Heroic Śāktism with Chinese Characteristics: The Female Warrior Sovereign Prophecy, the Navarātri, and a Trio of Devīs of War in the Accession of Female Emperor Wu Zhao*

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Abstract: In a previous publication, I argued that China's first and only female emperor Wu Zhao 武曌 (624–705) developed an assemblage of female divinities and dynastic mothers from Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions that she tactically deployed at different stages of her half-century career in governance to enhance her visibility and political amplitude; this strategy effectively imbued herself with the aggregate cultural resonance, maternal

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potency, demiurgic energy, and traditional charisma of these female ancestors. It seems that I overlooked several important devīs from the Hindu tradition: the indomitable radiant warrior queens Durgā, Cundī (Ch. *Zhunti* 准提/準提/准胝), and Mārīcī (Ch. *Molizhi tian* 摩利支天).[1] This paper argues that the timely confluence of 'heroic Śāktism'[2] and esoteric Buddhism—newly arrived and nascent yet influential religious and cultural currents in late seventh century China—which, in conjunction with the opportune circulation of a cryptic prophecy concerning a 'female ruler and martial king', enabled Wu Zhao to use this trio of Hindu goddesses as an integral part in the construction of her sovereignty— including playing a particularly central role during her accession in 690. The late Antonino Forte's brilliant translation of the Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra contains a number of prophecies that provide vital clues and insights into the roles that these devīs played.[3]

Keywords: Heroic Śāktism, Wu Zhao (Wu Zetian), Navarātri, Durgā, Mārīcī, *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra, vyākaraṇa*

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1 Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon*, 74, fn.2 , does briefly acknowledge the possibility that Cuṇḍī was another Buddhist figure in the female sovereign's eclectic assemblage of female goddesses. See 301, fn. 30.

2 This central concept in this paper is lifted from Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*.

3 Forte, *Political Propaganda*.

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1. Warrior Goddess Rising: Indic Origins and Development of Heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri

This paper hypothesizes that both an autumnal Hindu festival, the Navarātri, and the warrior devī Durgā (Ch. Tujia 突伽 or Yongmeng 勇猛), the primary goddess celebrated in that festival, along with her other Śāktic incarnations Cundī (Ch. Zhunti 准提), and Mārīcī (Ch. Molizhi tian 摩利支天), played important roles in the timing of the enthronement of Wu Zhao 武曌,[4] China's first

[4] While in most secondary scholarship she is known as Wu Zetian 武則天 or Empress Wu 武后, throughout this work I use the self-styled designation Wu Zhao that she assumed in 689. For historical records of her assumption of the name Zhao, see *ZZTJ* 204.6263; and *XTS* 76.3481.

and only female emperor, and the inauguration of her Zhou dynasty in 690. The timely arrival of nascent yet influential religious and cultural currents Śāktism and esoteric Buddhism enabled this trio of intertwined Indic warrior-goddesses to play an integral part in Wu Zhao's unprecedented ascendancy to the imperial throne. The timing of their arrival coincided with and was likely related to a prophecy of the ascendancy of a female warrior-king (a *kṣatriya*). Wu Zhao's coronation took place on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, the climactic day of Navarātri, an autumnal festival that celebrates and honors the divine feminine goddess/principle *śakti* and Durgā.

To this end, Part One of this paper examines the emergence of an Indic tradition that contemporary scholar of Religious Studies Bihani Sarkar terms 'heroic Śāktism'; once it reached its mature phase between the sixth and eleventh centuries, this tradition of 'warrior-centric goddess worship' was closely linked to kingship and legitimation. This paper explores the cultic backgrounds of Durgā, Caṇḍī/Cundī, and Mārīcī—the trio of deities most closely linked to heroic Śāktism. All three can be viewed as manifestations of the divine feminine goddess/principle *śakti* or as incarnations of the Mahādevī, the Great Goddess. In the tradition of heroic Śāktism, goddess worship found its most potent ritual expression in the Navarātri, an autumnal festival offering the warrior devī Durgā praises and seeking her protection. The second section of Part One investigates the origins, development, and political significance of this annual celebration. The final sub-section of Part One briefly presents pivotal elements of heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri that are connected with the accession of Wu Zhao.

Part Two of this paper presents a number of compelling pieces of evidence that connect both heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri to Wu Zhao's sovereignty and imperial enthronement. First, this section presents a short review of the extensive Sino-Indian commerce and interaction in the seventh century is presented to argue that both rising and popular Indian currents like 'heroic Śāktism' and the Navarātri festival were widely recognized in Tang China and greater East Asia.

The following sub-section (2.2) investigates the emergence and ongoing presence of the prophecy of a 'martial female sovereign' that circulated in both Tang China and Silla Korea during the early-to-mid

seventh century. A little more than a half century before Wu Zhao took the throne, a related prophecy aided the ascendancy of a Sillan queen, a Korean of the kṣatriyan caste, strongly indicating the prophecy's connection to heroic Śāktism. Next, this section scrutinizes the respective roles that two famous seventh-century prognosticators—Grand Astrologer Li Chunfeng and physiognomist Yuan Tianwang—played in prophecy's development. Finally, this section examines the rapid rise and precipitous fall of Chen Shuozhen, a self-proclaimed female sovereign and mystic who led a rebel army against the Tang.

Part 2.3, 'Cuṇḍī Enters Wu Zhao's Pantheon', examines the role that Indian Buddhist monk Divākara played in transmitting and promoting the cult of Cuṇḍī at a critical juncture in the mid-to-late 680s, a period of incubation when Wu Zhao, as grand dowager and regent presiding over court, explored political and ideological paths by which she might assume the throne. Divākara translated and presented several renditions of the *Cundī dhāraṇī*, an incantation that celebrated an esoteric Buddhist form of one of the Indic warrior goddesses.

The subsequent section examines the textual presence of Mārīcī in Wu Zhao's era and explores the connection between this Indic goddess of light and dawn and the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

A variation of a hymn addressed to Durgā from the *Harivaṃśa*, a Hindu text originally dating from the third or fourth century, appears in the Buddhist monk Yijing's 義淨 (635–713) Chinese translation of the *Golden Light Sūtra* that was presented at Wu Zhao's court. Part 2.5 examines the implications of this text in the context of Wu Zhao's idiosyncratic brand of heroic Śāktism.

Building on the work of Antonino Forte to translate and meticulously analyze Dunhuang document S.6502, the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra*, Part 2.6 briefly reviews the significance of this source and the pivotal role that it played in Wu Zhao's legitimation. This sets the stage for subsequent sections, which present the argument that in addition to the two cardinal purposes of the *Commentary*—to identify Wu Zhao as the prophesied bodhisattva in a female body and as a *cakravartin*—the document also contained a number of related elements contained in the document that support the related 'female warrior sovereign' prophecy and that are consonant with heroic Śāktism.

Wu Zhao's surname, Wu 武, means 'warrior' or 'martial'. Part 2.7 examines the manifold ways in which Wu Zhao amplified the power vested in her name by using it to name places, eras of reign, and in many other contexts, to broadcast an image of her rising success and power which dovetailed with a concerted effort to engineer and work toward the fruition of the prophecy of a female warrior sovereign prophecy.

Part 2.8 looks further at the late seventh century Chinese female ruler's calculated engineering of the warrior queen prophecy with close attention paid to the manner in which it is imbedded in the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra*, a piece of purposefully-engineered Buddhist propaganda that played a critical role in her accession and enthronement. This section focuses on the idea of the 'Two Nines' (*erjiu* 二九), which served as both a reference to Wu Zhao and Gaozong and, tacitly, to the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

Part 2.9 investigates the coincidental timing of Wu Zhao's ascendancy to the throne and the inauguration of the Zhou dynasty with the Navarātri festival, both of which occurred on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in 690. On a number of additional occasions during her short-lived Zhou dynasty, Wu Zhao inaugurated new eras and assumed titles on the ninth, culminating day of the Navarātri. This festival marked the fruition and realization of the 'female martial king' prophecy, providing further evidence of the significant part that 'Heroic Śāktism with Chinese characteristics' played in Wu Zhao's ascendancy and sovereignty.

1.1. The Rise of 'Heroic Śāktism' in Sixth and Seventh Century India

The story of goddess Durgā's victory over buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura, Bihani Sarkar contends, developed into an expansive belief system of 'warrior-centric goddess worship' closely linked to political power, kingship and legitimation. Sarkar has dubbed this belief system 'heroic Śāktism'.[5] From its origins in 'officially sanctioned royal inscriptions'

[5] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 1.

from the second to sixth centuries, Sarkar traces heroic Śāktism through textual accounts of 'the investiture of kingship by a supernatural female being' in 'Puraṇīc and Buddhist scriptures' dating from the seventh to ninth centuries to illustrate the burgeoning centrality of this tradition in medieval Indian courts and royal cults; indeed, she claims that the development of this tradition was germane to and concomitant with the rise of the early Indian kingdoms.[6]

Over time, Sarkar explains, 'tribal cults' of regional female deities evolved into 'court cults centered in temples'. In the 'kaleidoscopic "new world" born from the Gupta demise [mid-sixth cent.]', with competing medieval kingdoms, 'the goddess was a much more centrally positioned, indefinably protean and pragmatic symbol'; seeking to extend their power and gain local tribes' acceptance of local tribes, rulers worked to cultivate 'connection with, and elevation of, autochthonous devī cults'. Following a long period of coalescence that Sarkar painstakingly charts, 'the Gupta era cult of a single goddess "Durgā" with roots in the Kuṣāṇa period [the Kushan dynasty, first–third cent. AD] transformed, from the sixth century onwards, into a multi-layered cult formed of particular local goddesses, many from an indigenous background, in whom she was thought to inhere and for whom she served as a grander, classical symbol'.[7] By the end of the sixth century, as 'tribal-pastoral warrior communities came into contact with larger urbanized kingdoms...the ancient monarch of the terrain, the tribal patroness' took on a new form, one 'amalgamated with the established Brahminical warrior-goddess Caṇḍī/Durgā/Bhavānī, worshipped by means of the same ritual systems, and received elite patronage from royal palace'; these kingdoms patronized and sponsored 'local royal goddesses', integrating 'them with forms of Caṇḍī enshrined in Purāṇic scripture'.[8] 'From the

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[6] Ibid., 178.

[7] Ibid., 10–11, also chap. 5, 'Regional Cults of Goddesses Merged with Durgā', 137–74.

[8] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess in Mediaeval India*, 16–17. Sarkar argues that this 'incorporation of indigenous goddesses' is 'part of a larger social process of state formation' (*Heroic Shāktism*, 138). This is consis-

6th century onward', Sarkar observes, Durgā effectively became 'a metonym enfolding goddesses of particular locales...the face of these formerly faceless sylvan deities with whom she shared similarities of personality, notably her control over crises and her...interfusion of mild and wild aspects, of light and dark'.[9] In short, Durgā became the most visible and widely recognized 'brand name' of a Mahādevī, a composite mother and warrior goddess, an amalgam of regional cults, a deity with a 'cohesive nature,' whose tremendous appeal and reach spanned violence and civilization, destruction and creation, darkness (moon) and light (sun), and resonated with Brahman and outcaste alike.

During the late sixth and seventh century, a pivotal juncture in the maturation of heroic Śāktism, 'literature on devīs in Sanskrit, the language of the cultivated, began to appear in voluminous quantities', bringing about, in the Indian intellectual and cultural sphere a proliferation 'of formulations on the subject of who or what Śakti was, and the appropriate method of her propitiation, formulations that appeared in esoteric Tantric and exoteric Purāṇic writings'. As Sarkar capably frames it, in the *Devīmāhātmya*, a text discussed in detail below, 'Purāṇic myth and popular religion viewed Śakti as incarnated in a singular female god-head who adopts various regional forms and whose primary agency is a valiant king or warrior'.[10]

Sarkar's coined 'heroic Śāktism' evokes a vision of triumphant sovereignty featuring a strong ruler who was invested by and who

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tent with Liu Xinru's observation that the development of Śāktism was accelerated as the 'female deities of tribal societies, especially the matriarchal ones, were assimilated into the Brahmanical pantheon' (Liu, *Silk and Religion*, 29).

[9] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 138.

[10] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 18. In another publication, Sarkar notes that, 'though Purānic passages on the festival of the goddess abound, they are dispersed, patchy and difficult to date given that the Purānas themselves are mostly protean and composite texts that have mutated and grown over periods of time'. See Sarkar, 'The Rite of Durgā in Medieval Bengal', 328. This underscores the difficulty involved in tracking the transmission and spread of the cult of the Mahādevī.

identified with the goddess—a leader capable of protecting her or his realm and engaging in effective military action. This idea that a female divinity invested the first ruler and granted 'all the emblems of sovereignty', as Sarkar frames it, 'guided the way royal power was commonly expressed by forming the main conceptual patterns for medieval kingship'. In essence, the goddess served as the wellspring and rallying point of royal authority.[11]

Although on the surface the goddess at the heart of 'heroic Śāktism' 'present[ed] a "Durgā" identity, there are other layers embedded in their syncretic personalities'. To assume the goddess is Durgā, Sarkar cautions, 'would be to disregard these other forms. However, what is common among all these goddesses is that they seem to have been always connected to royal power'.[12] Durgā and two other primary forms of the goddess, Caṇḍī and Mārīcī, will be examined in Part I.3 below.

1.2. The Navarātri and the Warrior Goddess

Rising in popularity and prominence at the same time as the warrior goddess it celebrates, the Navarātri—literally 'nine' (Skt. *nav*) 'nights' (Skt. *rātri*)—is an autumnal festival that celebrates and honors the divine feminine goddess/principle *śakti* and/or the potent deity that is its embodiment. Calendrically, the Navarātri is situated at 'an astrologically auspicious time to worship the goddess'.[13] In its eventual mature form, the festival begins with the onset of Āśvina, the seventh month, with 'a burst of creative energies and a celebration of life', on the day of the new moon at the conclusion of the 'most inauspicious time of the year...the dark, waning phase of the moon' when funerary rites are performed and the Sun is moving southward. From a season of withering crops, a deathly ebb-tide, Durgā's rise and triumph over the buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura marks a renewal, a transition from

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[11] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 177–78.

[12] Ibid., 206.

[13] Wilson, 'Kolus, Caste, and Class', 241. Wilson's study examines Tamil celebration of the festival.

'the period of death, chaos, and disorder into one of creation, life, dharma, and order'.[14]

Sarkar traces the festival's origins and early development back to an autumnal popular apotropaic ceremony from the third century AD 'that pacified danger and publicly exhibited the heroism of rulers', placating harmful demons and spirits. Beginning in the sixth century, elements from the 'Brahminical military festival of Āśvina' were incorporated. Sources on the Navarātri (or Navarātra), like the later *Devīpurāṇa,* remark that the goddess is honored to 'acquire sovereignty' and to 'increase the kingdom's prosperity and power'.[15] Sarkar characterizes the early development of the Navarātri—a syncretic celebration with 'Tantric and Purāṇic ritual features'[16] —in the following manner:

> From a relatively small-scale festival in the Gupta empire it developed into a rite of civil sanctification performed by upcoming kingdoms around the 6th century, from which time Purāṇic accounts of the Śākta Navarātra begin to emerge. This was the time when, in the process of kingdoms forming, local goddesses thought to hold territorial power over them were merged into Durgā and attained their classical identity.[17]

By the seventh century, with this emergent notion of 'heroic Śāktism' at its core, the Navarātri emerged as the single-most important festal ritual of kingship—a critical annual consecration of the king—in medieval India. Sarkar argues that the cult of Nidrā, the goddess of sleep and death, also known by the Rātri (night) of Navarātri, was enfolded into the growing cult of Durgā between the third and fifth centuries. This goddess of darkness was born on the ninth day as the ninth portion of Viṣṇu; she received sacrifices on the Navamī, the

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[14] Narayanan, 'Royal Darbār and Domestic Kolus', 292–94.

[15] *Devīpurāṇa*, 50.81, see Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 221, fn. 27.

[16] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 226.

[17] Ibid., 270.

ninth day.[18] This day also marks Durgā's great victory over buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura—who had vanquished all of the other gods and usurped their preeminent position.[19] Sarkar notes that the myth cycles that recount Durgā's annihilation of and triumph over demons 'collectively embody the symbolic language of Indian kingship and royal power'.[20] In some regions, on this culminating victorious day, kings invoked the goddess and ceremonially undertook 'symbolic conquests of other lands'.[21]

Over time, as the 'royal goddess became more sanitized and subsumed by caste', she 'was made into a *kṣatriya* deity', associated with warrior-kings. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* (part of the Skanda Purāṇa) records an ancient genealogy that identifies goddesses as the source of a lineage of kṣatriyas.[22] Most important for the rulers of new competing medieval kingdoms in India, she represented heroic power and promised to sanctify kingship, warding off danger, bringing about civic order, and leading ruler and nation in the military conquest of enemies. Indeed, the king effectively transformed into a conduit channeling the energy, the *śakti*—the female potency, capability, and power—of the goddess. For rulers and earthly worshippers of

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[18] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 56. For the larger evolution of Nidrā into Durgā, see chap. 1, 'The Cult of Nidrā-Kālarātri', 41–69.

[19] Roy, *Traditional Festivals*, 1:304; Shah, *Hindu Culture and Lifestyle*; Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 96. In different places, the festival is known by different names. In Bengal and other parts of North India, it is known as Durgā pūjā (Durgā worship); in Karnataka (southwestern India) the final day is called Dasarā. See Fuller & Logan, 'The Navarātri Festival in Madurai', 79.

[20] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 13.

[21] Narayanan, 'Royal Darbār and Domestic Kolus', 288. Numerous regional variations of the Navarātri came to be celebrated. This is one of the fundamental underlying ideas in the collection of essays on this seasonal celebration. For example, Ute examines the Navarātri as 'an event that displays and negotiates cultural values relevant' to different performers and audiences, one that is 'understood in different ways' in different regions. See Hüsken, 'Ritual Complementarity and Difference', 190.

[22] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 129.

the goddess, the Navarātri marked the perfect time to connect with her immeasurable potency and power. At this particular auspicious calendrical and astrological junction, Durgā and other forms of the goddess were most approachable; the proximity, or even the interpenetration of the earthly and celestial realms made this the optimal time to contact this divine presence.[23]

The 'profoundly intimate and revelatory experience' conjoining goddess and ruler was best achieved on the ninth day of the Āśvina, the Navamī, on what became the culminating day of the Navarātri festival. This personal connection between sovereign and deity became a critical part of the 'celestial power' that formed the basis of the ruler's authority.[24]

C. J. Fuller and Penny Logan also assert the paramount religio-political importance of the festival, arguing that the Navarātri 'reiterated the king's role in maintaining an ordered society and cosmos, and renewed and re-emphasized his personal relationship with the deities'. They contend that, 'there can be no doubt that the festival

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[23] Luchesi, 'Navarātra and Kanyā Pūjā', 310. Though his study is focused on more recent times, Hillary Rodrigues describes the collective sense of awe and reverence that marks this arrival of the goddess: 'everyone, both male and female, is made unmistakably aware—through her ubiquitous embodiments on display—of the presence of the Divine Feminine.... all celebrants are akin to her children, able to play freely and securely under the watchful and protective presence of the Cosmic Mother'; see Rodrigues, 'Conclusion', 325.

[24] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 1–40, 'Introduction', and her dissertation, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 8–11 and 109–10. Sarkar (*Heroic Cult*, 12–15) identifies a 'premature phase' from the second to sixth centuries, when this tradition of heroic Śāktism was taking nascent shape, evidenced, for instance, by the presence of stone images of the sovereign-goddess slaying the buffalo demon or the coins under Candragupta, a fourth century ruler of the Gupta dynasty, featuring a lion-riding goddess. This image of Durgā as a lion-riding goddess may well be understood as an evolution of the cult of the Kushan/Iranian protector-goddess Nana; for more on this possible prototype of Durgā, see Ghose, 'Nana', 97–112. Ghose suggests Nana was assimilated into the cult of Durgā during the later stages of the Kuṣāṇa period (97).

of Navarātri...is centrally concerned with the themes of kingship and sovereignty.... [it] eclipsed any other single event as the most prominent ritual of kingship across India'.[25] In a similar vein, Hillary Rodrigues contends that the invocation of the devī at the festival held 'the promise of expanded or successful sovereignty, as well as auspicious beneficence or fertility for the patron, and for one's community or kingdom'.[26]

Under royal patronage, 'the goddess-centric Navarātra', the autumnal festival that venerated this composite goddess, progressively grew in significance. Sarkar characterizes this seasonal celebration as a:

> rite of heroic and civic glory par excellence. Annually celebrated, for if not disaster would strike, the Navarātra marked the occasion when the ritual of the court was publicly shared by all citizens, when goddess, king, and state were constituted as one energized entity. The regular performance of this rite, its association with cyclical patterns of time and seasons, fertility, abating the hunger of primeval spirits, its inclusion of tribal celebrations...suggest that systems of mediaeval state devīpūjā were but transformed continuations of the older, tribal goddess-centric modes of honouring kingship...rising from local cults of clan goddesses.[27]

Like the great warrior devī it celebrated, a deity at once the provider and the slayer, the Mother and the Warrior, the Navarātri festival developed into an amalgamation of elements from the Brahminic-Sanskrit center and the 'wild, occultic, and dangerous' periphery, through this process becoming the 'grandest and most complete expression' of the Pan-Indic imperial cult of Śakti.[28]

Among the competing kingdoms in sixth and seventh century India, the cult of the Great Goddess politically and culturally became mainstream Indic culture: as Sarkar frames it, 'heroic Śāktism had

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[25] Fuller & Logan, 'The Navarātri Festival in Madurai', 99 and 108.

[26] Rodrigues, 'Bengali Durgā Pūjā', 207.

[27] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 34.

[28] Ibid., 34–36, 43, and 46–47.

crystallized from a peripheral faith to a religion of state or Imperial power where political might was figuratively understood and ritually cultivated by a kingdom as Śakti'. In essence, Śakti—which had grown to 'pan-Indic eminence'—was an integral component of political power.[29] Without the sanction of the goddess—whom Devadatta Kālī describes as a 'beneficent and awesome deity' possessing an immeasurable 'universal creative power', a powerful divinity who can be 'conceptualized only as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe'[30]—a ruler's sovereignty and legitimacy were compromised.[31]

To gain this vital divine sanction, during the Navarātri, the king would perform 'rites of self-identification whereby the body of the worshipper was transformed into the body of the goddess'—so that the ruler, her or his person invested with the divine potency of the goddess, effectively became a '*mahābala*, a man [or woman] of super-human might, unvanquished in the onslaught of battle, or indeed under any duress'.[32] Thus, Sarkar terms the Navarātri, 'the politically most important enactment of the cult of the sovereign goddess'. She explains that this annual ceremony served as a 'public expression' of the relationship between devī and ruler, a festival that marked the ceremonial transference of 'power and kingship from sovereign-goddess to king'. Helping to bring military success and protect the realm from disaster and disease, 'the autumnal nine nights festival of the cult of the sovereign goddess was therefore essential for the periodical rejuvenation of the entire kingdom...[a] time that the affinity between Śakti and the ruler was singularly evoked, and temporal power was made sacred'.[33]

The festal veneration of Durgā in the Navarātri has its origins in the early Puranic classics, and is connected to the *Rāmāyana*,

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[29] Ibid., 20.

[30] Kālī, trans., *In Praise of the Goddess*, 11.

[31] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 18–20.

[32] Ibid., 10 and 10, fn. 6.

[33] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 211. The entire seventh chapter, 'Navarātra', is devoted to exploring the connection between heroic Śāktism and historical, political, social, and cultural dimensions of the festival.

the story of Prince Rama's victory over the demon-king of Lanka, Rāvaṇa; in the epic story, Rāma only gains victory after worshipping Durgā and being granted a boon from the goddess. According to Hindu ritual calendars, the culminating victorious day of the Navarātri marks both the day that Rāma killed Rāvaṇa and Durgā triumphed over Mahiṣāsura the buffalo demon. In an appendix to the *Mahābharata*, a hymn to the goddess called the 'Durgā Stava', the Pāṇḍava brothers praise and worship Durgā, and perform a rite in which they store their weapons and battle gear in a *śamī* tree; the goddess grants them a boon and as a result, they ultimately gain victory over their rival cousins. In another appendix to the *Mahābhārata*, a hymn known as the 'Durgā Stotra', Prince Arjuna praises Durgā, who ultimately grants him victory in battle.[34] Thus, in both of these seminal Hindu classics Durgā is a warrior goddess associated with a benevolent warrior's triumph over evil, with a warrior-king's righteous recovery of lost territory; invocation and adulation of the goddess that lead to martial triumph developed into an integral part of the Navarātri.[35]

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[34] Simmons & Sen, 'Introduction', 3–4; Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess*, 7–8 and 7–8, fn. 19. For a full description of the ruler's ritual victory march to the *śamī* tree on the culminating day of Navarātri that 'inaugurated the medieval military season by re-enacting the *Mahābhārata* Paṇḍava ritual after their period of exile', see Simmons, 'The King of the Yadu Line', 64; and the sub-chapter 'Royal and Military Background', in Einarsen, 'Navarātri in Benares', 141 and 153, fn. 3.

While the Vījayadaśamī is technically the tenth victorious day, in some textual traditions (the *Kālikā* and the *Bṛhaddharma*) it is on the Navamī, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month that Rāma would kill Rāvana thanks to a boon from Durgā, and the tenth day, Daśami, that his victory would be celebrated.

[35] In *Hindu Goddesses*, Kinsley remarks, 'Durgā's association with military prowess and her worship for military success undoubtedly led to her being associated with both sets of epic heroes [Rāma and the Pāṇḍava brothers] in the medieval period' (109). For more on Durgā in the *Mahābhārata* and *Ramayana*, see also Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, 81–83, and Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 122–25. It is difficult to date these two hymns in the

Given that one of the major contentions in this essay is that Wu Zhao, influenced by heroic Śāktism, framed herself as a female warrior-sovereign it is important to emphasize that the Navarātri was not just a harvest festival; it was also closely associated with the kṣatriya (warrior-king) class and connected to Durgā's role as a warrior queen and Goddess of Battle. On the culminating day of the festival, there was often a 'review of arms', marking the ninth day of Āśvina as 'the beginning of the traditional military campaigning season, coinciding with the end of the south-west monsoon'.[36] Reflecting on the military assemblage and triumphant parade, Sarkar explains:

> Stimulated by this courtly appropriation [of the festival], military rituals either blessing the army and weapons or prognosticating victory emerged as the most important feature of the goddess's Navarātra, performed with great pomp on Navamī [the ninth day]. However, in contrast to sanguinary sacrifice, these rituals were not it seems an archaic constituent of the Navarātra. They appear rather to be derived from Brahmanical military traditions performed annually in the month of Āśvina. Such calendrically performed military rituals blessing the king's army and weapons, such as the lustration

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Mahābhārata, the 'Durgā Stava' and 'Durgā Stotra'. Rather than calling them 'appendixes', Kālī remarks that they were 'interpolated into' the text (*In Praise of the Goddess*, 21). For more on these hymns, see Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, subchapter 'The Eulogy to Durgā in the *Mahābhārata*', 53–56. Sarkar remarks that while it is 'difficult to ascertain the date of composition', the hymns in the *Mahābhārata* likely date to the fourth century (56). Sarkar also remarks that from the sixth century onward, especially in the Deccan, Kashmir, and Bengal, Durgā generally appears 'in royal crises when indeed her powers were most sought after' (190).

[36] Fuller & Logan, 'The Navarātri Festival in Madurai', 99. Zotter, 'Conquering Navarātra', 496–97, remarks that this ritual inauguration of the 'season of warfare' is set on Vijayadaśamī, the 'Victorious Tenth' (day) following the ninth and final night of the festival, and that 'achievement and maintenance of victorious rule through worship of Durgā formed part of the master narrative' of the Śāha dynasty in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Nepal (509).

> of the troops and state animals (nīrajana), which would later become necessary components of Caṇḍī's autumnal worship, were already well-established as civic ceremonies performed on Navamī in Āśvina, before the appropriation of the Sākta Navarātra by the early mediaeval kingdom.[37]

Clearly, from an early juncture, military muster developed into an important component of the Navarātri.

Sarkar acknowledges that the Navarātri was the 'politically most important enactment of the cult of Durgā' because the festival's ceremonies that marked Durgā's triumph over Mahiṣa served to transfer 'power and kingship from sovereign goddess to king and thence to all citizens', a public expression and 'the visible climax of the relationship between goddess and ruler'.[38] A central festival in South Asian courtly life, the Navarātri served as an annual ceremonial confirmation of the king's sovereign authority—power that the goddess conferred.[39] As the 'prime festival of kings, rulers, and warriors', there were, and still are, wide-ranging traditions associated with the Navarātri—it was a harvest festival, a martial celebration inaugurating the season of warfare, a festal celebration of *śakti*—divine, demiurgic female power, and an annual marker of the triumph of good over evil.[40] Primary festal elements included the killing of demons, elevation of daughters and mothers, veneration of the goddess, celebration of the military force, and amplification of royal authority.[41] In their study of festival, Moumita Sen and Caleb Simmons claim that the Navarātri 'served as the yearly affirmation

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[37] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 222.

[38] Ibid., 210.

[39] Simmons & Sen, 'Introduction', 4–5.

[40] Ibid., 1.

[41] Ibid., 1. For a basic review of these festival elements, with a particular emphasis on the military aspect, see Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 106–15. The goddess Caṇḍī, another name/form of Durgā, see below, is invoked at the outset of autumnal hunting expeditions—hunting being closely connected to military exercises (Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, 88–91).

of the king's power to rule, which was granted from the goddess'.[42] How much more poignant if the ruler to whom this divine authority was granted was a woman who might be understood as an incarnation of the goddess![43]

1.2a. Connecting the Warrior-Goddess Durgā to the *Devīmāhātmya* and the Navarātri

Dating to the fifth or sixth century AD, the *Devīmāhātmya*, a work that Devadatta Kālī terms 'the primary text of the Śākti tradition'—one that 'united many and diverse strands of Indian myth, cult practice, and philosophy' to fashion a 'great hymn of glorification that proclaimed an all-encompassing vision of the Great Goddess'—marked the realization of a longer process that brought this Mahādevī to the Indian cultural mainstream.[44] According to Thomas Coburn, who translated the *Devīmāhātmya* into English, the text represents an effort to develop an integrated Sanskrit account of var-

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[42] Ibid., 4–5.

[43] Indeed, in modern Indian politics, several female candidates have been represented/represented themselves as incarnations of Durgā. Artist M.F. Husain portrayed Indira Gandhi as Durgā. And within the last decade, in West Bengal Mamata Banerjee was—in keeping with the theme of the Durgā pūjā, 'change'—represented as standing for 'śakti, the embodiment of divine feminine energy. The LED tableaux laid out in the street leading up to the pandal showed portraits of Mamata Banerjee in blinking lights...the ultimate portrait...was the goddess herself' (in Sen, 'Politics, Religion, and Art in the Durgā Pūjā of West Bengal', 108–09).

