based on the recently discovered Longmen stele of 765. See Takeuchi Kōdō 竹内弘道, “Shinshutsu no Katakū Jinne tōmei ni tsuite 新出の荷沢神会 塔銘について” (On the recently found stele inscription of Heze Shenhui), *Shūgaku kenkyū* 宗学研究 27 (1985): 313–25.

the “sudden.” This sudden-gradual doctrinal divide is key for understanding the hybrid nature of the *Lidai fabao ji*. Although it has features usually associated with the so-called gradual or Northern School trends that flourished through court patronage in the eighth century, it is most heavily influenced by Shenhui’s “Southern School” writings. Conspicuously, it is the only text to take Shenhui’s doctrine to its logical extreme by advocating radically antinomian “formless” practice.¹⁶ It was also the only text in which Bodhidharma’s robe continued to play a role beyond the sixth generation of patriarchs.

THE ROBE IN QUESTION

The *Lidai fabao ji* fabrication most frequently singled out for criticism is the story that in 692 Bodhidharma’s robe, which verified the monk Huineng’s status as sixth Chan patriarch, was sent by Huineng to court at Luoyang on the request of the Empress Wu Zetian. The empress was said to have later bestowed it on the monk Zhishen 智詵 (609–702), who was thus claimed to be the seventh patriarch in the lineage of the Bao Tang school. One of the aims of the present study is to reinvest this key transmission claim with some of the dignity of its presumption. Let us turn first to the passage in the *Lidao fabao ji* that puts forth this claim.

The monk Zhishen has been invited to Empress Wu’s court, where he encounters the challenge of an Indian Trepitaka (Tripitaka master) with magical powers. The Trepitaka reads Zhishen’s mind and, detecting that the Chan master is pining for home, taunts him about his attachment. The Trepitaka boasts that he can identify anything that Zhishen can bring to mind, and Zhishen amiably agrees. Zhishen then defeats the Indian master in an exchange reminiscent of the classic meeting between the shaman and Huzi that is related in the *Zhuangzi*.¹⁷ His success brings him to the attention of the empress with whom he engages in a kind of encounter dialogue. The following passage begins in the middle of the mind-reading contest:

[Zhishen] imagined himself dressed in layman’s garb looking toward the section office of the western market. That Trepitaka said, “How can [you], a worthy (*bhadanta*) monk, wear layman’s clothing and gaze into the midst of the market?” Shen [i.e., Zhishen] said, “Very good, try it again.” [Another similar scenario follows.] Shen said, “This time will be really good, try once more.” Then, right where he was, by relying on the Dharma he produced no thoughts at all. That Trepitaka searched throughout the Three Worlds, but in vain. The Trepitaka brahmin was

¹⁶ See Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, pp. 63–65.

¹⁷ Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 92–94.

filled with reverence and respect, and he bowed his head down at Shen's feet, telling the Venerable, "I did not know that in the country of Tang there was Mahāyāna Buddha-Dharma. . . ."

[Empress Wu] Zetian saw that the Trepitaka had taken refuge in Chan Master Shen. Zetian submitted a question to all the *bhadanta*: "Do the Venerables have any desires?" Shenxiu 神秀, Xuanyue 玄約, Laoan 老安 and Xuanze 玄曠 all said, "We have no desires." Zetian asked Chan Master Shen, "Does the Venerable have any desires?" Chan Master Shen, fearing that he would not be allowed to return home, complied with the will of Zetian and replied, "I have desires." Zetian further asked, "How can you have desires?" Shen replied, "That which is born has desire. That which is not born has no desire." At these words, Zetian was awakened.¹⁸

When Zhishen insists on leaving, the empress gives him Bodhidharma/Huineng's robe and other gifts, including an embroidered image of Maityreya. It is significant that bestowal of the robe takes place in the context of an awakening experience signaling Dharma transmission, or mutual understanding between master and pupil, which was a frequent motif in Chan hagiographies. Here, however, the transmission is characterized by several kinds of inversion. First, the transmission of the sudden teaching, the identity between Buddha-Nature and ordinary function that is beyond words, finds its voice as the antinomian affirmation of desire. Second, it is the bestower who is awakened by the recipient. Third, a worldly ruler stands in for the Dharma ruler, Huineng, who is still alive at the time and is subsequently informed by the empress of the fate of his robe. Finally, the bestower is a woman and an empress, a *lusus naturae*—who, perhaps not incidentally, was known for her sexual appetites and also for having had her lover ordained the better to bestow upon him legitimacy and favors.

Through these interesting devices—the affirmation of desire and a woman's gifts—the *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) got the robe into their own patriarchal narrative and eventually into the hands of their master, Wuzhu. In order to understand why they would risk such an incredible story, we must understand that this kind of coup de théâtre was not unprecedented and had worked for another Chan dramaturge, namely Shenhui. We may also call the robe "Shenhui's robe," for although Southern School claims hinge on Huineng's possession of Bodhidharma's robe, modern Chan scholars have shown that these claims refer back to the symbolic framework created by Shenhui.¹⁹ Integral to this framework is Shenhui's unique claim regarding the Chan patriarchy. Shenhui fused diverse historical and

¹⁸ T. 51 (2075) 184a25–b9.

¹⁹ I am particularly indebted to the invaluable article by the late Anna Seidel, titled "Den'e" (*Chuanyi* 傳衣, Transmission of the robe), to be included in the forthcoming *Hōbōgirin, Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Maison franco-japonaise); English translation to appear in a forthcoming selection of Seidel's works.

doctrinal material to support his notion of an exclusive patriarchal succession in which only one patriarch in each generation received mind-to-mind transmission of the true Dharma from the previous patriarch, linking back to Śākyamuni's transmission to Mahākāśyapa. According to Shenhui, the Indian master Bodhidharma was the first to bring this transmission to China, and he concomitantly transmitted his robe as verification of succession. Shenhui claimed that the Dharma and robe had been passed through six generations to Huineng, as follows: from Bodhidharma 菩提達摩 (died ca. 530), to Huike 慧可 (487–593), Sengcan 僧璨 (died ca. 606), Daoxin 道信 (580–651), Hongren 弘忍 (602–75), and finally Huineng 慧能 (638–713).²⁰ In fashioning his version of the lineage and biographies of these six ancestral patriarchs of the Chan school, Shenhui drew from two slightly different genealogies in the early eighth century “proto-Chan” *Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶記 (Chronicle of the transmission of the Dharma-Jewel) T. 85 (2838), and *Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記 (Record of the masters and disciples of the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra*) T. 85 (2837). The authors of these works had been influenced in turn by notions of patriarchal succession put forth in a late seventh-century epitaph for the monk Faru 法如 (638–89).²¹ Faru's epitaph is the earliest extant work to claim that the so-called East Mountain (Dongshan 東山) transmission from Hongren and Daoxin was linked, through Sengcan, to the “Lanka” masters Bodhidharma and Huike.²²

