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**Emerging from the Cocoon: Ethnic Revival, Lunar Radiance,
and the Cult of Liu Sahe in the Jihu Uprising of 682-683***

Closer examination of a Buddhist movement in Shaanxi 陝西 in the early 680s can help reveal the mechanics of the interplay between wealth, merit, faith and power in popular Buddhism during the early Tang. Bai Tieyu 白鐵余 evolved from a faith healer who amassed a huge fortune from Buddhist believers wishing to gaze upon a planted bronze Buddha he had ‘discovered’ to a messianic deliverer, who, claiming that the mandate had been severed, set up a government and assumed an imperial title. By the spring of 683, Bai Tieyu’s local uprising in Suizhou 綏州 had grown to such proportions that the Tang court ordered general Cheng Wuting 程務挺 and commander-in-chief of contiguous Xiazhou 夏州 prefecture Wang Fangyi 王方翼 to suppress it.

The uprising must be understood on three interrelated levels. First, it was a peasant rebellion, a response to abysmal socio-economic conditions. Second, it was a religious movement centred both upon local traditions of revivalist Buddhism and apocalyptic beliefs of popular Buddhism, particularly those surrounding Yueguang Wang 月光王 («Prince Lunar Radiance»), a lesser-known Buddhist deity. Third, it can be understood in terms of historical ethnic tensions between the Jihu 稽胡, a sedentary non-Chinese group that had long settled in Shaanbei 陝北 and Shanxi 山西, and the political centre. The analysis of the movement from the last two perspectives will require the introduction of another figure, Liu Sahe 劉薩訶, a Jihu monk and folk hero.

Sources of Information on Bai Tieyu

There are several different extensive accounts of the Bai Tieyu uprising. The earliest comes from the third fascicle of Zhang Zhuo’s 張鷟 *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載 («Records from Court and Country»), not an official court re-

* A much shorter version of this article was published in a collection of essays from papers presented at the ‘Merit, Opulence and the Buddhist Network of Wealth’ conference held at Peking University in June 2001. See Rothschild (2003).

cord but a collection of anecdotes and local legends (*xiao shuo* 小說, «tales of little importance») that court historians generally regarded as insufficiently momentous to warrant inclusion in court histories. Written prior to 733, the *Chaoye qianzai* extensively covers the waning years of Tang Gaozong's 唐高宗 reign (649-683), as well as the regency (684-690) and reign (690-705) of female emperor Wu Zhao 武曩 (d. 705). Compiled about half a century after Bai Tieyu's rebellion, the text of this unofficial source is as follows:

白鐵余者，延州 稽胡也，左道惑眾。先于深山中埋一金銅像于栢樹之下，經數年，草生其上。給鄉人曰：“吾昨夜山下過，每見佛光”。大設齋，卜吉日以出聖佛。及期，集數百人，命於非所藏處斷，不得。乃勸曰：“諸公不至誠布施，佛不可見”。由是男女爭布施者百余萬。更於埋處斷之，得金銅像。鄉人以爲聖，遠近傳之，莫不欲見。乃宣言曰：“見聖佛者，百病即愈”。左側數百里，老小士女皆就之。乃以緋紫紅黃綾爲袋數十重盛像，人聚觀者，去一重一廻布施，收千端乃見像。如此矯僞一二年，鄉人歸伏，遂作亂，自號光王，署置官職，殺長吏，數年爲患。命將軍程務挺斬之。¹

Bai Tieyu was a Jihu from Yanzhou.² He followed a sinister path and beguiled the masses. Formerly, deep in the mountains, he buried a golden bronze image beneath a cypress tree. When, after several years, grass had grown over it, he deceived the countryfolk, saying, «Last night, as I passed the foot of the mountain, I saw Buddha light». He laid out a huge vegetarian feast and divined an auspicious day to unearth the Saintly Buddha. When the time came, he gathered several hundred people and ordered them to dig in a location where he had not hidden [the statue]. [Therefore,] they did not obtain it.

He then exhorted them with the words, «Gentleman, if you do not offer donations³ with absolute sincerity, the Buddha cannot be seen». Because of this, men and women contended to contribute more than one million cash.

They dug again at the site where [Bai Tieyu] had buried [the statue] and obtained the golden bronze image. The country folk believed it to be a Saint and far and near they transmitted [word of] it, so that there were none who did not wish to see it. He then circulated rumour that those who looked upon the Saintly Buddha would have all of their maladies cured. Neighbours from hundreds of *li* away – old and young, gentlemen and ladies alike – went there. [Bai Tieyu] then took figured gauze of violet, purple, red and yellow and wrapped it around the statue in several tens of layers. Those who gathered to see [the image] for each donation could strip away one layer of it. Only once a thousand swathes were collected could they see the image. Such a fraud continued for a year or two, as more and more countryfolk took refuge and submitted. In the end, Bai Tieyu staged a rebellion, assumed the title Guangwang, set up administrative offices, killed senior subalterns, causing turmoil for several years. General Cheng Wuting was ordered to punish him.

¹ *Chaoye qianzai* 3.73. The following translation takes into account emendations according to the *Taiping guangji* 238.1833.

² As we shall see below, Sima Guang thinks this is an error and that Bai Tieyu was from Suizhou.

³ By contributing cash people could win *dana*, Buddhist merit.

Li Fang's 李昉 quoted the above passage of the *Chaoye qianzai* in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 («Miscellaneous Records of the Taiping Era»), compiled during the Taiping (976-983) reign era of Song Taizong 宋太宗 (r. 976-997).⁴ Li Fang situated the story of Bai Tieyu's rise and fall in a chapter on 'Deceivers and perpetrators of hoaxes' (*gui zha* 詭詐), alongside infamous rebel An Lushan 安祿山 and charlatans like Tang Tongtai 唐同泰 and Hu Yanqing 胡延慶, both men who in the late 680s and early 690s fabricated omens at the court of Wu Zhao. There are, however, curious disparities between the two texts, probably due to a different edition used by Li Fang.

While the statue in the *Chaoye qianzai* is initially identified only as a «bronze image» (*tong xiang* 銅像), in the *Taiping guangji* it is expressly called a «bronze Buddha» (*tong fo* 銅佛). In the original, Bai Tieyu is said to have «killed senior subalterns» (*sha chang li* 殺長吏), while in the later *Taiping guangji* he «established senior subalterns» (*she chang li* 設長吏). This confusion, as we shall see, illuminates an issue at the very heart of this movement: the perception of Bai Tieyu in the eyes of the local populace. In the *Chaoye qianzai*, when people gathered to feel the healing benefits of the bronze Buddha, Bai Tieyu only revealed the statue once 1000 swathes of cloth (*qian duan* 千端) were gathered, whereas in the *Taiping guangji*, Li Fang recorded that Bai Tieyu accumulated 10 million cash (*qian wan* 千萬) by means of this scheme. This disparity appears to be more routine – the change from «swath» (*duan* 段) to «ten thousand» (*wan* 萬) was likely due to a copy error on the part of Li Fang.

The second major account of the Bai Tieyu uprising comes from an official Northern Song source: Sima Guang's late 11th century compilation *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 («Comprehensive Mirror for the Advancement of Government»). While the account lacks the detail of the *Chaoye qianzai*, a similar story is told just after the Tang court returned to Luoyang on Hongdao 弘道 1.4.2 (3 May 683):⁵

綏州步落稽白鐵余，埋銅佛於地中，久之草生其上，給其鄉人曰：“吾於此數見佛光”。擇日集眾掘地，果得之，因曰：“得見聖佛者，百疾皆愈”。遠近赴之。鐵余以雜色囊盛之數十重，得厚施，乃去一囊。數年間，歸信者眾，遂謀作亂。據城平縣，自稱光明聖皇帝，置百官，進攻綏德、大斌二縣，殺官吏，焚民居。遣右武衛將軍程務挺與夏州都督王方翼討之。甲申，攻拔其城，擒鐵余，餘黨悉平。⁶

Bai Tieyu, a Buluoji⁷ from Suizhou, buried a bronze Buddha in the ground. After a while, once grass grew there, he deceived his countrymen, saying, «I have seen Bud-

⁴ *Taiping guangji*, 238.1833.

⁵ The actual date was Yongchun 永淳 2.4.2, as the reign period (*nian hao* 年號) Hongdao, used for horological calculations in the *Zizhi tongjian*, was adopted only on 27 December 683, upon Gaozong's death.

⁶ *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6413-6414.

⁷ *Zizhi tongjian*, Hu Sanxing commentary: «Buluoji are Jihu».

dha light here several times». A day was chosen to gather the masses and excavate the ground. As a result, they obtained it [the bronze Buddha]. Consequently, [Bai Tieyu] said, «For those who obtain sight of the Saintly Buddha, all of their maladies will be cured». People far and near flocked to it. [Bai] Tieyu used assorted-coloured sacks to swathe the Buddha with several tens of layers. When he received a generous offering, one sack would be removed.