[44] Kālī, *In Praise of the Goddess*, 12. In *Heroic Shāktism*, Sarkar—who terms the text 'the locus classicus of the Durgā-myth' (138)—remarks that the *Devīmāhātmya* 'implicitly articulated the myth of civilization through its metaphor of the goddess, the king, and the merchant' (132). She dates this text from a slightly later era: 'most likely the eighth century' (138). Although the text came to exist independently, the *Devīmāhātmya* also appears as a thirteen-chapter section of one of the Purāṇas.

ious regional myths and conceptions of cults of a Mother Goddess, effectively 'crystallizing' earlier traditions.[45]

The text—an interwoven fabric of 'diverse threads of an already ancient memory' to create 'a dazzling verbal tapestry' redounding to the glory of the great Hindu goddess[46]—features a great autumnal pūjā (prayer of devotional worship) for Durgā, where these deeds of the goddess are recited (i.e. the *Devīmāhātmya* is ritually chanted) for the nine nights of the Navarātri. The impressive deeds include three separate mythic triumphs over demons, including the well-known account of the Great Goddess's victory over the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa.[47] While a Great Goddess with many names wages battle to defeat demons, maintain order in the cosmos, and grant boons to those who offer praise and adulation, 'Durgā emerges as the supreme savior'.[48] Emphasizing the importance of this text, Sarkar has remarked

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[45] Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*. This text forms a thirteen-chapter section (chaps. 81 to 93) of the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, generally accepted as one of the eighteen great early Sanskrit Purāṇic texts (Coburn, 1 and 51). Coburn remarks that the 'text has an independent life of its own' appearing in numerous contexts outside and beyond the *Mārkaṇḍeya* (51–52). The *Devīmāhātmya* is often viewed as a text created as the 'culmination of a long, earlier process' involving 'integration of fragmented evidence for Goddess-worship in archaeological remains and in Vedic and epic literature' (53). For a succinct review of Coburn's translation and work, see Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 22–30.

Kālī offers a similar remark on the composite 'mosaic-like' nature of this text, observing that the *Devīmāhātmya* 'encompass[ed] the beliefs and practices of prehistoric agriculturalists, tribal shamans, ancient city dwellers, and nomadic pastoral clans...'. Kālī has also recognized the widespread popularity of the *Devīmāhātmya* compared to the rest of the *Mārkaṇḍeya*. See Kālī, *In Praise of the Goddess*, 4 and 12.

[46] Kālī, *In Praise of the Goddess*, xvii. Kālī remarks that the authorship is unknown and that the text originated in northwest India (xvii).

[47] For a detailed account of these triumphs in the *Devīmāhātmya*, see, *Devī Māhātmya*, 'The Myths', 211–49.

[48] Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses in India*, 313. Shaw dates the text to the sixth century.

that the hymn ultimately conveys 'the idea of war goddess as imperial metaphor', with savior and demon-queller Durgā presented as 'an image of the king himself in his most potent form, the cakravartin', the universal, wheel-turning monarch.[49]

The public declamation of the text was also called 'reciting the Caṇḍī' (*caṇḍīpaṭhā*), as the goddess at the center of the text—most often referred to as Caṇḍī or Durgā—represents the female embodiment of 'divine power and truth'.[50] Underscoring the overlap of these two goddesses, the *Devīmāhātmya* is also called both the *Seven Hundred Verses Dedicated to Durgā* (*Durgāsaptaśadī*) or the *Seven Hundred Verses Devoted to Caṇḍī* (*saptaśadī*).[51]

As mentioned above, the Navarātri marks the most effective time for a ruler to access, through ritual and worship, the goddess Durgā, and to invoke her 'primordial, universal, all-pervading' *śakti* to reinforce her or his sovereignty.[52] The *Devīmāhātmya*, Sarkar claims, 'was regularly recited in court during the festival, and the values of heroism presented in it, along with the image of the king and the deeds of Durgā, the king-of-all-kings, were viewed as glorified reflections and reinforcements of the monarch's own values and image'.[53] The connection made through this invocation of the goddess, served

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[49] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 13 and 132–34.

[50] Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, 74. In the following sub-section the connection between Durgā and Caṇḍī will be amplified.

[51] See Shankar, 'The Internal', 219 and 230, fn. 1.

[52] Einarsen, 'Navarātri in Benares', 141.

[53] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 184. Rodrigues (*Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess*, 296) identifies Durgā as the primary deity toward whom both ruler and subjects offer their devotion at the Navarātri:

> The monarch for whom the people have gathered in a display of service, loyalty, and devotion. In their numbers, and in their visible and verbalized sentiments of revelry and unity, they have a vision (darśana) of their own power, and with it the certitude of being victorious in any undertaking. This vision of the victorious power (vijayā śakti) that permeates the community of worshippers, binding them in a union characterized by joy and fearlessness, is implicitly a view of the manifest form of the Goddess.

as a renewal and confirmation of the ruler's sovereignty.

Because of the association of both text, *Devīmāhātmya*, and festival with victorious conquest, Astrid Zotter terms the Navarātri 'the paradigmatic festival of the warrior/royal estate'.[54] In traditional Indian groupings of festival and caste, the *yajñopavīta* renewal of the sacred cord was the festival of the Brahmins, Diwali the celebration of the Vaiśya (merchants), Holī for the Śūdras, and Durgā's Navarātri for the Kṣatriyas.[55] In essence, both the signature text of the Navarātri and the celebration itself bear out the claim of Fuller and Logan that, 'The goddess is self-evidently a warrior and, in the myths, if she is not exactly a monarch herself, she is none the less acting for the king of the gods, whose place has been usurped by the king of the demons'.[56] Durgā and the other deities associated with the Mahādevī and worshipped in the festival—clearly fierce goddesses of triumphant conquest—conferred upon and transferred to earthly rulers a measure of their aura of invincibility and power.

1.3a. Durgā

The 'bewilderingly composite deity' Durgā developed over centuries through a curiously eclectic commingling of 'traditions usually taken to be mutually distinct—the Tantric, the tribal, the Purāṇic, the Śaiva, the Vaisṣṇava, the Jaina, the Buddhist, [and] the local'.[57] David Kinsley characterizes Durgā as a 'great battle queen' who combats and bests demons to 'protect the stability of the cosmos'. Images of Durgā in battle became common around the fourth century and by the beginning of the seventh century the 'cosmic queen, warrior goddess, and demon slayer' became 'a well-known and popularly worshipped deity'.[58] In keeping with this chronology, Thomas Coburn

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[54] Zotter, 'Conquering Navarātra', 493.

[55] Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 5.1*, Vratas, Utsavas, and Kāla etc.,* 200.

[56] Fuller & Logan, 'The Navarātri Festival in Madurai', 92.

[57] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 272–73.

[58] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 95–96 and 105. In *Heroic Shāktism,* Sarkar records three known inscriptions of Durgā from seventh century India, one in

argues that there is strong evidence for a 'flourishing cult of Durgā' around the time the *Devīmāhātmya* first circulated (sixth century), including a temple devoted to her at Aihole (modern-day North Karnataka) and a late Gupta era seal of a lion-riding goddess.[59]

A scene in the *Skandapurāṇa*, a sixth century text, makes manifest Durgā's emergence as a mainstream devī, subsuming the martial function of the older Vedic war god Skanda:

> Holding her scepter with none but the king of gods, Indra, bearing the parasol behind, fanned by the Guardians of the Directions, she [Durgā] sat resplendent as Empress on the throne, the picture of the paradigmatic ruler, the *cakravartin* at the centre of all life and divinity.[60]

The eclectic nature of the goddess, though, elevated her to something greater than a mere goddess of war: she became a sovereign-protector capable of 'safeguarding a community from death-giving dangers such as drought, cataclysms, earthquakes, and the onslaught of harmful demons'.[61]

Benefitting from its wide-ranging powers and growing cultic influence, rulers patronized the 'expansive cult of Śakti' and the potent goddess at its nexus, Durgā, with her 'all-encompassing, pluralistic

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Kudarkot (a Harṣa vassal in modern-day Uttar Pradesh in North India) and one in Badami (southwest coast, Cālukya kingdom) (22), and one from Rajasthan, dated 625 (p. 193). And early eighth century ruler in Himachal, Maruvarman, commissioned a statue in a form of Durgā represented as a triumphant 'scepter-bearing regent' (121).

[59] Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 120.

[60] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 83. For more on the process of Durgā supplanting war god Skanda, see Sarkar's chap. 3, 'Taking over Skanda (c. 6th to 7th Century)', 97–114. Sarkar's chart on 107 illustrates how Skanda's roles and deeds—including the triumphant consecration by Indra and the signature victory over buffalo demon Mahiṣa—in the *Āranyakaparvan* (fourth cent. BCE to 1st cent. CE) became attributed to Durgā (Kauśikī) in the sixth century *Skandapurāṇa*.

[61] Ibid., 113.

personality'. Between the seventh and eleventh centuries, as 'heroic Śāktism' grew to 'pan-Indic resplendence', imperial lineages worshipped the devī and grew her cult with their enthusiastic patronage. Warrior-kings from around the Indian subcontinent paid reverence to the goddess, who was represented as a 'scepter-bearing regent'.[62]

In the *Devīmāhātmya*, Durgā is the 'supreme form' of the goddess. She is the primary source to whom the ruler appeals, the goddess he or she invokes, for—as Thomas Coburn puts it—Durgā is unassailable, 'the great protectress from worldly adversity'.[63] One hosanna in the text reads; 'Protect us from terrors, O Goddess; O Goddess Durgā, let there be praise for you!'[64] Another calls out, 'O Durgā, called to mind, you take away fear from every creature'.[65] Overall the text, as David Kinsley frames it, 'underlines Durgā's role as the upholder and protector of the dharmic order'.[66]

In Sarkar's analysis, the frame-story in the *Devīmāhātmya* of a disenfranchised king who—after hearing an ascetic relate the story of Durgā's triumphs over demons, fashions an idol in her likeness and worships her—recovers his kingdom, 'had as much of an impact as, if not greater than, the tale of the goddess itself'. In short, the *Devīmāhātmya* communicates the idea that rulers who show due admiration to the devī through hymns and worship can conquer territories and achieve universal sovereignty. 'Investiture by the goddess', the belief in Durgā granting kingdoms or land, Sarkar explains, became 'a staple of proper kingship'.[67]

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[62] Ibid., 116–17 and 121. This idea is revisited throughout chap. 4, 'Patronage, Civilization, and Heroic Śāktism'.

[63] Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 116.

[64] *Devī Māhātmya*, chap. 11.22 (91.22 in the *Mārkaṇḍeya*), translation from Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 116.

[65] *Devī Māhātmya*, chap. 4.16 (84.16 in the *Mārkaṇḍeya*), translation from Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 116.

[66] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 101.

[67] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 112–15. Remarking upon the frame-story within the text, Sarkar observes, 'The *Devīmāhātmya* presents the goddess as restoring power not only to a king but also to a merchant, Samādhi. In this way the agents

1.3b. Caṇḍī

Like Durgā, Caṇḍī underwent a process of 'domestication' and mainstream Hinduization to evolve from a 'disorderly devī' to the 'deification of the female principle', Śakti.[68] Sarkar argues that in the era of warfare that followed the fall of the Gupta dynasty in the early 540s, the 'need for a religion and ritual system particularly benefiting military state-expansion...was fulfilled by the rise and spread of the cult of the martial Caṇḍī and royal goddesses assimilated with her who blessed the onset of battle, in particular the potentially dangerous march (yātrā) leading to armed confrontation'. Thus, 'a number of royal dynasties...saw in the Imperial Caṇḍī's conquering exploits the apotheosis of the ideal Hindu sovereign'.[69] In the *Devīmāhātmya*, dating from this era, Caṇḍī (or Caṇḍikā, 'the violent and impetuous one'), a term previously absent from Sanskrit texts, appears in this guise as a powerful martial goddess twenty-nine times.[70]

While Durgā is 'historically the most important' of the names borne by the Mahādevī, Sarkar notes that Caṇḍī or Caṇḍikā are among her most popular epithets.[71] Indeed, as that text exalting the Great Devī spread eastward to Bengal, it became—eponymous to the goddess—known as the *Caṇḍī*.[72] Caṇḍī was closely connected to—and was often thought of as another incarnation of or name for—Durgā. Sibendu Manna, in his comprehensive study *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, repeatedly refers to the devī as 'Durga alias Caṇḍī' or 'Caṇḍī

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representing the main processes behind building kingdoms, governorship and commerce are shown to profit from the goddess' (183–84).

[68] Sengupta, 'Domestication of a Disorderly Devī', chap. 12.

[69] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 19.

[70] Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 94–95 (also see his larger sub-chapter on the epithet Caṇḍikā). Sarkar remarks that Caṇḍīkā is a 'Śaiva name for the goddess', indicating that she is more closely associated with Shiva worship (*Heroic Shāktism*, 65).

[71] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 14.

[72] Kālī, *In Praise of the Goddess*, 13.

alias Durgā', reflecting the interchangeability of the two goddesses.[73] Her name Caṇḍī, derived from Caṇḍa, means 'fierce' or 'violent'.[74] Catherine Ludvik, in a similar vein, notes that Caṇḍī, 'fierce one', is another name for Durgā.[75]

Like Durgā, Caṇḍī is a cultic goddess, a potent devī, the embodiment of female primordial cosmic power, *śakti*, who represents the syncretic 'assimilation of broad-based heterogenous elements' of center (Brahminic and Vedic tradition) and periphery (fierce goddesses of mountain tribes of the Himalayas and Vindhyas). Both are ever-victorious war deities, often depicted with eighteen arms, who destroy demons and benevolent mother goddesses who succor devotees, bringing happiness and relief in times of peril and distress.[76] In early medieval India, 'amazonian Caṇḍī' is often iconographically represented 'as a tempestuous demon-slaying sovereign'.[77] In origin, Durgā and Caṇḍī essentially share roots as one and the same devī—as the great goddess celebrated in the *Devīmāhātmya* and other Vedic and early medieval texts. Over time, however, Durgā remained predominantly a Hindu goddess, whereas Caṇḍī, particularly in her Chinese incarnation, became incorporated into esoteric Buddhism.

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[73] See Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*.

[74] Ibid., 91.

[75] Ludvik, '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 716.

[76] Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, 75–76, 80, and 222–223. Manna remarks, 'the primitive form of Caṇḍī is the result of the syncretism of a mountain-goddess, worshipped by the forest-born dwellers of the Himalaya and Vindhyan regions; a distinct but remarkable goddess usually propitiated by the nomadic shepherds; the vegetation spirit conceived as a female; and lastly a victorious war-goddess' (222).

[77] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 8.

1.3c. Mārīcī

Mārīcī, meaning 'shining' or 'mirage' in Sanskrit, is 'the proper name of the Indian goddess of the sun'.[78] The name, originally appearing in the *Rg Veda*, can also be understood as 'ray of light of the sun or moon'.[79] Miranda Shaw describes the goddess in evocative fashion:

> Mārīcī, 'Lady of Brilliant Light Rays', rises on the horizon as dawn each day. At first blush, she appears to be a delicate, gentle maiden, but on approach she reveals her full glory as a dazzling battle queen, brandishing flashing weapons.... relentless and invincible, pursuing all that threatens well-being—destructive demons and humans, aggressive foes, and mortal perils of every kind.[80]

In David Hall's study of the goddess, he convincingly argues that the two identifying traits of Mārīcī are her strong association with brilliant light ('sometimes expressed in stellar or solar symbolism') and her martial character.[81]

A radiant goddess associated with sun, moon, and stars, Mārīcī was called 'the Buddhist Caṇḍī'—indeed she was, according to David Hall, 'so closely associated with the cult of the warrior goddess Caṇḍī, that the character and names of the two goddesses became practically interchangeable'. In addition, she became amalgamated with Durgā, and seems to have emerged from the same prolific wellspring, the rising matrix of Śāktism, in fifth and sixth century India.[82] Miranda Shaw observes that 'the Hindu goddess Durgā, in her all-conquering Mahiṣāsuramardinī form' likely served as a 'divine

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[78] Buswell & Lopez, 'Marīcī', 533.

[79] Chaudhuri, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Japan*, 116–17. Chaudhuri notes that initially Mārīcī was a male deity, one of the ten mind-born sons of Brahma, in India.

[80] Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 203. Shaw devotes an entire chapter to Mārīcī, 203–23.

[81] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 19.

[82] Ibid, 21–22 and 25–26.

prototype' for Mārīcī, inspiring her development into a 'battle queen': in textual description and iconography, they both brandish a similar array of weapons in their many arms and share a similar 'martial pose'.[83] Indeed, Shaw even speculates that the 'hierophany of Mārīcī—armed for battle against demons, dangers, and delusion', might be understood as 'a Buddhist response to the strong appeal of Durgā'.[84]

Borne by currents of Śāktism, Mārīcī rapidly ascended from a regional cultic god/goddess in fifth-century north and northwest India to become a pan-Asian esoteric Buddhist devī by the late seventh century. Dhāraṇī, spells that connected the worshipper to the goddess and her abilities through repetitive invocation, helped spread her popularity.

1.4. Key Elements of Heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri related to Wu Zhao's Accession

As China's first and only female emperor Wu Zhao explored the viability different conceptions of sovereignty in the decades leading up to her accession to the imperial throne in 690, looking to disparate sources to become China's first and only female emperor. This article argues that heroic Śāktism provided one of those sources of inspiration. This sub-chapter provides a brief introductory description of the five aspects of heroic Śāktism that Wu Zhao drew upon to help amplify her claim to the throne. The specific manners in which she utilized and deployed these elements will be explored in Part 2.

1.4a. Heroic Śāktism: Warrior-goddess Connected to Sovereignty and Legitimation

Heroic Śāktism—worship of female warrior goddesses that helped to legitimate and amplify sovereignty in early medieval India—had much to offer Wu Zhao, both in her idiosyncratic campaign to

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[83] Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 215.

[84] Ibid., 218.

become emperor and as female sovereign. Bihani Sarkar explains that during the formative period (fourth to seventh centuries) of heroic Śāktism:

> The figure of the sovereign-goddess in the period simply represented a deity for all kings. Their sectarian affiliation did not seem to have mattered much, for only one specific spiritual credential was demanded...—the worship of a devī, identified under various names and appearing in common in several religious traditions.[85]

Therefore, it is important to recognize the syncretic, blurry nature of the nascent wave of Śāktism, of worship of this great amalgamated devī, that arrived in Tang China and during Wu Zhao's short-lived Zhou dynasty in the second half of the seventh century. Early Chinese reception of heroic Śāktism was complicated further by the dominant and multi-layered presence of Buddhism in this era. Still, this paper will show that Wu Zhao was aware of the trio of devīs—Durgā, Caṇḍī, and Mārīcī—at the heart of heroic Śāktism, and employed the religious and political energies to amplify her sovereignty.

1.4b. Warrior Class/identity

'It was in war', Sarkar contends, 'both in its defensive and combative aspects, that a goddess's potency was most sought after'. Numerous literary and inscriptional accounts attest to the practice of worshipping the Mahādevī at the time of the Navarātri just before embarking on military expeditions.[86] Although scripture, Sarkar maintains, indicates that 'democratic' Durgā reached out to all castes, 'even those deemed outsiders or reprehensible', in practice worship of the goddess tended to bring the greatest benefit to the kṣatriya, particular to a warrior-sovereign.[87]

While Wu Zhao never served as a general, her surname Wu 武

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[85] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 21–22.

[86] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 193.

[87] Sarkar, 'The Rite of Durgā in Medieval Bengal', 337.

means 'martial' or 'warrior', a fact that she repeatedly employed to her religio-political advantage, often to show that she fulfilled a prophecy with origins connected to heroic Śāktism.

1.4c. The Cakravartin

The idea of the cakravartin—'the universal monarch who possesses the seven jewels of sovereignty and sets in motion the wheel of righteous rule'[88] —is at the heart of Indic kingship. In the sixth-century *Skandapurāṇa*, Durgā is depicted as 'the cakravartin at the centre of all life and divinity'. Indra, the King of the Gods, 'adopted her as his sister, commanding her to protect the entire universe, to favour devotees, to conquer the foes of the gods, to roam the worlds praised by the hordes of Siddhas'. Bihani Sarkar noted that the *Devīmāhātmya*, the elaborate hymn of praise to Durgā chanted on the Navarātri, 'conveyed the idea of the war-goddess as imperial metaphor: she is an image of the king himself in his most potent form, the cakravartin "the one at the centre of the circle"—unifying vassal states as she unifies smaller goddesses, granted power and light by the gods and appointed by them to restore Dharma, the pristine true order'.[89]

1.4d. Luni-solar Light

Set at a seasonal juncture when the sun begins to wane, the Navarātri, Raj Balkaran observes, 'pays homage to the cycles of dark and light upon which the cosmos was founded, cycles expressed through the rhythms of nature, oscillating between night and day, summer and winter, full and new moon'.[90] Balkaran demonstrates that the Navarātri celebrates the strong connection between the goddess, Durgā, and the Sun, pointing out that the waning autumnal

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[88] Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 74. Though post-Vedic in origin, cakravartin is not a distinctively Buddhist term. There is also a long history of its wide utilization in Hinduism and Jainism.

[89] Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 13 and 132–34.

[90] Balkaran, 'The Splendor of the Sun', 23.

solar disc 'is ameliorated by the grace of the Goddess, whose role it is to keep darkness' (which, paradoxically, she also represents)'. In the *Devīmāhātmya*, which begins and ends with an invocation of the Sun, one of Durgā's feats involves securing a *manu*, an heir and successor, for the Sun. 'Like the Goddess', Balkaran explains, 'both sovereign and Sun are charged with supporting the realm'.[91] An Indian astrological treatise, the *Bṛhat Parāśara Hora* (c. 600–750) remarks that 'the Sun and Moon are of royal status'.[92]

Light plays a pivotal role in Durgā's investiture of power: in the *Devīmāhātmya* the goddess is 'formed from a mass of *tejas* from the gods', a 'universal pervasion' of divine light from multitudinous sources that coagulates and takes the radiant and bedazzling shape of a woman; ablaze with fire and light, this indomitable warrior—amidst a clamor of calls for her inevitable victory—then heads forth to engage Mahiṣa in battle.[93] In the *Taittiriya Āranyaka*, one prayer reads, 'I seek as my refuge the goddess Durgā, who is the color of fire, burning with austerity, daughter of the Sun, who is sought after for the reward of rites'.[94] The royal power that the goddess conferred through ritual was something substantial, a hot light (*tejas*).[95]

The Zhao 曌 of Wu Zhao—a novel self-designation she assumed in 689 shortly before taking the throne—contained both lunar 月 and solar 日 components. Part 2 will demonstrate how Wu Zhao and her rhetorician utilized radiance and luni-solar light to amplify her sovereignty.

1.4e. Gender

Simmons and Sen describe the transformative spaces in which Navarātri is celebrated as 'Multi-layered and co-existing spaces imbued with power and embroiled in issues of status'. Not only are

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91 Ibid., 33–35.

92 Ibid., 'The Splendor of the Sun', 34–35.

93 Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 140.

94 *Taittiriya Āranyaka*, Muir, trans., *Original Sanskrit Texts*, 4: 427.

95 Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 130.

status and power re-negotiated, but gender roles and dynamics are also inverted, 'upended or reversed'.[96] As a goddess, Durgā possesses a number of distinct characteristics that 'violate the model of a Hindu woman'. Kinsley describes this deity as possessing the following combinations of gender-defying 'world-supporting qualities and liminal characteristics':

> She is not submissive, she is not subordinated to a male deity, she does not fulfill household duties, and she excels at what is traditionally a male function, fighting in battle. As an independent warrior who can hold her own against any male on the battlefield, she reverses the normal role of females and therefore stands outside normal society. Unlike the normal female, Durgā does not lend her power or śakti to a male consort, but takes power from the male gods in order to perform her own heroic exploits.[97]

In this sense, this composite warrior-goddess of Indian origin who is neither subordinate nor submissive, who 'reverses the normal role of females', and who performed 'her own heroic exploits', served as the perfect role model for female emperor Wu Zhao.

1.4f. Numerology: The Power of Nine

The Navarātri was held on the ninth day of the month, the Navamī. In India, as in China, nine was a number that held tremendous numinous potency. There is a nine-syllable mantra of the goddess in the *Devīmāhātmya*.[98] In the Navarātri and devotion to Durgā/Cundī, there is a tradition that developed of worshipping nine plants (Navapatrikā).[99] In Indian science at the time, there were nine planets—the

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[96] Simmons & Sen, 'Introduction', 11–13.

[97] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 97.

[98] Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 29.

[99] Manna, *Mother Goddess Caṇḍī*, 46–58. This may represent an effort to fuse the image of Durgā/Caṇḍī as a fierce warrior with the notion that this same

sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Rāhu (associated with nodal eclipses), and Ketu (comets).[100]

Wu Zhao, as Part 2 will make manifest, took advantage of cryptic numerology involving the number nine to verify prophecies that were either explicitly or implicitly connected to heroic Śāktism.

2.1. Setting the Context: Sino-Indian Connections in the Early Tang

After the decline and after the fall of the Gupta Empire (320–540), competing regional kingdoms emerged. King Harsha's (r. 606–47) northern Indian empire, Puṣyabhūti, based in Kanauj; the ascending Chālukya dynasty on the Deccan plateau and southwest coast, emerging as a formidable rival to Harsha under the capable Pulakeshin II (r. 610–42); Shashanka, who established a unified polity in the Bengal region in the late sixth and early seventh century; the Tamil Pandya dynasty based in Madurai; and powerful Pallava kings Mahendravarman (c. 600–30) and Narasimhavarman (r. 630–38) of Kanchipuram in the Tamil Nadu.[101] It was in these kingdoms that the cults of regional goddesses were harnessed and reshaped into what Sarkar terms 'heroic Śāktism' and state cults focused on the Mahādevī; Durgā and her other powerful bellicose forms rose in

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deity is the agrarian 'mother of the world' bringing the 'life-sustaining vegetables grown on earth' (49).

[100] Kotyk, 'Early Tantric Hemerology in Chinese Buddhism', 17.

[101] Kulke & Rothermund, *A History of India*, 72–73; Thapar, *A History of India,* vol. I, chaps. 7 and 8, 136–93; and Keay, *History of India*, 155–79. This is just a short list of some of the more prominent regional leaders and states in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Keay notes that in this tumultuous time there were roughly 'three dozen royal houses' (155). His eighth chapter, 'Lords of the Universe', 155–79, provides a review of the rapidly rising and falling kingdoms in sixth and seventh century India. Also see Sen, 'The Establishment of Tang-Kanauj Diplomatic Ties', 16–25, for more on Sino-Indian embassies during Harsha's empire. There were more than 50 official embassies between 619 and 753.

prominence. The rise of these kingdoms coincided with the reunification of China after a protracted period of disunity.

Building on long-existing Sino-Indian maritime and continental routes of trade, these regional states had significant diplomatic, commercial, technological, intellectual and cultural intercourse with Sui and Tang dynasties.[102] Though there was significant intercourse between the two civilizations well before the seventh century, this was truly the time when what Tansen Sen terms 'a connected history' developed between India and China.[103] The return to China of celebrated Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (602?–664) in 645 and the multiple missions of Tang diplomat Wang Xuance 王玄策 (fl. late-640s) in the mid-seventh century both ushered in an 'Indian boom', and helped foster new cosmopolitan and international artistic currents.[104] By land and sea, with the incessant flow of caravans and argosies along maritime routes via the continental Silk Road, the seventh century marked an era of extensive and constant diplomatic, commercial, and cultural exchange between the recently reunified Chinese empire and the competing kingdoms of medieval India. Valerie Hansen remarks that during the cosmopolitan and flourishing early Tang, 'anything Indian or Central Asian was all the rage'.[105]

In addition to the constant stream of Buddhist monks from India, Indian knowledge of manufacturing techniques, geography, medicine, and astrology were coveted. Tang emperors frequently consulted horological specialists, a number of whom became officials and

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[102] Sen observes that China and India, at this pivotal juncture, the seventh century, 'had a tremendous impact on intermediary states'. At this time, he argues, 'most of Asia, China, India, and their respective spheres of influence, were fully integrated into this network of religious and commercial intercourse between India and China' (see Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 2; and *idem*, 'Buddhism and Maritime Crossings').

[103] Sen, *India, China, and the World*.

[104] Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 18, 23–24, and 251. The mid-seventh century marked a time when an 'East Asian International Art Style' developed, with 'vast temporal and spatial reach'.

[105] Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 173.

served in the Bureau of Astronomy, and Brahman physicians, masters of Ayurvedic medicine including alchemical rejuvenation therapy. Tang Taizong enthusiastically sought access to Indian sugar-making technology and was treated by Hindu physician Nārāyaṇasvāmin.[106] Based in part on the popularity of these experts in medicine and technology, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi opined that 'it is not improbable that small Hindu colonies grew up in China' during this era.[107] During this period, Richard McBride observes, esoteric Buddhism proliferated as '[n]umerous gods, beings, spirits, and creatures that populated the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons and pan-Indian cosmology were introduced in various stages into China first and then into Korea and Japan, where they... eventually came to dominate East Asian demonology' and 'were gradually assimilated into Mahāyanā Buddhism'.[108] Indeed, Alan Watts advanced the idea that 'Buddhism was Hinduism stripped for export'.[109] As part of this burgeoning exchange, it is not surprising that elements of developing 'heroic Śāktism' and its signature festival, Navarātri, were transmitted to China.

Wu Zhao's reign, Tansen Sen contends, was 'the most vibrant era in the history of Sino-Indian interactions, and a phase that perhaps marked the highest point in Indic influences on Chinese society'.[110] In 692, Indian rulers from different kingdoms, territories known in medieval China as the Five Indias (Ch. Wu Tianzhu 五天竺), as well as the Kushan king, visited the court of Wu Zhao, personally leading

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[106] See Sen, *India, China, and the World*, chap. 1, 'The Circulation of Knowledge', 29–110; 97–101, on sugar-making; Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 'The Search for Longevity Physicians', 43–54; and Bagchi, *India and China*, 158–59, and his essays 'Indian Sciences in the Far East', esp. 194–96, and 'Indian Hindu Culture and Religion in China', 213–16.

[107] Bagchi, *India and China*, 214.

[108] McBride, 'Wish-Fulfilling Spells and Talismans', 57; *idem*, 'Esoteric Buddhism and Its Relation to Healing and Demonology', 208.

[109] Though this quote is often casually attributed to Murti, in 'Esoteric Buddhism', 208, fn. 1, and 'Wish-Fulfilling Spells and Talismans', 57, McBride credits Watts, citing *Buddhism, the Religion of No-Religion*, 6.

[110] Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 101.

embassies to present tribute to the female sovereign.[111] At different junctures during her reign, Wu Zhao used calendrical specialists from three separate schools, including Qutan Luo 瞿曇羅 (active 665–98), whose surname is a Sinicization of the royal kṣatriyan name Gautama, served her for decades, and designed a new calendar of state.[112] In 693, kṣatriyan Kashmiri monk Maṇicintana 寶思惟 (d. 721) arrived in her capital, Luoyang, bringing vast knowledge in Tantric (esoteric) Buddhism in the form of 'highly effective dhāraṇī and esoteric rituals affording protection from a wide range of dangers'; he collaborated with other Buddhist monks to support the woman emperor.[113] Some of Wu Zhao's most important translation projects, involving a collaborative multinational team of Buddhist monks like Maṇicintana, were undertaken at temples in Luoyang.[114] Maṇicintana, as we will see below, worked with famous Chinese pilgrim Yijing as part of a translation project that led to the presentation of a Buddhist *sūtra* to Wu Zhao that contained the *Harivaṃśa* Hymn, a song of Indic origin redolent of heroic Śāktism.[115]

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[111] *Cefu yuangui* 970.11403; *THY* 100.1787; and *JTS* 198.5308 (this text suggests that the embassies from India arrived in the second year of Tianshou 天授 era [691, rather than 692]). For a thorough analysis of the rulers and kingdoms involved on these embassies, see Forte, 'The Five Kings of India and the King of Kucha who According to the Chinese Sources Went to Luoyang in 692', 261–83. While the Chinese sources maintain that the Indian representatives visited Wu Zhao's court in 692, other scholars have suggested that the representatives were ambassadors rather than kings; based on the names given in the *Cefu yuangui*, Forte identifies four of the six rulers from greater India who visited on this occasion.

