

The top half of the image shows two large, seated Buddhist statues carved into a dark, textured rock surface. The statue on the right is larger and more prominent, with its hands resting in its lap. The statue on the left is smaller and positioned slightly behind it. Both statues have serene expressions and are dressed in traditional robes.

CHINA'S BUDDHIST CULTURE

FANG LI-TIAN



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CHAPTER 1

Buddhism and Chinese Politics

1.1 POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIAN BUDDHISM

The relationship between Buddhism and Chinese politics is very complicated. Politics has played a very decisive role in shaping Buddhist culture; Buddhism, on the other hand, has always had a reactive approach toward politics and policies. One might wonder how Buddhism, a religion that advocates detachment from worldly matters, is in any way related to the real politics of dynasties in China. By what means does Buddhism influence politics? How can one characterize the role played by Buddhism in Chinese politics? What regularity does it reveal? These are some of the questions that we will attempt to address in this chapter.

Chinese Buddhism finds its roots in India. Hence, let us first summarize the attitude of Indian Buddhism toward politics. Śākyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, preached that everything around us, that is, everything worldly can be regarded as “sufferings,” and we can only achieve the ultimate goal of individual emancipation by detachment from the physical world and the termination of the vicious circle of life and death. During the early stages of evolution of Buddhism, wealth, honor, power, and rank were considered despicable, and politics considered as an impediment to individual emancipation. The tenets of early Buddhism urged mankind to unshackle themselves from politics and transcend to new heights. However, Buddhism could not have survived, spread, or grown in strength without the support from the ruling classes. Hence, arose the issue of dependency on the ruling classes for support, and furthermore, the issue of affirming and eulogizing state power, supreme rulers, and “royal laws.” The *Vinaya-matrka Sutra*, a Theravada scripture that appeared during the period of Abhidharma (Sectarian) Buddhism, clearly asserted that “there are two kinds of laws that cannot be violated: one is Buddhist dharma, and the other is the laws of Chakravartin (Wheel-Turning Sagely King).” Although it spoke of “two kinds of laws,” what it in fact meant was that the royal laws could not be violated; in other words, the laws of Buddhism need to comply with those of the monarchs. Within Buddhism, one can also find “sutras safeguarding the states.” These sutras discuss the ways to safeguard a state. For example, according to the *Karunikaraja-prajñāparamita Sutra*, no matter how small or large a country is,

Once the king preaches or reads *prajñāparamita*, seven types of calamities will disappear, seven kinds of blessings will be produced, the people will become peaceful and will be pleased, and the king will be satisfied... If all kings in a future world support the Three Treasures (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), I will dispatch five powerful bodhisattvas to protect their countries. The five bodhisattvas are the Roaring Bodhisattva of Vajra holding a wheel with excellent marks in his hand, the Roaring Bodhisattva of Nagraja holding a lamp with golden wheels in his hand, the Roaring Bodhisattva of Ten Fearless Powers holding a vajra stick in his hand, the Roaring Bodhisattva of Thunderbolt holding a net with a thousand treasures in his hand, and the Roaring Bodhisattva of Immeasurable Power holding a wheel with five thousand swords in his hand.

Buddhism upholds that all kings would be protected by various powerful bodhisattvas if they were ever threatened by calamities so long as they believed in and practiced Buddhism. Customarily, Buddhism also considers “Four Deva Kings,” namely, Dhritarashtra, Virudhaka, Virupaksa, and Vaisravana, as safeguarders of territories.

The tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism differ from those of Hīnayāna. Mahāyāna Buddhism states that the Buddha salvaged the world with his great kindness and sympathy, leaving no beings behind. This doctrine preaches that the attitude of detachment should be ingrained in all secular activities. Nagarjuna, the founder of the Mahāyāna school Mādhyamika, was supported by his contemporary Ikṣvaku, as evidenced in his writings *Ratnavali* (Proper Theory of King Bao-xing, 宝行王正论)¹ and the *Gatas for Advising the King* (劝诫王颂), specially telling Ikṣvaku how to rule his country, how to treat his people, how to believe in and support Buddhism, and how to keep his distance from non-Buddhist teachings. Such special teachings for the ruler reflected the political views of Mahāyāna. The subsequent Gupta dynasty despised Buddhism for a while; in response, some Buddhists wrote the book *Rajadharma-nyaya-sastra* (王法正理论), asking the kings for protection, and the kings in turn would often consult the śramaṇa or Buddhist monks about political affairs. That manifested the dependence of Mahāyāna Yogacara upon the dynasty. Later on, the Mahāyāna was gradually integrated into Esoteric Buddhism, which supported the dynasty and vice versa. By the early thirteenth century, Buddhism gradually died out in India because of the Islamic repression.

