

# Chapter Six

## Empress Wu's Impact Beyond China: Kingship and Female Sovereigns

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**Abstract:** Despite many scholarly tomes, Empress Wu 武后 (Wu Zhao, written 武照 or 武曩; also Wu Zetian 武則天, 624–705) remains an enigmatic figure in Chinese or East Asian history. Empress Wu skillfully crafted a hybrid system of kingship that incorporated Buddhist ideology into traditional Chinese kingship with both Daoist and Confucian origins. The Buddhist realm she envisioned and implemented provided a model of governance/kingship as well as the kind of state-sponsored institutions, rituals, and arts for neighboring polities to follow. While Wu's reign ended in 705, her court's influences lasted well beyond this date. This essay focuses on Wu's impact on Japan, primarily on the topics of kingship and female sovereigns, along with their visual and ritual dimensions.

**Keywords:** Empress Wu/Wu Zhao/Wu Zetian, Buddhist kingship, female sovereigns, Shōmu Tennō, Kōmyō, Kōken-Shōtoku Tennō, ritual architecture

Despite many scholarly tomes, Empress Wu 武后 (Wu Zhao, written 武照 or 武曩; also Wu Zetian 武則天 [624–705]), remains an enigmatic figure in Chinese or East Asian history.<sup>1</sup> She ruled as regent after Emperor Gaozong's 高宗 (r. 649–83) death from 684 to 690 and as emperor of the Zhou 周 dynasty that she founded from 690 to 705. One of Antonino Forte's key contributions is his investigation of the incorporation of Buddhist ideology in Wu Zhao's ascension to the throne and her rule as a thearch.<sup>2</sup> The strategy was multifaceted, including selection of passages in Buddhist texts that include prophecies of a ruler in female form; association with *cakravartin* (the wheel-turning king or universal monarch) in Buddhist kingship; invocation of Maitreya and messianic beliefs in achieving a utopia on earth; deployment of cults of relics, *dhāraṇīs*, and deities (especially esoteric deities) for state protection; creation of a network of Buddhist institutions that paralleled the state bureaucracy; expansion of the functions of palace chapels and the participation of Buddhist clerics in state affairs; and patronage of Buddhist monuments, images, and rituals.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional Chinese kingship and theory of government were informed with both Daoist and Confucian philosophies (see below). Buddhism, however, introduced a different worldview and set of expectations in political thought and practice. In Buddhist cosmology, there exist numerous universes or 'world systems' in infinite space. Humans live in one of these worlds, which is still impure, while a Buddha field or Buddha land (Skt. *buddhakṣetra*) denotes a realm or

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<sup>1</sup> Dora Shu-Fang Dien summarized, 'Because of the paucity of factual material and overabundance of hearsay and rumor, there are as many versions of her life as there are writers' (Dien, *Empress Wu Zetian in Fiction and in History*, 28). A review of scholarship on Wu Zhao can be found in Dien's work, and also in the more recent volume by Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon of Devis*.

<sup>2</sup> Forte, *Political Propaganda*.

<sup>3</sup> Other important works on Wu Zhao and Buddhism include: Barrett, 'Stūpa, Sūtra and Śāṣira in China'; Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 55–101.

a cosmos where a Buddha exerts his spiritual influence and purifies it.<sup>4</sup> Buddhists also believe that the world that humans live in revolves cyclically; the land is prosperous and there is no crime when the Buddha's dharma (teachings) is in ascendance with a *cakravartin* as sovereign, but the world deteriorates when the Buddha's dharma declines. The belief that Maitreya the Future Buddha will be born into an ideal kingdom on earth, one that is ruled by a *cakravartin*, and offers salvation to beings who attend his assemblies thus provides devotees with hopes of the realization of a utopia on earth.<sup>5</sup> In her rule as a Buddhist sovereign, Wu Zhao has invoked both *cakravartin* and Maitreya in her reign titles. As Sun Yinggang 孫英剛 summarized, 'Buddhism puts political order in a divine and harmonious frame of reference, extends the sacred order of the universe to human beings and thus bestows the rulers with some necessity, certainty and eternity.'<sup>6</sup>

Wu's reign, however, was not only informed with Buddhism. The country's diplomatic and domestic affairs continued to be administered through established Tang policies and the state bureaucracy. Although known for her cruelty in eliminating enemies at court, by all counts Wu was capable in selecting administrators with talents, including women, and was credited for instituting a more merit-based system to recruit officials.<sup>7</sup> She harmonized Buddhist kingship with the traditional Chinese concept of divine kingship vested in the notion of the ruler being the *tianzi* 天子 (Son of Heaven).<sup>8</sup> The convergence of divine and secular roles of the ruler was common in many traditional societies,

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 214–18.

<sup>5</sup> A collection of essays on Maitreya faith is in Sponberg & Hardacre, eds., *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*.

<sup>6</sup> Sun, 'Foguang xia de chaoting,' 197.

<sup>7</sup> Guisso, *Wu Tse-T'ien*, 51–69; Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 36–39, 202–3. A more comprehensive assessment of Wu's achievements and weaknesses as a ruler is in Guisso, *Wu Tse-T'ien*, 155–59.

<sup>8</sup> Charles D. Orzech discussed the fusion of Buddhist and Chinese notions of divine kingship and the metaphors of sovereignty in Chinese Buddhism in 'Metaphor, Translation, and the Construction of Kingship.'

in what David Summers called the ‘appropriation of the center.’<sup>9</sup> In addition to the well-known event of her participation in *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 rituals on Mt. Tai 泰山 in 666 with then emperor Gaozong,<sup>10</sup> a most vivid visual symbol is her construction of a ritual complex that juxtaposed buildings with Buddhist and traditional Chinese symbolism side by side inside the imperial palace at Luoyang (see below). Works by Stephen Bokenkemp, Norman Harry Rothschild, and others also shed light on Wu’s marshalling of Daoist divinities to bolster her rule.<sup>11</sup> In short, Wu’s status as a sovereign successfully integrated all three traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. The ideas and gods of all three traditions assisted her rule at various times and in different situations, and the performance of rituals and display of visual symbolism were all part of the language of kingship and power.<sup>12</sup> As Peter Skilling pointed out, in societies where a hybrid system of multiple ideals of kingship and religions coexisted, words like ‘legitimation’ do not adequately capture the complexity of social and conceptual forces at play.<sup>13</sup> In the discussion of Wu Zhao’s rule as the only female ruler in China, scholars have often used terms

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<sup>9</sup> Summers noted, ‘Many rulers have identified with dominant heavenly bodies, usually the sun or the Pole Star, and it cannot be overemphasized that this identification was not simply symbolic or allegorical, but was rather an assertion of authority, and of authority more or less sanctioned by the order of the world itself’ (Summers, *Real Spaces*, 201).

<sup>10</sup> See Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 183–89.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Bokenkamp noted that in Wu’s fashioning her role as a creator/savior, ‘Daoism, through its explorations of the fertile, primordial Dao, proved more productive than did Buddhism of appropriate metaphors for woman as creator’ (Bokenkamp, ‘A Medieval Feminist Critique of the Chinese World Order,’ 389). See also Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon of Devis*, 145–90.

