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**On the Author and Date of the *Zhenzheng lun* 甄正論
An Obscure Page in the Struggle between Buddhists
and Taoists in Medieval China***

Scholars of medieval Taoism are presumably familiar with the *Zhenzheng lun* 甄正論 ('Discussion to Distinguish What is Right'), a Buddhist pamphlet against the Taoist church (T 52 no. 2112, in three *juan*) generally considered as dating from the end of the seventh century.¹ As the *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 by Falin 法琳 (about 630), its older and far more famous companion, the *Zhenzheng lun* is conceived as a fictitious dialogue between an enlightened Master (*xiansheng* 先生) and a rather dull Young Gentleman (*gongzi* 公子), in which the former denounces the whole Taoist persuasion as a mere pack of lies, and goes on to explain the real origin of its rituals, tenets and scriptures. From this point of view, the work is much typical of the 'discussions' genre.²

The *Zhenzheng lun*, however, should be seen as a unique text in more than one respect. Previously, Chinese Buddhist apologists had almost always defended their community from the enemies' accusations, and whenever they

* This paper is a modified translation into English of 'Sulla data di composizione del *Zhenzheng lun*', an appendix to Palumbo (1995-96: 176-82). I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Silvio Vita and Antonino Forte, who improved my essay with many valuable suggestions and corrections, as well as to Larissa N. Schwartz and Vanessa Verschelden, who checked my English and eased my mind with their favourable remarks.

¹ See Pelliot (1912: 366, n. 1), who thinks of the *Zhenzheng lun* as dating 'des environs de l'année 700'; Wu Chi-yu (1960: 11) only says that the monk who wrote it was living between 684 and 704; Forte (1976: 123-24, n. 3) deals with the author's conversion to Buddhism, an episode closely related to the composition of the book (see below), and places it between '690 or 691' and 'towards 695'.

² Outside the religious milieu, this rhetorical pattern appears in such works as the 'Brief Discussion on Rulers' (*Diwang lüelun* 帝王略論), written about 627 by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), a statesman of the early Tang; on this book see Wechsler (1985: 18-19 and 241, n. 42). Whoever held the copyright on the literary scheme, it is clear that Buddhist treatises such as the *Zhenzheng lun* appealed to a reading public of lay scholar-officials, and their arguments reflect a pedagogical and propagandistic purpose more than a purely doctrinal one.

criticized their opponents, they did so in response to a specific attack. On the contrary, here the Buddhists strike first with an intentional, all-out aggression against the Lingbao 靈寶 church of Taoism and its paramount divinity, the Heavenly Venerable (*Tianzun* 天尊).³ More intriguingly, the author of the treatise was himself a former Taoist priest who had repudiated his own faith to embrace the Buddhist religion. For this reason, the material on Taoism in the *Zhenzheng lun* can be regarded as firsthand, and all the more valuable because it provides us with some original information concerning the authorship of such important Taoist books as the *Huahu jing* 化胡經 and the *Benji jing* 本際經.

But is this information reliable?

In the following pages I try to shed some light on this odd case of apostasy, as well as on the nature and date of the book that was its outcome. I survey anew what we already know on the authorship of the *Zhenzheng lun*, reconsidering it in historical perspective; a conclusion will be drawn after checking the internal evidence of the text as well as some further documents not taken into account so far.

The Book and its Author According to the Buddhist Sources

The main source on the author and date of the *Zhenzheng lun* is the well-known *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 by Zhipan 志磐 (completed in 1269), where we read:

萬歲通天元年…洛陽弘道觀主杜義乞爲僧。賜名玄疑，賜夏三十臘。勅住佛授記寺。疑撰甄正論以尊佛教。

In the first year Wansui tongtian..., Du Yi 杜義, Prior of the Hongdao guan 弘道觀 in Luoyang, begged to be a Buddhist monk. He was bestowed the name Xuanyi 玄疑 and granted thirty years of monastic seniority. By imperial edict he was ordered to reside at the Fo shouji si 佛授記寺. [Xuan]yi wrote the *Zhenzheng lun* so as to honour the Doctrine of the Buddha (T 49 no. 2035: 39, 370b14-16).

In this passage, the date given for the episode seems to be wrong. The first year of the Wansui tongtian 萬歲通天 era ran from April 22 to November 29, 696,⁴ but the name of 'Xuanyi, *bhadanta* translator, *karmadāna* (*duweina* 都維那) of the (Fo) Shouji monastery' already appears among the compilers

³ The Lingbao sect flourished in the fifth and sixth centuries, expanding rapidly throughout China from the Jiangnan 江南 region, where it originated. Its popularity was probably due to an attractive syncretism that mixed the traditional Taoist concern for longevity with the language and ethics of Mahāyāna Buddhism. See Ōfuchi (1974); Zürcher (1980); Bokenkamp (1983); Scidel (1984).

⁴ Here and throughout, dates are reckoned according to Hiraoka (1954).

of the *Da Zhou kanding zhongjing mulu* 大周刊定衆經目錄, a catalogue of Buddhist scriptures allegedly completed on December 7, 695 (Tiance wansui 1. 10. 26; T 55 no. 2153: 15, 475c15).⁵ Even if we cannot rule out the possibility that Xuanyi entered the editorial board of the catalogue after that date,⁶ Zhipan's short statement is unconvincing as a whole. It tells us nothing about the motivation behind Du Yi's choice, nor does it explain why he was granted such preferential treatment from the imperial authority.

