

**Divine Scrutiny of Human Morals
in an Early Chinese Buddhist *Sūtra*:
A Study of the *Si tianwang jing* (T. 590)**

Henrik H. Sørensen
Ethnographic Museum, Copenhagen

Introduction

Since Kenneth Ch'en wrote his now classic work, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*,¹ many scholars have begun to see and react to the importance of the cultural dimension in their understanding of Chinese Buddhism and its hermeneutics. The significance of apocryphal Buddhist scriptures composed in China—partly written in response to the xenophobic challenge to Buddhism as “a creed of barbarians”—has now been generally acknowledged.² Furthermore, the various strategies devised for assimilating Buddhism to Chinese culture and society which the early Buddhists in China employed—in particular issues pertaining to translating the voluminous *Tripitaka* into Chinese—can be seen from a number of perspectives, including that of adapting the meaning to the local culture while striving to maintain a certain faithfulness to the original Indian script.

When talking about the eastward spread of Buddhism from Greater India to the countries and cultures of East Asia, scholarship has naturally tended to focus on the historical process connected with the canonical transmission. This process is reflected in the gradual sophistication evident in the successive phases of translation as the techniques for translation became increasingly refined and the vocabulary was expanded and standardized. However, this major import of religious literature—a process which took place over a thousand-year long period—did not come about in an orderly manner, nor

¹ Cf. Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

² For a pioneering study of this important class of scriptures in medieval Chinese Buddhism, cf. Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū* [A Study of Apocryphal Scriptures], Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976. See also, *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

did it result in a well defined or homogeneous end-product despite several attempts, some of which were state-sponsored. In effect the standardization of the Buddhist canon in China was not achieved until the printing of the Sichuanese *Kaibao Tripitaka*, or *Shu ben* (Shu Edition), completed in AD 983.³ Thus the development of the Chinese Buddhist canon reflects the tortuous and winding road along which Indian Buddhism was introduced to East Asia. Any in-depth study of this process will reveal a complex and often confusing fabric of cross-cultural transformations that essentially resulted in the creation of a “new” corpus of scriptures in addition to those transmitted from India, namely the Chinese apocrypha.

Underlying the often great divergence between the Indian originals and the Chinese translations was the basic question of how to render, or rather convey, the meaning of one language into that of another, not to mention the successful translation and matching of symbols and values deeply embedded in the respective cultures of India and China. In the case of transforming the Indian and Central Asian scriptures into meaningful Chinese, the translators had to come to terms with the fact that they were dealing with vocabularies and concepts of two quite different but highly developed cultures. On top of that, traditional Buddhism, i.e. Indian norms and perceptions (including those of Indian derivation), and those found in the Chinese religious and philosophical traditions were on many occasions incompatible or even non-existent. This meant that in order successfully to render the basic textual meaning of the Indian script into Chinese, the translators had to develop various methods of adapting the meaning, which may be referred to as “strategies of cultural adaptation”. Of course the best known example of this was the development of the *geyi*, or system of “matching the meaning”, in which the early translators utilized the terminology of the Chinese tradition to create a functional system with which to convey the Buddhist technical meanings with a vocabulary readily understood by the Chinese.⁴

³ For a useful study of the formation of the Chinese Buddhist canon during the Tang, cf. Fang Guangchang, *Fojiao dazang jing shi* [The History of the Buddhist Tripitaka], Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991. Concerning the compilation of the *Kaibao Tripitaka*, see Tong Wei, *Bei Song Kaibao dazang jing diaoyin kao shi ji mulu huanyuan* [An Investigation of the Carving of the Kaibao Tripitaka of the Northern Song, Including a Reconstruction of its Contents], Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1991.

⁴ The problems which the translators of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese encountered, and how they tried to solve them, have been the *topoi* of several but often highly partial and discrete studies. It goes without saying that we are still waiting for a comprehensive study of this important aspect of Chinese Buddhist history. In the meantime the interested reader can benefit from Erik Zürcher, “Late Han Vernacular Elements in the Earliest Buddhist Translations”, *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers’ Association*, 12:3 (1977), pp. 177–203; and W. South Coblin’s, “Notes on the Dialect of the Han Buddhist Transcriptions”, *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Sinology*, Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1980; Volume on Language and Writing, Taipei, 1981, pp. 121–83. See also Erik Zürcher’s excellent survey, “A New Look at the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Texts”, in: *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yün-hua*, ed. Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen,

Another way of dealing with the Indian terms and ideas was to introduce them in the form of a set of new concepts especially designed for this use, i.e. as transcriptions of Sanskrit words. This strategy proved more useful in the long run, and in fact served as a vehicle for the adaptation of Buddhist concepts into Daoism during the the Nanbei Chao period (317–589), or perhaps even earlier.⁵

However, there was another, more indirect process by which the Indian Buddhist doctrines and lore were transmitted into Chinese, namely that of adapting and modifying the meaning of a given canonical scripture so as better to suit a Chinese audience. This process, I believe, has still not received the attention it deserves. Moreover, further research along these lines may reveal further and important information with which to understand the more obscure issues of the sinicization of Buddhism. First of all we might come closer to an understanding and appreciation of the numerous lesser *sūtras* and other scriptures in the Chinese Buddhist canon that at first glance appear to be genuine translations, but for which no Indian or Tibetan original can be found. I am inclined to believe that many of these scriptures actually never existed as such in India (at least not in the form in which they have been preserved), and that they should therefore be seen as essentially Chinese compositions. However, and most importantly, they are not apocryphal scriptures in the true sense of the word, since they are not simply fabrications, but rather re-writings or compositions based on or incorporating substantial portions from a given canonical work.

In the process of the Chinese transformation of Indian Buddhism there arose a new class of scriptures which had never existed in the country of their origin, but which were nevertheless accepted by the Chinese as genuine “words of the Buddha” and eventually incorporated into the growing Chinese *Tripitaka*. There is a wide variety of such scriptures in the canon, or otherwise referred to in the important *Tripitaka* catalogues, many of which have in fact become so significant in the course of history that they have sometimes overshadowed the so-called orthodox *sūtras*, i.e. works of Indian origin. We have hitherto been wont to look at the problem of the authenticity of canonical scriptures in Buddhism from two basic points of view, which to a considerable degree also reflect the attitude taken by the Chinese Buddhist tradition itself. Basically a given *sūtra* was deemed authentic if it could be proven to have come from India, i.e. if a Sanskrit manuscript was known to exist, whereas it was a forgery if it had been composed or written in, for example, China.⁶ I will not enter a discussion concerning to what extent

Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991, pp. 277–304.

⁵ For a discussion of this, see Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence”, *T'oung Pao* (hereafter *TP*), Vol. 66 (1980), pp. 84–147.

⁶ For a highly useful study of the classification of apocryphal Buddhist scriptures in China, see Kyoko Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures in Chinese Buddhist Bibliographical Catalogues”, in: *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, q.v., pp. 31–74.

such a categorization is meaningful or not, but will simply point out that by seeking to understand the problem through such narrow categories as “genuine Indian” and “apocryphal Chinese” we inadvertently bar ourselves from significant insights as regards the development of the Buddhist canon, as well as Buddhist beliefs and practices, in China, and by extension to the whole of East Asia. I believe that it is useful to pay attention to the fact that there is a very large number of canonical scriptures in the standard Chinese *Tripitaka*, which are neither original Indian compositions nor complete Chinese fabrications. Rather, they often turn out to be abbreviated versions of canonical works (*chao jing*),⁷ composita consisting of passages from one or more Indian *sūtras*, or simply a mixture of original Indian Buddhist textual material and concepts on the one hand, and Chinese adaptations of this material to their own cultural sphere on the other. The end product is therefore not necessarily an apocryphal scripture, at least not understood in terms of a complete forgery, but is rather a kind of hybrid, or inter-cultural script, which was conceived with the main purpose of adapting the often foreign Indian Buddhist doctrines to the general concerns of popular Chinese religious life. Examples of this kind of scripture can be seen in works such as the *Sishier zhang jing* [Scripture of Forty-two Sections],⁸ *Foshuo hujingjing* [Scripture on Protecting Purity],⁹ *Baoying jing* [Scripture on Recompensing the Pretas],¹⁰ *Foshuo xiaozi jing* [Scripture on the Filial Son],¹¹ etc. It is also noteworthy that a fairly large number of “orthodox” scriptures dealing with the *vinaya*, or some aspect of the Buddhist moral codex, were in fact composed in China.¹² Although none of these scriptures ever existed as such in India, nearly all of them consist of material lifted from canonical *sūtras*, and historically we find that they were often treated as authentic.

The present study is devoted to an analysis of one such scripture, namely the *Si tianwang jing* [Scripture of the Four Heavenly Kings],¹³ for which no Indian original exists, and which I suspect was compiled and edited in China sometime during the first half of the Nanbei Chao period (317–589).¹⁴ I have

⁷ In the later catalogues such works were referred to as *biesheng*, or “off-shoots”. Cf. *Zhongjing mulu* [Catalogue of All Scriptures], *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–35 (hereafter T.), Vol. 55, No. 2146, pp. 148c–149c (ch. 7).

⁸ T. 17/784.

⁹ T. 17/748.

¹⁰ T. 17/746.

¹¹ T. 16/687.

¹² Among such scriptures are the important *Fanwang jing* [Brahmajālasūtra], T. 24/1484; the *Shou shi shanjie jing* [Scripture on Receiving the Ten Good Precepts], T. 24/1486; *Fumu enchong jing* [Scripture of Recompensing [One’s] Parents], T. 85/2887; *Zhaifa qingjing jing* [Scripture on Purification by Fasting], T. 85/2900, etc.

¹³ *Foshuo si tianwang jing*, T. 15/590: 118.

¹⁴ A workshop held in Paris in 1969 under the direction of Michel Soyumié supposedly dealt with the *Si tianwang jing*, but as far as I am aware, the proceedings (if any such exist) have never been published. In any case I have regrettably not been privy to any of the results or ideas that were brought forth on that occasion.

chosen this relatively unknown scripture as an example of how the process of cultural interaction played a vital role in shaping Chinese Buddhism and its future course. My analysis will be accompanied by an annotated translation of the scripture in question together with extensive comparative material gleaned from contemporary canonical scriptures with which the *Si tianwang jing* bears many similarities in terms of typology and contents. In addition I will endeavour to place the scripture under discussion within a specific religious and cultural context, namely that of popular Chinese religion.

1. On the History of the *Si tianwang jing*

The exact origin of the *Si tianwang jing*, a scripture of the *sūtra* class, is somewhat obscure, but it is clearly of considerable age. In its attached colophon it is said to have been rendered into Chinese by the two translator-monks Zhiyan (fl. first half of the fifth century) and Baoyun (376–449) in the Zhiyuan Temple in Yangdu sometime after AD 427 under the Liu Song dynasty (420–77).¹⁵ Both of these monks are fairly well documented in contemporary records, and initially there seems to be no particular reason to doubt their connection with the *Si tianwang jing*. The question as to whether they actually translated it from on the basis of an original Indian version is another matter. The relatively early date of the scripture in question is corroborated by the early *sūtra* catalogue, the *Chu sanzang jiji* [Compilation of Records on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka]¹⁶ by Sengyou (445–518).¹⁷ Here we find it included in the first chapter (roll) of the *Xinji jinglun lu* [Record of the New Collection of Sūtras and Śāstras],¹⁸ and referred to as a work in one roll, but without any further comment.¹⁹ However, in chapter four of the same catalogue there is another entry for the *Si tianwang jing*, in which the appended note mentions that, “At the end there is a mantra which appears to have been added by later people.”²⁰ While this note does not reveal anything further about the text itself, nor does it indicate whether it was an entirely different work from the one-chapter scripture under the same name, it shows that there existed a dubious version of the *Si tianwang jing* as well. In any case by the early sixth century a scripture under the same name had been subject to redaction, and this modification apparently was done to suit a ritual purpose, i.e. that a mantra had been somehow linked with its message.²¹ In the section of lost works, or works which Sengyou

¹⁵ T. 15/590: 118a.

¹⁶ T. 55/2145.

¹⁷ For a highly useful presentation of this catalogue, see Kyoko Tokuno’s article, cited above, n. 6.

¹⁸ T. 2145: 5c–15a.

¹⁹ T. 2146: 12c.

²⁰ T. 2145: 24c (ch. 4).

