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"Prince Moonlight". Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism

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## “PRINCE MOONLIGHT”

### *Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism*

BY

E. ZÜRCHER

When in the course of the Nanbeichao period the two main traditions of Chinese religious thought—religious Taoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism—took shape and developed, their relation was one of constant interaction, mutual enrichment, and, in some cases, complete amalgamation. When I, some time ago, presented a preliminary survey and analysis of Buddhist loans in early medieval Taoist scriptures <sup>1)</sup>, I had to warn the reader that my presentation was necessarily one-sided, for by focusing upon the evidence of Buddhist influence in Taoist texts, no justice was done to the importance of the “Taoist counter-current”. The present study may be taken as an attempt to redress the balance. The choice of the subject is not fortuitous. Many other cases of Taoist influence upon early medieval Chinese Buddhism could have been chosen, ranging from terminological loans to hagiographic themes and cultic practices, but the impact and integrative force of Taoist ideas are nowhere more clearly manifested than in the development of eschatological and messianic <sup>2)</sup> beliefs in Chinese Buddhism from the late third to the late sixth century AD.

Since we are dealing with a typically hybrid complex of ideas that contains elements from both traditions, we shall first have to take a look at those elements, or themes, in their original context. This will be the subject of the first two sections. In the first part I propose to present a brief survey of the main themes in Taoist eschatology, centering around the belief in cosmic disasters at

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<sup>1)</sup> “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence”, *T'oung Pao* 66, 1980, pp. 84-147.

<sup>2)</sup> Since the term “messianism” nowadays is often used in a rather loose and metaphorical way, it may be useful to point out that the words “eschatology” and “messianism” are here used in their original, specifically religious sense: the complex of beliefs concerning a (usually violent) end of our world through the action of superhuman powers, and the expectation of a Saviour whose nature is clearly defined as divine, or at least belonging to a super-human level of existence.

the end of a cycle and in the appearance of a superhuman saviour. In the second part, we shall have to examine in how far the "original" Buddhist heritage, i.e. Buddhism as it was introduced into China from without, in itself contained certain elements that may be called eschatological and messianic. Thirdly, we shall trace the further development of a number of such ideas within Chinese Buddhism, and some characteristic changes and adaptations which they underwent in their new environment, notably under the influence of indigenous beliefs. After those preliminary sections, we shall turn to our basic subject: the emergence of a Buddho-Taoist complex of eschatological beliefs and expectations, with special emphasis upon the messianic role assumed by a rather obscure Bodhisattva called Yueguang tongzi 月光童子, i.e. Candraprabhākumāra, a name that may be rendered, in spite of its romantic associations, as "Prince Moonlight"<sup>3)</sup>.

### I. THE TAOIST TRADITION

Quite a number of early medieval Taoist scriptures contain references to, or even detailed descriptions of the disasters that will come upon sinful mankind when the times are fulfilled; the coming of a messiah and his helpers; the apocalyptic battles that will take place; the salvation of a small minority of *electi*, and the establishment of what, *mutatis mutandis*, may be called a New Jerusalem. In this introductory section we can only summarize the main themes, which are the following.

(a) *The crisis*. The belief that time (or rather "duration", for the theories are always concerned with the movement and changes of concrete things *in* time) moves on in cycles; that the universe in its many constituent parts passes through a great number of simultaneous cycles of different length, and that this complicated mechanism from time to time reaches certain "nodal points" or "conjunctions" (*hui* 會), when the beginning of several cycles coincide, was a basic assumption in Chinese cosmology at least

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<sup>3)</sup> The word *kumāra* means "a youth", and more specifically, "a crown-prince". It is no doubt in the latter sense that *-kumāra* very often figures as the second part in composite names of Bodhisattvas, who on account of their future Buddhahood enjoy, in a way, the status of "heir-apparent". The Chinese equivalent *tongzi* does not have any association with future royalty.

since Han times <sup>4</sup>). However, the idea that some of such nodal points in time will be accompanied by cosmic disasters and the appearance of a saintly redeemer does not appear to be older than the third century of our era <sup>5</sup>). In the Taoist world-view, the cataclysm is also drawn into the moral sphere, in accordance with the general view of disasters as Heaven's responses to human depravity. Thus, the crisis is not only represented as a mechanical happening, but also as a punitive reaction to the moral degeneration of mankind: the neglect of religious duties; social misbehaviour; abuse of power, and corruption. As to be expected in prophetic literature, we often find a quasi-exact dating of the years in which the crisis is to start, to reach its climax, and to be solved. Various systems of dating are used. Most common is the use of cyclical characters identifying the fateful year within a sixty-year period. Thus, according to the *Shenzhou jing* 神呪經, the destruction will begin in the year *renwu* 壬午 (382?, 442?), when the world will be swallowed by a deluge, demons will cause epidemics, and even sun and moon will disappear. Then, in the year *renchen* 壬辰 (392?, 452?) the messiah Li Hong 李弘 will appear. In other cases, a fixed point in time is used as a basis for calculation: the cataclysm will take place 90,000 years after “the opening up of Heaven and Earth”, or 2,760 years (= 46 cycles of sixty years) after Yao's accession to the throne, which according to traditional chronology would yield the year 403 AD. <sup>6</sup>).

(b) *The messiah* is clearly a being of a higher order of existence,

<sup>4</sup>) Cf. Nathan Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy”, *T'oung Pao* 55, 1969, pp. 1-73.

<sup>5</sup>) The earliest occurrence appears to be found in *TT* 1168 (counting according to K. M. Schipper, *Concordance du Tao-tsang*), 太上老君中經, section 52: shorter and longer cycles, combined with the periodic appearance of Sages 賢人, Saints 聖人, and Perfected Ones 真人. The end of every cycle of 3,600,000 years is marked by the “great conjunction of Heaven and Earth” 天地大會, in which everything is reduced to an indistinct, chaotic state.

<sup>6</sup>) *TT* 322 太上靈寶天地運度自然妙經 pp. 6<sup>b</sup>-7<sup>a</sup>; *TT* 335 太上洞淵神呪經 ch. 9, p. 2<sup>b</sup>; *TT* 442 上清後聖道君列紀 pp. 3<sup>b</sup>-4<sup>a</sup>; *TT* 1032 雲笈七籤 ch. 2 p. 7<sup>b</sup> quoting the original 上清三天正法經; 太平經鈔, 甲部 (late T'ang summary of the 6th century Shangqing redaction of the *Tai-pingjing*), ed. Wang Ming 王明, *Tai-pingjing hejiao* 太平經合校, Peking, 1960, p. 4; S. 2081 太上靈寶老子化胡妙經, studied and translated by Anna Seidel, cf. note 15 (I may here express my gratitude to Anna Seidel, who has kindly provided me with a copy of the typescript of her excellent article).

basically different from the founder of a dynasty in the well-known political mythology <sup>7</sup>). He is at least a prophet, directly inspired by a personalized divine power; normally he is a high-ranking Immortal, or the manifestation of a god. The increasing other-worldliness of Taoist utopianism is strikingly illustrated by the gradual apotheosis of the saviour Li Hong (also known in prophetic texts as Muzigongkou 木子弓口 or Gongkoushibazi 弓口十八子): originally a rather obscure sage of the first century BC; two centuries later the object of a local cult in the Chengdu region; then the semi-divine inspirator of fourth century rebel leaders who operated under his name; finally, in the late fourth and fifth century fully canonized as the August Lord of the Golden Gate-house 金闕帝君 or as a manifestation of the god Laozi himself <sup>8</sup>).

(c) *The helpers* of the messiah are a regular part of the soteriological scheme. Unlike the assistants of the worldly founder of a dynasty, they are not generals or advisors, but supernatural saints whose names sometimes are explicitly mentioned. They are living in this world, not recognized by common mortals, and they bide their time till the saviour will appear <sup>9</sup>).

<sup>7</sup>) I shall not go into the complicated problem of the relation between the political theology centered around the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, the political utopianism of the earliest Taoist movements, and the political function of the prophetic literature of the Han period. The political mythology and religious millenarianism no doubt share a number of features, and both are rooted in a cosmological world-view that they have in common; but it remains true that in the period studied here, religious messianism had become an independent tradition. Cf. Anna K. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao-tseu dans le Taoïsme des Han*, Paris, 1969; *id.*, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hong", *History of Religions* 9, 1969-'70, pp. 216-247; K. M. Schipper, "Millenarismes et messianismes dans la Chine ancienne", in *Understanding Modern China, Proceedings of the XXVIth Conference of Chinese Studies, European Association of Chinese Studies*, Rome 1979, pp. 31-49; Barbara Kandel, *Taipingjing, the Origin and Transmission of the "Scripture on General Welfare": The History of an Unofficial Text*, Hamburg, 1979, esp. p. 4 sqq.

<sup>8</sup>) Cf. Anna K. Seidel in *History of Religions* 9 (cf. note 7), esp. pp. 236-244; K. M. Schipper, *op. cit.* pp. 33-34. The main references to Li Hong as a divine saviour are found in *TT* 322 太上靈寶天地運度自然妙經 p. 4<sup>b</sup> and p. 6<sup>a</sup> (弓口十八子); *T* 335 太上洞淵神呪經 ch. 1 p. 4<sup>a</sup> (木子弓口); *TT* 442 太上後聖道君列紀. 2<sup>b</sup>; *TT* 1195 老君變化無極經 p. 2<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>) Helpers sent down to guide the chosen people: *TT* 335 ch. 1 p. 10<sup>b</sup>; *ib.* ch. 9 p. 2<sup>a</sup>; *TT* 442 p. 7<sup>b</sup> (list of twenty-four Perfected Ones); 太平經鈔, 甲部, ed. Wang Ming (cf. note 6), p. 4.

(d) In the last phase the world is transformed into a gigantic *battlefield*. Not four, but myriads of apocalyptic riders and spirit-generals strike mankind with death and damnation; other hosts are sent down to fight them and to protect the *electi* from their attacks. But only a small minority is to be preserved: they constitute the “chosen people” (*zhong min* 種民<sup>10</sup>), who actively prepare themselves for salvation, with prayers and fasting, and armed with the holy texts and talismans that will protect them when the judgement comes.

(e) This final *judgement* implies a complete separation between the pious minority and the vast majority of sinners who are doomed to perish. But in actual fact, the decision has been taken long before. The *zhongmin* are predestined (*you yuan* 有緣) to be saved; their bodies bear the sacred marks that indicate their special status, and their names have since long been entered into heavenly registers. Their number is fixed: 300,000 or 330,000 will survive the disasters. The judgement also implies a physical separation: the *electi* are set apart from the others, on safe places, from where they are transported to higher spheres.

(f) The “*New Jerusalem*”: finally, the world is reintegrated into an ideal state<sup>11</sup>), where the saviour either himself rules through “non-action”, or plays the role of the divine inspirator of a saintly king, surrounded by a hierarchy of heavenly officials. It goes without saying that the inhabitants of this paradise lead a blissful life that may last thousands of years, or even aeons.

In spite of all kinds of variations, this Taoist eschatology forms a rather consistent and well-integrated complex of ideas, in which every part has its logical place, and the various roles are clearly marked. The whole complex is furthermore strikingly autochthon-

<sup>10</sup>) The exact meaning of *zhong* is not clear. The explanation given in 太平經鈔，甲部 (ed. Wang Ming, p. 2) seems to suggest (“seed” =) “fine essence, (spiritual) refinement”: 精鍊成聖，故號種民， but that is a rather late source. In the (probably late fourth century) *TT* 442 上清後聖道君列紀 p. 4<sup>b</sup> *zhòng* is clearly used as a transitive verb, (“to plant” =) “to establish,” as opposed to *chu* 除 “to eliminate”: 甲申之歲，已前已後，種善人。除殘民—hence, “those (whose salvation) is firmly established, or secured”. But *zhōng* may also be taken as a noun, “the (right) kind (of people)”, those who belong to the inner circle of *electi*. In Buddhist texts, 種 or 種姓 is regularly used for *gotra* (lit. “family”), in the specialized sense of “religious group, communion” (cf. F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, N. Haven, 1953, p. 269).

<sup>11</sup>) *TT* 335 ch. 1, pp. 10<sup>b</sup>-11<sup>b</sup>; *ib.* ch. 9, p. 2<sup>b</sup>.

ous, for Buddhist influence appears to be limited to some minor, mainly ornamental, features <sup>12)</sup>).

## II. THE BUDDHIST INPUT

What had “original” Buddhism—here to be understood as the totality of Buddhist elements that reached China from abroad in this period—to offer? If we try to inventorize the non-Chinese Buddhist tradition, we can single out at least five themes that are relevant to our subject: the cyclical conception of time coupled with the belief in a periodic destruction of our universe; the prophecies concerning the degeneration and final disappearance of the Doctrine; the belief in the appearance of future Buddhas in this world, in particular Maitreya; the saving power of advanced Bodhisattvas; and the segregation of pious believers by rebirth in paradise-like regions outside our universe. In how far do these themes have eschatological and messianic implications?

(a) *The cosmic eras (kalpa, jie 劫)*. Any universe, with the exception of its highest celestial levels, passes through an endless sequence of cosmic periods: aeons of stupendous length during which a world-system evolves, exists, and disintegrates. A Great Aeon (*mahākalpa*, *dajie* 大劫) consists of a number of shorter, but still unimaginably lengthy, aeons (*kalpa*, *jie* 劫). At the end of each Great Aeon the physical universe is destroyed by catastrophes of water, fire, and wind, after which emptiness and darkness reign for a whole “intermediate *kalpa*”. But the world-system is only demolished up to a certain level. The highest heavens are spared; there all sentient beings have been reborn even before the catastrophes have started, and it is also from there that they will be

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<sup>12)</sup> The belief that the end of a major cycle will be accompanied by a cosmic upheaval may have been reinforced by the Buddhist notion of “*kalpa*-disasters” (*jiezai* 劫災, cf. below, under II.a). Buddhist influence can also be recognized in the imagery concerning the exorbitant length of an aeon (e.g. *TT* 532 太極真人敷靈寶齋戒威儀諸經要訣, p. 19<sup>a</sup>), and in the idea that at the completion of a Great Aeon (大劫之周) the destruction will only affect the lower levels of existence, up to the “Realm of Form”, 色界 *rūpadhātu* (*TT* 23 太上諸天寶書度命妙經 pp. 14<sup>b</sup>-15<sup>a</sup>). But the long list of stigmata in the late fourth century *TT* 442 上清後聖道君列紀 pp. 9<sup>b</sup>-11<sup>b</sup> does not show any trace of being influenced by the Buddhist *lakṣaṇa*, and in the legendarized account of Li Hong’s life in the same scripture only one minor detail (the *nāgas* bathing the new-born baby, *ib.* p. 1<sup>b</sup>) has been borrowed from Buddhist hagiography.



reborn on the lower levels of existence, each one according to his karmic destination, when a new “receptacle-world” has taken shape <sup>13</sup>).

As we shall see, this belief in “*kalpa*-disasters” and the periodic destruction of our world was to play a very important role in the development of Buddho-Taoist eschatology. However, in its original form it can hardly be called eschatological in the proper sense of the word. In the Buddhist complex, the dissolution of the “receptacle-world” is not coupled with a final judgement, nor with a separation of the saved and the damned, and certainly not with the establishment of a New Heaven and a New Earth. When the world is destroyed, it is no more than an empty shell. When after the aeon of suspended existence a new world-system has come into being, the process of *karman* recommences: the intermediate *kalpa* of non-existence is an *intermezzo*—the actors return to the stage, and the show goes on from the point where it has stopped before. In each *kalpa* there are ups and downs. Worldly prosperity reaches its climax under the reign of a perfect “Monarch Turner-of-the-Wheel” (*zhuan lun sheng wang* 轉輪聖王, *cakravartin*), characterized by universal peace, longevity, and material well-being. Spiritually speaking, a highest point is reached when a Buddha appears in the world and reveals the Doctrine; it is a happening of utmost rarity, and blessed are those who on account of their karmic merit are reborn in such a time and place that they can witness it. On the other hand, there are dark periods of intensified suffering, moral degeneration and decreasing life-span, in which the world is stricken by famine, war, and epidemics, and the good *dharma* has been eclipsed. However, rebirth in such a situation is the fruit of one’s own *karman* that works automatically and on a strictly individual basis. It is not the result of any external judgement, and the general situation of decay and sin has no connection with the destruction of the world at the end of a Great Aeon.

<sup>13</sup>) Buddhist cosmology had become known in China through the first version of the very popular *Da loutan jing*, T 23 大樓炭經, translated around 300 AD by Bo Fali 帛法立 and Bo Faju 帛法炬. A detailed account of the “three catastrophes” 三災變 is found in that version on pp. 302<sup>c</sup>-305<sup>a</sup>. For the influence of the *Da loutan jing* in Taoist circles, see my article mentioned in note 1, p. 139 (where, incidentally, I rendered the hypothetical Sanskrit equivalent of the title as (?) *Lokadhātu-sūtra*. This reconstruction is unsatisfactory; the—of course equally hypothetical—\**Lokasthāna-sūtra*, as given in the *Répertoire du Canon bouddhique*, ed. by H. Durt and A. Seidel, Tokyo, 1978, is preferable).

(b) *Prophecies* concerning the end of the world do not play any significant part in the non-Chinese Buddhist tradition. However, other types of prophecy are quite common in Mahāyāna Buddhism; they are generally made by the Buddha, who due to his Omniscience (*sarvajñatā*, *yiqiezhī* — 一切智) has unlimited knowledge of the future. A very frequent kind of prophecy is the *vyākaraṇa* (*shouji* 授記) formula, by which the Buddha in stereotyped terms foretells someone's religious career in future lives, culminating in the latter's achievement of Buddhahood. The prediction of future Buddhahood was destined to become an important theme in the kind of literature that we are dealing with, as it forms the scriptural base of all messianic expectations connected with Maitreya and Candraprabhakumāra. But even more important for our subject is a type of prediction that concerns the gradual decay and final disappearance of the Buddhist Doctrine itself. In a great number of canonical scriptures and scholastic texts we find, with many variations, the story that the Buddha Śākyamuni himself has warned his disciples that "the Good Law will not forever be present in this world", and that after a certain period it is doomed to be extinguished. The idea was later elaborated into a scheme of "three stages" (*sanjie* 三階), each of which is to last several centuries. The first period, starting with the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, is that of the "True Doctrine" (*saddharma*, *zhengfa* 正法), during which the principles preached by the Buddha are known and practised in their pristine purity. In the second phase, that of the "Counterfeit Doctrine" (*saddharma-pratirūpaka*, *xiangfa* 像法), religious life is more and more undermined by heresy and immoral practices, in which not only the laity but also the *saṅgha* itself indulge. In the end, when even the semblance of religious life is gone, the world will enter the dark "Final Age of the Doctrine: (*saddharma-vipralopa*, *mofa* 末法), and be lost in sin and injustice, until, after an immense span of time, the true *Dharma* will be revived by the next Buddha <sup>14</sup>).

<sup>14</sup>) For a survey of the various traditions in Indian Buddhism, see Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, Louvain, 1967, pp. 210-222; J. Przyluski, *La légende de l'Empereur Aśoka dans les textes indiens et chinois*, Paris, 1925, esp. ch. VII: "Développement des idées eschatologiques relatives à la Loi"; L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, Paris, 1925, vol. V, pp. 219-221 (= *T* 1558 俱舍論, trsl. Hsüan-tsang, ch. 29, p. 152<sup>b</sup>). For the many different statements about the length of each of the three stages see below, note 35.

(c) *Maitreya* (彌勒), who is to be the next Buddha in our world-system after Śākyamuni, is believed to dwell in the paradise-like Tuṣita heaven (兜率天) as a Bodhisattva of the highest stage, awaiting the moment of his descent. According to the most authoritative sources, he is still to stay there for an extremely long time. In the distant future he will be reborn in this world under the rule of a Universal Monarch, and hence in an era of almost unlimited prosperity and happiness. But pious believers do not have to wait all those billions of years to see him: they can be reborn in Maitreya’s palace-like dwelling in Tuṣita heaven, and even in this life they can visualize (*guan* 觀) him through mental concentration and receive his instructions.

(d) *The saving power of Bodhisattvas* is another theme that was to play an important role in the development of Chinese Buddhist messianism. They are represented as saintly figures who manifest themselves anywhere in the universe, in all possible forms, to perform the most extreme feats of altruism, saving grace and self-sacrifice for the benefit and spiritual improvement of all beings. Some of them are rather well-defined personalities, surrounded by their own legendary lore, and recognizable by their attributes. But the vast majority of the thousands of Bodhisattvas who figure in Mahāyāna scriptures are little more than names, or, at best, minor actors who in Mahāyāna scriptures play a modest role as parts of the Buddha’s entourage. As we shall see, in the messianic belief on which we shall concentrate in the last part of this study, the role of the saviour is played by one of such minor Bodhisattvas —perhaps because by his very indistinctness he more easily lent himself to mythological elaboration than such outspoken characters as Avalokiteśvara or Mañjuśrī.