The story of the Taoist priest who turned his back on the Tianzun's church is told in four more earlier sources: the *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (730), a catalogue of Buddhist scriptures by the Tang monk Zhisheng 智昇; the *Da Song seng shilie* 大宋僧史略 and the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), dating respectively from 999 and 988; and the *Nanbu xinshu* 南部新書, a collection of anecdotes compiled between 1008 and 1016 by the Song scholar Qian Yi 錢易 (see T 55 no. 2154: 9, 566c5-13; T 54 no. 2126: 3, 251a6-9; T 50 no. 2061: 17, 813b1-21; *Nanbu xinshu* 戊, II, 41).⁷ Unfortunately, none of these books offers more accurate information than that of the *Fozu tongji*. Apart from some variants of the convert's original name, we only learn that Du Yi became a *śramaṇa* under the reign of 'the Heavenly Empress' (*Tianhou* 天后), i.e. Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (623?-705). It is therefore necessary to deal at some length with the historical context behind the episode, re-examining events and circumstances for the most part widely known to scholars. In any case, this will not be a waste of time.

⁵ The date of completion is indicated *ibid.*: 475a18. Forte (1976: 123-24, n. 3) first pointed out this inconsistency, rejecting Zhipan's date as unreliable. In the catalogue the second character of the monk's name as a Buddhist is written as 疑, without the 'mountain' radical as in the form we find in the other sources.

⁶ The Zhou catalogue certainly contains later interpolations. It quotes an edict against the Sect of the Three Stages (*Sanjie hui* 三階會) dating from the second year Shengli (December 8, 698 - November 26, 699), four years after the alleged completion of the work itself. Furthermore, in the manuscript copy that in 1990 was discovered in the Nanatsudera 七寺 temple in Nagoya (Japan), many titles are followed by the note 'filed and passed in the third year Shengli' 聖曆三年奏行; the same words also appear in a note in the Yuan and Ming editions of the Buddhist canon. This means that the work underwent a revision, probably in the same third year Shengli (November 27, 699 - May 26, 700). See Forte (*in press b*: 527 and *passim*).

⁷ Even if this last work was written by a lay author, its note on Xuanyi is clearly drawn from the Buddhist sources. As for the original name of the Taoist, Zhisheng has Du You 杜又, Zanning has Du Yi 杜乂, whereas the *Nanbu xinshu* writes it with the same characters used by Zhipan.

The Historical Setting

Wu Zetian, under whose rule the *Zhenzheng lun* purports to have been written, obtained firm control over the court in 684, a few months after the death of her husband, emperor Gaozong 高宗. In October 690, she overthrew the Tang dynasty to establish a brand new one, the Great Zhou 周, assuming the (male!) title of 'Holy and Divine August Emperor' (*Shengshen huangdi* 聖神皇帝). This self-proclaimed androgynous ruler sat on the throne through 705, when a palace coup brought down her (his?) adventure and restored the Tang.⁸

The Empress' seizure of power had been prepared by sustained religious propaganda, that had begun in Gaozong's lifetime, possibly with more limited objectives. After 683, however, the succession of prophecies, miracles and portents in her favour became impressive. The Buddhists played no remarkable role in this campaign up to the eve of the 'usurpation', when they stepped in somewhat abruptly.

On August 17, 690 a group of ten monks from the Palatine Chapel (*nei dao chang* 內道場) of Luoyang presented to the throne a commentary to some passages of the 'Great Cloud Sūtra' (*Dayun jing* 大雲經). A genuine Indian scripture translated into Chinese by the *śramaṇa* Dharmakṣema around 417 (T 12 no. 387), the *Dayun jing* contained a prophecy concerning a female divinity named *Jingguang tiannü* 靜光天女: 700 years after the death of the Buddha, she was to be reborn as the woman ruler of a small kingdom in South India, making her country rich and happy. The monks managed to reinterpret all the predictions in the *sūtra* so that they might conveniently apply to Wu Zetian, who had copies of their commentary spread throughout the empire. In this exemplary piece of religious propaganda the Chinese Empress was depicted as a Bodhisattva and as a *cakravartin* ('Turner of the Wheel [of the Law]', that is the Universal Monarch of the Buddhist tradition).⁹

The first phase of the Zhou dynasty was indeed the heyday of the Indian religion in China. Barely two months after its proclamation, an imperial order was issued that in Luoyang and Chang'an as well as in every prefecture of the empire a Great Cloud Monastery (*Dayun si* 大雲寺) should be established, and that in each of these new temples the monks should publicly explain the 'real' meaning of the *sūtra* (see THY 48, 850; ZZTJ 204, 6469). On May 5, 691 (Tianshou 2. 4. 2, *guimao*), another edict formally ranked the Chinese *saṃgha* ahead of the Taoist church, so that the latter lost (at least in court etiquette) the privileged position it held under the Tang emperors; the measure was explicitly adopted as a reward to the Buddhists for having highlighted the

⁸ For a general survey on these events, see Guisso (1979).

⁹ On the whole matter see Forte (1976), by far the best treatment of this page of religious history.

Dayun jing's prophecies (see JTS 6, 121; THY 49, 859; ZZTJ 204, 6473).¹⁰ On October 13, 693, Wu Zetian eventually took the title of 'Holy and Divine August Emperor of the Golden Wheel' (*Jinlun shengshen huangdi* 金輪聖神皇帝), thus accepting the image of *cakravartin* that the monks ascribed to her (see ZZTJ 205, 6492).

Considering all these events in relation to our topic, we cannot help asking whether such an ideological climate affected in some way the conversion of Du Yi to Buddhism and the very contents of his book.