Within a few years, those who took refuge in the faith had grown to a throng, and eventually he plotted rebellion. He occupied Chengping county, assumed the self-styled title Guangming Sheng Huangdi [«Luminous Saintly August Emperor»], and instituted the hundred offices [that is, he set up an administration]. He then advanced, attacking Suide and Dabin counties,⁸ killing local officials and burning the residences of the people. General of the Right Cheng Wuting and commander-in-chief of Xia-zhou prefecture Wang Fangyi were sent to suppress him. On *jiashen* [Yongchun 2.4.27; 28 May 683], they attacked and routed the city, capturing [Bai] Tieyu and pacifying the remainder of his adherents.⁹

This passage, although it comes from Sima Guang's late 11th century compilation, was probably even earlier than that in the *Chaoye qianzai* because in the *Kaoyi* 考異 («Examining the Differences»), Sima Guang's collection of critical notes where he explains his choice of sources, he expressly states that he preferred on several points to rely on the *Shilu* 實錄 («Veritable Records»), rather than on the *Chaoye qianzai*.¹⁰ Unfortunately, nothing is known of the *Gaozong Shilu* 高宗實錄 («Veritable Records of Gaozong») that

⁸ *Zizhi tongjian*, Hu Sanxing commentary: «Chengping and the other two counties are all part of Suizhou, a prefecture established in the Western Wei ... Ouyang Xiu wrote, 'As to Dabin, the name comes from the fact that, when the Jihu are embraced and transformed, civil and military are blended' [歐陽修曰：大斌者，取稽胡懷化，文武雜半以為名]».

⁹ Liu Yuyi's *Shaanxi tongzhi* contains a slightly abbreviated, but very similar passage. Clearly, the Qing dynasty author was familiar with both the *Chaoye qianzai* and the *Zizhi tongjian* – he includes both at different junctures of his work (respectively, *juan* 100 and *juan* 79). He also lifts the *Xin Tang shu*'s account of the Bai Tieyu uprising from Wang Fangyi's biography (*juan* 50). The *Yupi lidai tongjian jilan*, *juan* 52, from the late 18th century, also contains a slightly abbreviated version of the account from the *Comprehensive Mirror* (in this text Bai Tieyu takes the title 'August Emperor', *huang di* 皇帝).

¹⁰ Sima Guang's *Kaoyi*, as quoted at the end of the passage concerning Bai Tieyu in the present edition of the *Zizhi tongjian*, says: «The [*Chaoye*] *qianzai* says, '[Bai Tieyu was a] Jihu from Yanzhou'. It also says, 'He assumed the title Yueguang wang'. It also says, 'In the Yifeng era (676-679), [Cheng] Wuting beheaded him and pacified the rebellion'. This is probably wrong. Here, I have followed the *Veritable Records* [考異曰：僉載云，“延州稽胡”又云“自號月光王”，“儀鳳中務挺斬平之，蓋誤也。今從實錄]». The text from the first of these three quotations from the edition of the *Chaoye qianzai* used by Sima Guang is the same as the text in the present edition of the *Chaoye qianzai*. However, the second contains a critical difference, suggesting that in the edition Sima Guang had at his disposal Bai Tieyu took Yueguang Wang as his self-appointed title, rather than merely Guangwang, as the text of the current edition of the *Chaoye qianzai* reads. The third *Chaoye qianzai* passage Sima Guang mentions is also not contained in the present edition of the *Chaoye qianzai*. It is possible that Sima Guang based the third quotation on the other passage in the *Chaoye qianzai* (1.18-19) that mentions Bai Tieyu.

included the account of the Bai Tieyu uprising other than that Empress Wu, his redoubtable spouse, compiled it (Twitchett 1992: 130).

There are many other accounts of the Bai Tieyu uprising. Gaozong's 'basic annals' (*ben ji* 本紀) in the *Jiu Tang shu* (5.111) contains a brief account:

[夏四月]甲申, 綏州 部落稽 白鐵余據城平縣反, 命將軍程務挺將兵討之。

On *jiashen* [Yongchun 2.4.27; 28 May 683], Buluoji Bai Tieyu of Suizhou occupied Chengping county and rebelled. By imperial order, general Cheng Wuting marshaled soldiers and suppressed him.

In Ouyang Xiu's *Xin Tang shu* (3.78) there is also sparse account of the uprising in Tang Gaozong's 'basic annals':

[夏四月]甲申, 綏州 部落稽 白鐵余寇邊, 右武衛將軍程務挺敗之。

On *jiashen* [Yongchun 2.4.27; 28 May 683], Buluoji Bai Tieyu of Suizhou raided the borders. General of the Right Militant Guard Cheng Wuting defeated him.¹¹

These records provide no new information on the movement.

Some information is also found in the biographies of the two military commanders involved in the campaign to suppress Bai Tieyu. The following passage appears in the biography of general Cheng Wuting in *Jiu Tang shu* (83.2785):

永淳二年, 綏州 城平縣人白鐵余率部落稽之黨據縣城反, 偽稱尊號, 署百官, 又進寇綏德殺掠人吏, 焚燒村落. 詔務挺與夏州都督王方翼討之. 務挺進攻其城, 拔之. 生擒白鐵余, 盡平其餘黨.¹²

In the second year of Yongchun [683], Bai Tieyu, from Chengping County in Suizhou, led his Buluoji followers in rebellion, occupying the county seat. He falsely assumed an honorific title, instituted the hundred offices, and advanced, plundering Suide, robbing and killing people and officials, burning dwellings and villages. By imperial proclamation, [Cheng] Wuting and Xiazhou commander-in-chief Wang Fang-yi were sent to suppress him. [Cheng] Wuting advanced, attacking and capturing the city, uprooting them. He captured Bai Tieyu alive and completely pacified his followers.

There is a similar account in Cheng Wuting's biography in the *Xin Tang shu* (111.41-47):

綏州 部落稽 白鐵余據城平叛, 建偽號, 署置百官, 進攻綏德 大斌, 殺官吏, 火區舍. 詔務挺與夏州都督王方翼討之, 務挺生禽白鐵余.¹³

¹¹ *Juan* 3 of the *Xu tongzhi*, completed under the Qianlong emperor in the late 18th century, contains an identical account.

¹² About a century later, Wang Qinruo's Northern Song compilation *Cefu yuangui* 358.4243 contains an identical passage.

¹³ The *Xu tongzhi* contains a very similar account in *juan* 218, although Suide 綏德 is erroneously called Suixi 綏息.

Buluoji Bai Tieyu of Suizhou occupied Chengping and rebelled. Establishing a false title, he appointed officials. He advanced on and attacked Suide and Dabin, killing officials and clerks, burning dwellings and residences. By imperial edict, Cheng Wuting and Xiazhou commander-in-chief Wang Fangyi were sent to pacify him. [Cheng] Wuting captured Bai Tieyu alive.

In the *Jiu Tang shu*'s biography of Wang Fangyi (185.4803), a similar chord is struck:

永淳二年…俄屬綏州白鐵余舉兵反，乃詔方翼副程務挺討之。賊平，封太原郡公。

In the second year of Yongchun [683] ... Suddenly, Bai Tieyu of Suizhou raised an army and rebelled. By imperial proclamation, [Wang] Fangyi was ordered to assist Cheng Wuting in suppressing him. When the bandits were pacified, he was invested as commandery duke of Taiyuan.

Wang Fangyi's successful quelling of the rebellion is taken as a meritorious service to the Tang court and wins him an investiture.

For the most part, in these official histories, the story seems quite simple. A power-hungry local demagogue belonging to a minority group (the Jihu, or Buluoji) incited fellow local 'barbarians' to rebel. The arrogant rabble-rouser then started annexing surrounding cities, assumed a lofty title and set up his own court. At this point, a punitive campaign led by two commanders crushed the movement. The Tang court punished those who had fomented rebellion and caused chaos and rewarded those who had restored order.

Wang Fangyi's biography in the *Xin Tang shu* (111.4135) contains further information on the suppression of the rebellion:

俄而妖賊白鐵余以綏州反，詔方翼與程務挺討之。飛旛擊賊，火其柵，平之。¹⁴

When mystical brigand Bai Tieyu took Suizhou and revolted, [Wang] Fangyi and Cheng Wuting were ordered, by imperial proclamation, to suppress him. With flying signal flags, they attacked the bandits and burned down their palisades, pacifying them.

This source adds a new dimension to our understanding of the rebellion. Clearly, Bai Tieyu did not simply kill local authorities and destroy residences. Instead, it appears that when he occupied cities in Suizhou, Bai Tieyu, presumably aided by the adherents who had «taken refuge in the faith» (*gui xin* 歸信), set up an administration. Therefore, when Tang imperial troops arrived, they found it necessary to uproot a locally entrenched opponent.