<sup>12</sup> On kingship and ritual in traditional societies, see Cannadine and Price, ‘Introduction,’ in their edited volume *Rituals of Royalty*.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Skilling’s discussion is of the dual Buddhist and Hindu institutions in Thailand; he also preferred the term ‘hybrid’ over ‘synthesis’; see Skilling, ‘King, Sangha and Brahmins.’

such as 'legitimation,' 'appropriation,' and 'usurpation,' and these terms seem less than neutral, if not inadequate.

Albeit Wu's deployment of the ideologies of all three traditions and their gods as intermediaries, in the realm of visual arts it was Buddhist art and architecture that trumped the other two traditions. Some aspects of this research have been presented in this author's recent monograph, with discussions of how the kind of Buddhist art developed in China in the latter part of the seventh to early eighth century spread to neighboring polities, and the agents and mechanisms for the circulation of art forms, subjects, visual styles, and rituals. The accepted norm of visual style became known as the Tang International Style or The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia. The mobility of the visual and performative language, I argued, accompanied the transmission of ideals of implementing a Buddhist state, and in turn this border-crossing material and non-material idiom of state Buddhism became 'cosmopolitan.'<sup>14</sup> Most of the findings will not be repeated here, and the present essay focuses on Wu's impact on Japan, primarily on the topics of kingship and female sovereigns, along with their visual and ritual dimensions.

Because of Wu Zhao's devout Buddhist faith and sponsorship of Buddhism, the religion flourished during her reign. As she became the de facto ruler after Gaozong's death in 683, she left Chang'an and ruled from the secondary capital Luoyang, which she named the *shendu* 神都 (Divine Metropolis). A key element in Buddhist clerics' participation in court affairs was the institution of *neidaochang* 內道場, or Palace Chapel. Established within the compound of the imperial palace, the palace chapel provided space for Buddhist observances for members of the court, *sūtra* copying, and other devotional activities. While there were historical precedents, the institution of *neidaochang* greatly expanded during Wu's reign.<sup>15</sup> For example, in 690 the ten

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<sup>14</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, especially chaps 2 and 5.

<sup>15</sup> Jinhua Chen's study identified four possible palace chapels during this Wu' reign: Biankongsi 遍空寺, Foguangsi 佛光寺, and a palace convent in Luoyang; and Changshengdian 長生殿 in Daminggong 大明宮 in Chang'an; see Chen, 'The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels,' 113–20.

*bhadanta*-monks (*dade* 大德) were in residence at the palace chapel when they presented to the court the ‘Dayunjing Shenhuang shouji yishu’ 大雲經神皇授記義疏 [Commentary on the Meanings of the Prophecy about the Divine August One (i.e., Wu Zhao) in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*], a key document preparing for Wu’s ascension as sovereign. A study of this momentous event was the central focus of Forte’s book *Political Propaganda*. Forte’s body of research enables us to understand how the palace chapels, along with the great Buddhist monasteries, became state apparatuses that served the interests of the state. Forte also closely studied the background and activities of many international Buddhist monks at the two capitals—the prime movers in planning and realizing a Buddhist realm in China.<sup>16</sup>

The transformation of Buddhism into a state religion included the creation of the Dayunsi 大雲寺 (also known as ‘Dayunjing si’ 大雲經寺, named after the *Great Cloud Sūtra*) state monastery network in 690 and a much greater role played by Buddhist clerics as advisers, with the most notable one being Fazang 法藏 (643–712).<sup>17</sup> Alongside the state monasteries, Wu designated a number of privately sponsored monasteries in the two capitals as *dasi* 大寺 (great monasteries), which functioned as institutions that served the interests of the state.<sup>18</sup> These great monasteries became repositories of Buddhist texts, centers for translation and learning, and ritual or artistic centers where ceremonies were performed for the well-being of the state.<sup>19</sup> Considering the purposes of the activities and the vast resources invested, these institutions constituted the loci where political, religious, and

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<sup>16</sup> See E. Forte, comp., ‘Antonino Forte—List of Publications.’

<sup>17</sup> One of Wu’s closest monk advisers was Fazang, who advised Wu on the Avatamsaka doctrine; see Chen, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician*. The pseudo monk Xue Huaiyi was often mentioned in connection with Wu for his promotion of Maitreyism; his influence on Wu, however, was short-lived.

<sup>18</sup> Forte, ‘Chinese State Monasteries in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries.’ The privately-sponsored monasteries in early Tang primarily received patronage from members of the imperial family and the aristocracy, reflecting the aristocratic nature of Buddhism at that time.

<sup>19</sup> Chen, ‘Monastic Learning and Private Education.’

economic power converged. A stellar group of international Buddhist monks congregated at the Tang capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang. They translated Buddhist texts, and introduced new tenets, cults, and deities, notably those of esoteric character. Coinciding with the decline of Buddhism in India, Tansen Sen noted that within the Buddhist community, there was a sense that China under a Buddhist sovereign (Wu) was now the center of the Buddhist realm.<sup>20</sup>

After the golden age of translation of Buddhist texts in mid-seventh century, which occasioned the great translator Xuanzang's 玄奘 (ca. 600–64) return to Chang'an in 645 and his voluminous work in the next two decades, the period of Wu's reign represented another high point in translation activities largely because of imperial support.<sup>21</sup> Along with the translation of many texts newly brought to China, Wu also supported new translations of texts important for state Buddhism, notably the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (Skt. *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; Ch. *Huayan jing* 華嚴經) and the *Golden Light Sūtra* (Skt. *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*; Ch. *Jin'guangming jing* 金光明經).<sup>22</sup> These texts and their contents also informed state-sponsored Buddhist art and rituals. In addition to established translation centers in Chang'an such as Ci'ensi 慈恩寺 and Ximingsi 西明寺, some of the most important monasteries in Luoyang during Wu's reign included Da Foshoujisi 大佛授記寺 (renamed from Jing'aiji 敬愛寺), Da Fuxiansi 大福先寺 (renamed from East Taiyuan Monastery 東太原寺), Tiangongsi 天宮寺, and Da Biankongsi 大遍空寺, one of the palace chapels.<sup>23</sup>

David Chidester, who observed that all world religions were also imperial religions, also noted the importance invested in the production, authentication, and circulation of knowledge, for *sacred* knowledge, or scriptural authority, was tied to *political* power in any

<sup>20</sup> Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 55–101.

<sup>21</sup> Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, 44–45. Among the prominent translators Wu supported were Divākara (613–88), Bodhiruci (d. 727), Yijing 義淨 (635–713), and Śikṣānanda (652–710), to name a few.