First, we must ascertain Wu Zetian's attitude as a ruler towards the Taoist church, as it was she who, according to the *Fozu tongji*, facilitated the installation of Du Yi as a *śramaṇa* of the Fo shouji si. The Empress Wu has always been viewed as a staunch supporter of Buddhism, as opposed to her husband Gaozong, traditionally depicted as a fervent Taoist.¹¹ The rationale of this image, accepted at face value by generations of historians, obviously lies in the role she played as a Buddhist theocrat in the first years of her dynasty. In 1974, however, an essay by Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 raised serious doubts about this cliché, on the basis of epigraphical evidence revealing the complexity of the Empress' commitments as well as her particular inclination towards Taoism. This material mostly pertains to the years around the death of Gaozong and to the final part of the Zhou period.¹²

However, even when the Buddhist propaganda in her favour grew impressive, Wu Zetian was far from hostile to Laozi's followers and their religion.¹³ On December 19, 691 (Tianshou 3. Zhengyue. 24) the Empress entrusted a prominent Taoist priest of Chang'an with the task of performing an auspicious ritual, the so-called 'Casting of the Dragons' (*toulong* 投龍), at the sacred rivers and peaks of China, in order to invoke a supernatural blessing on the new dynasty (see *Tang wen xu shiyi* 9, 1a5-b6).¹⁴

¹⁰ For the text of the edict see QTW (95, 4b4-5a2). It is widely known that the Li 李 clan of the Tang dynasty claimed descent from Laozi, and this was the reason why Tang emperors always gave special favour to the Taoist church. On this issue, see Sun Kekuan (1977), Benn (1977), and Barrett (1996).

¹¹ On Wu Zetian's Buddhism see Chen Yinke (1935), Ch'en (1964: 219-22), Guisso (1978: 31-49).

¹² See Rao Zongyi (1974: 402-5). More recently, the nexus between Wu Zetian and Taoism has been stressed by Barrett (1996: 40-45).

¹³ I am not trying to argue that Wu Zetian was Taoist *rather than* Buddhist. In my opinion, the Empress was neither Buddhist nor Taoist, in so far as these words define two distinct and conflicting religious traditions. Her beliefs shared much of both faiths. This syncretism was not a private matter, since it permeated the religious ideology of large strata of early Tang society, up to the ruling élite. But this is too vast an issue to be dealt with here conveniently.

¹⁴ The chief officiant was Ma Yuanzhen 馬元真, Prior of the Jintai guan 金臺觀. This monastery had been established in 631 (Zhenguan 5) in the Chongjiao 崇教 area of Chang'an, under the name of Xihua guan 西華觀; in 687 (Chuangong 3) its name was changed into Jintai guan (see THY 50, 869). The Casting of the Dragons was one of the most important ritu-

The very Taoist monastery of which Du Yi (Xuanyi) had been the head was closely connected to the Empress. Between 675 and 680 a strenuous confrontation for power opposed Wu Zetian to her second son, the Crown Prince Li Xian 李賢 (d. 684), who was supported by influential members of the government. The Empress eventually won: on September 20, 680 (Diaolu 2. 8. *jiazi*) she succeeded in bringing the prince to trial and had him reduced to the status of a commoner (see ZZTJ 202, 6397). Less than a week later, the imperial authorities declared the whole Xiuwen 修文 quarter of Luoyang into the Monastery for the Exaltation of the Dao (Hongdao guan 弘道觀). As the area had previously been property of the defeated Li Xian, the Empress was thus able to associate her political triumph with the establishment of the largest Taoist temple since the Tang.¹⁵ In the light of this episode, it seems quite plausible that the Prior of the Hongdao guan was in very good terms with Wu Zetian; we may even suspect that Du Yi's conversion was arranged by mutual consent of the Taoist and the Empress, at a time when the ruling class was exploiting Buddhist propaganda. However, we still cannot explain why he wrote such a defaming book against his former brothers, nor we have reason to suppose that the Empress urged him to do so.

As a matter of fact, there were only three measures issued by Wu Zetian which were somehow unfavourable to the Taoists, and they are concentrated in the short span of time between 689 and 693:

1. in the first year of the Yongchang 永昌 era, that lasted from January 27 up to December 17, 689, an imperial order abolished the honorific appellation of 'Arcane Primordial August Emperor' (*Xuanyuan huangdi* 玄元皇帝), bestowed on Laozi in 666 (Qianfeng 1) by Gaozong (see THY 50, 865);¹⁶
2. in the spring 691, as we saw, the Buddhists were granted precedence over the Taoists;
3. finally, at the beginning of the second year Changshou 長壽 (693), the

als of the Lingbao liturgy: plaques in the shape of dragons bearing prayers to the numinous authorities of the waters, earth, and heaven were casted down to the ground or into rivers from an altar or a high spot. It was performed at the end of Taoist ordinations as well as in particular occasions for the welfare of the sovereign and the state. See Chavannes (1919); Benn (1991: 69-71).

¹⁵ The *Tang huiyao* states that the monastery was established on the eighth month of the first year Yonglong 永隆. Now, the Yonglong era was only inaugurated on the twenty-third day of the same month, that is on September 21, 680, just one day after the arrest of Li Xian. The Hongdao guan was thus established between that date and the last day of the eighth month, that is September 27, 680. In Sui times the monastery's quarter was the seat of the Imperial University (*Guozhi xue* 國子學), whence the name Xiuwen ('Cultivation of Literary Studies'). It must be noted that the *Tang huiyao* erroneously gives its name as Xiuren 修仁; the right name along with a brief note on the area is reported in the *Henan zhi* 河南志, a description of Luoyang from the Northern Wei to the Tang dynasty (the work itself is by an anonymous author from the Yuan 元 period, 1279-1368; see THY 50, 870; *Henan zhi* 1, 4a2-5).

¹⁶ On the bestowal of the honorific title in 666 see ZZTJ (201, 6347).

Daode jing 道德經 was dropped from the imperial examinations' syllabus and replaced with a text personally written by Wu Zetian, the 'Instructions to the Officials' (*Chen gui* 臣軌; see ZZTJ 205, 6490; THY 75, 1373).

These acts are hardly understandable as wilful moves made by the Empress. We must search elsewhere for their instigators.

