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Commentarial Interpretations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Controversy over Requiring Buddhist Monastics to Pay Homage to the Emperor during the Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract: Once Buddhism had become established in China, one of the central issues in the relations between the Saṃgha and the state was the ongoing controversy over requiring Buddhist monastics to pay homage to the emperor. When this controversy resurfaced at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty, the participants in the debate frequently referred to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* to support their arguments. In this paper, I discuss these references to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and how they were interpreted by various participants. I argue that the ideas of “the distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions” and “the distinction between individual realization and general ethics” prevalent in the Buddhist circles of the Sui and Tang dynasties are in line with the concepts of “veneration out of gratitude” and “signless veneration” used for interpreting the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, indicating that the Sui and Tang Buddhist communities had a common understanding on this issue. A more extreme position was that of Kuiji, who interprets the relevant passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in terms of “forgetting decorum out of ignorance” in his arguments against the institutional feasibility of requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor. The arguments put forth in this debate clearly reflect the interaction between Buddhism, absolute monarchy, and historical events in China, in a fusion of intellectual and social history.



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1. Introduction

One of the central issues in the relations between the Saṃgha and the state in ancient China was the ongoing controversy over whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor. The issue was first raised by the Eastern Jin (317–420) officials Yu Bing 庾冰 and Huan Xuan 桓玄, and came to a head some three centuries later, at the end of the Sui dynasty 隋 (581–618) and the beginning of the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907). The debate is a manifestation of the historical tension in Saṃgha–state relations in China. Although Chinese Buddhism has been primarily based on the Mahāyāna school since the end of the Northern and Southern dynasties 南北 (420–589), the Buddhist Saṃgha continued to adhere to the monastic precepts of both the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, resulting in much tension between the mutually incompatible positions of monastic superiority and equality between the Saṃgha and laity, a tension which was exacerbated by the deeply entrenched feudal and patriarchal social system. This type of debate never occurred in India, where a very different relationship between state and religion prevailed.¹

The political unification which came about during the late Sui to the early Tang strengthened the notion of imperial authority, leading to a reemergence of the debate as to whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor. By this time, Buddhist thought had already become deeply engrained in the Chinese heart and mind, and many of the nobility and ministers were now conversant in the Buddhist scriptures, such that the Buddhist view of the Saṃgha as an entity outside of conventional

society was generally understood, if not widely accepted. In Part 3, Chapter 5 of *The History of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty*, Ryōshū Michihata 道端良秀 discusses the historical development of the Buddhist position on paying homage to parents and secular authorities, and presents the various arguments put forward when this topic was debated in China (Michihata 1957, pp. 335–57). Arthur F. Wright, Tang Yongtong, Shigeo Kamada 鎌田茂雄, and Stanley Weinstein also discuss this “Buddhist pay homage” debate in the Sui and Tang dynasties but fail to extend their discussions to the various interpretations made on *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* happening in the background (Wright 1951; Tang 1982, pp. 10–14; Kamada 1994, pp. 55–62, 92; Weinstein 1987). There is also the Japanese scholar Senshō Kimura 木村宣彰, who devotes nearly a hundred pages in his book *Studies in Chinese Buddhist Thought* to the translation and commentary of *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, but no connection between *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the debate is mentioned (Kimura 2009, pp. 201–347). The Chinese scholar He Jianping notices the references to *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Sui and Tang debates and discusses the kinds of appearances of the topic of bowing to laypeople in Buddhist scriptures. However, his research does not bring the appearance and the connection to a methodological level to understand the difficulties with monk–lay ethics and the interaction between scriptural interpretations and social history.

In the debate as to whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor, those who were in favor adduced various passages from the Buddhist scriptures, such as the passage in Chapter 20 of the *Fahua jing* 法華經 [*Lotus Sūtra*] on the bodhisattva Never-disparaging, who paid homage to every Buddhist he met, lay or monastic; the passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* where a group of Buddhist monks pay obeisance to the layman Vimalakīrti; the passage in the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 that states that the emperor is a bodhisattva on one of the three levels of worthies prior to the bodhisattva grounds; and the passage in the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 [*Sūtra on Contemplating the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*], which states that filial piety is a prerequisite for rebirth in the Pure Land (Michihata 1957, pp. 342–43). Among these, the passage from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, and how it was interpreted by the Buddhist community, is of particular interest.

In the “Disciples” chapter of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, we read that one time the monk Pūrṇa was teaching a group of newly ordained monks when Vimalakīrti arrived and admonished him on the proper way to teach, with the words, “After entering into a state of deep concentration, examine the minds of these individuals, and then teach them the Dharma” 先當入定觀此人心，然後說法, i.e., the teaching needs to be tailored to suit the capacity and proclivities of the audience. Moreover, these monks all had the capacity to understand and practice the Mahāyāna (Greater Vehicle), yet Pūrṇa was teaching them the doctrines of the Lesser Vehicle, which is why Vimalakīrti rebuked him so sternly. Vimalakīrti then enters into samādhi, causing those monks to “recall their past lives” 自識宿命, whereupon they all attain enlightenment and “bow down in homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti” 比丘稽首禮維摩詰足.² The corresponding passage in the Sanskrit text reads, “They prostrated themselves towards this distinguished man, touching his feet with their heads; they then sat down, clasping their hands together in the traditional gesture of reverence” 他們俯首向這位賢士行觸足禮，然後坐下，雙手合十 (Huang 2011). The Buddhist monastic code clearly states that monastics are not permitted to pay homage to a layperson, yet this is exactly what is done in this passage of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. Thus, this passage and its commentarial explanations played a particularly important role in the debate over whether monastics should be required to pay homage to secular authorities.

The debate over whether monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor and the interpretation of *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* are two fields of study of Buddhist social history and scriptural hermeneutics, which no attention to their connection has been paid by any scholar before. My research is thus concerned with the interaction between *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* as a scriptural interpretation in a particular ideological context and the Sui and Tang debate over the issue of “Buddhist pay homage” as a historical event. This methodological

approach is then with an intention to show that the fields of philology, social history, and the history of ideas can be integrated.