<sup>22</sup> For background of these texts, see *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 84–85, 877, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> The prefix *da* 大 designated 'great' monasteries.

imperial religion.<sup>24</sup> The translation bureaus and libraries in the great monasteries with imperially sponsored translation projects were centers for learning as well as loci for the production of sacred knowledge essential for state Buddhism. At the Tang capital of Chang'an, they in fact paralleled the state university and academies for the education and training of scholars and officials to staff the government, with the Confucian canon of classical texts as the basis of the curriculum.<sup>25</sup> The coexistence of Confucian and Buddhist canonical texts and associated libraries and academies/translation bureaus provided the basis of dual or hybrid kingship in Wu's time.<sup>26</sup>

Wu Zhao's patronage of Buddhist monuments began long before she became the de facto ruler. Emperor Gaozong was supportive of Buddhism and had built two of the grandest monasteries in Chang'an—Ci'ensi and Ximingsi, but there is evidence that Wu was the principal driving force behind a number of Buddhist initiatives, including the making of the colossal Buddha statue at Longmen 龍門 (Fig. 1; also see below). Although the inscription attributes the dedication of the colossal statue to Gaozong and mentions Wu's contribution of funds to complete the project in 675, Hida Romi 肥田路美 pointed out that Gaozong was already incapacitated after a stroke in 660, and that Empress Wu was likely the main force behind the project.<sup>27</sup> As the transcendent, principal buddha of the Avatamsaka doctrine (Ch. *Huayan jiaoyi* 華嚴教義), Vairocana Buddha (Buddha of Great Sun or Great Illumination; Ch. Rushena fo 盧舍那佛 or Piluzhe'na fo 毗盧遮那佛) presides over all other buddhas in the universe. It is not a coincidence that about the time the Vairocana Buddha was completed at Longmen that Gaozong and Wu Zhao adopted the title *tianhuang* 天皇 (Heavenly Sovereign) and *tianhou* 天后 (Heavenly Consort) in

<sup>24</sup> Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 309.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 203–6, 225–38.

<sup>26</sup> It would be relevant to investigate and contrast the social background of the individuals who became Buddhist intellectuals and those who became Confucian scholars and officials, although the topic would be beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>27</sup> See discussion in Hida, *Shotō bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū*, 224–26.



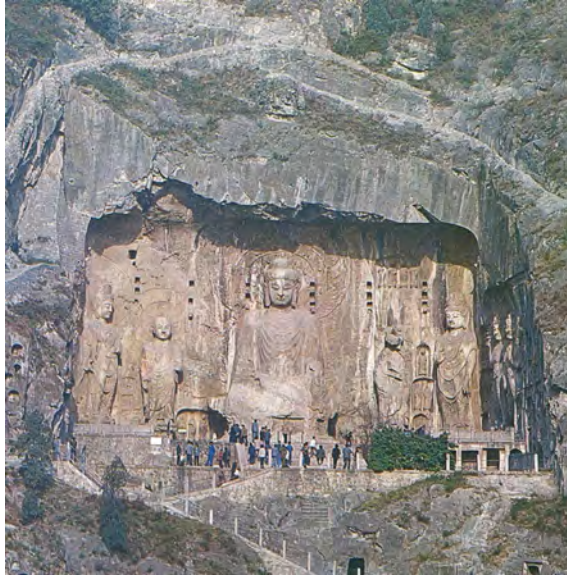


FIG. 1 Fengxian Monastery with colossal statue of Vairocana in center, Longmen, Tang dynasty, completed in 675; Limestone, H. of Vairocana 17.14 m. After Wen Yucheng and Li Wensheng, eds. *Longmen shiku diaosu*, pl. 151.

674, heavenly rulers who reference Taiyi 太一 (the Pole Star, also called *tiandi* 天帝, the heavenly emperor), the Great One who controlled *yin* and *yang*, was transcendent, and was considered the single origin of universe in Han 漢 (220 BCE–220 CE) cosmology.<sup>28</sup> Before the founding of Wu's Zhou dynasty, the harmonizing of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist ideologies of kingship already set the stage for her ascendancy.

At Luoyang, the most audacious religio-political complex Wu built within the imperial palace was the five-story Celestial Hall (*tiantang*

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<sup>28</sup> The reference to the Daoist god Taiyi indicates the harmonizing of Confucian and Daoist beliefs and rituals in Han kingship; for the Taiyi worship that began with the Han emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) of China, see Li & Harper, 'An Archaeological Study of Taiyi (Grand One) Worship'; Puett, *To Become a God*, 160–64, 304–7.



FIG. 2 Reconstruction of Bright Hall (right) and Celestial Hall at Luoyang, constructed between 2019–13.

天堂) and the Bright Hall (*mingtang* 明堂).<sup>29</sup> The Celestial Hall was a large, five-story building built to the north of the Bright Hall (Fig. 2). Installed inside was a colossal Buddha statue made in dry lacquer (*jiazhu daxiang* 夾紵大像). Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義 (662–694), the controversial monk who advocated Wu Zhao as the Maitreya Incarnate, was in charge of the whole project. Construction began in 689, but before completion it was blown down during a windstorm. A second Celestial Hall was commissioned, and the dry lacquer statue would be placed inside it, accompanied by a so-called Great Regulator (*dayi* 大儀) in bronze.<sup>30</sup> Because Xue Huaiyi was involved, the statue

<sup>29</sup> Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias*.

<sup>30</sup> Some scholars thought it was a bronze bell; Forte originally thought it was a mechanical clock though later he also considered the object to be an astronomical tower for the observation of the celestial vault; see Forte's introduction to the second edition of his *Political Propaganda*, xi. Note that an observatory tower called Cheomseongdae 瞻星臺 (Tower for Observing Celestial Bodies), built by

likely represented Maitreya Buddha.<sup>31</sup>

The Bright Hall was a religious-political complex built according to ancient Zhou 周 (c. 1046 BCE–256 BCE) ritual texts. It is described as a building with a base as square as the earth and a roof as round as the sky, surrounded by a round moat. The structure has five rooms, associated with the theory of the five elements. The king performs ceremonial circumambulations connected to the rhythm of the seasons and the twelve months to harness cosmic energy. As pivot of the center, the king achieves harmony between the world and the universe through his ritual actions in space and time as he moves through the building. The Bright Hall is thus viewed as an architectural symbol of traditional Chinese kingship, and the ritual performed there together with the *feng* and *shan* rituals were considered the most august ceremonies performed to Heaven by the ruler.<sup>32</sup> Wu's construction of a Bright Hall alongside a Buddha hall was to create a new architectural language stating her rule as both a rightful Chinese ruler and a Buddhist universal monarch.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there was the visual emblem of an octagonal bronze pillar called the Celestial Axis of the Sky (*tianshu* 天樞), which was approximately 33 meters tall and was surmounted by dragons and a pearl.<sup>34</sup>

A disastrous fire broke out during the festivities in 695 and destroyed the complex. Wu Zhao ordered the reconstruction of the Bright Hall in reduced size, but the Celestial Hall was not rebuilt. The colossal

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Queen 善德 (r. 632–47) of the Silla Kingdom, still stands in Gyeongju. Built of granite blocks, the tapering round tower rests on a square platform and has a square block at the top, with circles and squares alluding to symbols of heaven and earth.

<sup>31</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 177–79. For discussion of Wu Zhao and Xue Huaiyi, see Rothschild, *Wu Zhao*, 144–53.

<sup>32</sup> Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, chap. 10; Corradini, 'Ancient China's "Ming Tang" between Reality and Legend.'

<sup>33</sup> Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias*. Puay-peng Ho has compared Wu's Bright Hall to that built by Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE – 23 CE) of the Eastern Han; see Ho, 'Architecture and Legitimacy in the Court of Wu Zhao,' 106–9.

<sup>34</sup> Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias*, 233–46.

