

The political import of
the “Buddha” and the “Foreign Kings”
in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*

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Man wang li fo tu 蠻王禮佛圖 (Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha)

(fig.1) is an ink painting attributed to the Northern Song court painter Zhao Guangfu 趙光輔 (act. 960-976). The polychromatic painting is about 28.60 cm tall and 103.50 cm high. Figures on the painting are divided into two groups. The Buddha and his attendants are on the left side while foreign worshippers are on the right side, facing the Buddha. Among all the figures, the Buddha in a red gown occupies the most prominent position. The Buddha is casually posed, with his hands resting on his legs. The Buddha is seated on a lotus-shaped throne that makes him higher than the other figures. He has a serene expression on his face and he is looking down at the worshipper. The Buddha is flanked by two monks and two Lokapalas.¹ The halos behind the Buddha and monks indicate their identities as saints. The auspicious clouds at the back of the group of religious people also suggest their nobility and brilliancy.

The foreign worshippers are standing reverently in front of the Buddha. These figures are painted with great details. Comparing with Han Chinese, these foreign people are feature in higher nose, larger eyes, burns, hair styles, and their dressing codes. Each of them wears different cloths and baldrics from the others, indicating their diverse ethnicities. Expressions on their faces are vivid. Some of them are looking forward devotionally at the Buddha, some are looking backwards and

¹ *Lokapala* are often referred to as “the regents of the four directions” or the “four great kings”. They are gods who inhabit the lowest heaven above the human world. Statues of the four lokapalas are often found guarding religious sites. For information on *lokapalas*, see *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, Ed. Damien Keown, (Oxford University Press, 2003), Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, University of Hong Kong, 18 June 2009

(<http://www.oxfordreference.com.eproxy1.lib.hku.hk/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t108.e1027>)

talking with others, and the rest are meditating or praying. Most of the worshippers hold precious tributes for the Buddha. Others are making homage with their hands showing respect towards the Buddha.

Due to these worshippers' different appearances from Han Chinese, they were considered to be barbarians (*man* 蠻) in Han Chinese' eyes during the past time. As it was described in an early Tang text “the curly hair and green pupils, which are the fundamental appearance of the barbarian, and the high nose and deep eyes, which are the constant form of the barbarian.”² Moreover, according to the description of the painting in *Shiqu baoji xubian* 石渠寶笈續編 composed during Qianlong's period (1736-1795), these foreign people were probably royalties. The text reads:

Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha is a 8.7 cun. high, 3.16 chi long silk scroll with colour, depicting Buddha seated on the lotus throne (Skt.Padmasana) with two monks and two lokpalas beside him. The barbarian royalty, followed by 15 figures, is worshipping with a magpie tail. Signature: Guangfu. Seal: unreconizeable.³

Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha is currently in Cleveland Museum collection in the United States. However, the authenticity of the painting is doubted.⁴ The authenticity problem is mainly due to the lack of information. To my knowledge there are no references describing the painting in art historical texts that date to the Song dynasty including *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜 (Records and Criticism of paintings, composed during Xuanhe period (1119-1125). Up to now, the only record I

² Gong Bendong 鞏本棟, *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集 (Classical Buddhist essays), (Taibei shi : Fo guang wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 1998), Vol.13, 186.

³ Wang Jie 王傑 (act. c.1636-c.1912), et al. *Shiqu baoji xubian* 石渠寶笈續編 (the supplementation of Shiqu baoji), (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1995), 62-63, the Chinese text reads “趙光輔蠻王禮佛圖一卷。本幅絹本縱八寸七分橫三尺二寸六分設色畫佛做寶臺二弟子二天王夾侍蠻王執鵲尾鱸作禮後侍從十六人欽光輔今印不可辨。”

⁴ Wai-Kam Ho, Sherman E, Lee, et al. *Eight dynasties of Chinese painting : the collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art*, (Cleveland, Ohio : Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1980), 60-61.