2. Emperor Yang of Sui's Interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*

As the ultimate form of secular power, an absolute monarchy is established through the possession and domination of a particular territory and its inhabitants; it is based on narrow interests, backed by force, continues through blood ties, and requires a large bureaucratic system to operate. By contrast, Buddhism is an enduring spiritual force that operates on a deeper level, influencing people's behavior by appealing to their hearts and minds, and embodied and perpetuated primarily by the living example of exemplary monks and nuns. Prior to becoming the Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama relinquished his right to kingship by becoming a monk, demonstrating that Buddhism, right from its inception, has been antithetical to worldly power and domination, and that it regards secular power as inferior to spiritual power. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many Buddhists were of the view that monastics should be exempt from paying homage to those in positions of secular authority, a view which at times provoked the ire of many in the upper echelons of Chinese society, especially the conservative Confucian establishment, who feared that the increasing popularity of Buddhism would gradually erode the foundations of Chinese society (Weinstein 1987, p. 3).

Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (r. 604–618) had a rather divided personality. Although he provided much support to the Buddhist religion, treated eminent monks with courtesy, provided generous endowments to Buddhist temples, and sponsored the expansion of the Saṃgha, it appears that he was also concerned that the ascendancy of Buddhism might endanger imperial authority. Thus, in 607, Emperor Yang issued an edict stating, "All Buddhist and Daoist monastics who are invited to teach at the imperial court must pay homage to the emperor prior commencing their discourse" 諸僧道士等有所啓請者，並先須致敬，然後陳理.³ The background of this proclamation is recounted in the Biography of Mingshan 明贍 (d.u.) in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* as follows:

In the year 606 [sic; should be 609], when the emperor returned to his palace in the capital, in the southern precincts the army was displayed in magnificent array. At that time there were some debauched monastics who were flouting court etiquette, and when the emperor heard about it, he was furious. He summoned all the monks and had them line up in front of the imperial court. When they failed to follow the customary etiquette, he issued an edict stating, "the statutes requiring the proper display of respect have long been in effect." At that time the Daoist monks and nuns immediately began to pay obeisance, and only the Buddhist monastics stubbornly failed to do so.⁴ 大業二年（案：應為五年），帝還京室，在於南郊，盛陳軍旅。時有濫僧染朝憲者，事以聞上，帝大怒。召諸僧徒並列御前，峙然抗禮。下敕責曰：條制久頒，義須致敬。於時黃老士女，初聞即拜，唯釋一門，儼然莫屈。

Thus, we can see that Emperor Yang of Sui was keen on exerting his imperial power to gain absolute authority over all the religious orders within his realm. Although the Daoist monastics were quick to submit, their Buddhist counterparts resisted, a number of whom bravely stood forth to argue in favor of their position, including the monks Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), Mingshan, and Sengfeng 僧鳳 (562–638). For example, in the biography of Sengfeng in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, we read:

In the middle years of his reign, Emperor Yang of Sui was sojourning in the southern precincts . . . when he issued an imperial decree stating, "The military and nation have rules of decorum, and there is no distinction between Chinese and foreigner; paying respect to those in positions of authority preserves the nation's dignity; in order to promote the harmonious growth of all things, ceremonious rules need to be followed. Laozi, emperors, and kings are venerated in Daoist temples, while emperors and parents are honored in Buddhist temples;

these regulations were laid out long ago, so why resist proper decorum?" The Daoist monks and nuns have heeded the order to pay homage, and it is only the Buddhist clergy who stubbornly remain standing.

The monk Mingshan took the lead in answering the edict, as recorded in another biography. In the case of Feng, since he was the revered head of a monastery, he was repeatedly pressed to explain his failure to pay homage. He replied by citing passages from the scriptures which clearly explain why monks don't pay homage [to secular authorities]. 大業中歲，駐蹕南郊... 下敕曰：軍國有容，華夷不革；尊主崇上，遠存名體；資生通運，理數有儀。三大懸於老宗，兩教立於釋府，條格久頒，如何抗禮？黃老士女承聲下拜，唯佛一宗相顧峙立。沙門明瞻率先答詔，具如別傳。然敕頻催，何為不禮，鳳為崇敬寺主，依例被追。乃擺撥直進，援引經論，明不敬之理。⁵

Whereas Sengfeng quoted the scriptures to explain why Buddhist monastics should not be required to pay homage to secular authorities, Yancong 彦琮 (557–610) wrote a fictional account of a dialogue between a host and a guest, in which he satirizes this edict promulgated by Emperor Yang. Yancong's parody, the *Futian lun* 福田論 [Treatise on the Field of Merit], is referred to in fascicle 5 of the *Datang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 [Catalogue of Buddhist Works in the Great Tang], fascicle 25 of the *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification], and in the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities] compiled by Yancong 彦琮 (d.u.). In the *Futian Lun*, the guest argues that monastics should not resist the edict stipulating that they pay homage to the emperor, but should abide by the code of conduct adopted for the imperial court, and his reasoning fully accords with that proffered by Huan Xuan during the Northern and Southern dynasties, i.e., "(He) followed Huan Xuan's logic and recounted the previous argument" 遙附桓氏，重述前議. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the guest's argument is that he actually refers to two stories in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the *Lotus Sūtra* when he says, "In the past, monks paid homage to laymen by touching their feet, and bodhisattvas prostrated to each and all; their decorum was repeatedly displayed, and the meaning is evident" 昔比丘接足於居士，菩薩稽首於慢眾，斯文復彰，厥趣安在。⁶ However, neither the young monks paying homage to Vimalakīrti nor the bodhisattva Never-disparaging's bowing to the Dharma and the inherent buddha-nature of all beings has anything to do with the question of whether or not monks should pay homage to the emperor (He 2009, p. 448), and those who cite such passages as evidence supporting the position that monks should pay homage to secular authority do violence to the original meaning of the text. Moreover, in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, Vimalakīrti rebukes the ten leading disciples of the Buddha, and statements such as "generating *bodhicitta* is tantamount to going forth" 發菩提心即出家 and "that monk paid homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti" 比丘禮維摩詰足 are clearly intended to "put monks in their place," which is in line with the claims of those who were arguing in favor of requiring monastics to do obeisance towards secular authorities.