²¹ In turn this may point to the inclusion of esoteric practices in connection with the maintenance of the six monthly fast days.

had not seen himself, referred to in the fourth chapter of the *Chu sanzang jiji*, we come across an additional reference to the *Si tianwang jing*, this time, however, as a long version in four rolls,²² as well as another scripture, entitled the *Da si tianwang jing*, in one roll.²³ We have no way of knowing if there was any relationship between the latter scripture and the extant *Si tianwang jing*, but the note accompanying the entry on the former of these scriptures states that, “It belongs to the dubious class, and consists of four books.”²⁴ Hence, we know that an apocryphal version of the *Si tianwang jing* was in circulation as early as the beginning of the sixth century. Lastly, the one-roll version of the scripture was considered sufficiently important by the scholar monk Huilin (737–820), who included an entry on it in his one hundred volume encyclopedic work, the *Yiqie jing yin yi ji* [Collection of the Meanings of Sounds of All Sūtras].²⁵

Today there are two extant editions of the *Si tianwang jing*, both printed versions.²⁶ The oldest is found in the Korean *Tripitaka*, and is dated to AD 1243.²⁷ The second is that transmitted in the *Taishō Tripitaka*, which is the one used in the present study.²⁸ However, whether the edition of the *Si tianwang jing* as preserved in the *Taishō Tripitaka* is the alleged translation of a now lost Indian original, or one of the dubious scriptures signalled by Sengyou, is not clear, and we shall probably never know the real answer to this question. In any case I shall delve into the question of authenticity in greater detail below. Regarding the contents and format of T. 590, we are obviously dealing with a Buddhist scripture which in many ways resembles the type of *sūtra* of the so-called Hīnayāna persuasion, or what the Chinese refer to as *xiaocheng*, such as the canonical *sūtras* found in the *Āgamas*. As shall be shown below there are indeed passages in scriptures belonging to this category of the *Tripitaka* which are either similar to or closely correspond to parts of our *Si tianwang jing*.

²² T. 2145: 32a.

²³ 2145: 33c.

²⁴ T. 2145: 32a.

²⁵ T. 54/2128: 690a (ch. 57).

²⁶ There is a number of other editions of the *Si tianwang jing* published during the Ming and the t'ing, but they are all based on the Koryō carving of AD 1243.

²⁷ K. 856 (numbering according to *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue*, ed. Lewis H. Lancaster et. al., Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1979).

²⁸ Cited above, n. 15.

2. Translation of *The Scripture of the Four Heavenly Kings*

Si tianwang jing (T. 590)

Translated by the Śrāmaṇeras Zhiyan and Baoyun
in Liangzhou of the [Liu] Song dynasty

[118a20] Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha dwelt in Śrāvastī in the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada, the Benefactors of Orphans. The Buddha addressed all the disciples [as follows]: “Pay attention to your mind and reflect on nonattachment to the Six Sexual Attractions.²⁹ Get rid of desires by rejecting impurity, and take non-seeking (*wuqiu*) as the object [of your cultivation]. Be pure inside, always be filial in your outward [behaviour], and provide nourishment to all sentient beings by maintaining the Four Virtuous States of Mind.³⁰

“Enter the holy temple at dawn to reflect on (*qi*)³¹ and confess your transgressions. In the morning you should receive the commandments and in the evening recite the wonderful meaning of the scriptures. Regulate your minds with the Buddha’s grave precepts against the disease of impurity. Fast decorously, dwell quietly and count your breaths while being engaged in [the practice] of *dhyāna*. Turn back the stream to exhaust the source by seeking the path of truth. The span of a human life is [brief] like a flash of lightning.³² There is a sudden brightness and then it is gone!³³

[118b1] “On the fast days you should chastise your minds, control your bodies and keep your mouths closed,³⁴ [since] on these days all the gods examine whether people are good or bad. On Mt. Meru there is the second heaven of the Trayastriṃśās, the Heaven of the Thirty-three [Gods], and the sovereign of the gods is called thus.³⁵ Meritorious and eminent is the pledge of the Four Gods, and for this reason these four spirit kings are [considered] the four guardian kings. They regulate [affairs in] all directions. “On every eighth day of the month a messenger descends [from heaven] to examine the whether the minds, thoughts, words and bodily behaviour activities of the world below [including] emperors, kings, ministers, common people, dragons, demons, larvae, worms and all wriggling kinds, are good or bad.

²⁹ They are the six attractions arising from colour, form, deportment, speech, softness, and features.

³⁰ They are (1) *maitrī* (2) *karuṇā*, (3) *muditā*, and (4) *upekṣā*.

³¹ This could also mean to prostrate, i.e. to bow before the altar.

³² This might be a reference to the Buddha’s celebrated stanza on impermanence in the *Vajracchedikā*. Cf. T. 8/235: 752b.

³³ Up to this point it appears that the audience to which the message of the scripture is directed, is a purely monastic one.

³⁴ i.e. refrain from eating.

³⁵ The text is slightly unclear here; however, it remains a fact that sovereign of the gods is Indra, and he dwells in this heaven.

[118b6] “On the fourteenth day [of each month] a [heavenly] prince descends. On the fifteenth day the Four Heavenly Kings themselves descend. On the twenty-third day the messenger again descends. On the twenty-ninth day the prince again descends, and on the thirtieth day the Four Heavenly Kings again descend. Accompanying the Four Heavenly Kings are the [celestial] officials of the sun, the moon, the Five Planets, and the Twenty-eight Constellations, and together with them all kinds of god descend. The Four Heavenly Kings command as follows by saying, “Diligently investigate the auspicious and evil activities of all sentient beings, and [see] whether they take refuge in the Three Jewels³⁶ on this day, whether they purify their minds maintaining the fast, whether they give liberally to the poor and destitute, whether they hold the precepts with patient endurance, and whether they are making skilful progress in [their practice] of *dhyāna*, and whether they desist from indulging in loose talk in order to civilize the blind and ignorant. [Examine] whether they perform the obligatory filial piety towards their parents, as well as showing reverence towards the Three Worthies, whether they make worshipful prostrations, and practise the Four Virtuous States of Mind.

“As regards those who compassionately nourish sentient beings, it will all be communicated and made known to Indra, and if they furthermore cultivate many virtues and make skilfully acquired progress without negligence, Indra will send his ministers consisting of thirty-three men³⁷ in support, and all of them will be very pleased [?]. [118b17] On Indra’s orders they examine the life span [of such beings] and calculate the extent of its length. They [then] send all the good spirits to take up guard to protect them, in accordance with the number of precepts they keep. If they keep one precept they will order five spirits to protect [such persons], and for those who keep all the five precepts they will order twenty-five spirits to keep guard at the doors of their homes. Calamities and epidemics, as well as all kinds of harmful emanation, and dark matters will be eradicated, and during the night such people will have no evil dreams. Misfortune brought about by district magistrates (*xianguan*), robbers and thieves, or water and fire will be eradicated and can no longer cause any harm. [Hence] seeking to avert calamities by making offerings will destroy the bad things. Only for those who keep four or [the full] five precepts, and who maintain the six fast days, [their activity] may be likened to using a lot of water to extinguish a small fire. How can such people fail to extinguish it? [118b22] At the time of death their lives are terminated, and their spirits will ascend for rebirth into the seven precious palatial halls in heaven on high. [However] without prayers this cannot be achieved.

³⁶ i.e. *Buddha*, *dharma* and *saṃgha*.

³⁷ These are the Thirty-Three Gods. Some texts include Indra among them, some make him their leader.

“As regards the life span of those sentient beings who do not fast, who are evil and who steal, who in taking the wives of other men are immoral, and who make evil curses with their twisted tongues, who use false words and fancy speech, and who with hateful incantations curse others, who in envy rage foolishly, and who, being unfilial, are contrary to the Way—such persons will oppose the Buddha and oppose the Dharma, and slander the members of the *saṃgha*,³⁸ and will be adverse to the distinction between good and bad. For those who act in the above manner, the Four Heavenly Kings will make it known to Indra, and all the gods will certainly be displeased. [118b28] The good spirits will not guard and protect them, and they will order the sun and the moon to cease shining. The planets and the constellations will miss their [correct] intervals, and wind and rain will appear out of season.

“Regarding men of the present generation who wish to repent their past [activities] and to reform in the future, they must purify their minds with the severe fast, confess their transgressions to the Three Honoured Ones,³⁹ [cultivate] the Four Virtues⁴⁰ and care for their relatives. [118c1] They must be loyal to their sovereigns, and compassionately reprove and admonish [others], and with utmost sincerity be without duplicity. Turning away from former wrongdoings and cultivating in the future by rejecting the restraints of evil, this then is the Way of purity. For those who repent evil actions they will then be correct and true. Of Indra and the Four Heavenly Kings there will be no one who will not rejoice. The sun and moon will shine brightly, the (movements) of the planets and constellations will be constant, wind and rain will come at the right time, and harmful vapours (*duqi*) will cease. Sweet dew⁴¹ will fall from heaven and from the ground will gush forth springs. Water and crops will be full of flavour, and by eating them diseases will be annihilated. The colours of flowers will be abundant, and the span of life [of sentient beings] will be greatly increased. Those who are born [into this life] will not experience being put in gaols, and those who die will obtain rebirth in heaven on high. [Once there,] happiness and virtues will come in accordance with one’s wishes, and one will spontaneously be able to fly. [Furthermore] coming into and going out of existence will be free from problems, and from the crown of one’s head there will be rays like the sun. Food will be spontaneously transformed, and there will be no one who will suffer from want. The body will have a fragrant purity, and the breath [coming out] of the mouth will be fragrant. Now, they will dwell in the heavens in the halls of the gods in the sun and moon, the planets and the constellations, inside the seven precious palatial halls, or suspended in empty space in ac-

³⁸ Literally: the monks.

³⁹ i.e. *Buddha*, *dharma* and *saṃgha*.

⁴⁰ As mentioned above, these consist of (1) *maitrī*, (2) *karuṇā*, (3) *muditā*, and (4) *upekṣā*. Cf. *Foguang da cidian*, comp. Foguang dazang jing bianxiu weiyuan hui, Gaoxiong: Foguang chuhan she, 1988 (hereafter *FDC*), Vol. 2, p. 1777a.

⁴¹ *ganlu*, i.e. ambrosia.

cordance with their wishes. When that life is over they will be born below⁴² into a royal family. Their facial features will be glowing, pleasing to those who see them. They will meet with the Buddha, come into contact with the Dharma, and [eventually] join the virtuous and holy.⁴³ Through their power of practice they will not meet with anything unwholesome, but will certainly obtain *nirvāṇa* (*nihuan*). How much more so will someone who keeps all the five precepts and who performs the Ten Good Practices.

[118c13] When one keeps one's affections in check and restrains one's desires, then the maintaining of the six fast days will be natural. At the time of Krakucchanda Buddha⁴⁴ man's life span was sixty thousand years. The nature of people was unmoving, and they protected and nourished one another like they did themselves, in an equal manner of non-duality. However, when a Buddha departs from the world, the correct teaching declines. Without correct practice people will gradually be drawn towards evil, and their life span will gradually decrease until it reaches one hundred years. After I have well departed, people will come to disregard my teaching, and no one will be filial. The Officer of Life Spans⁴⁵ diminishes by calculation the length of life [of these people], which will decrease daily. The gods and spirits will have no shrines, evil pestilences and bad demons will arrive daily to encroach [upon people]. In short, calamities and strange phenomena in full manifestation, and prayers with the purpose of contradicting that which is without fault, will be rampant. Being born, one will suffer imprisonment according to the kin's law, and at death one will enter hell or be reborn as a *preta* or an animal of burden. If one should happen to appear as a human being then it will be in a lowly state.

[118c20] "Good and evil accompany the body just like the case with the five grains, in accordance with which kind one obtains the corresponding fruit. Or it is like reading at night: when the fire is put out the characters are hidden from view [although they are still there]. When the body dies the name is extinguished, but retribution is not obliterated. Carefully protect oneself and keep one's mouth closed.⁴⁶ If one adheres to the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Activities the Way will be obtained. I therefore instruct you to obtain the Buddha's accumulated practices which I have taught." When all the monks heard this discourse they became very happy, prostrated to the Buddha by placing their heads on the ground and took their leave.

⁴² i.e. on earth (Jambudvīpa).

⁴³ i.e. the community of monks and nuns.

⁴⁴ He is the first Buddha in the present *kalpa*, and the fourth in the group of the Seven Buddhas of the Past. Cf. *FDC*, Vol. 4, pp. 3270a–71a.

⁴⁵ Siming (i.e. the Kitchen God, Siming Shen), also known as "Controller of Destinies".

⁴⁶ i.e. fast.

3. The Message of *The Scripture of the Four Heavenly Kings*

As we have seen above, the *Si tianwang jing* opens with a description of the usual assembly scene in the manner of the traditional *sūtras* belonging to both vehicles, with Śākyamuni presiding over an assembly of monks in the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada in Śrāvastī. Although the Four Heavenly Kings, i.e. Dhṛtarāṣṭra (East), Virūḍhaka (South), Virūpākṣa (West), and Vaiśrāvaṇa (North),⁴⁷ are the main protagonists in the scripture (as indicated by the title), it is Śākyamuni who delivers the entire discourse. The scripture begins with a general exhortation given by the Buddha to the monks in the assembly, who are encouraged strictly to guard their minds and senses against defilements, and to maintain the monthly fast days and the precepts with great sincerity. The basic topics discussed in the *sūtra* concern the question of moral behaviour, and deal in detail with whether human beings adhere to the precepts and maintain the precepts on the six designated fast days of each month, the *uposadha*.⁴⁸ In order to check whether sentient beings in general are virtuous or not on these fast days, the Four Heavenly Kings residing on Mt. Meru send down to the world of the humans a messenger, a heavenly prince,⁴⁹ and finally they themselves descend to investigate. Having investigated they ascend to the Trayastriṃśās Heaven above Mt. Meru to report their findings to Indra, the sovereign of all the gods in the realm of form. Those who lead virtuous lives, and who uphold pure morals will experience an increase in their life span, and be protected by divine spirits as well, in accordance with the number of precepts they keep. At the time of death they will attain rebirth in the heavens. After having lived there for a very long time they will again be reborn among humans, but into a family with a high social status.