[112] Sen, *China, India, and the World*, 84–85 and *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, on Wu Zhao's employment of Indian astrologers (100–01). For more on the Qutan (Guatama) family that served Wu Zhao and Tang emperors as Royal Astronomers for a century, see Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, 286–87 and 291.

[113] Forte, 'Manicintana', 302.

[114] Ibid., 308–10 and 331.

[115] Yijing worked with a 'translation team' of 16 monks including two Indian monks from Kashmir, Maṇicintana and Śrīmata (in China from 700 to 707). For

Scholars have devoted a great deal of energy to examining the transmission of Buddhism from India to medieval China and the indelible influence it exerted on Chinese society and culture; far less attention has been focused on Hinduism. Yet there is clear evidence of a Hindu presence in Tang China. This presence, Catherine Ludvik remarks, 'not particularly surprising, given that the Indic Buddhist cosmos is populated with numerous Indic deities of Vedic, Brahminical, and Hindu, as well as folk origin'.[116] Indeed, an array of Hindu deities have a routine place in Buddhist scripture.

Durgā, Ludvik observes, 'was not unknown to the Chinese' in the mid-to-late seventh century. Transliterated at times as Tujia 突伽, her name appears during Wu Zhao's time in several Buddhist texts.[117] On his pilgrimage to India (roughly 629 to 645), the celebrated seeker of scriptures Xuanzang reportedly was nearly sacrificed to Durgā, when pirates along the Ganges captured the boat transporting the Buddhist master—a jarring incident he included in his account of his travels.[118] If the paramount goddess in heroic Śāktism was known, it stands to reason, then, that currents of this movement and of the Navarātri—both Indic cultural phenomena in their early phases—began to become culturally recognizable in early Tang China. As it arrived in Tang China and the rest of East Asia in the early-to-mid seventh century, heroic Śāktism took the form of a prophecy foretelling the rise of a ruling warrior queen.

2.1a. Female Ruler as Mahādevī

There is evidence that queens and female rulers (or regents) in seventh century India drew on the power of heroic Śāktism and the ascending visibility and power of the great Indic warrior god-

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more on the translators, see Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 13–14. This text will be discussed extensively below.

[116] Ludvik, '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 707.

[117] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess*, 24.

[118] Li, trans., *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master*, 76; *T* no. 2053, 50: 3.233c29–234a1.

desses to amplify their visibility and influence. Beginning with the *Devīmāhātmya* in the sixth century, David Kinsley has noted the 'tendency in many texts, myths, and rituals concerning goddesses to subsume them all under one great female being'—of *śakti*, divine female energy coalescing into a Mahādevī, a great goddess with many names.[119]

Around this time, Mahādevī became a common component in titles of Indian queen consorts. A number of Gupta queen-consorts were known as Mahādevī.[120] Mahādevī Yaśomati was queen consort of a Puṣyabhūti king in the late sixth and early seventh century.[121] The Jain queen of Chālukyan king Vishnuvardhana (r. 624–41) was known as Ayyana-mahādevī.[122] In the middle of the seventh century, a female regent, Vijayabhaṭṭārikā (reign c. 649–55), presided over the Chālyuka state, one of the contending kingdoms in medieval India. The Vijaya in her name means 'victorious' or 'victory', a quality and a term often used in conjunction with the Durgā and the other goddesses. One of the titles she was known by was Śri Vijaya Mahādevī, the Revered Ever-Victorious Great Goddess.[123] In the late seventh century, one of the queens of Vikramaditya I was known as Gaṅga Mahādevī.[124] At roughly the time Wu

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[119] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 132.

[120] Sinha, *Dynastic History of Magadha, 450 AD–1200*, 2–6. Sinha suggests that Mahādevī was a fairly regular term for queens-consort.

[121] Agrawal, 'A New Copper-Plate of Harṣavardhana from the Punjab, Year 8', 221.

[122] Sen, *Ancient Indian History and Civilization*, 394.

[123] Mahalingam, 'Āditya and Vikramāditya', 114; Dikshit, *Political History of the Chālukyas of Badami*, 116–21; and Rice, *Mysore, a Gazetteer Compiled for Government,* vol. I, *Mysore in General*, 323. Much of the information on Vijayabhaṭṭarikā, including her title, come from land grants to Brahmans from Nerūr and Kochare.

For a brief account of dowager queens in early and medieval India, including Vijayabhaṭṭarikā, see Alketar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, 187–90; and Raman, *Women in India*, vol. I, 159.

[124] Naik & Naik, 'Inscription of the Deccan', 75.

Zhao ruled her Zhou dynasty as emperor or slightly thereafter, in the Piṭhāpuram inscription, the queen of a later Chālukyan ruler, Vijayāditya, is referred to as Vijayāmahādevī, the Ever-victorious Great Goddess.[125] In early eighth century southern India, the queen of Telugu, Chola ruler Vikramaditya II, who played an active role in governance, had the title Mahādevī-Chola.[126]

While the term had earlier origins, the growing tendency of Indian queen consorts (or queen-regents) to assume the title Mahādevī, Great Goddess, presumably to amplify their status or sovereignty, coincides with the rising tide of heroic Śāktism in the seventh century. Indeed, these titles can be understood as a celebration of the burgeoning cultural power of *śakti*. This indicates that, to some degree, queens in seventh century India, assuming the title Mahādevī, represented themselves as earthly incarnations of the Great Goddess. This tendency presented an opportunity to Wu Zhao; the titles provided a template for her.

2.2. Prophecy of a 'Warrior Queen' in East Asia

2.2a. A Korean Kṣatriyan

Carried along Buddhist winds, a prophecy of the ascent of a ruling warrior queen reached Silla Korea by way of Tang China, arriving during the reign of Queen Sŏndŏk 善德 (r. 632–47). In the mid-seventh century, the Sillan 新羅 ruling family (r. 57–935)—most notably the two female rulers Sŏndŏk and Chindŏk 真德 (r. 647–54)—relied on a fusion of Buddhism and Hinduism (among other ideological elements) to amplify their sovereignty. Richard McBride points out that these female sovereigns both belonged to the 'Sillan holy-bone royal family...[that] identified themselves as being of the kṣatriya caste'.[127] Her name Sŏndŏk (Ch. Shande) was likely drawn from the Buddhist story of a Brahmin whom the Buddha predicted

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[125] Padma, *The Position of Women in Mediaeval Karnataka*, 167.

[126] Sen, *Ancient Indian History and Civilization*, 472.

[127] McBride, *Domesticating the Dharm*a, 19.

would—aided by possession of Buddhist relics—be reborn as Indian cakravartin of the Maurya empire Aśoka.[128] This story appears in the *Dayun jing* 大雲經 [Great Cloud Sūtra], a key Buddhist text for Wu Zhao that contained the Buddha's prophecy of a devī who would 'reign over the country as a ruler with the body of a woman' and obtain a 'part of the great sovereignty of a cakravartin ruler'. Wu Zhao and her Buddhist propagandists utilized this text as the basis for writing an elaborate *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra* (see much more on this text in 2.6–2.8 below) geared to proving that she was the prophesied warrior-sovereign (cakravartin) and a bodhisattva with a female body.[129] With her name echoing that of the Brahmin destined for Buddhist kingship, Sŏndŏk was seemingly familiar with this text as well.

The female Sillan sovereign proved to be an ardent patron and sponsor of the Buddhist faith. The posthumous title Sŏndŏk chose for her father, long-ruling and revered King Chinp'yŏng 真平王 (r. 579–632), was Clear Purity (Ch. Baijing/Kor. Paek Chŏng 白淨), a name often used in the Buddhist canon for Śākyamuni's father Śuddhodana. Sŏndŏk's mother was known as Lady Māyā (Ch. Moye furen/Kor. Maya puin 摩耶夫人), echoing the name of the Buddha's mother.[130] The idea that Sŏndŏk was the child of Māyā enhanced

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[128] Pankaj, 'The Buddhist Transformation of Silla Kingship', 28.

[129] This story is contained in *T* no. 387, 12:1096c4–1097c25, and translated in Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 336–42. It also appears in other sources in the Buddhist canon.

[130] Schulz et al., trans., *The Silla Annals of the Samguk Sagi* (by Kim Pusik), 5.147. Sŏndŏk's personal name was Tŏngman 德曼, an 'example of a Buddhist-style royal name that frequently was used in middle and late Silla' (147, fn. 1). Kim Pusik's 金富軾 (1075–1151) source, relying heavily on Chinese standard histories, does not include as much material on Buddhism as Iryŏn's *Samguk yusa* (see below). Also see Whitfield, ed., *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism,* vol. 10, 210–11, fn. 107 and 215, fn. 117.

This naming convention did not begin with Sŏndŏk and her parents. There is a longer history of names drawing on Buddhist kingship and the Śākya clan being interwoven with royal politics in the late Three Kingdoms (Samguk 三國)

her credibility as a sovereign who championed the Buddhist faith, intimating that the Sillan queen came from the kṣatriyan Śākya clan of warrior-kings and thus was, herself, the Buddha incarnate. Significantly, like Wu Zhao almost six decades later, she was the first female ruler in her country's history.

This claim to being a Buddhist warrior king was based on (and/or corroborated by) a prophecy that their Kim 金 family kinsman, Buddhist monk Chajang (Ch. Cizang 慈藏, 590–658), brought back from Mount Wutai after an encounter with Mañjuśrī during Sŏndŏk's reign. Mañjuśrī, the patron deity of Mount Wutai, foretold that: 'Your nation's sovereign belongs to the Indian kṣatriya caste (天竺剎利種) and has already received the Buddha's prophecy of her future Buddhahood 王預受佛記'.[131] While this story appears only in

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era of Korean history. Sŏndŏk herself was heir to a longer Buddhist lineage. The name Pŏphŭng 法興 (r. 514–40) of Silla means 'propagating the dharma', and his successor, Chinhŭng 真興 'True Propagator' [of Buddhism] (r. 540–76) named his two sons Dongryun 銅輪 and Kŭmryun 金輪, after the Bronze Wheel and Golden Wheel of the Cakravartin, the universal Buddhist wheel-turning king, respectively. Her successor Chindŏk was known as Śrīmala, after the famous Buddhist queen. Kang, in *Korean Buddhist Sculpture*, 209, mentions that the convention of Buddhist terms appearing in the names of Sillan kings dates back to King Jabi (Compassionate King; Ch. Cibeiwang 慈悲王) in the mid-fifth century. See also Pankaj, 'The Buddhist Transformation of Silla Kingship', 15–35, and Lee, *The Contemplating Buddha Images in Asia, with Special Emphasis on China and Korea*, 123–26.

[131] *Samguk yusa*, *T* no. 2039, 49:3.990c5–6. Translation is from McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*, 19. In 'Silla Buddhism and the Hwarang', 77, McBride contends that this account in the *Samguk yusa* came from 'more detailed narratives recorded in an "unofficial biography" (pyŏlchŏn 別傳) of Chajang that probably circulated independently from the late Silla (57–935)'. This passage is also translated in entry 4.6, 'The Nine-Story Pagoda of Hwangnyong sa' 皇龍寺九層塔 in Whitfield ed., *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism,* vol. 10, 218–19.

When he returned to Silla with the Buddha's robe, alms bowl, and *śarīra* (contact relics reputedly from the body of the original Buddha), Chajang had the nine-story pagoda built in Hwangnyung Monastery and installed some of these

sacred relics there; the pagoda became one of the 'Three Treasures of Silla'. The establishment of this nine-story pagoda was inspired by Mañjuśrī (and a conversation with a helpful dragon spirit and the prompting of another mysterious Buddhist monk, Wŏnhyung), who told Chajang that these acts of enshrining the relics (he also placed them in two other temples) would help protect Silla and enable it to vanquish its enemies. See also Jung, *The Diamond Ordination Platform of Tongdosa*, 13–14; Mohan, 'Wŏn'guang and Chajang in the Formation of Early Silla Buddhism', 51–64; McBride, 'The Vision-quest in Narrative Literature on the Buddhist Traditions of Silla', 16–43.

A footnote in the translation of this section of the *Samguk yusa* contained in the *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism,* vol. 10, explains that the term for kṣatriya (Ch. *chali* 剎利) in Iryŏn's text was a shortened form of *chadili* (Kr: *chaljeri* 剎帝利) that 'originally meant "ruler of the land" and was the second of the four *varnas* (social orders) in the ancient Indian caste system and designated the royal lineage and military class responsible for political rule and military leadership. Here it is a reference to the Śākya clan, which was the royal family of Kapilavastu' (219, fn. 128).

This is only one of three major accounts of Chajang in the *Samguk yusa*: of the other two, in one Chajang set up the Vinaya (Buddhist monastic rules) in Silla and in the other, 'Fifty Thousand Dharma Bodies on Mount Odae', Chajang established Silla's own Mount Odae (Wutai) in Myŏngju 溟州 in present-day Kangwoŏn Province. Richard McBride has translated all three in 'The Vision-quest in Narrative Literature on the Buddhist Traditions of Silla'.

The other major source on Chajang is Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* (*T*. no. 2060, 50:639a8–640a8): composed around 645 (redacted later; the text was published in 667). Mohan, 'Wŏn'guang and Chajang', 60–64, has translated Daoxuan's 'Biography of Chajang'. Daoxuan was a Buddhist chronicler familiar not only with Chajang's deeds in China, but also with his reputation and accomplishments in his homeland of Silla. In this biography, Daoxuan notes that Chajang was a 'Grand Buddhist Leader' (*da sengtong* 大僧統) in Silla and a 'bodhisattva protector of Buddhist law' (*hufa pusa* 護法菩薩) who standardized and propagated Buddhist rules upon his return to Silla in 643. Within larger East Asian Buddhist circles, due in part to this biography, he is perhaps best known for aligning the state and the Buddhist church together and contributing to the foundation of the Vinaya School (Kr: Kyeyulchong 戒律宗), which helped legitimize Silla as part of a pan-Asian Buddhist continuum. Mohan duly cautions that as these biographies are, to an extent, hagiographies they 'overemphasize the power, privilege and political

the late thirteenth-century century *Samguk yusa*, it is a narrative built upon the estabished belief in Mañjuśrī's presence on Mount Wutai from the period between 638 and 643, when Chajang was in China. Mount Wutai was associated with Mañjuśrī from the fifth century onward and by the seventh century his cult on 'Mount Wutai was already in full force'.[132]

Pankaj Mohan observes that as Sŏndŏk was the first female ruler of Silla and her status among elite clans was tenuous, 'Attributing Kṣatriya status to Queen Sŏndŏk would have established a direct linkage between her and Buddhism, the shared religious belief of the Silla elite in the early seventh century, and would evidently have been an effective strategy to shore up her authority'.[133] Thus, Sŏndŏk's

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patronage of eminent monks' (53). Also see McBride, 'The Complex Origins of Vinaya in Korean Buddhism', 151–78; and Zou, *The Life of Daoxuan*, 152–54. While Daoxuan was a contemporary of Chajang, he does not record anything about Chajang's encounter with Mañjuśrī, nor does he mention any connection between the Korean monk and Mount Wutai. Jung (*The Diamond Ordination Platform of Tongdosa*) has aptly observed that 'while sources contemporaneous with Jajang are likely to be the most accurate, their silence about certain events in his life does not necessarily mean that these events did not occur.... sources, contemporaneous or not, are to an extent bound by their own specific agendas, and none claim to provide an exhaustive record of Chajang's life' (52–53).

The *Samguk sagi* (*gwon* 5) just mentions Chajang in passing, mentioning his departure in 638 and return in 643. Nothing about the Buddhist monk's journey to Mount Wutai and encounter with Mañjuśrī is mentioned.

[132] Wong, 'A Reassessment of the Representation of Mount Wutai from Dunhuang Cave 61', 33. Belgian scholar of Buddhism Étienne Lamotte argues that the Mañjuśrī cult was already flourishing by the beginning of the sixth century and reached its apogee in the seventh century; see 'Mañjuśrī', 60–61. Raoul Birnbaum, in *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī* (8–9) articulates a slightly later time frame: though a 'significant cult' has arisen as Mount Wutai emerged as a sacred Buddhist mountain in the early Tang, it was not until the mid to late Tang that the cult had fully matured where Mañjuśrī was a 'fourfold character': 'a mountain deity, a national (and personal) protector, a prince of penetrating wisdom, and a cosmic lord'.

[133] Mohan, 'Wŏn'guang and Chajang', 53–54.

claim to be a kṣatriya—a warrior queen—was a vital part of her legitimation.

The term 'receiving the prophecy' (Ch. *shouji*/Kor. *sugi* 授記/受記) can also be a translation of the Sanskrit term *vyākaraṇa*, which originally meant 'assurance of attaining enlightenment'. In another pedagogical context it could mean the 'explanation of [Buddhist or Hindu] doctrines through the methods of analysis of teachings or dialogues', but it came to indicate the prophecy of a future Buddha, the prediction of a chosen disciple's enlightenment or attainment of Buddhahood.[134] It is in this final context that it the term appearing in the *Samguk yusa* should be understood.

This prediction of Sŏndŏk's future Buddhahood reflected a shared desire of the Buddhist establishment and the Sillan rulers to meld potent resonance of pan-Asian Buddhist sovereignty to a Hindu caste system in a manner that suited indigenous Korean aristocratic hierarchies. Clearly, by the mid-seventh century on the Korean peninsula—far from the metropole Chang'an, the capital of the Tang dynasty, a cosmopolis that served as the template of civilization to the rest of East Asia—there were free-floating prophetic currents of a warrior queen belonging to the kṣatriya caste that carried social and cultural weight. Undoubtedly, the same prophecy—which, after all, originated on Mount Wutai—circulated in contemporary Tang China and in Asuka era Japan.

Mount Wutai, the site where Mañjuśrī pronounced the prophecy to Chajang, is just north of Bingzhou 并州, the ancestral home of Wu Zhao's family. Chen Jinhua contends that 'the geographical proximity between Wutaishan and the Wu family's ancestral homeland (i.e. Wenshui 文水 in present-day Shanxi)' indicates that the

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[134] Whitfield ed., *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism,* vol. 10, 219, fn. 129. In his article 'Prince Moonlight' (8), Erich Zürcher explains that in Mahayana Buddhism, 'a very frequent kind of prophecy is the *vyākaraṇa* (*shouji* 授記) formula, by which the Buddha in stereotyped terms foretells someone's religious career in future lives, culminating in the latter's achievement of Buddhahood'. Sonya Lee, in *Surviving Nirvana* (201), defines *vyākaraṇa* as 'the conferring of a prophecy of future Buddhahood by one Buddha to his designee'.

activity of the Two Sages (in particular, Wu Zhao) on and around Mount Wutai 'was probably a strategy on the part of the empress and her ideologues to tout her family's divine origin by establishing its intrinsic ties to this sacred mountain and the principal Buddhist deity dwelling there, Mañjuśrī'.[135]

Wu Zhao was no doubt well aware of this female Buddhist ruler from the Sillan kingdom on the neighboring Korean peninsula. During Sŏndŏk's reign, when Wu Zhao was a young fifth-ranked concubine in the imperial seraglio of the second Tang emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–49), the Sillan ruler frequently sent embassies to the Tang court in an effort to secure a military alliance against neighboring Koguryŏ and Paekche.[136] And when Sŏndŏk died in 647, Taizong sent an emissary to invest her younger sister, 'female king Kim Chindŏk' 女王金真德 as ruler.[137] This prophecy suited Wu Zhao quite nicely, for she —by birth and by her Wu name/ancestry—was a warrior, and thus, in terms of twice-born Hindu castes, a kṣatriya!

2.2b. The Warrior Queen Prophecy in the Early Tang: A Narrow Escape for Wu Zhao

Around the time that female Sillan ruler Sŏndŏk availed herself of the prophecy that Korean Monk Chajang had brought from Mount Wutai—a site close to Wu Zhao's hometown and not far from Chang'an, the Tang capital—of a kṣatriyan warrior queen's ascendancy to the throne, similar rumors swirled around the future Chinese woman emperor. Late in Taizong's reign, when Wu Zhao was a Talent (*cairen* 才人), a fifth-ranked concubine, in his inner palace, prophecies and rumors about the rise of a female warrior-sovereign reached the imperial palace. The *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載 [Collected Records of Court and Country], a series of anecdotes and stories compiled by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (667–731) shortly after Wu Zhao's death in 705, contains a prophecy from a cryptic *Record*

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[135] Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 109–12.

[136] Pan, *Son of Heaven and the Heavenly Qaghan*, 209–17.

[137] *JTS* 3.62.

of Secrets (*Miji* 秘記): 'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king (*nüzhu wuwang* 女主武王) will supplant them and possess the empire'. Taizong then secretly summoned and consulted occult master Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–70) about how best to handle the threat. Li Chunfeng warned that, according to the mysterious patterns in the heavens and the calendar, the prophecy had already borne fruit and that the individual was 'living in Your Majesty's palace; within forty years they will possess the empire and annihilate the scions of the Tang clan to the brink of extinction'. When the alarmed Taizong asked if he might not purge the entire palace staff, the esoteric master and horological specialist cautioned against it, admonishing, 'That which Heaven decrees cannot be abrogated'. Li Chunfeng continued to dissuade the Emperor, claiming that if the sovereign were to follow such a rash course then rather than the current prophesied future woman-king who, forty years hence would be 'old and decrepit' (*shuailao* 衰老) and whose efforts to exterminate the Tang would be tempered by the 'benevolence and compassion' (*renci* 仁慈) of age, a fiery and violent, younger prophesied warrior king would arise and butcher every last member of the dynastic family. [138]

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[138] *Chaoye qianzai*, supplemental records, 179, and *TPGJ* 163.1180–81:
唐太宗之代有《秘記》, 云: '唐三代之後, 即女主武王代有天下'. 太宗密召李淳風以詢其事, 淳風對曰: '臣據玄象推算, 其兆已成. 然其人已生在陛下宮內, 從今不逾四十年, 當有天下, 誅殺唐氏子孫殆將殲盡'. 帝曰: '求而殺之如何?' 淳風曰: '天之所命, 不可廢也. 王者不死, 雖求恐不可得. 且據佔已長成, 復在宮內, 已是陛下眷屬. 更四十年, 又當衰老, 老則仁慈, 其於陛下子孫或不甚損. 今若殺之, 即當復生. 更四十年, 亦堪御天下矣. 少壯嚴毒, 殺之為血仇, 即陛下子孫無遺類矣'.

TPGJ 215.1647 (attributed to Zhong Lu's mid-ninth century *Ganding lu* 感定錄) contains a very similar passage. In Li Chunfeng's *JTS* (69.2718–19) biography, the esoteric master tells the emperor that the prophesied individual is a member of his household (*juanshu* 眷屬). Li Chunfeng's biography, in the *juan* 'Biographies of the Esoteric Arts' (*Fangzhi* 方伎) in the *New Tang History* (*XTS* 204.5798), contains both the prophecy and the Grand Astrologer's response. Taizong obtained a secret prophecy that read: 'the center of the Tang is weak;

Clearly, this prophecy deeply troubled Taizong. There is another related account involving this prognostication of a female ruler. According to a passage in the Northern Song era *Miscellaneous Records of the Taiping Era*, putatively from a mid-Tang text, Zhao Ziqin's 趙自勤 (fl. mid-eighth century), *Dingming lu* 定命錄 [Discourses on Predetermined Fate] (mid-eighth century), the emperor held further discussions (or, perhaps this may be understood as a more detailed account of the incident) with Li Chunfeng, who informed Taizong—at the time Wu Zhao had entered the ranks of his concubines—that an aura of the Son of Heaven (*Tianzi qi* 天子氣) emanated from within the 'rear palace' (*hougong* 後宮). Displeased, the emperor arrayed his concubines in groups of 100. Li Chunfeng indicated from which group the emanation issued. Taizong broke them into two groups of 50; again, the esoteric master informed him from which remaining group the aura of sovereign power emanated. Li Chunfeng asked Taizong to choose the woman from whom the aura exuded. The emperor could not and wanted to kill the lot of them. Li Chunfeng remonstrated: 'If Your Majesty leaves them, then although the imperial blessings will suffer a temporary blow, the imperial altars of grain and soil will long endure. If Your Majesty kills them, however, the prophesied one will become a man who will eradicate your imperial clan until no trace remains!' Chastened, Taizong did not

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a female warrior will supplant them as ruler (king)'. Instead of thirty years, the prophecy read: 'After forty years, the prophesied king will slaughter the scions, the sons and grandsons of Tang to near extinction'. And when Taizong proposed seeking and killing the prophesied one, Li Chunfeng warned that such a purge would not only fail to kill the future king, but would lead to indiscriminate and wanton murder of innocents. Finally, the master of the occult opined that forty years hence the emperor's former intimate would be older and more prone to benevolence and would 'not sever the Tang line' (不能絕唐), whereas if the original prophesied king were killed, a younger, fiercer and more violent king would be reborn and butcher the scions of Tang to utter extinction.

Though I have not found any comprehensive study of the topic, Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, 75–76, among others, has remarked on the prophecy of the 'female martial king'.

pursue the investigation.[139]

Fortunately for Wu Zhao, Taizong's suspicion ultimately fell on another target. In the *Old Tang History*, it is recorded that early in Tang Taizong's Zhenguan 貞觀 [True Vision] era (626–649), when Venus (Taibai 太白) was visible in the daytime the Grand Astrologer (Taishi 太史) predicted that this anomaly augured the 'ascendancy of a female ruler' (*nüzhu chang* 女主昌) and rumors circulated that a 'female martial king' (*nü wuwang* 女武王) would arise. When, at a banquet, Taizong asked his generals and court officials about their nicknames, the Left General of the Militant Guard (*zuo wuwei jiangjun* 左武衛將軍) Li Junxian 李君羨 (d. 648) mentioned that his childhood nickname was 'Fifth Girl' (*wu niangzi* 五娘子). The character for martial in the Li Junxian's 'Militant Guard' title was the same as the 'martial' of martial king and the 'five' (*wu* 五) in his nickname is a homophone for 'martial' (*wu* 武); further, the man had been gifted palace girls, horses, oxen, gold, and silks for his surpassing martial valor and service. In addition, the man came from Wuan 武安 (Martial Peace), near Luoyang, and had been granted a nobility title as Duke of Wulian County 武連縣. All of these 'martials' associated with Li Junxian—in his nobility title, his nickname, his hometown, and his military office—sharpened the unsettled sovereign's suspicions. Initially, Taizong laughed it off, remarking, 'How could a woman be so brave and fierce (*yongmeng* 勇猛) as you!' However, convinced that this general of the palace guards was the 'martial king' the prophecy warned would arise, summarily demoted the unfortunate general, sending him to a post outside the capital. Then, his

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[139] *TPGJ* 224.1720–21:

武后之召入宮, 李淳風奏云, '後宮有天子氣'. 太宗召宮人閱之, 令百人為一隊. 問淳風. 淳風云, '在某隊中'. 太宗又分為二隊. 淳風云, '在某隊中, 請陛下自揀擇'. 太宗不識, 欲盡殺之. 淳風諫不可, '陛下若留, 雖皇祚蹔缺, 而社稷延長. 陛下若殺之, 當變為男子, 即損滅皇族無遺矣'. 太宗遂止.

This may just be a more elaborate version of the story from the previous anecdote in *Chaoye qianzai.* According Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86) and his colleagues (*ZZTJ* 195.6134), Wu Zhao entered Taizong's 'rear palace' as a concubine in 637 at the age of 14 (according to Chinese reckoning).

suspicion enhanced when a censor mentioned rumors that Li Junxian was plotting with a sorcerer who practiced crooked arts, Taizong ordered the man's death. Curiously, in 691, shortly after Wu Zhao established her Zhou dynasty, responding to a formal grievance from Li Junxian's descendants, ordering the former general reburied with proper ceremony and posthumously restoring the wrongly-executed 'Fifth Girl's' rank and title.[140]

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[140] *JTS*. 69.2524–25:

李君羨者, 洺州武安人也. 初為王世充驃騎, 惡世充之為人, 乃與其黨叛而來歸, 太宗引為左右. 從討劉武周及王世充等, 每戰必單騎先鋒陷陣, 前後賜以宮女、馬牛、黃金、雜彩, 不可勝數. 太宗即位, 累遷華州刺史, 封武連郡公. 貞觀初, 太白頻晝見. 太史占曰, '女三昌'. 又有謠言, '當有女武王者'. 太宗惡之. 時君羨為左武衛將軍, 在玄武門. 太宗因武官內宴, 作酒令, 各言小名. 君羨自稱小名 '五娘子', 太宗愕然, 因大笑曰, '何物女子, 如此勇猛!' 又以君羨封邑及屬縣皆有 '武' 字, 深惡之. 會御史奏君羨與妖人員道信潛相謀結, 將為不軌, 遂下詔誅之. 天授二年, 家屬詣闕稱冤. 則天乃追復其官爵, 以禮改葬.

Also see *XTS* 94.3836–37 for a similar passage. The story is also told in the *Wengyou xianping* 甕牖閒評 [Idle Comments from Inside the Earthenware Window], *juan* 2, a Southern Song 'casual jottings' (*biji* 筆記) of scholar Yuan Wen 袁文 (1119–1190). There is different wording of the prophecy: 'There was a prophecy about a woman with the surname Wu' (有一女子身姓武) who would inevitably foment rebellion and bring about the fall of the House of Tang. It goes on to explain that as a result Taizong wrongly killed Li Junxian.

I can find no indication that Venus appeared early in Taizong's reign, though it appeared on four occasions in 626 (see below). Records indicated that it appeared repeatedly in 648. It is also curious that Li Chunfeng and Yuan Tiangang (see below) co-authored a one-*juan* work on the revolutions and divinatory resonance of the retrograde movement of Venus (see *XTS* 59.1545).

Curiously, while it is not a direct reference to the planet Venus, according to the *Samguk yusa* (*T* no. 2039, 49:990c4–8; see section 2.2a above), Mañjuśrī told the Buddhist monk Cizang, who brought the kṣatriyan prophecy back to Queen Sŏndŏk in 643, to start the Korean cult of Mañjuśrī on Mount Venus (Ch. Taibai/Kr. Taebaek 太白山), which, like Mount Wutai in China, had ten thousand Mañjuśrīs. Admittedly, this is not a direct or simple connection to the

The appearance of Venus in the daytime as an omen portending the ascendancy of a female ruler pre-dates the Tang. In Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian], the diurnal appearance of Venus or Venus crossing the meridian was understood as a sign that the planet was contending with the light of the sun, which, in turn, was taken as an omen that 'powerful states are growing weak, small states are growing powerful and female rulers are ascending' 晝

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diurnal appearance of Venus, but it still warrants mention.

The diurnal appearance of Venus was not a portent reserved for or unique to Wu Zhao. In 626, just before Taizong seized the throne from his father Tang Gaozu (r. 618–26), Li Yuan 李淵 (566–635), Venus appeared in the daytime and allegedly traversed the heavens. Daoist Grand Astrologer Fu Yi 傅奕 (554–639) among others told the ambitious future emperor that the daytime appearance of Venus (Taibai, also called the Star of Power [Dexing 德星]) presaged his ascendancy to rule the empire. Taizong's title at the time, Prince of Qin (Qinwang 秦王), corresponded with the appearance of Venus over the former Qin homeland in the west. According to the *New Tang History* (*XTS* 1.19), in the sixth, seventh, and eighth lunar months, just before Taizong seized the throne, Venus appeared four times in daytime; in the *Old Tang History* (*JTS* 33.851–52), five times. Fu Yi and several others predicted that this meant that Taizong would come to possess the empire (當有天下). While Taizong was a warrior-prince and his supporters and propagandists used this omen as a prophecy to support his ascent, there is no indication that there are any connections between heroic Śāktism and either the appearance of Venus in 626 or his enthronement. Dating back to the Han dynasty, anomalous planetary appearances had been viewed as portentous events. See *JTS* 36.1321, 79.2716, 191.5089; *ZZTJ* 191.6003; *XTS* 1.19. Also see Zhang, *Forming the Image of Cheng Xuanying*, 33–35.