In the *Futian lun*, the host's argument is as follows:

If you could debate like Vimalakīrti, then you would already be a tenth-stage bodhisattva; he is sick in bed, to show that he has transcended worldly conditions; he regularly displays his supernormal powers, and all praise his eloquence. Neophytes pay their respects to him, and are grateful for his teaching on the Dharma; but these are all merely temporary expedients, and should not be taken as universal norms; they can change at any time, and numerous examples could be cited... Those who are capable of tailoring their teaching of the Dharma to suit the situation are rare indeed; but when one teaches in this way, it is hard to uphold decorum 論淨名之功，早升雲地；臥疾之意，本超世境；久行神足，咸歎辯才。新學頂禮，誠謝法施；事是權宜，式非常准；謂時暫變，其例乃多... 因機作法，足為希有；假弘教化，難著律儀。⁷

The young monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of gratitude for his teachings, and their actions should be understood as appropriate under the circumstances, but should not be taken as a standard to be followed by all monks, in all circumstances. According to Yancong, making the exception into the rule amounts to failing to properly distinguish between principle and phenomena, doctrines and institutions, and Dharma and Vinaya. While such homage can be understood as an expedient at the doctrinal level, it cannot become a fixed standard of behavior at the institutional level.

Nonetheless, during the Tang dynasty these scriptural passages in which monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti were frequently cited by those who argued in favor of requiring Buddhist monastics to pay obeisance to the emperor.

3. The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Debate on Monastics Paying Homage to the Emperor during the Early and Middle Tang Dynasty

The emperors of the early Tang dynasty adopted a conciliatory policy towards Buddhism and built temples for holding memorial ceremonies for the fallen soldiers; at the same time, they also made various efforts intended to strengthen state control over Buddhist monasteries and to undermine the considerable social clout Buddhism had attained by this time (Weinstein 1987, p. 5). Between 618 and 755, the imperial court organized five debates between Buddhists and Daoists, in each of which the question of monastics paying homage to the emperor and parents was one of the main topics.⁸ When Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626) became the first emperor of the Tang dynasty in 618, all the officials prostrated and did the customary dance; as for the Buddhist monastics, they shouted praise and cupped one hand in the other as a salute, but remained standing” 百官拜舞，僧但山呼，拱立一面。 Yuchi Jingde 尉遲敬德 (585–658), Duke of E, and Liu Wenjing 劉文靖 (568–619), a General of Jinwuwei, complained, “A monastic who has not attained sainthood is just an ordinary worldlyling, so why should he merely bow to the secular authorities and to his parents, without making a full prostration? Who could possibly put up with such impudence?” 僧未登聖，俱是凡夫，何乃高揖王侯父母反拜，孰可忍也。 Emperor Gaozu ordered his ministers to record the vices and virtues of Confucianism and Buddhism, and they were incorporated into the imperial canon. After some discussion, his ministers reported to him, “They should not be required to pay homage” 不合拜上。⁹ In fascicle 7 of the *Zhenguan zhengyao* we read:

In the fifth year of Zhenguan, Taizong said to his ministers: “The teachings of Buddhism and Daoism are basically beneficial, but their monks and nuns have become arrogant and impudent, to the extent that they deign to remain seated while allowing their parents to pay homage to them. This is bad for established social customs and runs counter to the Confucian classics. This practice should be banned immediately, and they shall be made to worship their parents. 貞觀五年，太宗謂侍臣曰：佛道設教，本行善事，豈遣僧尼道士等妄自尊崇，坐受父母之拜，損害風俗，悖亂禮經，宜即禁斷，仍令致拜於父母。¹⁰

In 631, Emperor Taizong “decreed that Buddhist and Daoist monastics must do obeisance to their parents” 詔僧尼道士致拜父母,¹¹ but Buddhists strongly demurred, and in 633 the decree was rescinded.

During the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang 唐高宗 (649–683) the debate reached a climax. In 662, Emperor Gaozong issued an edict stating, “It is hereby decreed that ladies-in-waiting and Daoist and Buddhist monastics must pay homage to court officials, the empress, the crown prince, and their parents” 欲令道士、女冠、僧尼，於君、皇后及皇太子、其父母所致拜。¹² In six fascicles of Yancong’s *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* are recorded the prevailing views at that time, including those of more than 300 monks in the capital, more than 1000 civil and military officials of the ninth rank and higher, numerous officials at the prefect and county levels, as well as members of the imperial family, including Pei Wang 沛王, Madame Rongguo of the Yang clan 榮國夫人楊氏, etc. In fascicle 8 of the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* occurs the following passage on the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*:

In 662 an edict was promulgated stipulating the worship of the emperor and his relatives; fearing it would be deleterious to the national culture, officials at various levels discussed it at length. At that time the monk Daoxuan and others jointly wrote a petition and presented it to the court; opinions varied widely, and the senior officials got involved; ultimately, the emperor read the petition himself and rescinded the edict. Keen on ensuring that this event would be known to later generations, Yancong recorded it in his *Ji shamen bu bai su yi* 集沙門不拜俗議 [Compilation on the views against requiring monastics to pay homage to laymen, an alternative title of the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*], along with the views put forth by the sages of old in regards to a number of similar past events. It has been handed down to posterity for the everlasting edification of all.¹³

The imperial decree of 662 on paying homage to the emperor and parents not only gave rise to resistance and petitions from the Saṃgha, but also led to divisions within the court, such that “539 court officials were against the decree, and 354 were for it 朝宰五百三十九人請不拜，三百五十四人請拜。”¹⁴ The literati were also divided on this issue. The camp which opposed the decree included Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (582–666) and were of the opinion that “There’s no need to force the adherents of this profound religion to adopt the manners of Confucianism” 何必破彼玄門，牽斯儒轍。¹⁵ The camp which supported the decree included Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–670), Lu Cai 呂才 (606–665), Hao Chujun 郝處俊 (607–681), and some 20 others. Around the same time, Weixiu 威秀 (d.u.) of the Dazhuangyan 大莊嚴 Monastery and Daoxuan of Ximing 西明 Monastery submitted memorials to the emperor, citing passages in the Buddhist scriptures showing that monastics are not required to venerate rulers or parents, and sought support from Madame Rongguo and other members of the nobility who were sympathetic to their cause. Their efforts were successful, and within a few months Gaozong rescinded the decree requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor. However, Cheng Shixiao 程士顯 (d.u.) and others then presented a memorial stating that “to be entirely consistent, it would be better to also exempt Buddhist monastics from paying homage to their parents” 人主猶存抗禮，豈惟臣下反受跪拜儀，願國無兩敬，讓僧奉內教，不拜父母。 Left with little alternative, Gaozong also rescinded the decree requiring monastics to venerate their parents.¹⁶