¹⁴ Similar passages can also be found in the *Shanxi tongzhi*, *juan* 103, a Qing local treatise written in the late 19th century by Zeng Guoquan and in the aforementioned *Shaanxi tongzhi*, *juan* 50. Neither of these local monographs mentions the national figure involved in the suppression of the rebellion, Cheng Wuting, instead focusing on the local official, Wang Fangyi. In the *Shanxi tongzhi* Bai Tieyu is not called a «mystical brigand». *Xu tongzhi* also contains a very similar account in *juan* 218.

In one of the earliest textual accounts of the Bai Tieyu movement, we find a source that corroborates the version from Wang Fangyi's biography in the *Xin Tang shu*. It comes from the hand of the famous Tang scholar-official Zhang Yue 張說 (667-731), who was actually alive when the uprising occurred.¹⁵ His account clearly reinforces the view that imperial troops, rather than rebels, used destructive and incendiary tactics. In his *Zhang Yangong ji* 張燕公集 («Collections from Zhang, Duke of Yan»), *juan* 19, it is recorded:

妖賊白鐵予據城平以反。奉詔與程務挺討擒之。善公有發石壞城之計，反風 焚柵之感。¹⁶

Mystical brigand Bai Tieyu occupied Chengping and rebelled. In obedience to an imperial edict, [Wang Fangyi] together with Cheng Wuting suppressed and captured him. The Good Duke [Wang Fangyi] used the strategies of catapulting stones to destroy the city walls and using counter-winds to burn their palisades.

These two sources that focus on the damage caused by imperial troops rather than the destruction wrought by Bai Tieyu's rebellion provide an intriguing alternative perspective. Far from afflicting the Shaanxi countryside with predatory raids, in these accounts it appears that Bai Tieyu was fighting a defensive war against Tang imperial troops, desperately trying to protect the besieged Jihu homeland. While Bai Tieyu's uprising may well have «killed senior subalterns», given the broad-based local support he gathered one wonders about the reliability of sources that focus only upon the killing and destruction by fire provoked by the rebels.

In another passage from the *Chaoye qianzai* (1.18-19), the Bai Tieyu uprising is an event included among a list of scourges that befell the state in the aftermath of a comet that appeared during the Yifeng era (676-679):

儀鳳年中，有長星半天，出東方，三十餘日乃滅。自是土番叛，匈奴反，徐敬業亂，白鐵余作逆，博、豫騷動，忠、萬強梁，契丹翻營府，突厥破趙、定，麻仁節、張玄遇、王孝傑等，皆沒百萬眾。三十餘年，兵革不息。¹⁷

¹⁵ Zhang Yue, who compiled the *Shi lu* of Tang Xuanzong's 唐玄宗 (r. 712-756), was an important statesman and a strong voice of Confucian remonstrance (Twitchett 1992: 138-39).

¹⁶ An identical passage, with only one erroneous character, *huai* 懷 for *huai* 壞, can be found in the Northern Song anthology of Tang prose, the *Wenyuanyinghua* 文苑英華 («Blossoms and Flowers of the Garden of Literature») by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), *juan* 913. It can also be found in the *Shanxi tongzhi*, *juan* 191.

¹⁷ The passage is quoted in *Taiping guangji* 139.1005 with several variants. First, in the *Taiping guangji*, the character Tang 唐, for the Tang dynasty, precedes Yifeng at the beginning of the passage. Also, the *Taiping guangji* has *jiang* 疆 («border») instead of *qiang* 強 («strong»). The Yifeng reign era lasted from December 18, 676 until July 15, 679. The events mentioned in the passage are: the Tibetans capture of Anrong, in modern-day Sichuan in 680; the Bai Tieyu rebellion; Xu Jingye's failed rebellion against Grand Dowager Wu's regency in 684; the «disturbances in Bozhou and Yuzhou» refer to the failed revolt of Li princes in 688; after helping Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty subdue the Khitan, the powerful Tujue Turkish khan Mochuo rebelled in 697. I am not sure what the mention of the Xiongnu's uprising refers to, nor of the

During the Yifeng period, a long-tailed comet appeared in the east. It was visible for more than thirty days before disappearing. After this, the Tibetans rebelled; the Xiongnu rose up; Xu Jingye revolted; Bai Tieyu made chaos; disturbances flared in Bo[zhou] and Yu[zhou]; Zhong [zhou] and Wan [zhou] were powerful and violent; the Khitan routed Yingzhou. The Tujue destroyed Zhao[zhou] and Ding[zhou]. [Generals] Ma Renjie, Zhang Xuanyu and Wang Xiaojie lost over one million troops. For more than thirty years there were wars and rebellions without cease.

The prolonged appearance of the ill-omened comet for «more than thirty days» announced «more than thirty years» (one day of comet corresponding with a year of chaos!) of non-stop rebellion and turmoil, setting up a time frame that closely parallels the political ascent of Wu Zhao, first as wife of Gaozong (r. 650-683), then as regent and Grand Dowager (684-690), and ultimately as emperor (690-705). The ill-omened comet is clearly a vehicle for negative Confucian political commentary, a natural aberration anticipating the political aberration of her ascent to the apex of power. In any event, it is interesting that the Bai Tieyu uprising, a local movement in Shaanxi, should be included in this catalogue of wars and rebellions, set on equal footing with the Tujue Turks, the Xiongnu, the Khitans and the Tibetans.

Reconstructing the Bai Tieyu Uprising

Only a single specific date, 28 May 683, when Cheng Wuting and Wang Fangyi captured Bai Tieyu and quelled the uprising, is given in the aforementioned sources. From this date, we can work backward to establish a rough time frame. According to the *Chaoye qianzai*, Bai Tieyu waited «several years» between the date he buried the bronze Buddha and the time he gathered people of the region to excavate. Later another «year or two» passed with the bronze Buddha as the hub of the movement, before Bai Tieyu rebelled. In the *Zizhi tongjian* version, several years elapsed between the time the Buddha was initially swathed in cloth and the eventual outbreak of the rebellion.

Following this rough time frame, it seems reasonable to surmise that Bai Tieyu initially buried the bronze Buddha statue deep in the mountains at the base of a cypress tree at some juncture between 677 and 679.

As the finder of the statue, Bai Tieyu became its voice, a human incarnation who interpreted its silence. Though not an orthodox member of the Buddhist clergy, he drew extensively on Buddhist tradition. As a local in touch with the sentiments and beliefs of the common folk, Bai Tieyu tapped the pulse of popular Buddhism. The traditions involved in the initial faith healing phase of the movement include: discovery of Buddha light, divination, a vegetarian feast, collective acts of charity, public excavation, healing through sight

disturbances mentioned in Wanzhou and Zhongzhou, two prefectures along the Yangzi. For more detailed accounts of these events, see Pan Yihong (1997) and Twitchett (1979). The best primary source is the *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 202-7.

of the Buddha and swathing the Buddha in silk or gauze. The populist aspect is apparent in this list of ceremonies. There are no canonical texts, no *sūtras*, and no barriers to participation. All of these traditions are visual, oral, and inclusive.

According to legend, under Indian King Aśoka, fragments of the Buddha's body were stored in 84,000 pagodas all over India. Over time, these relics came to be dispersed among Buddhist holy sites all over Central Asia, Southeast Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Buddha light, possessing a numinous presence capable of instilling even an unbeliever with a sense of reverence for the Buddha's power, sometimes indicated the presence of such a relic, *śarīra* (*sheli* 舍利). For instance, Emperor Ming of Wei 魏明帝 (r. 227-240) was once dissuaded from destroying a Buddhist diagram (*fo tu* 佛圖) when foreign Buddhist monks placed *śarīra* in a golden alms-bowl, causing emissions of five colored light.¹⁸ In the *Zan Amituofo jie* 讚阿彌陀佛偈 («Hymn Praising Amitābha»), by Tan Luan 曇鸞 (476-542) it is recorded: «Buddha light is the foremost brilliant and luminous [佛光照耀最第一]» (T 47 no. 1978: 421). Discovery of Buddhist light and of the relic from which it emanated sometimes occasioned the construction of a temple or pagoda. Indeed, the famous Jihu monk Liu Sahe identified several Buddhist temples by the presence of just such light.¹⁹

In China, divination dates back to the Shang dynasty or earlier, and is connected with traditions of scapulimancy, achillomancy and plastronomy rather than Buddhist ritual. In orthodox Buddhism, there is a history of prohibitions against divination. For instance, in the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 («Brahma Net Sūtra»; T 24 no. 1484: 1007), in the thirty-third of the 48 secondary Buddhist precepts, the Buddha listed divination as an improper activity, lumping it together with fortune-telling and banditry. The very fact that the Buddhist clergy felt the need to issue such prohibitions can serve as evidence of the existence of divination in the practice of Buddhism. These restrictions came from orthodox state Buddhism rather than the more freewheeling and eclectic popular faith. It is possible that this folk belief in prognostication lent Bai Tiyu credibility. Folk traditions had long intermingled with popular Buddhism and Daoism.