(e) Finally, the *segregation of pious believers* by rebirth in a paradise-like “Buddha-region” outside this universe (like Amitābha’s “pure land” in the extreme West, or Akṣobhya’s land of bliss in the far East), or, in the case of the Maitreya cult, amidst the splendours of the Tuṣita heaven, is a well-known feature of Mahāyāna devotionalism, which has clearly influenced the image of the “New Jerusalem” in Chinese Buddhist eschatology, even if it originally had no such connotations at all.

If we try to summarize the “original Buddhist input”, we must conclude that it does not contain any elements that could be called, *stricto sensu*, eschatological-messianic. There is a very elaborate

representation of cosmic disasters at the end of a cycle, but this is not connected with any belief in a collective judgement or with the creation of an ideal world. The *mo-fa* belief is concerned with the disappearance of the True Doctrine, but it bears no relation to the cyclical destruction of our world. Maitreya may be called, in a loose sense, a Buddhist messiah (in fact, it is one of his standard epithets in western literature). But in the orthodox tradition Maitreya is, basically, a teacher and a revealer of the Doctrine. He will reach Buddhahood in the distant future, in a situation of peace and universal well-being—he is certainly not a messiah who saves his chosen people from disasters and establishes an ideal state. The same may be said of the Bodhisattva in general. His salutary action is primarily aimed at the spiritual advancement of individual beings; the ideal is neither socially nor politically orientated. The world as such cannot be saved by him, because all existence is *per se* subjected to suffering and impermanence.

A second conclusion must be that the Buddhist themes listed above show little coherence with each other, and cannot be said to form a consistent complex. They appear to have developed more or less independently, and in some respects clearly contradict each other—as in the case of the descent of Maitreya in a world of great moral and material well-being, whereas, according to the *mo-fa* theme, the same world should be steeped in utmost ignorance, sin, and misery.

### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESCHATOLOGICAL NOTIONS IN EARLY CHINESE BUDDHISM

Since the fourth century of our era we can observe the formation of a Buddho-Taoist eschatology, in which the main actors—and in any case the person of the superhuman saviour himself—are of Buddhist origin, and in which conceptual, stylistic, and terminological elements are largely borrowed from popular Mahāyāna devotionalism. But even if most of the *dramatis personae* and much of the style and imagery are of Buddhist origin, it is clear that Taoism provided the model for the structure as a whole. It was the Taoist vision that provided a coherent complex of eschatological expectations into which all these disconnected Buddhist themes became incorporated and welded into an integrated whole, and it was also Taoism that filled some essential gaps by providing the materials for which there was no Buddhist counterpart: the apocalyptic battle, the judgement, and the creation of an ideal world.

# I. *The sources*

Unfortunately, our data are fragmentary, and often—as is to be expected in apocalyptic literature—extremely cryptic. Only little can be found in the great scriptural tradition of Chinese Buddhism—the translations of the major Mahāyāna *sūtras*; the scholastic literature, and the biographical compilations. These are, by and large, the products of a clerical establishment that closely collaborated with the temporal authorities, and fully shared the latter’s aversion from wild prophesies and apocalyptic visions, as long as these did not serve the interests of the ruling élite. It should be stressed that the Chinese Buddhist canon is the final product of many centuries of clerical censorship, a continuous process of expurgation (and, in a number of known cases, even wholesale destruction) of “heretical” texts. We can only be grateful for the fact that, in spite of this censorship, at least some apocrypha have survived in the canon, either because they were not recognized as such, or because the content of such texts (or of interpolations inserted into translated scriptures) was considered harmless, or even beneficial <sup>15</sup>). To this oversight we owe the preservation of such valuable apocrypha as the *Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經 (T 685) which forms the scriptural basis of a well-known Chinese ritual; the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (T 1484) that has become the catechism of Chinese lay Buddhism; and the extensive *Guanding jing* 灌頂經 (T 1331) that, like most apocrypha, poses as a “genuine” (i.e. translated) text, but actually constitutes an invaluable panorama of early medieval popular religion and demonology.

However, these are only poor remnants of what must have been a huge body of religious literature. Hundreds of titles of “suspected” or “false” scriptures are listed by Buddhist bibliographers (by way of warning example, as they invariably explain in their introductory statements and glosses)—in fact, such tantalizing entries, and the

<sup>15</sup>) The best general survey of Chinese Buddhist apocryphal literature is found in the introductory part (pp. 1-95) of Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究, Kyōto, 1977. In her study on the messianic Dunhuang text *Taishang lingbao laozi hua hu mia jing* 太上靈寶老子化胡妙經, “Le Sūtra merveilleux du Ling-pao Suprême, traitant de Lao tseu qui convertit les barbares (TH. ms. S. 2081) — Contribution à l’étude du Bouddho-taoïsme des Six Dynasties” (to be published in M. Soyumi, ed., *Contributions aux études sur Touen-houang*, vol. III), Anna Seidel has pointed out that a similar process of expurgation has taken place in Taoist religious literature, by the suppression of Taoist texts “qui ont dû être exclus du Canon à cause de leur caractère trop populaire, hétérodoxe ou subversif”.

titles of the rejected texts themselves, constitute one of our most important sources of information. However, in this respect the importance of the Dunhuang manuscripts cannot be overestimated: it is, for once, an uncensored body of materials, and the fact that it contains so many dozens of Chinese Buddhist apocrypha—often in many different copies—allows us a glimpse of the great popularity and wide distribution of such texts that were excluded from the official canon. If this applies to Buddhist apocrypha in general, it is even more true of eschatological scriptures, which, for reasons to be treated below, were utterly condemned as dangerous and subversive. But for the Dunhuang materials, the subject could not be studied at all.

## 2. *Further development of Buddhist themes in China*

In the formation of a Buddho-Taoist eschatology in early medieval times, two themes appear to have been particularly productive: the transformation of Maitreya from a future Buddha into a Messiah; and the Chinese interpretations of the “End of the Doctrine”. Both the figure of Maitreya and the beliefs connected with the three stages of doctrinal degeneration are subjects of great complexity to which we cannot do justice here; a few general remarks must suffice.

*Maitreya* in his twofold role as the great Bodhisattva who rules as divine king in the Tuṣita heaven and as the Buddha in the distant future is the central topic of several *sūtras*, some of which had been translated into Chinese as early as the third century <sup>16</sup>).

<sup>16</sup>) For a survey of Indian and Central Asian sources and modern studies about Maitreya, see Ét. Lamotte, *Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna* vol. I, Louvain, 1944, pp. 4-5, *id.*, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, Louvain, 1967, pp. 775-788. For Maitreya as a religious instructor and inspirator, accessible through mental concentration, see P. Demiéville's remarks in *BEFEO* 44, 1954, pp. 376-395. The theme of Maitreya's glorious existence in the Tuṣita heaven and how to “visualize” him is elaborated in *T* 452 觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經, trsl. by Juqu Jingsheng 沮渠京聲 (mid-5th cent.). That of Maitreya's future incarnation 下生 and his attainment of Buddhahood is set forth in a whole series of different versions (in part Mahāyānist expansions) of a text that in its Hīnayana canonical form is found in the Chinese *Ekottarāgama* (*T* 125 增—阿含, trsl. Gautama Saṅghadeva, late 4th cent.), ch. 44.3, pp. 787<sup>c</sup>-789<sup>c</sup>. The present Chinese canon contains three versions of this *Maitreya-vyākaraṇa* made during the Nanbeichao: *T* 454 彌勒下生成佛經 (probably 5th cent.; wrongly attributed to Kumārajīva); *T* 456 彌勒大成佛經 (expanded version, trsl. by Kumā-

In the late fourth century we find the first traces of a specialised Maitreya cult in an educated Chinese clerical milieu <sup>17</sup>). A mass of information about the Maitreya devotion in all social strata is furnished by the epigraphical and iconographical materials, notably from the northern Chinese cave-temples of the late Nan-beichao period; the datable evidence indicates that this type of devotionism was especially popular in the first decades of the sixth century <sup>18</sup>).

However, it also shows that this cult was “orthodox”; i.e. it was based on the ideas and beliefs found in the original, translated scriptures related to the Maitreya cult (cf. note 16). The believers express the wish (often formalized as a regular “vow”, *praṇidhāna*, *yuan* 願) to be reborn in the Tuṣita heaven, there to enjoy the Master’s instructions and the pleasures of his paradise, and finally, in a very distant future, to be reborn in this world and to receive the double blessing of Maitreya’s Buddhahood and of the virtuous rule of a *cakravartin* king.

But at the same time we find the first traces of another, alternative Maitreya cult, basically different from this common, canonical, “harmless” expectation of the next Buddha after millions of years. It is a complex of ideas in which messianic and eschatological notions appear to play an important role. The decisive deviation from the common Maitreya devotion consisted in a chronological shift of the person of the saviour himself: Maitreya has been moved forward from an era of prosperity and happiness in the very distant future to an imminent period of decay and misery, which in turn is not only associated with the *mofa*, but also with the *kalpa*-disasters at the end of an aeon. Thus the benign Teacher is changed into a powerful Messiah who rescues the good people from the final holocaust, and condemns the sinners. We apparently

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rajīva; early 5th cent.); and *T* 457 彌勒來時經 (anon.; 5th cent.). These 5th century versions are preceded by *T* 453 彌勒下生經 attributed to the late 3rd century translator Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (active ca. 280-308 AD), but this text is a literal replica of the *Ekottarāgama* version mentioned above, and certainly not the original Dharmarakṣa translation mentioned in *CSZJJ* (*T* 2145, ch. 2, p. 8<sup>a</sup>). A different and much shorter treatment of Maitreya’s *vyākaraṇa* is found in the anonymous (4th cent.) *T* 44 古來時世經, which in turn appears to be a reduced version of the *Pūrvāparāntaka-sūtra* (= *T* 26 *Madhyamāgama* 中阿含經, ch. 13, pp. 508<sup>c</sup>-511<sup>c</sup>, trsl. Gautama Saṅghadeva, late 4th cent.).

<sup>17</sup>) Cf. my *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>18</sup>) Cf. Kenneth K. S. Ch’en, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964, p. 172.



stand here at the very beginning of a special type of sectarian Buddhism, for this is the Maitreya who was to inspire messianic movements and Buddhist rebellions—a phenomenon that is attested from the late fifth century onward<sup>19</sup>), and that was to continue throughout Chinese history till modern times.

It cannot be doubted that this type of Maitreya-cult was considered subversive by the temporal authorities as well as by the clerical establishment. Small wonder: obviously no political regime could accept the idea that the *mofo* era was at hand, because that period is characterized, *inter alia*, by a cruel, corrupt and tyrannical government, and the established church could not approve it either, because in *mofo* texts the traditional *saṅgha* is invariably described as degenerate, ignorant, and indulging in all kinds of forbidden practices.

If we look at the titles of messianic Maitreya scriptures listed in Buddhist bibliographies since the sixth century, it is evident that Maitreya is associated with all the main eschatological themes. We see how Maitreya “is incarnated in order to separate the sinners and the happy ones” (彌勒下生甄別罪福經)<sup>20</sup> and “to save (his devotees) from suffering and danger” (彌勒下生救度苦厄經)<sup>21</sup>, or even, with a clear reference to the disasters at the end of an aeon, “to rescue them from the great *kalpa*-holocaust, when the three catastrophes arise” (救度大劫燒三災起經)<sup>22</sup>. He overcomes the demon (彌勒下生伏魔經)<sup>23</sup>, and, like the Saviour in the Taoist tradition, he sends his helpers to prepare his work of salvation—in this case the Bodhisattvas Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) and Dashizhi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta) (彌勒下生遣觀世音大勢至勸化衆生捨惡作善壽樂經)<sup>24</sup>.

Of course the official Buddhist bibliographers made it quite clear that they condemned such heretical pamphlets. Fajing 法經, the chief compiler of the state-sponsored Buddhist bibliography of

<sup>19</sup>) For the “Buddhist rebels” of this period see the detailed account given by Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆 in his *Shina bukkuyōshi kenkyū* 支那佛教史研究 (*Hoku-Gi hen* 北魏篇), Tokyo, 1942; for later “Maitreya rebels” see Shigematsu Toshiaki 重松俊章, “Tō-Sō-jidai no Miroku kyōhi” 君宋時代の彌勒教匪, *Shi'en* 史淵 3, 1931, p. 68-103.

<sup>20</sup>) *T* 2153 大周刊定衆經目錄, ch. 15, p. 474<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>) *ib.* p. 474<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>22</sup>) *ib.* p. 474<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>23</sup>) *T* 2146 衆經目錄 by Fajing 法經 and others, ch. 2, p. 126<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>24</sup>) *T* 2154 開元釋教錄, ch. 18, p. 672<sup>c</sup>; cf. also *T* 2146 衆經目錄 ch. 2, p. 126<sup>c</sup>: 彌勒下生觀世音施珠寶經.



594 AD, concludes his list of “spurious texts” with the comment that these works contain false prophecies, and indulge in speculations about *yin* and *yang* and in weird stories about ghosts and demons: “their false and evil character is obvious; they must be removed from circulation, in order to safeguard the world from harm” <sup>25</sup>). Another official clerical bibliographer mentions the fact that at the beginning of the Sui dynasty a great number of such “false and extravagant” (偽濫) texts, amounting to 300 *chüan*, have been confiscated and burnt; however, in spite of this salutary action such works are still circulating among the people <sup>26</sup>). The most essential point—the shift of Maitreya to a time of imminent crisis—is of course unacceptable. After having listed a number of subversive Maitreya-*sūtras*, Zhisheng 智昇, the compiler of the invaluable *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* of 730 exclaims:

“The four scriptures mentioned above all are fakes fabricated by evil heretics; they speak, among other things, about the incarnation of the Tathāgata Maitreya in the immediate future. I may remark that according to the orthodox *sūtras* the Tathāgata Maitreya will only appear after fifty-seven *koti* and six million years after Śākyamuni’s Nirvāṇa <sup>27</sup>), when the human life-span on this continent of Jambudvīpa will have increased to 80,000 years. How then could he descend (at the present time), when our life-span has diminished to one hundred years? With such false and evil talk they mislead the stupid crowd; among the ignorant rabble there are many who follow them and credulously accept (such beliefs), and because of this fall (into sin and) are lost. One may truly call (such texts) harmful” <sup>28</sup>).

<sup>25</sup>) *T* 2146 衆經目錄, ch. 2, p. 127<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>26</sup>) *T* 2149 大唐內典錄, ch. 10, p. 333<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>27</sup>) The same time-span of 576 million years (one *koti* equals ten million) is mentioned in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* 俱舍論, *T* 1545, ch. 135, p. 698<sup>b</sup>. It there relates to another element of Maitreya lore that occasionally also plays a role in Chinese Buddhist eschatology: the belief that the great disciple Kāśyapa after the Buddha’s decease did not realize Nirvāṇa, but in accordance with the Buddha’s instructions let himself be enclosed inside the Kukkuṭapāda mountain. He will stay there for fifty-seven *koti* and six million years in the state of suspended animation called “concentration of suppression” (*nirodha-samāpatti*, *miejinding* 滅盡定), to emerge again at the time of Maitreya, to whom he will hand Śākyamuni’s upper garment as a token of spiritual succession. However, whilst steeped in this concentration he is able to manifest himself in this world and to act as a protector of the *dharma*—a role which he came to share with a varying number of other disciples (for which see S. Lévi and E. Chavannes, “Les seize Arhat protecteurs de la Loi”, *Journal Asiatique* 198, 1916, pp. 5-50 and 189-304, and Et. Lamotte, *Histoire*, pp. 768-770). The story occurs in several scriptures, but to my knowledge the number of 567 million is only mentioned in the *Vibhāṣā*.

<sup>28</sup>) *T* 2154 開元釋教錄 ch. 18, p. 672<sup>c</sup>.

In this case, official censorship has been successful, for as far as I know the four Maitreya scriptures branded as subversive by Zhisheng have disappeared completely. However, as we shall see, Dunhuang has yielded at least one complete text that shows us Maitreya amidst the horrors of the Last Judgement.

The forward shift of Maitreya was not the only change in a Buddhist theme that was made to adapt it to current apocalyptic expectations. At least as important was the combination of two other Buddhist notions that, as we have seen above, in their original context had not been associated with each other: the belief in the catastrophes that will destroy our world at the end of a great aeon, and the final stage of religious degeneration characterized by the disappearance of the Doctrine (*mofa*). The idea that the Way of Salvation was fading away, and, more specifically, that it did so in three stages (*sanjie* 三階), has made a very deep impression in early medieval Chinese Buddhist circles. The general misery and devastation wrought by warfare and exploitation, and probably also the wide-spread abuses within the Buddhist clergy, in any case made it clear that the “counterfeit Doctrine” made itself felt. But certain happenings—notably the two short-lived but violent repressions of Buddhism under some of the northern dynasties—could easily lead to the frightening thought that even that phase had run its course, and that the world was soon to enter the *mofa* period. The Sui chronicler Fei Changfang 費長房 may be right when he attributes the upsurge of *mofa* belief to the impression made by the persecutions of 446-454 (under Emperor Wu of the Northern Wei) and of 574-577 (launched by the Northern Zhou emperor Wu)<sup>29</sup>. In any case, this *mofa* belief was destined to have far-reaching consequences. This is not the place to go into this very complicated subject<sup>30</sup>. It has stimulated very important

<sup>29</sup>) *T* 2034 歷代三寶記 ch. 12, p. 107<sup>b</sup>. It is interesting to note how, many centuries earlier, the belief in the disappearance of the Doctrine in northwestern India had been stimulated by the devastations caused by the successive invasions of Scythians (Śaka), Greeks (Yavana), Parthians (Pahlava), and Yuezhi; cf. J. Przyluski, *op. cit.* pp. 162-163.

<sup>30</sup>) For the early phase of “*mofa* thought” in China see Yūki Reimon 結城令聞, “Shina Bukkyō ni okeru mappō-shisō no kōki” 支那佛教に於ける末法思想の興起, *Tōhō gakuhō* (Tokyo), 6, 1936, pp. 205-216. For Sui and T’ang developments see Takao Giken 高雄義堅, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shiron* 中國佛教史論, Kyoto, 1952, esp. pp. 54-96; “Mappō shisō to Zui Tō shoka no taido” 末法思想と隋唐諸家の態度.

doctrinal innovations, because one of the conclusions drawn from the expectation of an approaching *mofa* era was that in this degenerate world Buddhism could no longer be practised in its original, complicated and “difficult” form, and that there was, consequently, the need for a simple and direct way to salvation. It is well-known how this basic idea played an important role in the formation and development of the two great devotional movements in Chinese Buddhism: the Pure Land (Jingtu 淨土) School, founded by Tanluan 曇鸞 (476-542), and the remarkable pantheism of the School of the Three Stages (*Sanjie* 三階) that was established by Xinxing 信行 (540-594), and that was eventually proscribed on account of its “heretical” ideas and practices <sup>31</sup>).

Chinese Buddhist apocrypha very often contain detailed descriptions of the moral degeneration that prevails in the “last period” (*moshi* 末世; *mohoushi* 末後世). It is interesting to note that the sectarian groups from which such texts originate apparently were opposed to the established *saṅgha* of their time, which forms the main target of their criticism: according to these texts, the world as a whole is steeped in sin, but especially the church has become little more than a pack of swindlers and hypocrites. It is surprising to see how the abuses listed by these anonymous spokesmen of a “contestant church” completely agree with the well-known diatribes of anti-Buddhist polemicists (and, we may add, to the conclusions of modern historians): abysmal ignorance and even illiteracy among the monks; worthless ordinations; moral misbehaviour; monasteries hiding fugitives from justice and engaging in all kinds of commercial activities; deforestation of the countryside; usury; close relations between monks and unscrupulous officials, useless luxury, the exploitation of the common people by means of magic tricks, etcetera <sup>32</sup>). Thus, these texts (even if they pretend to be prophecies concerning a “last period” that is still to come) actually present a fascinating panorama of the dark

<sup>31</sup>) The most exhaustive and still unsurpassed study of the sect of the Three Stages is Yabuki Keiki 矢吹慶輝, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū* 三階教の研究, Tokyo, 1927.

<sup>32</sup>) Some examples: *T* 395 當來變經 (attributed to Dharmarakṣa, third cent.?), pp. 118<sup>a-c</sup>; *T* 396 法滅盡經 (anon.; 5th cent.?): *T* 245 仁王般若波羅蜜經 (wrongly attributed to Kumārajīva), ch. 2, pp. 833<sup>b-c</sup>; *T* 1331 灌頂經 (wrongly attributed to Śrīmitra; probably compiled in the fifth century, but including 4th cent. material), ch. 1, p. 497<sup>c</sup>; *T* 2085 像法決疑經 (anon.; probably 6th cent.; cf. Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū*; cf. above, note 15), p. 306.

side of Chinese Buddhist monasticism, and therefore are historical documents of great value, apart from their purely religious significance.

But the degeneration of the *saṅgha* takes place in a wider context: in the *mofa* period, the world is stricken by famine, epidemics and natural disasters; the government is cruel and corrupt; punishments are heavy and arbitrary. We can understand that, as in the case of the timing of Maitreya's incarnation, neither the temporal authorities nor the clerical establishment were eager to accept the idea that the final era was imminent, or even had already begun. Hence, the question at what time the *mofa* era was to start was of great ideological importance.