Those who lead a life devoid of morality, who are unfilial towards their parents, and are disrespectful towards the Three Jewels, will cause Indra and the other gods to become highly displeased. As a consequence the seasons will be brought into disarray, and the sun and moon will stop shining. If, however, people of the present age reform, repent, and perform their social obligations to their parents and the ruler, as well as maintain the fast days and keep the precepts, they will experience a happy life without problems and calamities. The sun and moon will shine, and the seasons will be regular. Crops and flowers will be abundant. At the time of death they will also be reborn in heaven, where they will experience all kinds of won-

⁴⁷ Here it should be mentioned that nowhere in the scripture are the Four Kings mentioned by their actual names. Instead they are referred to as *si tianwang*, *suwang*, or *si tianshenwang*.

⁴⁸ The practices undertaken during the fast are discussed in detail in the *Zhai jing* [Sūtra on the Fast], a translation from the mid-third century. Cf. T. 1/87: 910c–912a. For a more general discourse on the precepts to be held, see *Viśākhā* of the *Madhyamāgama*. T. 1/26: 770a–773a (ch. 55).

⁴⁹ Referred to in the text as *taizi*, who may be one of their own sons. The *Tianwang taizi Piluo jing* (Scripture of Prala, Son of the Heavenly King), T. 15/596, refers to such a heavenly prince by the name of “Piluo” (Prala?). Cf. T. 596: 130b–131a.

derful things. After their heavenly life comes to an end they again will be reborn as humans. Their social status will be excellent, and they will meet with the Buddha's *dharma*. Eventually they will join the *samgha* and attain *nirvāna*. Furthermore their life spans will increase greatly, and they will meet the coming Buddha, who will turn the Wheel of the Law. However, for those who refuse to reform, and who continue to commit evil actions, their life spans will decrease by direct intervention from the gods. They will meet with all kinds of hardship, and in the end they will be reborn in the hells or as *pretas*. Even if they should attain rebirth in the human realm, when they die they will be reborn in the hells, and even if they should later attain rebirth in the realm of men, they will experience a miserable and painful life with all kinds of affliction. The scripture ends with yet another admonition from the Buddha to his disciples, in which he urges them to lead a life of purity in accordance with the precepts.

In line with the above, the essential message of T. 590 concerns the issue of morality in relation to heavenly reward or punishment, in effect a concern that has always played a fairly central position in the way the Chinese conceived of their relationship with the unseen, but nevertheless highly powerful, divine forces. Beliefs in divine rewards and punishment may go back to the very rise of Chinese civilization in pre-history, but can be clearly documented to the Eastern Zhou period (771–256 BC), where it is found as part of the otherwise rational philosophy ascribed to Mozi (fl. c.5–4th century BC). In the chapter on “Understanding Demons” (Ming gui) we read:

Mozi spoke, saying, “Since the passing of the ancient three dynasties of Sage-Kings, the world has lost righteousness, and all the princes rule by means of might. Hence what has come to pass with regard to man is that sovereigns and ministers, high and low, are neither kind nor loyal. Father and son, older and younger brother are neither compassionate nor submissive, neither respectful nor upright. The leaders do not insist on taking care of government, and the men below do not insist on according with their affairs. The people act immorally and are cruel, and highwaymen and bandits with weapons such as swords, poison, water and fire stop innocent people on the roads and tracks, taking from them their carts, horses, clothes and fur coats, with which they enrich themselves. Starting with this the world fell into disorder. But what is the reason for this? It is all caused by doubt as to the existence or non-existence of the demons and spirits, and the lack of understanding that they are able to reward virtue and punish cruelty. Now, if all men in the world could be made to believe in the ability of the demons and spirits to reward virtue and punish cruelty, how could there be disorder?”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Mozi xianggu* [The Mozi with Interlinear Commentary], ch. 8, *Zhuzi jicheng* [Complete Col-

As can be seen here, the power of the spirit world over that of human affairs would seem to have played a fairly important role in the thought of Mozi. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to delve deeper into this fascinating aspect of Eastern Zhou philosophy, the above excerpt must suffice as evidence for the early belief in the ability of the beings of the spirit world to enforce judgement on the lives of human beings in a concrete and direct manner. What is perhaps most important to note in this respect, is that the basis on which the spirits reward or punish beings in Mozi's thought, is a universal moral system.⁵¹ Hence, as far as rationale and function go, this facet of Eastern Zhou belief matches fairly closely with the later syncretic belief as found in the *Si tianwang jing*.

Since the time of Dong Zhongshu (fl. 179–104 BC) of the Former Han, and ostensibly even earlier, a hybrid system of belief incorporating Yin-Yang philosophy, Five Elements theories, and Confucian morals had arisen, in which a direct correspondence between the moral behaviour of man (in particular that of the ruler) and responses from Heaven as reflected in natural phenomena interpreted as omens. Such omens or “indicators of Heavenly Will” could manifest themselves in positive ways, such as bountiful harvests, peace and social stability, but might on the negative side involve droughts, floods, plagues, war, etc.⁵² In the course of time this kind of belief had filtered down to the common people through the process that has been aptly described by Stephan Feuchtwang as “The Imperial Metaphor”, where it eventually became an integrated part of popular belief.⁵³ Hence, if a person was immoral, or otherwise behaved contrary to the social norm, such as being unfilial or breaking the various taboos, he or she was likely to be afflicted with the punishment of Heaven in the form of disease, or even stricken by death, depending on the severity of the case. This kind of punishment was seen as a sign of the unseen powers showing their displeasure, or it might simply indicate that the person in question was not in balance with the natural forces, and hence liable to incur the wrath of the spirits.⁵⁴ Punishment or retribution as exacted by the heavenly powers was conceived of in a bureaucratic manner, i.e. a divine hierarchy of gods and spirits constituted the punishing agents. Eventually the Chinese started inventing methods

lection [of the Works] of All the Philosophers], Vol. 4, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1978, pp. 138–9.

⁵¹ Thanks are due to Bent Nielsen for pointing out to me this aspect of Mozi's thought.

⁵² Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. II, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 55–8. See also Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979, pp. 6–9.

⁵³ Stephan Feuchtwang, *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 1–24.

⁵⁴ Some interesting observations in this regard have been made in Maeda Shigeki, “The Evolution of the Way of the (Celestial Master: Its Early View of Divinities”, *Acta Asiatica* 68 (1995), pp. 54–68. See also Whalen Lai, “The Chinese Universe of Moral Discourse: A Postmodern Appreciation”, *Ching Feng* 32:2 (1989), pp. 85–100.

against heavenly punishment, and it is among the earliest groups of organized Daoist religion that arose during the late Eastern Han that we find the first systematic rituals, including petitions to the heavenly powers, and pseudo-medical proscriptions to counteract the gods' displeasure with human morals.⁵⁵

On the basis of what has now been said about the *Si tianwang jing* it is apparent that it contains certain elements that are very im-Indian, not to say un-Buddhist. There can be no doubt that the way the heavenly powers are envisaged in this scripture reflects to a considerable extent concerns that are typical for Chinese popular religion. Indeed, on closer examination we find a number of other features that solidly support this. I would not go as far as to see the syncretism of the three religions as reflecting a *sanjiao* or three religions-type of teaching—at least not if it is understood as an integrated system of thought—but it is a fact that the scripture contains elements of early Buddhism and Daoism, as well as Confucianism.⁵⁶ Of course the outer framework of the scripture is based on a world view heavily influenced by Buddhist cosmology, but its purely Buddhist elements on asceticism and meditation are limited to a few passages at the beginning and the end. Basically the *Si tianwang jing* does not talk much about the practice of individual liberation which leads to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, but largely confines its discourse to the issue of worldly morals.

This leads us to the question concerning the religious milieu and social context in which the *Si tianwang jing* arose. Some years ago Whalen Lai made a study of what he referred to as “the earliest folk Buddhist religion in China” with reference to the apocryphal scripture, the *Tiwei Boli jing* [Trapuṣa and Bhallika Sūtra],⁵⁷ and the development of the *yiyi* associations under the Northern Wei.⁵⁸ In this study the author refers to popular Buddhism of

⁵⁵ It was for example a commonly shared belief among the early followers of the early Daoist sect, the Tianshi Dao, that sickness and disease was caused by the individual's leading a morally deficient life. For more information on this, cf. Michel Strickmann, “Therapeutische Rituale und das Problem des Bösen im frühen Taoismus”, in: *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien (Festschrift für Hans Steininger)*, ed. G. Naundorf et. al., Würzburg: Dr. Johannes Königshausen and Dr. Thomas Neumann, pp. 185–200. See also Anna Seidel, “Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950–1990”, *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 5 (1989–90), pp. 257–8. For a discussion of the question of morals and retribution, cf. Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence”, *TP LXVI*, 1:3 (1980), pp. 84–147 (esp. pp. 135–41).

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the concept of *jiao* in relation to the harmonization between Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism during the Nanbei Zhao period, see Kobayashi Masayoshi, *Rokuchō dōkyō shi kenkyū* [A Study of the History of Daoism During the Six Dynasties], Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1990, pp. 511–38.

⁵⁷ So far the most authoritative study of this apocryphal scripture can be found in: Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū* [A Study of Apocryphal Sūtras], Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976, pp. 148–220.

⁵⁸ Cf. Whalen W. Lai, “The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China: T'i-wei Po-li Ching and Its Historical Significance”, in: *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell, *Buddhist and Taoist Studies II*, Asian Studies at Hawaii 34, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, pp. 11–35.

the type expounded in the *Tiwei Bnli jing* as “[T]he plebeian Buddhist faith known as *Jen-t’ien-chiao*, ‘Man-Heaven Teachings’”.⁵⁹ However, despite the fact that the scripture certainly deals with a popular form of fifth century Chinese Buddhism mixed with many elements taken from Daoism and popular religion, Lai appears to have mistaken certain essential features of this type of Buddhism. First of all, the concept of *rentian jiao* does not mean “Man-Heaven Teachings”, but “the teachings pertaining to men and gods”, and as such refers to the particular type of teachings attributed to the historical Buddha in which he taught issues relating to so-called worldly matters, including public morals, rulership, the family, and the performance of virtuous behaviour leading to rebirth as a god in the heavens.⁶⁰ The *rentian jiao* does not—as Lai has contended—constitute “a third vehicle” in Chinese Buddhism, but is a basic aspect of traditional Buddhism, and can be said to constitute its most common spiritual denominator. Lai somehow confuses this and complicates the issue further by referring to it as “pre-Hīnayāna”.⁶¹ To anyone just slightly familiar with Buddhist doctrine and history of ideas the “this-worldly”, or relative, class of teachings, i.e. those that do not deal with liberation from the cycle of birth and death *per se*, form an integral part of the general structure of the religion. Such teachings are abundantly found in the Pāli Canon, as well as in the standard Mahāyāna *sūtras*, and one needs only recall the *Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣiayavikurvaṇanirdeśasūtra*,⁶² the *Gandavyūhasūtra*,⁶³ the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādasūtra*,⁶⁴ the *Suvarṇaprabhāśasūtra*,⁶⁵ or the *Shi shanye dao jing* [Sūtra on the Way of the Ten Good Karmas],⁶⁶ in order to see this general aspect of Buddhism fully developed. Even the founder of the Madhyamaka system of thought, the celebrated Nāgārjuna (fl. 2nd century AD), was the author of at least two treatises that deal extensively with “the teaching of men and gods”.⁶⁷ Hence, I am of the opinion that *rentian jiao* should not be seen as “a daring experiment in founding a new brotherhood” as Lai conjectures, but as another name for the

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ For a brief and highly useful introduction to this concept in the context of Chinese Buddhism, see Peter N. Gregory, “The Teaching of Men and Gods: The Doctrinal and Social Basis of Lay Buddhist Practice in Hua-yen Tradition”, in: *Studies in Ch’an and Hua-yen*, ed. Robert M. Gimello and Peter N. Gregory, Studies in East Asian Buddhism I, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983, pp. 254–63.

⁶¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

⁶² T. 9/271.

⁶³ T. 10/294.

⁶⁴ T. 11/310 (48).

⁶⁵ T. 16/665.

⁶⁶ T. 15/600.