Shenhui disputed Shenxiu's pride of place in the *Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji* as one of the most prominent of Hongren's heirs by claiming that Hongren had, in fact, secretly transmitted the Dharma and robe solely to Shenhui's own master, Huineng. The historical circumstances that contributed to the eventual success of Shenhui's version have been discussed at length elsewhere, but as rapidly as Shenhui's genealogical and doctrinal claims became accepted, they were equally as rapidly modified and superseded.²³

The so-called *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* story of the Dharma and robe transmission from Hongren to Huineng was the version that even-

²⁰ The most complete extant version of Shenhui's exposition on the transmission is a variant of P. 3047, the above-mentioned *Putidamou nanzong ding shifei lun*; this variant includes biographies of the patriarchs. See Suzuki D[aisetsu] T[eitarō] 鈴木大拙貞太郎 and Kōda Rentarō 公田連太郎, eds., *Tonkō shutsudo Katakū Jinne zenji goroku* 敦煌出土哥沢神会禪師語錄 (Discourse record of Heze Shenhui found at Dunhuang) (Tokyo: Morie shoten, 1934), pp. 53–64.

²¹ *Tang zhongyue shamen Faru Chanshi xingzhuang* 唐中岳沙門法如禪師行狀 (Epitaph for the Tang [Dynasty] Śramaṇa of the Central Peak, Chan Master Faru), in *Jinshi xubian* 金石續編 6:2a–b; see Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki Zenshū shisho no kenkyū* 初期禪宗史書の研究 (Research on early Chan historiographical texts) (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1967), pp. 487–96.

²² In the biography of Bodhidharma, included in the mid-seventh century *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Continued biographies of eminent monks), he is portrayed as transmitting the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* to Huike: T. 50 (2060) 552b.

²³ See n. 15 above.

tually became official and is the one most familiar today.²⁴ A late version of the *Platform Sūtra* story was incorporated in the above-mentioned *Jingde chuan-deng lu*, thus becoming the first Chan history to receive imperial sanction. The earliest extant versions of the *Platform Sūtra* itself, however, are Dunhuang manuscripts dating from roughly the same time as the *Lidai fabao ji*.

I would like to quote corresponding passages from the *Platform Sūtra* and the *Lidai fabao ji*, passages that illustrate the relative similarity of their accounts of Huineng's inheritance of the robe and their complete divergence regarding transmission after Huineng. The first-person narrator of the *Platform Sūtra* is Huineng: "At midnight the Fifth Patriarch called me into the hall and expounded the *Diamond Sūtra* to me. Hearing it but once, I was immediately awakened, and that night I received the Dharma. None of the others knew anything about it. Then he transmitted to me the Dharma of Sudden Enlightenment and the robe, saying: 'I make you the Sixth Patriarch. The robe is the proof and is to be handed down from generation to generation. My Dharma must be transmitted from mind to mind. You must make people awaken to themselves. . . . If you stay here there are people who will harm you. You must leave at once.'"²⁵ The corresponding passage from the *Lidai fabao ji* is as follows: "In the night [Huineng] was secretly summoned to [the Master's] room, and when they had spoken together for three days and three nights, [Hongren] entrusted [Huineng] with the Dharma and robe, [saying] 'You are to be the Great Master of this world, and thus I command you to depart quickly.'"²⁶

In the *Platform Sūtra*, when Huineng is on the point of death and has been asked who will inherit the robe and the Dharma, he says: "The robe may not be handed down. In case you do not trust in me, I shall recite the verses of the preceding five patriarchs, composed when they transmitted the robe and the Dharma. If you depend on the meaning of the verse of the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, then there is no need to hand down the robe."²⁷ And in the *Lidai fabao ji*, "Do not ask. After this, hardships will arise in great profusion. How often have I faced death on account of this robe? At Master Xin's (i.e., Daoxin's) place it was stolen three times, at Master Ren's (i.e., Hongren's) place it was stolen three times, and now at my place it has been stolen six times. But at last no one will steal this robe of mine, for a woman has taken it away. So don't ask me any more."²⁸

²⁴ *Liuzu tan jing* 六祖壇經 (Platform Sūtra of the sixth patriarch) is an abbreviated title. For a precis of the complex textual history of this work, see Yanagida's "Zenseki kaidai 禪籍解題" (A bibliographical introduction to Zen works), in *Zenke goroku* 禪家語經, ser. no. 2, ed. Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 and Yanagida Seizan (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1974), p. 459.

²⁵ For all *Platform Sūtra* passages, I use Philip Yampolsky's translation of S. 5475. Yampolsky (n. 10 above), p. 133.

²⁶ T. 51 (2075) 182b13–16.

²⁷ Yampolsky, p. 176.

²⁸ T. 51 (2075) 182c4–8.

The woman is the Empress Wu, who is to give the robe to Zhishen, the great-grandfather in the Dharma of the Bao Tang founder Wuzhu. The genealogical implications are complicated by the fact that although Zhishen is actually a disciple of the fifth patriarch Hongren, he receives Huineng's robe from the empress and passes it on to his disciple Chuji 處寂 (669–736), who passes it to Wuxiang. Except for this interesting claim, the *Lidai fabao ji* passages having to do with the robe and the patriarchal succession in China are largely identical to Shenhui's. Shenhui is quoted much more frequently in it than in the *Platform Sūtra*, even though the *Platform Sūtra* was to become the standard version of "Southern School" Chan transmission.