In our survey of Taoist eschatology we have seen that in Taoist scriptures of this type (as in Chinese prophetic literature in general) the beginning of the crisis and the appearance of the messiah are indicated in seemingly exact ways, either by combinations of cyclical signs belonging to the sexagenary cycle, or by indicating the number of years that have elapsed since a certain point in time ("forty-six cycles after Yao"). The latter method was the one used in Buddhist computations, since the chronological starting-point always was the date of the Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa*. However, chronological computation was hampered—and, at the same time, made more flexible—by two factors: the lack of unanimity regarding the date of the Buddha's birth (from which that of his decease could easily be derived, for all Buddhist traditions agree in according the Buddha a life-span of eighty years), and the fact that there were different opinions about the length of the phases that precede the *mofa*.

As regards the date of the Buddha's birth, quite a number of widely different opinions were held in early medieval China—a late sixth century author lists no less than seven, varying from 1173 to 467 BC <sup>33</sup>), and, consequently, yielding dates for the Buddha's

<sup>33</sup>) Fei Changfang 費長房, in *T* 2034 歷代三寶記 (597 AD), ch. 1, p. 25<sup>a</sup>. Another system of computation, not listed by Fei Changfang, is found in *T* 1933 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文, the solemn Vow formulated by the famous Huisi 慧思 (515-577), the popular and highly controversial preacher who also was the teacher of Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), the founder of the Pure Land school. Huisi, who actually was persecuted by his own fellow-monks because of his heretical ideas, was one of the few preachers who openly declared that the world had already entered the Final Period. In this dramatic document (p. 786<sup>c</sup>-787<sup>c</sup>), he states that he was born "in the 82nd year of the *mofa*"; from his computation the following scheme can be distilled:

*Parinirvāṇa* that range from 1094 to 388 BC. However, most of these are based on isolated and obscure sources, and never became popularized. During the Nanbeichao period, only two ways of dating were widely used; both were based on supposed references to the Buddha's birth in ancient Chinese chronicles <sup>34</sup>). Till the end of the fifth century, it was generally held that the Buddha had been born in the tenth year of the Zhou king Zhuang (686 BC), according to which his *Parinirvāṇa* would have taken place in 607 BC. In the sixth century, preference was generally given to a much earlier date for the Buddha's birth, corresponding to the twenty-fourth year of king Zhao (1029 BC according to the traditional chronology; 958 BC according to the chronology of the *Bamboo Annals* on which this synchronism was originally based). Hence, according to this somewhat later system, the *Parinirvāṇa* was placed in 879 or 950 BC. Thus, the diversity of chronological starting-points itself already offered ample space for different computations regarding the beginning of each of the Three Phases.

But also the length of each of these phases was a matter of controversy. In general, four schemes were current, for each of which excellent scriptural support could be adduced:

- (1) True Doctrine: 500 years; Counterfeit Doctrine: 500 years.
- (2) True Doctrine: 500 years; Counterfeit Doctrine: 1,000 years.
- (3) True Doctrine: 1,000 years; Counterfeit Doctrine: 500 years.
- (4) True Doctrine: 1,000 years; Counterfeit Doctrine: 1,000 years.

In addition, a number of other, deviating schemes were known, but they never became popular <sup>35</sup>).

(1) the *Parinirvāṇa* took place in 1068 B.C.; (2) the period of the True Doctrine lasted from 1067 to 568 B.C.; (3) the period of the Counterfeit Doctrine lasted a thousand years (567 B.C.-433 AD), and (4) the *mofa* had started in the *jiaxu* 甲戌 year (434 AD). For the influence of *mofa* thought on Huisi cf. Paul Magnin, *La vie et l'œuvre de Huisi* (515-577), Paris, 1979, esp. pp. 113-116, and Yoshio Kawakatsu, "A propos de la pensée de Huisi", in *BEFEO* 69 (1981), pp. 96-105.

<sup>34</sup>) Cf. my *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 271-274.

<sup>35</sup>) The starting-point of the schemes based on various combinations of the numbers 500 and 1,000 must be sought in the old tradition, according to which the Buddha himself, when (reluctantly, and only after Ānanda's repeated requests) admitting females into the Order, prophesied that due to this measure the True Law would only remain for five hundred years, instead of the one thousand years that it otherwise would have lasted (references to this famous episode in E. Lamotte, *Traité*, vol. I, p. 95). Apart from the schemes using multiples of 500, we find some other constructions: a gradual degeneration lasting ten centuries, each century

If we confine ourselves to the first two schemes that were by far the most common, and combine these with the dates most widely accepted for the Buddha's decease (i.e. the supposed birth-date plus eighty years), we obtain the following set of possible dates for the beginning of the dreaded Final Phase:

- (1) 1,000 years after Zhao 24, + 80 = 50 AD
- (2) *id.* (according to the chronology of the *Bamboo Annals*) = 121 AD
- (3) 1,000 years after Zhuang 10, + 80 = 392 AD
- (4) 1,500 years after Zhao 24, + 80 = 550 AD
- (5) *id.* (according to the chronology of the *Bamboo Annals*) = 621 AD
- (6) 1,500 years after Zhuang 10, + 80 = 993 AD

For the Nanbeichao period two of these dates are relevant: 392 AD and 550 AD. Both appear to be very significant, because we know from other sources that precisely around those two dates eschatological expectations reached a climax, not only in Buddhist circles but also in Taoism. As we have seen, it was around the middle of the sixth century that an upsurge of *mofa* belief led to the formation of new popular movements in Chinese Buddhism. But even more striking is the correspondence between Buddhist and Taoist eschatological expectations focused on the year 392, which is not only one of the possible dates for the beginning of the *mofa* phase, but also exactly the fateful year *renchen*, in which the Taoist messiah Li Hong was to appear! <sup>36)</sup>.

constituting a further step downward (*T* 390 佛臨涅槃記法住經, trsl. Xuan zang); three phases lasting, respectively, 80, 800, and 8,000 years (*T* 245, the apocryphal 仁王般若波羅蜜經 wrongly attributed to Kumārajīva); destruction of the True Doctrine by Māra the Evil One 700 years after the *Parinirvāṇa*, in the three versions of the (Mahāyāna) *Parinirvāṇa-sūtra* (*T* 374, ch. 7, p. 402<sup>a</sup>; *T* 375, ch. 7, p. 643<sup>b</sup>; *T* 376, ch. 4, p. 880<sup>a</sup>), a scheme that is also adopted by the apocryphal *T* 2879 普賢菩薩說證明經, for which see below. For the curious interpretation of this aberrant prophecy in the *Commentary on the Dayun jing* (大雲經神皇授記義疏), in 690 AD presented to Empress Wu in order to provide a Buddhist justification of her rule as a woman, see Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century*, Naples, 1976, p. 213.

<sup>36)</sup> Since the Buddhist calculation is based on the assumption that the Buddha was born on the eighth day of the fourth month of the tenth year of the Zhou king Zhuang, which assumption in turn was derived from an entry in the *Chunqiu* and *Zuojuan* (seventh year of Duke Zhuang of Lu, cf. my *Buddhist Conquest*, p. 272), the *renchen* year 392 AD was a fixed date that could not be altered; this way of computing is, moreover, attested as early as the first half of the third century. It would therefore be tempting to conclude that the Buddhist theory about the beginning of the *mofa*



One of the decisive steps in the formation of Buddho-Taoist eschatology was the original combination of *mofa* (which originally simply implied a state of moral degeneration and increased suffering) and the idea of “*kalpa*-disasters” (meaning the physical destruction of our world), and fixing the date of this total catastrophe, either by computations of the “x years after the *Parinirvāṇa*” type, or by a combination of cyclical characters. Thus, some recorded titles of apocryphal scriptures (the texts themselves have unfortunately been lost) refer to “the great deluge of the year *jiashen* (甲申年大水; 甲申年洪災大水)<sup>37)</sup>, and in other

phase in that year was taken over by the Taoists, and used as the basis of their own eschatological expectations. However, the chance of mere coincidence can never be excluded—after all, the early Jesuit missionaries in Ming China taught their converts that Jesus Christ had been crucified and resurrected from the grave “in the eighth year of the Han emperor Wu”—which is a *renchen* year! (cf. Luigi Buglio 利類思 and Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁, *Bu de yi bian* 不得已辯, 1665, ed. *Zhongguo shixue congshu*, p. 296).

<sup>37)</sup> CSZJJ (518 AD) already lists a group of three apocrypha (*T* 2145, ch. 5, p. 39<sup>a</sup>) which appear to have had as their common theme the appearance of the saviour Candraprabha (月光), connected with a prophecy concerning the Buddha’s almsbowl, the deluge of the *jiashen* year, and the descent of Maitreya:

- (1) *Prophecy about the visualization of the Bodhisattva Yueguang*; one *juan* 觀月光菩薩記一卷;
- (2) *Prophecy* (or “*Scripture*” 經 acc. to the Korean recension) *about the Buddha’s almsbowl* 佛鉢記 (note by Sengyou: “It foretells the great deluge of the year *jiashen* and the appearance of the Bodhisattva Yueguang 記甲申年大水及月光菩薩出事);
- (3) [*The scripture of*] *Maitreya’s descent and teachings*, in one *juan* 彌勒下教一卷 (note by Sengyou: “Appended to the *Almsbowl Prophecy*” 在鉢記後).

The second text was different from the apocryphal *Scripture about the huge disasters and great deluge of the jiashen year* 甲申年洪災大水經 mentioned in the early T’ang *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (*T* 2154, ch. 18, p. 673<sup>a</sup>), for the compiler notes that the two texts are not the same. The date of the group of apocrypha listed by Seng-you is difficult to determine; since they did not figure in Dao’an’s 道安 late fourth century bibliography that Sengyou has incorporated *in toto* into his CSZJJ, they probably date from the fifth, or the very beginning of the sixth century. In that case the *jiashen* year could be 444 AD or 504 AD (or, since we are dealing with a comfortably flexible system of prophetic dating, any later year following 504 AD with a sixty-year interval). However that may be, the choice of the *jiashen* year is certainly of Taoist provenance. In *TT* 442 上清後聖道君列紀, a text that probably belongs to the original Maoshan corpus of the late fourth century, we find (p. 3<sup>b</sup>) that the *jiashen* year marks the beginning of the Judgement, and in several other Taoist scriptures it is explicitly associated

prophecies the cataclysm is expected to take place in the two successive years *shen* 申 and *yu* 酉 (cf. below p. 38 and note 70). Such predictions were of course considered highly subversive by worldly and clerical authorities alike, and we can understand why Fajing, commenting upon one of the three texts mentioned above, exclaims: “Even at a first glance this scripture appears to be the summit of weirdness and fraud!”<sup>38)</sup>

The same original combination of *mofa*, the end of our world, and the emergence of a superhuman saviour at a certain date, and even at a certain place, forms the basic pattern of the apocalyptic lore that grew up around the Bodhisattva Yueguang tongzi, to whom we shall turn now.

#### IV. PRINCE MOONLIGHT—THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF AN OBSCURE BODHISATVA

Candraprabha-kumāra definitely does not belong to the small group of great Bodhisattvas who are well-known both from literature and from religious art—in fact, I have been unable to find a single image of him in Buddhist iconography. Buddhist biographical literature does not mention any specialized cult devoted to him; it only contains one single reference to his saving power, describing how the monk Zhizao 智炤 in 571 AD was restored to health by an apparition of the Bodhisattva Yueguang<sup>39)</sup>.

However, he does play a modest role in non-Chinese Buddhist lore. Apart from the occurrence of his name in lists of Bodhisattvas present in some other Mahāyāna scriptures<sup>40)</sup>, he is best known

with the great deluge, e.g. *TT* 335 神呪經 ch. 2, p. 2<sup>b</sup> and p. 8<sup>b</sup>; ch. 5, p. 2<sup>a</sup>; the original 上清三天正法經 quoted in *TT* 1032 雲笈七籤 ch. 2, p. 7<sup>a</sup>; *Tai ping jing* 甲部, ed. Wang Ming, p. 4.

<sup>38)</sup> *T* 2146 衆經目錄 ch. 2, p. 127<sup>a</sup>: 略觀此經妖妄之甚.

<sup>39)</sup> *T* 2060 續高僧傳 ch. 19, p. 585<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>40)</sup> Cf. *T* 262, Kumārajīva's translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, p. 2<sup>a</sup> (the current Sanskrit text reads Ratnaprabha “Jewel-light”, which is confirmed by Dharmarakṣa's older translation, *T* 263, p. 63<sup>a</sup>; but Kumārajīva's reading probably is the correct one, as the name Candraprabha here occurs, in accordance with a well-known Mahāyāna convention, between other names containing *candra* “moon”: 寶月 Ratnacandra, and 滿月 Pūrṇacandra); further *T* 398 大方等大集經 (Dharmakṣema, ca. 420 AD), p. 132<sup>a</sup>; *T* 656 菩薩瓔珞經 (Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, 2nd half 4th cent.), p. 1<sup>b</sup>. A more prominent role is played by Candraprabha as main interlocutor of the Buddha in Narendrayaśas' translation of the *Samādhi-rāja-sūtra* *T* 639 月燈三昧經 (Sui), p. 549<sup>a</sup> sqq, which also contains the story of his *vyākaraṇa* (ch. 3, p. 567<sup>b</sup>, cf. below), and as a singer of stanzas in praise of the Buddha in a later Tantric text, *T* 402 寶星陀羅尼經 (trsl. Prabhāmitra, ca. 630 AD), ch. 6, p. 565<sup>e</sup>.



for his role in a short *sūtra* that has been preserved in several Chinese versions. The first one dates from the late third century (T 534 *Yueguang tongzi jing* 月光童子經, trsl. by Dharmarakṣa); it is followed in the Canon by an anonymous translation, probably of the fifth century (T 535 *Shenri jing* 申日經) and by a very short recension translated by Guṇabhadra around 440 AD (T 536 *Shenri er ben jing* 申日兒本經). The latest still extant Chinese translation was made by Narendrayaśas in 583 AD (T 545 *Dehu zhangzhe jing* 德護長者經) from a much more developed recension of the Indian scripture <sup>41</sup>).

There is nothing in this short *sūtra* to make it stand out from the great mass of minor Buddhist scriptures containing pious stories (*avadāna*), of which there are hundreds in the Buddhist canon. In this case, the main personage is a depraved householder named Śrīgupta (trscr. 申日; trsl. 德護), who has a moral counterpart in his virtuous son, the sixteen-year old Yueguang. At the instigation of heretical masters, Śrīgupta digs a pitfall filled with fire, and then invites the Buddha to a meal in order to let him perish in it. The young Yueguang discovers the plot; he remonstrates with his father, and implores him not to carry out his plan, but to no avail. When the Buddha arrives, he naturally knows the father's evil intention, and changes the fire-pit into a lotus pond. Śrīgupta is deeply ashamed; his heart is changed, and he is converted on the spot. The theme—a pious son desperately trying to keep his father from committing a mortal sin—no doubt appealed to the Chinese public, and accounts for the many successive translations made of this short scripture.

In the original Indian text the main subject is Śrīgupta's plot and his conversion through a miracle; the young Yueguang plays

<sup>41</sup>) The successive Buddhist bibliographies mention a great number of versions with varying titles. Some of these are attributed to well-known translators, other versions are anonymous, and several are listed as “lost” at an early date. For the extremely complicated problem of those different versions and attributions see Hayashiya Tomojirō 林屋友次郎, *Iyaku kyōrui no kenkyū* 異譯經類の研究, Tokyo, 1945, ch. 7 (pp. 410-435). For the earliest versions cf. also my *Buddhist Conquest* p. 437, n. 130. I must correct the statement, made there, that T 535 probably was translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 in the third century: the so-called Zhi Qian version mentioned in Buddhist bibliographies appears to be identical with T 169 月明菩薩經, in which a young man named Candraprabha (月明童男, trscr. as 梅羅法) does figure, but the content of this short *avadāna* is totally different from that of the group of scriptures in question.

a secondary role as a remonstrant, and then disappears from the story. However, in two of the extant four Chinese versions—the anonymous fifth century text, and the Sui version by Narendrayaśas—the conversion is followed by a *vyākaraṇa*: the Buddha utters an elaborate prophecy concerning Candraprabha's future lives and his eventual attainment of Buddhahood. This is of course a well-known *cliché* occurring in innumerable Mahāyāna scriptures. But in these two cases there can be no doubt that we have to do with apocryphal interpolations of Chinese origin.

In the anonymous *Shenri jing* (T 535) the Buddha declares that a thousand years after the *Parinirvāṇa*, when the canonical doctrine is about to disappear, Yueguang tongzi will be reborn in China (Qin guo 秦國)<sup>42</sup> as a saintly ruler. He will revive the True Doctrine in all the Western Regions and among the surrounding barbarians. They will be converted in great numbers, and all who listen to the words of this scripture will be saved from sin<sup>43</sup>).

Thus we see how Yueguang, here promoted to the status of Bodhisattva, is associated with holy kingship, the final period of the Doctrine, and with China.

It is difficult to say how old this complex is, but the first traces of it in Chinese literature clearly antedate the fifth century *Shenri jing* interpolation. Yueguang's special relation with China is for the first time alluded to around the middle of the fourth century, in the "Ode to Yueguang tongzi" 月光童子讚 (*Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, T 2103, ch. 15, p. 197<sup>e</sup>), a piece of extremely obscure "metaphysical poetry" written by the famous scholar-monk and *xuanxue* 玄學 specialist Zhi Dun 支遁 (314-366). It is one of a series of thirteen eulogies written in the highly rhetorical and obscurantistic style that is characteristic of this genre. The first two, inspired by icons (*xiang* 像) representing Śākyamuni and Amitābha, are much longer than the other ones that are devoted to eleven Bodhisattvas, most of whom are well-known from Mahāyāna scriptures. The one describing the supernatural powers and

<sup>42</sup>) In early Buddhist translations, the term Qin 秦 is regularly used for "China", without any special reference to the Former or Later (Proto-Tibetan) Qin dynasties that ruled part of northern China in the late fourth and early fifth century. Cf. P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, Paris, 1959, p. 268 sqq s.v. "Cin"; A. F. P. H. Hulsewé and M. Loewe, *China in Central Asia—The early stage: 125 B.C.-A.D. 23*; Leiden, 1979, p. 169 n. 546 and p. 232 n. 898.

<sup>43</sup>) T 535, p. 819<sup>a</sup>.

compassion of Prince Moonlight does not explicitly refer to his actual appearance in China, either as a saviour or as an ideal ruler. However, it does state that “His beautiful (bodily) form flowered in India, and his fame is propagated in the region of the Red District (i.e. China)” 英姿秀乾竺，名播赤縣鄉， and this reference to China, combined with the fact that throughout the ode no allusion is made to Candraprabha’s original role as described in the *Shenri jing*, makes it probable that Zhi Dun was hinting at some tradition about Yueguang’s special significance for China—in fact, if this were not the case, it is hard to understand why he should have singled out this very obscure Bodhisattva for being eulogized, along with such great saviours as Mañjuśrī, Maitreya, and Vimalakīrti.

However, the first explicit reference to Yueguang’s appearance in China in secular literature still dates from Zhi Dun’s lifetime. The *Gaoseng zhuan* contains a fragment from a letter written by Xi Cuoqi 習鑿齒 to the famous scholar-monk Dao’an, and in this document, dated 365 AD, the writer, after having extolled the beneficial influence of Dao’an’s wisdom and piety, exclaims “Yueguang will appear, and the supernatural Alms-bowl is to descend!” 月光將出，靈鉢應降<sup>44</sup>). Again, no further details are added, but in this case the author clearly alludes to the appearance of Yueguang in China, as the result of Dao’an’s activities that have prepared the way to his coming. It is furthermore to be noted that in this very early reference the appearance of Prince Moonlight is already coupled with a tradition concerning the “descent” of the Buddha’s almsbowl, to which we shall revert later. Another attempt to connect Yueguang tongzi with China, probably also older than this *Shenri jing* version, is the remarkable identification of this Bodhisattva with Confucius’ young disciple Yan Hui 顏回 that occurs in a quotation from the (lost) apocryphal *Qingjing Faxing jing* 清淨法行經<sup>45</sup>).

But this theme is even more clearly brought forward, and in this case associated with a well-known Chinese ruler, in another apocryphal passage which we find in Narendrayaśas’ translation of 583 AD. Here the Buddha prophesies that in the final era of the Doctrine, on the continent of Jambudvīpa, in the country of the Great Sui, Yueguang will be a powerful ruler named Daxing 大行.

<sup>44</sup>) *Gao-seng zhuan*, T 2109, ch. 4, p. 352<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>45</sup>) Cf. *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 314-315.

He will make Buddhism flourish throughout his realm, and be renowned for his personal devotion. He will venerate the Buddha's Alms-bowl that at that time will be brought to the land of Sui from Kashgar (Shale 沙勒). He will patronize Buddhism on a grandiose scale, notably by the reproduction and spread of holy texts, the making of Buddha images of every kind, and the establishment of countless Buddhist sanctuaries in all parts of the empire <sup>46</sup>).