⁶⁷ Cf. the *Suḥṛlleka*, *Ratnāvalī*, and the *Fugai zhengxing suo ji jing* [The Umbrella of Blessings of Correct Practices Collection of Scriptures], cf. T. 32/1673 and T. 32/1671. For further information on the first two of these works, see Christian Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Buddhist Traditions, Vol. 2, Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidas, 1982, pp. 163–89, 218–24.

most basic and popularized teachings in Buddhism irrespective of affiliation to the Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna traditions, namely how to lead a karmically good and pure life free of suffering, and later to be reborn in a better state.⁶⁸ In the Chinese context this kind of teaching is an even more interesting phenomenon because the *rentian jiao* may have been the most obvious interface with the moral systems of the Daoist and Confucian traditions. Furthermore it probably served as the most ideal vehicle for assimilating elements from the indigenous religious traditions, including the various strains of popular belief that otherwise defy strict sectarian classification.

Although the *Si tianwang jing* does contain so-called “higher teachings” of Buddhism, i.e. instructions on liberation through entering *nirvāṇa*, its essential message on attaining long life, receiving blessings, and escaping from misfortune and a lowly rebirth, are precisely the kinds of teaching which characterize the *rentian jiao*. Although the opening of the scripture appears to be meant for a monastic audience, it soon becomes clear that it was chiefly meant for the laity. This seems clear from its references to typical lay concerns such as filial piety (in the Confucian sense), long life, harmonious seasons, bountiful harvest, clean water, robbers, and corrupt officials, matters which would normally be of little or no concern to a monk. Furthermore, the fact that the *Si tianwang jing* is devoid of philosophical issues would seem to indicate that its readership was primarily concerned with the worldly aspects of Buddhism.

The institution of fasting and fast days in Chinese Buddhism, the central theme around which the discourse of the *Si tianwang jing* revolves, has a long and interesting history in China.⁶⁹ Originating from the traditional Indian Buddhist practice of *uposadha*, during which the ordained members of the *saṃgha* purified themselves by refraining from eating, the meaning and intent of this practice was altered greatly when Buddhism was transplanted to Chinese soil. In the course of this process the meaning of the term *zhai* in the Buddhist context took on the meaning of “abstinence from ...” rather than “fasting” proper. “Abstinence” was interpreted as “abstinence from meat-eating”, while *zhai* as a term came to indicate purified food, i.e. a vegetarian diet.⁷⁰

During the early phase of the Indian religion’s assimilation and taking root in China, it would appear that the number of fast days was limited to

⁶⁸ Lai’s contention is in “The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China”, p. 19.

⁶⁹ For early primary Buddhist sources in Chinese, cf. T. 1/87, and T. 1/26: 770a–773a (ch. 55). See also the brief description of this phenomenon in: Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese. Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, tr. F. Verellen, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 257–9.

⁷⁰ For an interesting study of vegetarianism in East Asian Buddhism, see Shimoda Masahiro, “Tō Ajia bukkyō no kairitsu no tokushoku: Nikushoku kinshi no yurai o megutte” [Distinctive Features of the Precepts in East Asian Buddhism: On the Prohibition Against Meat-Eating], *Tōyō Gakujutsu kenkyū* 24:4 (1990), pp. 98–110.

six days each month, as well as on a certain number of days on specially designated “fasting months”. At some point during the Nanbei Chao actual fasting seems to have been given up as a common practice among the growing Buddhist laity, and was supplanted by the holding of vegetarian banquets, i.e. the eating of “pure flood”. This transition should undoubtedly be seen against the background of the cult of eating—one of the most salient and important features of Chinese culture—which would have made actual fasting highly unpopular among the Buddhist laity and populace at large.

Under the Tang and later periods, the fast days appear to have been universally interpreted as “meat-less” days, i.e. days when a pure vegetarian diet was upheld. Proper fasting on these days may still have been *de rigueur* among pious members of the Buddhist community—lay and clerical alike—but for the average lay person vegetarian fare was apparently considered sufficient “mortification of the flesh”. From the manuscripts found in the Mogao Caves around the turn of this century we learn that during the tenth century the Buddhists associations there held six monthly vegetarian banquets on the first, eighth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-fourth, and twenty-eighth days, and three major banquets in the first, fifth, and ninth months each year.⁷¹

The message of the *Si tianwang jing* concerning the *zhai* is, however, straightforward. The text clearly stipulates that actual fasting should be maintained on the six designated fast days, which both indicates that the text belongs to the early strata of apocryphal writing (or rather composition) of Buddhist scriptures in China, and that this injunction seems to have been specifically meant for monks. Otherwise the scripture features a strong secular twist, and—as mentioned previously—appears to address a mainly lay audience.

4. Analysis of The Scripture of the Four Heavenly Kings

It is likely that someone without much background in Buddhism may not detect anything odd about the *Si tianwang jing* as such, but as mentioned above, there is a number of features in the scripture which are strictly non-Buddhist. In order to establish exactly which aspects of the scripture are foreign to Buddhism, we shall take a look at some of the Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures that in their contents can be related to the *Si tianwang jing*. To this end let us begin by identifying the various traditional Buddhist elements the scripture contains.

As regards the overall form of T. 590, it is evidently composed in a manner that closely resembles many traditional *sūtras*, including works from the *Āgama* class in particular. As we shall see below this is certainly not a coincidence. First of all as concerns the location where the *sūtra* is spoken, the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada, the Benefactors of Orphans and the Destitute,

⁷¹ Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 270.

in the town of Śrāvastī, is of course common to a large number of canonical *sūtras*. Immediately after the opening injunction on how to lead a life in moral and bodily purity, the text, however, becomes strangely disjointed, and it clearly begins to lose its inner coherence. Suddenly the concept of impermanence of human existence is introduced in a sentence that resembles the famous concluding verse in the *Vajracchedikā*, and without further ado the Buddha changes the direction of his discourse on the practice of asceticism to that of the monthly fast days and the subsequent inspection carried out by the gods, the benefits of leading a sound moral life, the disadvantages of leading an immoral one, etc. The *sūtra* ends in the manner characteristic of numerous canonical scriptures, in which the followers rejoice at the Buddha's final words of admonition, bow down, and take their leave. However, like the opening passage, this way of ending a *sūtra* is basically formulaic rather than representative, and is therefore not sufficient evidence that the *Si tianwang jing* is a genuine *sūtra*.

As far as the contents go, the emphasis of the *Si tianwang jing* is on moral behaviour, long life, and the attainment of bliss in a future existence, all main features of the *rentian jiao* type of Buddhism discussed above. In addition the scripture also refers to the more liberating forms of Buddhist practice including reflection on impermanence, *dhyaṇa*, repentance, and asceticism in general. Hence, it would be incorrect to see it as expounding a purely “this-worldly” doctrine. At a superficial glance most of the figures appearing in T. 590 would seem to belong to the standard Indian Buddhist pantheon. They include Śākyamuni Buddha, the Four Heavenly Kings, Indra, the Thirty-three Gods, and even the princely messengers.

When these observations have been made, our attention shall now be directed towards a number of *sūtras* from the Chinese canon with which the *Si tianwang jing* shares some resemblance in both contents and style, and which beyond any doubt can be considered genuine translations of Indian scriptures. To this end I have identified five early *sūtras* that all contain similar information on the fast days and the gods.

The first of these is the *Foshuo zhai jing* [Sūtra on the Fasts],⁷² translated by Zhiqian (fl. first half of the third century) between AD 223–53 of the Wu dynasty (222–80). By all accounts this makes it the earliest scripture in China to discuss the Four Heavenly Kings and the institution of the *upoṣadha*, i.e. the six fast days. In addition to setting forth eight precepts and the ritual proceedings for the fasts, the *Zhai jing* discusses at length the various karmic benefits connected with holding the fasts. Special emphasis is given to rebirth as a god in one of the heavens together with the span of life one will have. While the gods on the level of the Four Heavenly Kings have a life span of five hundred years only, those who are reborn as gods in the Tusita Heaven live for four thousand years. Although no direct

⁷² T. 1/87.

Sanskrit equivalent of this *sūtra* is extant, there can be little doubt as to its being a genuine Indian scripture of the *rentian jiao* class.⁷³ The scripture does not mention the moral inspection by the gods, nor is it concerned with the punishment of evil, good or bad seasons, etc. Its major focus is obviously on the natural attainment of rebirth as a long-lived god in the heavens above Mt. Sumeru on the basis of the accumulation of virtuous *karma*. What is of interest to the present purpose is the fact that the concepts of moral behaviour, i.e. keeping the precepts, rebirth as a long-lived god due to the keeping of the fasts, and the Four Heavenly Kings, all appear in a scripture that was available in China no later than the mid-third century. This means that from this date onwards the Chinese were gradually being exposed to Indian cosmology and the concept of karmic retribution leading to rebirth in accordance with the *rentian jiao*. Furthermore, it indicates that the essential Buddhist elements found in the *Si tianwang jing* were present in China by this time.

The other four scriptures relevant to our purpose appear in the *Āgamas* and include the *Shiji jing* [Sūtra Describing the World] of the *Dīrghāgama*,⁷⁴ the *Qishi yinben jing* [Sūtra on the Cause and Origin of the World],⁷⁵ the *Dalou tan jing* [Sūtra of the Great Tower of Charcoal],⁷⁶ and the *Qishijing* [Sūtra on the Origin of the World],⁷⁷ all of which contain passages that are similar or nearly identical to passages found in T. 590.⁷⁸ Let us first take a look at the *Dalou tan jing*, and see what it has to say about the fast days:

The Buddha said, “The fifteenth day has three fasts. And which are these three? They are the eighth day, the tenth day, and the fifteenth day fasts of each month.” He further said, “Why is it that the eighth day of each month is a fast day? [It is because] on the fast day of the eighth of each month [the Four Heavenly Kings] address their messengers saying, descend to observe the activities of all under the four heavens and inspect the ten thousand peoples. Find out whether those living in the world fulfil their filial obligations towards their parents or not; whether there are those

⁷³ Similar information as regards the length of the gods’ life-span is given in T. 1/1: 133h (ch. 20). See also Xiao Dengfu, *Han-Wei-Liuchao fodao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo* [Information on Heaven and Hell by the Two Religions Buddhism and Daoism during the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties], Daojiao yanjiu zongshu, Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989, pp. 36–42.

⁷⁴ T. 1/1: 134b–144a (ch. 20–2).

⁷⁵ T. 1/25.

⁷⁶ T. 1/23. This *sūtra* is also found in Sengyou’s catalogue, the *Chu sanzang jiji*. Confer T. 55/2145: 9c (ch. 2).

⁷⁷ T. 1/24.

⁷⁸ These *sūtras* are sometimes described as being identical in their contents; however, a brief comparison reveals that this is not so. Despite their many similarities, they differ on several significant points. Furthermore, they belong to different strata of translations. The *Dīrghāgama* was translated by Buddhayaśas and Zhufonian in AD 413, while the *Qishi jing* was translated between AD 585 and 600.

who support the *śramaṇeras* and *brahmins* of the Way or not; whether there are those who respect the Elders or not; whether there are those on the Way who uphold the fast and keep the precepts; whether there are those who are generous or not; and whether there are those who have faith in the present and coming existences.⁷⁹

Having gone down to the world to inspect, the messenger then returns to report that there are sentient beings who actually do these things, but that there are also many who offend against them. The *sūtra* then continues with a description of what takes place on the fourteenth day of the month, where the Four Heavenly Kings this time order their princely sons, four in number, to descend to observe and inspect the activities of all beings. The same report is given upon their return to Mt. Meru, and on the next day, i.e. on the fifteenth day of the month, the Four Heavenly Kings descend in person to the world of the humans to observe whether they are virtuous or not. Having finished their investigation they re-ascend to heaven, where they report to Indra and the other gods. These in turn express sorrow or happiness upon hearing of the bad or good tidings brought them by the Four Heavenly Kings. The basic message here seems to be that the gods are pleased when humans are virtuous and fulfil their religious and civil obligations.⁸⁰ This passage then concludes the information on the fast days of each month as given in the *Dalou tan jing*. Note that only three fast days are mentioned in this scripture. Following this is a passage on how virtuous people will be protected by spirits against the various kind of evil. However, the scripture does not mention that the gods intervene in the life spans of sentient beings, no matter what their moral status.

The *Shiji jing* has a discussion of the three fast days which in many ways resembles that contained in the *Dalou tan jing*. Here we read as follows:

Bhikṣus! Each month has three fast [days]. He [i.e. the Buddha] further said, “And what are these three? They are the fast on the eighth day of the month, the fast on the fourteenth day, and the fast on the fifteenth day. These are the three fasts. Why is there a fast on the eighth day of the month? It is because on every eighth day of the month the Four Heavenly Kings order their messenger, saying, ‘You must observe the activities of the world below and investigate the behaviour of the ten-thousand people ...’”⁸¹

The text then continues more or less along the same lines as the of the *Dalou tan jing*. What is important here is to note that the three fast days are fixed

⁷⁹ T. 1/23: 298a–b.