can find is in *Shiqu baoji xubian* mentioned above. Modern art historian Huang Du 黃篤 claimed in his essay that many scholars believed the painting now located in Cleveland Museum is a copy dating from the Qing dynasty (1644-1912).⁵ Nonetheless, by displaying primary records pertaining to Zhao Guangfu's art works and his painting style, Huang Du argued that *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* is an original work.⁶

In addition, there are no specific records on the creator of the painting. The painting is attributed to Zhao Guangfu, Yet, owing to the rare information about Zhao Guangfu, the assumption can not be firmly proved. Most of the art historian records agree that Zhao Guangfu was a court painter working for Chinese royalties. All of the research to my knowledge has commented on Zhao Guangfu's excellent skills in painting Buddhism figures, Daoism figures, and barbarian horses. In Bian Yongyu's 卞永譽 (1645-1712) *Shigutang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫會考 (Notes and Records on calligraphy and paintings), Zhao Guangfu's paintings were classified as *shenpin* 神品 (divine) in painting animals and *shenpinxia* 神品下 (nearly divine) in painting figures.⁷ However, the active period of Zhao Guangfu remains unclear. According to Guo Ruoxu's 郭若虛 (act.c.960-c.1127) *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志 (Experiences in Painting),⁸ Zhao Guofu was active during Song Taizu's 宋太祖

⁵ Huang Du 黃篤, "Barbarian Royalties Worshipping Buddha: seen from a Different Perspective", *Oriental Art*, Vol.40, No.2 (1994), 18-26.

⁶ Ibid, 18-26.

⁷ Bian Yongyu 卞永譽 (1645-1712), *Shigutang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫會考 (Notes and Records on calligraphy and paintings), in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Complete books of the four imperial repositories), ed. Yongrong 永瑢 (1743-1790), et al, (Xianggang : Di zhi wen hua chu ban you xian gong si, 2002), Vol.31, 90- 91

⁸ Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (act.10th-12th. cent.), *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Complete books of the four imperial repositories), ed. Yongrong 永瑢 (1743-1790), et al, (Xianggang : Di zhi wen hua chu ban you xian gong si, 2002), Vol.3, 10.

reign (960-976). While in Liu Daochun's 劉道淳 (act.c.1057) *Songchao minghua lu* 宋朝名畫錄 (Records of Master Pieces created during the Song dynasty), Zhao Guangfu was an artist during Song Taizong's 宋太宗 reign (976-997).⁹

The conjecture that Zhao Guangfu as the creator of the painting is probably due to a record about one of his frescoes which bears similar theme and image with *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*. The detailed records about the fresco was written by You Shixiong 游師雄 (1037-1097). You Shixiong was an imperial officer, expert epigrapher and calligrapher.¹⁰ He made a piece of stele to memorize Zhao Guangfu's fresco. The content of the inscription was recorded in *Jingyang xianzhi* 涇陽縣誌 (Gazetteer of Jingyang). The stele made on April 25th, 1094, reads:

“... When I with attendants passed through the western town of Mengdian, in Yunyang, I found a painting on the back wall of one Hall of the Temple depicting Avalokitesvara in a leisurely yet dignified pose. On his left, foreign royalty and attendants were portrayed burning incense in respectful poses. To the right of Avalokitesvara, there was a figure clad in royal costume in a pose of piety. Accompanying the royal figure were wild beasts such as deer, tigers and leopards.”¹¹

Given the historical records listed above, I believe it is valid to assume that *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* was created by Zhao Guangfu during the Song Taizong's 宋太宗 reign. After all, there is no evidence could disprove the

⁹ Liu Daochun 劉道淳 (act.c.1057), *Songchao minghua lu* 宋朝名畫錄 (Records of Master Pieces created during the Song dynasty), in Wenyuange Siku quanshu 文淵閣四庫全書 (Complete books of the four imperial repositories), ed. Yongrong 永瑤 (1743-1790), et al, (Xianggang : Di zhi wen hua chu ban you xian gong si, 2002), Vol.1, 4.