To understand the significance of the addition of the line "a woman has taken it away," we must grapple with complex issues surrounding the legacy of the Empress Wu. Before discussing the empress directly, however, let us take a look at the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, an apocryphal text that was probably composed during her reign. In the guise of an Indian *sūtra*, this work points toward the signature subitism of eighth-century Chan, and it also reflects incipient criticism of the traditional trappings of Buddhist authority. Shenhui was clearly inspired by this text, and I suggest that his simplification and amplification of its message was partly due to the lingering effects of Empress Wu's reign.

SHENHUI'S ROBE AND THE *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*

Let us briefly review the opinions of the foremost Chan authority Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 regarding the relationship between Shenhui and the *Platform Sūtra*. Yanagida has offered different theories over the years, arguing first (in 1967) that although the *Platform Sūtra* has obvious affinities with Shenhui's writings, it is actually the product of a member or members of the Niutou 牛頭 school lineage who reworked Shenhui's symbolic and rhetorical framework and used it to promote a variant (and more sophisticated) doctrine and lineage.²⁹ He surmised next (in 1985) that it was written by a third-generation, legitimate successor to Huineng as a direct challenge to Shenhui's claim to Huineng's doctrine and lineage.³⁰ More recently Yanagida has stated that whatever the origins of the *Platform Sūtra*, there are no traces of Huineng's doctrine and lineage that can be separated from Shenhui's writings. Yanagida became intrigued instead by the apparent links between Shenhui's thought and the apocryphal *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*.³¹

²⁹ Yanagida, *Shoki Zenshū shisho no Kenkyū*, pp. 181–212; see the summary by John McRae in "Yanagida Seizan's Landmark Works on Chinese Ch'an," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1994): 68–71.

³⁰ Yanagida Seizan, "Goroku no rekishi 語録の歴史 (A History of the 'Recorded Sayings' Genre)," *Tōhō gakuho* 東方學報 57 (1985): 404–17; see the summary by McRae in "Yanagida Seizan's Landmark Works on Chinese Ch'an," pp. 94–96.

³¹ *Jin'gang sanmei jing* 金剛三昧經, T. 9 (273). For the following discussion I am indebted to Yanagida's lectures at the International Institute for Zen Buddhism in Kyoto, 1993. On the

There are several instances in Shenhui's writings in which passages and lines are taken from the *Vajrasamādhi* and yet not identified as quotations. In one of the most interesting of these, a section of the *Ding shifei lun* is composed of a pastiche of passages from the second and third fascicles of the *Vajrasamādhi*, but the section is identified instead as a quotation from a *Prajñāpāramitā* text, the *Sheng Tian Wang banruo [poluomi] jing* 勝天王般若[波羅蜜]經.³² The passages from the *Vajrasamādhi* are grafted onto an abbreviated section from the second fascicle of the *Sheng Tian Wang banruo jing*.³³ Furthermore, the *Vajrasamādhi* text has been changed slightly in places, apparently to render it more compatible with Shenhui's doctrine of sudden practice.³⁴ One wonders if perhaps the misleading attribution of the quotation in Shenhui's text points to the fact that the *Vajrasamādhi*, even though by then included in an official catalog of scriptures, was still regarded as somewhat dubious.

Robert Buswell has convincingly argued that the *Vajrasamādhi* was composed in Silla in the latter decades of the seventh century, during which time there were close cultural ties between the Korean peninsula and mainland China. The text weaves together *tathāgatagarbha* thought and teachings associated with the East Mountain school, all rendered so convincingly in authentic *sūtra* style that it was considered a translation of a lost Sanskrit original until this century.³⁵ Although the *Vajrasamādhi* was probably composed before or during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, it was still listed as "non-extant" in the Buddhist canon produced under her auspices in 695, and yet it was apparently widely known and officially accepted in China by the time of its inclusion in the Kaiyuan canon of 730.³⁶

There are elements in the text that would perhaps have been more fully appreciated after Wu Zetian's era. Consider the following passage

origins of the *Vajrasamādhi* and its relation to early Chan, see Robert Buswell, *The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra, A Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Walter Liebenthal, "Notes on the 'Vajrasamādhi,'" *T'oung Pao* 45, no. 4–5 (1956): 347–86.

³² On the *Ding shifei lun*, see notes 6 and 20 above. Compare the *Vajrasamādhi* passages, *T. 9* (273) 366c21–23; 367a4–6; 367c20–24; 368a18–21, to the *Ding shifei lun*, Suzuki and Kōda, eds., p. 52.

³³ Compare the *Sheng Tian Wang banruo [poluomi] jing*, *T. 8* (231) 693c24–694a14, to Suzuki and Kōda, eds., pp. 51–52.

³⁴ For example, consider the *Vajrasamādhi* line, *T. 9* (273) 366c23: *De wufa jing, shi wei dasheng* 得五法淨・是謂大乘. "Attaining purification of the five dharmas, this is called the Mahāyāna." In the *Ding shifei lun*, "five dharmas" is changed to "the Dharma-Eye" *fayan* 法眼; Suzuki and Kōda, eds., p. 52, line 9. The difference is not great, but while purification of the five dharmas (another term for the five aggregates, the physical and mental elements constituting the phenomenal world) connotes gradual practice, purification of the Dharma-Eye (inherent wisdom) connotes the integral, undifferentiated qualities associated with sudden practice.

³⁵ Buswell, pp. 171–81.

³⁶ This "reappearance" is due to the common seventh- and eighth-century practice of choosing the title for a work composed in China from among works listed in the catalogs as no longer extant. See *ibid.*, pp. 33–40.

concerning “the robe of the *tathāgatas*,” or “thus-come-ones,” the realized Buddha or buddhas:

Although he does not go forth into homelessness (*pravrajita*) he is no longer part of the household. For this reason, while he does not wear the dharma-robles and neither observes all the Prātimokṣa precepts [monk’s disciplinary rules] nor participates in the Poṣada [fortnightly religious observance], he does not engage in personal licentiousness in his own mind and obtains the fruition of sainthood. . . . Taeryōk Bodhisattva remarked, “This is inconceivable! Even though such a person has not gone forth into homelessness, he cannot but have gone forth. Why is this? He has entered the domicile of nirvāṇa, where he dons the robe of the *tathāgatas* and sits on the bodhi-seat (*bodhimaṇḍa*). Such a person should be worshipped respectfully even by śramaṇas.”³⁷

The figure who wears the “robe of the *tathāgatas*” is not “an exception who proves the rule,” such as the super layman Vimalakīrti, yet neither is he an exemplary monk who observes the precepts. The robe worn by this figure of ambiguous status is likewise inconceivable—what, after all, does a Buddha body wear? I believe that the mystique of legitimacy enveloping Shenhui/Huineng/Bodhidharma’s robe is patterned after this inconceivable “robe of the *tathāgatas*.” Furthermore, the kind of figure Shenhui promoted in the sixth patriarch Huineng embodies some of the same ambiguous qualities of the “one who has not gone forth and cannot but have gone forth”—to whom monks in ordinary Dharma robes should pay homage.