The term *zhai* 齋 encompasses both a Buddhist vegetarian feast and the period of fasting that preceded it.²⁰ By sponsoring the maigre feast, Bai Tiyu established himself as the leader of a collective event that cohered the local Buddhist community.

¹⁸ *Wei shu* 114.3029, quoted in Huang (1998: 488-91).

¹⁹ *Liang shu* 54.791; *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 («Biographies of Eminent Monks»), by Huijiao 慧皎, *juan* 13 (T 50 no. 2059: 409-10).

²⁰ Ch'en (1964: 290-92) lists vegetarian feasts along with *sūtra* recitation and charitable donations among collective activities that served to unite the Buddhist community.

Excavation is also a participatory collective activity, with the possibility of communal discovery. Inspired by faith, the people excavated a site from which the light had purportedly issued only to find nothing. If the statue were revealed too easily or too quickly, the elements of mystery, miracle and drama would be lost. As finder and banquet host, Bai Tieyu arrogated the spiritual authority to question the sincerity of their devotion. He then offered them a means to display their «absolute sincerity»: charitable donations. Like most effective cult leaders, Bai Tieyu possessed rhetorical ability and charisma. He was talented in manipulating emotions, bringing followers on a spiritual journey from hope to the brink of despair, where he offered them a route to prove their sincerity and devotion. The money poured in. This kind of transaction, the faithful giving up their material wealth to win merit and confirm their spiritual dedication, was a shared feature of institutional and popular Buddhism (Gernet 1995: esp. ch. 7, 8).

The spectacle, the theatre, of the movement, added to its aura of mysticism. In the course of daily drudgery for the Jihu population in Shaanxi, this was a suspension of the mundane: inspirational collective gatherings that featured vegetarian feasts and a Sainly Buddha that rose from the ground, a mysterious image festooned in colourful cloth that offered the promise of healing.²¹

The Buddha was again hidden, festooned with multi-coloured gauze. To be able to see, unobstructed, the «Sainly Buddha» beneath, the faithful thronged, donating their money to strip away a layer of cloth.²² Thus, the ex-

²¹ Bai Tieyu's Buddhist rituals share several common denominators with the Pañcavārṣika (*wu zhe hui* 無遮會) held by Wu Zhao in 695 (see *Zizhi tongjian* 205.6498-6499). In both ceremonies, vegetarian feasts were held, bronze Buddhas were raised from the ground, money was donated, and fabrics were used both as ornaments and veils. Max Deeg (1997) in tracing evolution of the Pañcavārṣika in China, shows that the term *wu zhe hui* can be translated roughly as «donations without limits». Dunhuang document P2189 describes Liang Wudi indiscriminately giving away himself, his possessions and vast sums of money to the Buddhist clergy. In return he was able to attain great merit, wisdom and magical power (*ibid.*: 78). Further study on the possible relationship between the ceremonial elements involved in Bai Tieyu's cocoon ritual and those in Wu Zhao's Pañcavārṣika are necessary. The first difference that strikes me is that Bai Tieyu gathered donations, whereas in Wu Zhao's ceremony money was scattered to the people. Second, although Wu Zhao's Buddhas were hidden in a silk palace, they were not individually cocooned in fabric.

²² The only source in which the fabric Bai Tieyu utilized was specifically mentioned is the *Chaoye qianzai*, which indicates the cloth is *ling* 綾, often understood as thin silk or damask. Given the very nature of Bai Tieyu's practice of wrapping the Buddha in «several tens of layers» of fabric to form a cocoon of sorts, and Liu Sahe's cocoon ritual, some sort of low-grade silk seems to be a strong possibility. There is, however, an intriguing alternative. The Jihu offered as tribute to the imperial court a distinctive cloth, known as «Ji women's cloth» (*nü Ji bu* 女稽布) or «barbarian women's cloth» (*hu nü bu* 胡女布), a more readily available local fabric that Bai Tieyu might have used (Pulleyblank 1994: 506). Based on a passage in the *Zhou shu* (49.896-897) that reads «there are few mulberries and silkworms in their territory and they mostly wear hempen cloth [地少桑蠶多麻布]», Pulleyblank speculates that the Jihu's local fabric was not silk, but a sort of dyed hemp.

cavation was re-enacted time and again as the Buddha statue was buried in swaths of cloth only to be discovered by the faithful. While silk was an important material component in Buddhist attire and ceremony, used in ritual banners, relic caskets, robes, seats, etc., I know of no other Buddhist rite that used silk to bodily wrap and conceal a Buddhist statue. The air of mystery could be preserved in a manner that would not be possible if the statue were simply exhibited uncovered. Constantly dressed and undressed, the statue was not a fixed image. With each symbolic burial and rediscovery faith could be recharged. Once it was revealed in its brazen splendour, the faithful would see its salubrious radiance and feel, as the diggers must have on the first day, that they had actively shown their devotion. Simultaneously, believers accumulated merit by presenting a donation and came to possess a wonderful souvenir, a contact relic of faith, a cloth that had wrapped the Buddha. Rather than a crude exchange of material goods for spiritual blessings, the faithful saw donation of money as a symbolic gesture that demonstrated one's devotion.

Meanwhile, as socio-economic conditions deteriorated and word of the miraculous healing power of the Buddhist statue spread, this cult increased in size, and Bai Tieyu called on an ever-widening circle to «take refuge in the faith». What Confucian sources do not indicate is that these countryfolk, like Bai Tieyu himself, were mostly Jihu. According to the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 («Pearl Grove of the Dharma Garden»; T 53 no. 2122: 516-17), an early Tang Buddhist encyclopaedia completed in 668, Liu Sahe circulated a simple, self-explanatory (*zi jie* 自解) one-chapter *sūtra* written in «barbarian tongue» (*hu yu* 胡語) in the 4th century. Presumably, as the same source identifies Liu Sahe as belonging to the Jihu, the *sūtra* was in a non-Chinese script familiar to the Jihu. «Therefore», the text continues, «in the eight prefectures both left and right of the Yellow River, including Cizhou 磁州, Xizhou 隰州, Lanzhou 嵐州, Shizhou 石州, Danzhou 丹州, Yanzhou 延州, Suizhou 綏州 and Yin-zhou 銀州, there was no place he was not worshipped and revered».²³ The 'Saintly Buddha' was recovered in this belt of former Jihu territory.

Shortly thereafter, in 682 or early 683, the movement evolved dramatically. Bai Tieyu transformed from faith healer to rebel emperor. Due to a series of interrelated causes, Bai Tieyu's movement evolved from one based on miraculous healing and acquisition of money into a popular uprising. First, there is only so much money the Jihu and other natives of greater Suizhou could donate. A continuous stream of generous donations over a two or three year period had probably drained their financial resources.

²³ Translation is Pulleyblank's (1994: 509-10). Due to the preponderance of myths and legends that surround Liu Sahe, dating his life is very difficult. According to Vetch (1981: 138-39) he was born about 343, experienced a great Buddhist awakening during the Ning kang 寧康 era (373-375) of Emperor Xiaowu of the Eastern Jin 東晉孝武帝, and died in 435, shortly after opening an Aśokan reliquary mound along the Yangzi, travelling westward and making a prophecy about Mount Yugu.

Second, a dying ruler, crop failure, border warfare, and the devastating series of natural disasters that struck the Guanzhong 關中 region in 682 fed into a belief that the apocalypse had arrived. In 679, coupled with an empire-wide cattle pestilence, there was a famine in Guanzhong, which includes Suizhou, the prefecture at the epicentre of the Bai Tieyu uprising (*Xin Tang shu* 35.898, 905). In 681, there were local reports of earthquakes, floods and droughts. Tang Emperor Gaozong was ailing. During the Yongchun era (22 September 682 to December 27, 683), ten million rabbits devoured the seedlings and disappeared into thin air in Lanzhou and Shengzhou 勝州 prefectures (*Xin Tang shu* 35.922). In Guanzhong, a plague of locusts descended upon the crops; grain prices skyrocketed. As famine swept over western China, «the dead pillowed on each other in the streets of the two capitals [兩京間死者相枕於路]», and people resorted to cannibalism.²⁴ Under such economic duress, the widespread sense that order had broken down and chaos had descended naturally engendered apocalyptic prophecies. Bai Tieyu, availing himself of these dismal socio-economic conditions, creatively utilized the Buddhist idea of apocalypse and renewal, of «the latter days of Buddhist law» (*mo fa* 末法) to his advantage.