¹⁰ Huang Du, 19-20, information is from *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song dyansty), ed. Tuo Tuo 脫脫 (1313-1355); *Jin shi cui bian* 金石粹編 (Collections of Stone Inscriptions), ed. Wang Chang 王昶(1742-1806).

¹¹ You Shixiong 游師雄 (1037-1097), “Song You Shixiong ti Zhao Guangfu Huabi 宋游師雄題趙光輔畫壁 (You Shixiong's inscription on Zhang Guangfu's fresco)”, in *Jingyang xian zhi* 涇陽縣誌 (Gazetteer of Jingyang County: Stone Inscriptions),ed. Liu Maoguan 劉懋官, (Taipei: Chengwen Min58, 1969), 179—181, the Chinese text reads “...餘行部過雲陽孟店鎮西寺殿後...自在觀音一...曲盡端嚴閑暇態度其左右有外國胡王與人從焚香狀貞極恭虔其右有衣王者服髻瞻禮之容旁有銜花野獸麋鹿虎豹各盡馴伏情狀至於竹 木花卉無不精至...”、

possibility. Even if the assumption was wrong, painting similar to *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* such as the fresco was indeed created. In this essay, I will mainly explore the relationship between Buddhism and politics during the Song dynasty. I will argue that Buddhism was used by emperors during the Song dynasty to achieve their political ambitions. In this case, *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* is actually a political metaphor suggesting that the Song emperors were cultural and governmental leaders. Moreover, according to relevant records, the Song emperors were unable to conquer non-Han Chinese regions as they wished to. Hence, *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* may also act as a mask to cover the emperors' actual failure in uniting both Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese. Why did the Song emperors choose Buddhism figures as the political metaphor? I believe that the choice probably followed the emperors' during the Tang dynasty. In this essay, I will make a comparison between the Buddhist images created during the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty. I believe such comparison would shed some light on the political function of *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* in the Song dynasty.

Song Taizong's attitudes towards Buddhism and inspirations from the Tang dynasty

Song Taizong was enthusiastic about Buddhism, and he had wanted to strengthen his reign over the country by promoting Buddhism. Song Taizong contended that his government would benefit from Buddhism.¹² As I have mentioned

¹² Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797), *Xu zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑒 (Supplementation of General Mirror for the Aid of Government), in *Chuanshi cang shu · Shi ku* 傳世藏書·史庫 (Chinese classics·historical classics), (Haikou: Haikou guoji xinwen chu ban zhong xin, 1995), Vol.12, 108, the Chinese text reads “凡爲君臣者，治人利物，即是修行。梁武捨身爲寺家奴，此真大惑！方外之說，亦有可觀，卿等試讀之。蓋存其教，非溺於釋氏也。”

above, I believe Song Taizong's idea of combining Buddhism with governance was inspired by the emperors during the Tang dynasty (618-907), especially Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (599-649).

To begin with, I would like to introduce Tang Taizong. Tang Taizong was an emperor who enjoyed good reputation among Chinese rulers. Under his domination, China reached its peak in the aspects of economic, military, and culture. Historical records frequently noted Tang Taizong was a great ruler. For instance, in *Tang Shi* 唐史 (the History of the Tang dynasty), Tang Taizong was eulogized as one of the merciful and wise emperors among the great emperors in ancient China. Tang Taizong released thousands of court ladies who originally lost their freedom and had to serve the court for their whole life. These ladies were able to reunite with their families and get married freely. In addition, Tang Taizong also abolished extremely cruel punishments. According to a law made by Tang Taizong, the suspects could not be beaten for more than three times. The amount of blows could not exceed two hundred each time. If the suspect still did not confess his crimes after the beatings, then he should be released.¹³ Furthermore, records suggest that Tang Taizong was a pious disciple of Buddhism. He had done many merciful behaviors under the name of Buddhism. For instance, shortly after Tang Taizong had ascended the throne, he asked those Buddhist Masters who had good reputations to come the palaces and pray for the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the peace of the country. Apart from this, Tang Taizong also established several Buddhist temples to commemorate his mother