Indian Buddhism was introduced into China as an amalgamation of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna forms of Buddhism. Chinese Sangha accepted and embraced the attitude of Indian Buddhism of avoidance, dislike, and detachment from the secular world, as well as its ideas of depending on kings for external safeguards and upholding laws (secular laws) and territories. In Chinese history, prominent Buddhists could largely be grouped into two, depending on their association with politics. The majority either advocated an assimilation of the secular world or stressed its convenient edification; accordingly, they took an active part in politics and kept close ties with the dynasties, serving politics in

¹King Bao-xing (宝行王), namely Ikṣvaku, translated as King Yin-zheng by Xuan-xang and Yi-jing.

a uniquely religious manner. The others, who were the minority, either retreated into Buddhism because of their failures in life or professed themselves as pious Buddhists strictly adhering to the Way and their pride. The latter group stayed away from the state capitals and led a reclusive life in forests or old monasteries, disliking or even detesting civilian life, prosperity, and politics. In addition, Buddhism was also related to political changes, peasant uprisings, and bourgeoisie reforms in early modern times. A basic approach to study Buddhism and Chinese politics is to review the relationship between Buddhism and the politics of various dynasties in China.

The relationship between Buddhism and Chinese politics is not limited to the political attitudes or propositions of prominent Buddhist monks and nuns. Rather, Buddhism as a whole, also plays an indirect role in the politics of society via religious ideas and philosophical thoughts. Therefore, a general investigation of the social and political implications of Buddhist thoughts will constitute an important part of this chapter on the relationship between Buddhism and Chinese politics.

In the arbitrary society of ancient China, Confucianism was an orthodoxy upheld by the government, which explained how to cultivate the mind, regulate a family, govern a state, and harmonize the world. Although Confucian scholars definitely adopted some Buddhist doctrines about mind and nature, they usually animadverted on Buddhism, particularly because the latter denied paternity and monarchy. Buddhist scholars were forced to answer, account for, comprise with, and conciliate such criticism, and this gave rise to the political side of Chinese Buddhism. Accordingly, the debates between Buddhism and Confucianism reveal, in a nutshell, the political views of Chinese Buddhism. This is another important way for us to research Buddhism and Chinese politics. We will discuss this aspect in detail in the next chapter.

1.2 BUDDHISM AND CHINESE IMPERIAL POLITICS

Buddhism did not flourish until the East Jin dynasty (317–420 AD). It did not develop into any social force, and the few individual members of the ruling classes who believed in Buddhism did so simply for their own happiness, that is, to eliminate calamities and gain blessings; and, they did not exploit it politically. During the East Jin dynasty, Buddhism was more widespread and was an important social influence that was increasingly recognized by the ruling classes. From then on, Buddhism and the ruling classes drew closer, and Buddhism began to be used as an auxiliary tool by the ruling classes to justify despotism; simultaneously, conflicts also gradually appeared between these two. This basic pattern, in which Buddhism conformed to (the major aspect) and conflicted with the autocratic ruling classes continued until the end of arbitrary society. The following three stages delineate the gradual build-up of this relationship between Buddhism and the ruling classes.