Buddha statue, in reduced size, was moved to another monastery in Luoyang but did not survive the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion (755–63). Toward the end of her rule, Wu Zhao again attempted to make another colossal Buddha statue, this time a bronze statue on the slope of Baisima 白司馬 northwest of Luoyang. Wu asked that monks and nuns all donate money each day in order to raise funds for the statue, or so that the coins collected could be melted for the casting. Facing opposition from her ministers, however, the project was aborted.<sup>35</sup> Not long after that, Wu Zhao returned to Chang'an in old age, and a palace coup restored the Tang dynasty, with her son Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 684, 705–10) on the throne.

Gaozong's predecessor, Emperor Taizong (r. 626–49) vastly expanded Tang's territories through military campaigns as a way to re-envision the glory of the Han Empire. Securing smooth traffic on the Silk Routes facilitated international trade and cultural exchanges, which in part accounted for the intensified transmission of new Buddhist doctrines to China in the seventh century. It was this vast, cosmopolitan empire that Gaozong and Wu Zhao inherited and which both strove to preserve. Before the watershed moment of the An Lushan Rebellion that marked the beginning of the downturn of the Tang, elements of Tang civilization—from political, social and economic institutions to philosophy, religious beliefs, arts, and literature—were widely emulated in vast territories of East Asia. Some scholars use the term 'Sinosphere' to designate the regions that adopted the Chinese written script along with other aspects of Chinese culture, a process that began as early as the Han dynasty.<sup>36</sup> Another term is 'world-system,' an analytic tool which in its early use by Immanuel M. Wallerstein and other scholars employed a political

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<sup>35</sup> Hida, 'Fengxiansi dong dafo yu Baisimaban dafo'; Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 179.

<sup>36</sup> Richard J. Smith noted that the use of the term preserves a sense of early Chinese cultural influences but that it is not intended to privilege China or Chinese culture in any way. Smith, 'Introduction' for Qian, Smith, and Bowei Zhang, eds., *Reexamining the Sinosphere Transmissions and Transformations in East Asia*, xxii.

and economic approach pivoted toward the study of the modern world.<sup>37</sup> Increasingly, however, historians and scholars of culture at large have adopted the concept to argue for the existence of a world system (or world systems) connected and interwoven through networks of exchange in the pre-modern period.<sup>38</sup> Hypothetically the Buddha realm in China with Wu Zhao as the sovereign can be considered such a world system (not to be confused with the world system in Buddhist cosmology), a system demarcated by the common adoption of Buddhist kingship as a mode of governing ideology that transcended political boundaries.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, the efforts of the royal courts in the Korean peninsula and Japan to import and partake of the 'Sinic/Tang civilization' contributed to the dissemination of Buddhism. Among the schools of Buddhist thought transmitted was Avataṃsaka Buddhism. Vairocana as a supreme being in the center of the cosmos is an apt metaphor for a ruler presiding over a vast empire, and it is no wonder that Avataṃsaka Buddhism became the chief doctrine linked to Buddhist state ideology in China and later in Japan. It is well known that Avataṃsaka Buddhism (K. Hwaecom) also flourished in the Korean peninsula in the seventh and eighth centuries, and that some of the most important exegetes in this school were Korean monks who had studied in China and later returned to Korea or resided in Japan. Well-known figures included Silla scholar monks Wonhyo 元曉 (617–86), Uisang 義湘 (625–702), and also Simsang/Jp. Shinjō 審祥 (?–742), who lectured on the *Flower*

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<sup>37</sup> Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1, 348.

<sup>38</sup> A recent work is Beaujard's two-volume *Worlds of the Indian Ocean*. With China's recent rise on the world stage, scholars have expressed renewed interest in the ancient Chinese concept of *tianxia* 天下 (all under heaven), comparing it to terms and concepts such as nation-states and empires in the discourse of political history. However, contemporary discussions focus on Confucian universalism and omit Buddhist universalism in pre-modern China; the edited volume by B. Wang, *Chinese Visions of World Order*, for example, does not include a single chapter on Buddhism and the state.

*Ornament Sūtra* in Nara and was instrumental in guiding the court's adoption of the doctrine. Hwaecom Buddhism received royal and aristocratic patronage in Silla, but unlike China and Japan (see below), the Buddhist establishment did not become a state apparatus, such as the creation of a state monastery system. Instead, the philosophical accomplishments of Korean clerics contributed to synthesis with other Buddhist beliefs and cults, and the creation of an *imaginaire* of Korea as a Buddha-land.<sup>39</sup>

In Japan, Shōmu Tennō's 聖武天皇 (r. 729–49) adoption of Buddhism as a state religion represented the apex of the century-long development of the importation of Sinic civilization. At the same time, however, the country also implemented the *ritsuryō* 律令 (law and penal codes) government modeled after that of Tang China, which was based on Confucian political theory. Shōmu's daughter, Princess Abe, ruled twice as *tennō*—Kōken-Shōtoku 考謙-稱徳 (r. 749–58, 765–70)—and as a Buddhist sovereign as well. As the Japanese historian Joan Piggott described the character of Wu's reign as 'Buddho-Confucian,' she similarly considered the Japanese rulers Buddho-Confucian, though adding to that was the Japanese rulers' claim to be descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu. Indigenous Japanese gods and beliefs would later become known as the Shinto tradition.<sup>40</sup> In that sense Wu's Japanese counterparts followed the hybrid form of kingship that she practiced, synthesizing Buddhist kingship with local traditions of kingship and governance—Confucianism and Daoism in Wu's case and Confucianism and Shinto in the case of the Japanese sovereigns.

The Japanese use of the term *tennō* 天皇 (Heavenly Sovereign) began in the late seventh century, and it probably was inspired by the titles of *tianhuang* and *tianhou* (heavenly sovereign and heavenly consort) that Gaozong and Wu Zhao adopted from 674 until

<sup>39</sup> McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*, 93–101.

<sup>40</sup> Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 236–79; idem, 'The Last Classical Female Sovereign,' 47–74. The name Amaterasu is rendered in the Chinese characters 天照; note the solar symbolism in the names Wu Zhao, Kōmyō, and also Vairocana, the Buddha of Great Illumination.

Gaozong's death in 683. As noted earlier, the term *tianhuang* was associated with Taiyi, the god of all heavenly spirits and a Daoist deity incorporated into Han cosmology and notions of kingship. The first Japanese ruler to use *tennō* as title was Tenmu 天武 (c. 631–86), and this occurred at a time when, after the Taika reforms of 645, Japan began in earnest to directly import Tang civilization, from modes of government to culture, and religions,<sup>41</sup> facilitated by the many diplomatic missions called *kentōshi* 遣唐使 sent to China.<sup>42</sup> By the time when Shōmu declared himself a Buddhist sovereign, Piggott wrote, 'Shōmu Tennō—presenting himself contemporaneously as living god, sage ruler, heavenly heir, and Servant of the Buddha—engaged in all sorts of majestic performances.'<sup>43</sup> For Shōmu's daughter, who ruled twice as *tennō*, Piggott noted, 'Her frequent edicts demonstrate that Shōmu's daughter placed her greatest faith in Heaven, with the gods and buddhas as intermediaries. Historians have usually described her as an exclusively Buddhist monarch, but in fact a close reading of the records of both her reigns shows that Kōken-Shōtoku should be characterized as a "Buddho-Confucian" for whom the ways of Heavenly rulership exemplified by Tang monarchs, especially the exemplary female sovereign Wu Zetian, were focal.'<sup>44</sup> One should note, however, that for Kōken-Shōtoku Heavenly rulership also referenced her descentance from Amaterasu the sun goddess.