¹³ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007-1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061), *Xin tang shu* 新唐書 (the newly organized history of the Tang dynasty), from <http://dbo.sinica.edu.tw/~tdbproj/handy1/index.html>?, 23-51.

and to express his filial piety.¹⁴ Tang Taizong's clement behaviors and his admiration towards Buddhism attracted numbers of foreign monks to China. Hence, in terms of politics, Tang Taizong's devotion towards Buddhism could also be considered as a strategy designed to help Tang Taizong win an esteemed reputation among the barbarian countries. From the above, we may say that Tang Taizong restricted his behavior and implemented merciful policies in the country according to Buddhism doctrines. Meanwhile, he won his reputation and power with his sincere in Buddhism and his efficient governance.

Song Taizong extolled Tang Taizong and would always like to compare himself with Tang Taizong. According to historical records, Song Taizong once asked his court officers how he compared with Tang Taizong as an emperor.¹⁵ In addition, Song Taizong was also keen on making a parallel between his court officers and Tang Taizong's. He once praised his prime minister Kou Zhun 寇准 (961-1023) was just like Wei Zheng Gong 魏鄭公 (580-643) of Tang Taizong's court.¹⁶ Wei Zheng Gong was a righteous officer who was famous for his bravery in pointing out the emperor's fault in a frank way. On the other hand, since Tang Taizong could accept Wei Zheng Gong's blame calmly and adjust his policies according to the suggestion, people complimented Tang Taizong as the emperor who was able to value the righteous officers. In this case, by appreciating Kou Zhun, Song Taizong actually showed

¹⁴ Zhao Keyao 趙克堯 and Xu Daoxun 許道勳, *Tang Taizong zhuan* 唐太宗傳 (the Biography of Tang Taizong), (Beijing: Renmin chu ban she, 1985), 97 – 123.

¹⁵ Feng Qi 馮琦 (1558-1603), *Song shi ji shi ben mo* 宋史紀事本末 (The history of the Song dynasty), ed.Chen Bangdan 陳邦瞻 (?-1623), (Shenyang: Liao shen chu ban she), 125.

¹⁶ Tuo Tuo 脫脫 (1314-1355), "Song Taizong ben ji 太宗本紀 (Biography of Song Taizong)", in *Song Shi* 宋史 (History of the Song dynasty), 53-73, from 漢籍電子檔——中央檢索系統 <http://dbo.sinica.edu.tw/~tdbproj/handy1/index.html?>

himself to be as a judicious emperor as Tang Taizong had been. From the historical stories listed above, we can see how Song Taizong admired Tang Taizong and Song Taizong wished to be considered as worthy as Tang Taizong.

In terms of governance, Song Taizong followed Tang Taizong in many aspects when ruling the country. For instance, Song Taizong also put great emphasis on promoting Buddhism. During Song Taizong's reign, he established expert organization to translate Buddhist sutra from foreign countries. The translation of Buddhist sutras helped spread Buddhism to the Chinese populace.¹⁷ Additionally, Song Taizong made clement policies as a Buddhist disciple and was commented as a merciful emperor.¹⁸

I believe it is justifiable to analyze the political meaning of *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* by making a parallel between the painting and those created during the Tang dynasty, since both Tang Taizong and Song Taizong claimed that they wanted to combine the Buddhism with governance. By making comparisons between paintings bearing similar themes from the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty, I would like to explore how Song Taizong used the images of Buddha and barbarians to promote his political ambition and how these iconographies being different from those during the Tang dynasty.

Analysis of the iconography of the Buddha during the Tang and the Song dynasties

¹⁷ Huang Qijiang 黃啓江, *Beisong fojiao shilun gao* 北宋佛教史論稿 (The development of Buddhism during the Northern Song dynasty), (Taiwan: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1997), 41-44.