In both Shenhui’s writings and the *Lidai fabao ji*, Huineng does not become ordained until after he has received transmission from Hongren and then does so only when importuned by an eminent monk who wishes to become his disciple. This loosening of the link between ordination and status as a realized person is exaggerated even further in the *Lidai fabao ji*. The protagonist Wuzhu disdains activities associated with the ordinary *śramaṇa*, and the Chan master Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) faulted the Bao Tang school precisely for tonsuring and conferring robes on people without requiring of them any evidence of Buddhist practice.³⁸ The *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) and Zongmi were perhaps the most explicit of the disputants over the antinomian implications of Shenhui’s writings, but they articulated a tension that was far more comprehensive.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁸ Zongmi’s critique occurs in his summary and evaluation of the different Chan schools of his day. He first describes Bao Tang ordination and practices, or lack thereof, and characterizes the Bao Tang as a school that preaches “extinguishing consciousness” (*mieshi* 滅識). *Yuanjue jing dashu chao* 圓覺經大疏鈔 (Subcommentary to the scripture of perfect enlightenment), ZZ. 14:278d. See Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, *Zengen shosenshū tojo* 禪源諸詮集都序 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1971), pp. 306–7. The Bao Tang school is then included in Zongmi’s more extensive criticism of the nihilistic and antinomian tendencies of the Hongzhou and Niutou schools. ZZ. 14:279a–c; Kamata, pp. 312–15.

I suggest that the appeal of the “one who has not gone forth and cannot but have gone forth” reflects a certain disenchantment with the garb of the ordinary monk, a disenchantment that followed the restoration of the Tang after the reign of Empress Wu, was given direction by the Emperor Xuanzong, and was accelerated by the An Lushan rebellion. In order to understand the devaluation of the status of the ordinary monk in the late eighth century, I believe we must consider it as part of the critical response to Wu Zetian’s attempted fashioning of a new order of Buddhist elites. Therefore, let us now consider the Buddhist fashions for which the empress was most infamous.

THE MANY ROBES OF THE EMPRESS WU ZETIAN

In 690, Empress Wu set a precedent by bestowing purple *kāśāya* robes upon a group of monks, including her lover Huaiyi 懷義, as a mark of special favor. The earliest source for the event is the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Tang history): “Huaiyi, Faming and others made the *Dayun jing*, in which was displayed a series of signs [concerning the Heavenly] Mandate and in which it was said that Zetian was Maitreya who had descended to be born and act as head of the Jambudvīpa. . . . Huaiyi, Faming and others, nine people, were all enfeoffed dukes of a subprefecture and were given different objects: all were given the purple *kāśāya* and a ‘silver bag for the tortoise.’”³⁹

This investiture enfolds Chinese patents of nobility within and around a gesture born of Indian Buddhist mythology. The princely robe, imperial talisman, and fief were indigenous Chinese symbols and substance of enfranchisement, granting permission to enter into the ritual arena constituted by the interplay of ancestral merit, heavenly sanction, and material privilege. The conferral of a robe signified imperial favor but was not one of the talismans of imperial legitimacy. However, in Indian Buddhist Maitreya mythology, transfer of the *kāśāya* robe evokes the inhumanly vast cycles of succession from Buddha to Buddha. The giving of meritorious gifts by the ruler to the community of monks also recalls the Cakravartin “wheel-turning king” mythology of ideal confluence between world monarch and world salvation.

Wu Zetian’s gesture thus reflects the intricate interplay of signs characteristic of her reign. Her efforts on the one hand were directed toward fashioning a dynastic identity in the time-honored manner, through the relationship of names (such as the Zhou 周) and symbols (such as the tortoise) intended to evoke harmonious reverberations in the sanctioned

³⁹ *Jiu Tang shu*, juan 183, Antonino Forte, trans., in *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century: Inquiry into the Nature, Authors, and Function of the Tunhuang Document S. 6502 Followed by an Annotated Translation* (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1976), pp. 4–5.

terms of Han-derived cosmology. On the other hand, she and her trusted advisors among the Buddhist clergy strove to build a new kind of empire, not through expansion of borders but rather by investing the entire realm in a rich (and expensive) overlay of institutional Buddhism. Other Chinese rulers before her, notably Emperor Wu 武 (reigned 502–49) of the Liang 梁 and Emperor Wen 文 (reigned 581–604) of the Sui 隋, had been taken with variations on the theme of the ruler as bodhisattva ruling for the benefit of sentient beings. Wu Zetian's state ideology was replete with complex Cakravartin and bodhisattva symbolism, but, as evidenced in the passage from the *Jiu Tang shu* quoted above, she is remembered in official history as the one who dared to take upon herself the mantle of Maitreya, the future Buddha.

In *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century*, the eminent sinologist Antonino Forte presents a more nuanced picture. He shows that the subtle manipulation of Maitreya symbolism stemmed from Wu Zetian's cadre of monk advisors, who can be credited at least provisionally for their sincere belief in the advent of a utopian Buddhist realm inaugurated by their empress. The commentary to the *Dayun jing* 大雲經 (*Mahāmegha-sūtra*) that they produced does claim that Wu Zetian is Maitreya—softened by a note that *maitreya* merely means one who is compassionate or benevolent.⁴⁰ Forte puts forth the interesting argument that the monks responsible for this commentary were playing on the popular appeal of Maitreya but were also wary of the subversive aspects of millenarian Maitreyism. In other words, they were attempting to win popular support and yet avoid becoming overly involved with the kind of messianic Maitreyism advocated in the banned apocrypha of the Sui, which might raise expectations too high and trigger a full-scale uprising.⁴¹ In concrete political terms, they were trying to shift the balance of power from the aristocracy to the military and civil bureaucracy.⁴² This is seen, for example, in the commentators' quotation from the so-called *Guang Wu ming* 廣武銘 (Inscription magnifying [Empress] Wu): “All the people will be happy: it will be learned that civilians and soldiers will develop.” [Commentary:] Here it is made clear that the ‘hundred offices’ of the civil and military administration will be extended

⁴⁰ See Forte, p. 156. The commentary is the *Dayun jing Shenhuang shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏 (Commentary on the meaning of the prophecy about [her majesty] Shenhuang in the Great Cloud Scripture), S. 6502; translated in Forte, pp. 183–238.

