

LUCAS RAMBO BENDER

Discursive Paradigms for Relating the “Three Teachings” in China’s Period of Division

ABSTRACT:

In recent years, scholars have shown that the well-known rubric of the Three Teachings distorts the complex institutional, social, and even conceptual realities of medieval China’s religious landscape. Yet discourse relating, comparing, and contrasting commensurable (proto-) Teachings amenable to prospective translation as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism can be found extensively in documents surviving from the fourth century through the sixth. By tracking this discourse, this essay argues that discussions regarding the interrelationships between these (proto-) Teachings developed according to a dialectical series of shared structural paradigms partially detached from the facts on the ground. Eventually, these paradigms came to exert an influence on institutional, social, and conceptual history.

KEYWORDS:

interreligious debate, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, religion and the state, pluralism, discursive paradigms

INTRODUCTION

The “Three Teachings” (*san jiao* 三教) rubric has long served as a standard way to present medieval Chinese religions in surveys and textbooks.¹ Although such surveys do not agree on all points – such as whether Confucianism is a religion or not – they generally outline a

➤ Lucas Rambo Bender, Dept. E. Asian Languages & Literatures, Yale University

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¹ For recent English-language introductory works at least roughly conforming to this rubric, see e.g. Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religious Traditions* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002); Jeaneane Fowler and Merv Fowler, *Chinese Religions: Beliefs and Practices* (Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2009); and Randall L. Nadeau, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). As pointed out in Kin Cheung et al., “Chinese Religion(s): A Survey of Textbooks,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 2.3 (2016), pp. 315–28, use of the Three Teachings rubric, though traditional in China itself, is actually a rather novel

similar historical trajectory.² According to this narrative, the origins of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism lie in the pre-Qin period, and the consolidation of their doctrines, communities, and institutions occurred in the Han (202 BC–220 AD). Over the course of the Period of Division (220–589) and through the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279), the Teachings’ early, predominantly antagonistic interactions gradually gave way to mutual accommodation and syncretism. As this narrative is summarized by Mou Zhongjian 牟鍾鑑 and Zhang Jianzhu 張踐著 in their *General History of Chinese Religion* 中國宗教通史, “From the third century up until the fourteenth, ... from the perspective of religion, there was a basic constancy: the three-legged tripod of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism had been established and ceaselessly flowed together, with those in power practicing a policy of rewarding all the Three Teachings at once, and Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism serving as the three great faiths of the Chinese people and the three great spiritual pillars of society.”³

Recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to raise questions about this account. T. H. Barrett, for instance, notes in a set of incisive essays exemplifying this tendency that “the very first reference as a group to what we call Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism” occurred in the sixth century, in the context of a massive “reshaping of tradition.”⁴ Before this time, nothing corresponding to the notion of

development in Western introductory materials. For recent Chinese surveys that employ the Three Teachings rubric, see Chen Yanbin 陳延斌 and Guo Jianxin 郭建新, *Sanjiao jiuliu* 三教九流 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1991); Mou Zhongjian 牟鍾鑑 and Zhang Jianzhu 張踐著, *Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi* 中國宗教通史 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000); Zhao Shulian 趙書廉, *Zhongguo ren sixiang zhi yuan: Ru Shi Dao sixiang de douzheng yu ronghe* 中國人思想之源, 儒釋道思想的闢爭與融合 (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1992); Lin Tianxiang 林天祥, Yao Binbin 姚彬彬, and Shen Ting 沈庭, *Zhongguo zongjiao shi* 中國宗教史 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2012); Zhang Rongming 張榮明, *Ru Shi Dao sanjiao lun* 儒釋道三教論 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2018), and Mou Zhongjian 牟鍾鑑, *Ru Dao Fo sanjiao guanxi jianming tongshi* 儒道佛三教關係簡明通史 (Beijing: Renmin, 2018).

² The question of whether Confucianism is or is not a “religion 宗教” has been much debated in China in particular. Several general surveys of Chinese religion do not contain dedicated sections on Confucianism; e.g. Lin Jianfa 林健發 and Ouyang Weijian 歐陽偉健, eds., *Zhongguo zongjiao shi* 中國宗教史 (Hong Kong: Yueya chubanshe, 1985), and Wang Youfan 王友三, ed., *Zhongguo zongjiao shi* 中國宗教史 (Jinan: Qi-Lu shushe, 1991). Others do provide such sections, but include caveats, such as Chen and Guo’s statement that “Confucianism is a religion but it also has characteristics that are not the same as other religions” (*Sanjiao jiuliu*, p. 25) and Mou and Zhang’s contention that “Although Confucianism has a religious character, it is not a religion” (*Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi* 2, p. 1218).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1211. All translations throughout this essay are my own.

⁴ T. H. Barrett, “Opposition to Buddhism and the Han Legacy,” *EC* 45 (2022), pp. 73–85, p. 75. The idea that the “Three Teachings” represent a constructed, retrospective rubric imposed on a past that lacked them is also found in Stephen F. Teiser, “Introduction: The Spirits of Chinese Religion,” in Donald J. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Chinese Religions in Practice* (Princeton:

the Three Teachings existed, whether conceptually, institutionally, or sociologically, since “The use of the words ‘Daoism’ and ‘Buddhism,’ implies a coherence that did not exist in ... the first through the fourth centuries CE.... Nor was there any word that corresponds neatly ... to the Confucians.”⁵ With regard to Daoism in particular, “a Daoist organization equipped with its own distinct canon and monastic strongholds” only came into being in the fifth century, when “the existence of the model of Buddhism as a religious tradition, which encompassed a range of religious texts and practices within one broader conceptual and organizational framework, had enabled various groups and individuals sharing a particular and not uncommon Chinese religious outlook to emulate the new foreign import and achieve a unity of a type that had not existed before.”⁶ Confucianism, Barrett claims, formed even later, again under Buddhist pressure, as Confucians lacked “institutional coherence and self-awareness as a group... until the Tang dynasty.”⁷ Before the consolidation of these concepts, identities, and institutions, therefore, Barrett suggests that it is anachronistic to talk about the Three Teachings, and it might even be fair to say that “there were no distinct religions in China, but only a variety of different cults.”⁸ Indeed, the imposition of our “category of ‘religion’ itself seems questionable,” Barrett writes, as “even a cursory glance at the history of Western

Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 1–39. This volume is one example of an introductory text that rejects the Three Teachings model.

⁵ T. H. Barrett, “Religious Change Under Eastern Han and Its Successors: Some Current Perspectives and Problems,” in Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe, eds., *China’s Early Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2010), pp. 430–48, p. 430. For the surprisingly late development of a concept corresponding to “Buddhism,” see also Antonello Palumbo, “The Rule and the Folk: The Emergence of the Clergy/Laity Divide and the Forms of Anticlerical Discourse in China’s Late Antiquity,” *History of Religions* 61.1 (2021), pp. 30–86.

⁶ Barrett, “Opposition to Buddhism,” p. 77. For scholarship (not all of which agrees) tracing the development of Daoist institutions and Daoist identity, see for instance Kobayashi Masayoshi 小林正美, *Rikuchō Dōkyōshi kenkyū* 六朝道教史研究 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1990); Gil Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); and Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016).

⁷ Barrett, “Opposition to Buddhism,” p. 73. Doubts regarding the historical existence of Confucianism are also voiced, for instance, in Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1997).

⁸ T. H. Barrett, “The Advent of the Buddhist Conception of Religion in China and Its Consequences for the Analysis of Daoism,” in *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 9.2 (2009), pp. 149–65, p. 151. Other scholars have also questioned whether we should talk about Chinese religions as distinct from one another. See, e.g., Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” *TP* 66.1 (1980), pp. 84–147; John Lagerwey, “Questions of Vocabulary or How Shall We Talk about Chinese Religion?” in Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, ed., *Daojiao yu minjian zongjiao yanjiu lunji* 道教與民間宗教研究論集 (Hong Kong: Xuefeng wenhua, 1999), pp. 165–81; Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face:*

conceptions of Chinese religion reveals ... that these have been based on hypotheses determined by a sixteenth century European religious environment much more than on detached and systematic study of the facts.”⁹ In particular, medieval China could not have had a precise analogue of our idea of “religion” because there was no concept of a non-religious “secular” realm that could serve as a contrast; instead, what we call its religions “asserted religious authority in a political fashion, since the distinction that we make is based on a presumed disjunction between the worlds seen and unseen that was not held to have existed by Chinese of the second century – or indeed later.”¹⁰ And even when roughly analogous concepts did develop – again, only late, from the fifth century onward – they still did not precisely correspond with our modern categories of secular and religious, but rather derived from an originally Indian distinction between what we would call *varieties* of religion, namely “worldly religions” (Skt.: *laukika*; Ch.: *shijian* 世間)

Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2008); Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “The Silkworm and the Bodhi Tree: The Lingbao Attempt to Replace Buddhism in China and Our Attempt to Place Lingbao Taoism,” in John Lagerwey, ed., *Religion and Chinese Society, Volume I: Ancient and Medieval China* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 2004), pp. 317–39; idem, *A Fourth-Century Daoist Family: The Zhen’gao or Declarations of the Perfected* (Oakland: U. California P., 2021); and Grégoire Espeset, “The Invention of Buddhō-Taoism: Critical Historiography of a Western Neologism, 1940s–2010s,” *Asiatische Studien / Etudes Asiatiques* 72.4 (2018), pp. 1059–98.

⁹ Barrett, “Religious Change,” p. 430; idem, “Advent,” p. 149. Barrett’s skepticism of the applicability of the concept of religion to premodern China accords with a larger trend to doubt its applicability in general to the premodern, non-Western world. See for instance Daniel Dubuisson, *L’Occident et la religion: mythes, science et idéologie* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1998); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2005); Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2013); and Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York City: Fordham U.P., 2016). For nuanced discussions of this trend and its sometimes problematic application to premodern China, see Robert Ford Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42.4 (2003), pp. 287–319; idem, “‘Religious’ as a Category: A Comparative Case Study,” *Numen* 65 (2018), pp. 333–76; and idem, “Chinese History and Writing about ‘Religion(s)’: Reflections at a Crossroads,” in Marion Steinicke and Volkhard Krech, eds., *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 273–94. Classic theoretical discussions of these issues in English and Chinese, respectively, are Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1998), pp. 275–80, and Chen Xiyuan 陳熙遠, “‘Zongjiao’: Yige Zhongguo jindai wenhua shishang de guanjian ci” “宗教”, 一個中國近代文化史上的關鍵詞, *Xin shixue* 新史學 13.4 (2002), pp. 37–66.

¹⁰ Barrett, “Advent,” p. 150. For the religious character of the Chinese state and the conceptual problems it can pose, see also Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005); John Lagerwey, *China: A Religious State* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2010); Campany, “Chinese History and Writing about ‘Religion(s)’”; and Mario Poceski “Evolving Relationship between the Buddhist Monastic Order and the Imperial States of Medieval China,” *Medieval Worlds* 6 (2017), pp. 40–60.

and a religion that aimed at “transcending the world” (*lokottara*; *chushi* 出世).¹¹

To my mind, these arguments, alongside all the detailed work by many scholars that supports them, represent a significant advance in our understanding of medieval Chinese history and of the surviving texts that evidence it. Yet while Barrett is no doubt right to caution that these texts “must surely be read against [their original] cultural and polemical context” rather than through later conceptual frames, it is also possible to take this sort of originalism too far.¹² Consider, for example, his most recent article advocating skepticism of the Three Teachings rubric, which argues for the late consolidation of Confucianism. Here, the major evidence cited concerns the diversity of the terms used to indicate Buddhism’s opposite – including “the teaching of [hierarchical] titles” (*mingjiao* 名教), “the teaching of ritual” (*lijiao* 禮教), “adherents of Confucius” (*Kongmen* 孔門), and “the Way of ritual” (*lidao* 禮道) – none of which seems to be a perfect equivalent for “Confucianism,” for which Barrett would prefer the vanishingly rare term *rujiao* 儒教.¹³ While this observation does usefully suggest that there was no common name for Confucianism in the Period of Division on a par with *Fojiao* 佛教 or *Fofa* 佛法 for Buddhism, we should also be careful to distinguish vocabulary from implication – a distinction that is especially important when dealing with medieval literary Chinese, which often inclined more towards gestural collocations than towards terminological precision. That is to say, when we find these terms opposed to Buddhism, the partial disparateness of their connotations does not completely erase the shared implication that Buddhism stood opposed to a commensurate alternative. What any given writer had in mind surely was not, as Barrett argues, precisely what we tend to think of under the heading of “Confucianism” – indeed, in some cases, the author may even have been pressed to formulate this commensurate alternative to Buddhism by what has been called the “discourse machine” of medieval rhetoric, which demanded parallel oppositions even when they were a stretch.¹⁴ Yet discursive structures of this sort are not noth-

¹¹ Barrett, “Advent.” For the contemporary conceptual vocabulary used for differentiating religious traditions, see also Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions.”

¹² Barrett, “Advent,” p. 161.

¹³ Barrett, “Opposition to Buddhism,” p. 73. Barrett translates *mingjiao* differently, as the “Teaching of a Good Name,” based on his reconstruction of Tang usage. The proper translation of this term is a difficult question, but I believe my choice basically represents its core significance in the texts to be discussed here.

¹⁴ For the way that medieval rhetoric could create meanings that the author had not truly intended or thought through, see Stephen Owen, “Liu Xie and the Discourse Machine,” in

ing. Eventually even the discourse machine's haphazard constructions may demand to be conceptually filled in, and the resulting concepts may colonize the world of social and institutional history.

In this essay, therefore, my goal is to track discourse throughout the Period of Division that suggests such commensurate oppositions.¹⁵ I will show that comparisons between reified entities susceptible to rough prospective translation as "Buddhism," "Daoism," and "Confucianism" can be found extensively and consistently in texts deriving from the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Even if these "religions" did not exist in these periods as conceptual, institutional, or sociological realities, these texts nonetheless represent what we might call a discursive prehistory of the Three Teachings. This discourse, moreover, maintains throughout this period a distinct autonomy from the facts on the ground, developing in significant part according to an internal logic structured by four widely shared structural paradigms whose sequential emergence can best – and, in at least one case, only – be understood

Zong-qi Cai, ed., *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric* in Wenxin diaolong (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001), pp. 175–92.