During the Kaiyuan period of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 (712–756), the issue of monastics venerating their parents arose again, but the debate on their being required to venerate the emperor seems to have subsided.¹⁷ From Yancong’s *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*, we can see that those who argued in favor of requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople¹⁸ supported their position by citing passages from the “Disciples” chapter of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the “Bodhisattva Never-disparaging” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, both of which appear to support the Confucian position on etiquette. For example, in the section titled “*Taichang si boshi Lu Cai deng yizhuang yi shou*” 泰常寺博士呂才等議狀一首 [Section on the Argument Made by the Scholar Lu Cai of the Taichang Office, et al.], we read:

Careful inquiry shows that there are nine types of ritual worship in the *Zhou li*, one of which was prostration, which the commentary defines as touching one’s head to the ground. Also, the *Shang shu* states that Yu, Yi, and others performed this prostration; this is a way of venerating the ruler, and has been valid since ancient times. Thus the Buddhist monks and nuns of the present day should also be required to kowtow. In this connection, the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* reads, “Because (the Buddha) can guide all sentient beings to silence, all sentient beings prostrate to the Buddha.” 一謹案：周禮有九拜之儀，一曰稽首。注云：首至地也。又案《尚書》言：於禹益等拜，皆言稽首，此為拜君之敬，通於古今也。然今之僧尼禮拜，正當稽首之法。是以《維摩經》雲：導眾以寂故稽首。¹⁹

This is one of the key passages from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* cited to support the argument in favor of requiring Buddhist monastics to venerate the emperor.

In addition, in the section titled “*Xiaowei zhang shi wang xuan ce qi cao xiao guan deng yizhuang yi shou*” 驍衛長史王玄策騎曹蕭灌等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the chief administrator of military officers Wang Xuance and the cavalry commander Xiao Guan, et al.], we read, “One of the officials challenged that monk again by saying, ‘In the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* a monk prostrates at the feet of Vimalakīrti, and in the *Lotus Sūtra* there is a monk who prostrates to everyone. In these two scriptures the monks clearly venerate a layperson, so how is it that you monks of the present age don’t do so?’” 一臣又親難彼僧曰：《維摩經》比丘亦禮維摩詰足，《法華經》僧行普敬。此二經文，拜俗明矣！何因比丘，得不拜尊者。²⁰ In the *Chunfang zhushi Xie Shou deng yizhuang yi shou* 春坊主事謝壽等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the supervisor of the Crown Prince Tutorial Office Xie Shou, et al.], we read, “Some people may ask, ‘We have read in the sūtras about those young monks who prostrated at the feet of Vimalakīrti, and the bodhisattva Never-disparaging, who venerated arrogant people. How is it then that in the case of the emperor, a layman whose spiritual stature is more than equal to that of Vimalakīrti, the Buddhist monks remain standing and arrogantly refuse to follow the established convention?’” 人或問曰：經中既說，新學比丘禮維摩詰足，不輕菩薩亦致敬於慢眾。況今聖主示為白衣，神德則不謝於維摩，立行則不同於慢眾。今使僧拜正合其宜，更有何辭敢不從順。²¹ The arguments of the ministers who advocated requiring Buddhist monastics to pay tribute to the emperor relied heavily on the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in which a group of monks pays homage to the layman Vimalakīrti, arguing that since the emperor’s virtue and achievements are not inferior to those of Vimalakīrti, monks and nuns should have no objection to prostrating to him. Furthermore, in the *Siweisi liu yang si jian deng yizhuang yi shou* 司衛寺卿楊思儉等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the minister of guards Yang Sijian, et al.], we read, “Buddhist monastics paid homage to a layman, and the archivist Zhu Shi did not dare to greet the king of Zhou as a guest. They have long been the role model of the Buddhist and Daoist monastics. But now this is no longer the case; they have strayed from their own teachings which have a long history, and there is the danger that others will follow them in their folly” 是以聲聞降禮於居士，柱史委質於周王，此乃成服[緇服]之表綴，立黃冠之龜鏡。自茲已降，喪其宗軌，歷代溺其真理，習俗守其迷途。 These passages demonstrate that the memorials in favor of requiring monks to venerate the emperor relied heavily on the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in which monks pay homage to the layman Vimalakīrti. As He Jianping sums up the debate:

These quotations have the following characteristics: First, even though the case of Vimalakīrti is an extraordinary one, they present it as if it were the norm, which amounts to mistaking the exception for the rule; secondly, they put the emperor on same level as Vimalakīrti; thirdly, they see the teachings of Vimalakīrti as comparable to those of the Confucian scriptures; and fourth, they reason that since monks venerate a layman in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, then the monastics of the present day should do so as well. (He 2009)

The frequent reference to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in these petitions advocating the worship of the emperor by Buddhist monks indicates that, by the Sui–Tang era, Buddhist doctrines and scriptures had become well known and taken root in China, and had become an important force in society. Thus, it was no longer possible for the imperial court to simply impose its will on the Saṃgha, but now had to present a cogent argument to support any statutes affecting it. In the case of the statute requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor, the court ministers made extensive use of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* to support their position.²²

At the same time, a line of reasoning which relied on both sacred doctrine and political expediency was put forth in the *Neifu jiancheng Liu Yuanzhen deng yizhuang yi shou* 內府監丞柳元貞等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the palace inspector Liu Yuanzhen, et al.], which states, “After the Buddha’s demise, the monarch takes charge of the Dharma” 佛滅度後，法付國王。²³ In this line of reasoning, the king has sacred authority to act as both the guardian and spokesman of the Buddhist religion, which provided a sacred reason

for the royal power to intervene in Buddhist affairs and also strengthened the practical significance of the monks' behavior in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*.