⁴¹ Jan Nattier points out that notions of Maitreya as a world ruler stem from the Chinese apocrypha (influenced no doubt by Chinese political praxis), whereas in Indian Buddhist canonical sources there is no blending of spiritual and political rule, the latter remaining strictly subordinate. This is symbolized by the disappearance of the seven jewel talismans of the Cakravartin's rule when Maitreya is enlightened. See Jan Nattier, “The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis,” in *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, ed. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 34.

⁴² Forte, pp. 153–59, 199–200.

from now on.”⁴³ These efforts of the empress’s advisors can be said to have had mixed results, for in spite of the dynastic reversion back to the Tang neither the uprising nor the shift in balance were avoided.

Wu Zetian’s legacy is a complex subject, but it is the lasting association between the empress and messianic Maitreyism, spoken of with distaste in official sources, that is of concern here. Later Buddhists, including the influential Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), took pains to disparage the activities of the monks who supported the empress.⁴⁴ However, there must have been others for whom, in retrospect, her reign seemed as it was advertised—the advent of a Buddhist utopia wherein monks were enfranchised as the aristocracy.

The *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) seem to have been susceptible to this nostalgia insofar as their lineage claim hinges on Wu Zetian’s power to bestow Huineng’s robe, and by implication the patriarchy, on Zhishen. At the same time, the author(s) must have been well aware that their Shenhui-derived doctrine and practice were based on the repudiation of monks whom Wu Zetian had sponsored. The *Lidai fabao ji* account of Zhishen’s sojourn at court and his defeat of the Trepitaka is designed to showcase the empress’s acknowledgment of the superiority of the doctrine of no-thought over the old-fashioned magic of her former favorites. Yet we also see evidence of ambivalence toward the ruler as mediator of Buddhist legitimacy, an ambivalence that in the *Lidai fabao ji* is neither erased nor entirely resolved.

Note that in addition to Huineng’s robe the empress gives Zhishen other gifts, including an embroidered image of Maitreya. I believe this additional gift is not included merely to underline Wu Zetian’s generosity. To further entangle the threads of conferral, let us examine Wu Zetian’s role as intermediary in light of the transfer of robes involved in Maitreya mythology.

There are many versions of the legend that the Buddha gave his robe to his chief disciple Mahākāśyapa, or exchanged robes with him, in order for Mahākāśyapa to convey the robe to Maitreya when he becomes the next Buddha.⁴⁵ The famous Tang pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–64) relates a version of the Buddha-Mahākāśyapa conferral in his *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (Tang Dynasty account of the western regions), a version that has been shown to be quite different from both Indian and Chinese

⁴³ For a discussion of this prophetic stone inscription “discovered” in 688, see *ibid.*, p. 191, n. 50. The quotation is from Forte’s translation of the Commentary, pp. 199–200.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁵ For discussions of the Indian sources, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, “Stages in the Bodhisattva Career of the Tathāgata Maitreya,” in Sponberg and Hardacre, eds., pp. 74–76; Miyaji Akira 宮治昭, “Kijiru daiichi yōbu no vōruto tenjō kutsu hekiga キジル第一様武のヴォールト天井壁画 (下)” (Murals on vaulted ceilings in the type-one style Kizil Caves [II]) *Bukkyo Geijutsu 仏教芸術 (Ars Buddhica)* 183 (1989): pp. 45–48; Jonathan Silk, “The Origins and Early History of the Mahāratnakūṭa Tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a Study of the Ratnarāśisūtra and Related Materials” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994), pp. 54–68.

canonical sources.⁴⁶ The legend of the Buddha's robe as told by Xuanzang is a possible source for a pattern favored in the *Lidai fabao ji*, whereby an intermediary conveys the robe and authority between two links in a chain that are not in direct contact. Here we must focus neither on the robe nor the bearer-wearers but on the legerdemain, the pattern of transmission. It is repeated twice in the *Lidai fabao ji*: the transmission of the robe from Huineng to Zhishen via Empress Wu prefigures the transmission of the robe and Dharma from Wuxiang to Wuzhu via a servant of Wuxiang's.

In Xuanzang's version the Buddha, about to enter *nirvāṇa*, entrusts his gold-embroidered *kāśāya* to his disciple Mahākāśyapa and at the same time publicly invests him as leader of the community and successor to the transmission of the true Dharma. The Buddha then predicts that twenty years after the first assembly, when Mahākāśyapa will in turn be about to enter *nirvāṇa*, he will enter Mount Kukkuṭapāda and will stand holding Śākyamuni's robe in his arms. The mountain will enclose him and he will thus await Maitreya. When the future Buddha comes, the mountain will open of itself and Mahākāśyapa will transmit the robe to Maitreya in view of the assembled crowd, and thereafter he will ascend into the air and self-combust, entering *nirvāṇa*.⁴⁷

The distinctive element in Xuanzang's version is that the robe that the Buddha entrusts to Mahākāśyapa is a gold-embroidered *kāśāya*, the gift of the Buddha's aunt Mahāprajāpatī, the first Buddhist nun and also the woman who raised him after his mother died. The Buddha's royal aunt and fostermother is an ambiguous figure, for her ordination is most famously associated with the Buddha's prediction that women's admission to the order will cause the Dharma to last only five hundred instead of one thousand years.⁴⁸ Xuanzang's identification of the entrusted robe conflicts with a separate set of Indian *sūtra* stories concerning Mahāprajāpatī's gift. Jonathan Silk, in his dissertation on the Mahāratnakūṭa tradition, says of these stories, "I know of no version in which Śākyamuni himself actually accepts the proffered robes."⁴⁹ Both Shenhui and the *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) refer to the robe entrusted to Mahākāśyapa as "gold-embroidered," which is the usual Chinese description of the Mahāprajāpatī's gift but not of Śākyamuni's transmission to Mahākāśyapa. Given the fact that Mahāprajāpatī's admission to the Saṅgha is strongly linked to the theme of the decline of the Dharma, it is somewhat ironic that the *Lidai fabao ji* author(s), following Shenhui's lead, cite conferral of the gold-embroidered

⁴⁶ Silk, p. 61.