⁸⁰ T. 1/23: 298b.

⁸¹ T. 1/1: 134b (ch. 20).

to the eighth, fourteenth and fifteenth days in every month, that the gods under the supervision of the Heavenly Kings observe the merits and demerits of sentient beings on these days, and that their behaviour produces karmic retribution automatically.

One of the most elaborate descriptions of divine response to the upholding of the precepts in connection with the fast days can be found in the *Lishi apitan lun* (Lokotthānābhīdharma?),⁸² translated by Paramārtha in AD 588–559. Like the *Qishi jing* this work deals with the structure and “physical realities” of the Buddhist cosmos, focusing especially on Mt. Sumeru, the abode of the gods, and the Netherworld. When describing the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods presided over by Indra, this scripture deals directly with the proceedings that take place in the so-called “Hall of the Law” (*fatang*) in connection with the reports on the behaviour by sentient beings, as handed in by the Four Heavenly Kings.

The text reads to the effect that all the gods, surrounding Indra, pay him their respects, standing by the central pillar of the hall. Following this Indra ascends his throne, having sixteen gods seated to his right, sixteen to his left, and with all the lesser gods at a distance from him according to their respective ranks. Flanking Indra on his right and left are his two sons, Candana and Suvīra, who are referred to as the two generals (*er da jiangjun*) of the Thirty-Three Gods. As part of Indra’s retinue each of the Four Heavenly Kings guards his respective directional gate, Dhṛtarāṣṭra to the east, Virūḍhaka to the south, Virūpākṣa to the west, and Vaiśrāvana to the north. They then report to the Thirty-Three Gods the good and evil deeds of all the world, as we have seen in the other scriptures with a similar content. On the eight, fourteenth and fifteenth day of every month, the Four Heavenly Kings journey to the world (*xing shijian*) to observe how well men are observing the prohibitions on the fast days.⁸³ They then report their findings to the Thirty-Three Gods, who are either sad or joyous, depending upon the nature of the report, and who then predict good or evil, respectively, for mankind.⁸⁴

⁸² T. 32/1644. As far as I am aware there is no extant Sanskrit or Tibetan version of this work.

⁸³ The eight prohibitions are specified as follows: (a) not to take the life of sentient beings (Skt. *prāṇātīpāta, sha sheng*), (b) not to take what is not given (Skt. *adattādāna, bu yuqu*), (c) not to be unchaste (Skt. *abrahmacaryā, fei fanxing*), (d) not to tell lies (Skt. *mṛsāvāda, kuangyu*), (e) not to consume intoxicating drink (Skt. *madyapāna, yin zhu jiu*), (f) not to sleep on high or wide beds (Skt. *uccaśayanamahāśayana, mianzuo gaoguang yanli chuang zuo*), (g) not to use scents, garlands, ointments or pastes (Skt. *gandhamālyavilepanavarṇakadhāraṇa, tushi xiangman*), as well as song and dance (Skt. *nṛtyagīta, wuge guanting*), (h) not to eat at improper times, i.e. any but the one authorized meal of the day, to be consumed between dawn and noon (Skt. *vikālbhojanā, ski feishi shi*). Among good deeds are stressed the giving of alms, deference to parents and household elders, to Brahmins and ascetics and, above all, to Buddhist monks.

⁸⁴ T. 32/1644: 181a–184a.

This description of the Hall of the Law of course bears some resemblance to a judicial court, with Indra as the judge, the Thirty-Three Gods as his assistants and Indra's sons, the Four Heavenly Kings, as tribunal officers. This passage may indeed have been read as such by the Chinese. However, nowhere in the *Lishi apitan lun*, nor in any of the other Indian Buddhist scriptures discussed here, are the gods actually involved in punishing sinners by shortening their lives, or otherwise play any active roles in determining the lives of sentient beings. It is through their own actions that beings create the potential for future lives, good or bad. The *Qishi yinben jing* spells this out in great detail. An example follows:

All bhikṣus! Sentient beings in the world all commit the three kinds of evil activity. And what are these three? They are evil committed with body, speech and mind. All bhikṣus! As regards the first type of evil activity committed with body, speech and mind, in this manner has it been done. ... The body at the time of death will immediately be reborn in hell in accordance with its evil disposition.⁸⁵

And so forth. The scripture also mentions the three kinds of wholesome activity, which are described along the same line of diction. Again it is clear that there are no external agents involved in shaping the karma of those who receive retribution. Whether they are reborn in hell or in one of the heavens is entirely dependent on their own previous activities.

One of the main problems that arise from utilizing the material found in the above *Āgama* scriptures is the fact that only the *Shiji jing* as a translation belongs to the same period as the *Si tianwang jing*. There can be no doubt that the *Si tianwang jing* builds on the same textual structure and contents as found in the *Dalou tan jing*, the *Qishi yinben jing*, the *Qishi jing*, and the *Lishi apitan lun*, since the style, diction, and even minor details such as specific sentences are rather similar if not sometimes identical. However, since the latter scriptures were translated almost two hundred years later than T. 590, i.e. during the middle of the Sui dynasty (581–618), only the *Dalou tan jing*, which was translated between AD 290–307 under the Western Jin (265–316), could have served as a direct model for the *Si tianwang jing*. Yet, it remains a fact that whoever composed our scripture must have had access to a canonical scripture or scriptures that closely resembled the *Qishi yinben jing* and the *Qishi jing*, in addition to the *Dalou tan jing*.

As regards the “foreign”, or non-Buddhist elements in our scripture, one of the most significant is that its insistence on divine judgement basically sets the Buddhist law of *karma* out of function. While the *Si tianwang jing* retains a rather traditional Indian preoccupation with asceticism, *dhyāna*, and the keeping of the precepts leading to moral purity and the eradication

⁸⁵ T. 1/25: 401a (ch. 7).

of impurity, the closely associated teaching of *karma* which we find in the above-mentioned Indian scriptures on which the *Si tianwang jing* is based, are essentially substituted with the legalistic Chinese concern for reward and punishment. Evil actions are no longer punished by the accumulation of evil *karma* for the individual, but punishment is meted out directly by a divine legal system.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the criterion for punishment or reward depends on whether one keeps or violates the ethical codex for correct behaviour as set forth by the Buddha himself. The nature of this form of divine punishment has—as we have already seen—its precedents in the Eastern Zhou, as well as the systems of belief prevalent during the Western Han dynasty, where the moral integrity of the sovereign was directly connected to the harmonization of the seasons. Beliefs of this type are reflected in the *Si tianwang jing* when we find that the gods punish evil humans by ordering the sun and moon to cease shining, and when they make the guardian spirits abandon sinners.

The consistent focus on longevity in the scripture should not be seen as evidence of Daoist influence *per se*, but more as the presence of a standard Chinese cultural element. However, it should come as no surprise that the *Si tianwang jing*'s concern for attaining a long life is a central feature shared by many apocryphal *sūtras* and can also be found in the *Foahuo tiandi bayang shenzhou jing* [The Buddha Discourses on the Scripture of the Eight-fold Yang Spiritual Mantra of Heaven and Earth].⁸⁷ The same holds good for the divine spirit protectors that guard the homes of the virtuous.⁸⁸ While the scripture does mention the extended life-spans of those who attain rebirth in the heavens in accordance with traditional Buddhist lore, it adds another dimension to this issue as well, namely that the gods' length of life is directly related to whether they were virtuous in their previous lives. In other words, a life lived in accordance with the prescribed moral system of the Buddhist precepts is rewarded by having additional years added to one's "normal" life-span (defined by the Chinese as one hundred years) whereas a life lived contrary to the precepts will result in the offender's being punished by having years subtracted from his or her length of life. As we have seen, the question is not one related to the law of cause and effect, but hinges on the operation of a system of punishment and reward administered by several external agents, including the heavenly messenger, the divine prince,

⁸⁶ In the *Devadūtasūtra* (*Tianshi jing*) of the *Madhyamāgama*, T. 1/26: 503a–506b (ch. 12), a late-fourth century translation, it is explained how, due to their evil *karma*, sentient beings are reborn in the hells, where they must undergo countless sufferings. The idea is that the hells exist as a product of the evil *karma* accumulated, i.e. they should not be seen as a kind of "permanent" or pre-existent judicial institution independent of those who are reborn there. That view only developed long after Buddhism had become assimilated in China.

⁸⁷ T. 85/2897: 1422b–1425b. For a discussion of the contents of this scripture, see Daniel L. Overmyer, "Buddhism in the Trenches: Attitudes toward Popular Religion in Chinese Scriptures Found at Tun-Huang", *HJAS* 50:1 (1990), pp. 197–222.

⁸⁸ T. 85/2897: 1422c.

the Four Heavenly Kings, the Kitchen God, and Indra. While the Kitchen God does the actual accounting in terms of the number of years to be added or subtracted, it is Indra who as the sovereign of the gods presides over the heavenly bureaucracy. In this capacity he comes close to playing the same role associated with Yu Di, the Jade Emperor in later popular Chinese religion, or Yama, the Lord of the Netherworld. Although the *Si tianwang jing* is somewhat unclear as to who in the heavenly bureaucracy passes the final verdict as regards rewards and punishment, it is evident that the response to the moral issue remains essentially the prerogative of the divine forces. Strangely as it may seem in a Buddhist text, the law of *karma* has somehow been substituted by an almost heavenly legalist system. This of course directly contravenes the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect, and as such removes—or at least neutralizes—the inner logic of the *Si tianwang jing* as an orthodox *sūtra*.

In addition to having one's life span shortened due to evil behaviour, the gods also cause the seasons to come out of order. This is yet another characteristic belief rooted in pre-Han and Han religion. The *Tiwei Boli jing*, mentioned above in connection with *rentian jiao*, is also interesting in this respect. Although it is much longer and deals with a number of different issues than the *Si tianwang jing*, we find in it various passages that match well. Most notably the *Tiwei Boli jing* explains how the imbalance of the seasons is caused by the Five Elements' being brought out of order due to the evil activities of sentient beings, in effect an extended argument of the kind we found in Mozi.

Although we also find the concept of heavenly messengers descending to the world of humans to observe their moral state in the Indian *sūtras*, it is clearly a concept with which the Chinese were very familiar. Not only were censors and public investigators a common thing in Chinese society and culture, but the Chinese view of the divine bureaucracy, which by extension was a copy of the human one, also included divine overseers and reporters who informed the heavenly authorities of the behaviour of human beings below.⁸⁹

Perhaps the most popular (and feared) of these divine “spies”, was the Controller of Destinies, popularly known as the “Kitchen God”, who every year just before New Year left his abode among humans and went to heaven to report on human activities done during the precious year. Closely connected with this belief was that of reward and punishment, something which was usually done by adding or subtracting yeirs from the lives of humans. Essentially a very un-Buddhist concept, as we have seen, the Officer of Life Span

⁸⁹ In this connection the *Taiping jing* contains valuable information. Cf. *Taiping jing hejiao* (Complete Collation of the Taiping Jing), ed. Wang Ming, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, ch. 42, pp. 88–97. See also the discussion of the officials of the netherworld, *ibid.*, ch. 40, pp. 73–4; the Tianjun as divine judge, ch. 110–11; and the Officer of Life Spans, ch. 114, p. 600.

appears in our text in precisely this function. How and when this god was first introduced into the Buddhist pantheon is not easy to answer, but as he was one of the most important divinities in Chinese popular religion prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the Middle Kingdom, it probably took place at an early stage, and most certainly before the foreign religion was sufficiently strong to eradicate such heretical beliefs. In any case the role of the Kitchen God as a messenger and informer for the gods is essentially limited to popular Chinese Buddhism at the level where any clear distinction between the Three Religions and general folk beliefs is no longer relevant.

The reference in the *Si tianwang jing* to the county magistrate among the list of things to be avoided would also seem to be a fairly straightforward Chinese concept. Of course corrupt officials would not be foreign to the Indian cultural sphere at the beginning of the present era, however direct mention of them as an evil phenomenon comparable to their traditional role in Chinese society is uncommon if not unknown in the Indian Buddhist scriptures. In the material relating to Chinese popular religion and beliefs there are of course numerous examples of local officials, i.e. magistrates, being conceived on a par with pestilences and demonic visitations. For example, we find among the Dunhuang material an apocryphal scripture, the *Xiangfa jueyi jing* [Scripture on the Allaying of Doubts [Concerning the Period of] Semblance of the Dharma],⁹⁰ which deals with the state of the *samgha* after the demise of the Buddha, also warns against corrupt officials.⁹¹ We also find a special class of talismans that protect against the tax authorities, and matters that relate to the jurisdiction of local government.⁹² It appears that it is in this light that the *Si tianwang jing*'s negative view of district magistrates should be seen.