Third, his act of dressing and undressing the Buddha was getting tired. Everyone in the region probably had seen it. Continuing the faith healing gig offered decreasing fiscal benefits and, in the face of the disasters of 682, risked losing the momentum of the movement, undermining the loyalty and faith of his adherents. Fourth, he had established a financial and territorial base. Fifth, Bai Tieyu's movement, a mere three hundred kilometres from the capital, seems to have continued for several years unhindered by the Tang court, local government or military. Given the burgeoning momentum of the movement, a perceived lack of response by local and central administration naturally may have led him to feel a sense of invulnerability, a preternatural confidence. Sixth, he was carrying on a militant Jihu tradition of revolt. Seventh, and perhaps most importantly, it is possible that he drew on the power of the Jihu folk aura surrounding Buddhist monk Liu Sahe.

By 683, the focus of his ambition had shifted from wealth to power. Suizhou, the location of the uprising, was made up of five counties.²⁵ From Chengping, he moved on Suide and Dabin. At this juncture, the Tang court finally took notice. By imperial proclamation, general Cheng Wuting and commander-in-chief of Xiazhou prefecture Wang Fangyi led a punitive campaign

²⁴ For this catalogue of misfortunes, see *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6410 and *Tongdian* 通典 7.149, quoted in Twitchett (1979: 278).

²⁵ The *Taiping guangji* makes neighbouring Yanzhou the site of the rebellion. Yanzhou also had a Jihu population. However, all other sources indicate that Suizhou was the site of the uprising, and several identify Chengping, Dabin and Suide, all counties within Suizhou prefecture that were occupied or attacked by Bai Tieyu.

against Bai Tieyu and his followers. Bai Tieyu was captured – decapitated in the *Chaoye qianzai* account – and the uprising was quelled.

Jihu Ethnicity and the Second Coming of Folk Hero Liu Sahe

To apprehend the nature of Bai Tieyu's uprising, it is also important to look at the history of ethnic relations between the Jihu and the center. Because of the strong presence of Central Asian bloodlines during the Period of Disunity (220-589 AD), the Sui and the Tang, it is not accurate to simply equate the political center with the Han Chinese. Bai Tieyu was a member of a small, internally pacified barbarian tribe known as the Jihu, the Buluoji, or the Shanhu 山胡. During the Tang, the Jihu tribes were settled both west of the northward-stretching Yellow River in Shaanxi and across the river in Shanxi. As suggested in the *Zhou shu* 周書 (49.896), there are two major theories on the origins of the Jihu. First, that they descended from a southern branch of the Xiongnu 匈奴; second, that they descended from the Rong 戎 and Di 狄 barbarians who settled the north and northwest frontiers during the Spring and Autumn period. While most scholars (Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Tang Changru 唐長孺, Ma Changshou 馬長壽, Zhou Weizhou 周偉洲) have accepted the first, Edwin Pulleyblank, referring to the Jihu as «indigenous», and Lin Gan 林幹, calling the Jihu an «autochthonous, self-formed nationality», have followed the second (Pulleyblank 1994: 510).

Both a study of geographical sources referring to the Jihu and a survey of the regions that paid tribute in «barbarian women's cloth» reveal a distribution of population of Jihu overlapping and strikingly close to the eight prefectures in modern-day Shaanxi and Shanxi where, according to Daoxuan's 道宣 (596-667) *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 («Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks»; T 50 no. 2060: 643), Liu Sahe's image was painted and he was worshipped everywhere.²⁶ This indicates that the Jihu collectively shared cultural and religious elements.

Throughout the sixth century, particularly during the Northern Qi 北齊 and the Northern Zhou 北周, the Jihu rebelled against central authority. One rebel leader, Bai Yujiutong 白郁久同, shared a common surname with Bai Tieyu. The surname Bai, literally «white», may hold further significance. Both the *Yuanhe junxian zhi* 元和郡縣志 by Li Jifu 李吉甫 from the ninth century and the *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 by Yue Shi 樂史 from the Northern Song, cite a passage from the lost *Sui tu jing* 隋圖經 («Map's Companion Classic») which records that Danzhou, one of the prefectures in Jihu territory,

²⁶ See Pulleyblank (1994: 504-7). The geographical sources he cites include *Sui shu* 隋書 29.817, 33.987, 66.1555; *Yuanhe junxian zhi* 3.19b,20b; *Taiping huanyu ji* 35 and 36; *Tang liudian* 唐六典 3; and *Tongdian* 6. The same sections of the *Yuanhe junxian zhi* are used in determining the parameters of the distribution of Jihu hempen cloth.

was popularly known as «White house» (*bai shi* 白室), a corruption, according to the texts, of «White Di» (*bai Di* 白狄) (*ibid.*: 504). Pulleyblank (*ibid.*: 524-25) uses this as evidence of the indigenous Rong-Di origin of the Jihu. Furthermore, he speculates that if the Jihu language belonged to the Sino-Tibetan group, the polysyllabic form of 'Bai' might be 'Buluoji', another collective name for the Jihu. For the purposes of this paper, it indicates the original ethnic import of the name Bai, and the power that might still accrue to the name. Members of the Bai clan would naturally assume positions of leadership and power among fellow Jihu.

The majority of the Jihu leaders, however, came from the Liu clan. Liu Yuanhai 劉元海 (Liu Yuan 劉淵), founder of the Zhao 趙 kingdom (304-329), is listed in the *Zhou shu* as one of the possible ethnic progenitors of the Jihu. Buddhist monk Liu Sahe will be discussed shortly. In 525, Liu Lisheng 劉彞升 rebelled against Northern Wei 北魏 authority and took an imperial title. In 578, Liu Shouluogan 劉受羅干 rebelled during the anti-Buddhist persecutions of the Northern Zhou.²⁷ In the Danzhou region, during the chaos at the end of the Sui, Liu Bulu 劉步祿 was known as a «Hu bandit».²⁸ In 621, Liu Xiancheng 劉亼成 led an uprising in Fuzhou 鄜州 that was crushed by Crown prince Li Jiancheng 李建成 of the newly-founded Tang, who butchered 6000 tribesmen after they had surrendered, taking particular pains to exterminate the fierce Jihu warriors.²⁹ The Liu clan and, to a lesser extent, the Bai clan, had traditions of military uprisings against the centre. These clans were bound by ethnicity, religious beliefs and marriage alliances.

In 624, as part of an effort to gloss over the massacre of Jihu by the newly established Tang rulers, one county in Suizhou prefecture was designated Dabin 大斌, «Grand Elegance», under the slogan «As the Jihu are embraced and transformed, civil and military are blended» – a perfect example of the integration of conquest, acculturation and the right to assign names. The *bin* 斌 character in Dabin conjoins the two characters for civil and martial. After 625, the Jihu had not only ceased to be a major threat, they apparently were not even a nuisance. For more than half a century, as far as I know, none of the major historical annals record a single mention of the Jihu. Yet this group had neither disappeared nor been wholly assimilated.

While Confucian histories treat the Jihu as a half-tamed tribe whose sporadic incursions required military response, Buddhist sources provide a very different perspective. Sources compiled by the great Buddhist chronicler Daoxuan reveal that during the mid-seventh century the Jihu were still an ac-

²⁷ *Zhou shu* 49.896-899, quoted in Pulleyblank (1994: 502-3). The timing of the Jihu uprisings coincided with the anti-Buddhist campaigns of Emperor Wu of Zhou. Possibly these campaigns threatened the religious customs of the Jihu and roused their ire.

²⁸ *Yuanhe junxian zhi* 3.19b, quoted in Pulleyblank (1994: 503).

²⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 64.2414-2415.

tive ethnic and religious group in the northern Shaanxi and on the opposite bank of the Yellow River in Shanxi, galvanized by their worship of fellow Jihu, Buddhist Teacher Liu Sahe.

Lore swirls around Liu Sahe, often known by his Buddhist name Huida 慧達. Wu Hung (1996: 32-34), noting that Liu Sahe is a complex figure whose importance in Buddhist legend and art must be understood in terms of a «metamorphic image» rather than a fixed historical persona, has identified two distinctive regional traditions that developed. A southern tradition, stemming from Huijiao's mid-6th century *Gaoseng zhuan*, features Liu Sahe as a dowsing rod for buried Buddhist images and relics who discovered Buddhist relics and stupas at several sites in the Yangzi River valley.

In the northern tradition, as Wu Hung (*ibid.*: 35) puts it, Liu Sahe is more a Buddhist prophet than an 'archaeologist'. In perhaps the most celebrated incident in Liu Sahe's life, he prophesized the appearance of a miraculous effigy at Mount Yugu 御谷山 in modern-day Gansu, that, if it emerged intact, might augur prosperity and peace. Nearly a century later, in the early 6th century, the effigy appeared, revealed to a deer hunter. Decades later, a radiant head was found that fit perfectly. During the Buddhist persecutions in the late Northern Zhou, the head fell off again.³⁰ This episode is featured prominently in Buddhist art, most notably, perhaps, in Cave 72 at Dunhuang (Vetch 1984; Whitfield 1989).