In both the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna scriptures, the superior status of monastics in relation to laypeople is taken for granted, and requiring monastics to pay obeisance to the emperor clearly contradicts this idea, so it comes as no surprise that any legislation to this effect was vigorously resisted by the Saṃgha. Faced with heavy pressure exerted by royal power and the patriarchal system in the early Tang dynasty, the Buddhist community fought hard to maintain its autonomy. In responding to the arguments that they should follow the precedent found in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the Buddhists were required to present a convincing counter argument to defend their position. Their arguments were generally of the following three types:

(1) The distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions. A large number of Mahāyāna scriptures present the veneration of monastics by laypeople as the norm, and the confounding of monks is only a minor element of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, and can hardly be seen as a mainstream element of Buddhism. In the *You xiaowei zhangshi Wang Xuance qicao Xiao Guan deng yizhuang yi shou* 右驍衛長史王玄策騎曹蕭灌等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the chief administrator of military officers Wang Xuance and the cavalry commander Xiao Guan, et al.], we read that Wang Xuance 王玄策 (622?–682?) was sent to India several times on diplomatic and military missions by the Tang emperors Taizong and Gaozong, during which he learned that Buddhist monastics in India paid homage to neither deities, ancestors, king, nor parents, and that the king and parents actually paid obeisance to monks and nuns. Thus, in the *Yizhuang*, we read:

The Buddhist monastic code lays out the regular standards of behavior for monks and nuns; when the monks in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* prostrate to Vimalakīrti, it's merely an exceptional expression of gratitude suited only to that particular occasion, rather than a model to be followed by others. Likewise, in the *Lotus Sūtra*, just because we see a great being adopting a particular expedient means doesn't mean that we should take it as a norm to be followed by all people at all times. Take, for example, Zhuangzi. When his wife died, he circumambulated her body while singing and beating a basin; this was merely temporary expedient; how could it possibly be make it part of the official funeral rites. 佛製律經，乃是僧尼常軌；其《維摩經》比丘荷法，暫行曲禮。《法華經》大士一時別行，何得以權時別行亂茲恆典。臣深然之。臣聞妻死鼓盆環屍而歌，此亦一時別行，豈得預於喪服之制？²⁴

Wang Xuance, Xiao Guan 蕭灌 (626–682), et al. argue that the passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* where the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of gratitude for his edifying instruction is an expedient means suited to a particular situation (*biaofa* 表法), rather than a rule of etiquette to be applied to all situations, and the same goes for the exceptional behavior of the bodhisattva Never-disparaging. By the same token, the fact that Zhuangzi beat a basin and sang a song when his wife died should not be taken to mean that his idiosyncratic behavior should be made into a standard rite to be performed at all funerals.

(2) The distinction between individual realization and general ethics. In the *You chunfang zhushi xie shou deng yizhuang yi shou*, we read:

A single scripture is to be interpreted in light of the entire canon, not vice versa. So if a particular monk prostrates to a layman, then it doesn't follow that the five types of disciples should be required to do so as well. Similarly, it might happen that a particular person doesn't cry at his mother's funeral, but that wouldn't be a proper reason to impose a blanket ban on crying at funerals. In the case of Zhuangzi, he sang and played music over his wife's corpse in the knowledge that life and death are like the four seasons; and Meng Sun didn't weep at his mother's funeral because he had realized the interdependent nature of life and death. They all had a high level of realization, so how could the average person be expected to emulate their example? The laws of a nation need to be formulated in accordance with the situation of the average person, rather than those who

are exceptional 不可以一人別行而亂於大教。若以比丘頂禮於居士，則令五衆設拜於君親。俗人有居母喪而不哀，豈使天下喪親而不哭。至如莊周對婦屍而歌樂，知存歿如四時；孟孫居母喪而不戚，達死生乎一貫。此皆體道勝軌，何不令天下俱行？若以體道之情，不可施於國法者；彼亦證理之行，豈得施於大化之議風也。²⁵

Whereas a monk prostrating to Vimalakīrti is an instance of the exceptional behavior of an individual, requiring that all monastics make a full prostration every time they meet the ruler or their parents is a matter of laying down a general rule for all to follow. Whereas the general teaching (*dajiao* 大教) needs to be suited to the situation and capacity of the average disciple, exceptional behavior (*biexing* 別行), though in accordance with the Dharma, is idiosyncratic in form and is a manifestation of an individual's particular level of spiritual attainment. Thus, it would be a mistake to try to turn the exception into the rule; Zhuangzi's idiosyncratic funeral rite for his wife is paradigmatic of such an exception.

(3) The incomplete teaching is not the complete teaching. In the "*Puguang si shamen Xuanfan zhiyi baizhuang yi shou*" 普光寺沙門玄范質議拜狀一首 [Section on the questions of the monk Xuanfan of the Puguang Monastery concerning homage], we read:

(It would be wrong) to use the famous case of Vimalakīrti as an example to advocate prostration. One time there was a teacher who taught the Dharma to a neophyte without giving due consideration of his capacity, so that he forgot the meaning, as though the teaching were incomplete. After mindfully composing his thoughts, he remembered his past lives, had an awakening experience, and returned to his original mind; this is revered as the complete teaching. Thus prostrating to an improper object or indiscriminately touching the feet is to fail to properly distinguish between monastic and laity, such that one's essential nature becomes obscured for a very long time. This is something a true master knows well, viz., that a teaching which suits those of lesser capacity should not be applied universally. 又舉淨名而取稽首，引知法而招恭敬。昔函丈於新學不觀機而授藥，以中忘此意，宗半字焉。既宴寂於正念，發宿生而示悟，還得本心，崇滿字矣。於是以亡相稽首，無想接足，乃混[緇]素於一時，泯性相於萬古。斯並大士權誠，未可小機普准。²⁶

Xuanfan 玄范 (d.u.) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) were contemporaries, and both were well-versed in the doctrines of the consciousness-only school. Xuanfan refers to the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna teachings as "incomplete" and "complete," respectively, and explains that Vimalakīrti awakens the wholesome roots laid down in past lives by the young monks, causing them to awaken to their original mind, in true Mahāyāna fashion. Since the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti while cutting off the external signs of worship, and since Vimalakīrti has no attachment to being venerated, this obliterates the distinction between monk and layman, as well as all external signs of veneration. Since Xuanfan is arguing from the perspective of the Mahāyāna, he points out the impracticality of absolute systematization.