¹⁸ Tuo tuo, 53-73.

First of all, I would like to point out that the Buddha image in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* may actually be Song Taizong. My argument is based on the overlapping between Song Taizong and Buddhism. According to historical records, Song Taizong (939-997) always depicted himself or even believed himself to be the incarnation of a Buddha.¹⁹ Song Taizong was enthusiastic about researching Buddhism. He wrote books such as *Mi cang quan* 秘藏詮 and *Lianhua xinlun* 蓮花心輪回文偈頌 to interpret Buddhist sutras in his own way. Song Taizong distributed his books to Buddhist temples and required monks there to study his Buddhist books.²⁰ This revealed Song Taizong's desire to have monks associate him with Buddhism. Song Taizong seemed to be quite successful in building himself as the incarnation of a Buddha. Monks during the Northern Song dynasty were convinced that Song Taizong was actually the living Buddha. Evidences could be found in Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007-1072) *Gui tian lu* 歸田錄 (Retiring back to fields). It records that one day, Song Taizong visited Xiang Guo Temple 相國寺. He asked Master Zan Ning 僧贊寧 (919-1001), a respectful monk at that time, whether he should kneel down in order to show his respect to the Buddha. Master Zan Ning replied “現在佛不拜過去佛 (the present incarnation of Buddha does not need to worship the past Buddha).”²¹

Apart from the adoration from Han Chinese laymen and monks, historical records from the Song dynasty shows veneration from foreign envoys confirmed Song

¹⁹ Huang Qijiang, 31-33.

²⁰ Ibid, 31-33.

²¹ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), *Gui tian lu* 歸田錄 (Retiring back to the fields), in *Li dai ming jia xiaopin wenji* 歷代名家小品文集 (Collections of literati's poses), ed. Lin Qing 林青 (Xi'an: San tai chu ban she, 2003), 6-7

Taizu's position as a living Buddha. According to *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (Records of Buddha and their lives), Japanese envoys visited China and presented their tributes to Song Taizong. Song Taizong was like a saint in their eyes and they observed auspicious light came out from the emperor's palace. In order to commemorate and pay their respects towards Song Taizong, Japanese envoys went back and built a temple named *Sheng Guang Si* 神光寺 (Temple of Auspicious Light).²² In addition to Japanese, *Fozu tongji* records that envoys from a country named Zhu Nian 駐輦國 also came and paid tributes to the Northern Song emperor. After their trip in China, the sea area around the country kept peaceful for forty years. People from Zhu Nian believed that the peace of the sea was due to the blessings from Chinese emperor.²³ Moreover, it is mentioned in the records that an Indian prince felt regretful that he did not have the chance to pay tribute to Chinese emperor in person. In this case, Song Taizong bestowed a piece of golden gown for him. The Indian prince hung the gown and worshipped it praying for Chinese emperor's health.²⁴

In general, with the help of historical texts, Song Taizong convinced people that he was the living Buddha. In this case, it is possible that the contemporary people during the Northern Song considering *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* as a portrait of their emperor Song Taizong. Why Song Taizong would like people believe him to be a ruler with dual identities of both a Buddha and emperor? What political ideas maybe promoted by *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*? I believe a

²² Master Zhi Pan, Vol.49, 458.

²³ Ibid. Vol.49, 458.

²⁴ Ibid. Vol.23, 398,

comparison between *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* and the similar paintings created during the Tang dynasty would provide fruitful answers to the questions above.

Dunhuang Cave No. 158, *Ju ai tu* 舉哀圖 (Barbarian royalties mourning for the Buddha)

During the Tang dynasty, paintings depicting Buddha in *parinirvana*²⁵ scene were prominent. To my knowledge, such *parinirvana* scenes were made in a certain way during the Tang dynasty. In most cases and similar with *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*, foreign dignitaries were depicted in the paintings accompanying with the Buddha. Given the combination of Buddhist images and politics during the Tang and Song dynasties, *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* may suggest similar political meaning as *parinirvana* scenes.