1.2.1 THE EAST JIN DYNASTY AND SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES (420–589 AD)

The relationship between Buddhism and politics during this period can be summed up in the following four aspects:

1. The rise of Buddhism and the involvement of prominent monks in politics. During the period of the East Jin dynasty, most rulers of the sixteen kingdoms in northern China encouraged Buddhism as it could be utilized to consolidate their regimes. The rulers of Later Zhao (319–351 AD), Former Qin (350–394 AD), Later Qin (384–417 AD), and North Liang (401–439 AD) were the most prominent among those who encouraged Buddhism. They honored prominent monks, for example, Shi Le (274–333 AD) of the Later Zhao dynasty honored Fotucheng (232–348 AD) as the Grand Monk, and Guo Lilue, a senior general of Shi Le, regarded him as a master. Fotucheng assisted the ruler of Later Zhao in dealing with important military and political affairs; according to historical records, he dissuaded Shi Le from slaughtering the populace. Fu Jian (338–385 AD), emperor of the Former Qin, attacked Xiangyang before he dispatched troops to Kumarajiva (343–413 AD). According to Fu Jian, he did this at the insistence of a prominent monk Dao-an (312 or 314–385 AD). After his arrival in Chang'an, Dao-an had actually become one of Fu Jian's political consultants. Dao-an believed that Buddhism could not survive without support from secular supreme rulers; therefore, he actively offered advice to Fu Jian. Historical records show that Dao-an had done his best to dissuade Fu Jian from dispatching a million troops against south China. However, Fu Jian did not heed him, and was eventually defeated by Xie Xuan (343–388 AD) during the well known Battle of Feishui (383 AD). Yao Xing (36–416 AD), ruler of Later Qin and a successor to the Former Qin, launched a punitive expedition against Lü Guang (338–399 AD) and welcomed and honored Kumarajiva as an imperial mentor. Another instance is Juqu Mengxun (386–433 AD) of the North Liang dynasty who invited Dharma-raksa (385–433 AD) to be his military and political consultant. On learning that Dharma-raksa had supernatural powers, Tuoba Tao (408–452 AD), chief of the Later Wei dynasty (386–534 AD), ordered Mengxun to arrange for Dharma-raksa to come to the capital of Later Wei (also known as Northern Wei). Mengxun, who was afraid of the formidable Later Wei, feared that things would become more unfavorable to North Liang once Dharma-raksa served the king of North Wei. Thus, he had Dharma-raksa murdered on his journey to Northern Wei. The rulers of monitories regarded Buddhists in high esteem, with a view to using Buddhism as a tool to rule the people more effectively.

In southern China, the supreme rulers of the East Jin dynasty, including Emperors Yuan-di (317–322 AD), Ming-di (322–325 AD), and Ai-di (361–365 AD), all embraced Buddhism. The supreme rulers of the southern dynasties endeavored even more to propagate and utilize Buddhism. Among the emperors of the Liu Song dynasty, Emperor Wen-di (453–464 AD) realized the usefulness of Buddhism in politics. He once told his premier He Shangzhi (382–460 AD),

Confucianism is intended to aid the mundane world for desirable governance. But for the pursuit of profound truth of nature and mind, what can one do without Buddhist sutras as a guide? . . . If the populace from inlands to seashores had truly converted to such teaching, I would sit there leisurely enjoying peaceful governance, saving myself all the troubles! (He Shangzhi's Reply to an Emperor of the Liu Song Dynasty Who Praised Buddhism, see Vol. 11, *Collection of Expositions of Truth*)

Emperor Xiaowu-di (454–464 AD) entrusted important business matters to a monk named Hui-lin and invited him to take part in political affairs; the people of his day called Hui-lin “Premier in Black.” The Southern Qi dynasty (497–502 AD) also regarded Buddhism highly. For example, Xiao Ziliang (460–494 AD), son of Emperor Wu-di (483–493 AD) with the title of Prince Wen-xuan at Jingling (today's Tianmen City, Hubei Province), engaged in preaching Buddhist doctrines and disseminating the proposition of eternal souls. Following this, Emperor Wu-di (502–549 AD) of the Liang dynasty (502–557 AD) showed more commitment. Although he originally believed in Taoism, he pledged to reject Taoism and convert to Buddhism after he was enthroned. Moreover, he even called on his subjects to embrace Buddhism. On several occasions, he made farcical attempts to donate himself as a slave to the Tongtai Temple, but was promptly redeemed by his ministers for large amounts of money. This act was, in fact, disguised extortion and exploitation. Emperor Wu-di even offered to be a pluralistic Layman Sangha Chief, intending to unite politics and Buddhism. He had almost elevated Buddhism to the status of a national religion, and he used Buddhism as a tool to rule the country. Owing to political demands, emperors of the Chen dynasty (557–589) succeeding Xiao Qi followed more or less the established regulations of Emperor Wu-di of the Liang dynasty. For example, both Emperor Wu-di (557–559 AD) and Emperor Wen-di (559–566 AD) of the Chen dynasty donated themselves to Buddhist temples, taking the lead in person to believe in Buddhism for stable politics and secure thrones.