It can be seen that, in arguing against mandatory veneration of lay people, the Buddhists of the early and mid-Tang dynasty made frequent reference to such concepts as exceptional actions, level of attainment, principle, and skillful means, to counter the notions of a universal teaching, institutionalism, and phenomena, an approach which is consistent with that adopted by Yancong in his *Futian lun*.

4. The Commentarial Interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*

While referring to the relevant passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the Buddhists of the Sui and Tang dynasties adopted the interpretations which had long been preserved in the commentarial tradition, yet their particular mode of argumentation was also affected by practical considerations. The appearance in 650 of Xuanzang's new translation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經, especially the line "Thereupon they prostrated themselves at the feet of the great sage," challenged the interpretive skills of Kuiji and others. From the perspective of philology and intellectual history, it is essential

to differentiate the various interpretations of the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* relating to this issue, since doing so reveals the interaction and tension between the intellectual trends and historical events.²⁷

The commentarial interpretations of the pertinent passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* can be categorized into three types: veneration out of gratitude; signless veneration; and forgetting decorum out of ignorance (See He 2009, pp. 459–62).

(1) Veneration out of gratitude

None of the extant commentaries on Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*—the *Zhu weimojie suoshuo jing* 注維摩詰所說經 by Seng Zhao 僧肇 et al., and the *Jingming xuan lun* 淨名玄論 and the *Weimo jing yishu* 維摩經義疏 by Jizang 吉藏—interpret the line in which the monks prostrate at the feet of Vimalakīrti. However, in Jingying Huiyuan's 淨影慧遠 (523–592) *Weimo yi ji* 維摩義記 [Notes on the interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], we read:

From “therefore” onwards, (the scripture) states that all those monks gained the original mind, and reverently expressed their gratitude; “top” means head; they kotowed at his feet as a gesture of respect “於是”下，明諸比丘由得本心，荷恩致敬；首是頭首，稽首禮足，顯敬愍至。²⁸

When the newly ordained monks realize the original mind, they prostrate at the feet of Vimalakīrti as a gesture of respect. The same interpretation is found in Daoye's 道液 (d.u.) *Jingming jing ji jie Guanzhong shu* 淨名經集解關中疏 [Guanzhong explanation of commentaries on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], i.e., “Those four were inspired to express their veneration out of gratitude” 此四，大志開發，感恩致敬也。²⁹

Huiyuan's interpretation influenced that found in the *Yuimagyō gisho* 維摩義疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], ascribed to the Japanese prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622), which states, “Second, from ‘therefore’ onwards (the scripture) states that the monks venerate Vimalakīrti” 第二從“於是”以下，明諸比丘報敬淨名。³⁰ However, the expression “veneration out of gratitude” only describes their motivation, without considering that doing so involves a breach on monastic discipline.

(2) Signless veneration

This veneration out of gratitude seems to run counter to the monastic code, and Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597) addresses this difficulty in his *Weimo jing wenshu*, where he writes:

As for the line “the monks paid homage,” although they were eager to hear the Dharma, they weren't ripe enough to understand it, so it would have been of no benefit to them. But when they were secretly blessed by Vimalakīrti with the power of *samādhi*, they remembered their past lives, and their good roots came to fruition. They were both ashamed and grateful, whereupon they prostrated at Vimalakīrti's feet. But how can a monk pay homage to a layman? Because he showed them the Way, for which they were immensely grateful; moreover, since they were now intent on following the bodhisattva path, they were no longer subject to the constraints of the *śrāvaka* monastic code. 諸比丘敬禮者，滿願差機說法，回惶無益。今蒙淨名三昧冥加，即知宿命，善根開發，荷恩事重，感愧頂禮也。問曰：出家人何得禮白衣？答曰：入道恩重，碎身莫報，諸比丘欲行菩薩道，豈存聲聞戒律之形儀也。³¹

Zhiyi's explanation that the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of shame and gratitude agrees with that of Huiyuan, but Zhiyi goes further by explaining that, by virtue of the principle of equality emphasized in the bodhisattva practice, they were no longer strictly bound by the monastic code. Mahāyāna Buddhism takes the attainment of buddhahood as the highest ideal, and takes as its norm the bodhisattva path, wherein the distinction between monastics and laypeople is of little importance. This stands in stark contrast to early Indian Buddhism, in which only a monastic could become an arhat, the highest aim in the early schools. For Zhiyi, the lay–monastic distinction has no relevance to spiritual attainment, and the external appearance of the act of worship disappears in the wisdom of emptiness.

Zhiyi's interpretation had an impact on the commentaries of later generations. In fascicle 3 of the *Weimo jing shu*, Pelliot 2049, we read, "From 'therefore' onwards, they reverently expressed their gratitude; the benefit they had gained was so profound that they discarded external appearances, so it is called a courtesy "於是"下荷恩致敬，得益既深，亡其形相，故謂禮也。³² Similarly, fascicle 5 of the *Weimo jing lueshu*, Zhanran (711–782) states, "Now that they were practitioners of the great Way, how could they be constrained by minor points of etiquette. 方行大道，豈存小儀。³³ Once Vimalakīrti had awakened them to their original mind, the monks were endowed with the wisdom of non-discrimination, such that they were no longer attached to appearances; this is what could be called "signless veneration." However, this is to explain it from the level of principle, which cannot resolve the difficulties in reality. Of course, Zhiyi and others may not have been personally involved in this controversy relating to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, since it largely took place in the late Sui and early Tang dynasties, so they do not directly comment on the issue at hand.