⁴⁷ *Da Tanag xiyu ji*, T. 51 (2087) 919b24–c24.

⁴⁸ For discussion of this issue, see Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in the Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 28–37.

⁴⁹ Silk, p. 62. For another discussion of the versions of Mahāprajāpatī's gift, see Jaini.

robe as the precedent for the power of the transmission of Bodhidharma's robe to guard against decline of the Dharma.⁵⁰

The recurring motif in the stories of Mahāprajāpatī's gift is the Buddha's refusal, but Silk notes related variants in which, on being refused, "Mahāprajāpatī wanders into the assembly looking for a monk to accept the robes, and all refuse—except Maitreya." Silk comments: "This version, of course, which omits Mahākāśyapa completely, provides a direct link between Śākyamuni and Maitreya."⁵¹ For our purposes, the main interest of the story lies in the fact that the link is not direct, that the robe is conveyed to Maitreya through the mediation of Mahāprajāpatī.

Although the *Lidai fabao ji* account of the empress conveying Bodhidharma's robe between patriarchs makes her a kind of interregnum regent homologous to Mahākāśyapa, her bestowal of princely robes recalls, whether welcome or not, the premature ending of Śākyamuni's Dharma "dynasty" associated with Mahāprajāpatī. Although this was not the sort of symbolism the empress would have appreciated, in the complex web of associations involved in the above-mentioned *Dayun jing* ideology, Mahāprajāpatī appears, perhaps an inadvertent shadow, in the company of Wu Zetian's opposites and doubles. Mahāprajāpatī is the "matriarch" of the order of nuns and as such takes her place in a trinity heading the great assembly described at the opening of the *Dayun jing*.⁵² She is beside Mahākāśyapa, who represents the order of monks and the "Great Cloud Matrix" Bodhisattva (Dayun mizang 大雲密藏) who represents the bodhisattvas. In the *Dayun jing* this bodhisattva is the Buddha's interlocutor, and he also serves as a foil for the Devī who-would-be-queen identified as the empress in the *Dayun jing* commentary.

The *Dayun jing* prophecy that the Devī Jingguang 淨光 would become a female Buddhist ruler was one of the central supports of Wu Zetian's ideology. In the following passage from the *Dayun jing* included in the commentary, the Buddha praises Devī Jingguang—which causes her to feel "ashamed in her heart"—and then he foretells her future conditions: "Excellent! Excellent! Shame is the good Dharma robe of the many beings. . . . On my appearing in the world you have once more listened to the profound and good [Dharma]. When you abandon this Devī-form you shall, with the body of a woman, rule over the territory of a country and obtain one quarter of the places governed by a Cakravartin king."⁵³

⁵⁰ Ding shifei lun, Suzuki and Kōda, eds. (n. 20 above), p. 63; *Lidai fabao ji*, T. 51 (2075) 183b26–c1.

⁵¹ Silk, p. 61.

⁵² Forte (n. 39 above), p. 253.

⁵³ S. 6502, reproduced in Forte, plate 1. Translation adapted from Forte's in *ibid.*, p. 185. The inability to obtain rebirth as Mahābrahman, Indra, Māra, a Cakravartin, or a Buddha constituted the "five obstacles" of female form, here circumvented by the proviso that the territory ruled

In the *Zhengming jing* 證明經 (Attestation scripture),⁵⁴ an apocryphal scripture also used to support Wu Zetian's reign, there is an apocalyptic vision of the birth of a Buddhist kingdom in China. In the scripture the bodhisattva Samantabhadra has the role of avenging angel and protective midwife, and in one passage Samantabhadra is called Mahāprajāpati.⁵⁵ This *sūtra* was quoted in the commentary to the *Dayun jing* to encourage people to connect the utopian realm prophesied by Samantabhadra with the reign of Devī Jingguang as Wu Zetian.

Perhaps fittingly, while weaving a mantle of scriptural prophecy to bestow on their empress, the cadre of monks captured not only a blushing Devī but also the more ambiguous shades of a willful Mahāprajāpati and a punitive Samantabhadra. Although in the *Dayun jing* the Buddha praises "shame" as the Dharma robe of all beings, it is hubris for which Wu Zetian is most consistently remembered by Chinese historians. Thus, the precedent she established of bestowing robes on monks became a dubious honor, resonant with the story of Mahāprajāpati, locus classicus for the trope of the monk who refuses to give up his tattered robes and accept fine clothing from a wealthy lay devotee. Although Buddhist literature abounds with words of praise and evocations of merit for those who give food, clothing, bedding, and medicine for the use of the Saṅgha, there was ambivalence toward laypersons who gave costly and personal gifts to individual monks.

Wu Zetian's attempt to raise permanently the level of the Saṅgha perhaps catalyzed the will to transcend even the monk's status once it became so unequivocally a cloak of worldly power. Emperor Wu of the Liang had donned monk's robes and then had his minister ransom him and his divested royal raiment back from the monastery, establishing an "inexhaustible" and independent financial base for the Saṅgha. In contrast, Wu Zetian's edifice and her lavish gifts reached toward monarchical assumption of the power to confer legitimacy on monks. Thus the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* invocation of an immaterial "robe of the *tathāgatas*" may have resonated with a current of feeling against the empress's presumption.

THE REFORMS OF EMPEROR XUANZONG

The issue of the distinction between material Buddhism and formlessness became even more vexed during the era of Shenhui's activities, the reign

will be only a quarter of that of a Cakravartin. However, by taking the title "Divine Sovereign of the Golden Wheel" (金輪聖神皇帝) in 693, Wu Zetian was clearly identifying herself with a Golden-Wheel Cakravartin.