¹⁵ Much of this discourse has been ably discussed by other scholars, if often in a disaggregated fashion, under headings as disparate as anti-clericalism, Buddhist apologetic, intra-Daoist polemic, Buddho-Daoist antagonism or syncretism, and state-religion interactions. In Western languages, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3d edn. (Leiden: Brill, 2007 [1959]), pp. 254–320; Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hung-ming chi und die Aufnahme des Buddhismus in China* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976); Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Dao: Debates among Buddhists and Daoists in Medieval China* (rpt. Magdalena: Three Pines Press, 2009 [1995]); Sylvie Hureau, "Réseaux de bouddhistes des Six Dynasties: Défense et propagation du bouddhisme," in Catherine Despeux, ed., *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale* (Paris: Peeters, 2002), pp. 45–65; Friederike Assandri, *Dispute zwischen Daoisten und Buddhisten im Fo Dao luheng des Daoxuan (596–667)* (Gossenberg: Ostasien Verlag, 2015), pp. 1–22; idem, *Inter-religious Debates at the Courts of the Early Tang Dynasty* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); Thomas Jülch, *Bodhisattva der Apologetik: Die Mission des buddhistischen Tang-Mönchs Falin* (München: Utz, 2014); idem, "In Defense of the Saṃgha: The Buddhist Apologetic Mission of the Early Tang Monk Falin," in Thomas Jülch, ed., *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel: Aspects of the Relationship between the Buddhist Saṃgha and the State in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 18–93; and Gil Raz, "Buddhism Challenged, Adopted, and in Disguise: Daoist and Buddhist Interactions in Medieval China," in Mu-chou Poo et al., eds., *Old Society, New Belief: Religious Transformation of China and Rome, ca. 1st–6th Centuries* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2017), pp. 109–28. For English-language accounts of state-religion relations in medieval China, see Tanya Storch, "The Past Explains the Present: State Control over Religious Communities in Medieval China," *The Medieval History Journal* 3.2 (2001), pp. 311–35; Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* (University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania State U.P., 1998); Yu, *State and Religion in China*; Li Gang, "State Religious Policy," in John Lagerwey and Pengzhi Lü, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589)*, pp. 193–275 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Lagerwey, *China: A Religious State*; Antonello Palumbo, "Models of Buddhist Kingship in Early Medieval China," in Yu Xin 余欣, ed., *Zhongguo shidai de liyi, zongjiao yu zhidu* 中古時代的禮儀·宗教與制度 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), pp. 287–338; and Poceski, "Evolving Relationship." The scholarship in East Asian languages is vast.

as a dialectical series of responses to previous paradigms. And insofar as this logic and these paradigms had conceptual, institutional, and sociological effects on the Three Teachings as they consolidated towards the end of the Period of Division, this discourse eventually became a historical actor in its own right.

In brief, the four predominant paradigms I have found for relating the (proto-) Teachings are as follows. The first and historically the earliest is represented by claims that they operate in the same arenas but differ fundamentally in their implications. The second responds to this posited divergence, claiming that multiple Teachings can be tolerated because, despite apparent differences, they derive from the same sources and conduce to the same ends. The third paradigm represents, in turn, a development upon the second: that since the Teachings are in fact convergent in their sources or implications, they or their particulars are not all necessary, as one can comprehend or supersede the others. And the fourth paradigm responds to the third, arguing that no supersession is possible since the Teachings apply to different realms in a relationship that is complementary rather than competing. I label these paradigms, in sequence, the “difference,” “convergence,” “supersession,” and “compartmentalization” models.¹⁶

As indicated, I will suggest that these paradigms represent responses to one another within a progressive debate. Yet none of them disappeared when the next came along; instead, each became part of an expanding repertoire of ideas about how different traditions could relate to each other and to the state. Given the fundamental disagreements that differentiate these models from one another, therefore, the prehistory of Three-Teachings discourse I will trace here complicates both the standard narrative of initially antagonistic religions progressively coming to terms with one another and Barrett’s picture of opposed Teachings coming into being only through contrastive self-definition.

¹⁶ The neatness of this typological-historical survey must, of course, be attended by several caveats. It is, for instance, difficult to delimit the boundaries of these discussions in surviving materials, even if we limit ourselves – as I do here – to primary (or ostensibly primary) texts that make explicit arguments about the relationships between at least two of the (proto-) Three Teachings. Making the task more difficult, many of the Buddhist “apocrypha” (that is, scriptures written in China) and Daoist texts that touch on these questions are difficult to date and attribute. Even those materials I discuss here, moreover, are sometimes complex in ways that militate against reducing them to broad types, recycling points from earlier paradigms alongside paradigms that only appear later. Many documents also offer particular objections to or defenses of one or another Teaching that do not fit easily into any of the categories delineated here. Finally, there seems to have been a disconnect between the arguments discussed in this essay and the practices of local religious communities, which often approached the proto-Three Teachings as flexible repertoires of ideas and practices without treating them as hypostatized entities.

Instead of a clear trajectory towards harmonization or differentiation, the debate carried on through these paradigms produced a variety of competing options for conceptualizing the interrelationships between the Three Teachings. If, therefore, my survey will confirm Robert Ford Campany's observation that hypostatized conceptual entities analogous to our "religions" will tend to emerge wherever, as in medieval China, "there is heightened awareness of religious plurality and difference," it will also suggest that such pluralist contexts undermine the clarity of the concepts they produce and the definitiveness of their interrelations.¹⁷ Debate begets debate, which partly explains why the discussions to be tracked here mirror the continuing disagreements of contemporary scholarly accounts of this period's religious history.

THE DIFFERENCE PARADIGM

In the interest of space, I will begin this survey from the fourth century. Strictly speaking, of course, the discursive prehistory of the Three Teachings extends back both to the pre-Qin period and to India, where we already find the development of paradigms for relating, differentiating, and harmonizing teachers and traditions of thought. There also survives a small number of Chinese texts that either derive or purport to derive from before the fourth century that specifically concern proto-members of the Three Teachings themselves; some of these texts will be discussed at appropriate moments in what follows. It seems, however, that sustained and cumulative reflection on the question of how to relate these particular proto-Teachings to one another *as* anything resembling hypostatized Teachings only began after Buddhism became well-enough established in China to be recognized as possessing a distinct set of doctrines and practices that could be either adopted or rejected by individuals and, more importantly, countenanced or eliminated by the government.

Since many of the earliest documents that discuss the relationships between different proto-Teachings focus on this latter issue and derive from court debates, they primarily concern the relationship of Buddhism to the practices, ideologies, and moral teachings promoted by the state – what would later be identified as Confucianism.¹⁸ Much

¹⁷ Campany, "On the Very Idea," p. 313.

¹⁸ In Western languages, these polemics have been studied in Arthur F. Wright, "Fu I and the Rejection of Buddhism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12.1 (1951), pp. 33-47; Kenneth Ch'en, "Anti-Buddhist Propaganda During the Nan-ch'ao," *HJAS* 15.1/2 (1952), pp. 166-92; idem, "On Some Factors Responsible for The Anti-Buddhist Persecution under The Pei-Ch'ao," *HJAS* 17.1/2 (1954), pp. 261-73; Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, pp. 254-85;

of this early material suggests that the two traditions are different in fundamental ways that preclude their mutual tolerance within a single polity. In some early broadsides, for instance, Buddhism was simply a religion for other people and other places: as Wang Bo 王波 and Wang Du 王度 put it in a memorial to the northern ruler Shi Hu 石虎 (emperor Wu of Later Zhao 後趙武帝, r. 335–349), the Chinese have their own proper gods, whereas the Buddha “is a deity of a foreign land... to whom neither the emperor nor the Chinese people should pay cult 外國之神... 非天子諸華所應祠奉.”¹⁹ Elsewhere, we find doctrinal conflicts. In 340, for instance, Yu Bing 庾冰 (296–344) argued at the court of the Eastern Jin (317–420) that permitting Buddhist monks to continue their current practice of refusing to bow to the emperor would be to “change the canons of ritual and discard the teaching of [hierarchical] titles 易禮典棄名教” that “had been in use [in China] for a hundred generations 百代所不廢” and to violate the principle that “the teaching of the king must be univocal, for if it is rendered dual, there will be disorder 王教不得不一, 二之則亂.”²⁰ In 402, Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404) would make a similar argument, protesting that “the principle of emotive reverence cannot admit of the duality 夫情敬之理, 豈容有二” introduced by the monastic institution’s alternative hierarchy.²¹ Writers like these apparently saw monks’ refusal to bow as threatening the *Shijing* 詩經-derived principle, enunciated by Bian Sizhi 卞嗣之 (n.d.) and Yuan Kezhi 袁恪之 (n.d.) in 404, that “Throughout the land, all are subjects of the king 率土之民莫非王臣.”²² By extension, therefore, Buddhist monasticism also threatened the entire system of cosmic significance by which the emperor’s position was revered, a system that He Chengtian 何承天 (370–447), writing a few decades later, thought so obviously incompatible with Buddhism that his anti-Buddhist polemic, “Da xing lun” 達性論 (“Understanding Our Nature”), consists almost entirely of laying out its all-encompassing claims.²³

Sylvie Hureau, “L’apparition de thèmes anticléricaux dans la polémique anti-bouddhique médiévale,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 24 (2002), pp. 17–29; and Palumbo, “The Rule and the Folk,” among others.

¹⁹ *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, in Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–32), sutra no. 2059, vol. 50, p. 385, register c, ll. 6–7. Hereafter, references to *Taishō* editions will be cited in the following format, using this case as an example: T.2059:50.385c6–7.

²⁰ *Hongming ji* 弘明集, T.2102:52.79c6–7 and 80a20.

²¹ T.2102:52.82a25–26.

²² T.2102:52.84c3. For the original *Shijing* passage, see *Maoshi zhuan jian* 毛詩傳箋, with annots. by Mao Heng 毛亨 and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, ed. Kong Xiangjun 孔祥軍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), j. 13, p. 302.

²³ T.2102:52.21c18–22a14.

Interestingly, some of the earliest defenses of Buddhism that survive also accept the idea that the Teachings are commensurate but different. In Daoheng's 道恒 (n.d.) early-fifth-century "Shibo lun" 釋駁論 ("Resolving the Denunciation [of Buddhism]"), for instance, Buddhism is presented as conducive to the good governance of the state, but in a way fundamentally different from that of the doctrines of (proto-) Confucianism. It is true, Daoheng admits, that "śramaṇas truly do not have any visible efficacy in worldly matters 沙門在世, 誠無目前考課之功." Yet whereas "the teaching of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius is exhausted in form and implements 周孔之教, 理盡形器," Buddhism "in fact aids the state in more mysterious ways 實有益於冥," including producing good harvests, preventing plagues, and promoting peace.²⁴ In general, Daoheng argues, Buddhism "is great, and of course not (the same as) the teaching of [hierarchical] titles within the realm; dignified, it is a mysterious path 'beyond the square' 落落焉, 故非域中之名教; 肅肅焉, 殆是方外之冥軌."²⁵ As a result, Daoheng suggests it is no surprise that Buddhism is misunderstood by those who follow the "teachings of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius." "Since their ambitions and efforts are not the same as ours and their paths are divergent, they go a different direction and part ways with us, not understanding us. They have not seen how exceptional [the Buddhist Teaching] is, so this is only appropriate 志業不同, 歸向塗乖, 岐逕分轍, 不相領悟. 未見秀異, 故其宜耳."²⁶ Here, the argument seems to be simply that valuable as (proto-) Confucianism may be, it is not the only good teaching in the world.

Another path to defending Buddhism in its difference lay in arguing that both states and individuals should be able to tolerate multiplicity. An ideal of capaciousness – recognizing that "gold and jade need not harm one another 金玉不相傷"²⁷ – seems to have been broadly shared in the fourth and early fifth centuries, and even Yu Bing himself, the first official on record to attempt to force the sangha to bow to

²⁴ T.2102:52.36B13-14, 36B18, and 36B14.

²⁵ "Beyond the square" (*fangwai* 方外) is a phrase from *Zhuangzi* 莊子, roughly denoting what is "beyond the mundane"; see Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 and Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚, eds., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), *j.* 6, p. 267. For the term's significance (and for "square" to render "*fang*" 方), see Willard J. Peterson, "Squares and Circles: Mapping the History of Chinese Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49.1 (1988), pp. 47-60. See also Campany, "On the Very Idea," pp. 307-10.

²⁶ T.2102:52.37A25-26 and 35C14-15.

²⁷ T.2102:52.3c. This quote derives from, and describes the basic position of, the long essay transmitted under the title "Mouzi lihuo lun" 牟子理惑論 ("Master Mou's Discussions Resolving Confusion"). This essay's date is uncertain; accordingly, despite its great interest, I do not discuss it in detail here. Though some scholars accept its purported Eastern Han date, others have preferred to consider it a fourth- or even a fifth-century document. See Paul Pelliot, "Meoutseu ou les doutes levés," *TP* 19 (1920), pp. 255-433, pp. 257-66; Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 13-15; John P. Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts: A Reader-Response Study and*

the ruler, explicitly accepted that Buddhism could be practiced in the home and that “men of comprehensive talent will select broadly and may frequently include [Buddhist] affairs in their learning 通才博採，往備其事。”²⁸ It was perhaps in part because Yu thus showed himself less than thoroughly opposed to the continued existence of the Buddhist faith in China that He Chong 何充 (292–346) and his allies summed up their defense of the sangha’s bowing exemption in this earliest debate on the topic by citing the *Laozi* 老子, arguing that “Heaven’s net is vast, and though it is wide-meshed, nothing escapes it 天網恢恢，疎而不失。”²⁹ The emperor, they wrote,

should go by what [the monks] take as their interests and be generous to them, ensuring that both virtuous and foolish do not dare fail to exert themselves. Thus, above there will be policies [as broad and indiscriminating] as heaven in its covering over [all things] and earth in its supporting [all things], and below there will be people who single-mindedly cultivate goodness. 因其所利而惠之，使賢愚莫敢不用情，則上有天覆地載之施，下有守一修善之人。³⁰

Huiyuan’s 慧遠 (334–416) attempt to persuade Huan Xuan to preserve the monks’ bowing exemption also invoked an ideal of capaciousness. Monks, he writes, “are guests from beyond the square 出家則是方外之賓,” “the principles [of whose practice] diverge from those of the worldly 此理之與世乖” to such an extent that their treatment should be differentiated from laypeople just as “deportment should differ in the army and the capital, and Chinese and barbarian should not mix 軍國異容，戎華不雜.”³¹ Here Huiyuan is suggesting that since the state ritual system is already heterogeneous, making space for divergent practices with regards to foreign guests and military men, it can reserve a distinct place for monks as well. The military, moreover, is a good parallel for monks since military men provide the state a service its civil officials cannot; similarly, Buddhism provides a service the proto-Confucian state cannot, since it is on its own “incapable of causing those whose livelihood it supports to be without suffering (that is, to reach nirvana) 未能令存者無患.”³² These seem perhaps to have been the arguments

Translation of the “Mou-tzu Li-huo lun” (Albany: SUNY P., 1994), p. 37; Li Xiaorong 李小榮, *Hongming ji Guang Hongming ji shulun gao* “弘明集”, “廣弘明集” 述論稿 (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 2005), pp. 20–29; and Palumbo, “The Rule and the Folk,” pp. 65–66.

²⁸ T.2102:52.80A21–22.

²⁹ T.2102:52.80B5–6. For the *locus classicus*, see *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋, ed. Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), j. 73, p. 288.

³⁰ T.2102:52.80B6–8.

³¹ T.2102:52.83C23, 83C27–28, and 84A25–26.

³² T.2102:52.30C19.

that resonated with Huan Xuan, who despite his early opposition went on to defend against continued protests the ultimate decision to allow monks not to bow by writing that the emperor “allows all things to be themselves, loving equally the nine streams (that is, all different intellectual traditions) and permitting each to follow its own *dao* 使自己, 亦是兼愛九流, 各遂其道.”³³ Here again, the difference of Buddhism from comparable traditional Chinese entities is assumed but accepted within a kingdom whose central authority is secure enough to accommodate multiplicity.

These discussions should, I think, already suggest the first key argument of this essay: that we find from the fourth century onward extensive discourse depicting proto-Buddhism and proto-Confucianism as roughly commensurate. It is true that none of these texts use the term *rujiao* and that they offer only limited insight into how their authors might have conceived of the relationships between “the teaching of [hierarchical] titles,” “the teachings of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius,” the official classes, state sacrifices, the classics and their exegetes, and moral teachings like filial piety. As Antonello Palumbo has recently observed, they do not even make it clear how exactly these authors might have thought about the proto-Buddhist complex of monks, lay devotees, doctrines, ritual practices, and canons.³⁴ Yet if indeed there was nothing outside these texts that would answer to later imaginations of Confucianism or perhaps even Buddhism, then that context would make it all the more obvious how the logic of the difference paradigm itself could push, as invocations of the paradigm by different authors with different understandings responding to different circumstances began to pile up, towards the imaginative consolidation of these communities, doctrines, practices, and canons into comparable hypostatized entities.