Considering the date of Narendrayaśas' translation and some details given in this prediction, no doubt is possible about the identity of Yueguang's *avatāra* in the person of "Emperor Daxing". The interpolation is a piece of political propaganda on behalf of the Sui emperor Wen, whose effort to incorporate Buddhist beliefs into the hybrid ideology justifying his rule is well-known. It may well be that Narendrayaśas himself was responsible for inserting this passage into his translation, which he made only one year after he had been summoned by Yang Jian himself to the Daxing shan si 大興善寺—the most prestigious Buddhist institution in the empire, situated next to the palace in the newly built capital—to perform his translation work under imperial auspices. However, the text clearly refers to Wendi's most grandiose act of politically inspired Buddhist piety: the building of hundreds of relic-shrines all over the country, in imitation of King Aśoka, and this only took place in the year 601. The interpolation may therefore have been made at that date, or somewhat later. I have no explanation for the curious fact that the Sui emperor is named Daxing, "Great Practice". At first sight it would be tempting to relate it to the name of the Sui imperial city, Daxing 大興, but such an association is untenable in view of the Middle Chinese pronunciation of the two characters now read *xing* (行: \*χiəng; 興: \*ɣvng).

However, the political role of Yueguang in support of temporal rulers still had to reach its climax. In the early T'ang we see him emerge again, this time as part of the Buddhist propaganda by means of which Empress Wu tried to legitimize her position as a woman on the throne. In a lengthy interpolation in the *Ratnamegha-sūtra* (T 660 *Baoyun jing* 寶雲經, trsl. by Dharmaruci)—itself no doubt an authentic translated scripture—Yueguang is foretold that in the final phase of the Doctrine he will be reborn in the country of Great China (摩訶支那國, Mahācīna), in the northeastern part of Jambudvīpa, as a powerful female monarch. She will rule

<sup>46</sup>) T 545, ch. 2, p. 849<sup>b</sup> sqq.

with wisdom and kindness, build many Buddhist temples, and provide the clergy with large endowments. Peace and prosperity will prevail. After a long life she will be reborn in the Tuṣita heaven and join the company of Maitreya <sup>47</sup>).

In all these cases Yueguang's role is ambiguous. He appears in a time of crisis, when the end of the Doctrine is approaching, and he has some traits of a saviour; yet we cannot call him a true messiah. He rather figures as a great revivalist. He restores for a certain period the Doctrine to its pristine glory, but afterwards it is still doomed to disappear.

This role of Yueguang as a temporary saviour is even more clearly expressed in a short apocryphal text, the *Sūtra of the annihilation of the Doctrine*, *Fa miejin jing* 法滅盡經 (T 396; probably fifth century) <sup>48</sup>). The text first describes the general moral degeneration of society, and particularly of the Buddhist church, in the last phase of the Doctrine. There will be great disasters, and the government authorities will be corrupt and ruthless. Then the catastrophes break out. Most sinners will be swallowed by the deluge; the few remaining sages withdraw into the mountains. At that moment the Bodhisattva Yueguang appears; as a saintly ruler he once more revives the True Doctrine. But after that last splendour that will last fifty-two years, the process of decay continues; one after another the sacred scriptures vanish from this

<sup>47</sup>) T 660, ch. 1, p. 284<sup>a</sup>. This interpolation has been studied by Antonino Forte, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-136, as it forms one of the main ingredients of the “Commentary” submitted to Empress Wu in 690 AD. However, he has not paid attention to the importance of Yueguang in Chinese prophetic and eschatological literature.

<sup>48</sup>) The various Buddhist bibliographies, starting with Sengyou's early sixth century *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (T 2145, p. 23<sup>c</sup>), contain many entries dealing with various versions of a *Fa miejin jing*, also called *Fa mojin jing* 法沒盡經 and *Kongji pusa suo wen jing* 空寂菩薩所問經. For the bibliographical details see my article “Eschatology and Messianism in Early Chinese Buddhism”, in *Leyden Studies in Sinology*, Leiden, 1982, p. 48, n. 20, where I have also presented a more extensive account of the content of this scripture. In the sixth century, the *Fa miejin jing* must have been quite influential. It is regularly quoted in contemporary literature and Sengyou himself considered it important enough to include almost its whole text in section 34 of his compilation *Shijia pu* 釋迦譜 (T 2040, p. 83<sup>c</sup>-84<sup>b</sup>). The controversial preacher Huisi 慧思 (515-577) also clearly refers to it in his “Written Vow” (T 1933, p. 786<sup>c</sup>; cf. note 33), adding the interesting detail—not contained in the original *Fa miejin jing*—that Yueguang's appearance in China (真丹國) will take place 9,800 years after the beginning of the *mofa* period, which, according to his own system of computation, would correspond to the year 9497 AD.

world<sup>49</sup>), and mankind is steeped in spiritual darkness: “At the time of the disappearance of my Doctrine, it will be like an oil-lamp, that shines even more brightly when it is about to expire—and then it is extinguished”<sup>50</sup>). It may be added that the idea of a last revival even in the final era is also found elsewhere in Buddhist scriptures<sup>51</sup>).

<sup>49</sup>) The idea that in the final phase the sacred scriptures spontaneously disappear, or are transported elsewhere, is attested in “authentic” Buddhist scriptures, e.g. *T* 383 *Mahāmāyā-sūtra* 摩訶摩耶經 (trsl. Tanjing 曇景, late 5th cent.), ch. 2, p. 114<sup>a</sup>: in the end, after 1,500 years, when the Doctrine is about to vanish, all scriptures spontaneously come together in Kuśinagara, and are from there taken into the sea by the *nāga*-king Sāgara. In the apocryphal *sūtra* quoted here, the order of disappearance is puzzling: fifty-two years after the coming of Yueguang, the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* and the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* will be the first to vanish; they will then be followed by all other scriptures (*T* 396, p. 1117<sup>b</sup>). However, the belief concerning the final disappearance of the scriptures is also found in the Taoist tradition, cf. *TT* 23 太上諸天靈盡度命妙經 pp. 14<sup>b</sup>-15<sup>a</sup>, and *TT* 532 太極真人靈寶齋戒威儀諸經要訣 p. 20<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>50</sup>) *T* 396, p. 1110<sup>b</sup>: 吾法滅時譬如油燈臨欲滅時光明更盛於是便滅.

<sup>51</sup>) According to the apocryphal *T* 1331 灌頂經 ch. 1, p. 497<sup>c</sup>, a thousand years after the *Parinirvāṇa* the Doctrine will be revived by the saviour-monk Puji 普濟, after the latter has rediscovered the text of this scripture, written in gold on sandalwood strips, and encased in a jewelled box, in the cave where it had lain concealed since it had disappeared from this world 700 years earlier. Yueguang himself is also mentioned as a powerful protector, together with his near-namesake Yueming 月明, in a short exorcistic apocryphal text from Dunhuang (S. 418 and S. 2617, 呪魅經, = *T* 2882). In the (probably authentic) *T* 390 佛臨涅槃記法住經 (trsl. Xuanzang), p. 1113<sup>c</sup>, it is explicitly said that all those who make the Doctrine flourish in the phase of final degeneration actually are manifestations of Bodhisattvas.

The same picture of decay, interrupted by a temporary revival under the rule of Yueguang, is presented by another short apocryphal text that, unlike the *Fa miejin jing*, has only been preserved in a Dunhuang manuscript studied by Makita Tairyō: the *Sūtra of the Ten Changes* (i.e. the ten stages of degeneration) of the Clergy after the *Parinirvāṇa* 般泥洹後比丘十變經 (S. 2109; cf. Makita Tairyō, *op. cit.* pp. 61-62). It probably also dates from the fifth century. When the True Doctrine (that in this scheme apparently only lasts three centuries) has come to an end, the clergy passes through ten stages of moral decline, each of which lasts a hundred years. The symptoms listed are familiar, as they occur in several apocrypha of this type. After a thousand years (i.e. 1,300 years after the *Parinirvāṇa*) a state of total degeneration has been reached: the clergy is ignorant, corrupt, and subjected to the worldly powers; the monks engage in forbidden practices such as carrying arms, slaughtering animals, and marriage. Great chaos and disasters will break out, culminating in a flood that will last twelve years. Then Prince Moonlight will appear in the world. As an ideal ruler, he will convert

In these apocryphal texts, the personage of Yueguang has advanced yet another step towards the status of a true messiah. Unlike his performance in legitimistic masquerades serving the interests of Sui Wendi and Empress Wu (for whom a truly apocalyptic role obviously would not have been acceptable) we see him here associated, not only with the *mofa* situation, but also with real apocalyptic themes: the deluge; the destruction of sinners, and the separation of the blessed minority.

An elusive element in this complex consists of the recurring references to a tradition concerning the “almsbowl of the Buddha”. We have seen how it was mentioned together with Yueguang in the earliest reference to that saviour, a letter of the year 365 AD, and how Sui Wendi in his role as manifestation of Yueguang tongzi is said to have paid homage to that sacred object after it had come to China from Kashgar. In the early Buddhist bibliographies, one of the three lost apocrypha that appear to have been devoted to the appearance of Yueguang and to the incarnation of Maitreya is a *Prophecy about the Buddha’s Alms-bowl* 佛鉢記 (cf. above, note 37). The details of this tradition and the role played by Yueguang in it are unclear. However, the idea that this famous relic in the distant future would mystically disappear from India, and successively emerge at various places, making a kind of tour throughout India, Central Asia, and China (or, according to another version, moving from one heaven to another), finally to be received by Maitreya, is attested in several sources.

According to a well-known episode of the legend of Śākyamuni’s life, the Buddha shortly after his Enlightenment received from the Four Heavenly Kings four stone almsbowls that had spontaneously been produced on Mt. Vinataka. The Buddha accepted them, and then miraculously joined them into a single bowl, which he used for the rest of his life. After his *Parinirvāṇa* it became one of the most venerable relics of the Buddhist world; in the fourth and early fifth century this object—or at least a huge

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the people by preaching the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and many will be reborn in the heavens. Universal well-being will return; the human body will become eight feet tall, and men will live up to 180 years of age. Yueguang’s reign will last fifty-one years. But then the final decay will resume its course. The monk Luoyun 羅云 will assemble all the holy relics, and the nāga-king “Parinirvāṇa” 般泥洹龍王 will receive these, as well as all the scriptures, and store them in his oceanic palace. On earth, no trace will be left of the great doctrine.



stone alms-bowl that was claimed to be the original *buddha-pātra*—was kept in a temple at Puruṣapura in Gandhāra, where it was visited by several Chinese pilgrims<sup>52</sup>). However, by the time Xuanzang visited the sanctuary, the Bowl was no longer there. He reports that it had been taken away and broken by a wicked king of Kashmir (who elsewhere is identified with the notoriously anti-Buddhist King Mihirakula)<sup>53</sup>; after the latter's conquest of Gandhāra, the relic had been moved elsewhere, and was now reported to be in "Persia" 波刺斯<sup>54</sup>). But relics have a natural tendency to multiply, and according to other statements the Bowl could also be seen in Kashmir, and even in Kashgar 沙勒國—the same Central Asian kingdom that is mentioned in the Sui interpolation as the place from where it was to reach China<sup>55</sup>).

<sup>52</sup>) Cf. Faxian's record of his pilgrimage, *T* 2085 高僧法顯傳 p. 858<sup>b</sup>; pilgrimages made by Fayong 法勇 recorded in *CSZJJ* *T* 2145, ch. 15, p. 113<sup>b</sup> and *GSZ*, *T* 2059, ch. 3, p. 338<sup>c</sup>; and by Daopu 道普, in *GSZ*, *T* 2059, ch. 2, p. 337<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>53</sup>) *T* 386 蓮華面經, trsl. Narendrayaśas, ch. 2, p. 1075<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>54</sup>) *T* 2053 大慈恩寺三藏法師傳, ch. 2, p. 230<sup>a</sup>; *T* 2087 大唐西域記, ch. 2 p. 879<sup>c</sup>, and *T* 2087, ch. 11, p. 938<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>55</sup>) Biography of Zhimeng 智猛 in *T* 2145 *CSTCC*, ch. 15, p. 113<sup>b</sup>, and *T* 2059 *KSC*, ch. 3, p. 343<sup>b</sup>; biography of Kumārajīva in *T* 2059 *KSC*, ch. 2, p. 330<sup>b</sup>.

Kashgar again is mentioned in an entry in the *Wei shu* chapter on Buddhism and Taoism (*Wei shu* ch. 114, 釋老志, pp. 3036-3037) where it is stated that at the beginning of the Tai'an era (455-460) "foreign monk(s?) from Kashgar came to the capital (i.e. the first Toba Wei capital near Datong), and brought there the almsbowl of the Buddha, as well as painted icons" 沙勒胡沙門赴京師，致佛鉢并畫像迹. This may have been a replica of the relic, but the text does not expressly say so. That such replicas were made, and eventually also found their way to China, is attested by a passage from the biography of the early fifth century monk Sengbiao 僧表 that has been preserved in the *Meisōden-shō* 名僧傳抄 (an extract made in 1235 by the monk Shūshō 宗性 from a *Mingseng zhuan* manuscript in the Tōdaiji at Nara; the original *Mingseng zhuan* was a compilation of monks' biographies completed by Baochang 寶唱 in 519 AD). The Biography first mentions the curious fact that the Almsbowl, then kept at Kashmir, once had flown through the air, with a retinue of twelve Arhats, to Liangzhou 涼州 (in present-day Kansu) and there had stayed for six years before returning to Kashmir. It then goes on to describe Sengbiao's attempt to reach Kashmir, which failed because the roads were blocked. Sengbiao then stayed in Khotan (于賓 in the text is no doubt a mistake for 于闐), where the king presented him with a Buddha statue and a replica of the Buddha's Alms-bowl. Afterwards Sengbiao returned to Shu (present-day Sichuan), where both objects "are now still kept by the Longhua Monastery 龍華寺 in Chengdu". (*Zoku-zōkyō* 續藏經 II, 2, VII. 1, p. 13<sup>b</sup>).



The prophecy concerning the future peregrinations of the *buddha-pātra* appears to be based on an Indian tradition, as is proved by a curious passage in Faxian’s account of his visit to Ceylon. There he listened to a prophecy recited by an Indian monk, to the effect that the Buddha’s alms-bowl originally was kept in Vaiśālī, and was now to be seen in Gandhāra. After “a number of centuries” it would move to the country of Yuezhi, and then, in successive stages, manifest itself in Khotan, Kucha, and China 漢地. From China it would return to Ceylon, and then move on to, respectively, Central India, the Tuṣita heaven (to be venerated by Maitreya), and the *nāga*-king Sāgara who would keep it in his ocean-palace till the advent of Maitreya. After the latter’s incarnation, the *pātra* will spontaneously return to Mt. Vinataka and split up into its original four parts. Each one of the Four Heavenly Kings will then again take one of these bowls to the Buddha Maitreya, who will repeat Śākyamuni’s miracle and join them into one alms-bowl—for all the thousand Buddhas of our *kalpa* use one and the same bowl. Faxian was duly impressed and wanted a written copy of this “*sūtra*”, but the preacher said: “For this (prediction) there is no canonical text; I am just making an oral recitation” 此無經本吾止口誦耳<sup>56</sup>).

In Narendrayaśas’ sixth century translation of the *Lianhua mianjing* 蓮華面經 (T 386), the whole circuit of the Buddha’s alms-bowl has been transposed to the heavens: after the removal of the *pātra* from Gandhāra to Kashmir, it will disappear from the earth, manifest itself to one class of gods after the other, and then pass into the hands of Sāgara who will keep it till the coming of Maitreya<sup>57</sup>). But China again figures in a prophecy of supposedly Indian origin, reported by Daoshi 道世 in his *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 of 668 AD: after the *Parinirvāṇa* the alms-bowl will move from one place to another; finally it will reach China and “cause the transforming influence left behind (by the Buddha) to flourish in the region of Han” 遺化興於漢境<sup>58</sup>).

<sup>56</sup>) T 2085 高僧法顯傳, p. 863<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>57</sup>) T 386, ch. 2, p. 1075<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>58</sup>) T 2122, ch. 30, p. 513<sup>b</sup>. Daoshi adds that this information was based on an Indian text that had been brought from Northern India to the Shijian Monastery 石澗寺 “in the year *jiazi* 甲子”, and that its content was made known by a certain *dhyaṇa*-master Saṅghayaśas 僧伽耶舍 when the latter was sent as an envoy to China. The text measured “about two sheets” 有兩紙許—an expression that apparently refers to the Chinese translation of the *Prophecy*, which then, depending on the number of columns per sheet and the number of characters per column, would have been a text of some-

From all this we can only conclude that an Indian tradition concerning the future peregrinations of the Buddha's alms-bowl, in which China was mentioned as one of the places to the blessed by its appearance, had given rise to a Chinese version in which the "descent" of this auspicious object in China probably was emphasized. The story, in which both Maitreya and Yueguang appear to have played a role, was, *inter alia*, told in a lost apocryphal text that may not be earlier than the fifth century, but the theme itself was already known around the middle of the fourth. In Sui times a new element is introduced: the object is said to move from Kashgar to China, there to be venerated by the emperor who, according to this propagandistic tale, is a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Yueguang himself.

But even more baffling is the question that underlies the whole story of Yueguang's career in China: why was this rather obscure Bodhisattva destined to play such an important soteriological role? We cannot answer it on the basis of clear evidence. Narendrayaśas' translation of the *Samādhi-rāja-sūtra* (T 639, second half of the sixth century), which contains the prophecy of Yueguang's future Buddhahood, does say explicitly that he will become a Buddha in the period of the end of the Doctrine (末法時代), when the world is full of ignorance and sin<sup>59</sup>), and this may provide one possible clue, but this text is of course rather late and cannot have been the original source of inspiration.

It is possible that the very name of the Bodhisattva may have played a certain role in his transformation. There are some scriptural passages in which Yueguang speaks words that refer to "moon" or "moonlight": in a series of Bodhisattvas each of whom gives his own definition of the Absolute (a familiar *cliché* of which many examples occur in Mahāyāna scriptures, the most famous one being the sequence of speakers in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*), he is the one who compares all phenomena with the moon's reflection in

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thing between 650 and 1300 *zi*. The Shijian Monastery in Shouchun 壽春 (present-day Shouxian in Anhui) is to my knowledge only mentioned in a few passages in historical and bibliographical sources referring to the early fifth century (*T* 2059 高僧傳 ch. 2, p. 333<sup>b</sup>; *ib.* ch. 11, p. 399<sup>c</sup>; *T* 2145 出三藏記集 ch. 3, p. 20<sup>b</sup>; *T* 2149 大唐內典錄 ch. 3, p. 246<sup>c</sup>). If the Indian text arrived at the monastery at that time, the *jiazi* year would be 424 AD. About Saṅghayaśas and his mission to China I have found no further information.

<sup>59</sup>) *T* 639 月燈三昧經, ch. 3, pp. 567<sup>b</sup>-568<sup>a</sup>.

water <sup>60)</sup>, and in a hymn sung by him the Buddha is compared to the moon <sup>61)</sup>, but the similes are quite commonplace, and can, at best, only have served to reinforce some pre-existing association between the theme of the saviour and some kind of moon-symbolism. As we shall see, the apocryphal Dunhuang text to be treated below contains some very obscure references to a (obviously evil) power or fluid called The Old Moon, *guyue* 古月, which prevails in the final period, and which is to be supplanted by the virtuous rule of Yueguang. At first sight, it seems obvious to regard the “Old Moon” as a veiled allusion to “the Barbarians”, as the two graphs combined form the character *hu* 胡. In fact, we find the term used in this way in a prognostic verse of ca. 360 AD, quoted in the Annals of the ruler Fu Jian 苻堅 in *Jin shu* ch. 114, p. 2910: 古月之末亂中國 . . . . <sup>62)</sup>. The term also occurs—probably again referring to the barbarians—in the Taoist apocalyptic scripture TT 322 天地運度經 p. 4<sup>b</sup>, where the Old Moon is said “to invade China” 古月侵神州 as an evil influence. However, in the messianic lore around Yueguang tongzi it appears to have a more general meaning. The saviour is by no means represented as a symbol of China versus the barbarians. As we have seen above (p. 24), in the interpolation in the *Shenri jing* he is even expressly said to convert the inhabitants in all border regions, and in the *Zhengming jing* the barbarians are explicitly stated to be destined to be saved as much as the Chinese are. We can only conclude that at a certain stage Prince Moonlight became part of a pre-existing indigenous complex of ideas in which the “Old Moon” played a certain role, and in which the Bodhisattva’s name acquired a special significance which it originally did not have at all. However, I have so far failed to find any further information about the origin and nature of such a belief.