2. Disputes about śramaṇas' paying homage to lay people. Buddhist fundamentals denied both paternity and monarchy, and a tonsured Buddhist was absolved from upholding secular manners or ethics. Instead of kneeling down or kowtowing whenever they met lay people, including their parents or even the crowned, tonsured Buddhists simply put their palms together to show their respects. Naturally, this contradicted the ethics of loyalty and filial piety in an autocratic Chinese society that adhered to a patriarchal clan system, and conflicted sharply with the principles of Confucianism. During the East Jin dynasty and Southern and Northern dynasties, this contradiction was concentrated on the issue of manners, especially on the issue that monks or nuns paid no homage to the crowned. During the reign of Emperor Cheng-di (325–342 AD) of the East Jin dynasty, Yu Bing (296–344 AD) assisted the emperor in political affairs. On behalf of Emperor Cheng-di, Yu issued an edict announcing that “All śramaṇa ought to pay homage to the enthroned.” In this edict,

he rebuked monks and nuns for despising loyalty and filial piety, abandoning manners and respects, and harming governance and politics. However, a few others, one of whom was the imperial secretary-in-general He Chong (292–346 AD), insisted that śramaṇa should not pay their full homage. The issue was then forwarded to officials in charge of manners and rituals for deliberation, but people disagreed with each other. This issue was raised three times and finally was suspended without being resolved. During the reign of Emperor An-di (396–418 AD), Huan Xuan (369–404 AD), a minister in charge of military forces all over the country, restated Yu Bing's argument, but was opposed by a group of powerful dignitaries in court. A prominent monk Hui-yuan (334–416 AD) wrote a five-piece essay on *Śramaṇa's Paying No Homage to the Enthroned* in refutation of Huan Xuan. Fa-guo was an imperially ordained chief of śramaṇa of the Northern Wei dynasty. As opposed to Hui-yuan, he took the lead in paying homage to emperors, professing that "Emperor Tai-zu is a sage who knew the Way, so he is the Buddha today, and śramaṇa ought to pay full homage to him" (*Annals of Buddhism and Taoism*, Vol. 114, *Book of Wei*). Moreover, he explained that kneeling down or kowtowing before an emperor was a matter of worshipping the Buddha instead of the emperor, for emperors were the reincarnation of the Buddha. Emperor Xiaowu-di of the Liu Song dynasty ordered the śramaṇa to kneel down and kowtow in the presence of an emperor, or they would be "slashed and punitively tattooed on cheeks or beheaded," (*Stories of Perplexed Emperors and Ministers of dynasties*, Vol. 6, *Continuation to Collection of Expositions of Truth*), and monks and nuns were left with no alternative but to obey. The dispute over śramaṇa's paying homage to lay people represented the contradictions of Buddhism against monarchical power and Confucianism, and in the case of the East Jin dynasty and the Southern and Northern dynasties, the final outcome was a mutual compromise concomitant with the victory of monarchic power and Confucianism. All this was conditioned by the circumstances then, especially the arbitrary polity.

3. Buddhism-suppressing events. Most emperors of the North dynasties, including Emperors Daowu-di (386–409 AD), Mingyuan-di (409–423 AD), Wencheng-di (452–465 AD), Xiaowen-di (471–499 AD), and Xunwu-di (499–515 AD) of the North Wei dynasty established by Tuoba Tao, had attached much importance to supporting and utilizing Buddhism. However, this dynasty also witnessed the first event in which political power was used to suppress Buddhism. Emperor Taiwu-di (423–452 AD), son of Emperor Mingyuan-di, was "keenly ambitious of military merits." To strengthen his military forces, he accepted advice from a Taoist Kou Qianzhi (365–448 AD) and his minister Cui Hao in charge of civil affairs, demanding in 438 AD (the fourth year of Taiyan Reign) that all śramaṇa below 50 years be secularized. Later, he issued another edict forbidding governmental organizations or civilians from supporting the śramaṇa without authorization. In 446 AD (the seventh year of Taiping Zhenjun Reign), a Buddhist monastery in Chang'an was found to stock weapons, brewing tools, and belongings consigned by officials and plebeians. It was a time of domestic riots. Emperor Taiwu-di suspected that the monasteries were somehow related to the rebellious uprising,