(3) Forgetting decorum out of ignorance

The controversy over monastics venerating laypeople at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty had a significant impact on the way in which the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* has been interpreted by subsequent generations of commentators, who often related their interpretations to issues being debated in their own time. For example, in the *Shuo wugoucheng jing shu*, Kuiji comments:

The verse states: Second is the passage in which they are brought into contact with the Mahāyāna. By hearing of various past events, their former aspiration reappears, enabling them to generate the mind of Mahāyāna. Since they are new to the Buddhadharmā, they had but a rudimentary understanding of monastic etiquette; and when they hear the marvelous teaching, they lose their presence of mind, whereupon they abandoned the formal constraints of the monastic code, and prostrate at the feet of the great master. 讚曰：此第二文，教發大心。說諸前事，今踵前心，故能發大心。初入佛法，不解軌儀，創聞妙理，回惶失錯，故舍出家之正軌，而禮大士之卑足經。³⁴

Kuiji takes a more realistic approach in explaining why the monks paid homage to Vimalakīrti, arguing that, since they were recently ordained, they did not have a good understanding of the monastic code and customary etiquette expected of a monk, such that under such dramatic circumstances they easily lost their presence of mind and paid homage to Vimalakīrti. This line of reasoning is quite different from that of Huiyuan and Zhiyi and has considerable bearing on the controversy over monastics venerating laypeople. In the Never-disparaging chapter of Kuiji's commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra*, we read, "Those new monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of ignorance; not due to something learned in past lives" 新學比丘禮維摩足，未有知故，非舊學故。³⁵ According to the interpretation of Kuiji, that kind of veneration is done out of ignorance, so it cannot be taken as a precedent for other monastics to follow.

Kuiji's interpretation seems to be echoed by Zhanran, who in the *Fahua wenju ji* writes:

Somebody has asked about the propriety of a monk paying homage to a layman. Now I will reply. The bodhisattva's raison d'être is to transform sentient beings; the Dharma is fluid; only what is beneficial is mandatory, and that's the purpose of etiquette. Seen from the perspective of universal truth, there is no difference between paying homage to an ordinary person and paying homage to a Buddha; it's personal behavior ... In this connection, some have misunderstood the passage in the scriptures in which monks venerate laypeople. In the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* the standard form is to reverence the Dharma, so since you have learned the Dharma from someone, you pay homage to him. Since the monks heard the Dharma from Vimalakīrti and were very grateful, they forgot themselves and prostrated, but that doesn't make it a permanent rule. Since the true meaning of the Mahāyāna surpasses secular rules, it would be uncalled for to require monastics to venerate laypeople 有人問：何故禮俗？今為答之。菩薩化緣，法

無一準，唯利是務，故設斯儀。見衆生理與果理等，故禮生禮佛，其源不殊，此自行也... 有人此中引大經中禮知法者，及淨名中比丘禮俗。此義不然。《涅槃》常儀顯敬法之志，從彼請益，故忘情禮下。淨名闡法已獲重恩，故忘犯設敬，不存恆則。若大乘正義出俗恆則，亦無令道而禮於俗。³⁶

Zhanran's view is that the monks' veneration of Vimalakīrti is a manifestation of their entering upon the bodhisattva path, by virtue of which paying homage to a layperson is one of the skillful means by which a bodhisattva transforms others. By virtue of the ultimate non-distinction between the Buddha and all sentient beings, the bodhisattva's edifying actions have no fixed form; this is seeing things from the perspective of principle and personal behavior. However, from the point of view of phenomena and institutions, the newly ordained monks prostrate out of forgetfulness, which is the same as Kuiji's interpretation. By contrast, Zhanran argues that, despite the emphasis in the Mahāyāna on non-duality, it does not advocate that monks and nuns worship lay people, neither in particular cases, nor as a general practice.

Buddhism teaches the interpenetration of principle and phenomena, and one should not be attached to either of them. Both veneration out of gratitude and veneration out of signlessness are based on principle and non-discrimination, at the expense of phenomena and institutions; forgetting decorum and outward signs out of ignorance gives precedence to phenomena and institutions, without considering principle. Thus, neither of them makes for a strong argument. Of course, this is closely related to the relationship between Buddhism and imperial authority in China, which were both interdependent and at odds with one another, resulting in a certain tension, which is also apparent in the commentaries on the relevant passages in *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* composed in the Sui and Tang dynasties, in terms of principle and phenomena, ultimate and expedient, idiosyncratic and universal, and complete and incomplete.

5. Conclusions

Beginning with Huiyuan's *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 [Treatise on why monastics should not pay homage to the ruler] in the Eastern Jin dynasty, Buddhist commentators have put forth a variety of views on the issue of monastics paying homage to laypeople, and these have had a profound impact on the later Buddhist tradition. Huiyuan advocated maintaining a close relationship with the secular authorities, so as to facilitate cooperation in social education, but not at the expense of the Saṃgha's ideological and organizational independence, in line with the Buddhist emphasis on transcending worldly affairs. Perhaps the most convincing and useful model on the relationship between Buddhism and the Chinese state is that of Huiyuan.

With the national unification brought about under the Sui and Tang dynasties, there arose competition between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism for imperial favor, giving rise to a series of attacks on Buddhism, and it was in the resulting turbulent ideological environment that Emperor Gaozu sought to curb the power of Buddhism. Endowed with a stronger sense of self-criticism and political rationalism, Taizong paid lip service to the Saṃgha, while maintaining a certain distance.³⁷ Therefore, when the imperial court and Buddhists were debating the issue of monastics paying homage to the ruler, the various citations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* were first and foremost a manifestation of political rationalism.

In interpreting the related passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, Buddhist apologists in the Sui and Tang dynasties emphasized "the distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions" and "the distinction between individual realization and general ethics," lines of reasoning which are consonant with the interpretations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* commentarial tradition I refer to as "veneration out of gratitude" and "signless veneration," indicating a certain consistency in Buddhist circles on the question of lay-monastic relations. However, the apologetic put forth by Kuiji I refer to as "forgetting decorum out of ignorance" was an extreme interpretation in the argument against the feasibility of requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople.