Barbarian Royalty Mourning for Buddha (fig.2) shares great similarities with *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*. The painting, part of the fresco inside Dunhuang Cave No. 158, is one of the most famous Nirvana Caves. The cave is about the *parinirvana* moment of the Buddha and numbers of Buddhist disciples came to show their grief. According to historical records, the cave was made during the mid-Tang. Against the southern wall inside the cave, a giant sculpture of the Buddha lying on the stone bed was carved. *Barbarian Royalty Mourning for Buddha* was rendered on the southern wall behind the Buddha. In the painting, “barbarian”

²⁵ *Prinirvana* (Skt.) The “final” or “highest” nirvana, usually denoting the state of nirvana that is entered at death, in contrast to that attained during life. Also known as *nirupadhisenanirvana*. In the earliest sources nirvana and parinirvana are used interchangeably. Information is from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Ed. Damien Keown. (Oxford University Press, 2003), *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of Hong Kong. 18 June 2009 (<http://www.oxfordreference.com.eproxy1.lib.hku.hk/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t108.e1358>)

royalties in exotic costumes are expressing their sorrow with their traditional ways such as cutting off an ear, carving a face, piercing a chest, and knifing a belly.²⁶ These mourning methods are cruel while vividly shows “barbarian” royalties’ great admiration towards the Buddha. Meanwhile, according to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (General Mirror for the Aid of Government), after the death of Tang Taizong 唐太宗, “barbarian royalties joined the emperor’s funeral and expressed their extreme lamentation in the similar way. The record reads “Hundreds of officers and tribute bearers from all foreign countries around China attended Tang Taizong’s funeral. They burst into tears and expressed their extreme sorrow by cutting their hair, curving their faces, and cutting off their ears. Blood was everywhere on the ground.”²⁷ The similar scenes of “barbarian” royalties mourning for Tang Taizong’s decease suggest the overlapping between the Buddha and Tang Taizong. By making a parallel between Buddha and Tang Taizong, the piece of fresco and the relevant records affirmed Tang Taizong’s leading position over China and foreign regions.

Song Taizong admired Tang Taizong’s achievements and was aspiring to become a powerful emperor as Tang Taizong. From my point of view, *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* helped Song Taizong realize the goal. Given Song Taizong’s endeavors in depicting himself as a Buddha, the image would easily remind contemporary people during the Song dynasty of Song Taizong. At the same time, it

²⁶ Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo ed. 敦煌文物研究所整理, *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄 (Completed records of Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang), (Beijing: Wenwu chu ban she, 1982), 53-54.

²⁷ Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑒 (General Mirror for the Aid of Government), in *Chuan shi cang shu-Shi ku* 傳世藏書·史庫 (Series of Chinese classics-historical classics), (Haikou: Hainan guoji xinwen chubun zhongxin, 1995), Vol. 199, 2512, the Chinese text reads “四夷之人入仕於朝及來朝貢者數百人，聞喪皆痛哭，剪髮、髡面、割耳，流血灑地。”

was probably that contemporary people were also aware of Tang Taizong's association with the Buddha. Via using the same political metaphor, *Barbarian Royalty worshipping Buddha* helped Song Taizong parallel himself with Tang Taizong. Tang Taizong and Song Taizong were both respected as a living Buddha by Chinese people and foreign royalties. Hence, Song Taizong was a great emperor as Tang Taizong. As Master Zan Ning 釋贊寧 (c.919-c.1001) commented on Song Taizong's reign as "the governance benefiting contemporary people and following Tang Taizong's policies."²⁸