## V. THE BUDDHO-TAOIST APOCALYPSE: TWO TEXTS FROM DUNHUANG

Fortunately, our information is not restricted to the isolated and fragmentary data which we have treated so far. The Buddho-Taoist eschatology in its fully developed form is set forth in two apocryphal *sūtras* that have been preserved in a number of Dunhuang manuscripts. The first text, that is almost exclusively

<sup>60)</sup> *T* 397 大方等大集經, trsl. Dharmakṣema (ca. 420 AD), p. 132<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>61)</sup> *T* 462 寶星陀羅尼經, trsl. Prabhāmitra (ca. 630 AD), p. 565<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>62)</sup> I owe this reference to Anna Seidel. Cf. also M. C. Rogers, *Chin-shu: The Chronicle of Fu Chien*, Berkeley, 1968, p. 261, n. 522.

devoted to the messianic activities of the Bodhisattva Yueguang tongzi, is entitled “The Scripture of the monk Shouluo” *Shouluo biqu jing* 首羅比丘經; it is no doubt identical with the “Scripture of the monk Shouluo meeting Yueguang tongzi, *Shouluo biqu jian Yueguang tongzi jing* 首羅比丘見月光童子經 that is mentioned in the section “faked *sūtras*” in Buddhist bibliographies since the early Sui, and probably dates from the sixth century<sup>63</sup>). For brevity’s sake, we shall refer to it as the *Shouluo jing*.

The text is only partly intelligible. At first sight this would seem to be due to extreme textual corruption, but a comparison of the five manuscript versions that are at my disposal leads to the conclusion that this is not the case: the manuscripts are carefully written by skilled copyists, and, apart from a few rather insignificant variant readings, the text is very uniform and appears to have been transmitted with great accuracy. If some parts of the scripture, particularly in its final sections, are so cryptic as to defy all attempts to understand it (let alone to translate it), this must be due to the intentional use of a kind of oracular language, teeming with veiled allusions, symbolic images, and plays on words—which, after all, it is not surprising to find in a sectarian prophetic scripture. In spite of its partial unintelligibility, it is a unique document that enables us to reconstruct the main features of a Buddho-Taoist eschatology of the late Nanbeichao period.

A number of cryptic passages can be made somewhat clearer by comparing them with our second text, the “Scripture of the Realization of Understanding preached by the Bodhisattva Samantab-

<sup>63</sup>) First mentioned in *T* 2146 衆經目錄 (594 AD), ch. 2, p. 126<sup>c</sup>, there immediately followed by a no doubt closely related *Prophecy concerning the vision of the Bodhisattva Yueguang* 觀月光菩薩記; also mentioned in the later Sui and T’ang catalogues: *T* 2147 ch. 4, p. 173<sup>b</sup>; *T* 2149 ch. 10, p. 334<sup>c</sup>; *T* 2153 ch. 15, p. 473<sup>a</sup>; *T* 2154 ch. 4, p. 173<sup>b</sup>; *T* 2157 ch. 28, p. 1020<sup>a</sup>. I have made use of five manuscript versions from the London and Peking collections: (1) Peking ms. 292:8274 (重 26 according to the old numbering system based on the *Qianziwen*) which is nearly complete (about twenty characters lacking in the upper half of the first two columns, and some minor lacunae further down); (2) Peking 292:8275 (old number 日 87) in which the first eighteen columns of (1) are lacking); (3) S 2697, reproduced in vol. 85 of the *Taishō Canon*, *T* 2873 lacking the first 68 columns of (1); (4) S 6881, lacking the first 25 columns of (1); (5) S 1811, lacking the first 46 columns of (1). The text can be tentatively dated between 518 (the year in which Sengyou completed his *CSZJJ*, in which the scripture is not mentioned) and 589 AD, when it figures for the first time in a Buddhist bibliography.

hadra” *Puxian fusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩說證明經, another sixth century apocryphal work, that is known by that title in Buddhist bibliographies since 594 AD, and, like the *Shouluo Scripture*, has only been preserved in a number of Dunhuang manuscripts <sup>64</sup>). Following the example of Antonino Forte, who has studied this scripture and summarized its content in his excellent work on the ideological use of Buddhism under Empress Wu <sup>65</sup>), we shall refer to it as the *Zhengming jing*. It is a composite work, the last part of which contains an appalling description of the cosmic disasters, the apocalyptic battle, Maitreya’s descent, the separation and salvation of the true believers, and the recreation of the world into an ideal form. Yueguang is mentioned in this text too, but the main personage is Maitreya. The description of the end of the world is also full of cryptic terms and allusions, but as a whole it is more coherent and understandable than the last part of the *Shouluo jing*, and it contains certain themes, such as the reconstruction of the world, that are lacking, or only briefly alluded to, in our first text.

<sup>64</sup>) A critical edition based on three Dunhuang manuscripts of this text has been included in vol 85 of the *Taishō Canon*, T 2879, p. 1362<sup>c</sup>-1368<sup>b</sup>. To the six manuscripts mentioned by Forte may be added four more from the Peking collection, viz. 2098:8290-8293 (陽 21; 談 85, 鹹 77, and 光 97 according to the old numbering system). The eschatological part of the scripture only covers the last sections of this composite text, from p. 1365<sup>c</sup> onward. The scripture figures in all the important Buddhist bibliographies since Fajing’s catalogue of 589 AD, sometimes with a slightly different title (普賢菩薩說此證明經 with a puzzling 此 “this” inserted before *zheng*): T 2146, ch. 2, p. 126<sup>c</sup>; T 2147 ch. 4, p. 173<sup>b</sup>; T 2154 ch. 18, p. 675<sup>b</sup>; T 2157 ch. 28, p. 1020<sup>a</sup>; title without 此 in T 2149 ch. 10, p. 334<sup>c</sup>, and T 2153 ch. 15, p. 472<sup>c</sup>. I agree with Forte that this text (like the *Shouluo jing*) probably dates from somewhere between 518 and 589 AD, but in this case we can perhaps be more precise, for terminological reasons. The text repeatedly refers to the continent of Jambudvīpa by the transcription 閻浮履 (also noted by Forte, *op. cit.* p. 276, note 22), which is quite unusual, the last syllable of the Chinese form usually being 提, 利, 梨, or 里. To my knowledge, it only occurs in the vocabulary of the translator Jñānagupta (e.g. T 3448, p. 861<sup>a</sup>), who was active in China between 560 and 600. If we accept this criterium, it follows that the *Zhengming jing* was written somewhere between 560 and 589. The text moreover speaks about “the five (kinds of) barbarians who break and destroy the Doctrine” (p. 1365<sup>c</sup>), which very probably refers to the violent repression of Buddhism under the Northern Chou in 574-577 AD. In that case, Fajing, writing in 589, was dealing with a very recent apocryphal production.

<sup>65</sup>) Antonino Forte, *op. cit.* pp. 271-280.

The *Shouluo jing* consists of at least three episodes. The first one is situated in the legendary “Land of Gentlemen”, Junzi guo 君子國 (an island in the eastern ocean peopled with long-lived saintly beings, known in Chinese tradition since the *Shanhai jing*)<sup>66</sup>). The opening scene describes the encounter between a certain “*bhikṣu* Shouluo” (Śūra?)<sup>67</sup>), who is dwelling in the Taining monastery 太寧寺 (apparently near the royal capital of the Land of Gentlemen), and the leader of a group of five hundred Immortals 仙 who arrive there. They are on their way to the abode of Yueguang, but at Shouluo’s invitation they consent to stay for a while in the monastery. The encounter is followed by a long dialogue between Shouluo and the “Great Immortal” 大仙 about the imminent disasters and the ways to escape from them; the appearance of Yueguang, who is also referred to as the “King (or ‘Lord’) of Light”, *ming wang* 明王 or *ming jun* 明君<sup>68</sup>) and as the “Lord of Peace”, *ping jun* 平君, and the number and qualities of the various categories of people that are to be saved. The Great Immortal also

<sup>66</sup>) *Shanhai jing* 山海經, ed. He Yixing 郝懿行 ch. 9.1<sup>b</sup>: a country lying in the far northeast, peopled with civilized people who are served by tigers and never fight each other. It is also mentioned in *Huainan zi*, ed. 諸子集成 ch. 4, p. 59.

<sup>67</sup>) This personage is not quite unknown in the Buddhist tradition, for a monk of that name (with the addition of *-bhikṣu* 比丘, which is very unusual in Buddhist translations) occurs in Kumārajīva’s early fifth century translation of the (?) *Pūrṇa-paripṛcchā* 富羅那問經 (incorporated by Bodhiruci in his version of the *Mahā-ratna-kūṭa*, *T* 310 大寶積經, ch. 78, p. 448<sup>a</sup>) as the receiver of a *vyākaraṇa* pronounced by the Buddha. However, his activities described there are not related to his role in the *Shouluo biqiu jing*.

<sup>68</sup>) In the *Zhengming jing* this “King of Light” occurs several times as an independent saving power, clearly different from the “Saintly Ruler” 聖主 who will also appear to rule the world (e.g. *T* 2879, p. 1366<sup>a</sup>, l. 26: 天出明王, 地出聖主, 二聖並治并在神州 (cf. Forte, *op. cit.* p. 280), and *ib.* l. 29: 明王聖主俱在化城 . . .). His relation to Maitreya, the principal saviour in the *Zhengming jing*, is not clear. Or does the “Lord of Light” simply refer to Maitreya himself? The simultaneous appearance of two saving powers as described in the *Zhengming jing* finds its counterpart in the “Tao-Buddhist” messianic text studied by Anna Seidel (cf. note 15) where the Perfect Lord 真君 is said to descend together with Maitreya. In the *Shouluo jing*, Yueguang tongzi and the “King (or Lord) of Light” appear to be the same person. He is twice referred to as 月光明王 (*T* 2873, p. 1357<sup>b</sup>, l. 2 and l. 7), and the identity of the two is clearly shown on p. 1357, l. 24, where the king “says to the King of Light . . .” 大王白明王曰 . . ., and the answer to his question is given by “Yueguang”.

reveals the names of a number of sages (*xian* 賢) who are already living in our world, but who cannot be recognized by the profane, as they all carefully hide their special qualities.

In the second part, the king of the Country of Gentlemen arrives with an immense following of ministers and courtiers, and when the Great Immortal has told the king about the aim of his journey, the king decides to join them, as does Shouluo. The whole company then makes the arduous journey to the island Penglai 蓬萊, well-known from Taoist tradition, where Yueguang resides in a subterranean cave together with three thousand Saints. After welcoming his guests, he at first shows no inclination to answer their question—he will appear soon, for the times are fulfilled; let them just wait and see. But after the king has explained that he does not know what to do when the catastrophe breaks out, Yueguang tells him about the way in which the apocalyptic happenings will take place, and the methods to be followed in order to be saved.

In the third part the company returns to the Country of Gentlemen. The king devotes himself to the propagation of the message that he has heard from the future saviour, in order to effect as many last-minute conversions as possible, and so to increase the number of saved souls among his subjects. This part also contains concrete indications on how to practice a certain mental technique, combined with the recitation of a spell and with ritual purification, that enables one to “visualize” the saviour, here called The Lord of Light, with all his attributes. The spell is a *dhāraṇī* in pseudo-Sanskrit <sup>69</sup>).

After this section, the text becomes ever more cryptic and chaotic. There is a list of miraculous signs that will appear, and a number of oracular statements, some of which seem to refer to certain poses or movements of hands and fingers by which the *electi* are to be recognized. The last lines refer, in equally sibylline terms, to the salutary activities performed by the Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti (Weimo 維摩) in this world, whilst pretending to lead a life of voluptuousness—a faint and distorted image of the famous house-holder of Vaiśālī, whose pious opportunism forms the subject of one of the most famous Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

After this very global survey of the contents of the *Shouluo jing* (a more extensive summary of which is given in the Appendix),

<sup>69</sup>) For the frequent use of this kind of pseudo-Sanskrit gibberish in Taoist texts see my article mentioned in note 1, p. 107–112.



we shall once more revert to the basic eschatological and messianistic themes mentioned in the first part of this article, and see how they appear in their fully developed form in these two Buddhist-Taoist texts.

(1) *The crisis* is clearly one of cosmic dimensions. According to the *Shouluo jing*, the three scourges of deluge, epidemics, and evil powers (*yaoxie* 妖邪) ravage the world. The water will stand forty *li* high upon the flat land; it will come rolling on from the northwest to the southeast, with raging billows and a thundering noise. Then epidemics will come and exterminate most of the surviving sinners under terrible sufferings. The third scourge, that of the evil powers, is brought over the earth by the demons. When the hour of Yueguang is approaching, thirty-six monstrous Māra-kings appear with their hosts; like true apocalyptic riders they are mounted on dragon-horses; they are brandishing their diamond clubs and shout “*sha!*” 殺. Then there will be a deep darkness lasting seven days and nights. In the dark, heaven and earth are shaken by heavy earthquakes, whilst the demons persecute the surviving sinners. In the *Zhengming jing*, the picture is even more terrifying. After the seven days and nights of darkness and cosmic convulsions, a demon-king will appear, wearing a black garment with red cords, and armed with a red club, at the head of a huge horde of demons who destroy the sinners. Then the cosmic conflagration takes place: the whole world is burnt down by an Asura-king holding seven suns in his hands. Even the mountains melt and disappear; the earth has become a scorched plain. At that moment, Maitreya descends, seated in a splendid shrine that floats down from the Tuṣita heaven. As in the Taoist tradition, there is a quasi-exact fixation of the apocalyptic happenings in time and space. The judgement will take place in the (two successive) years *shen* 申 and *you* 酉<sup>70</sup>); the saviour will appear “north

<sup>70</sup>) *T* 2873, p. 1358<sup>a</sup>, l. 9, and p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 4. At first sight, it would be tempting to regard 申酉 as a corruption of 甲酉, but all manuscripts read *shen*, and moreover, the same succession of years is mentioned in connection with the appearance of the Taoist saviour Li Hong in *TT* 322 天地運度經 p. 4<sup>b</sup>. On p. 6<sup>a</sup>, the same text specifies that the *shen* year here refers to the *jiashen* year: 甲申之歲是天地運度. In our second text (*T* 2879, p. 1366<sup>a</sup>) the deluge is said to take place 799 years after the *Parinirvāṇa*, a very unusual system of dating, which does not resemble other systems (for which see above, note 35) that make use of multiples of 500, or at least of round figures.



of the Yellow River, and south of the Weak Water” 黃河以北，弱水以南 <sup>71)</sup>, and he will be king in the territory of Han” 王於漢境。

(2) *The battle* is total and titanic. In the *Shouluo jing* the demons who ravage mankind appear to come of their own accord, but in the *Zhengming jing* it is, of all persons, the kindly Bodhisattva Samantabhadra who unleashes these monsters upon the sinners and orders the Asura-king to burn the earth. However, quite in accordance with the Taoist pattern, there is also a huge war going on between the supernatural forces of good and evil. The thirty-six Māra-kings and their armies that figure in the *Shouluo jing* will be defeated by a great Trāyastriṃśa god named Ho tian 赫天; he rides a dragon-horse and wields divine arms. But the *Zhengming jing* describes an even more grandiose field of battle: when Maitreya descends, the demon-kings with their armies will try to resist him, and they are defeated by a host of myriads of Bodhisattvas, riding on supernatural elephants and lions, and armed to the teeth.

(3) *The judgement* is a complete separation between the pious believers and the sinners. Interestingly, the line of separation runs through all worldly groups, so that even the closest relatives may find themselves in opposite camps. At that time, the *Shouluo jing* says in almost biblical terms, “the father will not know his son, nor will the mother know her daughter” <sup>72)</sup>. The crowds of sinners and of the pious ones seem to be herded into two separate groups, at least according to a rather cryptic passage in the *Zhengming jing*, which says that when Maitreya descends he will collect those who are destined to be saved “east of the bridge”, and the sinners “west of the bridge” <sup>73)</sup>. The chosen people constitute a small minority; for only 84,000 or 87,000 persons will be saved <sup>74)</sup>.

<sup>71)</sup> Ever since the Yugong chapter of the Book of Documents, Chinese semi-mythical geography mentions a river called Ruoshui 弱水, located in the far west or northwest (ranging from the Roman Orient to present-day northern Kansu). The expression quoted here probably means no more than “in northern China”.

<sup>72)</sup> T 2873, p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 5: 公不識兒母不識女。

<sup>73)</sup> T 2879, p. 1366<sup>b</sup>, l. 5-8: 有緣在橋東無緣在橋西。The river that here functions as the dividing-line appears to be the “Weak Water” 弱水 mentioned in l. 5 (cf. note 71).

<sup>74)</sup> In T 2878, p. 1366<sup>c</sup>, l. 10-12, the number of persons carried by the *garuḍa* that is sent to rescue them is said to be 87,000, but in an earlier passage (p. 1365<sup>c</sup>, l. 14) the number of 84,000 saved ones is mentioned. The text further explicitly states that this number includes both Chinese and barbarians; if I understand the text correctly, it even implies a kind

Their salvation is the fruit of their religious piety, which appears to be of the most elementary kind: the confession of the Triple Refuge (*sangui* 三歸); the Five Rules (*wujie* 五戒) to be observed by laymen; fasting, the practice of “visualization”, and reciting the *Guanshiyin Scripture* (*Guanshiyin jing* 觀世音經)<sup>75</sup>.

In addition to these formal precepts and techniques, the practitioners are constantly told to devote themselves whole-heartedly to religious works, to repent, and to abstain from desire and evil intentions. They are ordered to “change their hearts and change their thoughts” 改心改意; to “change their former ways and cultivate themselves for the future” 改往脩來; for soon a Lord of Darkness (*anjun* 闇君, apparently the mirror-image of the Lord of Light) will come, and only those who exert themselves to the utmost can be saved. Although Shouluo, who receives the message of Yueguang’s advent in the first part of the scripture, is a monk, and salvation is promised to members of the Five Communities of religious life (including monk and nuns) provided that they change their past and repent, the kind of religious exercises described in these passages definitely suggest that the *electi* are lay Buddhists rather than members of the *saṅgha*. In the second part of the *sūtra*, the monk Shouluo has disappeared; the propagation of Yueguang’s message is carried out by the king, and there is no indication that the clergy plays any positive role in the work of salvation. The lay character of this millenarian faith is confirmed by a passage in the *Shouluo jing* in which the clergy is described as steeped in sin (notably because of its commercial activities), so that only one

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of numerical distribution: 80,000 Chinese—i.e. 10,000 for each of the categories of people mentioned—and 4,000 barbarians. The idea that the latter can possess the sacred scriptures and therefore be saved is also found in the Taoist tradition, cf. *TT* 335 神呪經 ch. 5, p. 5<sup>b</sup>. As we have seen, the tendency to specify the number of *electi* who will be saved from the cataclysm is a general feature of Taoist eschatology. It reaches its climax in the messianic text studied and translated by Anna Seidel (cf. note 15) which not only indicates the size of the groups, but also their geographical distribution: 800 in the region of Sanyang 三陽; 1,300 in the Wei metropolitan area, etc.

<sup>75</sup>) It is not clear which one of the many scriptures devoted to Guan(shi)-yin is meant here. The most influential scripture of Guanyin devotion was the chapter devoted to this Bodhisattva in the *Lotus Sūtra* (section 24 in Kumārajīva’s version, *T* 262, p. 56<sup>c</sup>-58<sup>b</sup> 觀世音菩薩普門品, = *Samantamukha-parivarta*). However, several apocryphal texts devoted to *Guan(shi) yin* had been produced in the Nanbeichao period, cf. Makita Tairyō. *op. cit.* p. 67.

out of every thousand monks will be saved <sup>76</sup>), and by a curious statement in the *Zhengming jing* where the monks only come last in a series of eight categories of people to be saved, the first seven being (1) old men; (2) old women; (3) pious women; (4) pious men; (5) the poor; (6) low-class people 下賤; and (7) the young and feeble 小弱.

As in the Taoist tradition, the *electi* are represented as being physically rescued and brought to a safe place. The *Shouluo jing* is amazingly specific: when in the *shen* and *you* years the great disasters break out, it will be safe in the area of Yangzhou 陽州 <sup>77</sup>). The blood will flow in streams, and the white bones will lie piled up like mountains; only in the southeast it will be possible to obtain deliverance. The text also mentions several mountains on which one can escape from the deluge; most of these cannot be identified, but the one mountain that is also known from secular sources, the Fuzhou shan 覆舟山, is indeed situated in the Lower Yangtze region, near present-day Nanking. The rescue operation is described in very concrete terms. The *Shouluo jing* tells us that the pious ones will be saved from the deluge by a nāga king 龍王

<sup>76</sup>) *T* 2874, p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 10-15. The reading of S 2109, reproduced in the *Taishō Canon* as *T* 2874, is corrupt: 千介拔十介. All other manuscript copies have 千个拔一个.