THE CONVERGENCE PARADIGM

The discursive impetus towards commensurate reification discernable in the difference model would only have been strengthened by the second paradigm of argument we find in fourth- and fifth-century discourse, by which the (proto-) Teachings are, when understood in their fullest implications or stripped down to their core, ultimately

³³ T.2102:52.84c18. The “nine streams” are Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (77–6 BC) classification of the schools of pre-Qin thought. See Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 100 B, p. 4244.

³⁴ See Palumbo, “The Rule and the Folk.”

the same. Clearly, if two Teachings are ultimately the same, they must belong to the same category. It is important to note, however, that this paradigm also tends to undermine the possibility of defining the comparanda it pushes to create, for if none of the differences of ritual, moral thought, metaphysics, hierarchy, or pantheon that apparently distinguish these proto-Teachings actually define their ultimate nature, then it can become difficult to say what in fact they are. In this way, arguments in this mode begin to suggest the second key argument of this essay: that discourse about the Teachings' relationships was not merely unconcerned with realities on the ground, but moreover often positively disinterested in and dismissive of their specifiable contents as sociological, doctrinal, and moral systems.

This second paradigm seems in many cases to have been articulated as a response to threats posed by the difference model. Huiyuan, for instance, tried out a number of different arguments in persuading Huan Xuan to accommodate the sangha's refusal to bow to the ruler and to parents.³⁵ Though, as we saw above, he sometimes portrayed Buddhist monks as "guests" within the empire, he also hastens to assure Huan that Buddhist rules for lay adherents actually "follow the same dispensation as the kingly system, matching with it as perfectly as the two halves of a tally 與王制同命, 有若符契."³⁶ And even monks "bring blessings to their families and to all under heaven 道洽六親, 澤流天下" in a way that "cooperates and tallies with the principle of the emperor's rule 協契皇極," thus guaranteeing that "though within [the household, they apparently] violate the most important natural feelings, they nonetheless do not deviate from filial piety, and though externally [in the empire] they [apparently] omit to pay reverence to the lord, they nonetheless are not lacking in respect 內乖天屬之重而不違其孝, 外闕奉主之恭而不失其敬."³⁷ Huiyuan therefore concludes that "the ultimate point of the [teachings of] Śākyamuni, on the one hand, and of Yao and Confucius, on the other, is not different 釋迦之與堯孔, 歸致不殊."³⁸

In offering this defense, Huiyuan was employing a style of argument that already had a significant history by his time. Salient models

³⁵ In contrast to his initial epistolary reply, Huiyuan's essay transmitted under the title "Shamen bu jing wangzhe lun" 沙門不敬王者論 (T.2102:52.29C19-32B11) is rhetorically complex and sometimes obscure. Beyond arguments that might fit into the first two paradigms, outlined here, certain points this essay makes could potentially also be seen as fitting into what I will call a "supersession paradigm," and Campany's "Chinese History and Writing about 'Religions'" offers a reading of certain arguments that could plausibly fit into the "compartmentalization paradigm."

³⁶ T.2102:52.83C22.

³⁷ T.2102:52.84A6-7 and 30B17-19.

³⁸ T.2102:52.31B3.

could, for instance, be found in that body of philosophical commentary that nowadays goes under the heading of Xuanxue 玄學 (“Obscure Studies”). There, Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312) had offered surprising reinterpretations of the “obscure” ultimate significance of the proto-Confucian sages to reconcile them with the teachings of Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子, respectively,³⁹ and within Huiyuan’s own lifetime, Zhang Zhan 張湛 (b. ca. 332) had written a commentary to *Liezi* 列子, claiming that what Liezi “clarifies is often commensurate with the Buddha’s scriptures, and his major purport is the same as that of Laozi and Zhuangzi 所明往往與佛經相參，大歸同於老莊。”⁴⁰ Though these Xuanxue thinkers had originally sought to harmonize legendary teachers rather than abstract Teachings, their characteristic argumentative move – distinguishing divergent overt doctrines from convergent ultimate implications – would lend itself equally to the latter.

In the decades leading up to Huiyuan’s decisive intervention in the bowing debate, other writers had begun to apply this discursive move to proto-Buddhism and -Confucianism. Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314?–371), for instance, had argued in his “Yu dao lun” 喻道論 (“Explaining the *Dao*”) that “the Duke of Zhou and Confucius were the same as the Buddha, and the Buddha was the same as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius; these are just ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ names, that’s all 周孔即佛，佛即周孔，蓋外內名之耳;” apparent discrepancies between their teachings were thus merely attributable to the fact that both were “responding to the age [in which they lived] and rectifying the paths of things, and as a result, [their teachings] followed their times 應世軌物，蓋亦隨時。”⁴¹ A similar argument is also found in Zhou Daozu’s 周道祖 (n.d.) “Shiyi lun” 釋疑論 (“Resolving Doubts [about Buddhism]”), which responds to Dai Kui’s 戴逵 (330–396) skepticism of the Buddhist doctrine of karma by arguing that, in fact, the teachings of the proto-Confucian sages do implic-

³⁹ See particularly Wang Shumin 王叔岷, ed., *Shishuo xinyu buzheng* 世說新語補正 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), *j.* 4, p. 208, and Guo Xiang 郭象 et al., annot., *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu* 南華真經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), “Xu,” p. 1. Some suggestion that contemporaries too recognized their commentaries as involving such a reconciliation can be discerned in Sun Sheng’s 孫盛 (302–373) rebuttal of Wang Bi, arguing that Laozi, in fact, “did not follow the same track as the [Confucian] sages 老聃非...同軌”; see *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集, T.2103:52.119B15.

⁴⁰ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed., *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), “Fu lu er,” p. 279.

⁴¹ T.2102:52.17A7–10. For translations of this text, see Arthur E. Link and Tim Lee, “Sun Ch’o’s *Yü-tao-lun: A Clarification of the Way*,” *MS* 25 (1966), pp. 169–96, and Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, trans., *Gumyōshū, Kōgumyōshū* 弘明集、廣弘明集 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1988), pp. 54–66. For the distinction of “inner” (usually Buddhist) and “outer” (usually Confucian) Teachings, see Yoshikawa Tadao, “Nei to gai” 内と外, in *Iwanami kōza: Tōyō shisō* 岩波講座東洋思想 13 (1990), pp. 266–78, and Barrett, “Advent,” pp. 151–55.

itly affirm that doctrine; if they had not spelled it out, it was merely because sages “teach in ways both deep and shallow so that they will not overshoot the understanding of people... [and since] the principles of the *dao* of the subtle and the manifest are cut off from the realm of common perception, and Yao and Confucius were [primarily] attempting to save [the people of their times] from their coarse condition, it was appropriate that they left those principles incompletely elucidated 深淺並訓而民聽不濫... 但微明之道, 理隔常域, 堯孔拯其匱, 宜有未盡.”⁴² And before Huan Xuan consulted Huiyuan, Wang Mi 王謐 (360–408) had sought to persuade him of the acceptability of Buddhist teachings in a similar way, arguing that “the Duke of Zhou and Confucius sought to rescue [the people of their times] from their deeply defective conditions, and so their words and deeds only concerned this one lifetime, and did not open the path [that rescues us from reincarnation throughout] a myriad kalpas. However, when one seeks the more distant implications [of their teachings, that path] can often be discerned 周孔之化救其甚弊, 故言迹盡乎一生, 而不開萬劫之塗. 然遠探其旨, 亦往往可尋.”⁴³

After the 402 bowing debate and throughout the first three quarters of the fifth century, this claim regarding the incomplete explicitness of Confucian teachings served in the south as the most common apologetic strategy for defending Buddhism’s place within the polity. Responding to contemporaries who “foolishly disbelieve the Buddha’s utmost doctrine [of transmigration] 佛唱至言, 悠悠不信” on the basis of the Duke of Zhou’s and Confucius’s “refusal to speak about the spirit realm 神明之本絕而莫言,” for instance, Zheng Xianzhi 鄭鮮之 (364–427) argues nonetheless that “although their teaching confined itself within the square, if one extrapolates its principles, it is possible to know [transmigration’s truth] 周孔之教, 自爲方內, 推此理也, 其可知矣.”⁴⁴ Huiyuan’s student Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), similarly, claims in his “Ming Fo lun” 明佛論 (“Elucidating Buddhism”) that there are hints that Confucius knew more than he said, since “when he looked down from the top of Mounts Tai and Meng, both the empire and the state of Lu appeared small to him.⁴⁵ Does this not indicate that his spirit was matched with the eight extremities [of the cosmos] and consequently transcended his single lifetime? 及其眇邈太蒙之顛, 而天下與魯俱小. 豈非神合於八遐, 故超於一世哉.”⁴⁶ And Daogao 道高 (Liu-Song dynastic period) averred that

⁴² T.2103.52.222C17–A2.

⁴³ T.2102.52.81C15–17.

⁴⁴ T.2102.52.29A12–13.

⁴⁵ The *locus classicus* for this story is *Mengzi* 孟子 7A24; see *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), j. 13, p. 229.

⁴⁶ T.2102:52.15A9–11.

“the Duke of Zhou and Confucius were involved in saving collapsing ages and did not have time to reveal the future to beings. However, had they lived in the age of the knotted rope (before the invention of writing, when mores were less disastrous), they would have clarified [Buddhist teachings] such as the three periods (past lives, the present life, and future lives) and more 姬孔救頹俗而不瞻，何暇示物以將來？若丘且生遇於結繩，則明三世而不已。”⁴⁷ The implication here seems to be (as would often be claimed explicitly later) that Chinese sages had previously taught the full truth of Buddhism, but that it had subsequently been forgotten in China.

These sorts of arguments clearly abstract the proto-Teachings from their historical reality by suggesting that their present shape only hints at their true significance. Other southern writers took this tendency further, suggesting that, indeed, none of the Teachings represented the true wisdom of their sages. This argument is found most famously in Xie Lingyun’s 謝靈運 (385–433) “Bian zong lun” 辯宗論 (“Discerning the Ultimate”) of 422, which advocates for a “new theory 新論” that “departs from [the teachings of] both Confucius and the Buddha 離孔釋” by “discarding Śākyamuni’s idea of gradual enlightenment while accepting his idea that [the *dao*] can be attained, and discarding Confucius’s idea that [nonsages can only come] ‘somewhat close’ [to attaining the *dao*] while accepting his idea that [its principle reduces to] a single Ultimate Truth 去釋氏之漸悟，而取其能至，去孔氏之殆庶，而取其一極。”⁴⁸ A few years later, the monk Huilin 慧琳 (fl. 443) would take the point further in his controversy-stirring “Junshan lun” 均善論 (“Both Are Excellent”), which argues that “[any teacher who] leaves traces (that is, distinct teachings) cannot keep those traces from being defective, and if they provide methods, those methods cannot but contain falsehood: these are the shackles of all sages 有跡不能不敝，有術不能無偽，此乃聖人所以桎梏也。”⁴⁹ As a result, though we should preserve disparate Teachings as “disparate paths returning to the same source 殊塗而同歸者” (and Huilin includes here alongside “the Duke of Zhou and Confucius” and Śākyamuni also the proto-Daoist collocations “Laozi and Zhuangzi 老莊” and “Huang-Lao 黃老”), nonetheless “we should not merely keep to whatever wheel-track we start out on 不得守其發輪之轍

⁴⁷ T.2102:52.71A6–7.

⁴⁸ T.2103:52.225A4–7.

⁴⁹ “Traces” (*ji* 跡) is an important concept in Xuanxue thought, deriving from Guo Xiang’s *Zhuangzi* commentary; see *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, j. 5, p. 304, as well as Brook Ziporyn’s discussion in *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany: SUNY P., 2003), especially pp. 31–61.

也” but should freely adapt the doctrines and rituals of each.⁵⁰ Zhang Rong’s 張融 (444–497) “Menlü” 門律 (“Family Regulations”), similarly, declares that “Daoism and Buddhism both find their final principle in nonduality, silence, and stillness. Arriving at their roots and essence, they are the same, but in responding to things and leaving traces, they have become differentiated 道也與佛, 逗極無二, 寂然不動. 致本則同; 感而遂通, 逢迹成異.” Zhang thus enjoined his descendants, “even if you exclusively follow in the traces of the Buddha, do not offend the root of the Daoists 專尊於佛迹, 而無侮於道本,” and he instructed them to bury him with a combination of Buddhist and Daoist ceremony.⁵¹

Although surviving primary sources for the intellectual history of the Northern Dynasties are extremely sparse, there is some reason to suspect that the convergence paradigm was also being invoked there during the mid-fifth century as a means of harmonizing the proto-Teachings. John Lagerwey has suggested, for example, that the ritual reforms instituted by Cui Hao 崔浩 (381–450) and Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365–448) for Northern Wei emperor Taiwu 北魏太武帝 (r. 423–452) represented “a fusion of church and state and of Confucian and Daoist traditions”⁵² – a fusion that may, given Taiwu’s claim that he was thus “returning to the governance of [the early Chinese sages] Fuxi and Shennong 復羲農之治,” have been premised upon a vision of these two apparently divergent proto-Teachings as ultimately deriving from the same source.⁵³ Though Cui and Kou violently suppressed Buddhism in their Daoist-Confucian synthesis, moreover, Buddhism too had a place in what seem to have been further convergence-paradigm projects in the north. As soon as Taiwu died, his son emperor Wencheng 北魏文成帝 (r. 452–465) rehabilitated Buddhism as a major source of impe-

⁵⁰ Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 97, p. 2391. “Disparate paths” comes from the *Yijing* 易經; see *Zhouyi zhushu* 周易注疏, annot. Wang Bi 王弼, Han Bo 韓伯, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 et al., in Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本十三經注疏附校勘記 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1981), j. 8, p. 169a. For a complete translation of Huilin’s essay, see Paul W. Kroll, “Huilin on Black and White, Jiang Yan on *Wuwei*: Two Buddhist Dialogues from the Liu-Song Dynasty,” *Early Medieval China* 18 (2012), pp. 1–24.

⁵¹ T.2102:52.38C10–11 and C19–20. Note that the arguments of Xie Lingyun, Huilin, and Zhang Rong all occasioned sustained debates, often with avowed Buddhists as their main intellectual antagonists.

⁵² John Lagerwey, “The Old Lord’s Scripture for the Chanting of the Commandments,” in Florian Reiter, ed., *Purposes, Means and Convictions in Taoism: A Berlin Symposium* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), pp. 29–56, p. 53. See also Richard B. Mather’s discussion of the episode, “K’ou Ch’ien-chih and the Taoist Theocracy at the Northern Wei Court, 425–451,” in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism*, pp. 103–22 (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1978).