so he ordered that all the tonsured Buddhists both in Chang'an and other places be slaughtered, and Buddhist sutras and images burned and destroyed. Tuoba Jun, a crown prince, intentionally delayed the announcement of the edict so that the monks and nuns could flee and hide their Buddhist sutras and images at the news, but pagodas within the territory were mostly destroyed. Another example is the North Zhou dynasty (556–581 AD) that similarly embraced and utilized Buddhism; however, Emperor Wu-di (560–578 AD) valued and believed in superstitious Neo-Confucianism and prophecies, discriminating against both Buddhism and Taoism, especially Buddhism. On seven occasions, he called on the people to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, but it was all in vain. He also ordered his ministers to debate the priority, depth, differences, and similarities between Buddhism and Taoism, intending to debase and abolish Buddhism. However, each school of thought presented justifications and attacked the other fiercely, and no decisive conclusion could be reached. In 574 AD (the third year of the Jiande Reign), Emperor Wu-di invited Taoist Zhang Bin and Śramaṇa Zhi-xuan to debate, but neither could defeat the other. In this case, he ordered that both Buddhism and Taoism be clamped down, forcing more than two million śramaṇa and Taoist monks to be secularized, and distributing their property to his ministers, and temples and pagodas to princes. Three years later, he dispatched troops against the North Qi dynasty, and ordered that Buddhism be abolished in that region. About three million śramaṇa were forced to be secularized, and more than 40,000 Buddhist temples were converted to civilian residences. Besides, Buddhist images were burnt down, and Buddhist property was confiscated. Those were the early two of the four large-scale Buddhism-suppressing events, which are known as “Three-Wu and One-Zong” in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

The move to suppress Buddhism by the two emperors of the North dynasties highlighted the contradictions between autocratic rulers and Buddhism. For example, the expansion of Buddhism curbed the recruitment of military forces by the governments; this brought into the open the conflicts between Buddhism and both Confucianism and Taoism, and the development of such conflicts was also closely related to the beliefs of individual supreme rulers. Soon after his enthronement in succession to Emperor Taiwu-di, Emperor Wencheng-di of the North Wei dynasty gave a clear directive to revive Buddhism. After the death of Emperor Wu-di of the North Zhou dynasty, Emperor Xuan-di allowed the revival of Buddhism as soon as he ascended the throne, and soon after that, he likewise issued clear edicts to restore Buddhism across the territory that he ruled. These events indicated that the supreme arbitrary monarchial power had played an enormous role in the flourishing or suppression of Buddhism; on the other hand, they showed that there were both accommodations and contradictions between Buddhism and the autocratic power.

4. Uprisings of śramaṇa. With the worsening exploitation and oppression of despotism and the growing hierarchy of monastic order, lower-runged monastic members could not endure various bonded services any more, and an uprising ensued. In 481 AD

(the fifth year of Taihe Reign), Śramaṇa Fa-xiu planned an uprising at Pengcheng. In 490 AD (the fourteenth year of Taihe Reign), Śramaṇa Sima Hui from Pingyuan Prefecture assembled the masses for an uprising. In 509 AD (the second year of Yongping Reign of Emperor Xuanwu-di), Śramaṇa Liu Huiwang from Jingzhou (northwest of today's Jingzhou, Gansu Province) launched an uprising. In 510 AD (the third year of Yongping Reign), Śramaṇa Liu Guangxiu from Taizhou began a revolt. In 514 AD (the third year of Yanchang Reign) and in 515 AD (the fourth year of Yanchang Reign), Śramaṇa Liu Sengshao from Youzhou (present Beijing) and Śramaṇa Fa-qing from Jizhou, respectively, launched an uprising. The insurgents seized cities and slaughtered officials. Further, they killed some senior monks and burnt down a few Buddhist temples. These insurgent monks were mostly peasants, and most of them had entered monasteries to escape the tyranny. They did not actually believe in Buddhism, but embracing Buddhism was their only way out at that time. They used Buddhism to oppose the autocratic tyranny of the North Wei dynasty and monastic landlords, which indicated the complexity and manifoldness of the roles of Buddhism.