<sup>77</sup>) *T* 2874, p. 1356<sup>c</sup>, l. 5-7; the name of this well-known city is here followed by a series of six other names that appear to be mythical. One of these is, interestingly, Liucheng 柳城, the “Willow City”, which is known to play an important role in later secret society lore as the spiritual centre of the brotherhood. This may be coincidental, but the impression that some of such secret lore may be traced back to very early Buddhist sectarianism is reinforced by the reference to hand or finger gestures in the *Shouluo jing* (cf. below). The idea that Yangzhou is a place of salvation is also found in a sixth century Taoist scripture, *TT* 322, p. 5<sup>a</sup>: 揚州可度世. All manuscripts of the *Shou luo jing* write Yang 陽 zhou, which as such is only known as a locality in the state of Qi in the Spring and Autumn period. Since, however, the Taoist parallel mentioned above writes Yang 揚 zhou, I assume that it does refer to the famous city on the lower Yangzi which, incidentally, had also been a centre of “subversive” Buddhist sectarian activities around the beginning of the sixth century. It was here (at Xiadu 下都, i.e. Yangzhou) that the religious leader Miaoguang 妙光 together with three of his relatives started the very curious movement described by Sengyou, who himself played a role in its repression (*T* 2145, ch. 5, p. 40<sup>b-c</sup>). Liucheng is also mentioned in an analogous context in the prophetic verses of the same Taoist apocalyptic scripture, *TT* 322 太上靈寶天地運度自然妙經, p. 4<sup>b</sup>: after the outbreak of a great flood that will start from Northern China (燕趙成洪流), the Willow City will be a place of survival (柳城即生地).

who will transport them to a floating island <sup>78)</sup>; whereas according to the *Zhengming jing* they will be taken up by a gigantic garuḍa 金翅鳥 who lifts them to the Tuṣita heaven <sup>79)</sup>. But in both texts, the final destination of the blessed is described as a magic city 化城 <sup>80)</sup> of great splendour, situated either in the Tuṣita heaven or on an island in the ocean. It is represented as the celestial counterpart of the ideal Chinese metropolis: a huge, geometrically arranged complex of concentrically arranged city-walls, the inner wall enclosing the “Tuṣita City” 兜率城 where the King of the Doctrine 法王 is residing

(4) *The assistants*” of the saviour are mentioned in the *Shouluo jing*, and again we are amazed by its specificity, for it lists the names of nineteen “Sages” 賢 who are now already living in this sinful world <sup>81)</sup>. They are the spiritual Leaders 導師 who are able to

<sup>78)</sup> *T* 2873, p. 1357<sup>b</sup>, l. 24. The “dragon” is here of course mixed up with the *nāga* of Buddhist mythology. But the idea that the faithful will be saved from the deluge by (real, Chinese) dragons is also found in the Taoist *Shenzhou jing*, cf. *TT* 335 ch. 1, p. 7<sup>b</sup>. However, another passage of the same scripture (ch. 5, p. 7<sup>a</sup>) indicates that those dragons actually draw a huge wagon, 84,000 *li* square, which is able to hold 490,000 people.

<sup>79)</sup> *T* 2879, p. 1366<sup>c</sup>: it is twenty *li* long; it can carry 7,000 people in its mouth, and 80,000 on its back.

<sup>80)</sup> *T* 2873, p. 1356<sup>a-b</sup>; *T* 2879, p. 1366<sup>a</sup>. In some manuscripts *huacheng* is written 花城, “Flower City”, but this is probably a mistake (the confusion between 化 and 花 often occurs in Dunhuang manuscripts, e.g. *T* 2007, p. 345<sup>a</sup>, l. 8 and 9). In Antonino Forte’s view (*op. cit.* p. 162-163) the ideal of the Magic City is derived from the seventh section of the *Lotus Scripture* (trsl. Kumārajīva, *T* 262 ch. 3, p. 25<sup>c</sup>-26<sup>a</sup>), named “The Parable of the Magic City” 化城喻. As far as the name of this divine city is concerned, this is no doubt true. However, the image of the Magic City as described in our two apocryphal texts has nothing in common with the parable of the *Lotus Scripture*. Judging from the description of the city and the fact that its central part is called Tuṣita—the name of the heaven where Maitreya is dwelling—it is more probably that the account of the Huacheng is inspired by one of the exuberant descriptions of Maitreya’s residence, like the one we find in *T* 442 觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經, pp. 418<sup>b</sup>-419<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>81)</sup> *T* 2873, p. 1356<sup>c</sup>, l. 20-22 and l. 26-28. These two lists of what appear to be quite normal names are most puzzling. The first list consists of eight names which can be interpreted either as two-syllable names with the title *xian* 賢 “Sage” inserted between the *xing* and the *ming* (hence “the Sage Shih De 石賢德, the Sage Yan Ming 嚴賢明” . . . , or as monosyllabic surnames followed by two-syllable *ming*, each *ming* having *xian* as its first element. The second list enumerates eleven names, each of which consists of a monosyllabic *xing* and a bisyllabic *ming*. Further on, the text mentions three larger groups of helpers (p. 1357<sup>a</sup>), consisting of sixteen “Equanimous

control life and death 能運生死. But they are invisible to the eye of the flesh 肉眼, for they are living in disguise, pretending to be common people, or even fools and sinners. When the time comes, they will make themselves known.

(5) *A New Heaven and a New Earth*. The reconstruction of the world is described in the *Zhengming jing* in some detail. After the conflagration, a mild and aromatic breeze starts to blow from the west; during seven days and nights it cools and purifies the smouldering embers of the old world. Then the earth is reconstructed in successive layers of precious and magical substances—a theme of Buddhist origin, that has been taken over, with many variations, by Taoist cosmography. There are seven layers, that from bottom to top are made of bronze, mercury, rock-crystal, beryl, silver, (?)saffron 鬱金, and gold. The mountains (an interesting Taoist contribution, for the ideal Buddhist world always is completely flat) consist of silver and gold, and the trees are made of silver. This reborn country of Jambudvīpa is full of palaces, pavillions and many-storied buildings, and even the city-wards are adorned with luminous jewels, so that there is no more difference between day and night <sup>82</sup>). Under the transforming rule (治化) of Maitreya, all evil powers will have disappeared, for even the demons will have been reborn as human beings. Man’s life-span will be 87,000 years, after which they will be reborn in the even more

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Ones” 平等, seventy-two “True Gentlemen” 正士 and three thousand Sages 賢, and states that these cannot be seen by normal people as long as “the Old Moon is flourishing” 古月興盛. This curious theme, that has been mentioned above in connection with Yuanguang’s name (cf. p. 00), occurs several times in the *Shouluo jing*. It clearly denotes some kind of evil power or “fluid” that dominates in the final era, and that will cease to exist, or at least to be active, on the advent of Yueguang, the (new) “Moonlight”. As we have seen, the term also occurs in the Taoist scripture *TT* 322 天地運度經. It is to be noted that this Taoist text also is the one that mentions the Willow city and Yangzhou as places of deliverance (cf. note 75 above). A possible relation between the Taoist eschatology as represented by that particular Lingbao scripture and our *Shouluo jing* seems probable, and deserves further study. The idea of “hidden Sages” who cannot be recognized by the profane, but will show their true identity to the pious believers has a close parallel in *TT* 442 上清後聖道君列紀 p. 7<sup>b</sup>-8<sup>a</sup> (twenty-four Perfected Ones mentioned by name), and *TT* 335 神呪經 ch. 3, p. 8<sup>b</sup> (list of names of those who will realize Immortality in the year *jiashen*).

<sup>82</sup>) *T* 2879, p. 1366<sup>c</sup>-1367<sup>a</sup>.

blissful world of Amitābha, or be transported by Samantabhadra himself to Akṣobhya's eastern paradise <sup>83</sup>).

The complex of beliefs that we find in these curious documents forms the final product of a long and complicated process of borrowing, adaptation, and integration, resulting in an eschatological tradition that is so much an amalgam of Buddhist and Taoist elements, that it cannot be said exclusively to belong to either one or the other of the two main streams of Chinese religion. However, the general structure and some of the major themes—notably the Judgement and the apocalyptic battle—clearly are of Taoist origin.

The present study is only a first attempt to unravel the secrets of a nearly lost tradition, and many questions are still unanswered. Our source material is only partly intelligible, due to its oracular and esoteric nature; it is, however, to be expected that further comparative study of Buddhist apocrypha and early medieval Taoist texts will solve a number of problems. But even then another major question will remain unanswered, for there is little hope that we shall be able to provide these beliefs with a concrete historical background, as has been done with the well-known schools of Chinese Buddhism. We are obviously dealing with a very unorthodox, and potentially "subversive", kind of millenarian faith, that was probably limited to small groups of fanatic adventists who by fasting, repentance and prayer prepared themselves for the coming of the Lord. Geographical evidence supplied by the *Shouluo jing* itself indicates the Lower Yangtze region as its place of origin. But in the late sixth century the metropolitan Buddhist bibliographers included it in their lists of "faked scriptures", which may indicate that by that time it was already circulating in the Guanzhong region, and the many finely executed Dunhuang versions prove that the belief in Yueguang's advent was popular even in the far northwest in T'ang time. Its popularity is also indirectly proved by the political use made of his name in support of Sui Wendi and Empress Wu (cf. above, p. 26), for even if this kind of imperial propaganda has nothing to do with the eschatological message of the *Shouluo jing*, it hardly would have been effective if the personage of Yueguang had not had a certain appeal among the public. It is clear that we stand here at the beginning of a special type of sectarian Buddhism that even shows some affinities

<sup>83</sup>) *ib.* p. 1368<sup>a-b</sup>.



with a secret society—the use of an enigmatic terminology only to be understood by an inner circle of initiates<sup>84</sup>); the puzzling reference to the “Willow City” (cf. note 75) and the use of a “finger-language” that so curiously reminds one of Chinese secret society lore of modern times. But this Yueguang sectarianism appears never to have developed political ambitions of its own; unlike Maitreya, Prince Moonlight never was able to inspire rebellious movements and so to attract the attention of secular historiographers.

But the cult of saintly figures may take many forms in popular imagination. We have seen that in early medieval China Maitreya was split into two completely different personages: a benign teacher in a world of the distant future, and an apocalyptic hero—and how far are both again removed from the pot-bellied “laughing Buddha” into which he was transformed in later popular Buddhism! It appears that the basic idea—attested since the fourth century—that Yueguang tongzi was somehow to appear in China also has led to a more modest conception of this Bodhisattva and his beneficial powers, without any apocalyptic associations. Apart from the incident reported in *Gaoseng zhuan* where he is represented as miraculously curing a devotee’s disease (as any other Bodhisattva might do), historical literature contains one very curious passage in which Yueguang tongzi figures as the object of a popular cult. According to the *Treatise on Punishments* of the *Wei shu*, in the period 516/517 AD action was taken against superstitious practices that in Yanling 延陵 (in present-day southern Hebei) had grown around an eight year old boy, who was made to pose as an incarnation of Yueguang tongzi. The boy, whose normal name was Liu Jinghui 劉景暉, was surrounded by a circle of devotees, “(the monk?) Faquan 法權 and others”, who called him “the Yueguang youth (*tongzi*) Liu Jinghui”, and “with impish talk deluded the masses” 妖言惑衆. We know that this was considered a major crime warranting the death penalty—after all, only a few years before, it was on the same charge that the religious impostor Miaoguang (cf. note 77), who had made his family pose as a group of Indian saints, had been sentenced to death—a verdict that

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<sup>84</sup>) Cf. the significant phrase that in *T* 2873 (p. 1368<sup>c</sup>, 1. 4) follows a series of oracular sayings: “If among my disciples there are (some) who understand (these) sayings of mine, then those are (truly) my disciples” 若有吾弟子，解吾口語，即我弟子。



finally was changed into perpetual imprisonment by a special act of imperial grace.

In Yueguang's case, there indeed were some mitigating circumstances. When the matter was discussed at court, it was taken into account that the boy was a victim rather than a criminal. The Director of Justice Cui Zuan 崔纂 pleaded that he was a mere child, "his mouth still having the smell of milk". Though he was said to have the power to transform himself into a snake or a pheasant, he himself had never claimed to have such powers, nor had he himself ever said to be Yueguang—those were all fantastic stories spread by unscrupulous elements. As he was not responsible for what was said and done in his entourage, the Empress-dowager Ling was advised to spare his life, and to let him profit from an amnesty the terms of which had just expired, but that still was in vigour at the time when the "crime" was discovered. The poor child finally was banished to the desert commandery of Lueyang 略陽 in the far northwest <sup>85</sup>).

It is clear that, apart from the name, this pitiful story has nothing to remind us of the apocalyptic Prince Moonlight of the *Shouluo jing*. The text does not mention any messianic expectations connected with the boy Liu Jinghui, and it may well be that he was regarded as an incarnation of Yueguang tongzi because of his youth (*tongzi*). It is true that strange and auspicious animals play an important role in both Taoist and Buddhio-Taoist eschatology, but here the boy's pretended power to change himself into such creatures is just a case of magic "transformation", which probably is the most basic and common theme in Chinese popular religious lore of all ages. The incident shows that Yueguang tongzi in the fifth century had become associated with a great variety of religious beliefs, but it unfortunately does nothing to bridge the gap between our scriptural data on Yueguang messianism and its historical setting.

However, even if a historical frame-work is still lacking, the remarkable career of this minor Bodhisattva may have been

<sup>85</sup>) *Wei-shu*, ch. III (刑罰志), ed. Zhonghua shuju, Peking, 1974, pp. 3884-3885; cf. also Tsukamoto Zenryū, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-284. We cannot agree with Tsukamoto's thesis that such Buddhist sectarian movements under the Toba Wei were expressions of Chinese proto-nationalist resistance against the foreign ruling class. On the contrary: time and again we see, both in the "barbarian" northern empires and in the "Chinese" south, how it was not Buddhism but Taoism that served as a symbol of Chinese cultural identity, as opposed to Buddhism that never was able to free itself from the stigma of its foreign origin.

worth saving from oblivion, as a clear illustration of the “Taoist counter-current” that was active within Chinese Buddhism. But perhaps we must altogether abandon the idea of two separate religious traditions “influencing” each other. What we call “Chinese Buddhism” and “Taoism” are, after all, abstractions, created by the fact that they only show themselves to us at the top level, that of the clerical establishments who created and maintained the two great traditions. At that level, the two systems are quite distinct. But once we go deeper down<sup>86</sup>), it appears that they partially overlap, and in certain areas completely merge together. If seen in this light, the *Shouluo jing* is a valuable specimen of such a Buddhho-Taoist merger, brought up from a deep layer of total fusion that is normally hidden from our eyes.

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY OF THE *SHOULUO BIQIU JING* 首羅比丘經

The summary is based on the most complete manuscript, *viz.* (a) = Peking no. 292:8274 reproduced at the end of this summary. It is the only one in which the opening lines partially have been preserved (cf. note 63 above). This version has been collated with the other four mss. mentioned in note 61; they are here referred to as follows: (b) = Peking 292:8275; (c) = S 2697 (reproduced in the *Taishō Canon* as T 2873; (d) = S 6881; (e) = S 1811. Numbers preceded with “1.” indicate the columns in (a); from l. 69 onward, references to T 2873 have also been included.

[1. 1] In the Taining Monastery 太寧寺 (situated in the mountains of the same name), in the Country of Gentlemen 君子國, there is a *bhikṣu* called Shouluo 首羅. After having arisen at day-break, he sees that a group of five hundred Immortals 仙人, led by a

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<sup>86</sup>) “Deeper down” is perhaps somewhat misleading. What I intend to say is rather “removed from the centre of authority, both ecclesiastical (the clerical élite) and secular (the socio-political ideology of the scholar-official class)”. In other words: we are dealing with beliefs and movements that (1) primarily belong to the sphere of *lay* religion, and (2) are operating on a *local* scale. This of course does not imply that such movements exclusively recruited their members from the lower strata of society. I may again quote Anna Seidel (cf. note 15), whose remarks about Buddhho-Taoist fusion observable in sixth-century Taoist statuary may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to our subject as a whole: “Il ne s’agit pas, à proprement parler, d’une religion d’illettrés de basse classe car les donateurs de ces statues étaient certainement des familles munies de biens et de prestige, mais plutôt d’une religion laïque et peut-être provinciale”.

Great Immortal 大仙, approaches the monastery. He pays homage to them, and politely invites them to stay at the monastery, which they agree to do [l. 5]. When asked by Shouluo why they are so excited, the Great Immortal explains that they have heard that Yueguang is soon to appear, and that he will be king in the territory of Han 王在漢境; [l. 10] his realm will be situated south of the Weak Water and north of the Long River 弱水以南, 長河以北. Shouluo: [l. 15] “When the Lord of Peace 平君 appears, will people be able to see him?” Great Immortal: “All those who have changed their past conduct and cultivate themselves for the future 改往脩來, all those who observe the commandments, will be able to see him”; he explains that these commandments refer to severe fasting 癯齋戒, whole-hearted mental concentration on the Buddha and the Doctrine 一心念佛念法, and the recital of religious texts 口誦法言. Even those members of the Five Communities (of religious life: monks; nuns; male and female novices; lay believers) who have committed the gravest sins 五逆重者 will be able to meet the Lord of Light 明君, [l. 20] provided that they change their past and repent.

Shouluo then proclaims to all beings: “Yueguang will soon appear; there will be terrible disasters. The world will be ravaged by floods, epidemics, famine, and ‘heroes rising up in competition’ 英雄競起 so that the people will know no rest. But I declare that [l. 25] it is possible to escape from those evils. Monks and nuns can be saved if they practice meditation, subdue their senses, recite the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, and combat their own arrogance; [l. 30-35] lay believers can be saved through strict observance of their vows, charitable works, and fasting”.

Shouluo then asks about the circumstances under which the Lord of Light will appear and the number of years that he will need to realize the transforming power of peaceful government 太平治化. The Great Immortal answers that his territory will extend over the thirty-six countries. [l. 40] In the course of fifty-two years <sup>87)</sup> he will splendidly revive the old and worn-out doctrine of Śākyamuni 釋迦朽故之法. He will appear at Jingyang 境陽, in the final period of the “Old Moon” 古月末後時. He will then proceed to Mt. Tiantai 天台山, to Mt. Jiefu 介斧山, and to the [l. 45] Minzi Cave 閔子窟.

<sup>87)</sup> The same number of years needed by Yueguang to establish his ideal rule is mentioned in the apocryphal *Scripture of the Annihilation of the Doctrine* 法滅盡經, T 396, p. 1119<sup>b</sup>. But there it has the character of a temporary revival, after which the final degeneration sets in (cf. p. 27 above).

He will bear the titles of the Highest One 太上, the Perfect Lord 真君, and the Saint of Lülian Commandery 縷練郡聖. He will arrive with an enormous retinue of countless millions of Bodhisattvas, [l. 50] gods, saints and supernatural animals of all kinds that will appear as auspicious signs 應瑞. [l. 55] The males that escort him will ride heavenly dragon-horses; the females will be carried by golden and silver chariots. Thus they will enter the Magic City through its southern gate<sup>88</sup>). Yueguang stays there as the lord of all countries 百千國主, venerated by all people.

[l. 60-65] When asked where one can escape from the floods, the Great Immortal enumerates several mountains<sup>89</sup>), where one can find refuge: let the people go there, with their aged relatives and young children. But it is also possible to escape from the deluge and from the epidemics by piety, [l. 70-75] strict observance of religious duties, and purity—this applies to members of the clergy as well as to lay believers.

[p. 1356. l. 1.10] Shouluo then asks how to escape from the evil powers 妖邪 that will appear. The Great Immortal explains that there are many kinds of evil powers; one has constantly to be on one's guard, and never believe them. When Yueguang has come, only the good people will get to see him; the sinners will not.

[l. 80] (Then the conversation suddenly turns to the Magic City): when asked about its general lay-out, the Great Immortal gives a detailed and exuberant description of this heavenly metropolis<sup>90</sup>). It covers a space of more than seven hundred *li* square; (p. 1356.2.1) there are seventy-two gates in its golden walls that stand a thousand feet high. Within this outer enclosure there is the inner city, called Tusita 兜率城 which is even more gorgeous. [l. 85] Tusita city itself consists of eight smaller conglomerations,

<sup>88</sup>) Here follows a very obscure passage which seems to imply that Yueguang and his retinue move from the Magic City to China: 花 (var. 化: c, d, e) 城南門入道逍遙北門出信都土地海東流乘船流川置神州孟母曲中涌高樓. For the reading 化城 which is to be preferred, cf. note 78 above.

<sup>89</sup>) 恆山, 五嶽, 勃海 雍盧庭, 甘晨山, 覆舟山, 頗資山, 乳羅山

<sup>90</sup>) A similar but shorter description of the Magic City is found in our second text, the *Zhengming jing*, T 2879, p. 1366<sup>a</sup>, l. 8-18. It is there preceded by a fantastic version of the story of the Buddha's birth, in which Laozi himself is made to play the role of the “physiognomist”, the seer Asita. It then states that Śākyamuni in his quest for Enlightenment went from one (mythical) mountain to another; finally he reached Buddhahood on an island in the middle of the ocean, and there created the Magic City.

also surrounded by golden walls; its lay-out is strictly geometrical, “with the streets corresponding to each other, and the gates matching each other”, like the ideal Chinese city. Here one can see the King of the Doctrine 法王, in his city teeming with people of both sexes.