At the Nara court, it was perhaps Kōmyō 光明 (701–60), Queen Consort (*kōgō* 皇后) of Shōmu and mother of Princess Abe 阿倍 (the future Kōken-Shōtoku), who most explicitly modeled herself after

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<sup>41</sup> See Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan*, 64–66. Ooms' work also gives more attention to influence of Daoism and yin-yang hermeneutics in the crafting of religious rituals during the formative period of Japanese kingship in the seventh century. The names of many ceremonial halls in palaces in Japan also allude to the polestar myth, suggesting the influence of Chinese Daoist cosmological thinking; see Bialock, *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories*, 50–54.

<sup>42</sup> For Japanese Buddhist monks who went on the diplomatic missions to China, see Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 98–99.

<sup>43</sup> Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 278

<sup>44</sup> Piggott, 'The Last Classical Female Sovereign,' 59.

Wu Zhao.<sup>45</sup> Both Wu Zhao and Kōmyō came from families of strong Buddhist faith and both exercised their support of Buddhist activities while they were consorts to reigning monarchs. Wu's mother came from the Yang 楊 family of the Sui imperial line known for their Buddhist faith.<sup>46</sup> Kōmyō was daughter of the powerful court minister Fujiwara Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659–720), who was an architect in establishing the *ritsuryō* government as well as institutional Buddhism in Japan, and her mother, Tachibana Michiyo 橘三千代 (d. 733), was also a devout Buddhist.<sup>47</sup> During the time when Wu and Kōmyō were consorts to their respective reigning monarchs, they both asserted their support of Buddhism through their spouses.

In Japan's court, the *daiiri* 内裏 (residence of the monarch in the imperial palace) was the Japanese equivalent of the *neidaochang*, or palace chapel, for court members' devotional activities. Because of her active participation in court affairs and fervent support of Buddhism, Kōmyō established the Queen Consort's Household Agency in 727, which morphed into the Queen Consort's Palace Agency (*Kōgō kūshiki* 皇后宮職) when she obtained the title of queen consort as chief spouse of Shōmu upon his enthronement in 729. Drawing upon the vast resources available to her from her natal family, the household agency was located at the residence she inherited from her father Fujiwara Fuhito; it was south of the Nara palace and later became the site for Hokkeji 法華寺 (see below).<sup>48</sup> The agency included ateliers staffed with carpenters and craftsmen for temple building activities and a scriptorium with scribes copying Buddhist *sūtras*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Japanese historians have long made comparisons of Kōmyō with Wu, see summary in Inoue Kaoru, *Nara chō bukkyōshi no kenkyū*, 263–75.

<sup>46</sup> The Chinese historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) first brought attention to Wu Zhao's lineage and her Buddhist faith; see Chen, 'Wu Zhao yu Fojiao.'

<sup>47</sup> For Kōmyō's family background and Buddhist faith, see Mikoshiha, 'Empress Kōmyō's Buddhist Faith,' 22–30.

<sup>48</sup> For the development of Kōmyō cult centering on Hokkeji in medieval Japan, see Meeks, *Hokkeji*.

<sup>49</sup> Historians considered the agency extracodal and extralegal, because it was



Similar to Wu's support of translation of Buddhist texts, Kōmyō funded copying of sūtras brought from China to Japan, which were already translated into Chinese, as acts to accrue merit and to demonstrate her piety. Furthermore, the body of Buddhist texts constituted the canonical knowledge for state Buddhism; as material and ritual objects they also possessed magical efficacy to protect the country. Kōmyō first installed a scriptorium at her household agency, and soon after the creation of the Queen Consort's Palace Agency in 729, 'the scriptorium initiated an unprecedented project that would continue to the next twenty-four years: a herculean effort to copy an authoritative canon.'<sup>50</sup> Genbō 玄昉 (d. 746), who returned from China in 735 with a large set of Buddhist texts, became adviser to Kōmyō; he resided at Sumidera 隅寺 (also Kairyūji 海龍王寺), which was close to Hokkeji and was also one of the *sūtra*-copying halls. Some of the *sūtras* copied at the scriptorium have survived at the Shōsōin 正倉院, with luxurious examples using gold or silver ink on indigo-dyed paper (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>51</sup>

Occasioning her daughter, Princess Abe, being named the crown princess in 738 and Shōmu's planning for Tōdaiji 東大寺, Kōmyō's scriptorium became merged with the Tōdaiji scriptorium and also the

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not part of the *ritsuryō* government bureaucracy, but as Joan Piggott pointed out, the sizable agency also enabled Shōmu and Kōmyō an alternative channel to rule free from the state bureaucracy; see Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 246–47, 252–53. Hongō Masatsugu made a distinction between court Buddhism (Buddhism practiced privately by members of the court such as palace women) and state Buddhism (Buddhism promoted by the state government for the country's peace and welfare) and noted Kōmyō's Buddhist activities crossed the boundary from the private/individual to the public/state domain in advancing Buddhist institutions for state interests, in 'State Buddhism and Court Buddhism.'

<sup>50</sup> Lowe, *Ritualized Writing*, 124–25. A discussion of Kōmyō's scriptorium is in *idem*, 122–26.

<sup>51</sup> Kōmyō dedicated some 600 items to the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji to commemorate Shōmu's death in 756, and these artifacts and documents were housed in the Shōsōin, on the grounds of Tōdaiji.

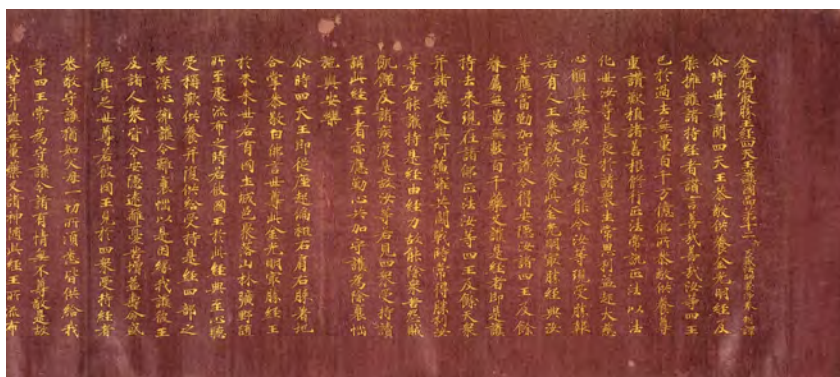


FIG. 3 Copy of *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra*, ‘Protection of the State by the Four Heavenly Kings’ chapter, Nara period, 8<sup>th</sup> century, gold ink on indigo-dyed paper, H. 26.2 cm. Nara National Museum. After Nara National Museum, ed., *Ko-mikkyō*, pl. 64



FIG. 4 Copy of *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, detail, Nara period, 8<sup>th</sup> century, silver ink on indigo-dyed paper. After Tokyo National Museum, ed. *Tōdaiji Daibutsu*, p. 158.