⁵³ Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 114, p. 3034. For further confirmation that this was an archaizing syncretism, see also *Wei shu* 35, p. 814, which has

rial legitimacy, justifying this new policy by arguing that “the *Spring and Autumn Annals* approve worship of gods [like the Buddha], and the [Confucian] Sacrificial Codes record those who [like the Buddha] achieved great merit.... [and, similarly, the Buddha’s teachings] assist the prohibitions and the laws of kingly governance and enhance the [Confucian] virtues of benevolence and wisdom 是以春秋嘉崇明之禮，祭典載功施之族... 助王政之禁律，益仁智之善性。”⁵⁴ Wencheng also commissioned statues of the imperial ancestors and of himself in the form of Buddhas, perhaps hinting that this harmonization of Buddhism and Confucianism was, like Taiwu’s harmonization of Daoism and Confucianism, partly an attempt to bring religion under the aegis of the state.⁵⁵ If this was indeed the implication, then these (unfortunately only sparsely evidenced) fifth-century experiments foreshadow a major development of the sixth century throughout the Chinese world – intense government interest in leveraging for state purposes a vision of how the Three Teachings related to one another.

THE SUPERSESSION PARADIGM

The coincidence of the Northern Wei’s attempted synthesis of Confucianism and Daoism with the first concerted suppression of Buddhism in Chinese history also foreshadowed the marked sharpening of discussions regarding the relationships between the (proto-) Teachings that was about to take place. In the last quarter of the fifth century and throughout the sixth, many participants in these debates began to rethink the implications of the suggestion, common to many convergence-paradigm accounts discussed in the last section, that one proto-

Kou Qianzhi telling Cui Hao that “Suddenly I received a secret message from the spirits that I should also study Confucianism in order to assist a True Lord of Great Peace, thereby continuing a tradition that has been cut off for a thousand years. But my learning does not include antiquity, and I am in the dark when it comes to government business. So please help me by laying out the governing examples of past kings 忽受神中之訣，當兼修儒教，輔助泰平真君，繼千載之絕統。而學不稽古，臨事闇昧。卿爲吾撰列王者治典。”

⁵⁴ *Wei shu* 114, p. 3035.

⁵⁵ This episode has been much discussed; e.g., Scott Pearce, “A King’s Two Bodies: The Northern Wei Emperor Wencheng and Representations of the Power of His Monarchy,” *Frontiers of History in China* 7.1 (2012), pp. 90–105. For a review of scholarship on the topic, see Chin-Yin Tseng, *The Making of the Tuoba Northern Wei: Constructing Material Cultural Expressions in the Northern Wei Pingcheng Period (398–494 CE)* (Oxford: Publishers of British Archaeological Reports, 2013), p. 53. Wencheng’s combination of Buddhism and Confucianism apparently remained state policy throughout the next several reigns as well, under the patronage of the simultaneously Buddhist and sinifying empress-dowagers Feng 馮太后 (442–490) and Hu 胡太后 (d. 528). For this period of imperial Buddhism and the role of the two empresses, see Stephanie Balkwill, “Empresses, Bhikṣuṇīs, and Women of Pure Faith: Buddhism and the Politics of Patronage in the Northern Wei,” Ph.D. diss. (McMaster University, 2015).

Teaching made explicit what was merely implicit within another. As we saw, this model was initially advanced to argue for the toleration of multiple teachings within one polity. Over time, however, the increasing consolidation, wealth, and power of Buddhist and Daoist organizations began to render conceivable and even urgent the repurposing of these convergences towards justifying the suppression or subordination of the supposedly less-ultimate Teaching to the more-ultimate. As a result, the convergence paradigm was supplanted towards the end of the fifth century by the supersession paradigm as the most common discursive model for relating the proto-Teachings – and, just as important, the model that governments came to see as most promising for exerting power over the various religious communities that coexisted within their states. Insofar as supersession-paradigm arguments depended for their plausibility on the widespread deployment in previous decades of the convergence paradigm, this weaponization of supposed ultimate identities between the Teachings evidences the third key argument of this essay: that even as it remained partly abstract from the facts on the ground, this discourse began in this period to exert its logic upon them.

The supersession paradigm seems to have been first elaborated in proto-Daoist texts, in particular those associated with what has been termed the *huahu* 化胡 legend: the claim that the Buddha was really Laozi in disguise (or his disciple Yin Xi 尹喜, or the *dao* itself, which had previously manifested itself as Laozi), preaching the Buddhist dharma to “convert the barbarians.” It is important to recognize, however, that *huahu* texts do not all conform to the same discursive paradigm. Since the earliest of these texts – such as Xiang Kai’s 襄楷 memorial of 166 AD and the Celestial Masters scripture *Dadao jialing jie* 大道家令戒 (*Commands and Admonitions of the Families of the Great Dao*, ostensibly from 255 but likely later) – date from well before there seems to have been any real interreligious friction between Daoist and Buddhist organizations, they apparently cite the idea that Laozi (or the *dao*) was the Buddha not to justify suppression of Buddhism but rather merely to add luster to proto-Daoist teachings.⁵⁶ It seems that the *huahu* leg-

⁵⁶ This point has been made by Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, p. 290, and Gil Raz, “Conversion of the Barbarians’ [*Huahu* 化胡] Discourse as Proto Han Nationalism,” *The Medieval History Journal* 17.2 (2014), pp. 255–94, 264–74. For other useful Western scholarship on the *huahu* legend, see Kristofer M. Schipper, “Purity and Strangers: Shifting Boundaries in Medieval Taoism,” *TP* 80 (1994), pp. 61–81; Antonello Palumbo, “La ‘Scrittura di Laozi che converte i barbari’: Sincretismo e conflitto ideologico in un ciclo di letteratura religiosa della Cina medievale,” Ph.D. diss. (Istituto Universitario Orientale, 2001); and Max Deeg, “Laozi oder Buddha? Polemische Strategien um die ‘Bekehrung der Barbaren durch Laozi’ als Grundlage des Konflikts zwischen Buddhisten und Daoisten im chinesischen Mittelalter,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft* 11 (2003), pp. 209–34.

end only became a tool of interreligious polemic sometime around the turn of the fourth century when, according to the evidence preserved in the anonymous mid-fourth-century “Zheng wu lun” 正誣論 (“Rectifying Slander”), proto-Daoist texts began claiming that Laozi was so disgusted by the behavior and character of the western barbarians that he created Buddhism in order to “stop them from marrying and ensure they would not have descendants 斷其婚姻，使無子孫。”⁵⁷ Since this argument has Buddhism diverging fundamentally from Laozi’s teaching within China, it might exemplify what I have called the “difference paradigm,” thus reflecting the general state of the debate at that time and perhaps hinting that the largely unknown proto-Daoist milieu from which these texts derived were not completely disconnected from the discourse discussed above.

Also in keeping with the development of these debates is the appearance, in Daoist texts surviving from the second half of the fourth century and the first decades of the fifth, of *huahu*-based claims that Buddhism and Daoism converge. The early-fifth-century *Taishang miaoshi jing* 太上妙始經 (*Scripture of the Wondrous Beginning of the Most High*), for instance, invokes the *huahu* legend to argue that “the Dao has no constant name and no constant form, sometimes being called Śākyamuni Buddha, Vimalakīrti, or Cakravartin 道無常名，無有常形，或稱釋迦文佛，或稱維摩詰，或稱轉輪王。”⁵⁸ According to Stephen R. Bokenkamp, similarly, the Shangqing 上清 revelations to Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–ca. 386) made clear – in their original, unexpurgated form – that Buddhism was itself a variety of Daoism, and that the Perfected of the eastern immortal isles practiced a form of “the Buddhist *dao* 佛道” dating back to the division of the heavens from the earth.⁵⁹ For this reason, Yang included a Buddhist scripture – *Sishi'er zhang jing* 四十二章經 (*Scripture in Forty-Two Sections*), with some emendations – as part of the teachings passed on by the Perfected in his nightly visitations. No indication survives that this incorporation of Buddhism was intended as a justification for suppressing it.

It is only in the fifth century that the *huahu* legend seems to have been put in the service of what I am calling the “supersession para-

⁵⁷ T.2102:52.7A28. The full text of “Zheng wu lun” is translated in Arthur E. Link, “Cheng-wu lun: The Rectification of Unjustified Criticism,” *Oriens Extremus* 8.2 (1961), pp. 136–65.

⁵⁸ DZ 658 (using the DZ numbering found in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* [Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 2004]), in *Zhengtong daoang* 正統道藏, ed. Zhang Yuchu 張宇初 et al., Shanghai Hanfenlou photolithc rpt. edn. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1985), vol. 19, “Nü wu zhi yi,” p. 148a.

⁵⁹ See *Zhen'gao* 真誥, DZ 1016, *Zhengtong daoang*, vol. 35, j. 9, p. 82b, and Bokenkamp, *Fourth-Century Daoist Family*, pp. 21–23.

digm.” We can find an argument along these lines, for instance, in the earliest corpus of Lingbao 靈寶 documents, composed and compiled by Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫 (n.d.) around the year 400, which depict all Buddhist sutras (and all proto-Daoist texts from other schools) as merely debased copies of the primordial Lingbao scriptures.⁶⁰ As Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477) would put it in his 437 “Lingbao jingmu xu” 靈寶經目序 (“Preface to the Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures”), these texts depicted Buddhism as serving to prepare the world for the full revelation of the Lingbao scriptures, after which point its incomplete “*dao* would [rightly] cease flourishing and these scriptures would be put in practice 道勢訖, 此經當行” by the then-reigning Liu-Song dynasty.⁶¹ And these Lingbao texts seem to have set the pattern for much proto-Daoist polemic over the next hundred years. Written partly as a response to them, for example, the Celestial Masters scripture *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (*Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens*) offers a similar vision, claiming that Laozi “promulgated three *daos* in order to instruct heaven’s chosen people 出三道以教天民,” two of which were the Celestial Masters’ “great *dao* of nondoing 無爲大道” and the “Buddhist *dao* 佛道.”⁶² Yet though these *daos* were both normative for the populations to which they were originally preached, they were not supposed to mix together in the manner that they had begun to do when Buddhism came to China in the Han dynasty. Buddhism was, after all, the most inferior portion of Laozi’s revelation, designed for the most inferior population, and the *Santian neijie jing* therefore enjoined the Liu-Song rulers to stamp it out and adopt the Celestial Masters’ creed wholeheartedly.⁶³ Later in the fifth century, similarly, both the lost “Laozi xu” 老子序 (“Account of Laozi”) and Gu Huan’s 顧歡 (420s–480s?) circa 467 “Yi Xia lun” 夷夏論 (“Barbarians and the Chinese”) would make roughly the same arguments about Buddhism as the *Santian neijie jing*, holding that although Buddhism derives from the *dao* – in “Yi-Xia lun,” indeed, the Teachings “match like two halves of a tally, Buddhism being Daoism, and Daoism, Buddhism 如合符契, 道則佛也, 佛則道也” – it is designed

⁶⁰ See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “Stages of Transcendence: The *Bhūmi* Concept in Taoist Scripture,” in Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: U. Hawai’i P., 1990), pp. 119–47, p. 121.

⁶¹ See *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, DZ 1032, *Zhengtong daoang*, vol. 37, j. 4, p. 123b. For a discussion of the Lingbao incorporation of Buddhist ideas and practices, see Raz, “Buddhism Challenged, Adopted, and in Disguise,” pp. 117–24.

⁶² DZ 1205, *Zhengtong daoang*, vol. 48, j. 1, p. 80a. For the *Santian neijie jing* as a response to the Lingbao texts, see Raz, *Emergence of Daoism*, pp. 232–45.

⁶³ See the discussion in Raz, “Conversion of the Barbarians,” pp. 274–79.

specifically for the barbarians and therefore should not compete in China with Daoism.⁶⁴

Gu Huan's "Yi Xia lun" sparked an extended debate from which several pro-Buddhist replies survive, nearly all of which evince Buddhist versions of the supersession model. Zhu Zhaozhi 朱昭之 (n.d.), for instance, argues that although the teachings of Confucius and Laozi were originally equivalent to Buddhism, "since the Han dynasty the pure mores [they promoted] have become diluted... for this reason, the mysterious (that is, Buddhist) teaching came east to exert its compassion for the sentient beings of successive eras... such that the essential meaning [of all the Teachings] flourished once again [in Buddhism] 自漢代以來，淳風轉澆，... 於是聖道彌綸，天運遠被，玄化東流以慈係世眾生.... 精義復興."⁶⁵ Somewhat more radically, the monks Huitong 惠通 (d. ca. 499, alternatively written 慧通) and Sengmin 僧敏 (n.d., alternatively written 僧愍) both invoke the Buddhist counter to the *huahu* legend, a story found in several now-lost apocryphal sutras to the effect that Laozi and Confucius were in fact the Buddha's disciples, sent to China to prepare the way for a later, fuller importation of the Buddha's teachings.⁶⁶ Yuan Can 袁粲 (420–477), even more aggressively, argues that "just as when the bright sun stops shining, the fixed stars can shine faintly... so too did Laozi, Zhuangzi, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius have that which was worth preserving when the sun's (the Buddha's) light was dimmed, but [now, since] they take from his dharma, 'stealing his oxen' and appropriating his virtues, they have become pests 白日停光，恒星隱照... 老、莊、周、孔，有可存者，依日末光，憑釋遺法，盜牛竊善，反以成蠹."⁶⁷ And, in another variation, Sengshao's 僧紹 (d. ca. 494?) "Zheng er jiao" 正二教 ("Rectifying the Two Teachings") adopts a strategy that will become particularly prominent in the anti-Daoist polemics of the sixth and seventh centuries, suggesting that "Buddhists can use Laozi's [teaching] as a [valuable] expedient means (*upāya*) 夫由佛者，固可以權老" potentially continuous with Buddhism, but that later Daoist texts and practices – of the sort that tend nowadays to be called "religious Daoism" – represent deviations from his original message.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The so-called "Laozi xu" is cited in "Xiaodao lun" 笑道論, T.2103:52.146C2–16. For "Yi-Xia lun," see Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 et al., *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972) 54, pp. 931–34.

⁶⁵ T.2102:52.43B22–28.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of this counter-legend, see Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, pp. 307–20.

⁶⁷ *Nan Qi shu* 54, p. 933. "Stealing his oxen" refers to a parable from the *Nirvana sutra* 大般涅槃經, wherein thieves steal a farmer's oxen but do not know how to milk them or make ghee; see T.374:12.382A12–16.

⁶⁸ T.2102:52.37C14–15.

When combined with his suggestion that these later Daoist teachings “steal [from Buddhism] to compete with it, striving after its loftiness, copying and compiling [from Buddhist scriptures] randomly and senselessly in order to use points of [specious] convergence to establish the evil and displace the correct 挾競慕高, 撰會雜妄, 欲因其同樹邪去正,” this argumentative strategy adopted by Sengshao shows a striking structural similarity to the Lingbao claim that Buddhism is merely a deficient fragment of its primal revelation.⁶⁹

By the turn of the sixth century, the supersession paradigm seems to have become predominant in the south throughout discourse relating the Teachings, a situation that can be indicated by the debate surrounding the anonymous “San po lun” 三破論 (“Three Objections”). This proto-Daoist polemic does not survive, but from quotations in Buddhist responses, we can tell that it included an apparently supersessionist *huahu* claim that that Buddhism “was not intended for China, but was basically [created in order] to rectify the Western regions.... The barbarians were without benevolence, violent, and lacking ritual, no different from beasts, incapable of believing [the Daoist teaching of] the void. Laozi therefore went through the passes and created the Teaching of Images (Buddhism) in order to edify them 不施中國, 本正西域. ... 胡人無二, 剛強無禮, 不異禽獸, 不信虛無. 老子入關故作形像之教化之.”⁷⁰ In response, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 522) offered a correspondingly supersessionist Buddhist vision, by which Buddhism both encompassed the teachings of the “fine books for guiding laypeople 導俗之良書” that are found in the Confucian Classics and Laozi’s *Daode jing* 道德經 and also provided “wondrous scriptures by which [monks can learn to] transcend the world 出世之妙經.”⁷¹ According to Liu, the sages of ancient China “were always buddhas 未始非佛” and the Chinese “classics and canons came about through their expedient means (*upāya*) 經典由權,” but since “there are coarse and refined stimuli [that stir a teaching response from such buddhas,] teachings are different between laypeople and people dedicated to the *dao* (monks) 感有精麁, 故教分道俗” – and only the teachings of the Buddha are suitable for the latter, since “religious Daoism” represents merely a false “minor *dao* 小道” and a “source of disorder 萌亂.”⁷² Sengshun’s 僧順 (n.d.) response

⁶⁹ T.2102:52.37C15–16.