Another recurring story is that of the great transformation Liu Sahe underwent after, as an illiterate, drunken hunter with no religious faith, he pursued a deer into a cave and lapsed into a trance. According to legend, he was led through Buddhist hells by a holy man or merciful Guanyin.³¹ The accumulation of these miraculous tales served to create a cult around Liu Sahe that clearly was still active in the Tang (Vetch 1981; Shi Weixiang 1983; Whitfield 1989; Wu Hung 1996; Huang 1998).

Liu Sahe's fame spread well beyond the Jihu homeland and many Chinese Buddhists had great reverence for the Buddhist miracles he performed. For the purposes of this essay, however, the most important stories that surround Liu Sahe are those that identify him as a Jihu or involve his apotheosis by the Jihu. The greatest volume of such information can be found in *Fayuan zhulin* (T 53 no. 2122: 516-17), where we learn the following:

1. at Liu Sahe's birthplace in Cizhou, there is an annual festival held on the 8th day of the fourth month;

³⁰ *Fayuan zhulin* 31 (T 53 no. 2122: 516-17). A translation of part of this passage appears in Whitfield (1989: 68-69). Wu Hung (1996: 35-36) translates a similar passage from Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 25 (T 50 no. 2060: 643).

³¹ *Gaoseng zhuan* 13 (T 50 no. 2059: 409-10); *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 25 (T 50 no. 2060: 643); *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* (T 52 no. 2106: 404), all quoted in Pulleyblank (1994: 508-10).

2. upon being restored after his trance in the cave, and hearing Avalokiteśvara's (Guanyin) lectures, he returned to convert fellow Jihu to Buddhism;
3. a new version of his name is given, Suhe 蘇何 instead of Sahe, the Jihu word for cocoon;
4. he retreated nightly into a cocoon;
5. in the eight prefectures on either side of the Yellow River (Shizhou, Xizhou, Cizhou, Danzhou, Yanzhou, Suizhou, Yinzhou and Lanzhou) people constructed earthen pagodas with flagpoles of cypress to which they bound silkworm cocoons;
6. some believed he was the reincarnation of Guanyin;
7. he circulated a one-chapter *sūtra* in the Jihu language;
8. his statue at Cizhou was carried around to different villages in the region. When the statue wore a happy expression, it was light and easily portable. Wherever it went it would bring people good fortune and good health. If, however, the statue wore an angry expression, it was heavy and virtually immobile, requiring ten men to move it. When it was carried to a village, calamities befell the residents (Pulleyblank 1994: 509-10).

Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 25 (T 50 no. 2060: 643-44) provides the following additional information on Liu Sahe's connection to the Jihu homeland:

1. Liu Sahe's home temple was situated at his birthplace in Cizhou [just across the Yellow River to the southeast of Suizhou];
2. the temple housed an impressive figure of Liu Sahe that was honoured daily;
3. in the eight prefectures he was worshipped everywhere;
4. he was known as 'Liu the Buddhist Master', *Liu shi fo* 劉師佛 (*ibid.*: 508).

There is some information in other sources as well. In the Buddhist encyclopaedia, *Ji Shenzhou Sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 3, 434 («Collected Records of Spiritual Response of the Three Jewels of China»; T 52 no. 2106: 404), which overlaps significantly with the contemporary *Fayuan zhulin*, it is recorded that:

1. the common folk looked up to him, respecting him like the sun and moon;
2. he would lecture on Buddhism from his elevated pagoda by day, and by night enter his cocoon and go into a cataleptic state. When he emerged the following morning, he would be rather woozy;
3. there were Buddhist halls erected to him in every village;

4. a Buddhist image, associated with Liu Sahe, was called 'Foreign Buddhist Master', *Hu shi fo* 胡師佛;³²
5. he circulated his one chapter *sūtra* among the common folk, written purely in barbarian tongue. He spent two years wandering around his home territory explaining the text;
6. as a result, among the people on both sides of the Yellow River, there were none who did not revere him.

The *Taiping huanyu ji* (35.13) adds another item: Liu Sahe sat in meditation at the Keye Monastery 可野寺 in Danzhou, at the heart of Jihu territory. In all these sources it is apparent that within northern Shaanxi and eastern Shanxi, the Jihu homeland, people still revered Liu Sahe in the early Tang and performed distinctive local rites in his honour. As Pulleyblank (1994: 508) remarks, «it is evident that Liu Sahe must have been a local hero to this whole ethnic community in the early Tang».

Collectively, these sources reveal that the Jihu practiced a distinctive form of Buddhism, rife with colourful local and ethnic features such as the earthen pagodas, the cypress flagpoles and silkworm cocoons tied in front of the pagoda to mark Liu Sahe's chamber of transformation. Thus, the Buddhist cult of death and revival which began with Liu Sahe's near death epiphany in the fourth century, was active in the early Tang. Bai Tieyu was not merely a charlatan. His use of colourful fabric to wrap the Buddha, at first sight seemingly flamboyant popular ceremony, must be seen in this wider ethnic and religious context: his rites were neither ornamental nor serendipitous. Instead, these rites were a vital part of the Jihu ethno-religious tradition, and helped Bai Tieyu successfully gather a large flock of believers.

Noting that the *Fayuan zhulin* included both a story that Liu Sahe's name comes from the Jihu word for cocoon and a legend that each night Liu Sahe encased himself in a cocoon, Pulleyblank (*ibid.*: 510) reasonably suggests that the «nightly retreat» was an allusion to «the story of his rebirth from the dead». Essentially, it is a retelling of Liu Sahe's death and Buddhist awakening: he enters an unbelieving caterpillar and emerges an enlightened Buddhist silk moth.

A cocoon is a chamber of transformation, of rebirth. The physical body that wraps itself within a cocoon emerges in a totally different state. His story is the quintessence of Buddhist transformation: a wealthy barbarian and hunter, a carnivorous epicure, he undergoes an epiphany, emerging an enlightened and devout Buddhist monk. The trance and cave are metaphorical cocoons from which Liu Sahe awakens having undergone a Buddhist transformation. As has been mentioned, Daoxuan has noted that Liu Sahe was still widely revered by the Jihu in the mid-7th century. My hypothesis is that the

³² Following Shi Weixiang, Wu Hong (1996: 37) remarks that this should probably be translated «The Foreign Master's Buddha», arguing that the statue did not represent Liu Sahe himself.

statue that Bai Tieyu wrapped in a literal cocoon of «several tens of layers» of cloth was an image of Liu Sahe – the Jihu’s Buddhist Master Liu. Each daily unravelling represented Liu Sahe’s emergence from the cocoon, his spiritual awakening to Buddhist truth. Replayed again and again, the dramatic retelling of the transformation of this legendary folk hero not only prompted a religious revival, but re-affirmed ethnic consciousness and unity among the Jihu. Personal participation in unwrapping the cocoon could only enhance their ardour.

Bai Tieyu also drew upon the career of Liu Sahe for other elements in his movement. The statue unearthed by Bai Tieyu’s followers, the «Saintly Buddha», like the legendary Liu Sahe statue from Cizhou that was transported throughout the eight prefectures inhabited by Jihu, was reputed to have the power to heal. The cypress tree was also a common presence. Bai Tieyu’s choice of the cypress, both a symbol of imperial power and the medium of the pillars supporting Liu Sahe’s distinctive earthen temples, as the site to plant the statue was not coincidental.

Liu Sahe’s legends contain several aspects relevant to understanding Bai Tieyu’s uprising. Liu Sahe emerges from his Buddhist transformation enlightened and changed, possessing prophetic powers. Furthermore, according to legend, like a dowsing rod his Buddhist faith allowed him to locate underground Buddhist relics and statues, bringing the hidden to light. This idea of piety bringing the hidden to light is imbedded deeply in his legend. His prophecies and ability to bring these statues and relics to light made Liu Sahe into a deity of sorts, not just to the Jihu, but to a wider Buddhist community. The enduring nature of the Liu Sahe legends can, to some extent, explain the ethnic and religious fervour generated by Bai Tieyu’s statue. It was the virtue of the finder that brought forth statues and relics; the statues, in turn, became commemorative monuments attesting to his reverent spirit. Thus, finder and statue are forever linked.

Bai Tieyu and Liu Sahe shared the Jihu ethnic heritage. Both came from families that had produced powerful leaders who had rebelled against the centre. In the early 680s, venerable tribal elders who still recalled the callous butchering of the Jihu in the early 620s stirred the blood of young warriors.