Despite of the similarities mentioned above, there is a difference between the two paintings. No matter in historical records about Tang Taizong's funeral or the fresco about the *prenirvana* of the Buddha, the emperor and the Buddha had left the secular world. However, in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*, the living Buddha appears in front of the foreign kings. Then, why the artist during the Song dynasty changed the "Buddha entering *parinirvana*" into a "living Buddha"? First of all, I believe the change of the iconography is related to Song Taizong's pursuit of combining the Buddhism and governance together. With *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*, Song Taizong showed himself as a religious leader and powerful ruler embracing worships from foreign kings. Song Taizong believed Buddhism and governance were not mutual exclusive. Song Taizong advocated that an emperor should cultivate himself with Buddhist doctrines. The raise of the emperor's moral standard and wisdom resulted from the cultivation could enable the

²⁸ Shi Zan Ning 釋贊寧 Master Zan Ning (c.919-c.1001), Song Gaoseng zhuan 宋高僧傳 (Masters during the Song dynasty), in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Buddhism canons), (No.2061) in Vol.50, the Chinese text reads "屬此雍熙之運。伸其貞觀之風。" from http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index_en.html.

emperor to govern the country more efficiently.²⁹ Thus he would not indulge himself in Buddhism. On the contrary Song Taizong held a negative attitude on Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (Emperor Wu of Liang) (502-549) who was so devoted to Buddhism that he abandoned the country for several times in order to become a monk. Song Taizu's prime minister Zhao Pu 趙普 (922-993) also made similar valuation about Song Taizong. He said "The emperor (Song Taizong) governs the country like Emperor Yao and Shun³⁰ and cultivates himself according to Buddhism doctrines."³¹ Based upon the analysis above, the living *Buddha in Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* well reflected the kind of emperor that Song Taizong sought to be, an emperor who was powerful enough to rule both China and foreign countries and merciful enough to be respected as the Buddha.

Analysis of the iconography of Tribute bearers during the Tang and Song dynasties

Other than the image of the Buddha, "barbarian" kings holding tributes play prominent role in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*. Actually, paintings rendering tribute bearers from foreign countries were commonly made from the Tang dynasty. Normally, this kind of painting can reflect the emperor's attitudes towards non-Han Chinese and the political relationships among China with the foreign countries. In 647, Tang Taizong expressed his ideas on Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese "Since antiquity, all have honored the Chinese and despised the barbarians;

²⁹ Bi Yuan, Vol.12, 108.

³⁰ Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun 堯舜 were both sage and great emperors existed in ancient legend of China. Information is from *Hanying shuangjie Xinhua zidian* 漢英雙解新華字典 (Xinhua Dictionary with English Translation), edited by Yao Naiqiang 姚乃強, (Beijing: Shangwu yin shu guan guo ji youxian gongsi, 2000), 725.

³¹ Master Zhi Pan, (No.2035) in Vol.49, the Chinese text reads "陛下以堯舜之道治世。以如來之行修心。",

only I have loved them both as one.”³² Due to Tang Taizong’s words, the artists or artisans who depicted barbarians did so consciously and used a particular visual vocabulary in order to mark the foreign people as indisputably barbarians.³³ By the same token, I believe the image of foreign tribute bearers in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* may also inspired by Song Taizong’s foreign policies. In the following passages, I will again make a comparison between non-Han Chinese’ images created during the Tang and Song dynasties, and try to find out the political meanings behind these foreign kings.

Apart from Tang Taizong’s clement and wise policies that made China become stronger and stronger, Song Taizong extolled Tang Taizong’s policy of political unity and Tang Taizong’s leading position in foreign royalties’ minds. During the Tang dynasty especially, China was strongest among countries around China. Tang Taizong leaded his military suppressed rebellions from *Tu jue* 突厥³⁴ and *Gao chang* 高昌³⁵.³⁶ In this way, Tang Taizong unified the frontiers. Moreover, Tang Taizong advocated the marriages among Han Chinese and other countries in order to consolidate the unity among different ethnicities. Tibet sent their envoys bearing tributes to Tang Taizong in order to marry with Han Chinese princesses.³⁷ Due to Tang Taizong’s efficient endeavors, Chinese land at that time was extremely

³² Sima Guang, Vol.198, 6247, the Chinese text reads “自古皆貴中華，賤夷、狄，朕獨愛之如一，故其種落皆依朕如父母”。

³³ Marc Samuel Abramson, “Deep eyes and high noses: physiognomy and the depiction of barbarians in Tang China”, in *Political frontiers, ethnic boundaries, and human geographies in Chinese history*, edited by Nicola di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt, (London ; New York : RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 110-159.