The team of propagandists that prepared the commentary on the *Dayun jing* was composed of prominent personalities of the Buddhist clergy and was led by the outstanding monk Faming 法明. However, these men were in a close and quite strange association with Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義, a Maitreyan religious leader as well as the alleged lover of Wu Zetian. Confucian historians would have us believe that this remarkable figure came to the fore due only to his sexual prowess in the Empress' bedroom. As a matter of fact, Xue Huaiyi was the head of a religious milieu tinged with a somewhat subversive utopianism, and which up to that time had probably been acting outside the institutional sphere. The main scripture of his movement was the *Zhengming jing* 證明經, an apocryphal text probably dating back from the second half of the sixth century. This book, which was largely quoted in the commentary on the 'Great Cloud Sūtra', forecasted the coming of a new age of social justice and welfare as well as the triumph of the just over the impious under the rule of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future.¹⁷

Around 685, Huaiyi became the chief of the Great White Horse Monastery (Da Baima si 大白馬寺) in Luoyang, traditionally considered the most ancient Buddhist temple in China (see ZZTJ 203, 6436-37; JTS 183, 4741-43). With the support of Wu Zetian, he distinguished himself as the architect of impressive religious buildings, directing first the restoration of the Baima si and then the construction of a Buddhist version of the *mingtang* 明堂, the 'Luminous Hall' that would symbolize the ritual centre of the universe.¹⁸ At some point, a conniving courtier wrote a biography of the monk, depicting him as no less than the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara descended on earth (see *Chaoye qianzai* 5, 125). Huaiyi himself recruited a thousand young outcasts and ordained them as Buddhist monks to his monastery, rousing suspicions that he was scheming against the imperial establishment (see ZZTJ 205, 6498; JTS 183, 4742).

The honeymoon between the Empress and her restless lover could not and did not last long. Late in the spring of 694, Wu Zetian held a special examination in the capital to ask scholars from all over the empire about some crucial political issues. One of the three questions was on the ongoing 'religious disorder':

¹⁷ On Xue Huaiyi see his biography in JTS (183, 4741-43); on the *Zhengming jing* see Forte (1976: 159-64 and 271-80; 1988: 180-90 and 210-11); Zürcher (1982: 34-35).

¹⁸ On the Buddhist *mingtang* see Forte (1988).

飛錫煙蒸，乘杯霧委，蘭艾因而或糅，玉石山是難甄。…若欲令沙汰。促以金科，將恐乖智海之弘規，…施張之術，去就何從？

A mist of flying staffs [i.e. Buddhist monks] is rising, a fog of raising bowls is falling; therefore epidendrum and artemisia [i.e. the high and the low] are confused and mixed; the mountains of jade and those of stone are hard to distinguish... Supposing that We were wishing to order a purge and promote the Golden Discipline, We fear [this would] deviate from the august regulations of the Sea of Wisdom... If We reject the method of munificence [towards the Buddhists], what would then follow? (see DKJK 3, 103-6).¹⁹

Behind the bombastic prose and the mild tones, the gist of the question is unmistakable. The Empress urged the scions of the élite convened in Luoyang to speak out and suggest the best way to deal with the Buddhists who had slipped out of the government's hands by then. On the night of December 9, 694, the whole *mingtang* complex was destroyed by a fire. Less than three months later, Xue Huaiyi was murdered, and his faction wiped out (see ZZTJ 205, 6498-502).

Unlike Wu Zetian, Xue Huaiyi's attitude towards the Taoists seems to have been quite rough, to say the least. In Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* (1084) we read that:

見道士則極意毆之，仍髡其髮而去。

When he met with a Taoist priest, he would beat him as much as he could; furthermore, he would crop his hair and go away (ZZTJ 203, 6437).

This piece of information is not to be found elsewhere, not even in the *Jiu Tang shu*'s biography of the monk. Personalities like Xue Huaiyi were veritable pet aversions to Confucian historians, so one may doubt whether the physical violence upon the Taoists was a factual reality or rather a tendentious overstatement. However, it is reasonable to assume that he was behind the measures against the Taoist church, and further evidence will show that this was indeed the case. For the moment, we should keep in mind that an anti-Taoist wave inspired by Xue Huaiyi shook the religious world of China, or more probably of its capital Luoyang, between 689 and 694.²⁰

Now we have to ascertain whether or not the *Zhenzheng lun* dates to this period.

¹⁹ The passage translated above is on page 104. The examination was held between April 30 and May 29, 694 (Changshou 3. 4). There also survives an essay by one of the candidates. These documents, unnoticed so far, shed new light on the political situation at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty and definitely deserve further study.

²⁰ We have just seen that it was a Taoist priest from Chang'an, not from the capital Luoyang, who in 691 performed auspicious rituals for the new dynasty. This was probably not a coincidence.

When Was the Zhenzheng Lun Really Written?

Putting aside the unreliable information from Buddhist sources, the date of Xuanyi's book may be clarified solely on the basis of internal evidence. In the concluding part of the *Zhenzheng lun*'s imaginary dialogue, the Master Who Distinguishes What is Right (*Zhenzheng xiansheng* 甄正先生) instructs the Stubborn Young Gentleman (*Zhisu gongzi* 滯俗公子) on the origin of Taoist rituals. The Buddhist champion explains that since the patriarch Zhang Dao-ling 張道陵 (second century AD) Taoist priests had always been merely plagiarizing the sacrifices (*ji* 祭) of the ancient Confucian tradition, only to trans-
pose them in a context of sorcery and occult lore (see T 52 no. 2112: xia 571b9-16).²¹ Then he adds

行此法者，自是太常所司，不合隸屬司賓寺管。僧尼所以屬司賓寺者，爲佛法從西國來，同諸外客之例。道士元非是客，自然不合屬司賓寺管。又，行像醮祭祀之法，即是司禮寺事。但以寺觀相對，因此遂屬司賓。

Those who practise these liturgies are normally administered by the Chamberlain for Ceremonial (*Taichang* 太常); it is not proper that they depend on the jurisdiction of the Court of State Ceremonial (*Sibin si* 司賓寺). The reason why Buddhist monks and nuns depend on the Court of State Ceremonial is that the Law of the Buddha came from the Western Countries, so they share the regulations for foreign guests. The Taoist priests are fundamentally not guests, and of course it is not proper that they depend on the jurisdiction of the Court of State Ceremonial; furthermore, they practise a liturgy of [rituals as the] *zhang*, *jiao*, *ji* and *si*, that is a matter for the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*Sili si* 司禮寺). However, since Buddhist and Taoist monasteries are in mutual relation,²² on that account they depend on the [Court of] State Ceremonial (T 52 no. 2112: xia, 571b16-21).