Shouluo is filled with joy, and tells the Four Assemblies: “The Great Jewel will arrive; do not have profane thoughts!”<sup>91</sup>) (*p.* 1356.2.10) Be pious, exert yourselves to do good, and don’t have doubts. Do as I say, [l. 90] practice ascetism 苦行. If you focus your thoughts on this, you will surely reach Non-activity 無為. The Great Immortal then concludes his description of the Magic City with an account of the many kinds of [l. 95] wonderful music that will resound when Yueguang appears.

(Then the theme of the “evil powers”, that was brought up before but was interrupted by the Magic City episode, is resumed): Shouluo declares that he has never been afraid of (common) evil powers, but will there also be very powerful ones? The Great Immortal answers that there will be thirty-six great Māras 魔, who can [l. 100] only be overcome (*p.* 1356.2.20) by one person, viz. a *kumāra* 童子 who lives in the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods (三十三天, Trāyastriṃśa-deva [loka]); his name is the Awesome God (He tian 赫天). [l. 105] He rides through the air on a dragon-horse, and is armed with a supernatural bow. The thirty-six Māras also ride dragon-horses; they are armed with metal staves; *vajra*-clubs, and axes made of *vaidūrya*; they run about, shouting “Kill!” There will also be other disasters when Yueguang is about to appear. [l. 110] For seven days and nights the world will be steeped in darkness, and in the dark (*p.* 1356.3.1) all kinds of demons (yakṣa, rākṣasa, pisāca, etc.) will devour innumerable people. Only those who observe the Three Refuges, the Five Commandments, and the rules of Fasting 受持三歸五戒齋法 will escape. “Yueguang will appear in the world; before the Old Moon has come back (= regained strength?), he is to manifest himself 古月未復乃當出現, and those who uphold and cultivate what is good 奉善修善 will see him”. [l. 115] People can only avoid the disasters in the region of Yangzhou 陽州, and in certain other places<sup>92</sup>). “When the three great disasters break out, the blood will flow in streams, and the white bones will lie piled

<sup>91</sup>) 莫如常意: a curious expression that occurs many times in this text. Lit. “Don’t have thoughts like (the ones people) commonly have”?

<sup>92</sup>) 唯有陽州, 次有玄免, 固都, 棘城, 柳城, 破資陽河灣.

up like mountains; only in the southeast Non-activity (無為, i.e. Release) can be obtained”. Shouluo then requests the Great Immortal to proclaim to the clergy and the lay believers (*p.* 1356.3.10) that the Great Saint, the King of Light [l. 120] is now in the territory of Han, and that they must devote themselves to meditation and pious works in order to be able to see him. When Yueguang manifests himself, it will first be evil, and later it will be good 前惡後善; don’t be like the unbelievers! The Great Immortal (apparently after having fulfilled Shouluo’s request) declares that every word of this is true, and he pronounces a [l. 125] solemn oath to confirm this.

When asked if there already are Immortals and Saints dwelling in this world, the Great Immortal affirms this: there are many of them in the world, but since the Old Moon is flourishing 古月興盛 you cannot see them. [l. 130] Firstly, there are seven Sages 賢, whose names are as follows: (*p.* 1356.3.20) (1) Shi [*xian*] De 石賢得 <sup>93</sup>); (2) Yan [*xian*] Ming 嚴賢明; (3) Sun [*xian*] Qi 孫賢奇; (4) Hua [*xian*] De 花賢德; (5) Wu [*xian*] Shi 吳賢使; (6) Zheng [*xian*] Chang 鄭賢常; (7) Guan [*xian*] Bao 觀賢寶; (8) Zhao [*xian*] Si 趙賢思 <sup>94</sup>). You can go and visit them. They truly are your (spiritual) Guides 導師, who are able to control life and death 運生死. But you do not need to ask where they are now—they are about to appear in the world, and you will see them if only you are earnest in your mind [l. 135]. When Shouluo asks if there still are others, the Great Immortal produces a second list of eleven names: (1) Qin Chaoshi 秦超世; (2) Pan Daocheng 潘道成; (3) Lu Huiyuan 盧惠遠; (4) Ban Guoxing 板國興; (5) Fu Nanyang 扶男陽; (6) Liu Daogui 劉道貴; (7) Wang Yanshou 王延壽; (8) Zhao Xianzong 趙顯宗; (9) Zhang Daoban 張道板; (10) Gu Shi’an 故世安; (11) Li Luocha 李羅剎. They all are moving about in this world, but with your mortal eye 肉眼 you cannot distinguish them from ordinary people. [l. 140] Therefore you must practise (*p.* 1357.1.1) equanimity 平等 towards all people, in accordance with my orders. There are now in the world sixteen Equanimous Ones 平等, seventy-two True Scholars 正士, and three thousand Sages 賢. They all dwell among men, but they outwardly adapt themselves to the sinful ways of mankind, and pretend to be

<sup>93</sup>) Read 德 in *c* and *d*.

<sup>94</sup>) For these names, in which *xian* may be either a title, or the common element in the eight *ming* (in which case the eight Sages would form a group of “spiritual brothers”, with *xian* as the shared generation-element in their names), cf. above, note 81.

ignorant fools, or poor and lowly people, or sinners who drink wine, eat meat, and break the rules of fasting by secretly taking food at night. How could one ever distinguish them? [l. 145] Only by the practice of Equanimity can one hope to meet the Sages and Saints.

Shouluo urges the Four Assemblies to propagate his *sūtra* among their teachers, parents, rulers, patrons, friends and other relations. (p. 1357.1.10) In view of the great disasters that are at hand, [l. 150] everyone who hides this scripture and keeps it for himself commits a grave sin, and will be reborn at an inferior level of existence. Using the familiar hyperbolic comparisons of Mahāyāna scriptures, he extols the immense merit of [l. 155] spreading this message to all people, young and old, men and women, in cities, villages and hamlets. It will be accepted by the wise, but fools will reject it.

(p. 1357.1.20) In the meantime, the king of the Country of Gentlemen, his ministers and courtiers, [l. 160] all together more than 3,000 persons, have heard the news that a group of five hundred Immortals is staying at the Taining Monastery. Filled with joy they proceed to the monastery and ask the Great Immortal what is their destination. After having been told that Yueguang's advent is approaching, and that they want to pay him a visit, the king sadly remarks: "By the cultivation of what merit have you, [l. 165] Perfected Men from a western country 西國真人, got the opportunity to enter into this excellent (situation); what good works have enabled you to witness Yueguang's appearance in the world? But we in this far-away country shall not be able to see him". But the Great Immortal reassures him: there is no reason to be worried, for when Yueguang appears he will be visible everywhere.

The king then expresses the wish to join them, (p. 1357.2.1) and he asks where Yueguang tongzi resides at present. [l. 170] The Great Immortal tells him that Yueguang, the King of Light, is biding his time in the Minzi Cave 閔子窟, under Mt. Hailing 梅陵山下, in the mountains of Penglai 蓬萊山. [l. 175] Thereupon the king with a huge crowd of courtiers, officials and common people, altogether 57,000 persons, accompanies the group of five hundred Immortals <sup>95)</sup> on their long and arduous journey over a distance of more than seven thousand *li*. They finally reach (p. 1357.2.10) the Minzi Cave, and there they behold Yueguang tongzi, surrounded by a crowd of three thousand Sages and Saints.

<sup>95)</sup> It is not clear whether the *bhikṣu* Shoulou is also with them. In any case he is no longer mentioned in the rest of the story.



Yueguang's first reaction is one of amazement: you, Immortals, and you, great king; [l. 180] from where do you come, and where are you going? The mountains in this region are steep and inaccessible—how have you been able to reach this spot? When the king explains that he would like to ask some questions regarding Yueguang's advent which, as he has heard, is to take place soon, the latter at first seems unwilling to give any details: “Just cultivate goodness; be diligent and persevering, and do not have profane thoughts. My (time) here is now finished 吾今已竟; what more is there to ask about?” However, after the king [l. 185] has pointed out that he still does not know what norms and rules 法則 one has to follow when the Saintly Ruler 聖君 arrives, Yueguang gives him the following description of the disasters that will break out, and the way to escape from them.

In the coming years 當來之年 there will be a deluge. The water will stand (*p.* 1357.2.20) forty *li* high on the flat land. It will emerge in the northwest and roll on to the southeast, with huge billows, and a deafening noise like a thunderstorm. [l. 190] You will be carried away by the waves and shout for help. At that time all people will be seized by panic and many will die. Only those who observe the rules 持戒, who are pure, and who strive diligently will be saved, for Yueguang will send a great Nāga-king 大龍王 to pick them up and to put them on a floating mountain 浮山. Rescue will also be given to those who recite the *Guanshiyin Scripture* in one *chüan* 觀世音經一卷; who concentrate their minds in meditation; who diligently apply themselves to the work of religious instruction 勸化, and who propagate this scripture [l. 195] without hiding even one word of it. All such people will be saved from a premature death by drowning. However, the deluge will be followed by (*p.* 1357.3.1) terrible epidemics, with many kinds of strange sufferings, and of those who are stricken by it ninety percent will die.

The king is then told to issue an edict throughout his territory, to the effect that all his subjects, old and young alike (and even young children from one year of age upward, who are already able to walk and speak) must accept [l. 200] the Three Refuges and the Five Rules. “I now reveal to you a secret teaching 密教, that you may know how in an evil world to practice what is good. If henceforward (your sinful conduct) causes you to die a premature death, then you should not (= then it will be too late to) feel remorse! I tell you that the end of the world is at hand 世將欲末; gradually the (forces of) evil will be allowed to arise, and the coming years

will be hard to get through. Turn to goodness in whatever you do, and do not have profane thoughts! [l. 205] When I appear in the world, there will be disaster and sin, but you must only exert yourselves to the utmost in the practice of the good Doctrine, and have no profane thoughts. Evil powers will bring misfortune; heroes will rise up in competition—but (all such sinners) will naturally be annihilated, and they will never see me appearing in the world”. (*p.* 1357.3.10) Protection, release and karmic merit are obtained by those who have recited the *Guanshiyin Scripture* a thousand times, as well as by believers who sincerely [l. 210] practise the Three Refuges and the Five Rules, and who widely propagate this scripture. “For those who spread this holy scripture, I have calculated 算計 the fortunate retribution for a thousand *kalpas*, and (their happiness) can never be exhausted”; the reverse is done for people who hide the text of this scripture, [l. 215] or even one word of it. By doing so, such sinners are covering other people’s wisdom-eye 慧眼; time and again they will be reborn blind, (*p.* 1357.3.20) and even if such a man eventually would reach the state of an Arhat, he would be a blind one. (On the contrary:) let my order be heard by everyone, in cities, towns and (rural) settlements 聚落, from the king and his ministers down to the common people. To all who are disposed to believe and to respectfully accept this scripture, it should be made known, to far and near alike. Let them all hear it, in a thousand cities and a hundred states: [l. 220] I shall appear in the world, north of the Yellow River, and south of the Weak Water, and between those (two rivers) I shall be king in the territory of Han”.

The king then asks the King of Light about the origin of this scripture <sup>96</sup>), and Yueguang tells him that it was made by the more than three thousand great Saints of Hailing in common consultation 海陵大聖三千餘人參議所造, and then orders the king and all the other visitors to spread the message all over the world—they [l. 225] do not need to come back any more <sup>97</sup>). Then the king obeys

<sup>96</sup>) I suppose that this refers to the prophecy just pronounced by Yueguang, and not to the *Guanshiyin Scripture* mentioned before.

<sup>97</sup>) The text is enigmatic: 等大眾各各分散順化天下不須復迴. I have interpreted 大眾 as referring to the huge crowd of visitors, and 等 as a temporal particle: “until you have. . . , you don’t need to come back”. But it could also refer to the great “conference” of Saints that has just been mentioned, in which case the phrase would imply that those divine assistants are soon to start their salutary work in the world: “until (this) great Assembly (of Saints) has dispersed, and every one of them is making

and departs. (When he is about to go), Yueguang tongzi cryptically alludes to a statue (with inscription?) that apparently confirms his prophecy: “If you do not believe what I have just said, you have only to look at the stone image of Kāśyapa—that is (contains?) the prophecy of my appearance in the world” 但看迦葉石像, 是吾出世記耳<sup>98</sup>). (p. 1358.1.1) For the good people there is no need to be afraid—when I appear in the world, they will all reach the state of Nonactivity 無為. The king and all who are with him are again urged to convert as many people as possible, for even in the present year the (first) difficulties will arise. (l. 230] “Let each of you make a vow to transcend (this) evil world” 過度惡世.

The king and the other visitors pay their respects to Yueguang and depart. After the five hundred Immortals have again settled in the Taining Mountains 太寧山中, they see there a copy of the *Yueguang Tongzi Scripture* 月光童子經 in one *juan*, and they also have some other visions: they see a Bodhisattva seated under an *longhua* 龍華 tree in the City of the Golden Dragon 金龍城, and an Adept who is transmitting this scripture (to the world below) in order to perfect the minds of all beings<sup>99</sup>).

(the world) comply with his transforming influence, you do not need to come back”. My reason for preferring the first interpretation is twofold: in the first place, this phrase is immediately followed by the statement that the king obeyed and departed, and, secondly, there is nothing in the whole story to suggest that the king would ever come back to Penglai.

<sup>98</sup>) This phrase is followed by one that is even more cryptic: 善哉索斷合絲作. Does it refer to some kind of line of succession or filiation of saints that has been interrupted and is now to be resumed, here symbolized by a thread that has been broken and is joined again? The theme of the “stone image of Kāśyapa” is unknown to me; it is possible that it has something to do with the old tradition that Mahākāśyapa is awaiting Maitreya’s advent inside Mt. Kukkuṭapāda, cf. note 27 above.

<sup>99</sup>) From this point onward the text becomes more and more difficult to understand. The Bodhisattva must be Maitreya, who according to a well-known tradition (e.g. *T* 453 *Maitreya-vyākaraṇa* 彌勒下生經 p. 421<sup>c</sup>) will realize Enlightenment and deliver his first sermons under a *Nāgaṇḍḍha* tree 龍花樹. The description of the second vision is very unclear: 見一道人下此經時為一衆生成一切衆生心. The expression 衆生 normally renders *sarvasattva*, “all beings”, but it occasionally does occur as a singular: 一衆生 “one being”. Does this “one being” here refer to the monk himself, who whilst acting alone, and relying on his individual wisdom, is able to lead all other beings to spiritual perfection? On the other hand, the “explanation” given by the king (cf. below) seems to refer to this vision when it says “(Yueguang will appear, and) perfect the Way of all beings 成一切衆生道; in that case the person who reveals the scripture is Yueguang himself. For that reason I have preferred to render *daoren* 道人 by “Adept” rather than by “monk”.

The king then “explains” these visions (to his subjects?). [l. 235] The King of the Doctrine 法王 is to be expected; the Saintly King 聖王 is soon to descend. On behalf of all (“virgin” =) unmarried young men and women he will “maintain” 持 one hundred and twenty Sage Lords 賢君 (as overseers?). (p. 1358.1.10) In the years *shen* 申 and *you* 酉 he will preach the Doctrine to all beings, and lead our young men and women to realize the Way. When reading this scripture, one should think deeply about it and (try to) grasp the meaning of these words<sup>100</sup>). Yueguang will soon appear; in his saintly perfection he will manifest himself, in order to perfect the Way of all beings. By reading this scripture one can [l. 240] escape from those disasters (that will break out), and by observing the Rules one will be able to see the King of Light. If one reads the following spell 呪, wild animals, evil spirits and demons will automatically stay away.

Then follows [l. 245] (p. 1358.1.20) a spell in pseudo-Sanskrit of the *dhāraṇī* type, consisting of ten words (46 syllables). The practitioner should first wash his hands and rinse his mouth. After one hundred recitations the Bodhisattva (Yueguang) will manifest himself to him, surrounded by a large halo, with a long staff<sup>101</sup>); his face is shining like gold, and on his head he carries a golden flower as big [l. 250] as a carriage wheel. His hands are one and a half foot in length. Do not be afraid when he appears, but merely take your refuge to the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Saṅgha in the dharma-regions of the ten directions of space 十方世界. Deliverance will be earned even by reading this scripture three times. The Buddha knows that all beings have committed many sins, and by clearly understanding (the way to) deliverance they (still) may get rid of (their sins), so that they may escape from the disasters<sup>102</sup>). (p. 1358.2.1) Those who rely on this scripture [l. 255] will be able to visualize the Bodhisattva and see how he preaches

<sup>100</sup>) This is followed by a phrase that seems to refer to the number of *electi* of both sexes, but beyond that I do not dare to offer any interpretation: 男取無億女取恆沙男不用取婦

<sup>101</sup>) 蓑杖; I suppose that 蓑 here is a graphic variant of 長 and does not refer to the tropical fruit called “carambola” (蕉). (蓑楚).

<sup>102</sup>) The text in the following four columns (253-256), from 明王出世 to 打人無度 is so cryptic that I cannot even try to explain it. It seems to imply that certain persons who are unwilling to accept the message will be reborn as wild beasts or malignant demons.

the Doctrine, wearing heavenly garments. Take care not to speak (to the apparition). This person (who is evoked by the practicant) has realized the Way; when (the practicant) perceives the (divine) fragrant flowers (that appear) spontaneously, he should not be excited; if he would speak, this person would certainly leave (this) sinful world (and vanish) <sup>103</sup>).

In the (fateful) years *shen* and *you*, the father [l. 260] will not know his son, nor will the mother know her daughter. So be mindful of the words of this scripture; change your hearts and change your thoughts, be free from lewd desires, and do not look upon others with wicked intentions (? 不惡眼視). When the Buddha preaches the Doctrine, you yet will have the opportunity to regain your basic intention 得本心—now he is to appear soon, so be diligent and have remorse! At the time of Yueguang’s coming, each one Sage will be able to save the lives of ten persons. But do not slander this scripture (by saying that it is untrue), for the Lord of Darkness 闇君 is about to stand up; evil powers are to arise, and only by diligence and perseverance you will get rid of these calamities.

Zhu Daoyi 諸道義 <sup>104</sup>) will then [l. 265] preach the Doctrine to all beings: (p. 1858.2.10) “If you understand what I say, you will see the King of the Doctrine at once” 若解吾語即見法王. Even if all the monks would die, the practice of the Way would yet not come to an end. But (in any case) many of them will die, for the monks have committed numerous sins: because of this (the clergy) engage in commerce for their livelihood 持生販賣, and because of this the country lacks peace. When (such) monks die, it will happen that (by that very fact) many scoundrels will lose their lives (?) 會構賊兒死多. Only one out of each thousand will be selected (to be saved) <sup>105</sup>). So let them, first of all, practise (the right) conduct; for the Saint will soon begin (his rule), the heroes will arise in competition; the time is at hand 時節欲到!

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<sup>103</sup>) Needless to say that my translation of this whole description of the *séance* is only tentative. It is followed by the even more enigmatic 第一用意百日在時不用癡貪: does it mean that the practicant has to observe a period of mental purification lasting a hundred days?

<sup>104</sup>) Apparently meant to be a clerical name, but Zhu 諸 remains puzzling.

<sup>105</sup>) The reading 千介拔十介 of S 2109 (= T 2874 p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 13) is garbled; cf. note 74 above.

From this point the text completely turns into oracular language that defies all attempts to summarize it in a coherent way. There is an enumeration of signs or portenta that are to be expected in the final period, such as the appearance of a person (Yueguang himself?) in a yellow garment, who is twelve feet tall (L 269 = T 2874, p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 14); grain covering the whole earth (L 270 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 15); unspecified “abnormal things” 怪 on the fourteenth day of the seventh month, followed by the appearance of the Buddha and an earthquake on the next day (L 271 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 16); a monk transmitting (this?) scripture (L 272 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 17); an epidemic that breaks out when people calumniate this teaching, and a huge bird <sup>106</sup>) whose feet measure one *zhang* (L 274 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 18); the emergence of Sages who have cultivated the Way in the Ziyang Mountains 紫巖山中 for more than seven hundred years (L 274 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 19), etc. It is followed by a conversation between Yueguang and the Buddha <sup>107</sup>), in which mention is made of a number of Bodhisattvas who will manifest themselves in this world (L 278 = p. 1358<sup>b</sup>, l. 23-29). Some kind of evil is associated with Luoyang (L 287 = p. 1358<sup>c</sup>, l. 3), and there are some very cryptic allusions to postures or movements of fingers and hands (L 289-292 = p. 1358<sup>c</sup>, l. 4-8). There will be great happiness, for all sinners have gone, and everybody, both male and female, will realize the Way (L 292 = p. 1358<sup>c</sup>, l. 8). The ancient Buddha Dīpaṃkara 定光 will dwell among men, and so will Vimalakīrti 維摩, who pretends to lead a luxurious life with many wives and concubines, but who actually is a great Bodhisattva destined to reach Buddhahood (L 296-301 = p. 1358<sup>c</sup>, l. 11-18).