In contrast to India, religious activity in China has always been closely tied up with secular and state affairs, so when Buddhism came to China it was inevitable that its relationship with the state would be complex and strained. Another relevant factor was the concept of the “formless precepts” exemplified by such lay Chan masters as Pang Yun 龐蘊 (740–808) and Fu Dashi 傅大士 (497–569), which presented a considerable challenge to the traditional notion of monastic superiority, a challenge that went even further than that posed by the problematic passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*.³⁸ At the same time, while this series of debates relating to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* attenuated the literati’s traditional respect for Buddhism,³⁹ it also led to the widespread popularity throughout Chinese society of this important text.

Seen from the perspective of social history and the history of Buddhist thought, scriptural commentaries constitute a vivid and lively expression of the views and concerns prevalent in a particular time and place. The lay–monastic ethics of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the Sui–Tang debate on requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople clearly reveal how, in the process of finding the right balance between doctrinal orthodoxy and individual capacity, i.e., discerning the proper relationship between what is true and what is right, the commentaries not only elucidate the meaning of the scriptures, but also the values and sentiments of the commentators themselves. As such, the commentaries can be seen as a fusion of personal views and social mores, and the meeting place of intellectual and social history.

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Notes

¹ For more on monk–lay ethics see: Schopen (1997, pp. 23–55).

² T14n541a. Alternative translations include “Thereupon all those monks paid homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti” 即時諸比丘稽首禮維摩詰足 by Zhi Qiang (T14n522c); and “Thereupon they prostrated at the feet of this great master” 即便稽首彼大士足 by Xuan Zang (T14n563a).

³ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n280c).

⁴ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 24 (T50n632c).

⁵ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 30 (T50n632b–c).

⁶ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n281b).

⁷ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification], fascicle 25 T52n282a.

⁸ In *Tang qianqi daorushi sanjiao zai chaoting de douzheng* 唐前期道儒釋三教在朝廷的鬥爭 [The clash of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the imperial court in the early Tang dynasty], Li Bincheng lists the main topics of these five debates: 1. Fu Yi’s attack on Buddhism; 2. the struggle between Buddhism and Daoism for primacy; 3. monastics paying homage to rulers and parents; 4. the *Laozi huahu jing* 老子化胡經 [Book of Laozi’s Conversion of the Barbarians] an apocryphal Daoist text in which Laozi is said to have civilized the non-Chinese peoples; and 5. the construction of Daoist temples for the two princesses Jinxian and Yuzhen. See Yang and Fang (2001, pp. 123–49). For Fu Yi’s attack on Buddhism, see: Wright (1951).

⁹ *Fozu Lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 [Comprehensive registry of the successive ages of the buddhas and the patriarchs]. T49n563c.

¹⁰ *Zhenguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要 [A survey of politics in the Zhenguan reign], fascicle 7, “*Liyue di ershijiu*” 禮樂第二十九 [Part 29: Music and ritual]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2009, p. 194.

¹¹ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive mirror in aid of governance]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2007, pp. 2, 344.

¹² *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n284a).

¹³ *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 [Records of Buddhism in the Kaiyuan era], fascicle 8 (T55n563c).

¹⁴ *Weixiu zhuan* 威秀傳 [The biography of Weixiu], in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Song-dynasty collection of biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 7 (T50n812b).

- 15 *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and Clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n289b).
- 16 For the details on this debate, see: [Fujiyoshi \(2002\)](#), pp. 341–70).
- 17 For more on this debate during the Xuan Zong era, see [Tonami \(1982\)](#), pp. 637–42). See also [Kamada \(1994\)](#), part 1, p. 92).
- 18 He Jianping categorizes the points at issue into: 1. ethics and etiquette; 2. the precedence of person over principle; 3. the three religions approach the same goal by different paths; and 4. the monarch takes charge of Dharma. See [He \(2009\)](#), pp. 456–59).
- 19 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 5 (T52n466c).
- 20 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 4 (T52n462a).
- 21 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 4 (T52n463a).
- 22 Emperor Xuan Zong was particularly interested in the *Jingang bore jing* 金剛般若經 [Diamond Sūtra] and the *Renwang bore jing* 仁王般若經 [Humane Kings Wisdom Sūtra]. This was influenced by the theories and practices of sudden enlightenment of the Chan school of the 8th century and by the ideal models of political leaders. See: The original version is Si 2702 and Bo 2188, and the corrected versions are Si 3770, Si 6503, Si 6568, and Si 6580. ([Fang 1996](#), p. 248).
- 23 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 5 (T52n467c).
- 24 *ibid.*, fascicle 4 (T52n462a).
- 25 *ibid.*, fascicle 4 (T52n463b-c).
- 26 *ibid.*, fascicle 6 (T52n471a).
- 27 See [Wang \(2009\)](#), pp. 7–10). For more on the interpretive history of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, see: [Hashimoto \(1966\)](#), pp. 118–91).
- 28 T38n453a-454a.
- 29 The original version is Si 2702 and Bo 2188, and the corrected versions are Si 3770, Si 6503, Si 6568, and Si 6580. ([Fang 1996](#), p. 248).
- 30 T56n37c.
- 31 *Weimo jing wenshu* 維摩經文疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 4. Xuzangjing 卍新纂續藏經, vol. 18, p. 567a-b.
- 32 *Weimo jing shu* 維摩經疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 3 (T85n388c).
- 33 *Weimo jing lueshu* 維摩經略疏 [Brief commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 5 (T38n624a).
- 34 *Shuo Wugoucheng jing shu* 說無垢稱經疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], end of fascicle 3 (T38n1049b).
- 35 *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經玄讚 [Commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra*], top of fascicle 10 (T34n840a).
- 36 *Fahua wenju ji* 法華文句記 [Notes on passages in the *Lotus Sūtra*], middle of fascicle 10 (T34n349a-b).
- 37 For more on Gaozu's policies on Buddhism and Taizong's Buddhist faith, see: [Moroto \(1990\)](#), pp. 513–84).
- 38 For more on “signless precepts”, see: [Schlütter \(2017\)](#).
- 39 For more on the Chinese literati's interest in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, see: [Sun \(1996\)](#).

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