⁷⁰ T.2102:52.50C19–22, reading 二 as a mistake for 仁. Another fragment has an exterminatist version of the *huahu* legend; see T.2102:52.50C22–23. It is not clear how these accounts might have fit together in the original text.

⁷¹ T.2102:52.51B13–14 and 50B17–18.

⁷² T.2102:52.51A13–14, 51B3–5, 51B14, and 51C4.

to the “San po lun,” similarly, cites the counter-*huahu* legend, arguing that “Chinese and foreign sages are the same. Therefore in establishing the dharma, it is said that the Buddha dispatched three bodhisattvas [to China] in order to gradually improve lay teaching here, so that later the Buddhist scriptures could correct our evil ways and cause us to follow the correct. Disciples of Laozi are thus the lieutenants of Śākyamuni 中外二聖，其揆一也。故立法行，云先遣三賢，漸誘俗教，後以佛經革邪從正。李老之門，釋氏之偏裨矣。”⁷³ Yet whereas “[the teaching of] the Śākya sage gets the ultimate truth of the *dao*, [the teaching of] Pengzu and Lao Dan remains at its branches 釋聖得道之宗，彭聃居道之末，” and contemporary Daoism is even worse, “borrowing our [Buddhist] wisdom and availing itself of our spiritual powers to disorder our scriptures and wipe out our teachings 籍我智慧，資我神力，遂欲撓亂我經文，虔劉我教。”⁷⁴

It is in this argumentative context that we find the most amply documented attempt in the Period of Division to craft a consistent imperial ideology around a vision of the Three Teachings’ interrelationships: that of the founding emperor of the Liang dynasty, Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (Liang Wudi 梁武帝, 464–549, r. 502–549). Before his ascension to the throne, Xiao had associated closely with Shen Yue 沈約 (431–513), who in his 490 “Neidian xu” 內典序 (“Preface to the Inner [Buddhist] Canons”) had proffered the supersessionist argument that “although the Teachings have different gates, the Truth they [lead towards] is not different; ... [thus] Confucius set forth the beginnings, and Śākyamuni exhausted their ultimate meaning 雖教有殊門而理無異趣... 孔發其端，釋窮其致。”⁷⁵ When Shen contributed his “Junsheng lun” 均聖論 (“Both Were Sages”) to the circa-504 court debates of the newly founded Liang, therefore, contending that the teachings of the Chinese sages represented merely “the sprouts and fore-omens of the Buddha’s teaching 佛教之萌兆，” gradually expanding the principle of universal compassion and preparing a land of hunters and fishermen to accept a religion that would require them not to kill, the intervention of this esteemed scholar seems to have been laying the groundwork for the vegetarian reforms to inherited “Confucian” state sacrifices that Wudi was soon to announce.⁷⁶ It is perhaps because he suspected collusion on this point between Shen Yue and Xiao Yan that the great Daoist

⁷³ T.2102:52.53B29–C2.

⁷⁴ T.2102:52.53C10–11 and 53C5–6.

⁷⁵ T.2103:52.232A17–18.

⁷⁶ T.2103:52.122A16. For Shen Yue’s vegetarianism and his possible influence on Liang Wudi, see Richard B. Mather, *The Poet Shen Yüe (441–513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), pp. 161–66.

master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) felt compelled to rebut Shen’s argument.⁷⁷ Even though Tao considered himself a devotee of the Buddha and even though Daoism is never so much as mentioned in Shen’s essay, Tao apparently recognized that the “Junsheng lun” offered Liang Wudi a supersessionist ideology whose logic could justify the at least partial suppression of Daoism – a suppression that seems, in fact, to have followed shortly after.⁷⁸

The religious policies of Liang Wudi’s reign have been extensively studied, and this is not the place to detail them.⁷⁹ For my purposes here it is sufficient merely to note how frequently narratives of Buddhism superseding native Chinese Teachings animate his writings and the writings of others about him during his reign. In the edict in which he began the partial suppression of Daoism that Tao Hongjing feared, for instance, Wudi demanded that his officials follow his example in giving up his family’s longstanding devotion to Laozi. “Although Laozi, the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, and the other Chinese sages were disciples of the Tathāgata,” he wrote, “the traces of their transformative teachings are ultimately deviant, merely concerning goodness within the world of men and being incapable of turning the common folk into sages 老子周公孔子等，雖是如來弟子，而化迹既邪。止是世間之善，不能革凡

⁷⁷ For translation and annotation of this debate, see Yoshikawa, *Gumyōshū*, pp. 146–56.

⁷⁸ See T.2103:52.122A11–23A22. The existence and extent of Liang Wudi’s suppression of Daoism have produced disagreement. For arguments that the suppression was fabricated or exaggerated in Buddhist sources, see Naitō Tatsuo 内藤龍雄, “Ryō Butei no sha Dō no hishi-jitsu sei” 梁武帝の捨道の非史實性, *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究 5.2 (1957), pp. 162–63; Ōta Teizō 太田悌藏, “Ryō Butei no sha Dō hōbutsu ni tsuite utagau” 梁武帝の捨道奉仏について疑う, in *Yūki kyōju shōju kinen ronbunshū kankōkai* 結城教授頌壽記念論文集刊行會, ed., *Yūki Kyōju shōju kinen: Bukkyō shisōshi ronshū* 結城教授頌壽記念、仏教思想史論集 (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1964), pp. 417–32; Xiong Qingyuan 熊清元, “Liang Wudi Tianjian san nian ‘She shi Li Lao daofa’ shi zhengwei” 梁武帝天監三年‘捨事李老道法’事證偽, *Huang-gang shi zhuan xue bao* 黃岡師專學報 18.2 (1998), pp. 67–70; Yan Shangwen 顏尙文, *Liang Wudi* 梁武帝 (Taipei: Dongda, 1999), pp. 199–207; Thomas Jansen, “Der chinesische Kaiser Liang Wudi (reg. 502–549) und der Buddhismus,” in P. Schalk, ed., *Zwischen Säkularismus und Hierokratie. Studien zum Verhältnis von Religion und Staat in Süd- und Ostasien* (Uppsala: Uppsala U.P., 2001), pp. 89–118, p. 108; and Tom De Rauw, “Beyond Buddhist Apology: The Political Use of Buddhism by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (r. 502–549),” Ph.D. diss. (Ghent University, 2008), pp. 25–36. For evidence that the episode really happened, see Michel Strickmann, “A Taoist Confirmation of Liang Wu-ti’s Suppression of Taoism,” *JAO* 98.4 (1979), pp. 467–75; Funayama Tōru 船山徹, “Tō Kōkei to Bukkyō no kairitsu” 陶弘景と仏教の戒律, in Yoshikawa Tadao, ed., *Rokuchō Dōkyō no kenkyū* 六朝道教の研究 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1998), pp. 353–76; Wang Jiakui 王家葵, *Tao Hongjing congkao* 陶宏景叢考 (Jinan: Qi-Lu shushe, 2003), pp. 23–41; and Kathy Cheng-Mei Ku, “The Buddharāja Image of Emperor Wu of Liang,” in Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo, eds., *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY P., 2010), pp. 265–90. For a reflection on the sources, see Mark Strange, “Representations of Liang Emperor Wu as a Buddhist Ruler in Sixth- and Seventh-century Texts,” *AM* 3d ser. 24.2 (2011), pp. 53–112.

⁷⁹ Useful summary discussions can be found in Yan, *Liang Wudi*, and Andrew Chittick, *The Jiankang Empire in Chinese and World History* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2020).

成聖。”⁸⁰ Although the authenticity of this edict has been doubted, it is consistent with several other autobiographical narratives Wudi gave of himself, including in a poem “On Understanding [or: Unifying] the Three Teachings” 會三教詩, wherein he wrote of “Studying Confucius and the Duke of Zhou when young 少時學周孔,” “studying the books of the Daoists in middle age 中復觀道書,” and “in my late years reading the scrolls of Śākyamuni, which were like the sun outshining those mere stars 晚年開釋卷, 猶日映眾星。”⁸¹ Similarly, in his “Jingye fu” 淨業賦, Wudi wrote of how he had long been attracted to vegetarianism, but only “understood why when I read the ‘inner’ [Buddhist] scriptures and ‘outer’ [Confucian] canons, from this point forward beginning to recognize that I should turn my heart [to Buddhism] 內外經書讀便解悟, 從是以來始知歸向” – a decision he then justifies by quoting a passage from the Confucian classic *Liji* 禮記.⁸²

Wudi also deployed supersessionist visions when justifying his ritual reforms. The hymns that were written to accompany his abolition of blood and meat sacrifices for the Confucian state cults, for instance, repeat the narrative of Shen Yue’s “Junsheng lun,” by which the present reforms represented the culmination of and the supersession of the merely provisional teachings of previous Chinese sage kings, thus translating, as Andreas Janousch puts it, Wudi’s “historical vision into the ritual realm.”⁸³

In the past, wise kings observed the [imperfect] readiness of the people (for the Buddhist teaching of vegetarianism), / and so set out various flavors in accordance with the stage [of development they were in]. / Though those kings did not [fully] engage in good acts in the way we do now, they nonetheless also sought order.

⁸⁰ T.2103:52.112A27–29. On this edict, see Antonello Palumbo, “From Constantine the Great to Emperor Wu of the Liang: The Rhetoric of Imperial Conversion and the Divisive Emergence of Religious Identities in Late Antique Eurasia,” in Arietta Papconstantinou, ed., *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 95–123.

⁸¹ T.2103:52.352C12–21, under the alternate title, “A Discussion of the Three Teachings” 述三教詩. See also Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nan Beichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), “Liang shi,” j. 1, pp. 1531–32, and Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), pp. 56–58. This poem’s title is the first unambiguous use of the phrase “Three Teachings” to indicate Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism preserved in the historical record.

⁸² T.2103:52:336B8–9. Note that although Wudi apparently thought of vegetarianism as a Buddhist teaching, it was not universally required of monks in India. Instead, it may have been constructed as a tenet of the religion in China partly through borrowing from Daoism. See Eric M. Greene, “A Reassessment of the Early History of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism,” *AM* 3d ser. 29.1 (2016), pp. 1–43.

⁸³ Andreas Janousch, “The Reform of Imperial Ritual during the Reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–549),” Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge University, 1998), p. 140.

/ [Now, however,] with vegetable offerings and frugal fare, the edifying transformative influence of government for the first time reaches perfection, / with the [emperor] leading beings by his own example in his exalted position (as Confucius himself aspired to do).” 在昔哲王觀民志。庶羞百品因時備。爲善不同同歸治。蔬膳菲食化始至。率物以躬行尊位。⁸⁴

It is also possible to discern a similar narrative in Wudi's decree that the sangha should be required by law to practice vegetarianism, which justified the policy by arguing that “laypeople cannot yet fully conform themselves to the *dao*, but you who have left the household, wear the robes of the Tathāgata, and practice the behaviors of bodhisattvas should give deep thought [to what you eat] 白衣居家未可適道，出家學人被如來衣習菩薩行，宜應深思。”⁸⁵ Here Wudi suggests that whereas laypeople remain within the scope of the provisional teachings of traditional China, monks should ideally have moved beyond them.

Political propaganda crafted by others about Wudi also displays a similar “supersessionist” narrative. In his “Da fa song” 大法頌 (“Ode on the Great Dharma”), for instance, Wudi's son Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551) depicted his father's Buddhist-favoring policies as “doing away with past expedients to teach the true *dao*, discarding expedient means (*upāya*: here, the other Teachings) in leading his people beyond the delusions of the illusory city 將欲改權，教示實道，遣方便之說，導化城之迷。”⁸⁶ According to the narrative given in this “Ode 頌” (whose composition, it might be noted, Xiao Gang explicitly justifies by recourse to the “Odes” 頌 preserved in the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經) Wudi recognized that the (Confucian) “way of utmost impartiality 至公之要道,” its “displaying frugality to beings 示物以儉,” and its “teaching them to be benevolent 示物以爲仁” all “do not yet reach up to [the Buddha's teaching of] transcending the world 未臻於出世也.” Daoist teachings, similarly, “merely lead to the joy of the Three Pure Realms but do not eliminate the perceptions that result from the eight cognitive distortions 徒階三清之樂，不祛八倒之境。”⁸⁷ Wudi therefore resolved to “establish Buddhist monasteries 建立道場” throughout his domain and to “open and make clear the affairs of the Buddha 開闡佛事” so as to “drive the myriad beings to achieve benevolence and longevity (the consummations of Confucianism and

⁸⁴ See Lu, *Han Wei*, “Liang shi,” *j.* 3, p. 2175. For the allusion to Confucius, see *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, ed. Cheng Shude 程樹德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), *j.* 14, p. 499 (7:33).

⁸⁵ T.2103.52:297B2–4.

⁸⁶ T.2102:52.240C5–6. The “illusory city” derives from a parable in the *Lotus sūtra* (*Saddharma puṇḍarīka sūtra*, 妙法蓮華經), T.262:9.25C26–26A12.

⁸⁷ T.2102:52.240C23–5.

Daoism, respectively), and to draw those bound in delusion to all enter the [Buddhist] Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna) 驅彼眾生, 同躋仁壽, 引茲具縛, 俱入大乘.”⁸⁸ Once again, native Chinese Teachings are treated as equivalent to the Hīnayāna: lesser vehicles that are encompassed and superseded by the fuller revelation of Buddhism.

The fact that “Da fa song” was written by someone close to Wudi but not Wudi himself makes it a particularly valuable document for assessing the ideology he sought to cultivate for his nascent dynasty. In this ode, Xiao Gang makes assertions about his father that Wudi seems to have refrained from making in his own voice, for instance that he possessed a “wondrous enlightenment singularly complete among all in heaven and beneath it 天上天下, 妙覺之理獨圓”; that “without giving up his original vow, out of the pure and placid *dharmakāya*, he manifested himself through his numinous powers, descending to this land as a response [to its karmic merits] 皇帝以湛然法身, 不捨本誓, 神力示現, 降應茲土”; and that he “was of the same body as the buddhas, having manifested the wondrous appearance [of a buddha], being equal to the buddhas in might, and thus matching [with the Buddha] like a tally 聖主同諸佛身, 降茲妙相, 等諸佛力, 若符契焉.”⁸⁹ The claim being made here, evidently, is that Wudi is not just a ruler who himself subscribes to and supports Buddhism, but moreover that he should be considered an authority over the Buddhist community itself, an emperor-bodhisattva 皇帝菩薩 (to use a term that was apparently applied to Wudi by his courtiers) or perhaps even, as Kathy Cheng-mei Ku has argued on the basis of artworks produced in Wudi’s reign, a Buddhārāja 佛王.⁹⁰

This claim helps to explain how Wudi might have justified the attempt he made to set himself up as the supreme legislative and disciplinary authority over the Buddhist clergy by establishing himself as Rectifier of the Sangha 僧正, and it explains the many other reforms and innovations he instituted that Andreas Janousch has described as placing him simultaneously at the apex of both Buddhist and Confucian hierarchies.⁹¹ To some degree, this consolidation of temporal and spiri-

⁸⁸ T.2102:52.240A9–10. It is also possible that “benevolence and longevity” are both Confucian consummations, drawing upon *Lunyu* 6:23; see *Lunyu jishi*, j. 12, p. 408.