FIG. 5 Great Buddha Hall, Tōdaiji, Nara, dedicated in 752, rebuilt in early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

overarching Tōdaiji Construction Agency (Zo Tōdaijisi 造東大寺司), which was responsible for every aspect of temple building activities.<sup>52</sup> The construction of Tōdaiji and the casting of the colossal Vairocana statue, to be installed in the Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden 大仏殿, Fig. 5), represented Shōmu's quest to entreat Buddhism and its deities to support his regime and as an alternative to the ritsuryō government, which was found wanting at a time when the country was beset by epidemics, natural disasters, and domestic turmoil.<sup>53</sup> Shōmu also endorsed Avataṃsaka Buddhism (J. Kegon) and the colossal Vairocana statue shared the same iconography as that of the stone

<sup>52</sup> Lowe, *Ritualized Writing*, 126–29.

<sup>53</sup> For an overview of the art and ceremonies of Tōdaiji see Rosenfield, 'Tōdai-ji in Japanese History and Art.'



FIG. 6 Vairocana Buddha, Tōdaiji, Nara, Nara period, ca. 752 (recast in 1185, repaired in the sixteenth century, and the head recast in 1692), gilt bronze, H. 14.73 m above pedestal. After Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, Fig. 5.6.

statue at Longmen (Fig. 6).<sup>54</sup> Monk Gyōki 行基 (668–749) assisted in raising funds for the making of the great Buddha by going around to ask for donations from his followers, and historians observed that the practice might have been inspired by Wu's edict to cast a colossal bronze Buddha statue on the slope of Baisima, which asked for monks and nuns to donate money each day.

In 741, Shōmu's court established the state monasteries (*kokubunji* 国分寺) and state nunneries (*kokubunniji* 国分尼寺) system. Modeled after the Dayunsi state monasteries network that Wu established, historians attributed this initiative to Kōmyō.<sup>55</sup> Tōdaiji, named after the *Golden Light Sūtra*'s four heavenly kings (*sitianwang* 四天王) as protectors of the country, became headquarters of state monasteries, while Hokkeji, a nunnery Kōmyō founded on land that she inherited from her father, became head convent for state nunneries. The full name of Tōdaiji and all state monasteries was Konkōmyō shitennō gogoku no tera 金光明四天王護國之寺 (Monastery for the protection of the country by the four heavenly kings of the *Golden Light [Sūtra]*), and the full name for Hokkeji and state nunneries was Hokke metsuzai no tera 法華滅罪之寺 (Nunnery for the expiation of sin by means of the *Lotus Sūtra*). Shōmu also asked that each state monastery build a seven-story pagoda and keep a copy of the *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra* as its principal text, and that each state nunnery keep a copy of the *Lotus Sūtra*. These two texts thus became vital to the new state monastery/nunnery system.

Both the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra*, along with a few other Buddhist texts, were deemed essential for the

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<sup>54</sup> The Vairocana statues at Longmen and Tōdaiji both depict a giant buddha sitting atop a large lotus, with each petal showing cosmoses presiding over by buddhas. The textual source of the iconography is from the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 [*Sūtra of Brahmā's Net*], an apocryphal text composed in China in the fifth century. The description of Vairocana's Lotus Repository World in the *Fanwang jing* is derived from the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, and thus is not a departure from the Avataṃsaka doctrine; see Elisséeff, 'Bommōkyō and the Great Buddha of the Tōdaiji'; Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 175–77.

<sup>55</sup> Mikoshiba, 'Empress Kōmyō's Buddhist Faith,' 30–37.

protection of the state.<sup>56</sup> Prior to the establishment of Tōdaiji and Hokkeji as the chief official monastery and nunnery, respectively, the building of Heijōkyō 平城京 (Nara) as the capital in 710 already included the rebuilding of four monasteries: Daianji 大安寺, Gangōji 元興寺, Yakushiji 藥師寺, and Kōfukuji 興福寺. Of these, Kōfukuji was associated with the Fujiwara kinship group, while Daianji was the first official monastery of Japan. Daianji later was dedicated in 742, but its importance was soon eclipsed by the Tōdaiji, dedicated a mere decade later.<sup>57</sup> These monasteries joined Tōdaiji and Hokkeji as the grand Buddhist establishments in the capital. Buddhist rituals and artworks, especially those based on state-protecting texts, were performed and displayed for the prosperity and well-being of the state. This was not different from the use of both performative and visual language to convey the role of Buddhism for the country at Wu Zhao's court.

When Shōmu retired and her daughter ascended to the throne as Kōken Tennō in 749, Kōmyō became Queen Mother (*kōtaigō* 皇太后), and the palace agency was renamed Shibichūdai 紫微中台 (Central Court of Purple Tenuity); the name combined the Central Court (中台) office of Wu Zhao and the Purple Tenuity (紫微) of Xuanzong's 玄宗 (r. 712–756) court, again providing evidence of continental inspirations for Kōmyō.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> During the seventh century, the *Benevolent Kings Sūtra*, the *Golden Light Sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sūtra* were recognized in Japan as state-protecting texts (*gokoku sanbukyō* 護国三部經). By the mid-eighth century, the *sūtras* most revered for state-protection included the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (Xuanzang's translation), the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, the *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra* (Yijing's new translation), and the *Lotus Sūtra*; see Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 111–30. See also Orzech, 'Metaphor, Translation, and the Construction of Kingship.'

<sup>57</sup> For discussion of the rebuilding of Daianji and Dōji 道慈 (d. 744), the monk charged to supervise the project, see Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>58</sup> Takikawa, 'Shibi chūdai kō'; Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 269. In the Daoist cosmology of Han times, one of the stars is visualized as the abode of a heavenly thearch, called Ziwei gong 紫微宮 (Purple Tenuity Palace).

Kōmyō was also well-known for being a champion of social welfare, including the establishment of an infirmary and a pharmacy in her household agency that cared for the sick, an aspect that might also have been modeled after Wu Zhao's similar efforts. The Dayun state monasteries Wu founded operated almshouses to care for the weak and the indigent, and Stanley Weinstein pointed out that while private almshouses existed before, this was probably the first publicly funded social welfare program informed by the Buddhist notion of *beitian* 悲田, meaning the fields of compassion (for reaping merit).<sup>59</sup> At Hokkeji, Kōmyō also built a bathhouse in response to a visionary experience and as a way to accrue merit. Open to the local community, the bathhouse was associated with the healing power of sacred waters; the bathing rituals introduced by the Indian river goddesses in the *Golden Light Sūtra* might have provided impetus for the creation of a bathhouse.<sup>60</sup>

While it was Wu Zhao who commissioned Yijing 義淨 (635–713) to retranslate the *Golden Light Sūtra*, with the new version known as the *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra* 金光明最勝王經, the latter proved to be far more consequential in Nara Buddhism and Buddhist art. It was due to the fact that not long after Wu's reign, Xuanzong favored Daoism and no longer gave Buddhism the premier position it received under Wu. In Japan, however, Buddhism received steady support from the rulers in the seventh century, reaching a peak in the eighth century when Shōmu instituted Buddhism as a state religion. As a result, art forms related to the *Golden Light Sūtra*, long considered a realm-protecting text, were much more prominent in Nara period Buddhist art than in China at the same time. First, there was widespread worship of the protective and benevolent deities introduced in the *sūtra*, from the four heavenly kings (Fig. 7) to the Indian river goddesses now incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon, such as Kichijōten 吉祥天 (Skt. Śrīmahādevī or Śrī Lakṣmī; Fig. 8) and Benzaiten 弁才天 (Skt. Sarasvatī). At monasteries such as Kōfukuji and Daijōji, the sculpture group comprising the Buddha, bodhisattvas, ten great disciples, eight

<sup>59</sup> Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang*, 131.