⁵⁴ *Puxian pusa shuo ci zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩說此證明經 (Scripture of attestation spoken by the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra), T. 85 (2879). For textual analysis and partial translation, see Forte, pp. 271–80.

⁵⁵ Forte, p. 276. Mahāprajāpati's name was translated into Chinese as Dasheng zhu 大生主 (Great lord of beings), an epithet of Samantabhadra.

of the Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (reigned 712–56). According to the Song Buddhist historian Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), the practice of bestowing the purple robe (*zìyī* 紫衣) did not occur during the reigns of the pious emperors Zhongzong 中宗 (705–10) or Ruizong 睿宗 (710–12) but was taken up again by Xuanzong.⁵⁶ Xuanzong was notably ambivalent about Buddhism, well aware of its role in the renegade reign of Wu Zetian and the attempted coup of the Taiping Princess 太平公主 (died 713), but he supported the clergy in a clearly defined and limited capacity. It has been argued that during the reign of Xuanzong we see the first signs of a different kind of imperial attitude toward Buddhism.⁵⁷ This attitude differs from earlier attempts to control Buddhism by outright persecution, differs from the massive scale of Wu Zetian's co-option, and differs again from imperial policy that suffered Buddhism to flourish as a kind of side bet alongside the dominant Confucian ritual and archival concerns. With Xuanzong we see attempts to persuade the loose network of Buddhist institutions to enforce critical standards that were arguably of benefit to the network itself.

Xuanzong's decrees proscribed marketplace proselytization, curbed irregular ordination and temple building, prohibited merchants from casting images and copying scriptures for profit, and strictly limited fraternization between lay and ordained.⁵⁸ These measures contributed to greater monastic control and yet at the same time "routinized the charisma" such that the center shifted toward decorum and ritual, an atmosphere in which Daoist priests and Tantric masters thrived. It is noteworthy that after centuries of protest against imperial attempts to require clergy to pay obeisance to the emperor and their parents, there is no record of clerical resistance to Xuanzong's 733 decree to that effect.⁵⁹

This is certainly not to claim that no emperor before Xuanzong had ever managed to control monks. Yet previous policies had aimed primarily to

⁵⁶ *Da Song sengshi lue* 大宋僧史略 (Song Dynasty compendium of monastic history), T. 54 (2176) 248c–249a. However, Du Guangting's 杜廣庭 (850–933) history of imperial support of Daoism, the *Lidai chongdao ji* 歷代崇道記, claims an earlier Tang precedent and states that Taizong conferred a purple robe on the priest Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知. Weinstein (n. 13 above), pp. 6, 153, n. 2. Moreover, Zanning's other main work includes at least one example of a purple robe bestowed by Zhongzong, who is said to have given one to Huian 慧安 in 706. See *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. 50 (2061) 823c11–12. For a history of the bestowal of the purple robe, see Huang Minzhi 黃敏枝, *Songdai fojiao shehui jingji shi lunji* 宋代佛教社會經濟史論集 (A collection of essays concerning Song Dynasty Buddhist socioeconomics) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1989), pp. 443–511.

⁵⁷ See Mamoru Tonami, "Policy towards the Buddhist Church in the Reign of T'ang Hsüan-tsung," *Acta Asiatica* 55 (1988): 27–47. I am also indebted to a talk given by Stephen Teiser at Stanford University, March 1995, titled "On the Idea of a Chinese Buddhist Canon."

⁵⁸ *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 *juan* 47 and 49; *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統記, T. 49 (2035) 374–75. See Tonami, pp. 31–32; Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism* (n. 11 above), pp. 76–80.

⁵⁹ Tonami, pp. 39–45. Faure cites a record of protest against such an edict in 714, early in Xuanzong's reign. The record is in the *Tang huiyao*, *juan* 47 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1974), p. 836; see Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*, p. 76. However, Tonami claims that "there is not a trace of resistance" to the edict of 733.

curb Buddhism from without, whereas eighth-century edicts seem more successfully designed to set centralized administrative standards to work within the monastic network. For example, in 724 Xuanzong issued an edict instituting an exam system for the clergy and ordered that those who could not memorize and recite the requisite amount of scripture be laicized. The decree further stipulated that skill in meditation would not be an acceptable substitute.⁶⁰

At the same time, Xuanzong is also well known for his predilection for masters of esoteric Buddhism and their thaumaturgic powers. Outside of the sphere of these favorites, however, the ordinary monk was beginning to be regularized, acquiring worldly status that put him on a par with an official but steadily losing the otherworldly status that allowed him to look benevolently down upon the emperor.

Shenhui's robe rhetoric may have been an attempt to regain this special separate status. In an insightful article, John Jorgensen draws connections between Shenhui's notions of patriarchal succession and the complex issues surrounding Tang imperial succession that were current in Shenhui's day. Jorgensen discusses Zongmi's commentary correlating Chan patriarchal succession and Chinese ancestral rites, in which a founder and six linear descendants are necessary in order to establish the ancestral temple of a clan or dynasty. In the aftermath of Empress Wu's interregnum there were disputes over the sequence of the tablets in the Tang ancestral temple, and Jorgensen demonstrates that Shenhui's rhetoric echoed, or perhaps even inspired, so-called "Southern Learning" (*nanxue* 南學) factionalists at court who were moving toward unequivocal ritual erasure of her reign.⁶¹

Jorgensen says:

If Tsung-mi correctly interpreted the ideas of Shen-hui, then Shen-hui is making a two-pronged attack on Northern Ch'an by associating it with the Empress Wu. Firstly he alleges that Northern Ch'an was an illegitimate succession like that of Empress Wu who reigned while Emperors Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung were still alive, with two masters per generation, or two suns in the sky. Secondly there was guilt by association with the perverted "materialistic" Buddhism of her times, a perversion that was probably due to a woman being on the throne.

There was another political dimension to Shen-hui's emphasis on the sixth generation. Yanagida Seizan has suggested that a comparison was being made by Shen-hui with the lineage of the T'ang house itself. If Empress Wu is eliminated as being illegitimate, ruling while two former emperors were still alive, this would make Hsüan-tsung the sixth emperor.⁶²

⁶⁰ Weinstein, pp. 110–11, 188–89, nn. 20–22.