5. Fast Days and Divine Control in Later Chinese Buddhism

As far as can be ascertained the *Si tianwang jing* is the earliest scripture to make a connection between the six fast days and the idea of divine rewards and punishment. Even a brief comparison between it and the *Tiwei Boli jing* reveals that many of the concepts and ideas contained in the latter work are obviously closely related. However, the latter scripture is much more diverse and elaborate, and it clearly features a more fully integrated discourse, in which the structural elements of traditional Indian Buddhist lore and the indigenous Chinese beliefs are completely blended to form a coherent system

⁹⁰ T. 85/2870: 1335c–1338c.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 1337b.

⁹² Cf. the *Foshuo qiān fo shēnfu jing*, T. 85/2904: 1446a–c; and the *Longshu wuming lun* [The Five Sciences Treatise of Nāgārjuna], T. 21/1420: 957b–c. For an abbreviated presentation of the latter work, see Michel Strickmann, “The Seal of the Law: A Ritual Implement and the Origins of Printing”, *Asia Major*, Vol. 4:2 (1993), pp. 1–83 (esp. 55–64). Despite the somewhat misleading title, this article is a highly valuable contribution to the study of talismans and talismanic seals as used in Daoism and Buddhism.

of thought.⁹³ As mentioned earlier, the *Tiwei Boli jing* contains information on the thrice yearly long fasts, the six fast days, the keeping of the five precepts, protection of the homes of the virtuous by spirits, protection against officials and diseases, and the extension of the human life-span by virtuous behaviour, all features that are analogous to those of our scripture. Interestingly we find that Tanjing (fl. second half of the fifth century), the compiler of the *Tiwei Boli jing*, obviously knew the *Si tianwang jing*, or one of the related *sūtras*, since we find an almost verbatim description of how the gods descend to earth on the six fast days to investigate how beings deport themselves.⁹⁴ Lai overlooks this connection, and fails to realize the scriptural basis on which this section of the *Tiwei Boli jing* is based.⁹⁵ However, as regards the heavenly administration of rewards and punishment, which is set forth so clearly in the *Si tianwang jing*, Lai, when referring to this issue in his text, correctly notes, “Mechanical karmic justice requires no agents to administer it, but the Jen-t’ien-chiao admitted such adjudicators.”⁹⁶

When one compares the *Tiwei Boli jing* with the *Si tianwang jing*, the former goes considerably farther in its integration of the Buddhist ideas with those of the indigenous tradition, and as such would seem to represent a somewhat later tradition of trans-cultural synthesis. For example, we find that in its discussion of the fast days it correlates the designated periods with the seasonal transformations of *yin* and *yang*, something which is not mentioned in the *Si tianwang jing*.⁹⁷ This would seem to indicate that the general notions of the *Si tianwang jing* were rather common to popular Buddhism of the fifth century, and that as a consequence of this its message should be seen as being “mainstream” i.e. that it was probably a fairly important and common scripture in its own day. In any case it would have been representative of the kind of Buddhism that was practised by the majority of Chinese Buddhists at that time. However, there were other apocryphal scriptures which were indebted to the *Si tianwang jing*, and in which its message was being propagated.

The *Jinglu yixiang* [Sūtras and Vinaya]⁹⁸ compiled by Baochang (fl. early sixth century) and others during the Liang dynasty (502–57), contains a short section on the six fast days under the heading, “The Eight Messengers of the Eight Kings Examine Good and Evil on the Six Fast Days” (Bawangshi yu liu zhairi jianyue shan’e).⁹⁹ A note towards the end of the section mentions that the information comes from the *Jingdu sanmei jing* [Scripture of Samādhi

⁹³ Cf. Whalen Lai, “The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China”, pp. 11–35.

⁹⁴ Cf. Lai, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–5.

⁹⁵ This is of course primarily a problem when seen in relation to his contention that the *Tiwei Boli jing* is the oldest scriptural expression of the *rentian jiao*.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁷ Cf. Lai, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–5.

⁹⁸ T. 53/2121.

⁹⁹ T. 53/2121: 259c.

of Pure Liberation],¹⁰⁰ another apocryphal scripture.¹⁰¹ The excerpt reads as follows:

As regards the days of the Eight Kings,¹⁰² all gods [including] Indra, his entourage of ministers, thirty-two men in all,¹⁰³ the four guardian Great Kings,¹⁰⁴ the Controller of Destiny, the Controller of the Registers, Wuluo the Great King,¹⁰⁵ are the messengers of the Eight Kings.¹⁰⁶ They comprehensively produce four notifications, and a memorial on the activities of sentient beings]. Later it is managed by the Four [Heavenly] Kings, who on the fifteenth and thirtieth days [of the month] make their reports.¹⁰⁷

Following this the text goes on to describe the bureaucracy of the netherworld presided over by Yama and the Eight Kings. As can be seen, the above group of divine officials controlling the behaviour of sentient beings differs somewhat from that given in the *Si tianwang jing*, although the underlying concept is basically the same. However, when comparing the corresponding parts of the *Tiwei Boli jing* with the *Jingdu sanmei jing*, from which the above passage comes, they turn out to be rather similar. And they are furthermore both indebted to the *Si tianwang jing*. Whether there was a direct connection between these works or not, it is obvious that they both integrated information gleaned from the *Si tianwang jing* in much the same

¹⁰⁰ The first chapter of this scripture can be found in the *Dainihon zokuzōkyō* (revised 90-vol. edition, hereafter ZZ), Tokyo: Kokushō kankōkai, 1980–1990, 15.1. For the best study of the Dunhuang manuscripts of this scripture, including a modern recension, see Makita, *Gikyō kenkyū*, pp. 247–71. For a discussion of the Daoist elements it contains, cf. Xiao Dengfu, *Daojiao shuyiyu mijiao dianqi* [Daoist Ritual Methods in Esoteric Buddhist Scriptures], Taipei: Xinwen feng chuban gongju, 1994, pp. 484–6.

¹⁰¹ For the most recent information on the *Jingdu sanmei jing*, including a description of the recovery of a complete manuscript version in two *juan*, see Ochiai Toshinori, *The Manuscripts of Nanatsu-Dera*, Italian School of East Asian Studies Occasional Papers 3, Kyoto, 1991, pp. 35–6. The *Jinglu yixiang* is important for having preserved several passages from the *Jingdu sanmei jing*. Cf. T. 53/2121: 258c, 259b–c.

¹⁰² These are eight unnamed deities of the netherworld, who in this text act as the assistants of Yama. As pointed out by Stephen Teiser, they may be considered the prototypes of the later group of hell kings, who together with Yama came to constitute the important Ten Kings of the netherworld. Cf. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, pp. 174–5.

¹⁰³ Presumably this group, together with Indra, is thought to constitute the Thirty-Three Gods.

¹⁰⁴ These are the Four Heavenly Kings.

¹⁰⁵ I am uncertain as to the identity of this deity or group of deities. Probably they are meant to indicate the Five Directional Spirits of the compass in accordance with the Five Element system, and as such they are identical with the Wudao dashen as mentioned in the ninth century text *Dacheng si zhairi* [The Four Fast Days of the Mahāyāna], T.85/ 2849 (S. 1164). The dating of this MS is uncertain, but it would certainly appear to belong to the late ninth century. See also Xiao Dengfu, *Daojiao shuyi yu mijiao dianqi*, pp. 492–5.

¹⁰⁶ How the author of this section arrives at this figure is beyond me. Presumably King Wuluo is counted as one.

¹⁰⁷ T. 53/2121: 259c. See also S. 4546.

manner. This indicates that not only did the message of our scripture exercise a considerable influence on the Chinese Buddhist concept of morals and divine punishment less than one century after its appearance, but its central message was already being transformed in accordance with the growing pantheon of Chinese popular religion. In comparison to both of the other scriptures, the *Jingdu sanmei jing* places more emphasis on the role of the hells in punishing the morally corrupt, and it is undoubtedly for this reason that King Yama is referred to in the text in the phrase, “the Heavenly Son of the netherworld is called Yama (*Diyu Tianzi ming yanluo*)”.¹⁰⁸

In the *Foshuo jiuji jing* [The Buddha Speaks the Scripture on Relieving Disease],¹⁰⁹ another apocryphal *sūtra* of which a number of manuscripts were found at Dunhuang, we again find the six fast days and the deities from the *Si tianwang jing* central to the discourse. Here additional figures appear including *mahārṣis* (*da xianren*), and *vajrapālas* (*jinganglishi*), i.e. protecting deities, who accompany the gods on their tours of inspection. Here we learn that,

If there are men who nourish what is precious,¹¹⁰ and who on the six fast days in front of the Buddha make vows causing [other] men to commit themselves to protecting [the Three Jewels]. When the Four Heavenly Kings descend, the Prince descends, the messenger descends, the Thirty-Three Gods descend, the Mahārṣis descend, the [Controller] of Death and Life descend,¹¹¹ and the Vajrapālas descend on their respective days to behold whether men are good or evil, that is if they correctly do good, or incorrectly make evil. If there are men who steal such things as [holy] scriptures, images and the like, [the gods] will cause these men to contract evil diseases. If they put their hands on gold, silver, bronze, and iron [that does not belong to them], and if there are those who secretly remove¹¹² the possessions of the Three Jewels, such as money, grain, and silk, when the year has passed it will be known that they have not made a recompensation and [the gods] will cause these men to contract evil diseases ...¹¹³

Although this passage mentions the six fast days and virtuous practices done on these days, the primary focus is plainly on divine punishment. It is

¹⁰⁸ S. 4546. Stephen Teiser sees a difference between Yama, or the Netherworld, and the heavenly Yama. However, I believe that we are dealing with the same deity in various stages of development. Of course one may distinguish between the Yama Heaven, and Yama, the god. Cf. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings*, p. 200, n. 34.

¹⁰⁹ T. 85/2878 (S. 1198, and S. 2467). See also Xiao Dengfu, *Daojiao shuyi yu mijiao dianqi*, pp. 476–7.

¹¹⁰ i.e. the Three Jewels.

¹¹¹ This is another name for the “Controller of Destiny” or the Kitchen God.

¹¹² The text says “anqu”, which could also mean “to borrow” against a pledge.

¹¹³ T. 2879: 1362a.

obvious that the worst kind of transgression a person can commit is to steal, or misappropriate, the material possessions of the Buddhist institutions, including the offence of not being able to honour debts incurred. As is the usual practice in traditional China, such debts are supposed to be redeemed by the end of the year, and failure to do so will result in the heavenly powers' being informed by their inspecting agents, after which punishment is certain to descend on the sinner.¹¹⁴ This is yet another clear example of how the medieval Chinese transposed an aspect of their worldly judicial system onto the divine powers. When seen in this light we find that the *Foshuo jiuji jing* takes the *Si tianwang jing*'s message on divine punishment one step further by specifying in great detail both the types of transgression as well as the punishment.

During the second half of the Tang the beliefs relating to the monthly fast days, and in particular those concerned with divine punishment, had become expanded and integrated into a broader Sinitic Mahāyāna vision in which the netherworld had come to play an increasingly central role. At the same time the salvific powers of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* in connection with redemption of evil *karma* and release from the tortures of the hells was given a high priority on the level of popular Buddhism. We find this clearly borne out in the *Dacheng si zhairi*, which is organized around the same basic beliefs as those of the *Si tianwang jing*, but which places much more emphasis on the punishment in the netherworld. The text reads as follows:

The eighth day of the second month; the eighth day of the fourth month; the eighth day of the fifth month; and the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The three yearly great fast months [are]: The first month, the fifth month, and the ninth month. The six fast days [are]: The eighth day, the fourteenth day, the fifteenth day, the twenty-third day, the twenty-eighth day, and the thirtieth day. [As regards these] ten fast days, then on first day of each month is when the Youths of Good and Evil¹¹⁵ descend; the fourteenth day is when the Examiner of Life Spans checks the records [of merits and demerits] descends; the fifteenth day is when the Great Spirits of the Five Ways descend;¹¹⁶ the eighteenth day

¹¹⁴ Concerning the system of borrowing and redemption in traditional Chinese society with special emphasis on Buddhism, see Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, pp. 153–86.

¹¹⁵ Shan's Tongzi. This pair occurs in connection with the cult of Kṣitigarbha during the second half of the Tang, but evidently have their origin in Daoism of the Nanbei Chao period. Cf. Michel Soyumié, "Notes d'iconographie chinoise: les acolytes de Ti-tsang", *Arts Asiatiques* 14 (1966), pp. 141–70.

¹¹⁶ i.e. the Great Spirit of the Five Paths, an official of the netherworld, who is responsible for overseeing the rebirth of sentient beings in their respective destinies as gods, humans, hungry ghosts, animals, or dwellers in the hells. In later Buddhist scriptures dealing with the Ten Kings of the netherworld, the function of this spirit was taken over by the by tenth of these rulers, Wudao Zhuanlun Wang. Cf. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, pp. 171–9.

is when King Yama descends;¹¹⁷ the twenty-third day is when the heavenly great generals descend;¹¹⁸ the twenty-fourth day is when Indra descends; the twenty-eighth day is when the Lord of Mt. Tai descends; the twenty-ninth day is when the Four Heavenly Kings descend; and the thirtieth day is when the heavenly officials governing the earth descend.

