

this particular attempt of Ruth Hung is marred by too many errors of judgement and omission to get as close to that elusive goal as it might have done.

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Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism. By April D. Hughes. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 181. \$68.00.

Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism offers a tightly focused and concise study of how two Chinese emperors, Sui Emperor Wendi 隋文帝 (r. 581–604) and the female ruler, Wu Zhao 武曩 (r. 690–705), made deliberate use of some strands of Buddhist apocalyptic, messianic, and millenarian thought in legitimating their regimes. Although it has long been known that these two figures, perhaps the shrewdest operators in the world of medieval religion and politics, benefited by aligning themselves with some of these popular religious currents, the genealogy of these religio-political ideas has not been fully traced. We have seen the story only piecemeal. In her book, April Hughes carefully lays out the extant sources and the research on them to date. For the first time in the scholarship, *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* presents a coherent chronological sequence of the key sources, symbols, and ideas. Hughes has given us an invaluable overview of the influence of Buddhist apocalyptic thought not only on the founders of dynasties, but also on popular uprisings in the medieval period (mostly focusing on the sixth to eighth centuries). Those in search of a clear, no-frill narrative of this significant trend in medieval Chinese statecraft will appreciate this book.

This study makes an original contribution to our understanding of how two founders of medieval Chinese dynasties were able to channel effectively the millenarian hopes and dreams of some of their subjects in uniquely challenging circumstances. Sui Wendi strove to unite a large and fractious empire that had been divided for hundreds of years prior to his rule. Wu Zhao needed legitimation for her Zhou dynasty and her unprecedented position as a female emperor. As they sought ideological justification for their worldly ambitions, some of their people were seeking to make real the utopias depicted in Chinese Buddhist texts. The

book is based on some of the research that Hughes conducted for her Princeton University dissertation of 2014, “Waiting for Darkness: Judgment, Salvation, and Apocalyptic Eschatology in Medieval China,” but it is substantially different from the dissertation in scope, organization, and approach. Because this book is the only such focused study and because it presents the primary sources and secondary studies so thoroughly, I think it will be widely read in the field of East Asian religions. The book is certainly an important contribution to our field.

There are five chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter 1 describes the impending descent of the future Buddha Maitreya and the messianic figure of “Prince Moonlight” (Yueguang tongzi 月光童子) in what Hughes calls Buddhist “apocalyptic scriptures.” These are works that prophesy the imminent end of the world and the arrival of a saviour who will liberate the chosen few. The apocalyptic scriptures considered here, such as *Puxian pusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩說證明經 (Scripture expounded for the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra on attesting illumination) and *Shouluo biqiu jing* 首羅比丘經 (Scripture of the Bhikṣu Shouluo), all seem to have been composed in Chinese rather than translated from Indic sources. Some are known only from Dunhuang manuscripts. The “worldly saviors” of her title are depicted in these sources as restoring order to the chaos that attends the last days and both rule over their subjects and liberate them from saṃsāra. These figures are, thus, both political and religious in nature, but the context in which they rule and liberate is rather specific—they appear in times of extreme disorder and offer only a temporary respite during a longer era of inevitable decline.

In Chapter 2, Hughes explores accounts of religiously inspired rebellions that seem to have drawn on the symbolism of Buddhist saviour figures in combination with the language of imperial legitimation in order to claim the right to rule. Interestingly, some of these rebellions are said to have been led by women, perhaps showing that Wu Zhao was not the only female leader to garner popular support. As Hughes notes, since we do not have any text produced by rebel groups themselves we are forced to rely on the unsympathetic accounts offered by later imperial historians. They usually did not trouble to provide exact details of the ideology of the rebels and thus it is difficult to know for certain whether they drew upon the same sources as Sui Wendi and Wu Zhao.

Chapter 3 analyses how the founder of the Sui, Emperor Wendi, made calculated use of Buddhist ideology in legitimating his new regime. Hughes shows that he drew on ideas of both the ideal Buddhist *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king) and the more potent and messianic model of Prince Moonlight. The symbolism of the Wheel-Turning King is, of course, rather common to rulers across the Buddhist world, but the saviour figure of Prince Moonlight is rather specific to medieval

China, as has been well studied by Erik Zürcher.¹ In a passage interpolated by a person or persons unknown into a translated Buddhist text, the Buddha is made to prophesy that during the latter days of the dharma, Prince Moonlight will appear as a potent leader named Daxing 大行 (perhaps to be understood as “Great [Religious] Practice” or “Great Practitioner”) (pp. 76–78). Emperor Daxing will venerate the Buddha’s alms bowl, promote the dissemination of Buddhist scriptures, patronize the making of images, and establish monasteries and sanctuaries across the land. It is interesting that, as Zürcher already noted, Prince Moonlight does not usher in an era of perpetual peace and good government. The decline of the Buddhist teaching is inevitable, and the rule of Moonlight/Daxing offers only a temporary recapitulation of Buddhism’s former glories before darkness draws in once again. As such, this figure is perhaps not an obvious choice for the founder of a dynasty with aspirations to continued glory and success.