⁶¹ John Jorgensen, "The 'Imperial' Lineage of Ch'an Buddhism: The Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch'an's Search for Legitimation in the Mid-T'ang Dynasty," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 35 (1987): 103–14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

It was precisely during Shenhui's generation that fixing the identity of a sixth patriarch or sixth Tang emperor became a crucial issue, for this would determine the composition of the foundational ancestral phalanx. Bodhidharma's robe qua the robe of the *tathāgatas* can therefore be seen to serve as talisman for Shenhui's implicit claim to be the seventh ancestor in the restored dynasty of the "Southern School." Shenhui writes: "The robe is the verification of the Dharma and the Dharma is en-doctrinization of the robe.⁶³ Robe and Dharma mutually transfer and are handed down without alteration. Without the robe one does not spread forth the Dharma; without the Dharma one does not receive the robe. . . . To know empty quietude is to fully realize the Dharma-body, and to be truly liberated."⁶⁴

Empress Wu's luxurious robes and Emperor Xuanzong's livery both threatened to bind the spiritual to the political realm, and Shenhui took up Bodhidharma's empty robe in order to reestablish the Chan patriarchs in the *dharmakāya* realm of nonduality where they reigned supreme.⁶⁵ The *Lidai fabao ji* is more faithful to Shenhui's doctrine, practice, and rhetoric than any of its rivals for "Southern School" legitimacy. Yet, in letting Bodhidharma's robe pass through Wu Zetian's hands, it allows the primary symbol of that legitimacy to pass through the milieu that was the focus of Shenhui's most vehement attack.

THE BODHISATTVA'S NEW CLOTHES

Perhaps the *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) were inadvertently correct in acknowledging the pivotal role that the empress's mixed blessing played in the formation of the "Southern School." In tandem with her lavish support of the Saṅgha, her ideological projects set the realm reverberating with the apocalyptic tones and imagery of immanence. Her realm of the Dharma was two-tiered, at once temporal and metaphysical. Shenhui's sudden teaching was immanent in two mutually contradictory yet interdependent absolutes, for it was realized exclusively in its patriarchal bearers and inclusively in each individual devotee. The danger was that the ordinary devotee might fail to see the difference and point out the nakedness of Buddha-Nature in both the patriarch and his pupils.

⁶³ *Yi wei fa xin fa shi yi zong* 衣為法信法是衣宗.

⁶⁴ *Dunwu wushang banruo song* 頓悟無生般若頌 (Hymn to the birthless wisdom of sudden awakening), S. 468, in Hu Shi (n. 6 above), p. 195.

⁶⁵ It is therefore somewhat ironic that, in order to quell the disputes that Shenhui's claims precipitated within the Saṅgha, his heir Zongmi appealed to a 796 edict by the Emperor Dezong 德宗 confirming Shenhui's status as seventh patriarch. See *Yuanjue jing dashu chao*, ZZ, 14:277b–c. The earliest source to refer to Shenhui as the seventh patriarch is the Longmen stele of 765. See McRae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch'an Buddhism" (n. 15 above), p. 237.

Let us consider a passage from the above-mentioned *Zhengming jing*, in which homage to the empress's new mandate, like that rendered the invisible robe of the *tathāgatas*, serves to distinguish the ordinary from the discerning who alone are able to see the "luminous king of the Dharma": "Then in the Sahā [world] there will not be the five kinds of people. All corruption will be cured, and all will be given the names of Bodhisattvas. . . . The countries will be Buddhist countries, the regions will be Buddhist regions, the commanderies will be Buddhist commanderies, the districts will be Buddhist districts, the villages will be Buddhist villages, the neighborhoods will be Buddhist neighborhoods. All will assemble in the Transformation City . . . and they will be able to see this Luminous King. . . . If there are distrustful people they will not be able to see this Dharma."⁶⁶

Wu Zetian's "material Buddhism" and its utopian underpinnings disturbingly blurred the fine line between visible and invisible Buddhist realms. Shenhui's concept of the patriarchy was an attempt to redraw that line, and his patriarchal robe was a self-contained *tathāgata* realm with a monarchy separate from both secular and ordinary institutional Buddhist authority. His success is attested by the number of rivals who arose to lay claim to this new territory.

The *Lidai fabao ji* author(s) apparently evoked the empress as a source of legitimacy separate from the pettiness of Chan infighting alluded to in the lament over frequent thefts of the robe. Yet perhaps this was not such a retrogression as it might seem. One of the more intriguing points in the *Lidai fabao ji* is the passage on Wuzhu's female disciple Liaojianxing 了見性 (Completely seeing the [Buddha] nature), who receives the most detailed treatment of any of the ordained disciples.⁶⁷ In this passage, it is said that Liaojianxing became a nun simply by donning robes and tonsuring herself, flaunting both Buddhist and imperial authority in a perfect enactment of Wuzhu's teachings.⁶⁸

There is no other record of this person, and we can only speculate as to why neither she nor any other disciple was named as Wuzhu's successor. Was it because his closest disciples were laypersons and women, or was it because his radical interpretation of sudden practice was incompatible with any form, including that of transmission? If the latter, then why is so much of the *Lidai fabao ji* invested in establishing a claim to legitimacy in conventional (and fabricated) terms? Perhaps the story of the empress,

⁶⁶ *Zhengming jing*, T. 85 (2879) 1366b9–17. Adapted from partial translation in Forte (n. 39 above), p. 280.

⁶⁷ The *Lidai fabao ji* also highlights Wuzhu's relationship with the prominent imperial minister in Sichuan, Du Hongjian 杜鴻漸 (709–69). Although he is considered to have been Wuzhu's follower, his role is that of primary patron rather than close personal disciple.

⁶⁸ *Lidai fabao ji*, T. 51 (2075) 192a24–b20.

who used the imperial system to establish a position not recognized by that system, struck a sympathetic chord among certain of Wuzhu's disciples. By including Wu Zetian, briefly and fictitiously, in its chronicle of Chan succession, the *Lidai fabao ji* allows us a tantalizing glimpse of many fissures hidden beneath a reflective surface of historical verisimilitude. Whatever the aspirations and fears of Wuzhu's antinomian followers may have been, they were soon lost in the gathering momentum of "Southern School" Chan orthodoxy.

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