#### Variant readings

(Ms. *b* = Peking no. 292:8275; *c* = S. 2697, reproduced in the *Taishō Canon* as T 2873; *d* = S. 6881; *e* = S. 1811; “l.” followed by a number refers to the columns in ms. *a* = Peking no. 292:8274 that has been reproduced above).

l. 53 鳥: 雉 *e*; l. 56 花: 化 *c d*; l. 93 其: + 意 *b c d e*; l. 97 諸: 詩 *c*; l. 101 此: *c om.*; l. 103 頗: 波 *c*; l. 106 三十: 卅 *e*; l. 107 頗: 波 *c*; l. 125 誑: *c e om.*; l. 131 得: 德 *c e*; l. 133 名: + 賢 *c e*; l. 135 有: + 見 *c e*; l. 171 萊: 來 *c*; l. 194 通: 是 *c*; l. 199 如: 知 *c*; l. 211 身: + 命 *c*; l. 215 一: *c om.*; l. 217 乃: 及 *c*; l. 218 路: *c om.*; l. 219 切: *c om.*; l. 221 來: 出 *c*; l. 225 歡: 觀 *c*; l. 229 難: *c om.*; l. 235 得: 待 *c*; l. 244 澤: 澤 *c*; 鬱: + 離 *c*; l. 247 菟: 菟 *d* (2x); l. 249 紫: 此 *c*; l. 252 少: + 為 *c*; l. 253 說: 脫 *c*; l. 254 莫: *c om.*; l. 254 正念... 正身: 念正想正意正身 *c*; l. 262 卽: 中 *c*; l. 262 道罷 *c om.*; l. 263 不得: + 識 *d*;

<sup>106</sup>) Most manuscripts read 鳥; S 6861 has 鳥 “crow”.

<sup>107</sup>) Apparently the Buddha Śākyamuni is meant, as he is said to dwell under the Āśvattha 波多 tree, i.e. the *Ficus Religiosa* under which Śākyamuni attained Enlightenment. Such a reappearance of the last Buddha at the final epoch is not so amazing, for, as the text tells us (below, l. 296), even the ancient Buddha Dīpaṃkara, from whom the future Śākyamuni many aeons ago obtained his *vyākaraṇa*, will manifest himself again.

1. 268 一 : 十 *c*; 1. 268 个 : 介 (2x); 1. 269 聖 : 十 人 *c*; 1. 274 鳥 : 鳥 *c e*;  
 1. 278 衆生 : *c om.*; 1. 284 堅 : 賢 *c*; 1. 291 善 : 義 *c*; 1. 298 利 : 朔 *c*;  
 1. 298 个 : 界 *c*; 1. 300 摩 : 十 時 *c*; 1. 306 粗 : 祖 *c*.

These *variae lectiones* show that the five manuscripts can be divided into two groups: *a b d* and *c e*. Both represent a single recension of the scripture, but the first group is very homogeneous, and superior to the second one. In the second group, *c* and *e* share a number of variants; *c* therefore belongs to the same stemma, but has added a great number of scribal errors of its own.



凡月光童子辭

山中有一比丘名曰首羅  
年向晨早起見五百仙人

順路而行即請大仙且住於此受我供養大

仙又住道人曰何處承盡有何不安大仙答

曰我聞月光出世是故我今忿忿不安首羅

比丘聞是語時歡喜踊躍三七日中不食

食自然飽滿即時問大仙曰月光出世王在

否曰王在溪境省羅間此歡喜踊

躍至我今云何如盲如聵如瘂

不知此事我今聞之改往脩

首羅比丘復問大仙曰溪境今

在何處顯示其所在大仙答曰弱水以南長

河以北於其中間出現於世度脫萬姓首羅

問大仙平君出時可見以不大仙答曰改往

脩來奉持禁者盡得見之首羅門曰奉持

禁者法則云何應養貳一心念佛念法口誦法

言貳足摩屈沙弥沙弥左亦復如是首羅問

曰如此五衆有五逆重者得見明君以不但

使改往脩來亦得見之首羅比丘曰吾今告

汝一切衆主天龍八部諸鬼神等從今以往

更別作心莫如常意月光臨出大火將至元  
 有疑也當來大水災至兼有疾病流行百  
 姓飢饉英雄覺起百姓无有安寧受吾勅者  
 25 可得免災難首羅告曰一切諸比丘及比丘  
 比丘從今以往坐禪執心好持煩惱賊者皆  
 度惡世能誦大乘經者捨離高心及以我慢  
 如此之人亦得度世除此以下勸化興福柔和  
 忍辱捨嫉妬心如此之人亦得度世優婆塞  
 30 優婆塞受持三歸五戒行十善者歲三月  
 六齋如此之人亦得度世受吾勅者皆得  
 度世比丘僧比丘從今以往不聽犯五逆及  
 以第一偏不聽飲酒食肉无度飲食持弟不  
 聽非時受吾教者必得度世優婆塞優婆塞  
 35 從今以往堅持五戒奉持齋法歲三長齋月六  
 齋食莫非時如此之人亦得度世吾復告四眾  
 眾曰受吾勅者皆得度世除不至心及以等  
 盡首羅比丘稽首問曰明君出世法則云何  
 主境何似壇場調伏大仙答曰卅六國恒舊  
 40 如是首羅問曰當化之時万民有會誦之名  
 次復輸之太平治化當用樂載大仙答曰

當五十五載為欲頭釋迦朽故之法首羅門  
 大仙曰月光出世當用何時古月未沒時出  
 境陽普告諸賢者天台山引路遊觀至介齊  
 45 山又到閻浮里列魯瑪一考太上二考真言  
 三考鍊鍊群聖首羅間此語時歡喜踊躍然  
 踉蹌起善哉善哉希有之法今得聞之非已不  
 也首羅問大仙曰月光大衆有幾數大仙告  
 曰不可稱計大仙曰當出之時二十億菩薩  
 50 二萬六千億天人諸天童子百千億不可  
 稱數皇天黑馬咄咄伊伊康誰道別神暉  
 阿難舍利弗大目犍連等三十六龍王四十九  
 經四十八萬七十兩師迦陵頻伽鳥鸞麟鳳凰  
 及三足神鳥一切應瑞盡皆出矣一鳴龍馬  
 55 鼓千億萬不可稱計累乘天龍馬女乘百福  
 金銀車男得金銀蓋女乘瑠璃軒花城尚  
 門入道遙北門出信都主地海東派乘松沈  
 儿宜神州並母曲中涌高樓月光童子在中  
 遊千百國至四方來成唱法鼓朗然鳴龍騰  
 60 建道場及有五蓮者建後元人卿首羅問曰  
 閻浮里地頗有得道者大仙答曰閻浮里地

亦有少不得者首羅問曰可有災咎大仙曰  
有八万四千恒河沙首羅問曰當來水災何  
處得免恒山五岳盡皆免水災勃海布盧  
庭亦得免水災甘晨山亦得免水災震耳  
山亦得免水災頗賢山亦得免水災乳羅  
山亦得免水災如此大災皆得免之受吾勅  
者當得老小令往就之首羅問曰更何方計得  
免水難大仙答曰更有一方亦得免之首羅歡  
喜更問之曰願說其意大仙答曰教信三寶礼  
佛念法敬比丘僧持齋礼拜教信不懈專念  
不然如此之人得免大水之難首羅復問大仙  
曰作何方計得免疾病之災大仙曰比丘僧  
比丘居假婆處假婆處從今以往持戒養養  
皆伏清潔男女大小能行知語皆應受戒如  
吾所勅莫如常意可得免脫首羅曰復作  
何方計得免姦耶之災大仙答曰姦耶乃至  
多種受吾勅者慎莫信之月光出世唯有善  
者盡得見之五逆大惡衆生終不見也首羅  
問曰城池卷陷其事云何大仙答曰城池卷  
陷縱廣七百餘里高千尺下基千尺深城三

百餘尺開七十二門城作紫磨金色中有光  
 瑩城高千尺下基千尺激城亦五百尺亦作  
 紫磨金色明中五百餘里亦開七十二門中  
 85 有八城各三十餘里亦作紫磨金色各有千  
 巷巷相當門門相望出見法王如此城壕  
 等男女皆志充滿首羅聞之歡喜踊躍无量  
 善哉善哉大願將果首羅告四衆言大寶特  
 至莫作常意決定脩善莫作狐疑吾見大仙  
 90 以來消息書之无有疑惑但從吾意脩善奉  
 道精勤者行莫如常意思之念之必至无有首  
 羅問大仙曰受樂之時亦有琴樂以不大仙  
 答曰月光出世琴有多種首羅曰願說其  
 大仙答曰琴戲吹詠无量天上音聲道遠  
 95 无極振大法鼓曜大法雷振動三千大千世  
 界種種寶而著琴戲畫轉三十六鼓音聲當  
 命之時諸天龍宮鬼鬼而動首羅比丘問大仙  
 曰向者妖耶我不畏之除此小耶更有大耶  
 以不大仙曰月光出世之時必有大魔而出  
 100 首羅問曰大魔出時可却以不大仙答曰唯  
 有一父能却此魔者為何人也大仙答曰三

十三天有一童子名曰赫天乘天龍馬從空而  
 來捉頭梨弓漆沉箭唯有此人能却此大魔  
 首羅比丘問大仙曰有何方能却唯有此一  
 105 人能却餘人不能大仙答曰如此大魔三十  
 六人各乘龍馬繫帶四十二金杖左手提金  
 金剛杵右手提頭梨斧走來攫去踏石沒踪  
 起達永階但言唱無有當者首羅問大仙  
 曰除此大魔更有何灾大仙答曰月光臨出無  
 110 有灾也首羅問曰灾復云何大仙答曰當  
 有七日閻當之時有夜叉羅刹此舍閻思燒  
 樣荼思飛行羅刹食人无量唯有受持三歸  
 五戒奉行齊法如此之人皆得度脫首羅問  
 曰月光出世古月未後乃當出現奉養脩善  
 115 皆得見之首羅曰更復何處得免灾大仙  
 答曰唯有陽州次有雲免國都城被破  
 資陽河潤於此之城實是冤良三相大灾生  
 起五流城河白骨如山唯有東南乃得免冤  
 大仙答曰首羅言好勅衆僧反以白衣坐禪  
 120 誦經懃脩三業莫如常意明王大聖今在漢  
 境未見之間催嚴福德莫如常意汝信脩善

奉喜月光出世時前惡後善惡世難度好自  
 勸屬更別作心莫如不信大仙答曰吾當虛  
 言若不俞者俟我當來之世金剛力士手捉  
 125 金杵碎我身體猶如微塵我若虛言誑汝衆  
 主當來之世身當如是首羅問大仙曰而今世  
 間頗有仙人賢聖以不大仙答曰賢聖仙人  
 世間元量首羅問曰何人是也大仙答曰賢古  
 月興盛是故不見耳首羅問曰賢士之人名  
 130 号是誰大仙答曰我說其名首羅曰唯願說  
 之大仙答曰石賢得嚴賢明孫賢奇范賢  
 德吳賢使郇賢當觀賢實趙賢思此是八  
 賢名字汝今可往就之其汝導師無量主死音  
 羅曰今在何處大仙答曰今當出世何須問也  
 135 但當嚴心時至有之首羅復稽除此八人更有  
 賢不大仙答曰無更有之何人是也大仙答曰  
 秦起世潘道成盧惠顧板國興扶男陽劉道  
 貴王延壽趙頭宗張道板故世安李軍斜如諸  
 賢去皆遊巡世間汝今冥眼不能別之得聞吾  
 140 經常行平等何以故太賢諸賢難分別故  
 受吾勸者宜應平等十六正士七十二賢三



乎人俱如是大士在人間也不可識別或見  
 其狂或復愚癡或復闇鈍寒貧下賤或飲  
 酒食寔或復夜食破齋如此示現何能識之  
 145 示衆生有三妻有見相隨順世法難可了知唯  
 有平等得值賢聖也首羅比丘告諸四衆比  
 丘比丘尼優婆塞優婆夷大定將至莫如常意  
 其有本師父母國王極越朋友知識目錄親  
 戚等得吾經者皆示之莫問迎遠得吾經者  
 150 懃行流布使一切聞之不聽隱匿吾經者當來  
 之世必值惡道首羅比丘日說有一人捨三千  
 大千國土馬七珍及國內人民穀帛財物  
 以用布施不如有人流通吾經諸比丘前切  
 德倍如百千萬首羅日君得吾經者懃行流  
 155 布城邑聚落男女大小皆使聞之其有匿吾  
 經者現世不吉當來得病首羅日有智信之  
 愚者棄之首羅日吾經當來皆應也莫作不  
 信一如衆生宜應奉行歡喜信衆此經如海  
 多有潤澤余時君子國王大臣宰相一切士  
 160 官三千餘人各聞太寧寺上有五百仙衆歡  
 喜踊躍各各獻駕詣太寧寺中仙人所稽首

問曰大仙從何所來欲至何許願說其意大  
 仙曰我聞月光童子出世是故我來欲到彼  
 處王及大臣聞是語時歡喜踊躍傾心西望而  
 不可心西國真人情何功德得值入善作何善  
 業得見月光出世而我國人遠而不見大仙  
 答曰月光出世人皆普見至今云何生懊歎  
 心也王聞普見并大臣及諸人民皆大歡喜  
 各持嚴駕今當去來王問大仙曰月光童子  
 今在何許大仙答曰善哉善哉大王善聽吾  
 說月光明至今三千大衆在蓬萊山中海陵  
 山下閔子虛所心思惟時至現也君子國大臣  
 宰相一切士官并及國內人民各白大仙曰  
 今隨從大仙至月光所聽見以不大仙日月  
 光明王群如大海亦如大地終不生疑作  
 留難也王及大臣并及人民隨從大仙有王  
 万七千人去君子國七千餘里到蓬萊山中海  
 陵山下閔子虛所見月光童子三千徒衆諸  
 賢聖等皆集於此月光童子問諸大仙并  
 及大王今從何所來欲何所至此中險難无  
 人行步汝今云何能來至此王曰聞世尊今

欲出世故來奉問月光童子曰但當脩善慙  
 行精進莫如常意吾今已竟何須復現問大  
 王曰我聞聖君出世不知法則云何願說其  
 意我當加心脩善月光童子曰汝若不知當  
 為說之月光曰善聽復當善念善思念之內  
 者心中莫如常意吾見說之當來之年必有  
 水災高於平地四十餘里當水來時從西北  
 角出東南而派大水陽波叫聲雷電霹靂  
 不得為喻汝復涌出運波叫聲當今之時人  
 皆惶怖迫死者多唯有持戒淨潔求懃度世  
 月光童子使大龍王大引人博著浮山設復  
 有人造觀世音經六卷設復有人禪思一心  
 設復有人於惡世懃行勸化設復有人流通  
 經不令隱匿章句文字懃行勸樂如此人  
 等皆得度世不為水災之所无災復除不至  
 心反壽命盡月光復告大王言當來三災廣  
 病流行十傷九亡種種果患皆當天命王當  
 信之各勅國內一歲以上能行如語應受三  
 歸五戒若老若少皆應勸畫使受三歸五戒  
 奉行善法如是之人皆得度世除不善不至

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心反命毒吾今密教語汝使知惡世流行善  
 法後致天喪莫生悔心吾告汝等世將欲求  
 漸令惡起來年難過好作向善莫如常意意  
 205 當出世矣亦不善但當努力懃行善法莫如  
 常意伏耶不祥英雄覺起自然磨滅終不見  
 吾出見於世汝等善哉莫如常意受吾教者  
 誦觀世音千遍防身度世極獲善果又沒有  
 人各受三歸五戒今當行之莫如常意懃行  
 210 此經者老若少皆使聞之得度惡世誤讓  
 有人派布此經處處派傳使人聞知得度身  
 以懃派布此經者亦得度世月光日派行此  
 經典者我於千劫中罕計是人福報終不能  
 盡說後有入生疑不信我於千劫中罕是人  
 215 罪報終不能盡兼演隱文字章句一玷一畫  
 不令人聞霞人慧眼故世世常音无可復見  
 乃至羅漢帝不離音名霞慧眼故新郭法  
 路乃雅是殃受吾教者城邑聚落國王大臣  
 一人民皆得聞之能有信心崇奉此經莫  
 220 問遠近應往通派使人聞之千城百國皆使  
 聞之吾當來世黃河以北弱水以南於其中

聞王於漢境大王曰明王言此經從何所出月  
 光告大王言海陵大聖三千餘人共議所造  
 月光告大王言等大眾各各示散順化天下  
 不須須迴今時大王受教奉行歡喜而去月  
 光童子曰向者所說汝若不信但看迦葉石  
 像是吾出世記耳善哉索新合盤作乃有喜  
 衆主順其驚怖言當出時盡皆得无爲王及  
 大眾歡喜奉行近化不懈吾告汝等今歲難  
 到汝且精進莫如常意各各發願過度思世  
 大仙國王并及臣民歡喜奉行作禮而去王  
 百仙人在太寧山中并見月光童子經一卷  
 金龍城中見一菩薩龍華樹下見一道人  
 下此經時爲一衆生成一切衆生心王曰爲  
 汝分別解說法王欲得聖君欲下爲一切童  
 男童女持百二十賢君申百年爲衆生說法  
 成我童男童女成道讀此經時善思取此語  
 男取无億女取恒沙男不用取婦月光童子  
 欲出聖成欲現成一切衆生道若讀此經語  
 可離此難月光菩薩欲來下說持戒可得見  
 明君若欲讀此咒時師子窟狼復惡耶祝

市百鬼自然去一切衆生狂死者多爲一切衆  
生貴佛正法

優曇鉢優曇鉢 但澤但澤 鬱離鬱離 烏呼烏呼

245 薩呼薩呼 但叉但叉 又何患池呼屋 要他莫他

索由富菟 屋富菟屋

若讀呪時淨洗手頰口讀此呪使人晨夜

安隱即見菩薩讀此呪百遍見菩薩放大光

明現在人前長杖一面如紫金色頭上金華大

250 如車輪手長一尺半初來入時莫作怖迫歸

命佛歸命法歸命僧十方諸界三讀此經

皆得解脫世事玄著衆生作罪不女分別

解說可離令得免難明君出時把此珠向明

君必見我慎莫迫怖好正念正想正意正身

255 得見我身有人必難此人或作師子虎狼手

捉金杖打人无度依此經語行菩薩行可得

見菩薩說法現身著天衣慎莫言語此人即

成道見香華自然不得動心言語此人必離惡

世第一用意百日在時不用飲食中百年時公

260 不誡兒女不誡女憶此經語可得改心改意

第一不婬欲第二不惡眼視佛爲衆生說法

還得本心佛欲出世慈心懺悔即見月光童子  
 產一命賢者得證上人此經不得誹謗聞者  
 欲起疑耶欲興惡情進即離此難諸道義不  
 265 一切衆生和說法若解吾語即見法王道人无  
 盡不羅道羅道行死者多道人作罪不少由走  
 持生販賣由此因不安寧道人死時會換狀  
 兒无多道意師僧欲責屋僧千个拔一个若  
 一用行聖欲如英雄欲起時節欲到持黃衣  
 270 長丈二鞭來善地生慈心作福可得見此  
 事思此經語即得見我身七月十四日其有  
 一怪十五日見佛地動莫作恐怖見道人漸  
 安義下此經語誹謗即有大病患起後見  
 一老烏足長一丈後見賢者脩道以來七百  
 275 餘年紫微山中後見一道人身著天衣賢者  
 見之即以供奉七日道人師徒三百餘年道  
 人口語讀經可得免難願佛波多樹下与一  
 切轉讀視見衆生衆生死盡月光童子演經  
 世事衆生可化佛語月光童子前頭隨意即  
 280 演經至達甚多云何可度佛演語月光童  
 子佛演語四天龍王衆生可憐隨因緣起



須臾百二十賢君除却衆生好惡欲分別佛  
 光菩薩善光菩薩咸增善賢功德不少由諸  
 國王樂王菩薩堅固菩薩見在人間十村中有  
 285 一村萬里有長佛欲見出語衆生慈心作替進  
 可得見佛若誹謗之人魂家滅盡定墮地獄  
 永不見佛佛欲出世慈替進比道欲知比難  
 洛陽西欲知比惡在於瑩西須有瑩北者  
 有吾弟子解吾口語即我弟子指手心上乃  
 290 思惟思之不但省後頭有杆十手相指受赫  
 赫自去善哉童子災後快樂由欲末頭兩手  
 相抱釋然自去善男子耶快以不惡人善盡  
 欲大棄惡人後不問女婦盡成道乃一替進  
 可得免此難佛後有大慈悲快憐衆生不捨  
 295 衆生心不迴畏衆生死盡有緣值我无緣索  
 索自去維摩共之定光在人中維摩稱妻  
 婦人中使人不識作行世帝下香化人維摩  
 利大各四廿五里直東維摩有三个兒維摩  
 度人无崖詐人聞望行施濟无婦行衆上  
 300 敢得此行看維摩節欲到无量衆生悔其  
 維摩度人決得成佛維摩貪財盜語一切

305  
衆生慙心稽進可淨見雖摩諸道義區  
此鳥傳誡下此經即見王僧慶行徒七人見  
此鳥燒香歡喜踊躍七日不食若一切衆生  
聞我語聲慙心稽進慎莫異意惡欲死盡  
飲大樂資糧不輸

首羅陀經