In traditional China, the appearance and movement of certain stars, planets, or comets is also connected to martial omenology. In 'Dou Jiande's Dilemma' (101), David Graff remarks that to a degree 'military-decision making was informed by cosmological and cosmographic beliefs, and medieval military commanders adjusted their plans to accord with their understanding of underlying patterns of the universe...', though he acknowledges that the application of these cosmological elements was largely limited to 'matters of timing, particularly choice of propitious days for the inauguration of important or hazardous enterprises'.

見而經天, 是謂爭明, 彊國弱, 小國彊, 女主昌.[141] The *Han shu* 漢書 [History of the Han Dynasty] has a similar passage that elaborates, contending that the appearance of Venus in daytime is also an ominous 'sign of soldiers' (*bingxiang* 兵象).[142] In the early Tang, this long-established omen of the 'ascendancy of a female ruler' (*nüzhu chang* 女主昌) seemingly became combined with widely-circulating rumors about the rise of a 'female martial king' (*nü wuwang* 女武王), rumblings possibly connected to the contemporary 'female warrior sovereign' prophecy originating on Mount Wutai and reaching Silla.

This Li Junxian Incident is also recorded in the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive Mirror for the Advancement of Governance] in greater detail. Two further significant elements are revealed. First, it happened not at the beginning of Taizong's reign, but at the very end, in the seventh month of 648, not long before the emperor's death. Second, a young Wu Zhao was almost implicated. This Northern Song state history records the following account:

> Initially, when Left General of the Militant Guard, Duke of Wulian County Li Junxian of Wu'an reached the Northern (Xuanwu) Gate, Venus was repeatedly visible during the daytime. The Grand Astrologer prognosticated, 'A female ruler will rise and prosper'. The *Miji* [*Record of Secrets*], also circulated among the people, saying: 'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler 女主, a martial king 武王, will possess the empire'. Finding these developments abhorrent, the Emperor gathered his military officers for a banquet in the palace, offering a command toast, and making each of the men reveal his childhood nickname. When Junxian said that he had been called 'Fifth Girl', the Emperor was alarmed, but joked, 'What kind of girl is as brave and robust as you!' In addition, because Junxian's official title, nobility rank, and hometown all contained the character 'martial' (*wu* 武), the Emperor deeply loathed him. Later, Junxian was

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[141] *Shiji* 27.1327. Sima Qian's observation is repeated in a number of subsequent histories. See also Hinsch, 'The Criticism of Women by Western Han Portent Experts', 112–13.

[142] *Han shu* 26.1283.

demoted and sent to be Prefect of Huazhou. There was a commoner named Yuan Daoxin who claimed he could fast and had knowledge of Buddhist arcana. Junxian deeply respected and trusted the man; on several occasions, he dismissed his followers and spoke secretly with Yuan behind a screen. A censor memorialized that Junxian was consorting with a wicked mystic and plotting conspiracy. On the *ren-chen* day (August 7, 648), Junxian was executed and his family property was confiscated. 初, 左武衛將軍武連縣公武安李君羨直玄武門, 時太白屢晝見, 太史占云: '女主昌'. 民間又傳秘記云: '唐三世之後, 女主武王代有天下'. 上惡之. 會與諸武臣宴宮中, 行酒令, 使各言小名. 君羨自言名 '五娘'. 上愕然, 因笑曰: '何物女子, 乃爾勇健!' 又以君羨官稱封邑皆有 '武' 字, 深惡之. 後出為華州刺史. 有布衣員道信, 自言能絕粒, 曉佛法, 君羨深敬信之, 數相從, 屏人語. 御史奏君羨與妖人交通, 謀不軌妖, 喬於翻.王辰, 君羨坐誅, 籍沒其家.

The Emperor secretly asked Grand Astrologer Li Chunfeng, 'Are the prophecies in the *Record of Secrets* credible?' Li answered: 'I have gazed both upward to examine the configurations of Heaven and looked downward to study the machinations of the calendar: the prophesied is already in Your Majesty's palace, personally connected by marriage or blood! Within thirty years this person will rule the empire, killing nearly all the sons and grandsons of Tang. This prophecy has already been fulfilled!' The Emperor asked: 'What if everyone who is suspect is eradicated?' The Grand Astrologer responded: 'Man cannot avoid that which Heaven has decreed. If you choose this course, the [future] king will not be slain, only many innocents wrongly killed. Moreover, in thirty years, the prophesied king will already be aged and perhaps will have a measure of compassion, so the catastrophe may not be so great. If you were to kill the prophesied one, however, Heaven might send a younger chosen one with unrestrained enmity who would extinguish Your Majesty's sons and grandsons, not leaving a single scion'. Thereupon, the Emperor did not pursue this course of action. 上密問太史令李淳風, '祕記所云, 信有之乎?' 對曰: '臣仰稽天象, 俯察曆數, 其人已在陛下宮中, 為親屬, 自今不過三十年, 當王天下王況于翻. 殺唐子孫殆盡, 其兆既成矣'. 上曰: '疑似者盡殺之, 何如?' 對曰: '天之所命, 人不能違也. 王者不死, 徒多殺無辜. 且自今以往三十年, 其人

> 已老, 庶幾頗有慈心, 為禍或淺幾,希 屑,翻. 今借使得而殺之, 天或生壯者肆其怨毒, 恐陛下子孫, 無遺類矣!' 上乃止.[143]

Taizong seems to have acted expediently: only eight days elapsed between the diurnal appearance of Venus and Li Junxian's death.[144]

Seemingly, then, the banquet was a staged event where imperial bodyguards might be questioned about this matter. Groups like the Militant Guard whose duty involved patrolling the palace walls and the vicinity of the Xuanwu Gate, the Northern Gate of the palace, beyond which the ruler's 'rear palace' lay, were close enough that the emperor suspected the prophesied king might herald from their ranks. Taizong seized upon the nickname of unfortunate 'Fifth Girl' Li Junxian, leading to the man's exile and death. More than four decades later, Wu Zhao, perhaps recalling how, waiting nervously among the final group of concubines isolated by Li Chunfeng, close she had come to meeting her demise, was very sympathetic and responsive when, shortly after she ascended the throne, the family of Fifth Girl came to the city gates requesting the rehabilitation of their deceased ancestor. Then female emperor presiding over the empire as kṣatriya queen, she happily restored rank and peerage to the disgraced general.

The prophecy is also mentioned in several later Buddhist sources, including Zhipan's 志磐 late Southern Song *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 [Comprehensive History of the Buddhist Patriarchs] and Nianchang's 念常 Yuan dynasty *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 [Comprehensive Record of Buddhist Patriarchs through the Ages]. To describe the prophecy, both use language almost identical to that found in the official histories and unofficial sources. The former records that 'in the twenty-first year [of the Zhenguan era, 647] the emperor obtained a secret prophecy that said: "After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will come to possess the empire" (二十一年, 上得密讖云: 唐三世之後, 女主武王代有天下).[145]

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[143] *ZZTJ* 199.6259–60.

[144] *XTS* 2.47, 33.853 (provides the date in the seventh month of 648 that Venus appeared in the daytime).

[145] *Fozu tongji, T* no. 2035, 49:371a20–21.

It also appears later in a catalogue of prophecies and omens (*juan* 52) in identical form, except that *di* 帝 rather than *shang* 上 is used for the emperor.[146] In the latter source, it is recorded that Taizong obtained the 'secret prophecy' in the *dingwei* 丁未 year of the sexagenary cycle (the 21st year of Zhenguan; February 10, 647 to January 29, 648).[147] In another Yuan source, the monk Jue'an's 覺岸 (1286–?) *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略 [A Brief Search into Buddhist Antiquity], it is recorded that sometime after Wu Shihuo's daughter [Wu Zhao] entered Taizong's seraglio as a fifth-ranked Talent at 14, the Grand Astrologer memorialized that the 'portentous air of a female ruler' (*nüzhu zhi zhao* 女主之兆) issued from the rear palace.[148] The fact that this passage is included in a number of Buddhist sources, including the catalogue of historical prophecies and auspicious omens (*lichao chenrui* 歷朝讖瑞) in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 [Comprehensive Record of Buddhist Patriarchs through the Ages] is a strong indication that, like the appearance of Mañjuśrī or Mount Wutai, this prophecy may be understood as Buddhist or, perhaps, Indic. In addition, the term 'martial king' (*wuwang* 武王) might be understood as a translation for the kṣatriya caste of royal warriors. In this sense, the rumor/prophecy that circulated in Taizong's time appears to be closely connected to the prophecy that Sillan monk Chajang received from Mañjuśrī on Mount Wutai.

The timely emergence of this female warrior prophecy, on the swirling multicultural winds of the early Tang, is a perfect example of how existing lore within the Chinese cultural matrix—prognostications tying Venus to an ascending female ruler with a millennium of history—might become interwoven with novel elements like the recently-arrived Indic tradition heroic Śāktism, the belief featuring a divine, all-victorious, protective martial queen who substantiates and symbolizes sovereignty, or become enfolded in a prophecy of a warrior/kṣatriya queen preordained to achieve bodhisattva-hood or Buddhahood.

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[146] Ibid, 458a3–4.

[147] *Fozu lidai tongzai*, *T* no. 2036, 49:572b11–12.

[148] *Shishi jigu lüe*, *T* no. 2037, 49:816c20–21.

TABLE 1 Timing and Language of 'Female Warrior King' Prophecy

Source/Date	Putative Timing/ Context	Language
Zhang Zhuo, Chaoye qianzai (early 8th cent.)	During Taizong's reign (626–49), the prophecy appears in *Record of Secrets*	'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will supplant them and possess the empire'. 女主武王代有天下
Zhao Ziqin, *Dingming lü* 定命錄 (mid-8th cent.)	When Wu Zhao entered the palace as Taizong's concubine[149] (after 637)	'The air of a Son of Heaven emanates from the rear palace'. 後宮有天子氣
Zhong Lu, *Ganding lu* 感定錄 , mid-9th cent (in *TPGJ*)	During Taizong's reign (626–49), the prophecy appears in *Record of Secrets*	'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will supplant them and possess the empire'. 女主武王代有天下
Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 69, Li Junxian's bio, mid-10th cent.	At the beginning of the Zhenguan era (late 620s–early 630s)	Rumors circulate that a 'female warrior king' would arise 謠言曰：當有女武王者。
Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 83, Li Chunfeng's bio (mid-10th cent.)	During Taizong's reign (626–49), the prophecy appears in *Record of Secrets*	'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will supplant them and possess the empire'. 女主武王代有天下
Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 204, 11th cent., Li Chunfeng's bio.	During Taizong's reign	Taizong obtained a secret prophecy that read: 'the center of the Tang is weak; a female warrior will supplant them as ruler (king)'. 唐中弱 , 有女武代王
Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 , late 11th cent.	7th month of 648	The *Record of Secrets* also circulated among the people, saying: 'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler 女主 , a martial king 武王 , will possess the empire'.

[149] According to *ZZTJ* 195.6134–35, Wu Zhao entered Taizong's inner palace as a concubine at the Chinese age of 14 in 637.

Yuan Wen, *Wengyou xianping* 甕牖閒評 , 12th cent.	Prophecy during Taizong's reign	There was a prophecy about a woman with the surname Wu 有一女子身姓武 who would inevitably foment rebellion and bring about the fall of the House of Tang.
Iryŏn, *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 , 13th cent. Korea	A prophecy delivered from Mañjuśrī on Mount Wutai to visiting Sillan monk Chajang (636–643)	'Your nation's sovereign belongs to India's kṣatriya caste (天竺剎利種) and has already received the Buddha's prophecy of her future buddhahood'.
Zhipan, *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 , 13th cent.; twice, *juan* 39 and 52	647, 21st year of Taizong's Zhenguan era	Taizong obtained a secret prophecy that read, 'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will supplant them and possess the empire'. 女主武王代有天下
Nianchang, *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 , 14th cent.	647, 21st year of Taizong's Zhenguan era	Taizong obtained a secret prophecy that read, 'After three generations of the Tang, a female ruler and martial king will supplant them and possess the empire'. 女主武王代有天下
Jue'an, *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略 , 14th cent.	Sometime after Wu Zhao entered the palace as a concubine in 637	Grand Astrologer [Li Chunfeng] memorialized that the 'portentous air of a female ruler' (*nüzhu zhi zhao* 女主之兆) issued from the rear palace.

2.2c. Li Chunfeng and Wu Zhao

Though he is perhaps better known as an occultist, as 'China's Nostradamus', Li Chunfeng was also a prodigiously gifted 'technocrat' who served as an historian, an astronomer, a mathematician, a calendrical specialist, an omenologist, and a prognosticator. He enjoyed a four-decade career as a court official, beginning under Taizong and continuing through fifteen years of co-rule by Gaozong and Wu Zhao.[150] He was well aware of the 'female warrior sovereign' prophecy;

[150] Goodman, 'Li Chunfeng', 29–49.

it was widely known and disseminated. As the aforementioned passage from the *Zizhi tongjian* indicates, the prophecy in a cryptic *Record of Secrets* 'circulated among the people' (*minjian chuan Miji* 民間傳秘記).

There is some indication that Li Chunfeng may have become a partisan of Wu Zhao. His counsel prevented Taizong from executing Wu Zhao and scores of other concubines in his harem. Howard Goodman has noted that, perhaps because of this, 'he is perceived by some as a Wu factionalist', an observation to which he adds, 'but this is speculative and if true seems not to have been a negative force on his career'.[151] When Wu Zhao had risen to become Gaozong's

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[151] Ibid., 42. There is some evidence that seems to counter the argument that Li Chunfeng was a Wu Zhao partisan. In the preface of the *Yisi zhan* 乙巳占 [Prognostications of the Yisi Year], a ten-*juan* compendium of heavenly omens published under Taizong in 645, Li Chunfeng's omenological views on female rule, situated amidst his commentary on 'venal usurpers' (Goodman, 'Li Chunfeng', 41) come across as rather conventional: 'When a female ruler takes the reins of government, then the bonds of order are rent, powerful officials indulge in force, and these bring about weak tremors. Light and shadows hide flying swallows, and the earth splits apart birds and pheasants—these fall into the category of astral verification after the fact' (trans. Goodman, 'Li Chunfeng', 41); *THY* 159.1633–34. Li Chunfeng's point, Goodman explains, 'is that the female-usurper category is especially dire because its omens allow no mitigation'.

Indeed, Li Chunfang's perspective on omenology and the machinations of *yin-yang* and the Five Elements is quite similar to that of Yu Wenjun 俞文俊, one of Wu Zhao's court officials. In 686, a 200-foot mountain reputedly jutted forth from the ground, replete with a divine pool on the mountain where a yellow dragon swam to and fro, regurgitating fist-sized pearls. Proclaiming it auspicious, Wu Zhao felt it resembled a miniature Sumeru, the sacred Buddhist marchmount, and dubbed the miraculous peak Mount Felicity (Qingshan 慶山). While some offered their congratulations, other Confucian ministers insisted it was a calamity. Yu Wenjun memorialized, 'Your Majesty, a female ruler (*nüzhu* 女主) has improperly situated in a male *yang* position, which has inverted and altered the hard and soft; therefore the earth's emanations are obstructed and separated. This mountain born of the sudden convulsion of earth represents a calamity. Your

empress, Li worked extensively on a number of projects under the aegis of prime minister Xu Jingzong, a staunch political backer of Wu.[152] By 660, oft-indisposed Tang Gaozong and his empress Wu Zhao sat in tandem presiding over court; the empress played an increasingly visible and public political and ceremonial role. To rectify the poorly-designed *wuyin* 戊寅 calendar that Daoist Fu Renjun 傅仁均 (fl. 618) had designed for the founding emperor of the Tang, Li Chunfeng and Indian astronomer Jiashe (Skt. Kāśyapa) Xiaowei 迦葉孝威 devised a new Unicorn Virtue Calendar (*Linde li* 麟德歷) for Wu Zhao and Gaozong in 665.[153] At the same time the new calendar was promulgated, due to a protracted rainy spell, Gaozong feared that Heaven did not approve of his intent to perform the sacrosanct *feng* and *shan* rites on Mount Tai in late 665. The fretful emperor

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Majesty may take this as 'Mount Felicity', but your subject feels there is nothing to celebrate. To respond properly to Heaven's censure, it is suitable that you lead the quiet life of a widow and cultivate virtue, otherwise I fear further disasters will befall us'. Needless to say, Wu Zhao strenuously rejected this interpretation. Of course, she dismissed the critique that as a female ruler her authority, by its very nature, was an affront Heaven's will, throwing the elements out of kilter. Infuriated, Wu Zhao exiled him to swampy, disease-ridden Lingnan 嶺南. See *DTXY* 13.193–94; *JTS* 37.1350 and 187.4883; *XTS* 35.910 and 76.3479; and *ZZTJ* 203.6442. For Yu Wenjun's memorial, see *QTW* 235.2271.

[152] Ibid., 42–43.

[153] *ZZTJ* 201.6344. This assistance could also simply be understood as part of Li Chunfeng's job. In 633, Li Chunfeng designed an armillary sphere that included the ecliptic (*huangdao* 黃道) at Taizong's behest (*JTS* 3.43). He also compiled a text called the *Faxiang zhi* 法像志, edited the monographs on harmonics and the calendar in the Jin and Sui histories (*JTS* 35.1295, 36.1311), and compiled the *Tianwen yaolu* 天文要錄 [Essentials of Astronomy].

Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 251, fn. 42, notes that Li Chunfeng's collaborator Kāśyapa came from 'from a family of Indian astronomers active in China at the time'.

For the launch of Fu Renjun's calendar, see *JTS* 1.8. In contrast to preceding dynasties, the Tang and Wu Zhao's Zhou frequently altered their state calendars. See Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 219–23.

sought the assistance of Li Chunfeng's father, Daoist Li Bo 李播, who communed with one of the patron deities of the mountain, the Heavenly Thearch of the Jade Capital (Yujing tiandi 玉京天帝). The Daoist divinity sanctioned the performance of the *feng* and *shan*.[154] Wu Zhao argued her way into playing a pivotal role in these rites; this platform and visibility marked a major political triumph for her.[155]

Li Chunfeng's manual on numerological divination, the *Tuibei tu* 推背圖 [Illustration of Opposing Backs], as we will see below, later played a role in bringing to fruition the prophecies of a rising female warrior sovereign that circulated in the early to mid seventh century. Li Chunfeng did not create the prophecy of the ascendancy of a female warrior king; he did, however, make predictions based upon widely circulating cryptic rumblings and planetary signs.

2.2d. A Physiognomist's Initial Prediction of Wu Zhao's Future Ascendancy

There is another earlier prophecy of Wu Zhao's ascent to power. Because it does not explicitly identify her as a warrior queen, I have placed this story toward the end of Part 2.2. In an anecdote recorded in both official and unofficial sources, at some juncture during the late 620s, celebrated physiognomist Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (583–665) visited the Wu family in Lizhou 利州 (present-day Guangyuan 廣元, Sichuan). After examining their facial features and structures of other family members and making prognostications, Yuan Tiangang was awestruck when he saw Wu Zhao enter in the embrace of her nurse, wearing boys' clothing. Confused, he halted 'This young gentleman has divine coloring—how utterly sublime! His fate is not easy to fathom'. Curiosity piqued, he had the nurse put her down so that she might toddle around in front of the bed. With burgeoning surprise, he exclaimed, 'This child has the pupils of a dragon and

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[154] *TPGJ* 298.2321.

[155] Gaozong and Wu Zhao jointly performed the *feng* and *shan* rites on Mount Tai in 666. See *ZZTJ* 201.6346; *JTS* 5.89–90 and 23.888; also Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 184–85.

the neck of a phoenix 此郎君子龍瞳鳳頸!' Slowly, he circled Wu Zhao, then prophesied, 'If this noble child were a girl, someday she would become the ruler of the empire' (必若是女...後當為天下之主矣).[156] The *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Miscellaneous Records of the Taiping Era] contains a similar passage, attributed to Hu Qu's 胡璩 (d.u.) mid-ninth century *Tanbin lu* 談賓綠 [Records of Chats with a Guest], though it adds the detail that Wu Zhao as a toddler had a 'solar halo and a draconian mien' (*rijiao longyan* 日角龍顏).[157] The dragon, of course, symbolizes imperial authority. Wu Zhao possessed the distinctive phrenological characteristics to impress the famous physiognomist.

On the surface, there is nothing in this account of Yuan Tiangang's prediction that is explicitly connected to the heroic Śāktism or the female warrior queen prophecy. Nonetheless, one might understand that the persistence of the account and its appearance in many sources may attest to the presence of these currents. And, after all, Yuan Tiangang's prediction did identify a future female warrior sovereign.

In addition, along with calendrical specialist and astrologist Li Chunfeng, Yuan is one of the putative authors of the *Tuibei tu*, a cryptic manual of numerological divination that Wu Zhao and her propagandists utilized as evidence that she was the prophesied 'warrior' (see Part 2.7 below).

2.2e. The Chen Shuozhen Rebellion of 653

Another event that may be connected to the rising influence of heroic Śāktism and the related 'female warrior sovereign' occurred at this same juncture: early in Gaozong's reign, shortly after he

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[156] There are several variations of this anecdote. See *JTS* 191.5093–94; *XTS* 204.5801; and *DTXY* 13.193. In each of the latter two sources, the physiognomist says, 'If this child were a girl, she would be fit to be the Son of Heaven' (若為女當作天子). Yuan Tiangang composed a seven-*juan* manual on physiognomy (*XTS* 59.1557).

[157] *TPGJ* 224.1720.

had recalled Wu Zhao from a Buddhist convent to become a concubine in his rear palace. Chen Shuozhen 陳碩真 (d. 653), whom Tang officials reported have 'used magical incantations to beguile the masses' 以妖言惑眾, proclaimed herself the Civil and Splendid Emperor (Wenjia Huangdi 文佳皇帝), raised armies, staged a short-lived rebellion in the area of modern-day Hangzhou, appointed military officers and began to annex surrounding counties and prefectures including Muzhou 睦州. Before battle, she would strike a bell and burn incense. Wild stories circulated that she possessed numinous divine powers (*shenling* 神靈), had ascended to the heavens (*shengtian* 升天) and walked among the immortals, and that her guardian spirit would punish anyone who resisted her by eradicating their entire clan, bewitching locals and filling her opponents with terror. The uprising of this self-proclaimed female sovereign was quelled in the eleventh month of 653. Chen Shuozhen was executed.[158] In general terms, Chen's ability to contact divine powers, to conquer spirits and demons (*yigui* 役鬼), and to harness those powers in warfare, corresponds with the consecration of kings in heroic Śāktism, in which the sovereign, at a certain time of year, communes with the Mahādevī, and is granted power to rule and success in battle.[159]

Rebellions led by women in early medieval and medieval China are rare.[160] In short, given these multivalent influences in the cos-

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[158] *ZZTJ* 199.6282–3; *XTS* 4.72, 32.842, 109.4095–96 (the biography of Cui Yixian 崔義玄 (586–656), the prefect of Wuzhou 婺州 [modern-day Jinhua 金華] who quelled the uprising); *JTS* 3.55, 77.2688–89 (biography of Cui Yixian). In one version (*XTS* 109.4095–96), when she returns from the heavens she transforms into a man who has the ability to enslave and control ghosts and spirits.

[159] Based on rather tenuous evidence, this uprising is identified as Zoroastrian in Lin, 'Cong Chen Shuozhen qiyi kan Huoxian jiao dui Tangdai minjian de yingxiang', 140–41. This view is rebuffed in Chen Sanping, 'From Azerbaijan to Dunhuang', 183–84.

[160] Declaring herself a general, Mother Lü 呂母 led a rebellion during Wang Mang's Xin dynasty interregnum in 14 CE. See *Hou Hanshu* 11.477–78. In modern-day Vietnam, the Trung sisters (Ch. Zheng Ce 徵側 and Zheng Ni 徵貳), probably ethnic Vietnamese, rebelled against Emperor Guangwu 光武帝 (r.

mopolitan early Tang—Central Asia, India, the Silk Road, and Buddhism—the patriarchal Confucian center of gravity no longer held such great pull. Benefactors of this historical serendipity, Chen Shuozhen and Wu Zhao lived in a time where gender roles were in a state of flux, in the midst of a process of redefinition and renegotiation.[161] Without doubt, this cultural flux and new influences like heroic Śāktism enabled women to enjoy a more prominent social presence, greater sexual freedom, and more political influence during the early Tang.

25–57 CE) in the Eastern Han; see *Hou Hanshu* 1.66–70, 24.838–39 (the biography of the general Ma Yuan 馬爰 who quelled the uprising), and 'Biographies of the Southern Barbarians', 86.2836–37.

[161] Heroic Śāktism is, of course, not solely responsible for the rising political and cultural influence of women in seventh century East Asia. For a look at the multiple variables, see Rothschild, 'Historical Preconditions for the Ascent of a Woman Emperor', in *Wu Zhao*, 11–16; Gao, 'A Fixed State of Affairs and Mis-Positioned Status', 270–314.

Another curious example of women playing untraditional roles in the late Sui and early Tang would be the 'warrior princess' Pingyang. The third daughter of founding Tang emperor Gaozu, Princess Pingyang 平陽 (598–623) raised and led a rebel 'Women's Army' (*niangzi jun* 娘子軍) of 70,000 into Chang'an to help terminate the foundering Sui dynasty in 617. Despite objections, Gaozu insisted that military music was played at her funeral. Her imperial father lovingly remarked, 'Wenmu 文母 [the wife of the celebrated founder of the Zhou dynasty of antiquity, King Wen 文王] is counted among the ten great ministers of Zhou. The Princess' contribution in assisting to gain the mandate likewise marks her as an extraordinary woman'. See *JTS* 58.2315–16; *XTS* 83.3642–43; also see Wechsler, 'The founding of the T'ang dynasty: Kao-tsu (reign 618–626)', 60; and Liu & Lee, 'Li, Princess Pingyang', 198–200. There is no indication that heroic Śāktism played any particular role in her impressive military career.

2.3. Cundī Enters Wu Zhao's Pantheon

2.3a. Caṇḍī-Cundī Connection

After the demise of the Gupta empire, 'the Holy Land of Buddhism', despite 'staunch royal supporters' like King Harsha (r. 606–47), the Buddhist faith in India suffered a marked decline in many regions of India. While traditional schools and elements of Buddhism withered in the homeland of the Buddha, however, esoteric (Tantric) Buddhism emerged and flourished, and, given the volume of commercial and diplomatic interaction between Indian kingdoms and Tang China, its enthusiastic and widespread transmission exerted a rising influence on Chinese Buddhist thought by the late seventh century.[162] Śāktism was deeply embedded in Tantric Buddhism and its galaxy of female divinities spread to East Asia.[163] These Tantric deities—hybrids of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Indian folk culture—gained popularity, becoming interwoven with Chinese mythology and folklore.

Though it is a matter of some contention, according to some scholars, in this complex process of transmission the late-developing Indic warrior goddess Caṇḍī was transmogrified into the Tantric Buddhist goddess Cundī.[164] Noting the considerable variations in

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[162] Liu, *Silk and Religion*, 25–26. Liu Xinru remarks that 'the decline of Buddhism became obvious in the sixth century' (27). The oft-repeated assertion that the post-Gupta period marked the beginning of the decline of Buddhism is an over-simplification. For a more nuanced discussion of the timing of the decline of Buddhism in India, see Sarao, *The Decline of Buddhism in India*, which examines regional and sectarian differences, the role of class, and many other variables. Mitra (*The Decline of Buddhism in India,* 12–13) opines that the seventh century marked 'the end of original thought' in Indian Buddhism and the rise of the 'arid pedantry and mystic cobweb of Tantric Buddhism'.

[163] Ibid., 29.

[164] Robert Gimello, 'Icon and Incantation', contends that the 'dubious identification' of the 'often repeated claim that she [Cundī] is the Buddhist form' of Caṇḍī/Durgā 'invites suspicion' and is founded in part on similarities of 'variant

names, Buddhist scholar Edward Conze speculated that 'Chinese and Tibetan equivalents Tchouen-t'i (T'siuen-d'ie) [準提] or Tchouen-tche, and Tsundahi or Tsundehi may go back to a Sanskrit Cundī, Caṇḍī (=Durgā!), Cunda, Chundi, or Cuṇṭi'.[165] In short, Caṇḍī and Cundī may be one and the same. Some scholars directly connect Cundī to the goddess at the core of heroic Śāktism: 'Cundī, more commonly Cundā', C.N. Tay asserts, 'is a name for Durgā...in Brahmanic mythology'.[166] Likewise, one of the definitions for Cundī given in the Buddhist dictionary compiled by Hodous and Soothill identifies her as 'a vindictive form of Durgā', as Caṇḍī, or, alternatively, as Mārīcī.[167]

From a 'prominent local ogress (*yakṣiṇī*)' in the Bengal and Orissa regions, Cundī rapidly evolved into first a pan-Indian, then a pan-Asian cultic deity.[168] Also having evolved from bloodthirsty, carnivorous local tribal mother-protectors, Cāṇḍī, like Cundī, is closely associated with this same greater Bengal region. Sibendu Manna, in

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spellings' and 'creative etymologies' (249–50, fn. 1). Henrik Sørensen, classifying her as another emanation of Guanyin in early esoteric Buddhism, remarks that Cundī is a female, many-armed martial divinity who may have originated in India as an off-shoot of Tāra in the sixth–seventh centuries (see 'Central Divinities in the Esoteric Buddhist Pantheon in China', 99). In his entry on 'Cundā, Cundī' in the *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography*, vol. 3, Lokesh Chandra goes even further, arguing that identifying Cundī with Caṇḍī is a confusion that has resulted from lack of a standard Sanskrit transcription of the devī's name, an 'error that has persisted over the years' (849). Singhal is also very skeptical, presenting an argument similar to Chandra's and adding that Cundā/Cundī, 'the name of one or more disciples of the Buddha', was originally a powerful yakṣa from between Varanasi and Apara-gayā who was integrated into the Buddhist pantheon; see her essay, 'The Iconography of Cundā', 385–86.

[165] Conze, 'The Iconography of the Prajñāpāramitā', 254. For another source corroborating this identification, see Niyogi, 'Cundā', 299. Brackets containing the characters are my addition.

[166] Tay, 'Kuan-yin', 152, fn. 27.

[167] Soothill & Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 405.

[168] Buswell & Lopez, 'Cundī', 204.

his monograph, *Mother Goddess Cāṇḍī*, identifies the goddess most closely with West Bengal.[169] In the *Kādambari*, a drama written by Bāṇabhaṭṭa, a poet-chronicler of Harsha, the Puṣyabhūti ruler who dominated Northern India, Caṇḍī is a fierce goddess worshipped by the Śabaras, a primitive hunting tribe in Odisha, a region bordering West Bengal.[170] Whether or not the esoteric Buddhist mother Cundī evolved from Caṇḍī or not, the spread and growth of both warrior goddesses in India and into East Asia stems from their shared matrix of heroic Śāktism.

2.3b. Esoteric Buddhism, Divākara, and the Cundī *Dhāraṇī*

In the years leading up to her accession to emperor, as grand dowager and regent (684–690), Wu Zhao deposed her feckless third son Zhongzong and relegated the nominal emperor, her tractable youngest son Ruizong, to the palace of the Crown Prince while she 'presided over court and issued edicts' (*linchao chengzhi* 臨朝稱治).[171] During this critical juncture the central Indian Buddhist monk Divākara (Dipoheluo 地婆訶羅; 613–88) translated several *sūtras* about an esoteric Buddhist devī, Cundī (Caṇḍī), a goddess with earlier Indic roots.