On the first day when the Youths [of Good and Evil] descend one should invoke Dingguang Tathagata, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for forty *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Swords and Lances. On the eighth day, when the [Heavenly] Prince¹¹⁹ descends one should invoke Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for thirty *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Pounded Grass.¹²⁰ On the fourteenth day, when the Examiner of Life Spans descends, invoke the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for one thousand *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Boiling Cauldrons. On the fifteenth day, when the Great Generals of the Five Ways descend, invoke Amitābha Buddha, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for two hundred *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Freezing Cold. On the eighteenth day, when King Yama descends, invoke Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for ninety *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Sword Trees. On the twenty-third day, when the great generals of heaven descend, invoke Vairocana Buddha, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for one thousand *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Selfish Demons.

On the twenty-fourth day, when the Lord of Mt. Tai descends, invoke Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for ninety *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Having Just Been Cut in Two. On the twenty-eighth day, when Indra descends, invoke Amitābha Buddha, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for one thousand *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of the Iron Saw. On the twenty-ninth day, when the Four Heavenly Kings descend, invoke the two *bodhisattvas* Yaowang and Yaoshang, maintain the fast, and remit one's

¹¹⁷ Note here the inconsistency with having Yama/Yanle Wang, who rules over the netherworld, descend from heaven. The same holds good for the divinity of Mt. Tai.

¹¹⁸ i.e. the host of divine warriors. This is a generic group of spirits employed by Buddhists and Daoists alike.

¹¹⁹ This is actually the first time he is introduced in the scripture.

¹²⁰ There is some uncertainty as to the correct understanding of the term *fencao*. In his study of the netherworld Stephen Teiser suggests "powdery grass". Cf. *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, p. 54, n. 17.

wrongdoings.¹²¹ Then for seven thousand *kalpas* one will not fall into the Hell of Grinding. On the thirtieth day, when Great Brahma, the Heavenly King¹²² descends, invoke Śākyamuni Buddha, maintain the fast and remit one's wrongdoings. Then for eight thousand *kalpas* one will not fall into [the Hell of] Freezing Cold.¹²³

Although it is not clear whether the compiler of this text based himself on the *Sitianwang jing* or not, it is in any case obvious that a scripture deriving its message from it was used. While the sequence in which the gods appear on the fast days differs slightly, the basic meaning and structure are largely the same. However, the most significant thing to note here is that we find the divine punishments being directly linked with the torments of the ten hells, and as such the *Dacheng si zhairi* can be seen as having developed the beliefs which were first expressed in the *Jingdu sanmeijing*, mentioned above. This development signals the major change in the concept of the Buddhist after-life that took place during the second half of the Tang, when concepts of the netherworld became standardized into a hell consisting of ten departments, each of which was presided over by a demon king with judicial power.¹²⁴ What is perhaps most striking about the above text is that we find it stipulating spiritual measures to counter the punishments meted out by the gods for a faulty moral life. As we have seen this is done by invoking a number of the most important Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* in the pantheon, beings whose salvific powers were considered superior to the indictment of the gods operating the heavenly bureaucracy. In effect this indicates that the influence and power of the “old” guardians of the Buddhist moral norms, i.e. the gods (including those taken over from the traditional Chinese pantheon) had been superseded by a “new” order, namely the saving grace of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, which, by the time of the composition of the scripture in question, was seen as transcending the judicial law of heaven.

That the fast days and the divine scrutiny of the moral behaviour of all sentient beings eventually became a standard ingredient in the make-up of Chinese Buddhism is evident from the compendium, *Shishi liutie* [Six Documents of the Buddhists],¹²⁵ also known as *Shishi zuanyao liutie* [Essential Compendium in Six Documents of the Buddhists], which was compiled in AD 954 by the monk Yichu (n.d.). Most of the entry on the Three Long Fast

¹²¹ This pair of *bodhisattvas* is undoubtedly identical with Candraprabha and Sūryaprabha, the attendants of Bhaiṣajyaguru.

¹²² This is also the first time this assimilated Hindu god appears in our text.

¹²³ T. 2849: 1299c–1300a.

¹²⁴ For an excellent study of this important aspect of Chinese Buddhism, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, q.v.

¹²⁵ For the standard edition, see *Shishi liutie*, comp. Yichu, Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1990.

Months, which also includes a description of the descent of the gods on the six monthly fast days, is largely based on a quotation from the *Tiwei Boli jing*. However, when discussing the issue of divine scrutiny on the six fast days, the *Shishi liutie* when quoting the Buddha on what is referred to as *yizhai*, i.e. “correct fast”, it appears in fact to rely on the *Si tianwang jing*, and not on the *Tiwei Boli jing*.¹²⁶

The continuation of the tradition of the three long fasts of each year and the six monthly fast days beyond the Tang and Five Dynasties Period, including the importance of the *Si tianwang jing* and the *Tiwei Boli jing* as the basic textual references, is testified to in an entry contained in the thirteenth century Buddhist historical compilation, *the Fozu tongji* [Comprehensive Record of the Buddhas and Patriarchs].¹²⁷ Here we read under the heading of the Three Long Fasts:

When discoursing on the *Tiwei [Boli jing]*, the Buddha explained why [the fast days] are long and said, “The four seasons follow each other in succession at the end of each year, and [at that time] three reports are collated [by the gods]. Each month there are six memorials [sent to heaven], [During that time] all the gods, including Indra, the heavenly prince, the messenger, Yama and the demonic spirits, make them on the days of the first, the fifth, and the ninth month. They examine whether the actions of sovereigns, the people, dragons, demons, birds, and wild animals are good or evil. And the Four Heavenly Kings [likewise] present six memorials on each of these months. Allowing no mistakes to be made they note in their reports the transgressions or blessings of sentient beings, large and small. For those whose blessings are many, they order the Controller of Destinies¹²⁸ to descend to Yama and his five officials to add to their records the remittance of transgressions [of those beings]. Thus the Three Long Fasts are instituted.¹²⁹ If on the six fast days or on the yearly Three Long Fast months a son of the Buddha kills other beings, steals, breaks the fast [by eating], or fails to keep the precepts, then even a light offence will be [considered] a foul transgression.¹³⁰

Although the focus here is on the three months of fasting in the year, this

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 111.

¹²⁷ T. 49/2035.

¹²⁸ i.e. the Kitchen God.

¹²⁹ Here, in a note, the text refers the reader to the *Tiwei Boli jing*. Cf. T. 49/2035: 320b. Zhipan (n.d.), the compiler of the *Fozu tongzhi*, does not quote verbatim from the apocryphal scripture, but has modified its message considerably. For studies on the *Tiwei Boli jing*, see Whalen W. Lai, “The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China”, pp. 11–35 (esp. pp. 21–30); and Makita, *Gikyō kenkyū*, pp. 148–220. The latter also includes an edition of the text.

¹³⁰ T. 49/2035: 320b. This passage is followed by a note referring the reader to the *Fanwang jie jing* [Brahmajāla Sūtra], T. 24/1484.

passage reveals that the prohibitions and precepts to be upheld on those occasions are basically identical with those of the Six Fast Days. Since Zhipan is basing himself here on the *Tiwei Boll jing*, the group of deities playing the roles of heavenly judges differ slightly from those found in the *Si tianwang jing*. By the time the *Fozu tongzhi* was compiled, the Ten Kings of the netherworld had long since become institutionalized, and it is slightly peculiar that Zhipan, when referring to Yama and his five officials, makes no reference to the other nine kings. It is also interesting to observe that just a light transgression committed during the fast months was considered liable to heavy punishment simply because it had taken place in a fasting month. Concerning the six fast days, the *Fozu tongzhi* has the following to say:

Indra ordered each of the Four Heavenly Kings to rule over one direction [of the world system]. During the first half of the month, on the eighth day, a messenger is sent down to investigate whether sentient beings are good or evil. On the fourteenth day the [heavenly] princes are sent [down]. On the fifteenth day the [Four Heavenly] Kings pay a visit in person. During the latter half of the month there are also three days like this. When the [Four Heavenly] Kings descend in person, the [gods] of the constellations and demons and spirits all accompany them.¹³¹

This passage more or less reproduces the basic intent of the *Si tianwang jing*, which is also acknowledged by Zhipan. Hence, we see here that its importance as a primary source on the fast days, or more correctly days for “meagre feasts”, was still undisputed by the time the *Fozu tongzhi* was compiled, during the latter half of the Southern Song. This also reveals that the complex of beliefs relating to the fast days had by then become standardized as part of official Chinese Buddhism.

The continued importance of the *Si tianwang jing* as a scriptural authority on the fast days can also be testified to in the encyclopedic work, the *Dazang yilan ji* [Collection of the Tripitaka at a Glance],¹³² where we find it cited

¹³¹ T. 49/2035: 320b–c. A note towards the end of this passage indicates that this information is based on the *Si tianwang jing*. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 320c.

¹³² Contained in the *Tripitaka Koreana*, K. 45/1504: 362a–628b (ch. 3). For a short description of the contents of this work, cf. *FDC*, Vol. 1, pp. 892c–893a. The name of the compiler of the *Dazang yilan ji* was a certain Chen Shi (n.d.), a native of Ningde in Fujian. There has been some confusion as to the dating of the *Dazang yilan ji*, however, the Korean scholar Choe Changsik shows in a recent article that it is a work from the early Southern Song, and gives its date as AD 1157, without, however, providing sufficient evidence for this. Cf. his, “Zongzhe chanshi ‘Zuochan Yi’ ūi chusŏk chŏk yŏngu” [An Annotated Study of Chan Master Zongzhe’s ‘Zuochan Yi’]”, *Pulgyo Hakbo*, Vol. 26 (1989), p. 202. Given the fact that the Korean *Tripitaka* does not contain any works post-dating the Yuan—excepting of course its Supplement—Choe may in fact have a point here. A general Song dating is also maintained by the excellent bibliographical study, *Fodian jingjie* [Detailed Explanations of Buddhist Works], comp. Chen Shiqiang, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992, pp. 779–84. However, it remains silent as regards its exact date.

verbatim in the section on maintaining the precepts in the *Chijie pin*.¹³³ The fact that this Buddhist encyclopedia draws upon an extensive array of standard canonical scriptures and sectarian materials covering almost every aspect of Buddhist lore and practices, shows that the *Si tianwang jing* was a fairly popular work, and that its message in regard to the fast days was well known and regarded as authoritative.

Above we have seen how this short apocryphal scripture survived the vicissitudes of time, including the fate of being screened out of the *Tripitaka* as an apocryphal work. To all intents and purposes the impact of the *Si tianwang jing* was still being felt long after Buddhism had become fully integrated into the spiritual sphere of Chinese culture. Nowhere in the later texts are there any indications that our scripture and its message were considered suspect, nor do we find any evidence of the clear warnings in the *sūtra* catalogues concerning its authenticity. As such the *Si tianwang jing* came to share the fate of other apocryphal scriptures, including the *Shoulengyan jing* [Sūraṅgamasūtra],¹³⁴ the *Yulanpen jing* [Scripture on the Yulan Bowls],¹³⁵ the *Fanwang jing* [Brahmajālasūtra],¹³⁶ *Beidou qixing yanming jing* [Scripture on the Seven Stars of the Great Dipper Extending the Lifespan],¹³⁷ the *Fumu enchong jing* [Scripture on Repaying the Kindness of Parents],¹³⁸ and the *Gaowang Guanshiyin jing* [Scripture on Gaowang Avalokiteśvara],¹³⁹ all of which were embraced by orthodox Buddhism and gained considerable popularity.

Conclusion

On the basis of what has been shown above it would appear that an early to mid-fifth century dating for the *Si tianwang jing* is the most likely. As we have seen, the scripture is referred to in the *Chu sanzang jiji*, which means that it was well known by the early Liang. This considerably narrows down the period in which it must have been composed to sometime between AD 427 and 520. In the light of the fact that large parts of the *Si tianwang jing* are based on standard Hīnayāna *sūtras*, as well as the fact that it is almost completely devoid of any traces of Mahāyāna doctrine or lore, I am most

¹³³ Cf. *Tripitaka Koreana*, K. 45/1504: 443a (ch. 3).

¹³⁴ T. 19/945.

¹³⁵ T. 16/685. For a study of the beliefs and ideas connected with this scripture, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

¹³⁶ T. 24/1484.

¹³⁷ T. 21/1307. For a study of the role of this apocryphal scripture in Korean Buddhism, including a discussion of its Chinese origin, see Henrik H. Sørensen, “The Worship of the Great Dipper in Korean Buddhism”, in: *Religions in Traditional Korea*, ed. H. H. Sørensen, SBS Monographs 3, Copenhagen: The Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1995, pp. 71–105.

¹³⁸ T. 85/2887.