<sup>60</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 202; Ludvik, Sarasvatī, 162–83.



FIG. 7 Tamonten (Heavenly King of the North), Ordination Hall, Tōdaiji, Nara, ca. 740s, clay with pigments, H. 164.5 cm. National Treasure. After *Genshoku Nihon no bijutsu*, vol. 4, pl. 25 left.



FIG. 8 Kichijōten, Hokkedō, Tōdaiji, Nara, 2nd quarter 8th century, clay with pigments, H. 202 cm. Important Cultural Property. After Tōdaiji Museum, ed., *Nara jidai no Tōdaiji*, p. 28.

classes of beings, and other protective and benevolent deities likely represented a transformation tableau (*bianxiang* 變相) of the preface of the sūtra: the mythic scene of the Buddha's Assembly on Vulture Peak (Mount Gṛdhrahakūṭa) where the teachings of the *Golden Light Sūtras* unfold (Figs. 9, 10).<sup>61</sup> After Dōji's lecture on the *Golden Light Glorious King Sūtra* at the imperial palace in 737, rituals called the Misai-e 御齋会 (also Gosai-e) gathering or assembly, which focused on

<sup>61</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 115–26.





FIG. 9 Subhūti, part of the sculpture group, Kōfukuji, Nara, Nara period, ca. 734, dry lacquer with pigments, H. 147.5 cm. National Treasure. After *Nara rokudaiji taikan*, vol. 7, pl. 170.

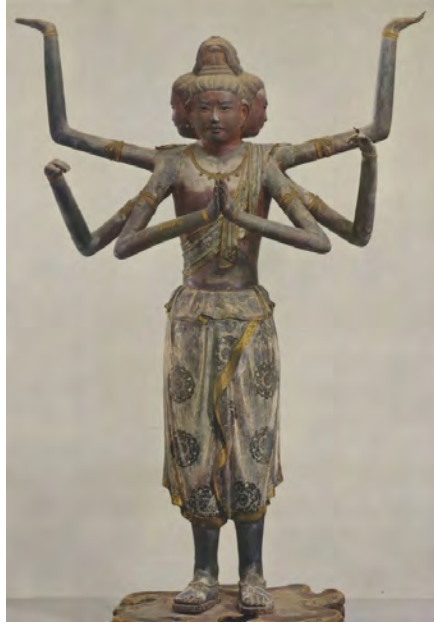


FIG. 10 Asura, part of the sculpture group, Kōfukuji, Nara, ca. 734, dry lacquer and pigments, H. 153.4 cm. National Treasure. After *Nara rokudaiji taikan*, vol. 7, pl. 137.

the *sūtra*, were established and were performed at court annually.<sup>62</sup>

Court women and nuns were active in the courts and palace chapels of both Wu Zhao and Kōmyō. They participated in recitation of *sūtras*, chanting of Buddha names, confession rituals, and patronage of Buddhist images and monuments. For example, the Buddhist nun Zhiyun 智運 from the palace convent, together with a eunuch called Yao Shenbiao 姚神表, dedicated the Cave of Ten Thousand Buddhas (Wanfodong 萬佛洞) at Longmen in 680 for Gaozong,

<sup>62</sup> Sango, *The Halo of Golden Light*, 10.



FIG. 11 Interior of Wanfodong (Caves of Ten Thousand Buddhas), south wall, Longmen, Tang dynasty, dated 680. After Wen Yucheng and Li Wensheng, eds. *Longmen shiku diaosu*, pl. 145.



FIG. 12 Cintāmaṇicakra (Nyoirin Kannon), Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji, Nara, original gilt-bronze statue lost, remade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, gilt wood, H. 7.22 m. After postcard sold at Tōdaiji.



FIG. 13 Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzū bosatsu), Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji, Nara, original gilt-bronze statue lost, remade in 18<sup>th</sup> century, gilt wood, H. 7.1 m. After postcard sold at Tōdaiji.

Empress Wu, the crown prince, and other princes and princesses (Fig. 11).<sup>63</sup> At Tōdaiji, Shōmu was the royal patron of the colossal gilt-bronze Vairocana statue, while Kōmyō dedicated the two flanking bodhisattvas—Cintāmaṇicakra (Avalokiteśvara with the Wish-Granting Jewel; J. Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪觀音) and Ākāśagarbha (Bodhisattva of Boundless Space; J. Kokūzō bosatsu 虛空藏菩薩; Figs. 12, 13), with two prominent nuns, Shinshō 信勝 and Zenkō 善光 (head nun of Hokkeji), raising money for the bodhisattvas statues.<sup>64</sup> During

<sup>63</sup> Chen, 'The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels,' 111–12; see also McNair, 'On the Patronage by Tang-Dynasty Nuns at Wanfo Grotto, Longmen.'

<sup>64</sup> Konno, 'Kokūzō bosatsuzō no seiritsu (III)'; Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 194–95.

Wu's reign, a number of transformed Avalokiteśvara bodhisattvas—Eleven-Headed Avolokiteśvara, Amoghapāśa, and Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara—were introduced and became popular as protective deities. While they were promoted and have appeared at sites from Longmen to Dunhuang and as individual images, they appeared to have been separate cults. At Tōdaiji and a number of other Buddhist establishments in Nara, the configuration of Vairocana Buddha with transformed Avalokiteśvara bodhisattvas and deities of esoteric strands, I argued, demonstrated a synthesis of the Avataṃsaka doctrine with the deity cults and spells popular in eighth-century Nara, and represented a further trajectory and divergence from what first appeared in the Buddhist art of Wu's time.<sup>65</sup> The Hokkeji that Kōmyō built also featured Buddhist art themes related to the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* and images of transformed Avalokiteśvara, augmented by devotion to and study of other Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the *Lotus*, *Amitābha*, and *Vimalakīrti sūtras*. The performance of Lotus assemblies began at Hokkeji, and Katsuura Noriko 勝浦令子 suggested that the ritual might have been influenced by the performance of Lotus assemblies by Tang nuns in Luoyang.<sup>66</sup>

Within the context of the *ritsuryō* government and continuing 'Tangification' in eighth-century Japan, it was remarkable that Shōmu's daughter, Princess Abe, could be enthroned as *tennō* twice, with the second time as Shōtoku Tennō and a nun monarch.<sup>67</sup> When she first ascended to the throne in 749 as Kōken Tennō, inheriting her father's title could reference female deities and precedents of female sovereigns in Japan. The edict she issued in 757, Joan R. Piggott noted, 'reflects a new synthesis of the Sun-line myth, strong belief in Buddhist realm protection, and emphasis on the Chinese classical discourse.'<sup>68</sup> Thus it seems that Kōken-Shōtoku had taken to heart closely how Wu Zhao skillfully assembled the various ideologies and gods at her disposal to formulate a hybrid form of religious

<sup>65</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, chap. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Katsuura, 'Hokke metsuzai no tera to Rakuyō Angokuji Hokke dōjō.'