Chapters 4 and 5 are both devoted to Empress Wu (referred to as Emperor Wu Zhao in the book), a descendant of Sui Wendi, who made use of several different Buddhist saviour figures. Chapter 4 relates Empress Wu’s association with Maitreya as saviour, and with another figure known as Pure Light (Jingguang 淨光) as articulated in the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sutra* (*Dayun jing shu* 大雲經疏). Chapter 5 focuses on three events that occurred in October 693—Empress Wu was invited to take on the title of Wheel-Turning King which she did by adding the term “Golden Wheel” to her imperial title. She was also presented with a new translation of a Buddhist scripture which contained an interpolation identifying her with Moonlight who will rule as both *cakravartin* and bodhisattva. Distinct from Prince Moonlight, this saviour figure appears in a female body and acts as a mother towards her subjects. Empress Wu continued to allude to the prophecies found in both commentary and scripture long into her reign (p. 109) and kept “Golden Wheel” as part of her title until 700. As part of her legitimation campaign, she ordered the making of the traditional symbols of the “Seven Treasures of a Wheel-Turning King” (a Golden Wheel, a White Elephant, a Woman, a Horse, a Pearl, a Supervisor in Charge of the Military, and a Supervisor in Charge of the Storehouse, according to a later history of her rule) and displayed them at court. According to some Buddhist sources, the physical manifestation of these Treasures is necessary for the Wheel-Turning King to perform truly his (or her) role.

Hughes’s painstaking and patient approach to the scattered and incomplete literary sources offers a reliable guide to a strand of medieval Chinese ideology that has often been underappreciated by scholars. She handles the diverse primary

¹ E. Zürcher, “‘Prince Moonlight’: Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *T’oung Pao* 68, no. 1/3 (Jan. 1982): 1–75.

sources with confidence and shows an easy familiarity with the secondary studies. Throughout the book, Hughes guides the reader through the complex and contradictory stories told by her sources, and demonstrates her sure grasp of the rapidly changing social, cultural, and political environment that was the backdrop to the manipulation of an array of potent religious ideals and symbols. She is particularly attentive to questions of gender throughout the primary sources, reflecting on the unique challenges that faced Empress Wu as a female ruler and the spiritual possibilities offered for women in some of the apocalyptic sūtras. Much of Empress Wu's ideology played on her gender in powerful ways, declaring that she had taken the form of a woman only to respond to the needs of her people. She could nurture them just as a mother would tend to her own children (pp. 91–92). Hughes also highlights some of the apparent contradictions around having the transcendent figures of buddhas or bodhisattvas actually rule over human societies. This seems to have been a Chinese innovation as Indic sources do not commonly present buddhas and bodhisattvas in this way. On the whole though, insights in the book derive less from individual points of analysis and more from the process of fitting the primary sources together to tell a coherent story of ideology and the manipulation of ideas. The book is well edited and has a thorough and intelligently arranged index. Chinese characters are provided throughout the text.

Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism is really quite short for a scholarly monograph. There are 114 pages of actual text, plus notes, bibliography, and a thorough index. I have read longer journal articles. The book covers the known sources well, but it introduces no new ones. Much of the spadework on Wendi and Wu Zhao's uses of Buddhist ideology has already been done, most notably by Erik Zürcher, Arthur Wright, and Antonino Forte. Many of the translations in the book are based directly on those made originally by Forte and others, properly acknowledged, of course, and with some minor modifications. The writing is brisk and to the point. There are virtually no digressions from the through line of the discussion. It reminded me of a presidential briefing document in places because of its determined focus on facts. It does not offer an immersive reading experience.

The book is mostly well edited and free from typographical errors, although there are a few. On p. 147, n. 63, we read “The *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載 was compiled by Zhang Zhuo 長鸞 records the inscription (3.72) slightly differently than the later sources.” The word “was” should probably be deleted here. “Li Chengqi 李成器, the eldest son Li Dan (the future Emperor Ruizong)” (p. 148, n. 72) should probably read “eldest son of Li Dan.”

I had many questions that were not answered in the book. For example, what did later historians and statesmen make of Wendi and Wu Zhao's populist uses of Buddhist ideology? Also, it seems easy to guess the probable motivations of those

who interpolated specific prophecies into translated Buddhist texts, or composed commentaries, but what were the possible motivations of the (unknown) authors of the apocalyptic scriptures? I would have appreciated a closer attention to the actual rhetoric employed in the scriptures themselves—overall, the Buddhist sources are treated somewhat unproblematically, whereas I think they might yield to a closer examination of their language, style, syntax, and so on. These are some of the most interesting sources in the book, and I think they merit a more extended analysis.

I enjoyed reading the book and found much in it to reflect upon. It is a very solid first monograph. I expect that scholars of Chinese history and East Asian religions will be delighted to have it and that it will prove particularly helpful for graduate students looking for an orientation to the political manifestations of Buddhist apocalyptic thought. Although this is a well-executed survey, there is surely still more to say about the rise and fall of the Buddhist saviour figure in medieval China.

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A Decade of Upheaval: The Cultural Revolution in Rural China. By Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, England: Princeton University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 225. \$95.00/£74.00 hardcover, \$29.95/£25.00 paperback.

In the forty-five years since the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)¹ officially ended, it has been commonplace wisdom that the political, activist, and ultimately violent phase of this movement was primarily an urban one. True, as students-turned-Red Guards criss-crossed China by train and on foot, they often traversed rural territory and saw for the first time the enormous gap between urban and rural life. True, millions of those same students, and their younger siblings, were later sent to the countryside to learn from (and potentially reside permanently with) the poor and

¹ The end of the Cultural Revolution is itself a contested topic. Officially declared over in 1969, after Mao Zedong's death it was renamed "the ten years of chaos" and the temporal reach of its policies was extended until after the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976.