1.2.2 SUI DYNASTY (581–618), TANG DYNASTY (618–907), AND FIVE DYNASTIES (907–979) PERIOD

The Sui and Tang dynasties were a period of political unity, strong economy, and prosperity—an age when Buddhist sects emerged and reached their summit, and a transitional stage when Buddhism began to gradually decline. The political unity of the country entailed that of Buddhism. The replacement of the Sui dynasty by the Tang dynasty, as well as the relationship between Buddhist leadership and different political ruling groups in sequence, resulted in the establishment of different Buddhist sects. The rulers of the Sui and Tang dynasties faced triple ideological conflicts with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and this situation, which had been brewing for a long period, came to a head. Generally, most rulers of these two dynasties adopted a policy of supporting and utilizing all the three schools of thought. However, Buddhism found its current standing and future to be directly influenced by the developing political situations, conflicting economic interests, triple confrontations between the three schools, and individual supreme rulers' beliefs. Buddhism contradicted the ruling classes in various ways while it received enormous support from the latter, which thus led to the Buddhism-banning movement by Emperor Wu-zong (841–846 AD) of the Tang dynasty and the oppression of Buddhism by Emperor Shi-zong (954–959 AD) of the Later Zhou dynasty (951–960 AD) during the Five dynasties period. Buddhism prospered on account of support from the rulers, and could not recover after setbacks because of their oppression. Accordingly, in the tussle between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, the different propositions of literati and officials to oppose or support Buddhism had vividly manifested the complexity of ideological struggles.

1. Buddhist sects and Sui and Tang dynasties. The parents of Emperor Wen-di (581–604 AD), also known as Yang Jian, of the Sui dynasty, were so devoted to Buddhism

that the infant prince was delivered in a Buddhist nunnery and brought up by a nun named Zhi-xian. Taking advantage of his special Buddhist background, Yang Jian disseminated the message that “My enthronement was under Buddhism.” Yang Jian who had befriended Ling-zang, a monk specialized in vinaya before he was enthroned, praised Ling-zang saying, I, a humble disciple, am the emperor in the secular world, but you, the master of vinaya, are a king of śramaṇa... You, the Master, help people do good deeds, and I, a disciple, forbid people to commit bad ones. We are different in name, but actually we are doing the same thing” (Biography of Ling-zang, Vol. 21, *Sequel to The Biography of Prominent Monks*). During his reign, Emperor Wen-di of the Sui dynasty allowed about 240,000 male and female Buddhists tonsured; he had more than two million Buddha statues carved and more than 5,000 pagodas built all over the country. Moreover, to redeem his previous vow, he demanded that local authorities worship the images of Zhi-xian within pagodas. It was out of a political need that Emperor Wen-di energetically encouraged Buddhism, and he once gave an edict to “promote Buddhism and edify the perplexed.” Buddhism was advocated as an ideological tool to rule the people. Emperor Yang-di (604–618 AD) of the Sui dynasty, namely, Yang Guang, ascended to the imperial throne by murdering his father Emperor Wen-di and his crowned elder brother. In the eyes of Confucians, he was a wanton tyrant who had committed patricide and regicide, and was more evil than his worst congeners in the history of China. So, he went all out to sanctify himself by means of Buddhist sutras and by a monk Zhi-yi (538–597 AD), founder of the Tiantai School. The Tiantai School was established with the support of the supreme rulers of the Chen dynasty of the South dynasties and those of the Sui dynasty. Both emperors and ministers of the Chen dynasty had sent Zhi-yi as many as 30 to 40 edicts and letters, and allocated the taxation of Tiantai County to the temples of Zhi-yi. After the fall of the Chen dynasty, Zhi-yi turned to “uphold the territory of the Great Sui dynasty.” Zhi-yi had an extremely close relation with Emperor Yang-di. Much before he was enthroned, Yang Guang had taken Bodhisattva vows from Zhi-yi, and was called “Bodhisattva in General.” In the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, there is a passage about King Ajatasatru who committed patricide and regicide so that he could ascend the throne, but he was judged not guilty. More than that, the *Ajaseajuketsu (Prophecy of Buddhahood for King Ajatashatru) Sūtra* even predicted that King Ajatasatru would certainly gain his Buddhahood in the future. In his *Comments to Amitayur-dhyana Sūtra*, Zhi-yi designedly made a special analogy with the story of King Ajatasatru, propagating that a retribution for the pre-existing harms must be paid despite the close relation as father and son, and that an ultimate expediency was characterized by unnaturalness and was incomparable with the common evils in the world. Thus, he suggested that Emperor Yang’s usurping the throne had been destined, and was thus necessary and reasonable. It was indeed a fantastic political use of Buddhism to defend patricide and regicide.