As Bai Tieyu and his statue became the hub of an ethno-political and religious movement, he became entrenched in the Jihu ancestral homeland, fortified by the faith of his ethnic brethren. As recorded in *Zhang Yangong ji* and in the biography of Wang Fangyi in *Xin Tang shu*, Tang imperial soldiers resorted to incendiary tactics and hurling stones to dislodge Bai Tieyu from his local base of power. These Tang troops were not protecting greater Suizhou from rebels or raiders – rather, like Li Jiancheng sixty years earlier, they were bent on violently extricating a recalcitrant minority, the Jihu.

Apocalypse by Moonlight

Between the third century and the seventh century, influenced by Daoist ideas, Chinese Buddhism developed messianic and apocalyptic dimensions lacking in native Indian Buddhist tradition. A distinctly Chinese Daoist tradition provided previously nebulous Buddhist messianic ideas with an apocalyptic battle, a day of reckoning and the creation of an ideal world. Over the centuries, a Daoist-Buddhist hybrid tradition of millenarianism developed. The idea that with the advent of «the end of law», the final of the three Buddhist epochs, a limited number of sincere believers might be saved, brought by future Buddha Maitreya to join him in his utopian sanctuary, the Tuṣita Citadel (*dou shuai tian* 兜率天), became prominent. By the early Tang, this messianic tradition had matured. Maitreya transformed from a «benign teacher» situated in the initial period of «True Law» to a «powerful messiah who rescued good people from the final holocaust and condemned sinners» (Zürcher 1982: 1-22; Forte 1988: 31). Other Buddhist prophets and saviours, such as Yueguang (月光; Skt Candraprabha, «Lunar Radiance»), also emerged. Naturally, the scriptural tradition had a popular counterpart. Bai Tieyu drew on these folk traditions to give religious and political weight to his movement.

If it is true that Bai Tieyu assumed the title of Yueguang Wang, then it means that he drew upon the tradition of Yueguang. This has already been pointed out by other scholars (Guisso 1978: 35, 221 nn. 76-77; Forte 1988: 31 n. 43). Unfortunately, it is far from being certain.³³ What is certain is that in 683, as his movement gained momentum, Bai Tieyu assumed the title Guangming sheng huangdi 光明聖皇帝 («Luminous Sainly August Emperor»)³⁴ It is possible that the term *guangming*, refers to the 'Buddha light' emanating from the image hidden by Bai Tieyu. The term *sheng* (Skt *ārya*) in Bai Tieyu's title often is also used as a term for a Buddha.³⁵ Through these titles, Bai Tieyu may have sought to strengthen his identification with the bronze Buddha statue while grounding his newly acquired authority in a tradition of Buddhist kingship.

³³ Antonino Forte (personal communication on June 5, 2005) has clearly articulated the nature of this uncertainty: «The reason we cannot be sure of this consists in the fact that the only evidence we have [that Bai Tieyu assumed the title Yueguang wang] was in the edition of the *Chaoye qianzai* used by Sima Guang. The present edition [of the *Chaoye qianzai*] gives the title of Bai Tieyu as Guang Wang 光王. This was also the title that appeared in the edition used by the compilers of the *Taiping guangji*. However, Sima Guang states that this [the *Chaoye qianzai* text] was an error and that he preferred to rely on the *Veritable Records*». Forte (1988: 31, n. 43) defines Bai Tieyu's assumption of the title Yueguang as «probable».

³⁴ *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6414.

³⁵ In explicating the importance of the concept *sheng* to Buddhist kingship, Gu Zhengmei (2000: 291) notes that Wu Zhao's adoption of the title 'Saintly Mother, Divine and August' 聖母神皇 in 688 intentionally drew on the Buddhist tradition of *cakravartin*, the 'universal wheel-turning monarch'.

Zürcher enumerates a series of *sūtras* in which Candraprabha became linked to China and, progressively, to the developing Daoist-Buddhist eschatological tradition. In the *Yueguang tongzi jing* 月光童子經 («*Sūtra* of the Moonlight Child»); translated by Dharmarakṣa, late 3rd century; T 14 no. 534: 815), the Yueguang tongzi was a filial son who tried to persuade his father that it would be most unkind to roast the Buddha in a firepit. When the Buddha arrived, the chastened father realized the error of his ways, and converted (Zürcher 1982: 22-23). As a Daoist-Buddhist tradition matured in later versions, the legend developed apocalyptic and prophetic dimensions. In the fifth century, the *Fa miejin jing* 法滅盡經 («*Sūtra* of the Annihilation of the Law»); T 12 no. 396: 1118) attacked corrupt clergy within the Buddhist church, depicting Lunar Radiance as a saviour who might temporarily revive the «True Law» during this era of moral decline (*ibid.*: 27). Like a candle just before its extinction, so the True Law was to flare brilliantly during Lunar Radiance's 52 years reign, an 'eleventh hour' revival of the Buddhist faith. Subsequently, the letters of scriptures disappear and the robes of Buddhist clergy turn white, symbolizing a return to lay status. In the *Shenri jing* 申日經 («Lunar (*Chandra*) *Sūtra* »); translated by Guṇabhadra, 5th century; T 14 no. 535: 817; Zürcher 1982: 24), it was prophesied that a «Child of Lunar Radiance» would be reborn in China (*Qin guo* 秦國) as a «saintly ruler» to convert the many barbarians. In the *Shouluo biqu jing* 首羅比丘經 («The *Sūtra* of Bhikṣu Shouluo»); early 6th century; T 85 no. 2873: 1356-58; Zürcher 1982: 37-39), Lunar Radiance lived in a cave on Penglai, an island straight from Daoist mythology, with 3000 saints. He instructed the king of Junziguo 君子國 («Land of Gentlemen [China]») and his entourage of ministers, who had made a pilgrimage to seek his wisdom, what Buddhist works needed to be performed in order for them to be saved when the apocalypse arrived.³⁶ The late 6th century evolution of the *Yueguang tongzi jing*, the *Dehu zhangzhe jing* 德護長者經 («*Srīgupta Sūtra* »); T 15 no. 545: 849) by Narendrayāśas, was «a piece of political propaganda on behalf of Sui emperor Wen», in which after Lunar Radiance converted his father, the Buddha prophesied that he would become a powerful ruler of China who would make Buddhism flourish (Zürcher 1982: 26).

Proof that Lunar Radiance played a role in Buddhism contemporary to Bai Tieyu can be found in the *Bao yu jing* 寶雨經 («Precious Rain *Sūtra*»; translation by Dharmaruci in 693). This scripture contains an interpolation that features a *devaputra* (*tian zi* 天子), not coincidentally the same characters used to indicate the Son of Heaven, named Lunar Radiance riding a five-coloured cloud around the Buddha. The Buddha praised Lunar Radiance's luminosity, saying that it was due to his veneration of countless Buddhas through ornaments, clothing, food, drinks, etc. When the Law is about to fade

³⁶ Zürcher (1982: 34, n. 63) notes that there are several Dunhuang documents that have more complete text of the *Shouluo biqu jing* than the Chinese Buddhist Canon (Taishō Ed.).

away, the Buddha continued, Lunar Radiance would be reincarnated as a female sovereign. Eventually, she would go to the Tuṣita Citadel to serve Maitreya.³⁷ The original *sūtra* was manipulated and altered in a conscious effort to use the Lunar Radiance myth to support Wu Zhao's sovereignty. That Buddhist propagandists chose Lunar Radiance rather than Maitreya as her textual counterpart shows that he was still an influential Buddhist figure in the late 7th century.

Unfortunately, we cannot be certain at the present stage that the title Bai Tiyu attributed to himself was precisely Yueguang Wang. Even if we were certain, in understanding the eventual role of Lunar Radiance in Bai Tiyu's uprising, one must understand that the respective historical contexts in 683 and 693 were quite different. For the Tang in 683, a dynasty that had been established for more than half a century, both orthodox clergy and state administration found such Buddhist cults, which foretold the end of the world and the establishment of a new order, to be both subversive and dangerous. For Wu Zhao, however, Lunar Radiance might provide prophetic validation for her sovereignty and clear evidence of her Buddhist devotion, important political propaganda and ideological support for her nascent Zhou dynasty.

Zürcher (1982: 44-45) concludes that «unlike Maitreya, Prince Moonlight was unable to inspire rebellions», noting that with Lunar Radiance we are merely «dealing with a very unorthodox and potentially subversive kind of millenarian faith limited to a small group of fanatical Adventists, who by fasting, repentance and prayer, prepared themselves for the coming of the Lord». This view does not take into account the evolving nature of the Daoist-Buddhist eschatology that he takes such pains to explicate. I would like to suggest that the cult of Lunar Radiance was building in momentum and importance during the period this eschatological tradition developed, progressing through four major phases.