From his arrival at the Tang court in 676 until his death in 688, Divākara was part of a wider Buddhist 'intellectual group', a broad-based multinational coalition of Buddhist monks, belonging to many sects, orthodox and unorthodox, who worked as propagandists to promote the vision of Wu Zhao not merely as emperor but as a universal Buddhist wheel-turning monarch, the cakravartin, and as a living bodhisattva. Antonino Forte persuasively illustrates that Divākara was an important translator and ideologue, working with

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[169] See Manna, *Mother Goddess Cāṇḍī*, chap. 4, 'Caṇḍī' and chap. 5, 'Caṇḍī in Action'.

[170] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 117. Manna, in *Mother Goddess Cāṇḍī*, notes that Cāṇḍī/Durgā was worshipped by the Śabaras (73).

[171] *JTS* 6.116; *XTS* 4.82. See Rothschild, *Wu Zhao*, 'Celestial Mother and Grand Dowager', 65–92.

a wider community of Buddhist monks in monasteries in both capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, to translate pivotal Sanskrit texts into Chinese.[172] Chen Jinhua enumerates Divākara among the 'contemporary major Buddhist translators' supported by Wu Zhao, a group of luminaries including Khotanese monks Devendraprajña (d. 691 or 692) and Śikṣānanda (Shichanantuo 實叉難陀; 652–710), and Yijing 義淨 (635–713).[173] His prolific translations included the *Foshuo zaota gongde jing* 佛說造塔功德經 [*Sūtra* Preached by the Buddha about the Merits of Constructing Pagodas];[174] a version of the *Huayan jing* in 685;[175] the *Zhuangyan jing* 莊嚴經 [Skt. *Lalitavistara Sūtra*], a twelve-*juan* biography of the Buddha, when Wu Zhao was grand dowager;[176] and two different versions of an important *sūtra* that was widely circulated throughout China on *dhāranī* pillars beginning in this era: the *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經 [*Sūtra* of the *Dhāraṇī* of Victory from the Buddha's Head-Summit] in 682, while Wu Zhao was co-ruling with sickly husband Gaozong;[177] and the *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing yezhang jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅

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[172] Forte has written extensively on Divākara and had a larger, more ambitious project planned examining the life and career of the monk. See Forte, 'Divākara' and 'Fuxian Monastery'. In *Political Propaganda*, Forte shows that Divākara worked extensively with the orthodox and unorthodox Buddhist monks who collaborated to compile the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra*, a text critical to Wu Zhao's campaign to become emperor; he observed that Divākara 'belonged to the same intellectual group' as those other monks (167).

For a thumbnail biography of Divākara, also see Dorothy Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 90.

[173] Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 76.

[174] *T* no. 699, vol. 16. See Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 116.

[175] Dessein, '*Samanthābhadrācaryāprandidhānarāja*', 322.

[176] *Fangguang da zhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經 [*Lalitavistara sūtra*], Divākara trans., *juan* 3, *T* no. 187, vol. 3. This text used Sage Mother (*Shengmu* 聖母), a title Wu Zhao took as her own, for the Buddha's mother, Māyā. Pleased, Wu Zhao personally wrote a preface. See Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, 44.

[177] *T* no. 969, vol. 19. See Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 104; Tay, 'Kuan-yin', 150. This version was co-translated with Du Xingyi 杜行顗.

尼淨除業障經 [*Sūtra* of the *Dhāraṇī* of Victory from the Buddha's Head-Summit for Eradicating Karmic Obstacles]—which Divākara presented shortly before his death in early 688.[178]

Divākara's prolific production at this critical juncture—the final years of Gaozong's life and the first years of grand dowager Wu Zhao's regency—and his involvement in the projects closely linked to amplifying the female sovereign's profile as a Buddhist ruler both serve to make manifest the resounding influence of this talented propagandist. Noting that he was honored as Tripiṭaka, Dorothy Wong terms him the most important Buddhist translator apart from Xuanzang.[179]

As a pivotal player in the collaborative Buddhist campaign to elevate the grand dowager to the paramount position of emperor, Divākara proved a tireless translator and an important political ally to Wu Zhao. Of the tremendous impact of Divākara and these other Buddhist propagandists, Antonino Forte remarks, 'Their relevance in the margins of the vast Chinese cultural area is a consequence of their importance at the very centre, Luoyang, of that cultural area at a precise historical moment, the period when Wu Zhao dominated the political scene'.[180]

Wu Zhao's regency and reign (684–705) witnessed a meteoric surge in the popularity of esoteric Buddhism, featuring enthusiastic promotions of cults, practices like dhāraṇī and mantras, numerous textual translations, and construction of statuary that integrated novel iconographic elements.[181] She was an enthusiastic patron and promoter of esoteric Buddhism who 'eagerly endorsed new deities and the associated rituals and practices'; under her aegis, 'esoteric deity cults and practices received court support and flourished'.[182] Esoteric

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[178] *T* no. 970, vol. 19. See Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 104–05. Divākara coauthored this sūtra with Huizhi 慧智 (fl. 676–703).

[179] Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 90.

[180] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 167.

[181] Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 92.

[182] Wong, 'The Art of Avataṃsaka Buddhism', 225–26; *idem*, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 59.

Buddhism incorporated a number of fierce, martial protector deities from Hinduism and earlier Indic origins into the Buddhist matrix, including the martial devīs Durgā, Mārīcī, and Cundī. This can be understood as the esoteric Buddhist-ization of heroic Śāktism.

With the aid of a 'coterie of foreign monks' like Divākara, Wu Zhao 'promoted the cults of Amoghapāśa and other esoteric Avalokiteśvaras [Guanyins]...invoking their powers to protect the state'.[183] Indeed, by mid-to-late seventh century China a number of different esoteric manifestations of Guanyin emerged, including Eleven-faced Guanyin (Shiyimian Guanyin 十一面觀音; Skt. Ekādaśmukhā), Guanyin of the Unfailing Rope (Ch. Bukong juansuo 不空羂索; Skt. Amoghapāśa), and Thousand-Armed Guanyin (Qianshou Guanyin 千手觀音; Skt. Sahasrabhujarya). During Wu Zhao's regency, another one of these manifestations of Guanyin (*Guanyin bianhua* 觀音變化) emerged: Cundī (Ch. Zhunti 准提).[184]

Divākara played an essential role in initiating and promoting a cult of Cundī. Because Cundī was identified with the celebrated bodhisattva of mercy and compassion, Avalokiteśvara, C.N. Tay observes that with Divākara's translations of the dhāraṇī *sūtra*s on Cundī in the 680s, 'the feminine aspect of Kuan-yin [Guanyin] in the form of Cundī-Avalokitasvara (Chun-t'i kuan-yin), "mother of the seven koṭīs (a huge number often represented as ten million) of

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[183] Wong, 'The Case of Amoghapāśa', 152. Wong hypothesizes that Wu Zhao's reign marked the beginning of a trend toward fusing cults of esoteric Buddhist deities with the Huayan Buddhist ideology that reached its culmination/maturity in the Tōdaiji of Emperor Shōmu and Empress Kōgyō six decades later; see Wong, 'The Art of Avataṃsaka Buddhism', 225 and 255–56; and Wong's 'Esoteric Deity Cults', in *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 184–87.

[184] Keyworth, 'Avalokiteśvara', 526–27; also see Wong, 'Early Transmission of Esoteric Images', 1713; and Stevens, 'Images of Sinicized Vedic Deities on Chinese Altars', 63–64. In this wider argument that seeks to link Cundī to the Hindu goddess Durgā and the Navarātri festival, it may be instructive to observe that there are a number of common denominators between the mudrās (powerful figures and gestures made with hands and fingers) used in esoteric Buddhism and those employed in Hinduism. See Chou, 'Tantrism in China', 253, fn. 30.

Buddhas", was established in China'.[185] With significant implications for this study, another scholar refers to Cundī as 'a feminine Kannon form whose name possibly was an alternate form of the Shivite goddess Durga'.[186]

During Wu Zhao's regency, in 685 or 686, Divākara wrote the earliest known version of the Cundī *dhāraṇī*, a 'mystical incantation' reputedly of the goddess's own utterance designed to be recited in concert with visualization, with 'ritual/contemplative communion with the image of Cundī, that promised "both ultimate transcendence and manifold control of the world"'.[187] This was a fruitful alliance: the grand dowager regent offered her sponsorship and support; in turn, the Indian Buddhist monk invoked the goddess Cundī to protect the state that she ruled.

While working at Weiguo Western Monastery (Xi Weiguo si 西魏國寺), Divākara translated several one-*juan dhāraṇī sūtra*s bearing the Cundī's name in 686.[188] In one, the *Saptakoṭibuddhamātṛ Cundī*

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[185] Tay, 'Kuan-yin', 152.

[186] MacWilliams, '"Reizo" Myths of the Saikoku Kannon Pilgrimage', 40, seemingly c.f. Iwamoto, *Bukkyō no denshō to shinkō*, 159–89. There are other different characterizations of Cundī's origin.

In his study of this 'unheralded' and new Buddhist goddess Cundī, Robert Gimello describes her as a complex and 'mysterious' deity who has 'no stories told about her; no accounts...given of her history...no particular doctrinal significance'. While the faithful might invoke Cundī with *dhāraṇī* recitations or vividly render her in a painting, she curiously lacked any clear historical, geographical, or cosmological back-story. Existing beyond the orbit of orthodox Buddhism, she was the 'object of special or discrete veneration, the central focus of her own self-contained and self-sufficient cult' ('Icon and Incantation', 225–26).

[187] Gimello, 'Icon and Incantation', 226 and 247, fn. 3. The date comes from McBride, 'Popular Esoteric Deities and the Spread of their Cults', 219.

[188] There were Weiguo Monasteries in Luoyang, Chang'an and Taiyuan. See Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 111–13 and 171–73. Since the Dong Weiguosi 東魏國寺 was in Luoyang, it seems likely that the Weiguo Western Monastery where Divākara engaged in this project was in Chang'an. For more on Divākara's importance as a Buddhist propagandist, see Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 50 and 16–67.

dhāraṇī sūtra, she is the Buddhist mother-goddess of countless millions (seven *koṭī*, 70 million) enlightened bodhisattvas (Ch. Qijuzhi fomu 七俱胝佛母; Skt. Saptakoṭi Buddhabhagavatī). By reciting the *dhāraṇī*, one can develop a karmic connection with Cundī. The *sūtra* promises that one who recites it repeatedly could slough off evil karma and baleful influences, and, under the protection of benevolent Buddhas and bodhisattvas, could avoid harm, illness, and malevolent influences. For the state it promised to help end floods, droughts, epidemics and other disasters.[189]

Curiously, Cundī is described in the *dhāraṇī* that Divākara composed as having eighteen arms—two sets of nine—two nines (we will revisit the numerical significance of this configuration of arms in 2.7).[190] This eighteen-armed form of the goddess is called Mahacundī (Da Zhunti 大準提), Great Cundī. Her eighteen arms—described in the text—symbolize the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas*—characteristics exclusive to Buddhas like transcendent generosity and wisdom, and the capacity to teach the Buddhist law ceaselessly to all creatures.[191] The arms of the esoteric bodhisattva hold various items geared to help with the salvation of mankind.[192] *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* remarks that 'the *dhāraṇī* attributed to Cundī is said to have infinite power because it is in continuous recitation by myriads of buddhas; hence, an adept who participates in this ongoing recitation will accrue manifold benefits and purify himself from unwholesome actions'.[193]

Divākara played a key role in the larger enterprise in esoteric Buddhism that sought to reimagine and repurpose Hindu goddesses of war in the late seventh century, fitting these divinities into the Buddhist pantheon and tailoring them to the ideological and needs of a Chinese sovereign, Wu Zhao. While the connection needs further

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[189] *Foshuo Qijuzhi Fomu xin da Zhunti tuoluoni jing*, *T* no. 1077, 20:185a10–186b3.

[190] Buswell & Lopez, 'Cundī', 204.

[191] Gimello, 'Icon and Incantation', 247.

[192] Fowler, 'Travels of the Daihōonji Six Kannon Sculptures', 190.

[193] Buswell & Lopez, 'Cundī', 204.

and more systemic investigation, the correspondence between the Indian monk's purposeful translation of a series of Buddhist spells and chants about an emergent esoteric Buddhist goddess and the grand dowager's rise was no mere coincidence.

2.4. The Presence of Mārīcī in Wu Zhao's Era

Emerging from an amalgamation of Indic warrior deities including Caṇḍī, the esoteric Buddhist war goddess Mārīcī (Ch. Molizhi tian/Jp. Marishiten 摩利支天) came to be known in medieval China for her apotropaic powers and for her association with sunrays and light.[194] 'In the form of Mārīcī', Miranda Shaw explains, 'this light is apotheosized as a dynamic, all-conquering warrioress who protects and liberates'.[195] In a broader study of esoteric Buddhism in East Asia, Henrick Sørensen places Mārīcī among the 'Assimilated Hindu Deities' in his chapter on 'Central Divinities in the Esoteric Buddhist Pantheon in China', describing the 'Goddess of War' as appearing during the Tang 'in two major forms: as a standing, multi-armed martial form, and as a seated, peaceful form holding a fan'.[196]

Molizhi tian started appearing in Chinese texts in the sixth century, marking the commencement of what David Hall calls the initial phase of the Mārīcī cult in East Asia from the Liang dynasty (502–557) through the early Tang. During this time, basic components of the Mārīcī cult were introduced, anticipating the mid-Tang (eighth

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[194] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 2–4. Other scholars like Doré (*Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, vol. VII, 303–11); Soothill & Hodous (*A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 435), and Irwin ('Divinity and Salvation', 64) casually conflate Cundī and Marīcī. Under his title to a chapter, 'Marichi, Goddess of the Dawn', Doré (303) uses the Wade-Giles subtitle 'Chun-t'i 準提'. In his article, 'Images of Sinicized Vedic Deities on Chinese Altars', Stevens characterizes Mārīcī as 'the offspring of Brahma, Candi, or Cundi', acknowledging that 'legends of Maritchi and Cundi produc[e] an inextricably involved and complex picture' (63).

[195] Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 210.

[196] Sørensen, 'Central Divinities in the Esoteric Buddhist Pantheon in China', 97.

cent.) 'assimilation phase', when her maturing cult spawned a greater number of texts and the deity was fully incorporated into Chinese Buddhism.[197] Appearing in the waning stages of the Liang dynasty in southern China, the *Kongquewang zhou jing* 孔雀王咒經 [Scripture of the Spell of the Peacock King] marked the first textual evidence of the assimilation of the goddess into the Chinese cultural sphere, mentioning Mārīcī/Molizhi tian in passing as 'radiant' (*guangming* 光明).[198] In many later images, she holds aloft the sun and moon in the uppermost of her many pairs of arms.[199]

Also in the Liang, the first rendition of the *Mārīcī dhāraṇī sūtra* contains an account of the Buddha illuminating merits of the goddess (*tiannü* 天女) Molizhi tian for a congregation of 1250 monks and nuns: Molizhi tian is one who is invisible, who cannot be deceived, who can neither be seized nor bound, who can protect followers from disease and illness, and who 'always preceded the sun and moon' 常行日月前. The Buddha informs the congregation that believers who chant this spell will not only receive protection from the goddess, but can even acquire her supernatural abilities themselves.[200]

A dhāraṇī master, an enthusiastic propagator, and an early systematizer of esoteric Buddhism, Central Asian monk Atiṭūka (Adiquduo 阿地瞿多) arrived in Chang'an in 652,[201] the same year that Tang emperor Gaozong recalled Wu Zhao from a Buddhist convent to enter the palace as a second-ranked concubine, a Lady of

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[197] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 34. Hall also identifies a 'late phase' in the Song, but that is outside the parameters of this paper.

[198] *Kongquewang zhou jing*, *T* no. 984, 10:451b10 and 452c8.

[199] Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, 303.

[200] *Foshuo Molizhi tian tuoluoni zhou jing*, *T* no. 1256, 21:261c2–4. The translator of this one-*juan* incantation is unknown. Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 40. Shaw, in *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, remarks that she is sometimes described as 'holding the sun and moon' (213).

[201] Orzech, 'Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang', 268. Orzech provides a sub-section, 'Atiṭūka', which contains both biographical information on the monk and an account of his seminal works.

Luminous Deportment (*zhaoyi* 昭儀).[202] In 654, this pioneer in the unification and evolution of esoteric Buddhism translated the next widely-circulated rendition of the *Mārīcī dhāraṇī sūtra*, helping spur the rapid development and spread of esoteric Buddhism in early Tang China. In this text, the Buddha—speaking to a range of arhats, bodhisattvas, devas, and nāgas—holds forth on the astounding powers of Mārīcī (mostly the same as the Liang-era text, but including an expanded range of the protections that the goddess has the capacity to offer), and adds sections on fashioning images of the goddess and performing invocational rituals that offer the supernatural abilities of the goddess to the chanter. Many of these powers—such as the abilities to confound and delude enemies or to succor the devotee against enemy military commanders—are, David Hall argues, 'primarily aimed at combative use'.[203] Associated with celestial bodies and brilliant light, she could blind opponents and become invisible or help devotees remain hidden,[204] tremendously useful qualities that promised to bedazzle and confound opponents in battle.

The *sūtra* also contains the description of a consecration (Skt. *abhiṣeka*; Ch. *guanding* 灌頂) ritual where the devotee has their head anointed, crowned, thereby becoming initiated and attaining the wondrous powers Mārīcī offers. The rite was performed on a platform that is 'actually a mandala', representing 'a royal city or palace

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[202] *ZZTJ* 199.6284; *JTS* 6.115. After Taizong's death, Wu Zhao became a Buddhist nun at Ganye Convent 感業寺. It is difficult to determine exactly when Wu Zhao was recalled brought back into the imperial palace as a second-ranked concubine, a Lady of Luminous Deportment. However, given that Wu Zhao bore Li Hong in late 652, Gaozong must have recalled her in late 651 or early 652 (or, possibly, she gave birth to the future Crown Prince in the convent. See Wang & Zhao, *Wu Zetian pingzhuan*, 28–31.

[203] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 34 and 52–54. For Akiṭūka's translation, see *Foshuo Molizhi tian jing*, part of the larger *Tuoluoni jijing* 陀羅尼集經 [Scripture of Collected Dhāraṇī; Skt. *Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*], *T* no. 901, vol. 18. The better part of Hall's fourth chapter, 'The Warrior Goddess in China', 51–75, provides a partial translation and explanation of the *Foshuo Molizhi tian jing*.

[204] Orzech, 'Esoteric Buddhism in the Song', 429.

constructed to symbolize the universe rotating around the central axis, the throne of the king', which itself was 'identified with the Pole Star'. Her image situated at the *maṇḍala*'s center, Mārīcī is associated with the cakravartin; and the devotee/disciple/ruler performing the rite effectively becomes 'consubstantiated with the Tathāgatas', becoming a cakravartin in her or his own right.[205]

In a ceremonial manual of eighth century Buddhist esoteric master from Samarkand Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong 不空, 705–74)—the *Molizhi tian yigui* 摩利支天儀軌 [Ritual Guide of Mārīcī]—Mārīcī uses her powers of deception and protection to save the sun god, Sūrya, and the moon god, Candra, from the demon Rāhu.[206] Mārīcī appears in this text as 'Awesome Radiance' (Ch. Weiguang 威

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[205] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 64–65; *Foshuo Molizhi tian jing*, *T* no. 901, 18:871a1–b8. Hall draws upon the conceptual work on *maṇḍalas* in Tucci, *Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, 24–25.

A little more than half a century after Wu Zhao's death, shortly after the Tang emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–79) took the throne, the Buddhist esoteric master Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong 不空, 705–74) consecrated the sovereign as a cakravartin in an *abhiṣeka* ceremony after presenting him with a white sandalwood image of Mārīcī and a Mārīcī *dhāraṇī* as part of such a consecration ritual. See *Zhenyuan xinding Shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄, *T* no. 2157, vol. 55; *Daizong chao zeng sikong Dabianzheng Guangzhi sanzang heshang biaozhi ji*, *T* no. 2120, vol. 52. For more on this consecration, see also Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism*, 162–64; and Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, 77. Daizong's *abhiṣeka* did not occur on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month; rather, it seems to have been performed on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, which accords with the ceremonial instructions in Akiṭūka's *Foshuo Molizhi tian jing*.

Hall (*The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 79–84) argues that there is abundant evidence of the Mārīcī cult 'being assimilated and standardized in eighth century China', a time when high-profile esoteric masters like Amoghajavra, Yixing, Vajrabodhi, and Śubhakarasiṃha exerted a significant influence on Xuanzong's court; Amoghavajra performed a similar consecration rite for Xuanzong, but there is no indication that Mārīcī was the deity invoked.

[206] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 85.

光; Skt. Tejaḥ).[207] Instructions are provided for fashioning an image of Mārīcī: she should appear holding a 'heavenly fan' (*tianshan* 天扇) with 'a Western nations-style *svastika* in the middle' 於扇當中作西國卍字, a character like the *sauvastika* found on the Buddha's chest. Within each of the four quadrants of the *svastika*, there is a sun-shape. Above the heavenly fan, there is a symbol of blazing radiance (*yanguang* 焰光).[208] Iconographically, this crowned and bejeweled female divinity was often depicted seated on a lotus, bearing a fan with a *svastika* sign.[209]

Though not necessarily in connection with Mārīcī, Wu Zhao is curiously connected with the Indic *sauvastika*. Widely used among Buddhist clergy in early and medieval China, the symbol had existed for centuries and was well known in India and Central Asia. There is some indication that during Wu Zhao's reign, among the new characters she devised, the Indic *sauvastika* 卍 replaced the character for 'ten thousand'/'myriad' (*wan* 萬/万).[210] In the Buddhist monk Huiyuan's 慧苑/惠苑 (673–743) *Da Fang Huayanjing yinyi* 大方廣佛華嚴經音義 [Explication and Magnification of the *Huayan jing*], it is recorded that, 'In the second year of Changshou 長壽 (Protracted Longevity) era (693) of the Great Zhou, the Sovereign mandated that *wan* 卍 be inscribed on the Axis of the Sky (Tianshu 天樞). It was pronounced *wan* 萬 and meant the accumulation of auspiciousness and the myriad virtues' (大周長壽二年, 主上權制此文, 著於天樞音之爲萬。謂吉祥萬德之所集也).[211] A Tokugawa-era Japanese source,

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[207] Ibid., 53.

[208] *Foshuo Molizhi tian jing*, *T* no. 901, 18:870b11–14; Hall, trans., *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 59.

[209] Chaudhuri, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Japan*, 116–17.

[210] Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, 97. For more on Wu Zhao's 'new characters' (*xinzi* 新字), see Kuranaka, *Sokuten monji no kenkyū*; Rothschild, 'Drawing Antiquity in Her Own Image', 117–70; Shi, 'Wu Zetian zao zi zhi ebian', 58–62; Dong & Wang, 'Tang Wuhou gaizi kao', 447–76; and Tokiwa, *Bushu shinji no ichi kenkyū*.

[211] *Fanyi mingyi ji*, *T* no. 2131, 54:1147a4–6. This Song-era text cites Huiyuan's *Da Fangguangfo Huayanjing yinyi*. Curiously, this passage does not appear

Amano Sadakage's 天野信景 (1663–1733) *Shiojiri* 塩尻 [Salt Fields] (1733), also contains a reference to a *sauvastika* sign drawn on the chest of Wu Zhao.[212]

Both Mārīcī's rising presence and her connection to cakravartin emperorship, a form of sovereignty that proved integral to Wu Zhao's eventual accession and reign (see below), indicate that this radiant warrior goddess, riding the currents of heroic Śāktism, played a part in the Chinese woman emperor's ascendancy.

2.4a. Mārīcī's Connection to the Ninth Day of the Ninth Lunar Month

Soon after the Tang—perhaps earlier, David Hall concedes—Mārīcī became a popular folk cult figure assuming the guise of the Daoist Dipper Mother (Doumu 斗母), a goddess associated with the Pole Star. For the appearance of Mārīcī, Daoists adopted the image of Indic warrior goddess Caṇḍī, which, as we have seen, may well have been the alternative name of Cundī/Zhunti in China.[213] The early Ming-era *Doumu jing* 斗母經 [Scripture of the Dipper Mother]

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in the transmitted versions of *Da Fang Huayanjing yinyi*. There is, however, a similar passage in the monk Zixuan's 子璿 (965–1038) *Shoulengyan yishu zhujing* 首楞嚴義疏注經 [Annotated Meaning of the Comentary on the Pseudo-*Śuraṅgama sūtra*], *T* no. 1799, 39:841a17–19.

For primary sources on the construction of the Axis of the Sky, see *JTS* 6.124 and 89.2902; *XTS* 4.95; *ZZTJ* 205.6496 and 205.6502–03; *TPGJ* 240.1850 and 236.1816. For secondary sources, see Rothschild, 'Severing Grandma's Phallus', 51–72; Forte, *Mingtang*, 233–43; Guo, 'Da Zhou Wanguo songde tianshu kaoshi', 73–77; Zhao, 'Zhuchi jianzao Tianshu de waifan renwu yu "Zilai shi"'; Zhang, 'Wu-Zhou Wanguo tianshu yu Xiyu wenming', 44–45; and Rothschild, 'The Koguryan Connection', 199–234.

[212] Chaudhuri, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Japan*, 118.

[213] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 104 and 108. For accounts of the Daoist-ization of Mārīcī, see Kohn & Despeux, *Women in Daoism*, 64–82; Capitanio, 'Esoteric Buddhist Elements in Daoist Ritual Manuals', 533; and Predagio, 'Doumu', 382–83.

describes the goddess as 'the Daoist counterpart of the Indian goddess and Tantric bodhisattva Marīcī'.[214]

The mid-Warring States era Daoist sage Pheasant Cap Master (Heguan zi 鶡冠子) intimates that the Nine Sovereigns (*Jiuhuang* 九皇), sagely and perfect Daoist rulers, are connected to the nine stars of the Dipper, the seven visible stars of Ursa Major that orbit around the North Pole, and two additional invisible stars.[215] All are sons of an archaic goddess, the Dipper Mother,[216] who, according to Livia Kohn, as 'mother of nine sons, rulers of the central constellation of the Dipper...represents the germinal, creative power behind one of the most central Daoist constellations, the Northern Dipper, ruler of fates and central orderer of the universe'.[217] The Nine Sovereigns are sometimes seen only as manifestations of the powerful Dipper Mother; collectively cosmic mother and offspring strive to ensure peace, harmony, and blessings on earth. She is often depicted with eighteen arms, two for each of the nine sons.[218]

The ten-day Festival of the Nine Sovereigns begins on the evening of the final day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar and culminates on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. Cheu Hock Tong

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[214] Kohn & Despeux, *Women in Daoism*, 67.

[215] Wells, *The Pheasant Cap Master and the End of History*, 10, 68, and 156.

[216] Heinze, 'The Nine Imperial Gods in Singapore', 151 and 154.

[217] Kohn & Despeux, *Women in Daoism*, 67 and 78. Though the Dipper Mother appears in Daoist literature only from the Yuan forward, she has many earlier Daoist and Buddhist incarnations. There is a Ming-era *Doumu jing* 斗母經 [Scripture of the Dipper Mother], 'extant in the Daoist canon of 1445 and in a manuscript dated to 1439'. See also Kohn, 'Doumu', 149–51.

[218] Cheu, *An Analysis of the Nine Emperor Gods Spirit-medium Cult in Malaysia*, 197. Cheu presents a number of different origins and regional variations for the festival, some extending back as far as the Eastern Han dynasty. The current festival remains alive primarily in overseas Chinese populations in southeast Asia. His research is based extensive fieldwork done at Malaysian temple fairs. Also see Cheu, 'The Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods in Malaysia', 49–72. For more on the contemporary Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods in China and Southeast Asia, see DeBernardi, 'Commodifying Blessings', 49–67.

describes the focal figure of worship in the following manner:

> ...seated on a lotus in the same posture as that adopted by the Buddha and Guanyin... Doumu is conceived of as the Goddess of Loving Kindness and Mercy. She helps Heaven maintain the universe in equilibrium, provides for human sustenance, and judges human deeds and misdeeds. She controls life and death and bestows upon humans rank and status, luck and fortune, prosperity and happiness, health and long life. Doumu's nine pairs of arms, which represent the Nine Emperor Gods, extend in every direction of the compass to meet human needs and offer solace and comfort during times of suffering.[219]

Although this festival reached its maturity much later, the presence of Mārīcī and the celebratory date of the Double Ninth indicates that its origins may stem from Wu Zhao's era.

2.5. The *Harivaṃśa* Hymn in a Buddhist *Sūtra* during Wu Zhao's Reign

The *Harivaṃśa*, a text from the third or fourth century generally thought of as an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*, contains a hymn to a female divinity who intervenes to save Kṛṣṇa's life: Vindhyavāsinī (lit: she who dwells in in the Vindhya Mountains), a regional deity who 'evolve[d] into the great Goddess in warrior aspect popularly called Durgā'.[220] Coburn calls both the hymns of praise to Durgā in the *Mahābhārata* and this hymn 'anterior versions', 'preliminary stages in the crystallization process' of the goddess that reached its mature expression in the *Devīmāhātmya*.[221] This hymn—which contains

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[219] Ibid., 62–63.

[220] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Praises to a Goddess*, 1. For correspondences between the 'Durga Stotra', mentioned above, and the hymn in the *Harivaṃśa*, see pp. 7–8, fn. 19. For more on the dating of this text, see Sarkar, *Heroic Shāktism*, 45 and 111–12, fn. 30.

[221] Coburn, *Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, 45 and 83.

one of the earlier references to the Navarātri—made its way to Wu Zhao's court in the guise of a Buddhist *sūtra*.[222]

A variation of this *Harivaṃśa* hymn addressed to Durgā appears in the Buddhist monk Yijing's Chinese translation of the *Golden Light Sūtra*, a text presented to Wu Zhao in 703. As has been noted above, Yijing was one of Wu Zhao's pivotal Buddhist translators.[223] This *sūtra* for the protection of the state invokes the warrior goddess, the divine embodiment of victory and a fierce defender of the dharma.[224] The appearance of Hindu divinities in Buddhist *sūtras*

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[222] Ludvik (*Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess*, 3–8) argues that the larger part of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn translated into Chinese and included in the Buddhist sūtra comes from a 'later addition' inserted to amplify the praise of the goddess, though one made prior to 695, the 'Āryā stava'.

[223] Also see Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 92. Wong's list of 12 notable translators who worked extensively with Wu Zhao includes Yijing; curiously, he is the only Chinese monk among them.

[224] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess,* 1–3. For Ludvik's side-by-side comparative annotated translations of both Yijing's Chinese translation of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn and the Sanskrit version on which it was based, see Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess*, 17–70; for another translation, see Coburn, *Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, 279–81. For Yijing's 10-*juan Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經 [Golden Light Sūtra; Skt. *Suvarṇabhāsottoma sūtra*], see *T* no. 665, vol. 16. For more on the the sūtra's role in protecting and maintaining peace for a state (in Nara Japan), also see Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 112–14.