¹³⁹ T. 85/2898; ZZ. 33.1. For an extensive study of this scripture, see Kiriya Shōichi, “Gikyō Kōō Kanzeon kyō no tekisuto to shinkō” [Text and Belief of the Spurious Sūtra Gaowang Guanshiyin jing], *Hokke bunka kenkyū* 16 (1990), pp. 1–67.

inclined to see it as a product of the first half of the fifth century. Concerning the possible authorship of the scripture we are on more uncertain ground. Zhiyan and Baoyun, the two said translators, were active in Gansu under the Northern Liang (397–439) during the first to second quarter of the fifth century as members of the translation team surrounding the celebrated Indian translator Dharmakṣema (385–433).¹⁴⁰ Later they worked in Yangdu, the capital of the Liu Song, where they did the majority of their translations. However, all the *sūtras* Zhiyan and Baoyun were involved in translating belong to the Mahāyāna class of scriptures, and all are confirmed Indian Buddhist scriptures.¹⁴¹ Since it is clear beyond any doubt that the *Si tianwang jing* was composed in China, and most likely during the first half of the fifth century, to link it with Zhiyan and Baoyun only makes sense if they are considered as authors or composers. I am more inclined to consider the scripture a product by someone who appropriated the names of this fairly respected pair of translators in order to bolster the reputation and authenticity of the *Si tianwang jing*. Whether or not Zhiyan and Baoyun were actually connected with the composition of the scripture, it remains a forgery based on an Indian Buddhist scripture of the *Āgama* class. Here it should be mentioned that there appear to have been other similar scriptures with identical or near-identical titles in circulation during the fifth century,¹⁴² and although a longer, four-chapter version was already suspected of being a forgery in the earliest extant *sūtra* catalogue, the Chinese origin of T. 590 was never discovered, or at least it was not considered sufficiently suspect to be excluded from the canon, since all later catalogues place our one-chapter version of the *Si tianwang jing* among the orthodox scriptures. Whatever, the scripture was included in the printed-Kaibao *Tripiṭaka* of AD 983, and it remains a fact that it found its way into the later printed Korean Buddhist canons as well.¹⁴³

The *Si tianwang jing* as it appears in T. 590 is obviously not a translation

¹⁴⁰ According to the colophon of the *Mahāvaiṣṭyamaḥāsannipāta sūtra* they translated four chapters of this major collection of scriptures. Cf. T. 397: 184a, 192a, 199b, and 205c (ch. 27–30). See also T. 2157: 817b. For additional information on the spread of Buddhism under the Northern Liang, see Susanne Juhl, “Cultural Exchanges in Northern Liang”, in: *Cultural Encounters: China, Japan, and the West*, ed. S. Clausen, R. Starrs, and A. Wedell-Wedellsborg, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995, pp. 55–82.

¹⁴¹ In addition to the *Mahāvaiṣṭyamaḥāsannipāta sūtra*, T. 9/268; the *Akṣayamati sūtra*, T. 13/397 (12); and the *Fahua sanmei jing* [Dharma Lotus Samādhi Sūtra], T. 9/269. Although the latter has no Sanskrit counterpart, its structure as well as its contents would seem to confirm its Indian origin.

¹⁴² In the fourth chapter of *Chu sanzang ji ji* there is mention of a *Si tianwang anxing shijian jing* [Sūtra of the Four Heavenly Kings’ Investigating the Activities of World]. The title seems to indicate a direct connection to the *Si tianwang jing*. This scripture is referred to in the catalogue as a copy. Cf. T. 55/2145: 24c.

¹⁴³ It is known to have been included in the first Korean *Tripiṭaka*, printed during the late eleventh century, and at present it can be found in the second printed canon. Cf. *The Korean Buddhist Canon*, p. 318 (K. 856).

into Chinese of a classical Indian *sūtra*, but it is not a completely apocryphal scripture either, at least not if we thereby mean a complete fabrication. What we have here is essentially an adaptation of the framework, basic meaning and imagery, including central passages, taken from one or more Indian Buddhist sources. To these redacted excerpts have then been added various indigenous elements and patterns of beliefs to form a consistent and meaningful whole for a readership grounded in the Chinese cultural sphere. Incidentally the traditional Buddhist veneration of monks, parents and elders as found here—and in the scriptures on which the *Si tianwang jing* is based—fits well into the Confucian concept of filial piety, moral righteousness, and respect for the sovereign.

Despite the fact that the *Si tianwang jing* bears evidence of having been adapted to the Chinese cultural milieu, it does not contain any explicit references to Daoism. The appearance of the Kitchen God in the text is too general a product of Chinese culture to be seen as a solely Daoist component. In contradistinction to other constructed or apocryphal scriptures such as the *Tiwei Boli jing*, or the *Qiqian fo shenfu jing* [Scripture of the Seven Thousand Buddhas' Divine Talismans],¹⁴⁴ both of which are full of Daoist imagery and concepts, the *Si tianwang jing* maintains the basic form and structure of a traditional Indian Buddhist scripture. However, with its basic orientation and vision it clearly addresses itself to the reality of popular religion as it unfolded in medieval Chinese society.

The *Si tianwang jing* is an important scripture in the tradition of the Six Monthly Fast Days and in the cult of the Four Heavenly Kings. This is not only because it reflects an obviously early stratum in the dissemination of Indian Buddhism in China, but also because of its special message regarding the punishing gods. As we have seen, the scripture sets forth the standard Buddhist injunction to do good and to avoid evil, and next it describes how a life led according to pure morals will result in happiness in this life and in the next. In contrast, an immoral life in which filial piety is ignored and other evil is committed, leads to a present and future life in misery. So far there is nothing which is not in accordance with the traditional Buddhist law of *karma*. However, in our scripture the gods are not only spectators of the human world, and by extension of all sentient beings, they are also active moral agents who, through the investigation of the Four Heavenly Kings and their helpers, interfere directly in human affairs. The consequences of the behaviour of sentient beings is no longer simply seen as a question of individual *karma*, i.e. that each person creates for himself his future through a law governed by cause and effect, but it was now turned into a matter for the heavenly bureaucracy. The gods, who in traditional Indian Buddhist scriptures mainly play roles as spectators, interlocutors, and occasional messengers, are here proper functionaries, who from their offices

¹⁴⁴ T. 85/2904.

in heaven exercise their control over human affairs. Hence divine intervention in the human world with this Chinese Buddhist scripture became one of reward and punishment.

The *Si tianwang jing* is just a minor example of the ways in which Indian Buddhism was adapted and assimilated to Chinese culture. I am certain that the Chinese *Tripitaka* will prove to contain virtually scores of other “*sūtras*” that never existed as such in the country of Buddhism’s origin, but which might be of immense value to our understanding of the development and transformation of Chinese Buddhism from that of a foreign creed to a naturalized religion. This would of course both include the most obvious redactions and excerpted scriptures, but might also reveal something about the cultural process behind the making of these scriptures. While this observation may prove of relevance to the canonical works in general up to the codification of the first printed *Tripitaka* in the late tenth century, it is especially the case when dealing with Chinese Buddhism during the Nanbei Chao period. For this reason we need to investigate this matter much more closely, and to pay stricter attention to strange terminologies that crop up in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures which have previously been considered of Indian or at least Central Asian origin. This injunction may seem slightly irrelevant, or perhaps even tedious to some, and especially for scholars working with the Buddhist material from Dunhuang this problem has long been taken as a matter of course. However, when dealing with the standard canonical material found in the printed Chinese *Tripitakas*, we are often much less on guard against textual oddities than when we deal with manuscripts. It goes without saying that we should be especially careful with regard to canonical scriptures for which no translators are given, or in the cases where earlier compilers of *sūtra* catalogues have in fact already signalled doubts concerning the authenticity of a given scripture.

List of Characters

<i>anqu</i>	闇取
Baochang	寶唱
<i>Bawangshi yu liu zhairi jianyue shan’e</i>	八王使於六齋日簡閱善惡
Baoyun	寶雲
<i>Beidou qixing yanming jing</i>	北斗七星延命經
<i>bi sheng</i>	別生
<i>bu yuqu</i>	不與取
<i>chao jing</i>	抄經
Chen Shi	陳實
<i>Chijie pin</i>	持戒品
<i>Chu sanzang jijì</i>	出三藏記集
<i>Dacheng si zhairi</i>	大乘四齋日

<i>Dainihon zokuzōkyō</i>	大日本續藏經
<i>Dalou tan jing</i>	大樓炭經
<i>da xianren</i>	大仙人
<i>Dazang yilan ji</i>	大藏一覽集
Dong Zhongshu	董仲舒
<i>duqi</i>	毒氣
<i>Diyu Tianzi ming yanluo</i>	地獄天子名閻羅
<i>Egui baoying jing</i>	惡鬼報應經
<i>er da jiangjun</i>	二大將軍
<i>Fahua sanmei jing</i>	法華三昧經
<i>Fanwang jing</i>	梵網經
<i>fatang</i>	法堂
<i>fei fanxing</i>	非梵行
<i>fencao</i>	粉草
<i>Foahuo hujing jing</i>	佛說護淨經
<i>Foshuo jiuji jing</i>	佛說救疾經
<i>Foshuo tiandi bayang shenzhou jing</i>	佛說天地八陽神咒經
<i>Foshuo xiaozhi jing</i>	佛說孝子經
<i>Foshuo zhai jing</i>	佛說齋經
<i>Fozu tongji</i>	佛祖統紀
<i>Fugai zhengxing suo ji jing</i>	福蓋正行所集經
<i>Fumu enchong jing</i>	父母恩重經
<i>ganlu</i>	甘露
<i>Gaowang Guanshiyin jing</i>	高王觀世音經
<i>geyi</i>	格義
Huilin	慧琳
<i>jiao</i>	教
<i>jinganglishi</i>	金剛力士
<i>Jingdu sanmei jing</i>	淨度三昧經
<i>Jinglu yixiang</i>	經律異相
<i>Kaibao dazang jing</i>	開寶大藏經
<i>kuangyu</i>	誑語
Liangzhou	涼州
<i>Lishi apitan lun</i>	立世阿毗曇論
Liu Song	劉宋
<i>Longshu wuming lun</i>	龍樹五明論
<i>mianzuo gaoguang yanli chuang zuo</i>	眠坐高廣嚴麗床座
Ming gui	明鬼
<i>Mozi xiangu</i>	墨子閒詁
Mozi	墨子
<i>nihuan</i>	泥洹
Northern (Bei) Liang	北涼
<i>qi (reflect on)</i>	稽
<i>Qiqian fo shenfu jing</i>	七千佛神符經

<i>Qishi jing</i>	起世經
<i>Qishi yinben jing</i>	起世因本經
<i>rentian jiao</i>	人天教
<i>sanjiao</i>	三教
Sengyou	僧祐
<i>sha ming</i>	刹命
<i>sha sheng</i>	刹生
Shan'e Tongzi	善惡童子
<i>shi feishi shi</i>	食非食時
<i>Shiji jing</i>	世記經
<i>Shishi zuanyao liutie</i>	釋氏纂要六帖
<i>Shishi liutie</i>	釋氏六帖
<i>Shoulengyan jing</i>	首楞嚴經
<i>Shou shi shanjie jing</i>	受十善戒經
<i>Shu ben</i>	蜀本
<i>si tianahenwang</i>	四天神王
<i>si tianwang</i>	四天王
<i>Si tianwang anxing shijian jing</i>	四天王案行世間經
<i>Si tianwang jing</i>	四天王經
<i>si wang</i>	四王
Siming	司命
Siming shen	司命神
<i>Sishier zhang jing</i>	四十二章經
<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i>	大正新修大藏經
<i>taizi</i>	太子
Tanjing	曇靜
Tianjun	天君
Tianshi Dao	天師道
<i>Tianshi jing</i>	天使經
<i>Tiwei Boli jing</i>	提謂波利經
<i>tushi xiangman</i>	塗飾香鬘
Wudao dashen	五道大神
Wudao Zhuanlun Wang	五道轉輪王
<i>wuge guanting</i>	無歌觀聽
Wuluo [Dawang]	五羅大王
<i>wuqiu</i>	無录
<i>Xiang fa jueyijing</i>	像法決義經
<i>xianguan</i>	縣官
<i>xiaocheng</i>	小乘
<i>xing shijian</i>	行世間
<i>Xinji jinglun lu</i>	新集經論錄
Yangdu	楊都
<i>yangfu buxiu</i>	殃福不朽
Yaowang, Yaoshang Pusa	藥王藥上菩薩

Yichu
yin zhu jiu
Yiqie jing yin yi ji
yi yi
yizhai
Yu Di
Yulanpen jing
zhai
Zhai jing
Zhaifa qingjing jing
Zhipan
Zhiqian
Zhiyan
Zhiyuan Si (Temple)
Zhuzi jicheng

義楚
飲諸酒
一切經音義集
義邑
宜齋
玉帝
玉蘭盆經
齋
齋經
齋法清淨經
志磐
支謙
智嚴
枳園寺
諸子集成