Initially, *sūtras* like the *Yueguang tongzi jing* in the late 3rd century merely intertwined filial piety and religious piety, as the good son Lunar Radiance attempted to rectify the conduct of an errant father. Such a meshing helped Buddhism adapt to Chinese traditions. Second, in the 4th and 5th centuries, Lunar Radiance was bodily transported to China, as seen in the *Yueguang tongzi zan* 月光童子讚 («Panegyric of the Child of Lunar Radiance», mid-4th century) where it is written «His [Lunar Radiance's] beautiful bodily form flowered in India and his fame was propagated in the Red District [China; *chi xian xiang* 赤縣鄉]». Third, in the fifth and sixth centuries, Lunar

³⁷ *Bao yu jing*, interpolated version from 693 (T 16 no. 660: 284); see Forte (1976: 130-32) and Zürcher (1982: 26-28).

³⁸ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 («An Expansion of the 'Collection for Glorifying and Elucidating [Buddhism]'») 15 (T 52 no. 2103: 197), quoted in Zürcher (1982: 24). Though the *Guang hongming ji* is a 7th century text compiled by Daoxuan, Zürcher points out that this poem, the first allusion to Yueguang's connection to China, was written by «famous scholar-monk and *xuanxue* 玄學 specialist Zhi Dun 支遁 (314-366)» back in the 4th century.

Radiance began to be associated with the apocalypse and salvation. This trend can be seen in the *Fa miejin jing* and the *Shuoluo biqiu jing*. It is at this stage that Lunar Radiance becomes a «temporary saviour», a flash of true Buddhist light on the cusp of the apocalypse. Finally, in the sixth and seventh centuries, as seen in Narendrayāśas' translation and the interpolated *Bao yu jing* of 693, the cult of Lunar Radiance became politically and religiously mainstreamed.

Thus, in the respective cases of Sui Wendi and Wu Zhao the legends of Lunar Radiance were crafted to become part of the rhetoric used to legitimize the sovereignty and testify to the Buddhist faith of a ruler attempting to establish a new dynasty. Neither ruler, needless to say, sought to situate their hard-won newfound authority on the brink of the apocalypse. In both texts it is prophesied that Lunar Radiance would be reborn as a strong earthly ruler, in the case of Sui Wendi «a powerful ruler named Daxing 大行» and in Wu Zhao's instance a compassionate, mighty female monarch presiding over an era of peace and prosperity. Bai Tieyu's rebellion occurred during this fourth and final phase. If he appropriated the title Prince of Lunar Radiance, he understood it in the same vein as those two rulers: Lunar Radiance was no longer a temporary saviour, but one capable of leading the chosen through the apocalypse to a new utopia.

Even in orthodox Buddhism, the timing of the three epochs was a matter of scriptural interpretation and debate among the clergy. In popular Buddhism, sense of time was less than precise. Several years of crop failures or natural disasters could be taken as harbingers of the apocalypse. In a popular uprising like that of Bai Tieyu, time could be customized, compacted to fit the circumstance. Bai Tieyu, as the Prince of Lunar Radiance, could bridge end and new beginning, apocalypse and renewal, leading his followers to a Buddhist paradise.

Several Western scholars have made similar comments on the plastic nature of Buddhist time. Forte (1988: 31) gives a similar sense that there were multiple «reckoning systems» of the three Buddhist epochs that were prone to manipulation, particularly in dire socio-economic circumstances. Guisso (1978: 35, 221 nn. 76-77), in explicating to the importance of the Maitreya cult to Wu Zhao's political legitimation, made pointed reference to the Bai Tieyu uprising, indicating the religious-political authority that might accrue to one who shepherded the faithful on the brink of Buddhist apocalypse:

In 683 the perpetrator of what the court then regarded as a hoax declared himself Kuang-ming sheng Emperor and rose in rebellion, seizing two *hsien* before he was suppressed. Though his title was more closely connected with Amithaba or Candrababha than with Maitreya, his rebellion demonstrated the force of Buddhist legitimation and must have reinforced among the people the belief that the latter period of law was at hand.

That in orthodox scripture Lunar Radiance's reign ended prior to the apocalypse, in the waning years of the «end of Law» epoch, was not an impediment to the faithful.

Within the legend of Lunar Radiance, there is also a tradition of charitable donation. In dire straits, people give with abandon. After all, what good would material wealth be if, at the hour of reckoning, one were stricken down by deluge, pestilence or demons? In a letter from Xi Cuochi 習鑿齒 to Dao'an 道安 from the 4th century, it is written: «Lunar Radiance will appear, and the supernatural alms bowl is to descend!» (Zürcher 1982: 25). Lunar Radiance is the herald of the apocalypse. His appearance offered a final opportunity to accumulate merit and show one's devotion. Without hesitation, people surrendered their cash and possessions. There is also a single example of Lunar Radiance as a healer. In 571, a monk named Zhizao 智瓘 was restored to health by an apparition of the bodhisattva Lunar Radiance (*ibid.*: 22). These examples indicate that some traditions of healing and charitable donation existed in the worship of Lunar Radiance.

As a prophet of apocalypse, Bai Tieyu only needed to point out the shortcomings in orthodox clergy and state administration, the suffering and deterioration of the current age – to run an essentially negative and destructive 'campaign' against the existing order. His timing was perfect: Gaozong was feckless and dying; pressures from incursions of the Tujue Turks and Khitan mounted; a litany of floods, famines, drought, pestilence and plague beset Shaanxi and Shanxi. There was little need to prophesize the apocalypse: the apocalypse had arrived. People from several hundred surrounding villages congregated, as the excavated bronze Buddha became a cynosure, a rallying point for revival of faith in a period of decay. Initially, Bai Tieyu offered the miracle of healing; later, he became the voice of the impending apocalypse, and, after the 'apocalypse' he became the leader of the new order he had prophesied. Like Sui Wendi before him and Wu Zhao a decade later, Bai Tieyu, reinforced by prophecies and popular lore, was seen as the earthly incarnation of Lunar Radiance, a figure chosen to lead the saved to a new utopia. Drawing on mingled millenarianism, ethnic tradition and folk superstition, he needed not concern himself with following chronologies of Buddhist *kalpas* too carefully or strictly adhering to the words of *sūtras*. Instead, he could draw on the spirit of Buddhist-Daoist folk beliefs suited to the particular milieu.

The Jihu uprising of 682-683 was clearly much more complicated than an elaborate hoax or a moneymaking scheme. Bai Tieyu tapped into a regional network of folk Buddhism tied together by common ethnicity, myths and religious customs. The earthen pagodas, the cocoon ritual and the apotheosis of Liu Sahe all were local customs. As the finder of the 'Saintly Buddha' when Jihu fortunes were at a nadir, Bai Tieyu inherited the mantle of power, drawing on longstanding Jihu religious and military traditions. To accumulate merit and pay reverence to the image of folk hero Liu Sahe, Jihu clansmen congre-

gated to the statue discovered by Bai Tieyu. Around 682, socio-economic conditions led people to believe the apocalypse had arrived. Bai Tieyu's identity as Prince Lunar Radiance may well have been tailored to this belief.

The Jihu also had a tradition of rebelling against central authority. Their martial ferocity can be seen in frequent uprisings against the Wei, Qi, Zhou, Sui and Tang. Long dormant in the aftermath of the massacre of 621 at the hands of the Tang, a galvanized Jihu people rallied around their latter-day Liu Sahe and the miraculous image he had discovered. There is every reason to believe that Bai Tieyu had galvanized his local people, the Jihu. Thus, the Tang troops who stormed Suizhou in May 683 used fire and rock to break through his defense works and savagely extirpate Bai Tieyu and his followers, «completely pacifying» them – almost certainly a euphemism for brutal eradication.

It would seem that in this conflict the recalcitrant Jihu lived up to their reputation as fierce warriors. A dozen years after the Bai Tieyu uprising, Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂, following the time-honoured court strategy of 'using the barbarians to control the barbarians' (*yi yi zhi yi* 以夷制夷), urged Wu Zhao to use elite Jihu warriors from Suizhou to help rebuff the Khitan (Pulleyblank 1994: 503). The martial prowess of the Jihu was well known.

In Bai Tieyu, the Jihu saw a religious, political and military leader toward whom they could direct their allegiance. At once, he was an avenging rebel king, an apocalyptic Buddhist demigod, and a latter-day Liu Sahe who might heal and transform. As Lunar Radiance incarnate he could lead the chosen from the decadence and decay of the existing order to a new utopia where he might be the sacred and secular leader. Liu Sahe's death and revival was tailored perfectly to fit this vision of apocalypse and genesis – a miniature version, a personal re-enactment of the Buddhist eschatology where the end of the world engenders a new cycle of True Law. In this sense, Bai Tieyu's dual identities complemented each other and were well-suited to the times.

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