From this passage it is evident that the book dates from a time when both Buddhist and Taoist clergies were controlled by the Court of State Ceremonial, a bureau within the Ministry of Rites (*Li bu* 禮部) in charge of foreign visitors.

Now, along with the inauguration of the Yanzai 延載 era on June 9, 694, the jurisdiction on the two religious communities was transferred from this very court to the Bureau of Sacrifices (*Ci bu* 祠部), another agency depending on the Ministry of Rites (see THY 59, 1028 and 49, 859). We may safely assume that Xuanyi wrote his pamphlet before this date. As for the *terminus a quo*, it is revealed by a quotation from the 'Holy Records of Laozi' (*Laozi shengji* 老子聖紀), a hagiography composed in 679 by the influential Taoist

²¹ Incidentally, it must be noted that Falin had already raised the same argument in his *Bianzheng lun* (see T 52 no. 2110: 2, 500a4-26).

²² Because they are both places of religious activities.

priest Yin Wencao 尹文操 (d. 688).²³ Xuanyi refers to this book as a work from 'the Tang dynasty' (see T 52 no. 2112: *zhong*, 565b24-25), making clear that he wrote his treatise when the Tang rulers were no longer on the throne. That is, under the Great Zhou.

Thus the *Zhenzheng lun* must have been written between October 16, 690, when the new dynasty was established, and June 9, 694, the very period in which the influence of Xue Huaiyi's clique on the political and religious life of Luoyang was at its peak.²⁴ A connection between the Maitreyan leader and the former Taoist Xuanyi will prove more than a mere suspicion.

How Xuanyi was Converted to Buddhism

The colophon of the *Zhenzheng lun* in the Song, Ming and Yuan editions of the Buddhist canon indicates the author's name as 'Xuanyi, a *śramaṇa* of the Fo shouji monastery under the Tang' 唐佛授記寺沙門玄嶷 (T 52 no. 2112: 559, n. 23). This fits what we already know from the other sources, but we should be careful. The *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (961) informs us that the Fo shouji si 佛授記寺 - 'Monastery of the Prophecy Conferred by the Buddha', or '*Vyākaraṇa vihāra*' - was established in 657 (Xianqing 2) on behalf of the heir apparent Li Hong 李弘 (651-675). At that time the temple's name was Jing'ai si 敬愛寺, 'Monastery of Devout Love', but in the second year Tianshou (December 6, 690 - November 25, 691) it was renamed precisely Fo shouji si. Our source adds that 'later' (*hou* 後) the monastery retook its former appellation (see THY 48, 848). The prophecy hinted at in the temple's title was very probably the one in the *Dayun jing*. Since this paved the way for Wu

²³ The original title of this book, now lost, was 'Holy Records of the Arcane Primordial August Emperor' (*Xuanyuan huangdi shengji* 玄元皇帝聖紀), derived from the honorific appellation bestowed on Laozi in 666. As we saw, the epithet was abolished in 689. It appears that Yin Wencao's work was restyled conveniently. The hagiography, in ten *juan*, was composed by imperial order in 679 (Yifeng 儀鳳 4), after an epiphany of the Taoist god during a public ritual at a temple in Luoyang (see D 605 no. 957: 1, 7b4-10). The relevant passage is contained in the funerary inscription of Yin Wencao (*Da Tang Zongsheng guan zhu yinqing guanglu dafu Tianshui Yin zunshi bei* 大唐宗聖觀主銀青光祿大夫天水尹尊師碑), composed by the scholar and lay disciple Yuan Banqian 員半千 (died after 721) and erected on November 9, 717 (Kaiyuan 5. 10. 2); the stele is our main source of information on this outstanding Taoist of the Tang period.

²⁴ For the exact date in which the Zhou dynasty was established see ZZTJ (204, 6467). Within the span of time indicated, it would be tempting to assume that the *Zhenzheng lun* was written to pave the way to the demotion of the Taoists behind the Buddhists. Thus the date of the book could be further refined and placed between October 16, 690 and May 5, 691, when the demotion was implemented. However, as we shall see below, the struggle between the two religious communities continued even after 691. All things considered, the probabilities are the same over the whole period.

Zetian's usurpation, one may presume that the return to the old name of Jing'ai si coincided with the Tang restoration of 705.

Be that as it may, this colophon is definitely apocryphal. First, the Tang are not referred to as 'Great', as was the rule under a reigning dynasty. Second, even if we admit that the monastery maintained its Zhou name for some time after the restoration, a monk of the 'Fo shouji si under the Tang' could only exist after 705. The *Zhenzheng lun*, as we saw, was written long before that year.

We are lucky enough to have a different colophon in the Song edition (1104-48) of the Canon preserved in the Japanese Imperial Library and in the Korean edition of 1151. Here we read that the author Xuanyi was 'a Buddhist monk from the Great White Horse Monastery' (*Da Baima si seng* 大白馬寺僧) (see T 52 no. 2112: *shang*, 559c5; *zhong*, 563a9; *xia*, 567c4). That is new to us. None of the sources previously examined mentions this membership of the *Zhenzheng lun*'s author. Nonetheless, we should not reject this information hastily. It could well be that Du Yi began his Buddhist career as a simple if peculiar novice in the monastery led by Xue Huaiyi, and that his new superior made him attack the Taoist church simply to test his reliability.