In the original context the hymn, a praise of Durgā is uttered by Viṣṇu the Sustainer in connection with the birth of Kṛṣṇa (see Ludvik, '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 708–09). Yijing's version has 22 stanzas rather than the 28 in the original Sanskrit version. The cultural context of Yijing's hymn is hard to pin down. As Ludvik frames it, 'We have, then, a hymn extolling Nīdra-Vindhyavāsinī [an untamed goddess dwelling in the Vindhya mountains who evolves into the warrior goddess Durgā], used in the sūtra context to invoke Sarasvatī, and rendered into Chinese to praise Biancai tiannü, whose name points to Sarasvatī's function and whose weapon-bearing form is modelled on the warrior goddess [Durgā] into whom Vindhyavāsinī has by then evolved' (Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the*

is not uncommon: to cite one example contemporary to Yijing's *Golden Light Sūtra* in the final years of Wu Zhao's reign, in the *Great Dhāraṇī of Immaculately Pure Golden Light*, composed by Tokharian monk Mitraśānta (Ch. Mituoshan 彌陀山; fl. 690–704) and Sogdian Fazang 法藏 (643–712), featured 'many Indian gods, both older Vedic and newer Hindu ones' including 'heavenly gods Śakra (Indra) and Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) and Maheśvara (Śiva)'.[225]

Ludvik identifies the hymn in Yijing's *Golden Light Sūtra* as a translation of the Sanskrit *Āryā stava* ('a praise of she who is noble'), a pivotal text in Durgā's emergence as a great devī, a warrior goddess nonpareil.[226] The primary goddess addressed in the hymn is not the

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Praises, 2; the author has added brackets).

A deified personification of a great river, Sarasvatī in Vedic texts is, like Durgā, a slayer of a demon of chaos. Evolving from a primitive river deity to a goddess of learning, Sarasvatī became revered for her associations with poetry, speech, music, and culture. See Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 11 and 55. In adapting the hymn to Chinese culture, Yijing likely found her an excellent choice—trying to fashion a hybrid devī who possessing both the civil (*wen* 文) aspect of Sarasvatī while retaining the martial (*wu* 武) aspect of Durgā.

[225] McBride, 'Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy', 40 and 45, referencing the *Wugou Jingguang da tuoluoni jing* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼經, *T* no. 1024, vol. 19. Mitraśānta likely worked with brilliant Sogdian ideologue-thaumaturge Fazang and Khotanese Śikṣānanda to complete this work in 704 or 705; Chen, '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 111–12. Timothy Barrett has studied this text extensively, with special attention to its role in the development of printing technology. He shows that the text built on the earlier 'Indian practice of combining text and stupa' to create mass produced stand-in for Buddhist relics. This gave these texts a talismanic force. See Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, and '*Stūpa*, *Sūtra*, and *Śarīra* in China, c. 656–706 CE'.

[226] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 9–12. The *Āryā stava* that Yijing translates may well be a 'later insertion' rather than an integral part of the original *Harivaṃśa*, a textual addition that 'belongs to a period that is prior to 695, the date of Yijing's return from India and Southeast Asia with the Sanskrit manuscript of the *Golden Light Sūtra* on which his translation of 703 is based' (3–4). For further discussion of the problematic dating of the hymn and the evolution

indomitable warrior goddess Durgā, but Sarasvatī, known in Tang China as the Devī of Eloquence (*Biancai tiannü* 辯才天女), a Hindu devī who developed into a Buddhist goddess. Ludvik demonstrates that the emphasis in the hymn of this sūtra for the protection of the state is not on Sarasvatī's eloquence, but on her Durgā-esque 'warrior-like nature and countenance'. Therefore, she concludes that the 'eight-armed, weapon-bearing' goddess invoked in the *Golden Light Sūtra*, having no analogous antecedent form as Sarasvatī in India, 'is actually the battle goddess Durgā'.[227] Concurring with Ludvik, Miranda Shaw has also remarked on Sarasvatī's connection to Durgā and her appearance in the hymn in this sūtra:

> The association between the divine protectress and the muse, on the surface a puzzling one, is traceable to Indic connections between Sarasvatī and Durgā, a Hindu warrior goddess. In Hindu mythology Sarasvatī is sometimes cast as the knowledge aspect or speech aspect of battle queen Durgā. In the Buddhist context, too, Sarasvatī is linked with Durgā in the *Golden Radiance Scripture*.... its descriptions of Sarasvatī draws on liturgies and iconic conceptions of Durgā in her buffalo demon-slaying mode.[228]

This Sarasvatī, an eight-armed warrior goddess rather than a riparian goddess of eloquence, can be understood as a representation of Durgā. Elsewhere in the sūtra, Durgā appears, or is rendered, as the

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of the 'tribal mountain goddess' Vindhyavāsinī into Durgā, the warrior goddess at the center of the Hindu pantheon, see *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 11–12.

[227] Ludvik, 'La Benzaiten à Huit Bras', 293 and 295. Ludvik argues that, influenced by Yijing's version of the *Golden Light Sūtra*, the esoteric Buddhist goddess Benzaiten/Ch. Biancaitian 辯才天 (Skt. Sarasvatī) in late Nara and Heian Japan is, much like her Chinese incarnation, actually Durgā in disguise.

[228] Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 240–41. Shaw remarks at how easily and readily Sarasvatī was transferred from the pantheon of Hindu devīs to the ranks of Buddhist goddesses: 'Sarasvatī is the only Hindu goddess adopted into the Mahayana pantheon without a change of name or significant alteration of divine personae' (237).

Brave Fierce One (Yongmeng 勇猛); in context, this might also be understood as a reference to Caṇḍī, widely known as 'Fierce One'.[229]

In a number of ways, the goddess in Yijing's distinctive Chinese

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[229] For Ludvik's translation of this stanza and her annotations, see her *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 19 and 22–28 and '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 707–08 and 714–16; cf. *T* no. 665, 16:437a6–b20. The Sanskrit version of the hymn expressly mentions 'Durgā the brave, of great energy'. Ludvik renders the Chinese translation of that passage *yongmeng chang xing dajingjin* 勇猛常行大精進 as 'brave fierce (one), you constantly practice great energy' (715) or 'Brave-fierce constantly-going (one) of great energy' (2006, 19). She furnishes a detailed explanation speculating on how Yijing may have intended his translation to be understood:

> The fourth *pāda* [of the Sanskrit version] calls the goddess Durgā, qualifies her as brave, and mentions her great *tapas*. It is quite possible that Yijing had the same reading as the above Sanskrit (*durgā vīrā mahātapāḥ*) and that he may have rendered an exact Chinese translation: *yong meng* 勇猛 'brave-fierce' for *durgā virā* (or rather *virā durgā*) and *da jingjin* 大精進 'great energy', literally 'great energy-progress', for *mahātapāḥ*, with the intervening *changxing* 常行 'constantly practice' to further explain *mahātapāḥ* and to fill in the required number of characters. Yongmeng 勇猛 taken together means 'brave' and might lead one to think that if '*Durgā/durgā*' did in fact appear in Yijing's manuscript, it was left untranslated, perhaps under the constraints of the seven-character verse or because Yijing chose not to include her name in his Chinese rendering. If the characters are read separately, however, *yong* 勇 as 'brave' and *meng* 猛 as 'fierce', the second character *meng* 猛 might have been intended as a translation of Durgā: literally, *durga* means 'difficult to access' and can refer to a place like wilderness, where the fierce goddess Durgā dwells, and of which she might be conceived as a personification (716).

In *Recontextualizing the Praises of a Goddess*, Ludvik notes that a 'rendering of Durgā's name through the binomial expression Yongmeng (for 'brave Durgā') does not appear in Buddhist dictionaries, or, it would seem, in the Buddhist canon' (24). Despite this ambiguity, because of the original Sanskrit—and because both Sarasvatī and Durgā can be understood as different incarnations of the Devī, the Goddess—I have translated it as Durgā. This term appears in *T* no. 665, 16:437a9.

variation of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn differs from Durgā in the Sanskrit original. In the original, the reciter invokes the goddess for personal protection from sins; in Yijing's version, the protection of the goddess extends to all. In the Sanskrit, Durgā is a protective deity of seafarers; in the Chinese version, the goddess is recast as one capable of mastering all of the dragon deities and yakṣas. Whereas in the Sanskrit version she is the personification of night and fond of quarrel, in Yijing's translation she has a compassionate heart, yet is the 'most victorious, unsurpassable Devī' (*tiannü zuisheng wuguo zhe* 天女最勝無過者).[230]

Ludvik remarks that 'Yijing and his collaborators were translators and their main duty was to give the best possible rendering, both in terms of fidelity and readability, for their Chinese audience'.[231] While readability and an effort to be faithful to the Sanskrit original may have been important to the translators, Yijing and the other Buddhist monks were also propagandists; members of Yijing's team like Faming 法明 (fl. 690) and Degan 德感 (659?–704?) charged with 'verifying the meaning' of the hymn[232] were the self-same rhetorical masters who had worked with Wu Zhao on the *Commentary of the Great Cloud Sūtra*, a pivotal part of the campaign leading to her enthronement as emperor in 690 (see below). Many Buddhist translators actively sought patronage of rulers to help to spread their faith. The above-mentioned differences between Chinese and Sanskrit were not simply errors in translation or subtle changes; Yijing was part of a translation bureau adept at deliberately customizing, crafting, tailoring sūtras in keeping with Wu Zhao's vision of sovereignty.

It is not surprising that there is some confusion as to the precise name or identity of the goddess, the Devī. In some regions, Durgā is not the exclusive focus of the Navarātri. In Tamil, for instance, Durgā, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī are all worshipped in successive three-night blocks. See Wilson, 'Kolus, Caste, and Class', 241. Kinsley remarks that the worship of Lakṣmī during the Navarātri is significant due to Lakṣmī's association with agriculture (*Hindu Goddesses*, 33).

230 Ludvik, trans., '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 723; *T* no. 665, 16:437a23.

231 Ibid., 713. Information already given in fn.116.

232 Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 14.

Like Durgā in the seventh stanza of the Sanskrit original, the goddess in the eighth stanza of Yijing's version of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn 'carries a sun and moon banner' (*chi riyue qi* 持日月旗).[233] She is a standard bearer, flourishing a banner of these celestial bodies. In the seventeenth stanza of Yijing's version, the Devī is praised as being 'like a great, ever all-illuminating light' (如大燈明常普照).[234] Notably, both 'sun' (*ri* 日) and 'moon' (*yue* 月) are part of Wu Zhao's chosen designation Zhao 曌, assumed in 689 shortly before taking the throne.[235] Lunisolar radiance was built into her name. It has been established in Part I that two of the three Indic warrior goddesses were connected to brilliant light. In the *Devīmāhātmya*, when Durgā was invested with power of the other gods, she was shaped from the divine *teja*s (brilliant light) of the gods into the radiant form of a woman, an unconquerable warrior ablaze with light. Radiant, preceded by the sun and moon, Mārīcī was closely associated with sunrays and light.

In this same seventh stanza it is recorded that the ninth day of the dark fortnight (*heiyue jiuri* 黑月九日) is a day designated for worshipping the goddess. Ludvik mentions that Sanskrit 'variant readings include switches among bright and dark fortnights'. Indeed, she contends that some of these Sanskrit variants 'accord with the great Durgā Pūjā (Navarātra, "nine nights") performed during the first nine lunar days in the bright fortnight in the month of Āśvin (September–October) and culminating on the ninth'.[236] In addition, Ludvik notes that in the Sanskrit version of this same stanza of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn, the ninth, 'is the birthday of the goddess, who is

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[233] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 40; *T*. no. 665, 16:437a20.

[234] Ibid, 62; *T* no. 665, 16:437b9.

[235] *XTS* 76.3481.

[236] Ludvik, trans., '*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 722; *idem, Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 41–42. While Yijing's Chinese version that places the days to worship the goddess in the dark fortnight, the waning moon, which would not correspond with the Navarātri, Ludvik ('*Harivaṃśa* Hymn', 722, fn. 71) suggests that this may be the result of 'a simple copyist error'—particularly given the ambiguity between bright and dark fortnights in the Sanskrit versions of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn.

considered the ninth sibling after Kṛṣṇa the eighth child'.[237] Kṛṣṇa, the eighth manu/avatar of Viṣṇu, would make the goddess—and implicitly Wu Zhao, as her earthly counterpart—the ninth. In section 2.8 below, we will revisit the significance of the idea of Wu Zhao as the ninth.

2.6. *Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Divine August in the Great Cloud Sūtra*

Before we go further, it is vital to give further attention to a text mentioned in the previous sub-section, the *Dayun jing Shenhuang*[238] *shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏 [Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Divine August in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*; hereafter *Commentary*]. This section owes a profound debt to Antonio Forte, who, in his brilliant and meticulous work *Political Propaganda and Ideology in Late Seventh Century China*, illustrated how the *Commentary* forwarded proofs that Wu Zhao was both a cakravartin (*zhuanlun wang* 轉輪王), a Buddhist universal wheel-turning monarch, and a 'bodhisattva who will manifest and receive a female body' (*xianshou nüshen pusa* 現受女身菩薩) in order to convert countless

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Sarkar, in 'The Rite of Durgā in Medieval Bengal', examines some of the historical and scriptural confusion surrounding the proper days for the Navarātri and for Durgā pūjā (worship). The Brahmanical lunar calendar was broken into two *tithi* (lunar fortnights), a brightening *tithi* beginning on the new moon and a darkening *tithi* beginning with the full moon. In different places and times, Durgā pūjā and the Navarātri reached its crescendo on the Navamī, the ninth day of the bright/waxing cycle in Āśvina, while at other times it marked the ninth day of the dark/waning fortnight. Indeed, other days and even other months were used to venerate Durgā (350–51).

[237] Ludvik, *Recontextualizing the Goddess*, 41.

[238] Shenhuang is a reference to the abbreviated form of Wu Zhao's title Sage Mother, Divine August (*Shengmu shenhuang* 聖母神皇) at the time the *Commentary* was completed and promulgated. She held this title from June 21, 688 to October 19, 690, during the last few years in her tenure as grand dowager and the first three days of her emperorship.

beings. This work was a collaborative composition written by Wu Zhao's notorious monk-lover Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義 (d. 695) and nine orthodox Buddhist monks working at the Palace Chapel in Luoyang. It was circulated on the eve of Wu Zhao's accession to Emperor and her inauguration of the Zhou dynasty in 690. The *Commentary* was masterful propaganda chock full of prophecies indicating that she was the chosen one who had received the *vyākaraṇa* and who thus inevitably would take the throne as a bodhisattva in a female body and as cakravartin.[239]

The original *Mahāmegha sūtra* was translated into Chinese from an earlier Sanskrit version in the late fourth or early fifth century by Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385–433) or Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (fl. late fourth–early fifth cent.), as *Dayun jing* 大雲經 [Great Cloud Sūtra]; by Wu Zhao's time it had become part of the Buddhist canon.[240] 'Great Cloud' was both the name of bodhisattva Mahāmegha, one of the great preachers who helped propagate the Buddhist faith, and a metaphor for the all-encompassing, far-reaching power of Buddhism and, implicitly, the power and dominion of the Buddhist sovereign.[241] The reason Wu Zhao and her Buddhist

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[239] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, based on his brilliant and layered reading of Dunhuang document S.6502. For a thumbnail account of this text, see Vermeersch, 'On Justifying Buddhism's Place in the Body Politic', 30. Vermeersch observes that in the Commentary one of the main thrusts was 'the all-out push to make the gold-wheel cakravartin the dominant mode of rulership' (30).

For a brief background on cakravartin kingship in India and its transmission to China, see Jülch, 'Introduction', in *The Dharma Wheel in the Middle Kingdom*, 9–11.

[240] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, chap. 1, appx. A has shown that there is ongoing confusion as to the translator of the *Great Cloud Sūtra* (*T* no. 387, vol. 12)—it might be either Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen) or Zhu Fonian. Both translated the *sūtra* independently, but it is unclear whose version survived. From the late seventh century forward, Dharmakṣema is credited as the translator of the extant rendition of the *sūtra*. For a more focused study on Dharmakṣema, see Chen, 'Dharmakṣema (385–433)', 215–63.

[241] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 48 and 321.

supporters were so powerfully drawn to this sūtra was simple: the fourth fascicle contains a conversation between the Buddha and the Devī of Pure Radiance, Jingguang tiannü 淨光天女 (Vimalaprabhā), a goddess who the Buddha presaged would descend to the mortal world, a bodhisattva in the body of a woman, as a ruler with great sovereignty and a great champion of the Buddhist faith.[242] According to the Buddha's pronouncement, this devī was the incarnation of a queen Hufa 護法, Protector of Buddhist Law, and she would be reborn in the future as another earth-bound queen, Zengzhang 增長.[243] In short, contained in the *Great Cloud Sūtra* there was a lineage of female Buddhist political ancestors who moved fluidly between earthly and divine realms, a lineage connected not by blood but by a canonical prophecy and shared ardent devotion.

Availing themselves of the opportunity that the consonance between the female emperor's ascendancy and the Buddha's prediction from the original *Great Cloud Sūtra*, Wu Zhao's Buddhist propagandists skillfully constructed a text substantiating clauses lifted from that original sūtra with fragments from other eclectic texts and miraculous events to form a catalogue of prophesies foretelling Wu Zhao's imminent emergence as a cakravartin, while identifying her as the prophesied incarnation of the Devī of Pure Radiance to whom the Buddha spoke. Her reign, the Buddha claimed, would be a perfect Buddhist era of greater peace without distress or disease in which all in the vast empire would willingly convert to the Buddhist faith.[244]

In several of subsequent sections, this paper will argue that complementing and in addition to two cardinal purposes of the *Commentary*—to identify Wu Zhao as the prophesied bodhisattva in a female body and as a cakravartin—there are also a number of related elements contained in the text that support the related 'female warrior sovereign' prophecy and that are consonant with heroic Śāktism.

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[242] Ibid., 342–43, c.f. *T* no. 387, 12:1095a5–10.

[243] Ibid., 215.

[244] Ibid., 342–43 and 348.

2.7. Amplifying the Power of Her Martial *Wu* Name

'Power Invested in the Wu Name', a subchapter in my dissertation on the respective roles that language, ritual, and different constituencies played in undergirding the unique political authority of Wu Zhao, noted 'the repetitive presence of the martial (*wu* 武), her clan name, in building names and place names', a rhetorical device utilized to create compounds 'announcing the success, emergence, and prominence of the Wu family in general and Wu Zhao in particular'.[245] This sub-section will examine how the woman emperor built up the potency of that 'martial Wu', particularly during the critical years before her accession in 690, to help make manifest her unique status as a prophesied warrior-sovereign.

This strategy was utilized most prominently in the *Commentary*, a masterful piece of Buddhist propaganda written and circulated in the months immediately preceding her assumption of the throne. In the original *Great Cloud Sūtra*, written in the sixth century, the Buddha prophesies that this goddess will 'obtain great sovereignty' and 'in reality be a bodhisattva who will show and receive a female body in order to convert beings'.[246] Building on this earlier text, the *Commentary* musters a vast accumulation of evidence to verify Wu Zhao as a prophesied sage—both a cakravartin and bodhisattva in a female body. [247] Because of the passages about a 'female ruler' in the *sūtra*, Wu Zhao considered the text to be a 'sagely enigma' (*shengbie* 聖瞥) and attached 'extreme importance' (*kuzhong* 酷重) to it.[248] In

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[245] Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, 136–37. This is not a unique strategy of legitimation on Wu Zhao's part. For instance, on the eve of occupying the throne and establishing his short-lived Xin dynasty 新 (8–23 CE), regent Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) used similar auspicious compounds. On Wang Mang's behalf, a craftsman fashioned a bronze box with two slots that were respectively labelled 'Wang Rising' (*wangxing* 王興) and 'Wang Flourishing' (*wangsheng* 王盛) (*HS* 99.4095).

[246] Forte, trans., *Commentary*, *Political Propaganda*, 262.

[247] *JTS* 199.5336. This poem is also included in *Silla Annals*, *gwon* 5, 162.

[248] *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, *T* no. 2061, 50:863a2–3, *juan* 24, 612, biography of

the *Commentary*, time and again, her surname Wu is broken into the components 'stop' (*zhi* 止) and 'halberds' (*ge* 戈), meaning in tandem 'a cessation of weapons', a rebus for an age of great peace and harmony.

The 'stop halberds' rebus has its origins in connection with the legendary King Wu 武王, one of the founders of the Zhou dynasty of remote antiquity. In the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 [Chronicles of Zuo], on the commentary given on the 12th year of Duke Xuan 宣公 (597 BCE), Pan Dang 潘黨 (active 590s BCE) suggested that the Chu 楚 ruler gather Jin 晉 corpses of the defeated into a mound to celebrate a military achievement. The Chu ruler strenuously objected, pointing out that 'martial' was a rebus for peace composed of 'stop' and 'halberds', and recalling that when King Wu defeated the Shang and founded the halcyon age of the Western Zhou he composed a poem titled 'Martial' (*Wu* 武), celebrating the sheathing of weapons and the advent of peace and stability.[249]

'Stop halberds' continued to be widely utilized in political rhetoric during the Tang. To cite one contemporary instance, in 648 dying minister Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579–648) remonstrated with Taizong to cease his endless campaigns against Koguryŏ, saying that 'nobility in martial endeavor resides in the cessation of halberds' (武貴止戈).[250] In 650, when sending newly-enthroned Tang emperor a report of Silla's victory over Paekche, female king Chindŏk wove a poem into silk including (after praising the imperial splendor of the Tang) the verse, 'halberds have ceased and martial clothing is folded; virtue is cultivated following the example of the glorious past king' (止戈戎衣定, 修文繼百王). Using this rebus that shaped her surname, Wu Zhao consciously sought to echo the titular name of and claim the normative legitimacy associated with King Wu and of celebrated sage rulers long honored for their morality, virtue, and perfect administration, thus she designat-

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the monk Huijing 慧警 of Chongfu Temple 崇福寺 in Taiyuan (not far from Mount Wutai). Wu Zhao conferred a purple robe upon him.

[249] *Chunqiu zuozhuan* 23.652–53. Citing Granet, Forte mentions this passage in *Political Propaganda,* 287, fn. 150.

[250] *JTS* 66.2464. For the full text of his memorial, see *QTW* 137.1383.

ed her new dynasty after the halcyon age Zhou 周.[251]

Thus, anchored in the traditional legitimacy of a sage ruler honored in Confucian lore, the Buddhist propagandists who designed the *Commentary* left no augural stone unturned in their effort to represent Wu Zhao as his latter-day prophesied 'martial' heir. For instance, one of the many augural stones included in the text bears the inscription, 'Stopping unique woman; good fortune in ten thousand directions' (止一女, 万方吉). The commentators explain that 'stopping' (*zhi* 止) is shorthand for 'stop halberds' (止戈), a reference to her martial Wu surname, with the tacit suggestion that she can bring about an era of greater peace, and 'unique woman' means Divine Sovereign (*Shenhuang* 神皇), a reference to Wu Zhao's title at the time.[252] In the *Commentary*, Wu Zhao is often referred to as the Saint/Sage (*sheng* 聖), part of her title, Sage Mother, Divine Sovereign (*Shengmu shenhuang* 聖母神皇) as grand dowager-regent at the time the text was initially promulgated in 690, shortly before her accession to the throne.[253] This is just one instance: other corroborative evidence cryptically using 'stop-halberds' to identify Wu Zhao as the prophesied warrior-ruler can be found in the Commentary.

A 'speaking bird' (*yanniao* 言鳥) appears in a Daoist oracular text, the 'Zhongyue Ma xiansheng chen' 中岳馬先生讖 [Prophecy of Master Ma of the Central Peak], imbedded in the *Commentary*.[254] The Buddhist propagandists demystify the reference, explaining that the 'speaking bird' is a parrot (*wu* 鵡), a homophone for their

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[251] Wu Zhao is not unique in employing this strategy of trying to gain the normative power offered by tradition, of course. Yuwen Yu 宇文毓 (534–560) inaugurated the short-lasting Zhou dynasty (557–581) in north China. See *Bei shi* 9.330–36. During the tumultuous Five Dynasties, Guo Wei 郭威 established another ephemeral Zhou dynasty (951–960).

[252] *Commentary*, trans. from Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 287.

[253] For assumption of the title in 688, see *XTS* 4.87, *ZZTJ* 204.6448. For the promulgation of the *Commentary*, see *ZZTJ* 204.6465.

[254] Dunhuang document S.6502, 'Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shenhuang in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*', translated in Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 301. This prophecy should probably be attributed to Daoist Ma

patron's Wu surname, and thus 'corresponds to the clan of the Saint' and 'refers to the surname of the Divine Sovereign'—further evidence that Wu Zhao is the prophesied one.[255] Later, the *Commentary* cites a further passage from the 'Zhongyue Ma xiansheng chen' in which Wu Zhao's namesake parrot helps a distressed group of plum trees with withering branches and leaves; the commentators explain that the plums (*li* 李) are a reference to the Li 李 family, her in-laws who rule the Tang.[256] This Daoist text also contains the prediction that 'stop-halberds agrees with the way of heaven' (止戈合天道).[257]

There is a passage from the mysterious *Tuibei tu*, which claims that 'stop-halberds is thriving' (*zhige chang* 止戈昌) and predicts the

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Yuanzhen 馬元貞. In 'Daojiao tu Ma Yuanzhen yu Wu-Zhou geming', 73–80, contemporary scholar Lei Wen 雷聞 has shown that Master Ma was likely Ma Yuanzhen, head of a Daoist abbey in Chang'an, and that the prophecy was composed after Gaozong's death. See also Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 300, fn. 210. In 691, shortly after Wu Zhao established her Zhou dynasty and assumed the throne, this same Ma Yuanzhen, abbot of the Golden Terrace Abbey (Jintai guan 金臺觀) in Chang'an, performed the tossing dragons ceremony at Mount Song, Mount Tai, and the Ji 濟 and Huai 淮 rivers to generate merit on her behalf and to, in these public and visible ceremonies, garner popular support for the transfer of the mandate. Although Wu Zhao defined herself as a cakravartin and formally elevated Buddhism over Daoism, and in spite of several notorious incidents where Daoists were forcibly tonsured, there is abundant inscriptional evidence that even at the height of the campaign to elevate Buddhism, Master Ma and a number of eminent Daoists (like the Daoists of the Western Marchmount, Huashan 華山) enthusiastically supported Wu Zhao during the early years of her Zhou dynasty, presenting auspicious omens, casting statues of the divine Laozi and transcendents, and staging vegetarian feasts. Lei Wen, *Jiaomiao zhi wai*, in a sub-chapter titled, 'Casting Dragons and Tablets on the Five Marchmounts and into the Four Rivers: The Political Propaganda of Wu Zetian' (岳瀆投龍與武則天的政治宣傳), 156–66, see also the chart on 207–09 indicating the frequent performance of 'tossing dragons' during Wu Zhao's reign.

[255] *Commentary*, 302–03. Translation modified by the author from Forte.

[256] *Commentary*, trans. Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 303.

[257] Ibid., 301.

ascendancy of a female ruler (*nüzhu* 女主) who will establish what is right, and raise up, 'transform and purify the Four Seas' 化清四海, and 'put in order and make uniform the Eight Directions' 整齊八方.[258] Contrary to scholarly claims, the inclusion of Li Chunfeng and Yuan Tiangang's cryptic text in the *Commentary* proves this text existed in the seventh century and that people believed in its prognostic authority; different apocryphal versions of *Illustrations of Opposing Backs* circulated in subsequent eras.[259]

The 'Songyue Daoshi Kou Qianzhi ming' 嵩岳道士寇謙之銘 [Inscription of Kou Qianzhi, the Daoist Master of Song Peak] included in the *Commentary* mentions the 'stop-halberds dragon' (*zhige long* 止戈龍), which the commentators explain is a reference to the Divine Sovereign (Shenhuang), Wu Zhao.[260] Zhang Zhuo's *Chaoye qianzai* contains a passage that explains that a man in Gaocheng 郜城 prefecture of Luozhou 洛州 at the outset of the Shangyuan 上元 era (beginning September 20, 674) discovered the Northern Wei Daoist master's cryptic inscription. Corroborating the *Commentary*, this

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[258] *Commentary*, trans. Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 297.

[259] Idema, 'Review of *Das Bild in der Weissage-Literatur Chinas*', 114. In the review, Idema comments that 'the first reference to the text [*Illustrations of Opposing Backs*] dates from the Southern Song dynasty, where it is said that the text was already prohibited during the Northern Song dynasty'. As noted above, though, the appearance of *Illustrations* in the *Commentary* is proof that it is not just an apocryphal text from later eras, but a living text with political and ideological currency in the early Tang and Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty. See Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 295–96, fn. 192 and 373, for a discussion on how the discovery of the *Commentary* has prompted an academic recalibration of this text. He enumerates *Illustrations* as one of the many lost texts that appear in the *Commentary* (394). None of the passages from the *Tuibeitu* mentioned in the *Commentary* appear in the later apocryphal versions of *Illustrations* that hasve been passed down.

Books of prognostication, charts (*tu* 圖) like *Illustrations*, were considered subversive and had been banned since the fifth century. Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, 224–25.

[260] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 310–11.

source mentions that it contains the phrase 'stop-halberds dragon' (*zhige long* 止戈龍) which 'is a reference to the Grand Dowager [Wu Zhao] presiding over the court' 言太后臨朝也. Zhang Zhuo further explains, 'stop' plus 'halberds' equals 'martial'; 'Martial' is the clan of the Heavenly Empress 止戈為武; 武天后氏.[261]

In addition, 'stop halberds' also appears in other cryptic texts mentioned in the *Commentary*: the *Yitong shi ji* 宜同師記 [Record of Master Yitong][262] and the 'Xianren shi ji' 仙人石記 [Immortal's Stone Record].[263] In each case, the compilers of the *Commentary* offer pointed interpretations to make clear that Wu Zhao is the prophesied one. For a more complete catalogue of references to 'stop halberds' and 'warrior' in the *Commentary*, mentions that serve to manifest more clearly that she is the prophesied sovereign/living bodhisattva, see Table 2 below.

TABLE 2 Appearances of 'Stop Halberds' and other efforts to amplify the Martial Wu in Wu Zhao's Surname in Texts Mentioned in the *Commentary*[264]

Source/Date	Language	Commentators' Explanations
augural stone 瑞石 of uncertain provenance, (n.d.)	The 'stopping' *zhi* on the stone	It is an abbreviation for 'stop halberds', which together is the martial Wu, a reference to Wu Zhao.
'Zhongyue Ma xiansheng chen' 中岳馬先生讖 [Prophecy of Master Ma of the Central Peak], after 684 (?)	1. A flying speaking bird beating its wings 2. 'Stop-halberds agrees with the way of heaven'	1. The speaking bird is a parrot (*wu* 鵡), a homophone for Wu Zhao's clan name. 2. The Saintly Virtue of the Divine Sovereign conforms with the way of heaven.

[261] *Chaoye qianzai* 5.118. Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 329–30, translates the passage. The same passage can be found in *TPGJ* 391.3125–26.

[262] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 304–05.

[263] Ibid., 313–14.

[264] Based on Forte's translation of *Commentary*, *Political Propaganda*, 287–313.

Tuibei tu 推背圖 [Illustrations of Opposing Backs]	'Stop-halberds is thriving'	'Stop halberds' is an allusion to Wu Zhao. She will prosper.
Yitong shi ji 宜同師記 [Record of Master Yitong], Wu Zhao's regency	1. A cryptic phrase that includes 'stop' and 'halberds' that culminates with the Sovereign riding on *kun* 坤 (the female essence) into the imperial pavilion 2. The 'warrior' alone will endure and prosper	1. Explains the rebus that when one removes components *bei* 貝 and wen 文 from the character *yun* 贇 , the warrior remains: 贇 - 貝 - 文 = 武. Implicitly, this is Wu Zhao. 2. The lone enduring and prospering 'warrior' is implicitly Wu Zhao.
'Songyue Daoshi Kou Qianzhi ming' 嵩岳道士寇謙之銘 [Inscription of Kou Qianzhi, the Daoist Master of Song Peak]	1. A king with the virtue of fire will reign in the 'stop-halberds dragon' 2. A 'warrior' will promulgate the Saintly teaching and be the great gem of the Country	1. 'Here it is made clear that the Divine Sovereign [Wu Zhao] reigns over the world'. 2. With a nod to the *Book of Changes* (Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 312, fn. 260), the implication is that the 'warrior' will be a champion of the Buddhist faith.
'Xianren shi ji' 仙人石記 [Immortal's Stone Record]	'The six points and ten thousand countries will all join the stop-halberds heaven'	Stop-halberds refers to the name of the Wu Clan. The Ten Thousand Countries will all unite and rely on the guidance of the Saint (聖) [Wu Zhao].