⁸⁹ T.2102:52.240A21–22 and 241C3–4.

⁹⁰ Kathy Cheng-Mei Ku, “The Buddhārāja Image.” For the appellation “emperor-bodhisattva,” see T.2103:52.112B20 and *Wei shu* 98, p. 2187.

⁹¹ For Wudi’s attempt to install himself as “Rectifier of the Sangha,” and the ensuing debate with Zhizang 智藏 that finally discouraged him from this course of action, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, T.2060:50.466B10–C19. This account is a hagiographical biography of Zhizhang and should be treated with skepticism; in particular, the anecdote seems designed to embarrass Wudi, who is depicted (implausibly) as not knowing who Devadatta was. However it came about that he was discouraged from installing himself as Rectifier, however, Wudi

tual power was merely a logical extension of the supersession paradigm he had adopted from contemporary debates about the Teachings. If, that is, the governance-focused teachings of Confucius and Laozi are encompassed within the fuller teachings of the Buddha, then the emperor who finally rules as a Buddhist is fulfilling the potential of all the Three Teachings in a way that had been impossible when the Chinese Teachings dominated statecraft and Buddhism was primarily monastic. In this sense, we can observe in what Yan Shangwen 顏尚文 has called Wudi's policy of "the Three Teachings combined as one 三教合一" in a "Buddhist empire 佛教帝國" the logic of the discourse exerting a force on social, institutional, and doctrinal realities.⁹²

THE COMPARTMENTALIZATION PARADIGM

Liang Wudi would not be the last emperor enticed by this sort of logical extension of the supersession paradigm. A similar project was, for instance, pursued later in the sixth century by Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 of the Northern Zhou (543–578, r. as Zhou Wudi 北周武帝, 561–578), who purged Buddhism and (supposedly) Daoism from his empire and in 574 instituted the state-managed Tongdao guan 通道觀 (Abbey for the Encompassing *Dao*) in order to replace and reconcile the Three Teachings under his personal authority.⁹³ Judging from surviving sources, it seems to have been this weaponization of the discourse that prompted

continued to have "household monks" under his direct employ serve in that position; see Tom De Rauw and Ann Heirman, "Monks for Hire: Liang Wudi's Use of Household Monks (*jiase* 家僧)," *The Medieval History Journal* 14.1 (2011), pp. 45–69. For Wudi's multiple attempts to place himself at the apex of the Buddhist and Confucian hierarchies, see Janousch, "Reform of Imperial Ritual," and idem, "The Aśoka of China: Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (r. 502–549) and the Buddhist Monastic Community," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 50.1 (2016), pp. 256–95.

⁹² Yan, *Liang Wudi*, 318–19. The phrase "the Three Teachings combined as one 三教合一" appears frequently later in the Chinese tradition, but neither Wudi nor his court used it. Note also that Wudi's court was not unfailingly consistent in its propaganda, and on other occasions he availed himself both of other Buddhist ideas not directly linked to his supersessionist rhetoric and to more traditional Chinese visions of government as well. For a study of Wudi's *pratimokṣa* or bodhisattva vows 菩薩戒, see Andreas Janousch, "The Emperor as Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattva Ordination and Ritual Assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty," in Joseph P. McDermott, ed., *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), pp. 112–49, though Janousch is depending upon an idiosyncratic reconstruction of a Dunhuang manuscript that is beset by a number of uncertainties. For a detailed discussion of Wudi's use of the idea of the "last age of the dharma" (*mofa* 末法), see De Rauw, "Beyond Buddhist Apology," pp. 56–89. For Wudi's more Confucian rhetoric and his continued interest in Daoist texts like the *Laozi*, see Tian, *Beacon Fire*, esp. pp. 15–110.

⁹³ For the Tongdao guan, see Yamazaki Hiroshi 山崎宏, "Hokushū no Tsūdōkan ni tsuite" 北周の通道觀について, *TS* 54 (1979), pp. 1–13; John Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao: Somme taoïste du V^e siècle* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981), pp. 4–21; and Sunayama Minoru 砂山稔, *Zui Tō Dōkyō shisōshi kenkyū* 隋唐道教思想史研究 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1980), pp. 135–39. Though the Tongdao guan employed Buddhist monks, Tang-era accounts

the development of the compartmentalization paradigm, according to which the empire needed to preserve two or more Teachings, and to respect their autonomy, because they applied to and were each limited to different spheres of concern. In context, it is easy to understand how this final paradigm to develop during the Period of Division might have recommended itself to defenders of the Teachings who wanted to deny the discursive basis of the encroachments upon them perpetrated by emperors like Liang Wudi and Zhou Wudi.⁹⁴ Yet compartmentalization of this sort generally demanded that the Teachings give up, at least discursively, on ambitions to temporal or spiritual significance that feature prominently within their canons. In this sense, both the initial proposal and the eventual popularity of this final paradigm suggest the fourth key argument of this essay: that important developments in the religious and intellectual history of medieval China will appear paradoxical or inexplicable unless they are understood in light of the still-largely abstract logic of discourse relating the Three Teachings.

Reconstructing the precise contours of the context in which the compartmentalization paradigm first emerged is a project complicated by discrepancies among our sources.⁹⁵ Although supersessionist arguments seem to have been prominent in the north throughout the sixth century,⁹⁶ it is not clear that Zhou Wudi was committed to this paradigm

suggest that “what was studied there was only Laozi and Zhuangzi (i.e. Daoism) 其所學者惟是老莊” (T.2103:52.156c8), and the institute’s major work was the great Daoist compendium *Wushang biyao* 無上祕要. For the Zhou suppression of Buddhism, see Nomura Yōshō 野村耀昌, *Shūbu hōnan no kenkyū* 周武法難の研究 (Tokyo: Azuma shuppan, 1968). In English, see Longdu Shi, “Buddhism and the State in Medieval China: Case Studies of Three Persecutions of Buddhism, 444–846,” Ph.D. diss. (London: SOAS, 2016).

⁹⁴ Other sixth-century rulers also availed themselves of the resources provided by the Three Teachings, though not all seem to have proposed consistent ideologies regarding their interrelations. Examples of such rulers include the Buddhist emperors of the Chen dynasty, emperor Wenxuan of the Northern Qi 北齊文宣帝 (r. 550–559), and emperor Wen of the Sui 隋文帝 (r. 581–604). In one early edict Sui Wendi suggests a unified policy towards the Three Teachings (see *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, T.2034:49.107B26–27), but records of that policy’s continuation do not survive. For Wendi’s use of Buddhist ideas in legitimizing his reign, see most recently April D. Hughes, *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2021), pp. 61–79.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the differences between our sources and an interpretation of which is the most reliable, see Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, *Hokuchō Bukkyō shi kenkyū* 北朝仏教史研究 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1974), pp. 550–73.

⁹⁶ E.g., in 520 the Northern Wei court sponsored a debate between the Daoist Jiang Bin 姜斌 (n.d.) and the Buddhist monk Tanmozui 曇謨最 (alternately written 曇無最, n.d.) concerning the birth dates of Laozi and the Buddha. At issue here, again, seems to have been the (probably supersessionist) question of whether Laozi had “converted the barbarians” or whether he and Confucius might have derived their wisdom from the Buddha. See *Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡, T.2104:52.369B13–70A2; T.2060:50.624B22–625A; and *Poxie lun* 破邪論, T.2109:52.481b–c26.

when he initiated the court debates of the 560s that would ultimately lead to the institution of the Tongdao guan. According to Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) narrative account in *Guang Hongming ji* 廣宏明集 (*Expanding the Collection of Works That Magnify and Clarify Buddhism*), Wudi became suspicious of the black-robed sangha on account of a prophecy that the dynasty would be overthrown by someone in black and, believing slanders about rebellious monks propagated by the Daoist Zhang Bin 張賓 (fl. 560–590), set out in a series of court debates to humble Buddhism as the least exalted of the Three Teachings, declaring finally that “The Three Teachings have spread throughout the populace, but their meanings cannot all stand together 三教被俗，義不可俱。”⁹⁷ As the debates are narrated by Fei Changfang 費長房 (fl. 581), however, Wudi was actually “interested in evening out the Three Teachings 欲齊三教” as a means of pacifying a population that was “disorderly and argumentative, vying to produce divergent opinions 時俗紛然，異端競作。”⁹⁸ And in yet another account, the *Zhou shu* 周書 depicts Wudi as initially worried that “Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were not the same 佛、道、儒三教不同，” before being convinced (at least temporarily) by Wei Xiong 韋夔 (502–578) that establishing a hierarchy among them was unnecessary because “although the Three Teachings have their differences, they all ultimately return to goodness, and though their traces seem to have differences of depth, their ultimate principles probably cannot be ranked differently 夔以三教雖殊，同歸於善，其迹似有深淺，其致理殆無等級。”⁹⁹

Evidence from surviving primary sources, finally, suggests that the ultimate direction of the debates was particularly influenced by the 567 contribution of the ex-monk Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩 (n.d.), which seems to have stimulated a number of responses and would, twelve years later, be retrospectively blamed for the Northern Zhou dynasty's anti-Buddhist policies.¹⁰⁰ In a memorial to the throne, Wei advocated subordinating Buddhism's institutions to the traditional statecraft ends of imperial Confucianism. As Wei saw it, the southern Qi and Liang dynasties had failed because they exhausted their resources in patronizing the corrupt version of Buddhism that, according to prophecy, would characterize the “last age of the dharma” (*mo fa* 末法). Wei proposed, therefore, that by devoting the Buddhist monastic institution to the

⁹⁷ T.2103:52.136A26.

⁹⁸ T.2034:49.101B16–17.

⁹⁹ Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 et al., *Zhou shu* 周書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971) 31, pp. 545–46.

¹⁰⁰ See Wang Mingguang's 王明廣 memorial of 579, T.2103:52.157A16–59B22.

goal of governance – which he argues had once reached perfection under the Chinese sages Yao and Shun – the dynasty could return to the “age of the correct dharma” (*zheng fa* 正法) under a new Buddha, Zhou Wudi himself.

Merely benefitting the people and aiding the state: this is all that is necessary to match the mind of the Buddha. For the Buddha’s mind is based in great compassion, bringing peace and happiness to all beings, and never making the masses suffer.... How could the people not yearn for the excellent ways of Yao and Shun and not cast aside the “dharma of the last age” that characterized Qi and Liang? I thus request the founding of great Universally Welcoming Temples that can accommodate all the people within the four seas. I am not recommending that we establish temples to partial views that will one-sidedly house the five divisions of the clergy who follow the two [lower] vehicles. Instead, these Universally Welcoming Temples will make no differentiation between clergy and laity, just as they make no distinction between self and others. They will cherish and benefit the people equally and without distinction as to whether they hold to or forsake a precept. [In this way,] let the shrines to the city gods be made into temples and stupas; let the ruler of the Zhou be the Tathāgata; let the cities and towns be the residence quarters of the sangha; and join husbands and wives as that holy multitude.

但利民益國，則會佛心耳。夫佛心者，以大慈爲本，安樂含生，終不苦役黎元。... 慶黎庶之逢時。豈不慕唐虞之勝風，遺齊梁之末法？嵩請造平延大寺，容貯四海萬姓。不勸立曲見伽藍，偏安二乘五部。夫平延寺者，無選道俗，罔擇親疎。愛潤黎元，等無持毀。以城隍爲寺塔，即周主是如來，用郭邑作僧坊，和夫妻爲聖眾。¹⁰¹

Here as elsewhere, Wei does not seem to have truly renounced the religion he previously served as a monk; to the contrary, he claims to be trying to save Buddhism from its decline into mere monasticism, a project upon which he apparently expanded in a now-lost seven-scroll disquisition entitled *Qi sanjiao lun* 齊三教論 (“Evening Out the Three Teachings”).¹⁰² Yet in doing so in a way that suggested the good governance of the ancient Chinese sages encompassed, fulfilled, and thus could supersede the teachings of the Buddha, he offered a potential

¹⁰¹ T.2103:52.132A8-19.

¹⁰² A notice to this effect is found in Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tongzhi* 通志 (Taipei: Taiwan shang-wu yinshu guan, 1987), “lüe,” j. 67, p. 794c.

rationale for Buddhism's subordination and suppression – one Zhou Wudi seems to have grasped eagerly.¹⁰³

Buddhism's defenders invoked several different paradigms in attempting to dissuade Wudi from this course. In a memorial rebutting Wei Yuansong's, for instance, Wang Mingguang 王明廣 (n.d.) wrote that “Even though the teachings and actions of the Buddha, the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, Yao, Shun, Laozi, and Zhuangzi are diverse, their ultimate purport returns to unity. How, then, can [Wei] take high Chinese antiquity (literally, the age of the knotted ropes) alone as well governed and call only the shaven-pated monastic institution a provisional *dao*? 釋迦周孔堯舜老莊, 教迹雖殊, 宗歸一也. 豈得結繩之世, 孤稱正治; 剃髮之僧, 獨名權道.”¹⁰⁴ A few other participants in the debate also offered convergence-model arguments, with the monk Tanji 曇積 (n.d.), for example, submitting a memorial assuring Zhou Wudi that “Although when fine sages speak their classics/sutras, they [appear] different and not at one, nonetheless ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ connect, and there is no divergence or difference between them 令聖說經, 互差不一; 內外相通, 亦無乖異.”¹⁰⁵ Zhen Luan 甄鸞 (b. 535), however, opted to respond with an argument of Buddhist supersessionism, contending in his “Xiao *dao lun*” 笑道論 (“Laughing at Daoism”) that “Confucius took Buddhism rather than Daoism as the sagely [Teaching] 孔子以佛爲聖, 不以道爲聖也”; that, in fact, “Laozi's teacher was Śākyamuni 老氏之師名釋迦文”; and that later Daoists had “long been imitating Buddhism 學佛久矣” without actually understanding it.¹⁰⁶ And when Zhou Wudi had Zhen Luan's work burned in court, the monk Dao'an 道安 (n.d.; not to be confused with the famous fourth-century monk of the same name) decided in his “Er jiao lun” 二教論 (“There Are Two [Different] Teachings”) to follow a different tack altogether.

Dao'an sets up his entry in the debate as a dialogue between an antagonist, an “exceptional youth of the eastern metropolis 東都逸俊童子,” and his own mouthpiece, an “elder of the western capital fully

¹⁰³ Wudi would echo Wei unmistakably in defending his anti-Buddhist policies: “The *dao* is everywhere; it pervades both the ordinary man and the sage, and for this reason, there is no Confucianism or Buddhism, no teachings vain or exalted.... Thus we know that the emperor is the Tathāgata, so we should cease to worship Buddhist images; his ministers are the bodhisattvas, so we should cease to pay cult to [Indian bodhisattvas such as] Mañjuśrī; and old folks can be taken as senior monks, so that we have no need of [Indian arhats such as] Piṇḍola-bhāradvāja 此則道無不在; 凡聖該通, 是則教無孔釋虛崇. ... 是知帝王即是如來, 宜停丈六; 王公即是菩薩, 省事文殊. 耆年可爲上座, 不用寶頭” (T.2103:52.155A7-10).