<sup>67</sup> Piggott, 'The Last Classical Female Sovereign.'

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

kingship. In the domain of Buddhist monuments, in her second reign she initiated the building of Saidaiji 西大寺 as a counterpart to Tōdaiji, and dedicated bronze statues of the four heavenly kings for the protection of the country, which no longer exist. As noted already, the worship of four heavenly kings was associated with the realm-protecting *Golden Light Sūtra*.<sup>69</sup> The building of Saidaiji was entrusted to Dōkyō 道鏡 (700–72), the healer monk who became Shōtoku's close adviser. After the suppression of a rebellion against Dōkyō, in the 760s Shōtoku commissioned the making of Hyakumantō Darani 百万塔陀羅尼 (*dhāraṇīs* of a million miniature pagodas, Figs. 14, 15). The printed spells encased in the miniature pagodas come from the *Wugou jingguang da tuoluoni jing* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼經 (Skt. *Raśmivimāla Viśuddhaprabhā dhāraṇī, Sūtra* of the *dhāraṇī* of pure unsullied light). It was translated into Chinese by the Tokharian monk Mituoshan 彌陀山 (Mitrasānta; d.u.), together with Fazang, during the reign of Wu Zhao. Wugou jingguang 無垢淨光, or Wugouguang 無垢光, is the name of a *devī*, the Pure Unsullied Light goddess; her name is similar to Jinguang tiannü 淨光天女, or Goddess of Pure Light, who received a prophecy to become a female *cakravartin* in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*.<sup>70</sup> The *sūtra* includes a number of spells, noting that practitioners of the spells would obtain long life, have their sins and hindrances removed, and be able to be reborn into pure lands or meet with buddhas. Printed texts from the *sūtra* have also been found beneath a pagoda in Bulguksa 佛國寺 in Gyeongju 慶州, South Korea, dating to 751.<sup>71</sup> The dissemination of the *dhāraṇī* text to neighboring Korea and Japan again attests to the broad reach of Buddhist ideology developed at Wu Zhao's court. Whether it was the specimen in South Korea or Japan that proved to be the earliest printed text in the world,

<sup>69</sup> Katsuura Noriko noted a copy of the *Golden Light Sūtra* in Shōtoku's private library, 'Shōtoku tennō no 'Bukkyō to ōken,' 87–88.

<sup>70</sup> Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, 217–19.

<sup>71</sup> McBride discussed the *sūtra*'s central role in Silla Buddhism, maintaining that it represented a ritual text in the mainstream of Sinitic Mahāyāna Buddhism rather than belonging to the 'Tantric' tradition; see McBride, 'Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy.'



FIG. 14 Miniature pagoda, one of a million pagodas, Nara period, ca. 764–70, wood, H. 21.3 cm. Hōryūji, Nara. After Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, Fig. 5.35.



FIG. 15 Details of *Sūtra of the Dhāraṇī of Pure Unsullied Light* encased in miniature pagoda, Nara period, ca. 764–70, printed text on paper, H. 5.45 cm. Hōryūji. After Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks*, Fig. 5.36.





FIG. 16 Main Hall of Inner Shrine dedicated to Amaterasu, Ise Shrine, Mie Prefecture, Japan. Rebuilt every 20 years since the late seventh century.

T. H. Barrett has long argued that the context and conditions for the realization of the printing technology first occurred during the reign of Wu Zhao.<sup>72</sup>

As Chinese notions of kingship, or Wu's hybrid kingship, reached Japan, Herman Oom speculated that, rather than building a Bright Hall like the one in China, the construction of the Grand Ise Shrine (Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮; Fig. 16) in late seventh century was Japan's answer to having a ritual center that honored the sun goddess Amaterasu, the primogenitor of the Japanese royal line.<sup>73</sup> If that were the case, the Ise Shrine together with the grand Buddhist monasteries in the capital, Tōdaiji in particular, articulated the dual or hybrid system of kingship in Japan. By the time Shōtoku ascended to the throne the second

<sup>72</sup> Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*.

<sup>73</sup> Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Ancient Symbolics in Ancient Japan*, 188–90.

time as a nun (with no heir) and with Dōkyō's attempt to usurp the throne, the crisis of succession that ensued would henceforth tilt the balance of ritual authority to Ise, or what would later be called the Shinto tradition, and the *ritsuryō* government established after Tang models.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, that also meant there would be no more female rulers in Japanese history!<sup>75</sup>

The present discussion demonstrates that the hybrid system of religious kingship crafted by Wu Zhao, when adopted in the Nara court with local modifications, established a cultural norm shared by both countries in what can be called a 'world system' or Buddha realm. In this Buddha realm with Wu Zhao and Shōmu and Kōken-Shōtoku as sovereigns, imperial support of Buddhist kingship and Avatamsaka Buddhism contributed to the 'cosmopolitan' character of Tang and Nara Buddhist art and rituals, and to some extent in the Korean peninsula as well. The longer period of state Buddhism practiced in Japan also accounted for more diverse subject matter further developed from the Buddhist art formulated at Wu's time. The ideal of a Buddhist state enabled Wu Zhao to reign as a female sovereign; in turn, she provided Kōmyō (a pious queen consort of Shōmu) and her daughter Kōken-Shōtoku with the model of a female Buddhist ruler. In his discussion of the mobility and materiality of

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<sup>74</sup> Piggott, 'The Last Classical Female Sovereign,' 62–65; Piggott wrote of the end of enthronement of female sovereigns in late Nara times, 'First, growing familiarity with the Chinese classics and *ritsuryō* prescriptions resulted in broader acceptance of male-dominant gender hierarchy, patriarchy, and patrilinearity.... Second, the historical experience of Kōken-Shōtoku's two unstable reigns led court leaders to the conclusion that female succession resulted in problems for court and throne that were best avoided' (ibid., 65). Ryūichi Abé also commented, 'The government of Empress Shōtoku paralyzed the court bureaucracy and seriously disrupted *ritsuryō*, the official legal procedures of the state.... Shōtoku's court, as well as the Buddhist clergy that supported it, failed to produce a governing principle that would have replaced the *ritsuryō* system' (in *The Weaving of Mantra*, 22).

<sup>75</sup> Piggott, 'The Last Classical Female Sovereign.'



religions, David Chidester observed the impulses of colonialism and imperialism in the contexts of the more recent globalizing world.<sup>76</sup> During the time when Wu's China was considered the center of the Buddhist realm, a domain that transcended political boundaries, there was widespread dissemination of Buddhist ideals, rituals, and visual art forms. Nevertheless, colonialism and imperialism would not apply here because the dissemination of Buddhism to Japan and Korea was sought after by those countries, with Buddhist monks among the instrumental agents of transmission, and this phenomenon draws attention to alternate forms of cosmopolitanism or partial 'globalization' in pre-modern times.

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<sup>76</sup> Chidester cited examples of religious encounters between European colonizers and indigenous peoples of Africa and the Pacific islands; See Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 79–88, 152–65, 195–202.

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