In fact, some further documents seem to bear out this possibility. In the funerary inscription of Hou Jingzhong 侯敬忠 (649-718), a Taoist priest who was attached to the same Hongdao guan of which Du Yi/Xuanyi was the Prior before the establishment of the Zhou dynasty, we read:

永昌之歲，有逆僧懷義，恃寵作威，抑尊師爲僧。經四載，快快不得其志。登封年，遂抗表願復其道人，願天從還居仙境。法衆以尊師言行無雙。始終若一，遂舉爲弘道觀主。

In the Yongchang 永昌 year, there was the rebellious monk [Xue] Huaiyi who presuming upon the imperial favour acted in overawing manner, and coerced the Venerable Master into becoming a Buddhist monk. Four years elapsed, and very discontented [Xue Huaiyi] did not reach his aim. In the [Wansui] Dengfeng 登封 year, [the Venerable Master] then addressed a remonstrance [to the throne], begging to be reinstated as a Man of the Way [i.e. as a Taoist priest], begging that Heaven [i.e. the Emperress] comply with [his wish] to return in the Precincts of the Immortals [i.e. in his former Taoist monastery]. The religious community, considering that the Venerable Master had been speaking and behaving without duplicity, and that he had always been consistent, elected him Prior of the Hongdao guan ('Da Tang Da Hongdao guanzhu gu Sandong fashi Hou zunshi zhiwen' 大唐大弘道觀主故三洞法師侯尊師誌文, in TMH 1, 1207).

In this text there are some obscure points that need to be elucidated. It is not immediately clear whether or not the Taoist priest was eventually 'converted' to Buddhism and ordained as a monk. We know that the first and only year of the Yongchang era roughly corresponds to 689. The next date mentioned is the Dengfeng 登封, or Wansui denfeng 萬歲登封 era, that only lasted from January 20 to April 21, 696. However, the inscription tells that in

the four previous years Xue Huaiyi did not reach his aim, that is, following the Chinese way of counting years, up to 692. Since it was only in 696 that Hou Jingzhong returned to his previous condition of Taoist priest, one wonders what happened in between.

Another epigraphical document, the funerary inscription of the Buddhist monk Yugong 瑀公 (673-752), offers a possible key to this riddle. Here we read that

以如意年大赦，度人壞衣削髮。…弱冠遊東京大福先寺，厥受大戒。

By the great act of grace of the Ruyi 如意 year, people were ordained (as monks), tearing their dresses and shaving their hair... At the age of twenty (Yugong) moved to the Great Fuxian monastery in the Eastern Capital [i.e. Luoyang], and there he received the great precepts (of Buddhism; QTW 918, 3b8-9).

According to this passage, in the first and only year of the Ruyi 如意 era, that is between April 22 and October 22, 692 there was a sort of mass ordination of Buddhist monks arranged by imperial decree. Thus we may tentatively suppose that Hou Jingzhong held out on Xue Huaiyi's aggression until he had to bow his head to a superior injunction.

In any case, now we know for certain that in 689 the faction of Xue Huaiyi tried to forcibly convert to Buddhism a prominent priest from the Hongdao guan, and very probably the whole Taoist monastery. It was in that same year that the first measure against the Taoists was taken.

A few months later, the commentary on the 'Great Cloud Sūtra' was presented to Wu Zetian. It would have been strange if the Hongdao guan incident went unreported in the very manifesto of the Zhou revolution. Actually, the episode is duly mentioned. In this document, the following prophecy from the *Dayun jing*: '(Thou will) destroy and subdue the perverse and heterodox views of the heretics' (摧伏外道諸邪異見) is followed by a gloss that ends with the statement 'The ordination of the Yellow Cap(s?) at the White Horse (Monastery) is thus this case' 白馬之度黃冠即其事也 (S. 6502: col. 136-39).²⁵ 'Yellow Caps' is an epithet reminiscent of the Yellow Turbans (*Huang jin* 黃巾), the religious rebels of the Han period, and clearly indicates the Taoists. In other words, we are informed that before the submission of the commentary on August 17, 690 one or more followers of Laozi's church were ordained as Buddhist monks in the monastery of which Xue Huaiyi was the abbot.²⁶ This does not contradict the inscription of Hou Jingzhong and per-

²⁵ Photographic reproduction in Forte (1976: pls. V-VI).

²⁶ This piece of evidence has passed unnoticed or it has been wrongly interpreted for a long time. See Palumbo (1995-96: 179-80). Recently, reviewing his own translation of 1976, Forte (in press a: 15-18) proposed a slightly different rendering of the sentence: 'White Horse's [Buddhist] ordination of the Yellow Hats is such an event'. In his opinion, the expression

fectly agrees with the colophon of the *Zhenzheng lun* indicating Xuanyi as a monk of the Great White Horse monastery.

Now we have all the necessary evidence in our hands to imagine how things really occurred.

Conclusion

In 689, when the fate of the Tang dynasty was clearly settled, a group of Buddhist monks and Maitreyan followers led by Xue Huaiyi burst onto the overheated political scene of Luoyang. They assumed the leading position in the ideological propaganda for the seizure of power that was to take place one year later, and rushed upon their main rivals in the religious society of the capital, the Taoist priests of the Hongdao guan. The Empress gave them free rein, presumably hoping to capitalize on their faction, and for a few years she reversed her usual favour towards Laozi's followers. On that occasion, some of the Taoists offered proud resistance, but others lost no time in siding with the winners and acquiring convenient positions within the new order.