Effectively branding the surface of the land with Wu Zhao's surname to create a sacred geography in her image, the Buddhist rhetoricians crafting the *Commentary* also painstakingly catalogued the presence of her martial Wu in place names:

> The title Martial Success (Wucheng 武成) pavilion is confirmation of the name of the pavilion. The denomination Befitting a Warrior (Wudang 武當) of the mount, is confirmation of the name of the mountain. As for Martial Merit (Wugong 武功), Martial Ascendancy (Wuzhi 武陟), Martial River (Wushui 武水), Immortal Warrior (Wuxian 武仙), Martial Force (Wuli 武力), Martial Vigor (Wukang 武康), and Martial Strength (Wuqiang 武強), these are conforma-

> tions of her prefectures and commanderies. 殿号武成, 則殿名之應也。山稱武當, 則山名之應也。至若武功、武陟、武水、武昌、武仙、武力、武康、武強, 則州郡之應。[265]

This provided the sense that the prophesied one was ubiquitous, that her inevitable advent was inscribed—in most potent fashion, with martial vigor, force, and merit—on the architecture of the capital, graven on the landscapes, written into the winding rivers.

During her time as grand dowager-regent, Wu Zhao had taken measures that allowed the compilers of the *Commentary* to bruit out her victory narrative. For instance, in the second month of 684, Martial Success Pavilion (*Wucheng dian* 武成殿) in Luoyang, one of the sites mentioned above, was the locale where Wu Zhao, as grand dowager, was invested with an honorary title, formally took charge of the court, and began to act as regent and issue edicts, dismissing her son Li Dan, the nominal emperor Ruizong, to dwell in a lesser palace.[266]

The *Commentary* contains a section of the *Songyue Daoshi Kouqianzhi ming* that includes a prognostic song with the line, 'A warrior will promulgate the Saintly Teaching and will be the great gem of the country' (武興聖教, 國之大珍). The *Commentary* explains that the 'warrior' is Divine Sovereign, Wu Zhao.[267]

As further amplification of her 'warrior' surname and verification that Wu Zhao was the chosen one, this masterful piece of Buddhist propaganda also refers to an *Guangwu ming* 廣武銘 [Inscription Amplifying the Warrior] found on a rock in the Sishui River—which she renamed Amplifying the Warrior River in 688—

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[265] *Commentary*, translation adapted from Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 316.

[266] *ZZTJ* 203.6419; *JTS* 6.116; *XTS* 4.82 and 76.3481. The Martial Success Pavilion stood inside Martial Success Gate (see *Tang liudian*, *juan* 7). For more on the respective meanings and contexts of the other auspicious compounds integrating Wu Zhao's surname, see Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 316, fns. 279, 280, and 281; and Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, 138–41.

[267] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 310 and 312.

that contains a series of cryptic linguistic riddles. These riddles speak of the 'virtues of earth' (*tude* 土德), a female element, crossed sevens (*qi* 七), which form the character for woman (*nü* 女), and the cryptic phrase 'Under the recumbent mountain invert the exit and you will find the sage' which the helpful commentators explain is a riddle for 'mistress of the house' (*fu* 婦). All of these mysterious riddles, they explain, augur the advent of the reign of female sage Wu Zhao.[268]

There is also ample evidence for Wu Zhao's elevation and amplification of her warrior surname outside of the *Commentary*. Standard histories record that just a month after Wu Zhao proclaimed herself emperor and inaugurated the Zhou dynasty, she continued to magnify her bellicose surname, re-designating her ancestral home county Wenshui 文水 as 'Warrior Rising' (Wuxing 武興) County[269]—in doing so realizing the previously-mentioned lyrics of the prognostic song from the Daoist master of Mount Song. And in 697, when she cast Nine Tripods (Jiuding 九鼎), powerful symbols betokening a sovereign's virtue and legitimacy, one of the vessels also bore the appellation 'Warrior Rising'.[270]

In this manner, Wu—the warrior, martial force—became not only a power word associated with Wu Zhao's person and the legitimation of her rule, but evidence that helped corroborate a prophecy that she was cakravartin and a living bodhisattva, and, of course, the prophesied warrior-sovereign mentioned in all of these oracular texts.

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[268] For an English translation of this inscription, which appears in the *Commentary*, see *Political Propaganda and Ideology*, 273–77.

[269] *XTS* 4.91, 38.1003, and 76.3481. Wu Zhao also made her home prefecture Bingzhou 并州 the Northern Capital (Beidu 北都). The *Commentary* mentions a well in Bingzhou known as the Warrior's Well (Wujing 武井); the talented coterie of propagandists writing the text seamlessly weave this well—further evidence of the power vested in the Wu name—into the larger prophecy. See also Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 294.

[270] *JTS* 22.807. For more on the Nine Tripods, see Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 95–97.

2.7a. Projecting and Embodying Warrior: Military Examinations and Martial Motherhood

During her time as grand dowager-regent Wu Zhao, with the assistance of her extra-bureaucratic helpers, the Scholars of the Northern Gate (*Beimen xueshi* 北門學士)[271] composed a political treatise, *Chengui* 臣軌 [Regulations for Ministers]; the penultimate fascicle of the latter *juan*, titled 'Good Generals' ('Liangjiang' 良將), features two mothers of Warring States generals—the mother of Chu 楚 general Zifa 子發母 and the mother of the Zhao general Zhao Kuo 趙括 (d. 260 BCE) 趙將括母—from Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 [Biographies of Exemplary Women].[272] Denis Twitchett remarks that 'Good Generals' 'reminds us that the empress ruled a state in which the military played a vital role, in which her great commanders were as important to the sovereign as were her civil ministers, equally essential to the smooth exercise of power'.[273] As emperor in 693, Wu Zhao raised the *Chengui* to canonical status, placing it alongside the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of History*, and the works of Confucius as a compulsory text for all officials taking the examinations.[274]

Surrounded by powerful groups like the Tibetans, the Khitan, and a Turkish khanate, as grand dowager and emperor Wu Zhao could not afford to be perceived of as weak or soft. In 'Good Generals', military officials are repeatedly and emphatically reminded of their duty to state.[275] The two martial matriarchs play key roles in

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[271] *ZZTJ* 202.6376. In the mid-670s, Wu Zhao's political fortunes were clearly on the rise. In 675, Gaozong suffered another stroke and drafted an edict arrogating her powers of regulating the court (*ZZTJ* 202.6375–76), though remonstrance prevented it from being issued. Wu Zhao then formed a private band of brilliant literary and poetic minds, Scholars of the Northern Gate, who, beyond the parameters of the Confucian bureaucracy, served as her personal propagandists and rhetoricians.

[272] *Chengui*, 54–58.

[273] Twitchett, '*Chen Gui* and other Works Attributed to Wu Zetian', 92.

[274] *JTS* 24.918; *ZZTJ* 205.6420.

[275] Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon*, 136–41.

delivering this reminder. When Zifa 子發 (fourth cent. BCE) failed to share rewards and spoils with his rank-and-file troops, his mother denied him entry to his household, imparting to her self-absorbed son the importance of 'sharing in sweetness and bitterness alike' 同甘共苦 with his men.[276] Lisa Raphals remarks that the mother of Zifa assumes 'the admonitory role of a Sunzi-style strategist'.[277]

The mother of General Kuo goes to even greater lengths. Repudiating her son for not distributing the spoils of war, food and gifts with his rank-and-file soldiers, she directly petitions the king of Zhao, urging him not to promote and appoint her son to lead the fight against Qin. Twitchett remarks that these back-to-back biographies in 'Good Generals' very likely 'reflect the personal input of the empress', and that the 'two anecdotes about generals and their mothers' served to 'obliquely justify her own intervention in this masculine sphere'.[278] Like these martial matriarchs of the past, Wu Zhao was a dutiful widow with grown sons, possessing knowledge of and insight into military affairs; she, too, could offer wise instructions to generals, her political sons.

Wu Zhao is also the architect of the military examination (*wuju* 武舉), implemented in 702 to standardize skills and knowledge expected of military officers. It tested men in seven areas: archery on foot, target-shooting archery, mounted archery, mounted lance play, physical strength, leadership, and deportment.[279] In 703, she issued an edict ordering officials in each prefecture to instruct the people in the martial arts in order to recruit talent.[280]

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[276] *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 [Biographies of Exemplary Women], 8 *juan*, Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), Song woodblock edition with illustrations by Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (345–409). Cited from University of Virginia e-text database, accessed May 30, 2020, http://etext.virginia.edu/chinese/lienu/browse/LienuImgTOC.html, 1.10.

[277] Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 40.

[278] Twitchett, '*Chen Gui* and Other Works', 97.

[279] *ZZTJ* 207.6558; *XTS* 44.1170.

[280] *JTS* 24.715.

While she did not lead troops into battle, Wu Zhao was by name and nature a warrior, a mother warrior, a martial matriarch. The landscape, mountains, rivers, and counties all called out 'warrior'. Palaces and pavilions bearing plaques with the Wu were powerful visual reminders of the warrior. And the prominent appearance of 'warrior' in widely circulated texts like the *Commentary* and *Regulations* all helped meticulously engineer the transition from prophecy to political reality.

2.8. Wu Zhao and the 'Two Nines' in the *Commentary on the Great Cloud Sūtra*

As part of the aggregation of prophecies gathered in the *Commentary*, several passages refer to the number nine and the 'Two Nines' (*erjiu* 二九). The term 'Two Nines' serves multiple purposes. As will be further explained below, the *Commentary* calls the tandem of Wu Zhao and husband, Tang emperor Gaozong, the 'Two Nines'. In addition, 'Two Nines' could also refer to the ninth day of the ninth lunar month on the Chinese lunar calendar—a date corresponding both with the Navarātri and the inaugural day of Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty. An example of this latter usage can be found in a poem written by Linghu Chu 令狐楚 (766–837), a late Tang poet on the occasion of the Chongyang Festival 重陽節: 'The Two Nines mark the Chongyang Festival, when the skies are clear and the wild chrysanthemums turn yellow' (二九即重陽, 天清野菊黃).[281] In this verse the Two Nines are made equivalent to the Chongyang, the Double Ninth, festival, so-called because the celebration is held on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

The term 'Two Nines' appears on a number of occasions in the *Commentary*. For instance, a passage from the 'Zhongyue Ma xiansheng chen' reads: 'The two nines shine in harmony 二九共和明 and stop-halberds agrees with the Way of Heaven. The saintly wife helps the luminous husband and her mercy spreads in all the earth.... During the 180 years of the Two Nines the world will have Great

[281] *Quan Tangshi* 334.3745.

Peace...' (二九一百八十年, 天下太平). The commentators explain the riddle: 'The Two Nines means that both the Great Emperor (Gaozong) and the Divine Sovereign (Wu Zhao) are ninth, thus it is said the Two Nines' (二九者, 大帝神皇俱是第九, 故稱二九). They add that 'shine in harmony' can be understood to refer to their luminous and equitable joint government—'like the Sun and the Moon'.[282] Realizing that her position and authority rested to no small extent upon her connection to the ruling Li family, Wu Zhao (and the propagandists compiling the *Commentary*) emphasized rather than denied her roles as empress and wife. For the better part of the 28 years she was Gaozong's empress—particularly after he suffered a stroke in 660—Wu Zhao sat in tandem with her sovereign-husband presiding over court proceedings. People of the time called them the Two Sages (*ersheng* 二聖):[283] They were a power couple, a wife-and-husband team that co-ruled the empire.

In his effort to understand the meaning of the 'Two Nines', Antonino Forte notes that Gaozong was the ninth son of Tang Taizong, while acknowledging that he does 'not understand according to which classification Wu Zhao might be the ninth'.[284]

The 'Two Nines' also appear in a passage in the contemporary

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[282] Translation modified from Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 301.

[283] *ZZTJ* 202.6372–75; *XTS* 76.3475–76; *JTS*, 5.99. The 'Two Sages' was not an official title, but a popular sobriquet acknowledging Wu Zhao's political involvement. According to the *Old Tang History* (*JTS* 6.115), 'From the Xianqing reign era (656–660) on, Gaozong was often afflicted with illness. All petitions and memorials were determined by the Celestial Empress...for several decades, her prestige and influence were as great as that of the emperor. So people of the time called them the Two Sages' 帝自顯慶已後, 多苦風疾, 百司表奏, 皆委天后詳決。自此內輔國政數十年, 威勢與帝無異, 當時稱為二聖。*XTS* 76.3475–76 reads, 'When [Shangguan] Yi was executed [in 664], political power returned to behind the curtain. The Son of Heaven simply folded his hands. The officials of the four quarters who submitted memorials called them the Two Sages' 及儀見誅, 則政歸房帷, 天子拱手矣。羣臣朝、四方奏章, 皆曰二聖。*ZZTJ* 201.6242–43 contains a similar account.

[284] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 301, fn. 215.

esoteric *Tuibei tu*, a manual of numerological divination attributed to calendrical specialist and astrologist Li Chunfeng and Yuan Tianwang. This text includes a prophecy that reads: 'There is a full platter of fruit. No one can clearly tell how many. Each fruit has a single pit; the new replaces the old' (累累碩果, 莫明其數。一果一仁, 即新即故). Then the accompanying oracular quatrain (*song* 頌) proclaims: 'For the myriad things to be born of the earth, the Two Nines must first bear fruit. When the *yin* essence flourishes, the *yang* essence must first be exhausted (and give way)' (萬物土中生, 二九先成實。一統定中原, 陰盛陽先竭).[285] Autumn is a time when the male *yang* essence, waning and depleted, gives way to the ascendant *yin* essence. Thus, the 'Two Nines' in Li Chunfeng's arcane oracle might be understood as a reference to the ninth day of the ninth month—precisely the seasonal juncture where *yang*, having reached its peak, gives way to *yin*. His prophetic words of the male yielding to the female might also be understood as a reference to Wu Zhao's eventual and inevitable accession to the throne—and to the timing of that ascendancy. As mentioned in Part 2.4 above, Li Chunfeng was intimately acquainted with the prophecy of the female warrior-king; he had advised Taizong on his handling of the matter back in 648 and predicted that four decades hence the prophecy would come to fruition. Forty years had elapsed: the time for the accession of the martial female sovereign had arrived!

To be sure, the *Commentary* did not directly associate the 'Two Nines' with the Navarātri. An explicit announcement of the annual celebration of a Śāktic rite to honor a battle goddess was too radical a proposal for the multi-national team of Buddhist rhetoricians who wove together this interpretive text to bluntly and overtly promote. Yet this tantalizing and mysterious pair of nines are not without purpose: Woven into the fabric of prophecies and prognostications

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[285] Li Chunfeng and Yuan Tiangang, *Tuibei tu*, image 2, in Ruan, *Ancient Chinese Prophecies*, 4–5. Charles L. Lee has also written an annotated translation of the text, including this passage; see *The Great Prophecies of China*, 24. This passage does not appear among the sections of *Illustrations* cited in the *Commentary*, and may come from one of the later apocryphal renditions of the text.

of the *Commentary* bent on identifying Wu Zhao as a cakravartin king who would reign over the country 'with the body of a woman' (*nüshen* 女身), the 'Two Nines' are connected both to the person of Wu Zhao (and her then-deceased husband and former co-ruler Gaozong) and very possibly to a specific time or date—the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

2.9. Wu Zhao's Enthronement and Dynastic Inauguration on the Navamī

As mentioned above, the Navarātri occurs during the first nine days of the waxing lunar fortnight of the autumn month of Āśvina (September–October). This seventh month, Āśvina, on the traditional Indian calendar corresponds with the ninth month on the Chinese lunar calendar. The ninth day of this festival, according to Hillary Rodrigues, came 'to mean, among other things, the great day of the Great Goddess'.[286] In Indian and Tantric hemerology—'the cultural practice of connecting success and failure of actions with favorable and unfavorable days defined by the calendar'[287]—each month is divided into two *pakṣas*, a bright waxing fortnight and a dark waning fortnight broken into days, *tithis*; for ritual and ceremonial actions, choosing a propitious time and date is vital.[288] This is similar to the Chinese practice of choosing auspicious days for marking significant ritual or ceremonial undertakings.

After co-ruling with Gaozong for almost a quarter century, and acting as grand dowager and Sage Mother Divine and August for six additional years, Wu Zhao had a superb sense of political timing and theater; knowing well how to seize an occasion and to stage a

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[286] Rodrigues, 'Bengali Durgā Pūjā', 197 and 199–200.

[287] van Stuckrad, 'Hemerology', in Brill's *New Pauly*, eds. Herbert Cancik and Helmut Schneider, accessed May 30, 2020, http//dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1128610.

[288] Kotyk, 'Early Tantric Hemerology in Chinese Buddhism', 3–10. Kotyk points out that there was 'no authoritative hemerological manual in Chinese' in the early eighth century (23).

political event, no ceremony or rite was serendipitous. Furthermore, Wu Zhao was deeply preoccupied both with movements of celestial bodies and with the ritual calendar.[289]

As the religion developed into a greater political and ideological force, new ideas of Buddhist sovereignty proliferated, swelling into a 'pan-Asian religio-social-political phenomenon' that crested in China with Wu Zhao. The *abhiṣeka*, a rite that enthroned and consecrated a prophesied Buddha or bodhisattva as earthly sovereign, gained popularity. Dorothy Wong has observed that, 'The idea of the "crowned" or "bejeweled" Buddha was introduced to China on the eve of Wu Zhao's ascension to the throne as a Buddhist monarch'. In this novel iconographic vision of Buddhist emperorship, originally from Kashmir and Bamiyan (modern-day Afghanistan), 'the crowning of the Buddha-to-be ... had taken on the paraphernalia of investiture (the crown and the robe) as well as the ritual of consecration (abhiṣeka)'.[290] This ritual unction and investiture marked the ruler as a cakravartin.

When considering the manner in which Wu Zhao sought to define herself as a cakravartin with currents of heroic Śāktism, Ann Blackburn's observation that Buddhist cakravartin rulers often tailored their visions of sovereignty to local circumstances is most

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[289] For Wu Zhao's preoccupation with the armillary sphere, see Forte, *Ming-tang*; for her concern with the ritual calendar, see Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, 282–91.

[290] Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks*, 251–52. For more on images of the crowned Buddha as cakravartin, curiously often in conjunction with lunisolar imagery, see Twist, 'Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road', 11–12. Like the notion of cakravartin, abhiṣeka is best understood as more of a wider Indic rather than an exclusively Buddhist concept. In his lecture, 'Ḍākinī, the wish-fulfilling jewel, and the Japanese medieval ritual of enthronement unction', Iyanaga Nobumi remarked that the 'Tantric unction or consecration ritual (*kanjō* 灌頂 in Japanese) is named abhiṣeka in Sanskrit, and it is based on the ancient Indian enthronement unction ritual of the same name for kings, described already in texts like the Atharva Veda or the Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa'. Iyanaga, 'Under the Shadow of the Great Śiva', 11.

pertinent.[291] Her point, Sem Vermeersch observes, 'appears to be that the model of the Wheel-Turning King as an ideal of rulership was employed creatively in ad-hoc texts'.[292]

In the Indic currents of heroic Śāktism that reached Wu Zhao's China, Durgā's abhiṣeka, the investiture and ritual anointment of an earthly sovereign as cakravartin, fell on the culminating day of the Navarātri, the Navamī. In this sense, in the late seventh century, the Hindu Great Goddess—Durgā, in all of her various incarnations and guises—was fitted and customized to suit Wu Zhao's vision of rulership. The Mahādevī and the Navarātri played vital roles both in the Chinese woman emperor's identification as the prophesied female martial sovereign and as a cakravartin.

And so it was that on the *renwu* 壬午 day of the sexagenary cycle, October 16, 690, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month of the first year of the Tianshou 天授 (Heaven Bestowed) era, grand dowager Wu Zhao assumed the throne as China's first and only female emperor and inaugurated the Zhou dynasty, publicly calling for a seven-day bacchanal feast (*pu* 脯).[293]

This choice of date was not serendipitous. Contending that Wu Zhao sought to show that her ascendancy marked the fulfillment of the prophecy in the *Great Cloud Sūtra* that the devī Vimalaprabhā (Jingguang 淨光) would descend as a cakravartin, a bodhisattva in a female body, contemporary scholar Hu Ji has suggested that Wu Zhao's distinctive reign era name Heaven Bestowed was chosen to express in abbreviated fashion that she was the 'Devī Bestowed with the Prophecy' (*Tiannü shouji* 天女授記).[294] As mentioned above, Antonino Forte has also systematically shown that the rhetorical efforts made by the masterful Buddhist propagandists who wove together

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[291] Blackburn, 'Buddhist Technologies of Statecraft and Millennial Movements', 72–74.

[292] Vermeersch, 'Who is Legitimating Whom?', 24.

[293] *JTS* 6.121. Technically, Wu Zhao took the title as Divine and Sagely August Emperor (*Shensheng huangdi* 神聖皇帝) three days later, on October 19, 690.

[294] Hu, *Wu Zetian benzhuan*, 170.

the *Commentary* were geared to 'demonstrate immediately and convincingly that Wu Zhao was the avatar of the goddess Vimalaprabhā', preordained to rule a vast empire as 'a bodhisattva with a female body' and a cakravartin.[295]

But the *vyākaraṇa*/prophecy did not end there. Wu Zhao and her propagandists (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) consistently wielded rhetoric and ideas with tremendous semantic flexibility: why limit yourself to identifying with a single devī (Vimalaprabhā)? Rather than limit herself to either/or, expedient Wu Zhao inevitably chose both/all (Vimalaprabhā, Durgā, Mārīcī, Caṇḍī, Māyā, etc.). In addition to the prophecies geared toward identifying Wu Zhao as the incarnation of Vimalaprabhā in the *Commentary*, I have (above) recorded the numerous interpretations of cryptic rebuses and auguries in this piece of carefully crafted propaganda that were designed to show that Wu Zhao was the prophesied 'female warrior sovereign'—predictions connected to Indic heroic Śāktism and warrior goddesses like fierce Durgā.

Nothing Wu Zhao did was serendipitous: she chose this date to mark her public announcement that she was the recipient of the *vyākaraṇa*, the day Wu Zhao became China's first and only female emperor on the ninth day of the waxing moon in the ninth lunar month: Both the precise date and the lunar phase of Wu Zhao's coronation and the inauguration of her Zhou dynasty correspond perfectly with culmination, the final day, of the Navarātri.

Another way that Wu Zhao announced that she was the prophesied one was by establishing a pivotal Buddhist temple in her Divine Capital Luoyang called Temple of the Buddha's Prophecy (Foshouji si 佛授記寺) in 691.[296] As noted above, the term for 'prophecy' (*shouji* 授記; Skt. *vyākaraṇa*) was not merely part of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī's prediction on Mount Wutai of the rise and attainment of Buddhahood of Sillan Queen Sŏndŏk, but a broader prophecy that

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[295] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 325. See Rothschild, *Devis, Divinities, and Dynastic Mothers*, chap. 12, 'Bodhisattva with a Female Body', for further argument that the devī Jingguang was an important figure in Wu Zhao's pantheon.

[296] *THY* 48.848.

grew legs, spreading through East Asia, auguring the ascendancy of a female warrior sovereign.

Further investigation reveals Wu Zhao's ongoing preoccupation with the culminating day of the Navarātri. Not only did she inaugurate her Zhou dynasty on this date, but she celebrated the very same date of the lunar calendar, which corresponded with the waxing harvest moon, with ascendant *yin* essence on at least four additional occasions in the next seven years: thrice to mark new reign eras (*nianhao* 年號) and once, in 693, to mark the assumption of the title cakravartin.

In 692, two years after linking the Navarātri to the announcement of her new dynasty and the celebration of the fruition of the prophecy of the advent of a female warrior sovereign, Wu Zhao yoked the Hindu festival to the inauguration of a new reign era. By the time Wu Zhao took the throne as emperor, she was already in her mid-sixties. She took great pains to project an image of vitality and agelessness. She linked her physical self to the state ritual calendar, tying the inauguration of the Protracted Longevity reign era to her personal rejuvenation:

> Although the Grand Dowager had passed through many springs and autumns, she excelled at applying cosmetics and adornments to herself, so that even her own attendants did not feel her decrepit. On the *bingxu* day of the ninth month she issued an imperial edict declaring that because her lost teeth had regrown, on the ninth, she went to the Zetian Gate, declared a general amnesty, and changed the reign era to Protracted Longevity. The sacrifice to the earth god was changed to the ninth month. 太后春秋雖高, 善自塗澤, 雖左右不覺其衰. 丙戌, 敕以齒落更生, 九月庚子, 御則天門, 赦天下改元, 更以九月為社.[297]

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[297] *ZZTJ* 205.6487; *XTS* 76.3482 contains a similar passage. *XTS* 4.93 mentions the changing date of the sacrifice to the earth god—shifted from spring to the ninth month—reversing the polarities of *yin* and *yang* of the seasons! There is no *bingxu* 丙戌 day prior to the inauguration of Changshou. This is probably an error for the *bingshen* 丙申 (i.e., the fifth) day (October 11, 692) or the *wuxu* 戊戌 (i.e., the seventh) day (October 13, 692).

The sacrifice to the earth god, which had corresponded with breaking the ground and planting in the early spring, was now shifted to the final month of autumn, realigning the terrestrial and the celestial in synchronicity with her dental regeneration, springtime in her autumn years. In a concerted effort to conceal her mortal blemishes, her wrinkles and creases, Wu Zhao, like many Tang women, expertly applied powders, rouges, creams, ointments, mascara, and oils to disguise the ravages of time.[298] For woman emperor Wu Zhao, this announcement to a new era on the Navamī, a day when the goddess descends to consecrate the ruler, can perhaps be understood as an effort to project an image of vitality, timelessness, and agelessness, to reclaim youth and proclaim immortality, a gala occasion that served to fuse and confuse earthly sovereign and divine goddess.

Despite the claims made in the *Commentary* and her accession to emperor on the culminating day of the Navarātri in 690, Wu Zhao did not proclaim herself a cakravartin on this grand stage; nor did she proclaim herself a wheel-turning monarch on the Double Ninth in 692. It would seem that there was substantial opposition from the Confucian court and the Daoist establishment, and no clear consensus among Buddhists.[299] In Buddhism, the Five Impediments (*wuzhang* 五障) restricted women from the five highest tiers of political and religious power: being a cakravartin, a god-king, a Brahmā king, a non-regressing (*avaivartika*) bodhisattva, and the Buddha.[300] Blurring and rationalizing Wu Zhao's gender, the *Commentary* helped circumvent this ideological obstacle and justify her ascent to power, defining her (with the Buddha's prophetic blessing) as both bodhisattva and cakravartin. Yet the proofs offered in the *Commentary* had not proved sufficient to satisfy all of the diffuse Buddhist faithful that Wu Zhao was the prophesied cakravartin and bodhisattva. In another

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[298] For a summary of the widespread availability and use of cosmetics in Tang China, see Benn, *Daily Life in Traditional China*, 109–12.

[299] See Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 212–14, for a discussion of some of the possible reasons behind Wu Zhao's three-year delay in assuming the title, cakravartin.

[300] Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 186.

instance that makes manifest Wu Zhao's deft circumnavigation of ideological strictures, her Buddhist supporters re-translated the *Baoyu jing* 寶雨經 [Skt. *Ratnamegha sūtra*; Precious Rain *Sūtra*], an interpolated rendition of a text that had arrived in China in the sixth century or earlier.[301]

On October 7, 693, the third day of the ninth lunar month, Southern Indian monk Dharmaruci (Damoliuzhi 達摩流支 = Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (Bodhiruci; 572?–727), Xue Huaiyi and a multi-national coalition of Buddhist monks including a Sillan royal, Central Asian translators, and monks from various parts of India and Uḍḍyāna (Wuchang 烏萇), with the support of a cadre of Chinese officials, collectively presented the *sūtra* to Wu Zhao.[302] In this interpolated version, the Buddha conversed with a light-emanating, cloud-riding divinity Lunar Radiance (Yueguang 月光; Skt. Candraprabha) and prophesied that during an age in which Buddhist law had fallen that he would be reborn in a female body in Mahācīna (Great China). In this purposeful forgery, the prophetic Buddha tells this heaven-protected born king that, 'Since in reality you will be a bodhisattva, you will manifest a female body and you will be the sovereign head.... Your name will be Lunar Pure-radiance (實是菩薩故現女身爲自在主...名曰月淨光)'.[303] Forte reasonably suggests that the name Lunar Pure-radiance was chosen because it closely echoed Pure Radiance (Vimalaprabhā), 'the object of the Buddha's prophecy in the *Commentary*'.[304] In the capable hands of the propagandists, the considerate Buddha then waives two of the usual Five Impedi-

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[301] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, chap. 3, pt. I, 'The Interpolation of the *Baoyu jing*', 189–203.

[302] Ibid., chap. 3, especially the appendix, 'The Translators of the *Ratnamegha sūtra* in 693', 246–53.

[303] *Baoyu jing*, *T* no. 660, 16: 284b21–25; Forte, *Political Propaganda*, trans., 196. Lunar Radiance appeared in a Buddhist-related title ten years earlier. Inspired by popular millenarian Buddhism, a charismatic local leader may have taken the title Yueguang (Candraprabha) in a revolt of his Jihu 稽胡 people in Shaanbei 陝北 in the early 680s. See Rothschild, 'Emerging from the Cocoon', 257–82.

[304] Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 196, fn. 30.

ments to a woman achieving Buddhahood, allowing her to become a cakravartin and an *avaivartika*, a non-backsliding bodhisattva who proceeds straight to *nirvāṇa* despite her female body.[305]

In timely fashion, this Buddhist *sūtra* re-confirmed and re-emphasized Wu Zhao's identification as a bodhisattva—this time as the reincarnation of Lunar Pure-radiance, perhaps a cousin to Jingguang—and a cakravartin. Whereas Chinese kingship merely took the emperor as a sanctioned divine agent of Heaven, in this Buddhist tradition of the cakravartin, the universal wheel-turning monarch, the emperor was not merely a representative and a political ancestor of divinized culture heroes, she became herself an incarnation, an avatar, of Indic deities.[306] As Sarkar pointed out, court recitation of the *Devīmāhātmya* during the Navarātri conflated the 'image of the king and the deeds of Durgā, the king-above-all-kings, were viewed as glorified reflections and reinforcements of the monarch's own values and image'; the text conveys 'the idea of war goddess as imperial metaphor', so that savior and demon-queller Durgā becomes 'an image of the king himself in his most potent form, the cakravartin'.[307] In describing the divine might of the cakravartin, recognizing the consonance between the earthly ruler's sovereignty and the celestial bodies above, André Bareau waxes rhapsodic: 'Even as the holy king alone rules the world, even as the sun and moon reign alone in the sky, one during the day and the other at night, shedding their light on all the earth's inhabitants, just so does the cakravartin spread the benefits of his wise and pacific government upon men'.[308] Cakravartin kingship

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[305] Ibid., 196–97. Also see Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 117.

[306] Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 114–15. Also see Tambiah, 'The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia', 252–86. Though this work focuses on kingship in a different region in a later era, the idea of a Buddhist (or Hindu-Buddhist), 'galactic polity' with a ruler—*cakravartin*, dharma wielder and living bodhisattva—situated at the cosmological, topographical and political center that he describes was not unconnected to developing notions of Buddhist sovereignty in early medieval and medieval China.