¹⁰⁴ T.2103:52.158B4-6.

¹⁰⁵ T.2103:52.279A21-22.

¹⁰⁶ T.2103:52.152A11-16.

learned in the arts [of the *dao*] 西京通方先生。”¹⁰⁷ The first hint that Dao'an's argument will diverge from the convergence and supersession paradigms that had dominated the debate since the beginning of the fifth century comes in the voice of the antagonist, who begins the discussion not by attacking Buddhism, but rather by claiming its ultimate unity with Confucianism and Daoism: “Though the Three Teachings are different, their meaning is at one in the encouragement of goodness, and though their paths and traces are truly distinct, if one understands their deeper principles they are the same 三教雖殊，勸善義一；塗迹誠異，理會則同。”¹⁰⁸ As the discourse moves on, the antagonist offers a number of ways in which the Three Teachings supposedly converge, claiming at one point that “Daoism includes the Buddha 道教收佛”； at another that “Confucius and Laozi were Buddhas 孔老是佛”； and finally even grasping at the counter-*huahu* thesis that “the Buddha sent his disciples to China to begin the process of educating [the Chinese], with Māṇava bodhisattva being called Confucius, Prabhāsvara (?) bodhisattva being called Yan Hui, and Mahākāśyapa being called Laozi 佛遣三弟子振旦教化。儒童菩薩，彼稱孔丘；光淨菩薩，彼稱顏淵；摩訶迦葉，彼稱老子。” It eventually becomes clear, however, that each of these claims of convergence is designed to advance the antagonist's true supersessionist goal: the extirpation of monastic Buddhism in China. Ultimately, he will argue, the teachings of Confucius and Laozi “are sufficient to transform the people 爲化足矣，” and since they are the same as the Buddha's, “why would we need to borrow the scriptures of the barbarians? Moreover, [the disciplines of] pulling out one's hatpin, shaving one's hair, ruining one's looks, and changing one's surname can perhaps be used to educate those stubborn barbarians, but should not be put in practice among the Chinese 何假胡經？又簪抽髮削毀容易姓，可以化彼強夷，不可施之中夏。”¹⁰⁹ It seems likely that this final revelation of the antagonist's true intent represents Dao'an's reconstruction of the most threatening position in the current debate at the Zhou court.

Sensing throughout the danger of the antagonist's seemingly friendly overtures, Dao'an's protagonist staunchly resists his attempts to coax him into admitting continuities between Buddhism, on the one hand, and Confucianism or Daoism, on the other. His response is con-

¹⁰⁷ For a useful introduction to Dao'an's “Er jiao lun,” and a full translation into French, see Catherine Despeux, “La culture lettrée au service du plaidoyer pour le bouddhisme: Le traité des deux doctrines (‘Erjiao lun’) de Dao’an,” in idem, ed., *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale*, pp. 145–227. I have also benefitted from Yoshikawa's translation into Japanese, *Gumyōshū*, pp. 157–211.

¹⁰⁸ T.2103:52.136B26–27.

¹⁰⁹ T.2103:52.141C11–13.

sistent: “the principles of the worldly [Teachings of Confucianism and Daoism] and the sagely [Teaching of Buddhism] are vastly separated, completely different in their [respective] movement and stillness, such that they cannot even be compared at the same time 凡聖理懸，動寂天異。焉可同時而辨昇降哉。”¹¹⁰ Although Daoism and Confucianism, he explains, “are the utmost Teachings ‘within the square,’ they truly are not the great doctrine that ‘transcends the square’ 並是方內之至談，諒非踰方之巨唱，”¹¹¹ for “the trans-worldly (*chushi, lokottara*) Three Vehicles [of Buddhism] and the Four Great Ones [spoken of by Laozi] within the [worldly] realm are separated as far apart as heaven and earth, and are more different from one another than a dustmote and a mighty mountain 出世三乘，域中四大，懸如天地，異過塵嶽。”¹¹² Most elaborately, the protagonist protests,

You say that “though the ‘Three Teachings’ are different, their meaning is at one in the encouragement of goodness.” I say, however, that “goodness” has refined and coarse forms and that the excellent and the deficient should be differentiated. The excellent transcends the many transformations [of the world] and rises high, while the coarse remains unendingly within the nine abodes [of reincarnation as a sentient being]. How could these two be discussed and compared even within the same year? You also say that “though their paths and traces are truly distinct, if one understands their deeper principles they are the same,” going on to take the worldly Teachings [of Daoism and Confucianism] to match like a tally the obscure Teaching [of Buddhism]. This is the ignorance of the benighted, who have not reached the Teachings’ [respective] roots. For what is a Teaching but a way of explaining a principle, and what is a principle other than that which a Teaching explains? Therefore, if two Teachings lead to different fruits, their principles cannot be the same, and if their principles were to be the same, then how could they not be just one Teaching?

子謂三教雖殊，勸善義一；余謂善有精麤，優劣宜異。精者超百化而高昇，麤者循九居而未息。安可同年而語其勝負哉！又云：教迹誠異，理會則同，爰引世訓以符玄教。此蓋悠悠之所昧，未暨其本矣。教者何也？詮理之謂。理者何也？教之所詮。教若果異，理豈得同；理若必同，教寧得異。¹¹³

¹¹⁰ T.2103:52.139A17-18.

¹¹¹ T.2103:52.137B12-15.

¹¹² T.2103:52.139C8.

¹¹³ T.2103:52.137B3-10.

Here Dao'an sets out to demolish the basic premise of the supersession paradigm, arguing that since Buddhism aims at a different "fruit" from Daoism and Confucianism – escape from the nine abodes of reincarnation – it is fundamentally divergent from them. For Dao'an's protagonist, indeed, the Teachings do not even share the same subject, speaking instead to different aspects of the human self: "though they are amalgamated [in any given lifetime] into a single being, nonetheless body and spirit are distinct.... Therefore there are Teachings that save the body, and these teachings are called 'outer,' and there is a Teaching that saves the spirit, and this Teaching is called 'inner' 聚雖一體而形神兩異. ...故救形之教, 教稱為外; 濟神之典, 典號為內."¹¹⁴ Within the context of the discourse up to this time, these claims are radical. Not only do Confucianism and Daoism have no bearing on the spirit, but Buddhism is apparently unconcerned with "saving the body" and all the worldly "fruits" that entailed.

In furtherance of this compartmentalizing vision, Dao'an's essay omits, apparently pointedly, a significant portion of the existing Buddhist apologetic repertoire. Rather than arguing, for instance, that Buddhism converged with Confucianism in promoting the interests of mundane morality and the state, his protagonist ignores almost entirely the religion's more "worldly" components. Indeed, even when he speaks of the expedient teachings of the Buddha, he is not referring, as apologists from Huiyuan all the way to Liang Wudi often had, to its prescriptions for laypeople. Instead, he depicts the Buddha as "turning [our interest from] benevolence and longevity (the consummations offered by Confucianism and Daoism) to *bodhi*, and thus shifting the meaning of the Teaching towards [providing] both provisional guides and also truth, making those who revere the void awaken to the emptiness of emptiness and those who remain within existence follow the expedients of the precepts and meditation 移仁壽於菩提, 徙教義於權實, 使宗虛者悟空空之旨, 存有者進戒定之權."¹¹⁵ Here, the "provisional" and "expedient" teachings in question are, surprisingly, designated exclusively for monks, rather than for those people his contemporaries would normally have thought of as "remaining within existence": those who take the business of daily life and of the temporal empire as their main

¹¹⁴ T.2103:52.136C10-12. For the topic of the "spirit" in Chinese Buddhism, see Jung-nok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China* (Sheffield: Equinox Pub. Ltd., 2012), and Michael Radich, "A 'Prehistory' to Chinese Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, with a Focus on the Term Shishen 識神/Shenshi 神識," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44.2 (2016), pp. 105-26.

¹¹⁵ T.2013:52.142A11-13. Again, "benevolence and longevity" may simply be the consummations of Confucianism alone.

concern. In effect, Dao'an is treating Buddhism as a purely monastic enterprise.

Even more pointedly, Dao'an scolds his antagonist for even worrying about Buddhism's impact on the state, given that "nowadays the great Zhou rules the realm 今大周馭寓" with such virtue and efficiency that "fine grains are abandoned in the fields and the storehouses are so full that food rots 嘉穀委於中田, 倉庫積而成朽."¹¹⁶ This statement is blatant political flattery. Yet it is also congruent with Dao'an's larger aims in the essay, since it suggests that whether the state flourishes or fails has nothing to do with Buddhism and everything to do with the ruler. Dao'an makes this point again in the most provocative section of the dialogue, entitled "The Ruler is the Master of the [Worldly] Teaching" 君爲教主.¹¹⁷ In this section, the antagonist protests that Daoism cannot be a mere subbranch of Confucianism because its "master," Laozi, was a sage – in other words, that the Three Teachings are all comparable since they all have their own sagely "Masters of the Teaching" 教主. The protagonist responds, however, that there are, in fact, only two "Masters of a Teaching": the Buddha, master of Buddhism, and the emperor of any given age, who is in charge of the worldly teachings of governmental system, ritual, and music, and who is thus – ideally, provided he enacts his role properly – the master of Confucianism and all the branches of secular thought that are subordinate to it.¹¹⁸ Here, Dao'an effectively divides the world into two empires governed by two separate Teachings. Zhou Wudi is allowed to claim dominion over everything within the mundane realm, so long as he acknowledges his counterpart, the Buddha, to be the master of what lies beyond it.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ T.2013:52.143B5-9.

¹¹⁷ T.2103:52.138A26-C17.

¹¹⁸ T.2103:52.138B4-10.

¹¹⁹ In light of what I take to be Barrett's misunderstanding of the argument in this section ("Advent," pp. 158-59), it is important to distinguish Dao'an's discussion of the idea of "Masters of the Teachings" from that found in Falin's 法琳 (572-640) *Bian zheng lun* 辯正論. For Falin, the problem with considering Confucius a "Master of the Teaching" is that "the [Confucian] Teaching was [originally] the Teaching of the Three August Gods and Five Thearchs 教是三皇五帝之教," with Confucius merely a later "propagator" of it 傳教人 (see *Bian zheng lun*, T.2103:52.499A5-6). Dao'an's protagonist, however, is explicit that his use of the term *jiaozhu* 教主 is not a matter of origination, but rather a position within the normative system of Confucian governance: "When a ruler's achievement is complete he creates music, and when his rule is established he institutes ritual 帝王功成作樂, 治定制禮" for "teaching" his people (T.2103:52.138B4-5). Thus the Duke of Zhou was the effective "Master of the Teaching" when he held the reigns of government and instituted hierarchies and rituals for the Zhou dynasty, despite the fact that he inherited much of his system from previous sages (T.2103:52.138B8). We should also be wary of drawing conclusions about the meaning of the term *jiaozhu* on the basis of its usage in "San po lun," where the emphasis is on the fact that the term *zhu* 主 has connotations of "rulership": the Buddha, it is argued, could not be a true *jiaozhu* because he

Zhou Wudi does not seem to have been impressed by this attempt to limit his authority, tactful as it may have been in comparison with Luan Zhen's confrontational Buddhist supercessionism. Yet despite its initial failure, Dao'an's essay appears to have set the template for a number of works promoting the compartmentalization paradigm in the Sui and early Tang. Although on their own, many of the essay's claims were far from unprecedented, the way Dao'an combined them was revolutionary.¹²⁰

The clearest early echoes of Dao'an's argument are found in the works of the prolific Buddhist translator, theorist, and apologist Yancong 彦琮 (557–610). According to a surviving précis by Daoxuan, Yancong authored a now-lost "Bian jiao lun" 辯教論 ("Discriminating the Teachings"; or perhaps "Bian sheng lun" 辯聖論, "Discriminating the Sages") that followed the pattern of Dao'an's "Er jiao lun" closely, "making clear that whereas Buddhism propagates the ultimate truth, Confucianism improves the conventional, and discussing how Laozi was no different from a common Confucian, whereas the Lingbao scriptures do not even fit within Confucianism 明釋教宣真, 孔教弘俗; 論老子教不異俗儒, 靈寶等經則非儒攝."¹²¹ Yancong also seems to have offered much the same vision in his (also lost) "Tongxue lun" 通學論 ("On Comprehensive Study"),

was not, and did not act like, a ruler (see T.2102:52.49C20–23). This kingly connotation is not at issue for the antagonist in Dao'an's treatise, who wants to label Confucius and Laozi as *jiaozhu* despite the fact that neither was a ruler; it is also not at issue for the protagonist, for whom the Duke of Zhou, again, was *jiaozhu* despite not being king, serving instead as regent for the immature King Cheng 周成王.

¹²⁰ Previous scholarship on inter-religious discourse during the Period of Division has missed this revolutionary character because it has focused on cataloguing what I would consider particular sub-arguments rather than the broader argumentative paradigms I identify here. And Dao'an does borrow many such sub-arguments from earlier debaters. The idea, e.g., that Buddhism centrally concerns the immortal spirit whereas Daoism and Confucianism focus on the world of the body is found both in Zong Bing's "Ming fo lun" (T.2102:52.16A6) and in Yan Yanzhi's 顏延之 (384–456) "Ting gao" 庭誥 ("Household Announcement"), T.2102:52.89B12–13. Dao'an's claim that "cultivating the pure [Buddhist] *dao* is work that runs opposite of a lay life 修淨道者·務在反俗," similarly derives verbatim from Xie Zhenzhi's response to Gu Huan's "Yi-Xia lun" (T.2102:52.42A3–4), which was itself drawing upon Huiyuan's argument that "the principles [governing the practice of monks] diverge from those of the worldly, and their *dao* is the opposite of laypeople's 此理之與世乖, 道之與俗反" (T.2102:52.83C27–28). And the idea that Buddhism is world-transcending (*chushi, lokottara*) – as opposed to the thoroughgoing worldliness (*shijian, laukika*) of Confucianism and Daoism – had been cited in Liu Xie's response to the "San po lun," in Yuan Can's response to Gu Huan, and in Liang Wudi's edict on abandoning his worship of Laozi (see T.2102:52.51B13–14; *Nan Qi shu* 54, p. 933; and T.2103:52.112A28; see also Barrett, "Advent," pp. 155–56).