In the text of Hou Jingzhong's inscription, the emphasis on the upright conduct of the priest in the face of Buddhist aggression seems to be an oblique reference to someone else amidst the Taoist community in Luoyang, who on the same occasion did 'act with duplicity'. Among these renegades behind the curtain, the first was undoubtedly Du Yi, the very head of the Hongdao guan. He agreed to be ordained as a *śramaṇa* of the Great White Horse Monastery with the new religious name Xuanyi; thereby he put himself under the authority of Xue Huaiyi, and it was in this position, between October 16, 690 and June 9, 694, that he wrote the *Zhenzheng lun*. This was therefore but a work done on commission. Its main aim was to strike the final blow to the Lingbao church, a troublesome competitor in the ideological struggle; to accomplish this Xuanyi did not hesitate to twist some arguments traditionally raised by the Buddhists themselves against their rivals. An example is his peculiar version on the origin of the *Huahu jing* 化胡經, the famous Taoist tale according to

Baima 白馬 directly refers to Xue Huaiyi, not to the White Horse monastery. He also thinks that this point of the Commentary on the *Dayun jing* hints at the same historical event reported in the passage of the *Zizhi tongjian* concerning Xue Huaiyi's aggressions to Taoist priests (see above). Whether the 'White Horse' is the monastery with the same name or its abbot is a matter of metonymy, which does not alter the substance of the episode (unless one wants to think that Huaiyi ordained his monks in a monastery other than his own). On the second point, my position is decidedly at variance. It seems to me that Sima Guang points to offhand, repeated acts of violence committed by Xue Huaiyi against the Taoists. We are told that the Maitreyan leader used to beat his religious opponents black and blue whenever he met them. This is hardly comparable to a monastic ordination such as the one of Xuanyi, and it is more likely to refer to the assaults on the Taoists as Hou Jingzhong who refused the conversion to Buddhism.

which Buddhism was nothing but a set of strict rules Laozi created during his legendary travels to the Western Regions in order to curb the impious inhabitants of those countries. Xuanyi ascribes the authorship of the scripture to the Lingbao sect, and in particular to the renowned Taoist master Song Wenming 宋文明, who lived around the middle of the sixth century (see T 52 no. 2112: 中, 564c5-9 and 565a22-24).²⁷ Until then, Buddhist apologists had always been telling that the hated book was the work of a Libationer (*jijiu* 祭酒) Wang Fou 王浮, who allegedly wrote it about 300 AD. Although this attribution is probably unreliable, there is no doubt that the *Huahu jing* existed long before the date Xuanyi had suggested. Moreover, the contents and style of its most ancient fragments seem to rule out the possibility that it originated from the Lingbao tradition. This kind of Taoism used to plagiarize Buddhism rather than denigrating it.²⁸

To come to the point, the *Zhenzheng lun*'s information on Taoism is even more tendentious than that contained in other Buddhist apologiae, and scholars of medieval Chinese religion should treat it very carefully. Nevertheless, the book still must be seen as a valuable source on ideological trends in Chinese society of the late seventh century.

In the end, what became of Xuanyi? And above all, who was he actually? History often speaks through silences, which are scattered amidst lies. We could probably get an idea of this ambiguous figure and his overall role by taking a last glance at the sources with which we started. Buddhist historians cleverly hide the fact that Xuanyi was a monk of the Great White Horse monastery, probably ever since 689; on the contrary, they care to let us know that he was granted thirty years of monastic seniority, and that he was assigned to the Fo shouji si by imperial order. They date the episode vaguely ('at the time of the Heavenly Empress') or even try to mislead us with a false date (696). Why?

We should bear in mind that Zhisheng, Zanning and Zhipan all upheld Buddhism as an institutional force within the hierarchical frame of Chinese society. Their conservative view was poles apart from that of Xue Huaiyi, to whom religion should rule any other aspect of social life, without regard for the established order and even in opposition to it.

As likely as not, however, they also intended to preserve the historical and ideological validity of Xuanyi's dramatic abjuration, which they could hold up as an example for posterity, and above all of his most useful pamphlet: proba-

²⁷ On Song Wenming see Ōfuchi (1974: 34-35).

²⁸ Volumes have been written on the *Huahu jing*, and probably much more is still to be written. I am preparing something on this topic. The information given by the *Zhenzheng lun* on the origin of the book was accepted as the most reliable by the Japanese scholar Shibata Norikatsu, expressly on the ground that its source was a man from the Taoist church, see Shibata (1933: 229-31). For a recent reassessment of the issue, questioning the legend of Wang Fou, see Liu Yi (in press).

bly for this reason they silently passed over the relationship between the convert and Huaiyi. If Zhisheng, Zanning and Zhipan decided all the same to report that Xuanyi was installed as a leader of the Fo shouji monastery, we may infer that this only happened when that embarrassing connection was over.²⁹

The truth of the matter is that in late 695 or after, definitely *after* the murder of Xue Huaiyi, Xuanyi was still a Buddhist, and what's more one of the chiefs of the powerful Fo shouji monastery. The Buddhist leaders thought he was reliable enough to take part in the editorial board of the *Da Zhou kanding zhongjing mulu*, a catalogue conceived as an instrument of the ideological restoration following the death of Huaiyi, and when the work was revised about 700 they left his name in the list of the compilers.³⁰ They would hardly have acted in this way if Xuanyi had returned to his former church in the meantime. In any case, when the Hongdao guan started having its own Prior again at the beginning of 696, he was not the same man who held the office before the Zhou revolution, that is Du Yi/Xuanyi. Another priest, Hou Jingzhong, was chosen to be the new leader of the monastery precisely because of his loyalty to the Taoist community during the hard times of the Buddhist offensive.