[307] Sarkar, *Heroic Śhaktism*, 13 and 132–34.

was an important part of heroic Śāktism: on the Navarātri the Great Goddess would consecrate the ruler, amplifying her sovereignty, and invest her as cakravartin.

So it was, just six days after the *sūtra* was presented, on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in 693, the primary festal day of the Great Goddess, at her Divine Palace of Myriad Images in Luoyang (Wanxiang shengong 萬象神宮), that Wu Zhao appended to her already grand imperial title the designation 'Golden Wheel' (Jinlun 金輪), broadcasting that she was a cakravartin, a wheel-turning universal monarch—the zenith in the Indic vision of sovereignty.[309] She had seven Buddhist treasures (*qibao* 七寶; Skt. *sapta-ratna*) fashioned—a golden wheel, a white elephant, a woman, a horse, a pearl, a ruler's guardian warrior, and a ruler's hidden minister. All were displayed prominently as visible symbols of her authority in the audience hall of the court.[310] In Indic lore, the alpha treasure, the golden wheel, was a symbol of the cakravartin, a magnanimous conqueror who bound and unified a disparate empire with Buddhist law.

It is also worthy of note that nine days elapsed—the duration of the Navarātri festival—between the time Wu Zhao's nephew Wu Chengsi 武承嗣 (d. 698) led a parade of 5,000 (on October 5, 693, the first day of the ninth lunar month) to petition Wu Zhao to take on the title 'Cakravartin of the Golden Wheel' and her assumption of the title.[311]

On her designated day of celebration, the great warrior goddess Durgā had the power to invest, to enthrone and consecrate, the ruler.

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[308] Bareau, 'Superhuman Personality of Buddha', 20.

[309] *XTS* 4.93; *ZZTJ* 205.6492.

[310] *XTS* 76.3482. Though to an extent these seven treasures represented an innovation on Wu Zhao's part—the usual 'seven treasures' were various precious metals and stones like gold, silver, pearl, agate and amber—Chen Jinhua, in '*Śarīra* and Scepter', 49–50, fn.32, explains that the female sovereign was 'inspired by the legend promoted in some Buddhist texts, especially the *Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 彌勒下生成佛經 [Skt. *Maitreyavyākaraṇa sūtra*], that the cakravartin king Saṅkara possesses seven such precious materials'.

[311] *XTS* 76.3482.

Wu Zhao's titular elevation on the Double Ninth in 693 can be understood as a rite in which the Mahādevī consecrated and enthroned her, investing her as Cakravartin of the Golden Wheel. Finally, on the Double Ninth in 693, Wu Zhao fulfilled, with the help of the *Precious Rain Sūtra*, the prophecy delineated in the *Commentary*: she had become a Cakravartin of the Golden Wheel—a fully realized 'female warrior sovereign' of the highest order.

There is evidence that members of the Confucian court took umbrage at these unorthodox foreign celebrations. In early 695, at the zenith of Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty, in the immediate aftermath of the conflagration that consumed the Bright Hall, a Recorder (*zhubu* 主簿)[312] from Huojia 獲嘉 (modern-day Henan, not far from Luoyang), future historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), approached the throne of the female sovereign offering four points of remonstrance. First, he criticized her excessive amnesties—granted on the occasions of her frequent celebrations and reign era changes—noting unlawful and uncivil elements, the wicked and rebellious, might take advantage of the amnesties, the imperial acts of grace that accompanied these occasions. Such events, Liu pointed out, were suited to the sense of cosmic renewal accompanying the advent of a new dynasty, but staged gratuitously with undue frequency, at a juncture when peace and stability already prevailed, lost their impact and were unnecessary, offering a refuge for fractious subjects and venal officials. As part of this criticism, he noted that such bad elements only needed to wait for the calendar to turn: that despite their rebellious and lawless ways 'on New Year's Day they hopefully await imperial favor of Heaven; on the Navarātri/Double Ninth Festival (Chongyang 重陽) these rascals long attend relying upon Your Majesty's bestowal of august grace. And it is just as they anticipate: in the end, as expected they are all forgiven and granted amnesty' (而元日之朝, 指期天澤, 重陽之節, 佇降皇恩, 如其忖度, 咸果釋免). Thus, Liu Zhiji maintained, devious rascals and criminals, availing themselves of Wu Zhao's amnesties, received the benefit of imperial grace, while good, law-abiding citizens fell victim to their devious machinations.

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[312] Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 82, entry 1413.

Moving forward, to avoid sending the wrong message—'the good fortune of petty men', he admonished, 'brings ill fortune to the ruler' (小人之幸, 君子之不幸)—Liu urged her to grant amnesties on festal days in a far more measured fashion.[313]

Liu Zhiji's reference indicates that during Wu Zhao's reign, the festival held on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month held particular moment. Clearly, the Confucian court official's remonstrance against the Double Ninth festival was not based on concerns that he had about her celebration of traditional Chinese elements of the Chongyang Festival like ascending to high places, reciting poetry, picnicking, savoring the fragrance of chrysanthemum flowers, drinking chrysanthemum wine, and longevity.[314] Indeed, though Liu Zhiji's ostensible objections targeted Wu Zhao's free and easy dispensation of amnesties and imperial grace, this autumnal nodal day was already

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[313] *ZZTJ* 205.6501–02. The other itemized points of remonstrance were related. Second, Liu Zhiji pointed out that the constant amnesties that she issued were accompanied by rank and merit increases for court officials. These promotions are not based on conduct or ability, therefore there is no distinction between the virtuous and the wicked, the capable and the stupid. Third, she drafted a superfluous number of officials, 'like grains of sand, dirt and grass'. Finally, her constant administrative shifts—high turnover and brevity of appointments—precluded good governance. Liu Zhiji's remonstrance is recorded in full in *QTW* 274.2782–83 and *THY* 40.729. *JTS* 102.3168 and *XTS* 132.4519 also refer to this text. Antonino Forte, in his *Mingtang*, also refers to Liu Zhiji's admonition, noting that it was 'a general criticism of policy...but does not discuss the construction of the *tiantang*' (68).

[314] For more on poetic and cultural elements of the Chongyang Festival in early medieval and medieval China, see Davis, 'The Double Ninth Festival in Chinese Poetry', 45–64; McMullen, 'Recollection without Tranquility', 189–252; and Benn, *Daily Life in Traditional China*, 153–54. The webpage for Wairarapa Academy for New Sinology, edited by Barmé, 'Ninth of the Ninth Double Brightness', http://chinaheritage.net/journal/ninth-of-the-ninth-重陽-double-brightness/, offers an excellent cross sections of poetic references to the Double Ninth from intimations in the *Elegies of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) to Tao Yuanming to the iconic poets of the Tang to Li Qingzhao and Su Shi in the Song, to Crab Flower Club's

strongly associated with Wu Zhao's effort to establish herself as a prophesied cakravartin, a living bodhisattva, and a female warrior sovereign. It is evident that the grandiose, Indic/Buddhist festivals geared toward the performative fulfillment of these interconnected prophecies held on the Double Ninth was the greater underlying reason for his protestations.[315]

Ignoring Liu Zhiji's remonstrance, Wu Zhao continued to stage momentous events marking personal triumphs on the Navamī in the ninth lunar month. That same year, on *jiayin* 甲寅, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month (October 22, 695), she augmented her already grand imperial title with 'Heaven Appointed' (*Tiance* 天冊) and inaugurated a new reign era, 'Appointed by Heaven for Ten Thousand Years' (*Tiance wansui* 天冊萬歲). Her new title was thus Heaven Appointed Cakravartin of the Golden Wheel, Sagely and Divine August Emperor (*Tiance jinlun shengshen huangdi* 天冊金輪聖神皇帝). She held a joint sacrifice to Heaven and Earth in the southern suburb. She offered a general amnesty and held a nine-day bacchanal feast (*dapu* 大脯).[316] This new title and the reign era name likely represent further efforts to publicly announce and display that she was the prophesied cakravartin receiving the annual sanction and consecration from the Great Goddess and the Buddhas. 'Heaven Appointed' (Tiance), similar to 'Heaven Bestowed' (Tianshou), served to broadcast that Wu Zhao was the recipient of the *vyākaraṇa*.

Wu Zhao's inauguration of the Divine Achievement era (Shengong 神功) also fell on the ninth day (*renchen* 壬辰) of the ninth lunar month in 697 (September 29). The festal event on this nodal

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poems on chrysanthemums in *Dream of Red Mansions* to Mao Zedong's musings on the festival.

[315] Elsewhere, I have documented efforts made by the Confucian court to ban and disparage another non-Chinese festival at this same historical juncture. See Rothschild, '*Sumozhe* Suppressed, Huntuo Halted', 262–300, and 'Why is it Necessary for Naked Savages to Drum and Dance?', 65–80.

[316] *ZZTJ* 205.6503; *XTS* 13.336; *JTS* 6.124, 21.830. Forte (*Political Propaganda*, 218–19, fn. 114) has noted that the title is incorrect in *ZZTJ* 205; it reads 'Great Sage' (Dasheng 大聖) instead of Sagely and Divine.

day was marked by a general amnesty and the beginning of a seven-day grand bacchanal feast. A great sacrifice (*daxiang* 大享) was staged at Penetrating Heaven Palace (Tongtian gong 通天宮), Wu Zhao's towering Bright Hall.[317]

There is reason to believe that the inauguration of this reign era in 697 also marked the celebration of the Navarātri/Navamī. The Sogdian Buddhist monk and Avataṃsaka (Huayan 華嚴) master, Fazang, one of Wu Zhao's long-standing political and ideological allies at that juncture, played a decisive role in the conclusion of a year-long pair of campaigns against the Qidan in the northeastern part of the empire—one of the bloodiest conflicts in all of Tang and Zhou history.[318] Leading up to a pivotal battle, Wu Zhao requested that he deploy Buddhist magic to help defeat the Qidan. Fazang performed ceremonial ablutions, changed clothes, set an image of Eleven-faced Guanyin (Shiyimian Guanyin 十一面觀音; Skt. Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara) on a ritual platform, and worked his magic. To resounding drums, the image of Guanyin appeared on high, marshalling the countless divine troops who materialized to combat the raiders, inspiring the Zhou forces and plunging the Qidan into despair. Wu Zhao triumphantly proclaimed, 'This is the blessed aegis of Buddha force!' (蓋慈力之加被) and changed the reign era to Divine Achievement.[319]

Remarking on Amoghavajra's performance of war rites to protect

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[317] *ZZTJ* 206.6523. These are the two reasons that commentator Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) gives (206.6512). *JTS* 6.126 just provides a single reason: the pacification of the Qidan. *XTS* 4.98 also mentions the feast and seven-day amnesty.

[318] Chen, 'Fazang (643–712) the Holy Man', 34–40 (37–40 provide a good account of the fierce campaigns against the Qidan in 696–97; see also, *ZZTJ* 205.6505–23. For more on Fazang and Wu Zhao, see Chen Jinhua's monograph, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician*, and Rothschild, *Rhetoric, Ritual, and Support Constituencies*, sub-chapter on Fazang, 259–69.

[319] *Dang Daech'ŏnboksa gosaju bŏngyŏng daedŏk 'bŏpchang Hwasang jŏn'*, *T* no. 2054, 50:283c16–25. This text was composed in Unified Silla in the early ninth century.

the state during the An Lushan Rebellion and against the Tibetans, Geoffrey Goble contends that, 'Esoteric Buddhist rites were militarily important as a form of weaponized ritual promising to cause the death and defeat of enemy armies and their commanders'.[320] Esoteric Buddhism, as it enfolded and incorporated different Indic deities, came to play an important role as a 'war religion'. Fazang's battle magic—which he acknowledged to Wu Zhao was 'unorthodox' (*zuodao* 左道)[321] —can perhaps be understood as a prototype of Amoghavajra's later rites.

While Fazang's ceremony reflects the development of the esoteric cult of Avalokiteśvara under Wu Zhao,[322] it can also be seen as an event reflecting the growth of heroic Śāktism. One recalls the capacity of the dhāraṇī of war goddess Mārīcī to 'delude and confound enemies'.[323] Divākara had just translated the dhāraṇī for battle devī Cundī, another esoteric manifestation of Guanyin, a decade earlier (see 2.3b above). The goddess who helped secure victory over the Qidan was a war deity. Wu Zhao celebrated the triumph of this goddess of war and her personal victory against a powerful foe by inaugurating a new reign era on the Navamī.

The change of reign era occurred several months after Fazang's elaborate ceremony. There are no sources that directly and explicitly state the reason that Wu Zhao inaugurated the Divine Achievement. In 'Fazang (643–712): The Holy Man', Chen Jinhua explains, 'in order to celebrate this hard-fought victory, and probably also for the casting of the *jiuzhou-ding* 九州鼎 (Tripods of the Nine Prefectures), the empress ordered on 29 September 697 a change of the reign-name from Tiancewansui to Shengong 神功 (The Divine Feat), apparently attributing the overcoming of the Khitans to divine intervention' (40).

[320] Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism*, 132. For more on these subjugation rites (*abhicāra*), see also all of Goble's chap. 3, 'Esoteric Buddhism in Context', 95–133.

[321] *T* no. 2054, 50:283c18.

[322] Chen, 'Fazang (643–712): The Holy Man', 40. For the development of the cult of Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara in the late seventh and early eighth century, see pp. 40–47.

[323] Hall, *The Buddhist Goddess Marishiten*, 58.

Two months earlier, Wu Youyi 武攸宜 (d. 707–710), a leading general in the campaign and Wu Zhao's first cousin once removed, led back Qidan captives in a traditional military victory parade (*kaixuan* 凱旋).[324] Though this march of triumph was a traditional military rite,[325] given the involvement of an esoteric Buddhist battle goddess in the successful conclusion of the campaign and the subsequent celebration of the Navarātri, this triumphant return might also be viewed in conjunction with Durgā's role as a triumphant battle goddess and the martial pomp and fanfare associated with the ceremonial aspects of the festival.

The notion that there are both intraregional and interregional variations of this celebration is an underlying assumption of this essay. Clearly, over space and time, the Navarātri evolved as it was customized to suit different religious and political circumstances. As the *Commentary* and the *Precious Rain Sūtra* make abundantly clear, Wu Zhao's impressive coterie of Buddhist propagandists pored over the Buddhist canon in search of materials to justify and legitimate her sovereignty as a female emperor; indeed, the interpolation in the *Precious Rain Sūtra* illustrates that they were not strictly constrained by existing canon and were willing to take creative liberties to help their powerful sponsor overcome ideological impediments. Naturally, the multi-national team of propagandists—who drew heavily upon prophetic Daoist sources as well—sought to data-mine new Indic currents of Śāktism as well to further amplify and substantiate Wu Zhao's novel vision of emperorship.

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[324] *ZZTJ* 206.6522. Wu Youyi is the grandson of Wu Zhao's paternal uncle Wu Shirang 武士讓. For an overview of military rituals including Taizong's victorious *kaixuan* return from a campaign in 621 clad in golden armor, see Graff, 'Dou Jiande's Dilemma', 100.

[325] *Da Tang Kaiyuan li, juan* 83. The rite involved presenting captives, spoils of war, and left ears taken as trophies (*fuguo* 俘馘/馘).

TABLE 3 Recorded Celebrations of the 'Navarātri' on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Lunar Month during Wu Zhao's Zhou Dynasty, 690–697

Date/Year	Form of celebration
October 16, 690	Inauguration of Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty and the Heaven Bestowed (Tianshou 天授) era; realization of 'female warrior sovereign' and 'bodhisattva with a female body' prophecy (*vyākaraṇa* 授記)
October 23, 692	Inauguration of the Protracted Longevity (Changshou 長壽) reign era. Suggestion that Wu Zhao, having grown new teeth and eyebrows in her mid-60s, is timeless and deathless, like a goddess.
October 13, 693	Wu Zhao invested and consecrated as a cakravartin
October 22, 695	Confirmation that Wu Zhao is both the prophesied one and the cakravartin role with elaboration of title: Heaven Appointed Cakravartin of the Golden Wheel, Sagely and Divine August Emperor (Tiance jinlun shengshen huangdi 天冊金輪聖神皇帝); joint sacrifice to Heaven and Earth in the southern suburb; general amnesty and held a nine-day bacchanal feast; inauguration of Heaven Appointed for Ten Thousand Years (Tiancewansui 天冊萬歲) reign era. 'Heaven Appointed', like 'Heaven Bestowed', served to broadcast that Wu Zhao was the recipient of the *vyākaraṇa*.
September 29, 697	Fazang's thaumaturgic deployment of image of war god Cundī/Eleven-headed Guanyin against Qidan helps win martial victory; inauguration of Divine Achievement (Shengong 神功) reign era.

2.9a. Aftermath: A Poetic Evocation of Navamī in Zhongzong's Reign?

In 708 (twice, because of an intercalary month) and 709, on consecutive autumns, Wu Zhao's son Zhongzong and his favorite, the gifted Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉儿 (664–710)—ghostwriter of imperial edicts, prodigious poet, master of political intrigue, stunning literary talent, and concubine to two rulers—accompanied by a talented coterie of literary and poetic courtiers, climbed to lofty heights,

close to the immortals and spirits, and wrote poetry on this date.[326] 'Fenghe jiuyue jiuri deng Ciensi futu yingzhi' 奉和九月九日登慈恩寺浮屠应制 [Ascending the Pagoda of Ci'en Temple on the Ninth day of the Ninth Lunar Month], a poem composed by courtier Zhao Yanzhao 趙彦昭 (d. 715?) in 708 at the imperial command of Zhongzong, may provide evidence that the Navarātri continued to be celebrated after Wu Zhao's deposal and death in 705.

Zhao's poem concludes with a reference to 'receiving the prophecy' (*shouji* 受記), a poetic intimation that Wu Zhao's son, emperor Zhongzong, on this occasion had attained a foretold Buddhahood:

出豫乘秋節	On an imperial progress, the ruler enjoys an autumnal holiday,
登高陟梵宮	Climbing the heights, he ascends the Buddhist palace.
皇心滿塵界	While the Sovereign's heart is filled with matters of the dusty world,
佛迹見虛空	A manifestation of the Buddha appears in the empty skies.
日月宜長壽	Sun and moon align in accord with longevity,
人天得大通	Only at such a juncture can men and spirits attain great communion.
喜聞題寶偈	With delight, I hear the topic set to this gatha:

[326] See Jia, 'A Study of the *Jinglong Wenguan ji*', 231. Rebecca Doran has analyzed the role of poets like Zhao Yanzhao (among a flock of others) in aesthetically transforming the estates of princesses and elite into divine landscapes and poetically turning outings of rulers and courtier-officials such as this into celestial peregrinations of immortals; see her *Transgressive Typologies*, 84–92. The structure and composition of these poems are discussed in Luo, 'Tangdai Jinglong ernian youxing Fosi yingzhi shi shulun'.

Shangguan Wan'er played not merely a participatory, but a leading role on these outings. See Owen, 'The Formation of the Tang Estate Poem'; Wu, *A Study of Group Compositions in Early Tang China*; Rothschild, "Her Influence Great, Her Merit beyond Measure".

These outings, like Wu Zhao's announcements of new reign eras on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, were also celebrations of the Chongyang Festival.

受記[327]莫由同 Receiving the prophecy: there is nothing comparable![328]

This contemporary usage of *shouji* by a poet to laud Zhongzong as the prospective recipient of future Buddhahood is evidence that the language of prophecy that Wu Zhao and her propagandists had employed to show that she was the prophesied female warrior sovereign and a 'bodhisattva with a female body' was widely understood in court and country.[329] The timing is an indication that the Navarātri was celebrated in Zhongzong's court as well, and that perhaps he, too, sought the potent blessings and support of the warrior goddess.

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[327] The term *shouji* 受記 in this poem is a variant of and has essentially the same meaning as *shouji* 授記, the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit Buddhist term, *vyākaraṇa*, referring to the Buddha foretelling the future Buddhahood or bodhisattva-hood of a disciple or believer.

[328] *Quan Tangshi* 882.9989. Zhao Yanzhao is wrongly identified as Zhao Yanbo.

[329] This is certainly not the only contemporary example of references to *vyākaraṇa* in and around Wu Zhao's time. In the early 660s, when Wu Zhao and Gaozong were co-ruling as the Two Sages, a Buddhist monk named Yuanze 元則 (fl. 660s) from the Tiangong Temple 天宮寺 in Luozhou 洛州 (in the Eastern Capital Luoyang) wrote the 'Preface to the Former Collection of Miraculous Records of the Forest of Chan' ('Chanlin miaoji qianji xu' 禪林妙記前集序). He mentions the Buddha's original *vyākaraṇa*; see *QTW* 908.9477. 'Receiving the prophecy' can also be used in a Daoist context. Emperor Gaozong's 'Imperial proclamation to exalt Laojun [Laozi] with the honorific title August Emperor of Primal Origin' in 666 uses the term; perhaps in reference to his own future Daoist apotheosis he remarks that 'seated in the Bright Hall he received the prophecy' 坐明堂而受記, see *QTW* 12.151. Attributed to Wu Zhao herself, the 'Preface to the sacred teachings [translated by] the Tripiṭaka' ('Sanzang shengjiao xu' 三藏聖教序), also include the term; see *QTW* 97.1001–02. The larger point is simply that the notion of one receiving *vyākaraṇa*/prophecy of future Buddhahood, bodhisattvahood, or apotheosis was insider circulation.

Disclaimers on Wu Zhao's 'Heroic Śāktism' and Celebrations of the Navarātri

First, this paper does not make the claim that 'heroic Śāktism' was the exclusive or primary reason that Wu Zhao inaugurated her Zhou dynasty on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month; rather, it argues that there is strong evidence her adaptation of this Indic form of 'warrior-centric goddess worship' played a significant role in her purposeful choice of the ninth day of the ninth lunar month to found her Zhou dynasty and to mark significant political and personal triumphs. While this essay focuses on Wu Zhao's utilization of the Navarātri and currents of heroic Śāktism, the female emperor's choice of the ninth day of the ninth lunar month to inaugurate her Zhou dynasty may best be understood as a carefully-engineered convergence of numerous cultural, religious, ideological, and astronomical currents. Indeed, this paper is one part of a trilogy that examines why this unique historical personage chose the Double Ninth as her inaugural date.

One of the legs of this tripod argues that Wu Zhao's reimagined Chongyang Festival emphasized a number of Daoist elements—including circumpolar sovereignty, divine kingship, longevity, and lofty venues that placed her in proximity of divinities and immortals—geared toward enhancing her religious and political authority.[330]

The final part of the trilogy examines the way in which Wu Zhao's calculated elevation of the Double Ninth interwove traditional Chinese festal elements such as chrysanthemums and longevity with Indic notions of cakravartin kingship and Buddhist prophecies to create a novel, culturally-hybrid holiday that enhanced her religious and political authority.[331] Though each of these parts—respectively investigating folk/Daoist, Buddhist, and Śāktic aspects of Wu Zhao's Navarātri/Chongyang Festival—has been published separately, to fully apprehend her choice of this efficacious date as her holy day, her

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[330] Rothschild, 'Daoist Elements in Wu Zhao's Reimagined Double Ninth Festival', 55–98.

[331] Rothschild, 'Chrysanthemum Cakravartin'.

holiday, the entire trilogy needs to be taken into account.

Second, admittedly, there is a speculative element in this paper. Wu Zhao and her propagandists never explicitly or boldly announce an agenda of heroic Śāktism linked to the Navarātri to promote her sovereignty. I acknowledge that the argument here—that the lore and aura of warrior-goddess Durgā and other Indic battle devīs contributed to the timing of the founding of Wu Zhao's Zhou dynasty and to shaping her emperorship—is largely based on circumstantial evidence. Nonetheless, taken in its totality, as the Conclusion will demonstate, this evidence is tantalizingly convincing.

Conclusions

Birani Sarkar has remarked upon the syncretic nature and the numerous faces of the great warrior Devī in 'heroic Śāktism', a flexibility that 'led to the pan-Indic expansion of the cult of the sovereign-goddess between the sixth and the twelfth centuries'.[332] The festival that celebrated the great warrior goddess, the Navarātri was also 'a flexible ceremony' that developed 'according to the needs and customs of particular regions'.[333] Evidence has been presented in this paper that this 'pan-Indic' cult had spread to Tang China and the rest of East Asia by the seventh century. Given the constant traffic of flourishing commerce, diplomatic missions, and Buddhist pilgrims, ideas of both the great warrior goddess and the autumnal festival that celebrated her had reached China and came to exert a significant and growing ideological influence during female emperor Wu Zhao's time as empress, regent, and ultimately emperor. The timely confluence of 'heroic Śāktism' and esoteric Buddhism, newly arrived and nascent yet influential religious and cultural currents in late seventh century China, enabled this trio of devīs—indomitable radiant warrior queens Durgā, Cundī, and Mārīcī—to play an integral part in the construction of Wu Zhao's sovereignty, including a particularly cen-

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[332] Sarkar, *The Heroic Cult of the Sovereign Goddess*, 90.

[333] Ibid., 145.

tral role in her accession in 690.

This paper does not claim that Wu Zhao devised a vision of sovereignty based upon a clear blueprint of the Śāktic tradition of Durgā pūjā, or reverent worship of the Hindu warrior goddess; neither does it assert that the woman emperor sought to amplify her rulership by staging recognizable vision of the Navarātri festival. In the seventh century, both the tradition of heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri (part of that tradition) were in early stages of development in the competing kingdoms in India—let alone in China! Rather, this paper is seeking to show that at a pivotal juncture when the powerful wave transmitting Indian culture and religion reached its zenith in Tang China, Wu Zhao and her Buddhist propagandists incorporated culturally-legible elements of heroic Śāktism and the Navarātri. Given that she was a consummate politician and that she chose to incorporate these elements into her unprecedented accession, Wu Zhao must have done so with the belief that the public and visible display of these elements would be recognized, would resonate with some constituencies, and would, ultimately, serve to buttress and amplify her sovereignty. This utilization of heroic Śāktism was not, of course, *the* sole strategy in the diverse repertoire of Wu Zhao's emperorship, nor can it stand alone as an explanation for the timing of her accession; rather, it was *a* strategy and *a* reason.[334]

For a woman-ruler who had spent decades trying to tap into the cumulative powers of eminent female paragons—Daoist goddesses, Buddhist devīs, and powerful women from Chinese folklore—'heroic Śāktism' and the Navarātri, novel ideas that she encountered through her engagement in esoteric Buddhism, through contact with Brahmanic calendrical specialists and physicians, and via Hindu elements in Buddhist sources like the *Harivaṃśa* hymn, were neither strange nor unrecognizable. The powerful warrior goddesses Durgā, Caṇḍī/Cundī, and Mārīcī could be seamlessly integrated into her larger project of building a flexible, diverse, pluralistic pantheon of female divinities.

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[334] For a synopsis of the diverse repertoire of strategies Wu Zhao employed to secure power, see Rothschild, *Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon*, 20–22.

The following list provides a review of compelling pieces of evidence that, among the diverse strategies she employed to ascend the throne to become China's sole female emperor, Wu Zhao incorporated both elements of worship of the Great Goddess from Hinduism and related aspects of the seasonal festival Navarātri to amplify her unique sovereignty:

1. From the 640s, around the time Wu Zhao was first taken into the palace as a concubine of emperor Taizong, a prophecy circulated foretelling the future rise of a female kṣatriya ruler. In name—her surname Wu means 'martial' or 'warrior'—and in essence, when she ascended to the throne as emperor, she fulfilled the prophecy. Queen Sŏndŏk of Silla can be viewed as a predecessor/prototype, both in the sense that she received the prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) of becoming a bodhisattva/Buddha and that she was a warrior/kṣatriya.
2. The date that Wu Zhao inaugurated her Zhou dynasty, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in 690 (October 16, 690), corresponds with the culminating day of the Navarātri, the ninth day of the waxing moon. Subsequently, between 692 and 697, Wu Zhao marked her assumption of the title cakravartin on two occasions and inaugurated three additional reign eras on this same day of the lunar calendar.
3. During Wu Zhao's six years as grand dowager and regent, a critical period of incubation and preparation leading up to her bold move of establishing herself as Emperor and inaugurating a new Zhou dynasty, an Indian monk translated a dhāraṇī invoking Cundī from Sanskrit.
4. The presence of Durgā and Sasravati in the *Harivaṃśa* Hymn that Yijing incorporated into his translation of the *Golden Light Sūtra* in 703.

Emphasizing the plasticity of cultic tradition in heroic Śāktism, Bihani Sarkar contends that there 'must have been private manuals and traditions in every kingdom customised to suit the particular needs of courts and communities. Locally influential goddesses with individual personalities and cults were worshipped as unique forms

of Durgā with distinctive versions of the Navarātra, which led to a great degree of diversity and autonomy in the rite'.[335] Wu Zhao's staging of a proto-Navarātri festival and nascent worship of a warrior Mahādevī—invariably on occasions that served to aggrandize herself and amplify her sovereignty—can be understood in a similar vein as a creative effort to customize certain useful elements of heroic Śāktism to suit her religio-political needs at the time of her accession and during her reign. Wu Zhao tactically appropriated basic contours and ideas, enfolding heroic Śāktism into her composite paradigm of rulership. Bound in grand ceremony to a female ruler, the ascending cultic force of the Mahādevī must have been all the more resonant.

Though it is well beyond the compass of this paper and undoubtedly further investigation is necessary, the rise of Wu Zhao in China, ruling empresses Suikō 推古 (r. 592–628), Jitō (r. 686–97), Kōgokyo 皇極/Saimei 斉明 (r. 642–645, 654–661), Jitō 持統 (r. 686–97), Genmyō 元明 (r. 707–15), Genshō 元正 (r. 715–24), and Kōken 孝謙/Shōtoku 稱德 (749–52 and 764–70) in Japan, Sŏndŏk and Chindŏk in Korea, a matriarchy of sorts in Sufala'najujuluo 蔫伐辣拏瞿咀羅 on the fringe of Tibet, female rulers in the heavily Indicized states in southeast Asia like Linyi 林邑 (central Vietnam) and Zhenla 真臘 (Champa/Cambodia), where Wu Zhao's long-ruling contemporary Queen Jayadevī (r. 681–713) presided, may indicate a pan-Asian diffusion of heroic Śāktism—female kṣatriya-sovereign that may well help explain the proliferation of female rulers in the seventh and eighth centuries.[336]

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[335] Sarkar, 'The Rite of Durgā in Medieval Bengal', 328.

[336] There have been some preliminary investigations of this anomalous phenomena, but none of them include any cognizance of the impact of heroic Śāktism or any other Indic influences outside of Buddhism and the cakravartin tradition of kingship. See, for instances, Jay, 'Imagining Matriarchy', 220–29; *idem*, 'Female Rule in East Asia', 10–12.

For the female rulers in Linyi, see *ZZTJ* 199.6281–82 and *XTS* 222.6302. For more on Jayadevī in Champa, see Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses*, 23–26, and 'Autonomous Queenship in Cambodia', 365–71; and Walters, 'North-western Cambodia in the Seventh Century', 140–42.

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Abbreviations

DTXY	*Da Tang Xinyu* 大唐新語. See Primary Sources.
HHS	*Hou Han Shu* 後漢書. See Primary Sources.
JTS	*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書. See Primary Sources.
QTW	*Quan Tangwen* 全唐文. See Primary Sources.
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu & Watanabe et al., eds.
THY	*Tang huiyao* 唐會要. See Primary Sources.
TPGJ	*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記. See Primary Sources.
XTS	*Xin Tang shu* 新唐書. See Primary Sources.
ZZTJ	*Zizhi tongjia*n 資治通鑑. See Primary Sources.

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