The Tang dynasty lasted for approximately 290 years, and witnessed the enthronement of about 20 emperors. Among these, Emperor Tai-zong prescribed in his edict that Taoists were superior to Buddhist ones; Empress Wu Ze-tian (690–705 AD) did the opposite, and Emperor Rui-zong (710–712 AD) issued an edict demanding that Buddhism and Taoism

be treated equally. Besides these three emperors, except Emperor Wu-zong who opposed Buddhism, most emperors of the Tang dynasty attached either more or less importance to taking advantage of Buddhism. These emperors made use of Buddhism in different ways, but they had a common basic starting point. As contemporary Li Jie observed,

Now the society has gone wrong, and people have been worried. Without Buddhism to make them law-abiding, the courageous will be pushed to fight, and the intelligent will calm down to scheme. Consequently, the rabble will rise up successively in group (Preface of Poems at a Farewell Dinner for Zen Master Shu-yan in Tanzhou to Head for Taiyuan for Buddhist Sutras, Vol. 788, *Collected Writings of the Tang Dynasty*).

Autocratic rulers propped up Buddhism in order to take advantage of Buddhism. In doing so, they intended to ameliorate people's sufferings, subdue their struggle and morale, make them law abiding and reconciled to their fates, and prevent peasant uprisings.

Li Yuan, Emperor Gao-zu (618–626 AD) of the Tang dynasty, once took over and used the Xing-guo Temple and the Asoka Temple as barracks before he led the revolt in Taiyuan; and Jing-hui, a contemporary monk, encouraged Li Yuan to follow the ordinance of Heaven to become an emperor. Li Shimin, Emperor Tai-zong (626–649 AD) of the Tang dynasty, did not believe in Buddhism at all, which was evident in his remarking “As for Buddhism, it is not my choice,” his placing Taoism before Buddhism, and his attempting to persuade Xuan-zang (602–664 AD) into being secularized. But having noticed that Buddhism was helpful in consolidating the dynasty, he actively supported it. Emperor Tai-zong caused much bloodshed in war, and had single handedly killed a thousand people. Later, he issued decrees to set up Buddhist temples in previous battle fields, pretending to release the dead from their sufferings and bring them happiness. However, he was actually deluding the public. The Mind-only School established by Xuan-zang and his disciple Kui-ji was set up with the support from Emperor Tai-zong and his enthroned son Emperor Gao-zong.

After the death of Emperor Gao-zong, Emperors Zhong-zong and Rui-zong were enthroned in succession. But within a year, Wu Ze-tian seized power and assumed the role of a regent. Wu's mother Yang had been a member of the Sui dynasty, and was very devoted to Buddhism. Wu Ze-tian had been brought up in a Buddhist family. She entered the imperial palace at age 14; after the death of Emperor Tai-zong, she was tonsured to be a nun; but later, she was called back by Emperor Gao-zong. Having put her talent and tricks to good use, she seized the throne and became an empress—the only female emperor in the history of China. Professing to be a “Disciple of the Buddha” and a “female Bodhisattva,” she made the best use of Buddhism to vindicate her imperial status, and quoted Buddhist doctrines to justify her political position. Likewise, Buddhist monks and nuns took advantage of Wu Ze-tian's family tradition of Buddhist faith to recover their power and position that they had lost since the founding of the Tang dynasty. Confucianism forbade women to take part in political affairs, to the effect that a queen or an empress could only be engaged in silkworm