All these circumstances suggest that Xuanyi was not so reluctant as a *śramaṇa*, and that his conversion to Buddhism was not forced. On the other hand, had he really been a partisan of Xue Huaiyi, he should have shared his lot. But when the Maitreyan leader and his gang of unruly dreamers were massacred, the apostate got off quite well, and was even able to conclude his career as an influential guardian of Buddhist orthodoxy.

In my opinion, there is only one explanation to this odd affair. I think that from beginning to end Xuanyi was hand in glove with the Empress. We should remember that he came on stage as the head of a monastery established by Wu Zetian on purely political grounds. To put it bluntly, he was a man from the Establishment inside the religious community, and we can bet that he was not the only one in his time.

As for Xue Huaiyi, a full-blooded man indeed, he was probably snared in a game too big for him. His religious fury did not prevent him from being fooled by the man he had thought to convert. In fact, as a compiler of the Zhou catalogue, Xuanyi gave himself the satisfaction of being among those Buddhists who blacklisted the *Zhengming jing*, the sacred text of Huaiyi's utopia, as a 'false and wrong' (*weimi* 偽謬) scripture (see T 55 no. 2153: 15, 472c25).

²⁹ Forte (in press a: 28, n. 22) points out that 'Xuanyi could not have become a *duweina* of the Fo Shouji monastery before October 7, 693 because at that time the two positions of *duweina* were occupied by Degan 德感 and Zhijing 知靜, two of the ten monks who presented the commentary on the *Dayun jing*'. Therefore, at the earliest, the appointment of Xuanyi took place when Xue Huaiyi was soon to be descendant.

³⁰ On the ideological value of the Zhou catalogue see Forte (in press b: 529).

The visionary comes to a bad end, the opportunist gets on: it's a familiar story. And everything gets ordinary eventually.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

- Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載. 6 *juan*, by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (660?-733?). Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1979.
- D = *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏. Photographic reproduction in 1120 fascicles of the woodblock edn. of the Taoist Canon kept in the Baiyun guan 白雲觀, Beijing. Commercial Press, Shanghai 1924-26. Reduced-size reprint in 60 vols.: Xinwenfeng 新文豐, Taibei 1977. The codes refer respectively to the fascicle number of the 1120 vols. edn. and to the serial number assigned to 1487 titles in the Taoist Canon according to K.M. Schipper *Concordance du Tao-tsang*. École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris 1975 (repr. as *Zhengtong Daozang mulu suoyin* 正統道藏目錄索引 Xinwenfeng 新文豐, Taibei 1977).
- D 605 no. 957 = *Gu Louguan ziyun yanning ji* 古樓觀紫雲衍慶集. 3 *juan*, by Zhu Xiangxian 朱象先 (fl. 1279-1308).
- DKJK = *Dengkeji kao* 登科記考. 30 *juan*, by Xu Song 徐松 (1781-1848), 1838. Edn. in 3 vols. ed. by Zhao Shouyan 趙守儼. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1984.
- Henan zhi* 河南志. 4 *juan*, by an anonymous author from the Yuan 元 dynasty (1279-1368). Edn. *Song Yuan difang zhi congshu* 宋元地方志叢書 1, 4, 295-354. Dahua shuju 大化書局, Taibei 1980.
- JTS = *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書. 200 *juan*, by Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946), completed about 945. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1975.
- Nanbu xinshu* 南部新書. 10 *juan*, by Qian Yi 錢易, completed between 1008 and 1016. *Congshu jicheng - chubian* 叢書集成—初編. Shangwu yinshu guan 商務印書館, Shanghai 1936.
- QW = *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文. 1000 *juan*, completed in 1814 under the direction of Dong Gao 董誥 (1740-1818). Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1982.
- S.6502 = *Dayun jing Shenhuang shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏. Originally 1 *juan*, written by Faming 法明 and others in 690 AD. Fragmentary manuscript from Dunhuang in the Stein (S.) collection, British Library, London. Photographic reproduction in Forte (1976).
- T = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Compiled under the direction of Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡邊海旭, 85 vols. Issaikyō kankōkai 一切經刊行會, Tōkyō 1924-32.
- T 49 no. 2035 = *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀. 54 *juan*, by Zhipan 志磐, completed in 1269.
- T 50 no. 2061 = *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳. 30 *juan*, by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), completed in 988.
- T 52 no. 2110 = *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論. 8 *juan*, by Falin 法琳 (572-640), c. 630.
- T 54 no. 2126 = *Da Song seng shilüe* 大宋僧史略. 3 *juan*, by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), completed 999.
- T 55 no. 2153 = *Da Zhou kanding zhongjing mulu* 大周刊定衆經目錄. 15 *juan*, by Mingquan 明全 and others. Completed on December 7, 695, but containing interpolations and emendations from a later date (probably c. 700).
- T 55 no. 2154 = *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄. 20 *juan*, by Zhisheng 智昇, 730.
- Tang wen xu shiyi* 唐文續拾遺. 16 *juan*, by Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 (1834-94), published as a posthumous work in 1895. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1982.
- THY = *Tang huiyao* 唐會要. 100 *juan*, by Wang Pu 王溥 (922-982), completed in 961. This is

- the continuation of the *Huiyao* 會要 by Su Mian 蘇冕, in 40 *juan*, completed in 804; and of the *Xu huiyao* 續會要 by Yang Shaofu 楊紹復 and others, in 40 *juan*, completed in 853. Edn. Guoxue jiben congshu 國學基本叢書, Shangwu yinshu guan 商務印書館, Shanghai 1935 (reprint Shijie shuju 世界書局, 3 vols. Taipei 1982).
- TMH = *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編, 2 vols. Ed. Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 with the assistance of Zhao Chao 趙超. Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, Shanghai 1992.
- ZZTJ = *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑. 294 *juan*, by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-86) and others, presented to the throne in 1084. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing 1956. This edn. includes Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* 資治通鑑考異 and the commentary by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230-1302).
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