¹²¹ See T.2060:50.439C4–6 and T.2149:55.279A10–12. This description is verbatim in existing versions of *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 and *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄, both compiled by Daoxuan. The title is, however, given differently in these two texts. Note that Yancong served in his youth in the Tongdao guan of the Northern Zhou, and it is possible he knew Dao'an personally.

which Daoxuan describes as “an attempt to lure all the people of the age to take as their teachers both Confucius and Śākyamuni, to make them know both the ‘outer’ and the ‘inner’ and to comprehensively recognize both the conventional and the ultimate 勸誘世人遍師孔釋，令知外內備識俗真。”¹²² And Yancong makes a similar argument in his surviving “Tong ji lun” 通極論 (“Comprehending the Ultimate”). Although the body of this apology is devoted to showing that objections to Buddhism are parochial, improperly limited in scope given the vaster vistas of time, space, and possibility that Buddhism has revealed, Yancong makes it clear in the preface that, in keeping with much contemporary Buddhist thought, both the “conventional truth” (Skt.: *saṃvṛti-satya*; Ch.: *sudi* 俗諦) of Confucianism and “ultimate truth” (*paramārtha-satya*; *zhendi* 真諦) of Buddhism need to be preserved.¹²³ He thus designates his treatise as aimed at correcting the misunderstandings of both petty Confucians and arrogant monks alike, and denies that either Confucians or monks need to give up their vocation to become the other.¹²⁴

Yancong also suggests a similar compartmentalization of the Teachings in his other surviving treatise, titled “Futian lun” 福田論 (“Planting Good Karmic Seeds”).¹²⁵ Written in response to Sui Yangdi’s 隋煬帝 (r. 604–618) attempt in 608 to force the sangha to bow to him, this dialogic quasi-rhapsody is directed at the emperor. Here, not only are the Teachings of Confucius and Laozi “confined within human affairs, so distant from Buddhism that they cannot be discussed in the same year 局於人事，相望懸絕，詎可同年”; they are, moreover, designated as applying specifically to the official ranks: “the scribe by the pillar of the Zhou house [Laozi] was long wrapped up in the king’s affairs, and the Lu minister of punishments [Confucius] was a premier of the state. ... Of course their Teachings, therefore, involve bowing their bodies to do obeisance 且復周之柱史，久牽王役；魯之司寇，已居國宰。...鞠躬恭敬，非此而誰。”¹²⁶ Confucianism and Daoism thus have a limited scope and do not encompass recluses, monks or, just as important, the emperor himself.¹²⁷ Indeed, Yancong’s protagonist claims that “the arising of

¹²² T.2034:49.106B23–24 and *Da Tang neidian lu*, T.2149:55.279A12–13.

¹²³ T.2103:52.113B18–19. Similar arguments remained prominent throughout the seventh century; see e.g. *Zhenzheng lun* 甄正論, T.2112:52.571B15.

¹²⁴ T.2103:52.113C1–14 and b24–25.

¹²⁵ This text has been translated into English by Thomas Jülch, “On Whether or Not Buddhist Monks Should Bow to the Emperor: Yancong’s (557–610) ‘Futian lun’ (Treatise on the Fields of Blessedness),” *MS 60* (2012), pp. 1–43. The text is difficult, and my interpretation diverges from his at several points.

¹²⁶ T.2103:52.281C1–2 and 282A24–27.

¹²⁷ For the claim that even Confucians allow recluses not to bow (a common point made in many Buddhist apologetics from the fourth century onward), see T.2103:52.282A27–29.

an emperor is necessarily the reincarnation of a bodhisattva 本皇王之奮起，必真人之託生。”¹²⁸ As a result, the emperor has a foot in two different worlds, the public world of officials and the religious world of monks, “dwelling within the kṣatriya caste and receiving [worldly] veneration [as emperor], while relying upon his [Buddhist] *prajñā* to protect the dharma. He does not ruin [monks’] four kinds of faith, and lacks none of the ten kinds of wholesome behavior [expected of laypeople]. He worships the Buddha and does homage to monks, and amasses [worldly] achievements and virtues 居刹利而稱尊，籍般若而爲護。四信不壞，十善無虧。奉佛事僧，積功累德。”¹²⁹ And since he is “possessed of lofty virtue that is secreted within his quiet mind but expressed in his physiognomy through his layperson’s aspect, therefore, [just as in past lifetimes when] he manifested the *dao* in a monk’s robes it was right for him to work fiercely on his passions, [so too now,] when he hides his karmic accomplishment within the dark gate (namely, when he is reincarnated as something other than a monk), is it not right that he cut off [the demand that monks] do obeisance to him with their bodies? 上德雖祕於淨心，外像仍標於俗相。是以道彰緇服則情勤直猛，業隱玄門則形恭應絕?”¹³⁰ In other words, the emperor should allow Buddhist monks to forgo the strictures of Confucian ritual because he is himself only partly dedicated to it. It is an appropriate teaching for one facet of his being, but not for another.

Similar claims that the Teachings apply to different aspects of a single individual can be found in several texts around this time. Yan Zhitui’s 顏之推 (531–591) *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓, for instance, seems sometimes to be offering a supersessionist argument, claiming that “the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ teachings are at base the same, but gradually grew apart and became different in their relative shallowness and depth 內外兩教，本爲一體，漸積爲異，深淺不同。”¹³¹ Yet Yan also acknowledges something no true Buddhist supersessionist could admit: that the monastic religion “empties state coffers 空國賦算。” As he sees it, therefore, “to seek the [Buddhist] *dao* [as a monk] is to take consideration for the self, while to care about expenditures is to plan for the state. Consideration for the self and planning for the state cannot be satisfied at the same time 求道者，身計也；惜費者，國謀也。身計國謀，不可兩遂。”¹³² They

¹²⁸ T.2103:52.282B8.

¹²⁹ T.2103:52.282B16–18.

¹³⁰ T.2103:52.282B0–10.

¹³¹ Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), j. 5, p. 368.

¹³² *Ibid.*, j. 5, p. 391, though see later in the same paragraph for Yan’s assurance that these two goals could be miraculously fulfilled were the government to transform its entire popula-

belong, instead, to different spheres of concern, an arrangement that seems to be structurally enacted in the *Yanshi jiaxun* by the consignment of the supposedly greater Teaching of Buddhism to one chapter only, a chapter enjoining his descendants to “turn their *minds* 歸心” to Buddhism that is apparently parallel to the “Daoist” chapter enjoining them to “nurture their *bodies* 養生.”

Finally, though the continuance of this debate into the Tang dynasty is properly a subject for another essay, a number of early-Tang texts likewise follow this model of differentiating the Teachings’ spheres of concern, and by the middle of the seventh century, the compartmentalization paradigm had apparently achieved widespread penetrance in the thought of the literati. When in 662, to give just one example, Tang emperor Gaozong 唐高宗 (r. 649–683) contemplated forcing Buddhist monks and Daoist priests alike to bow to him, this paradigm featured prominently in the protests offered by his courtiers.¹³³ Several argued that Confucian injunctions towards ritual deference only applied within a limited sphere, writing, for instance, that “when the hundred kings [of the Chinese past] laid out tracks for governance, they only established rituals for what lies within the royal domain, whereas the enlightened one [the Buddha] passed on his Teaching as a bridge to what is beyond the realm 百王布軌，但禮制於寰中；大覺垂教，乃津梁於域外，” and – more shockingly, particularly in light of the history narrated above – that since Buddhist and Daoist “Teachings do not concern governance within the realm, the rituals [their monks and priests] follow are [properly] ‘beyond the square’ (the province of Confucianism) 教非域中之政，形乃方外之儀.”¹³⁴ Agreeing with this reasoning, other respondents argued that since Confucianism simply did not apply to monastics, forcing monks and priests to bow would improperly “constrain them within the gates of Confucianism and tie them up in the king’s regulations 約以儒門，牽於王制，” whereas by rights, “in sitting calmly and engaging in walking meditation, the path [of Buddhist monks] has nothing to do with palace halls or ancestral shrines, and in ascending altars holding petitions [to the spirits], the tracks [of Daoist priests] do not line up to pay court to the emperor 宴坐經行，道不參於廊廟；登壇執

tion into monks. Note here that for Yan, echoing Dao’an, “seeking the Buddhist *dao*” is now predominantly envisioned as a monastic enterprise, despite the fact that he himself was a lay Buddhist. Yancong too focused apparently exclusively on monastic rather than householder Buddhism, suggesting that the logic of the discourse was pushing in this period towards the discursive discounting of what remained a major feature of the religion as a fact “on the ground.”

¹³³ For this debate, see Eric Reinders, *Buddhist and Christian Responses to the Kowtow Problem in China* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

¹³⁴ *Ji shamen buying baisu dengshi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事, T.2108:52.462A29–B1 and 460C5–6.

簡, 迹未齒於朝宗。”¹³⁵ Yet others argued further that the proposed policy would violate the purity of Buddhism and Daoism, for “although their theories are loftier than the lay Teaching [of Confucianism], if we force their practitioners to follow Confucian examples, they will ultimately become laypeople 論高於俗教, 若同儒例, 還入俗流”; or, put differently, “if people devoted to the *dao* participate in lay activities [like bowing] and the laity [the Confucian government] interferes with those devoted to the *dao*, then what should be concerned with oneness will become dual, and the *dao* will not be practiced in an unadulterated way 道而可俗, 俗又參道, 則一當有二, 而道不專行矣。”¹³⁶ In all such comments, we can see that Buddhism and Daoism are understood to be capable of coexisting with Confucianism not because the Three Teachings were ultimately or ideally the same, but rather because they do not overlap.

This 662 debate is an example of the continued efforts of courts at the end of the Period of Division to exert power over Buddhism and Daoism – power that, if it had been claimed personally by the emperors of the Liang and the Zhou, had become routinized under the Sui and Tang by the subordination of their monastic organizations under one or more offices of the (assumedly Confucian) bureaucracy.¹³⁷ In an echo of Barrett’s argument discussed above, Robert Ford Campany has suggested this routinization of state control over Buddhism and Daoism prevented premodern China from developing a strong or lasting analogue to our notion of “religion” (singular, as opposed to “religions”) because there was no truly “secular” realm to which it could be contrasted; instead, the brief impetus towards this sort of distinction that can be discerned early in the Period of Division gave way at precisely this point, when Buddhist and Daoist churches were subordinated to and given a place within a state that “was never, from its inception down to its end in 1911 CE, conceived as anything other than a deeply (in our terms) ‘religious’ system in purpose and in function.”¹³⁸ It seems to me, however, that arguments made according to the compartmentalization paradigm often do represent remarkably close analogues to our “secular” and “religious,”¹³⁹ with Confucianism giving up its claim

¹³⁵ T.2108:52.462C13 and C11-12.

¹³⁶ T.2108:52.461A15-16 and 459A5-6.

¹³⁷ See Campany, “Chinese History,” pp. 291-94. Antonello Palumbo, in a slightly different variant of this narrative, suggests that routine state supremacy over the Buddhist clergy began to be established in the Northern Dynasties but was not firm until the Song; “Exemption not Granted: The Confrontation between Buddhism and the Chinese State in Late Antiquity and the ‘First Great Divergence’ between China and Western Eurasia,” *Medieval Worlds* 6 (2017), pp. 118-55, pp. 145-47.

¹³⁸ Campany, “Chinese History,” p. 291.

¹³⁹ Note that Nicolas Standaert has suggested that in fact Confucianism may have pro-

to ultimate significance and Buddhism and (sometimes) Daoism relinquishing their previous aspirations to political application.¹⁴⁰ If, as I have suggested, this discursive model was actually increasing in prevalence and acceptability at just the moment it was becoming institutionally untenable, then this observation suggests the overarching point of this essay: that we should avoid conflating discourse with other fields of history, recognizing instead the continuing, at least partial, autonomy of the abstract debate.

CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the four key arguments made in the body of this essay, perhaps the most significant (and surprising) takeaway is simply that a reasonably coherent survey along these typological-historical lines was possible in the first place. This possibility suggests that, despite the fractured political and religious landscape of the Period of Division, discourse about the (proto- and later officially established) Three Teachings can to a significant degree be represented as belonging to a shared history, rather than several discrete histories or a mere series of local disputes with purely local stakes. To be sure, the writers sampled above do often respond to local stimuli. Yet there seem to have been vectors of communication that connected them, allowing them both to learn rhetorical strategies from one another and also to respond to one another in what was, apparently, both a highly literate and a remarkably coherent intellectual exchange. Commensurately, this exchange never limited itself to a discussion of local issues. Instead, whatever local issues were at play were considered against arguments that had been made previously throughout the Sinoscript world.

Thus although T.H. Barrett is certainly correct, in the conclusion of one of his recent articles questioning the application of the Three Teachings rubric to the Period of Division, in advocating that “the defi-

vided the original model for the Western idea of “non-religious” political, civil, and social thought; see “The Jesuits Did NOT Manufacture ‘Confucianism,’” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 16 (1999), pp. 115–32 (building on Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, *De l’idolâtrie: Une archéologie des sciences religieuses* [Paris: Seuil, 1988]). Though the point must remain speculative here, it is thus possible that late-medieval China – which according to Campany and Barrett did not have an analogue for the Western notion of the “secular” – is in fact an important historical source for that very idea.

¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting how the position of Daoism had shifted from Dao’an’s essay to this early-Tang debate, transforming it from a subbranch of Confucianism to a closer analogue of Buddhism. This shift, which seems to have been fairly pervasive in compartmentalization arguments, would have significant consequences for later Chinese religious history, wherein Buddhism and Daoism were often seen as more comparable to each other than either was to Confucianism.

nitions of religions and their interrelations that we find in texts of this period must surely be read against the cultural and polemical context in which they are used,” it seems to me that the meanings such reading would unearth are not the only properly historical significance these texts can be seen to bear. While it is true, that is, that those who formulated and employed these models for relating the Teachings “did not contemplate them as mere abstractions, hypotheses for making sense of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*,”¹⁴¹ it is also true that these models did answer timeless questions about, for instance, the proper structure of authority and whether temporal and eternal goals align. And this engagement with universal concerns was not incidental: as we all know, it is often a powerful rhetorical move in a local dispute to relate it to non-local principles.¹⁴² The point is particularly salient with regard to the debates covered here, since by the end of the Period of Division, as we have seen, it was possible to promote the suppression or the toleration of any of the Teachings through claiming either their ultimate divergence (the difference and compartmentalization models) or their ultimate sameness (the convergence and supersession models). In this debate, in other words, the discursive choices writers made in justifying their positions cannot be understood as flowing purely from the pragmatic goals they hoped to advance; participating in this discussion instead necessarily involved taking a stance within a long-running, multifaceted, often-abstract debate, articulating a vision whose usefulness in the local context would depend in part upon its also transcending that local context. And such visions, by this very fact, could go on to generate entailments and demand responses their initial formulators had not imagined.

Though the point cannot be pursued here, it is worth noting in this connection that many of the questions that arose in this debate are non-local not only within but also beyond medieval China. This fact partially explains why the discursive positions it generated continue to resonate with current scholarly discussions regarding the religious history of the period. When we at present ask whether our concept of religion fits the realities on the ground, whether Buddhism and Daoism were two or ultimately one, whether Confucianism was religious or secular, whether an originally disparate Three Teachings tended

¹⁴¹ Barrett, “Advent,” pp. 161–62.

¹⁴² If this point can be forgotten when applied to medieval Chinese texts, the reason may relate to what Eric M. Greene has identified as the anti-doctrinal posture of much recent Religious Studies scholarship on Asia. See Eric M. Greene, *Chan Before Chan: Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2021), esp. pp. 249–54.

gradually towards harmonization or whether they progressively came into being through contrastively appropriating each others' features and institutions – in all these cases and more, there are clear similarities to the questions that were asked in medieval China. The medieval debates, moreover, produced multiple competing visions for some of the same reasons these questions remain topics of discussion for scholars today: namely, that they attempted to bridge the local and the universal, the concrete and the abstract, textured history and structural possibility. In our own attempts to do justice to these poles so as to write a fuller history of medieval China, there is much important research to be done continuing the work of Barrett and others unearthing the complex institutional, sociological, and conceptual realities that have been obscured by the overly simplistic Three-Teachings rubric. These realities, however, need to be considered alongside the discursive pre-history of this rubric, recognizing both its partial freedom from and its ultimate influence on other aspects of Chinese religious history.