³⁴ An ethnic located in the Northern part of China.

³⁵ An ethnic located in the North-west of China.

³⁶ Zhao Keyao, 227-257.

³⁷ Ibid. 258-281.

extended.³⁸ Because of Tang Taisong's power and moral standards, he was respected by barbarian kings as *Tian Kehan* 天可汗 (emperor ruling the whole land).³⁹

There are many visual works recording Tang's superior position over other foreign countries. It seems to be common for the rulers during the Tang dynasty to have statues or wall paintings depicting "barbarian" kings in their tombs. For instance, in *Zhao Ling* 昭陵 (Tomb Zhao) (fig.3) which is the mausoleum of Tang Taizong, the stone statues of fourteen "barbarian" kings are standing there.⁴⁰ These stone statues affirm the friendly relationship among China and foreign countries during the Tang dynasty. They also demonstrate Tang Taizong's identity as the most powerful emperor. In Empress Wu 武則天 (683-705) and her husband Tang Gaozong's 唐高宗 (649-683) mausoleum named *Qian ling* 乾陵 (Tomb Qian) stands the Sixty-one "barbarian" officers stand (fig.4). There are names and titles carved on the back of the stone statues. According to research, these statues include almost all the barbarian royalties from the foreign countries around China.⁴¹ Additionally, inside the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai 章懷太子 (654-684), who was the second son of Empress Wu, there was also fresco named *Ke shi tu* 客使圖 (Barbarian Envoys) depicting barbarian officials who attended Prince's funeral and showed their grief (fig.5).⁴²

Apart from the statues and wall paintings located in emperors' tombs, there

³⁸ Sima Guang, Vol.195, 2469, the Chinese text reads "於是唐地東極於海，西至焉耆，南盡林邑，北抵大漠，皆爲州縣，凡東西九千五百一十裡，南北一萬六千九百一十八裡。"

³⁹ Sima Guang, Vol.193, 2436.

⁴⁰ Li Haoyang, *Zhaoling wenshi baodian* 昭陵文史寶典 (Historical remains of Tomb Zhao), (Xi'an: San tai chu ban she, 2006), 81-141.

⁴¹ Wu Zhiyi 吳志毅, *Qianling zhi mi* 乾陵之謎 (Recovering Tomb Qian), (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chu ban she, 2002), 42-44.

⁴² Ji Dongshan 冀東山, *Shen yun yu hui huang : Shanxi li shi bo wu guan guo bao jian shang. Tang mu bi hua juan* 神韻與輝煌：陝西歷史博物館國寶鑒賞. 唐墓壁畫卷 (Charm and brilliance : an appraisal of the national treasures in the Shaanxi History Museum, the Tang dynasty tomb frescoes), (Xi'an: San tai chu ban she, 2006), 150-152.

are paintings bearing similar subject matters as well. For instance, the renowned artist during the Tang dynasty, Yan Liben 閻立本 (c.601-673) rendered *Bu nian tu* 步輦圖 (Emperor Taizong receiving the Tibetan envoy) (fig.6). In the painting, Tang Taizong was depicted as a noble man around by female attendants while the Tibetan envoy appears to be humble. By the contrast between Emperor Taizong and the Tibetan envoy, Yan Liben emphasized the superior position of Emperor Taizong and China that the emperor represented for.

These paintings created during the Tang dynasty about barbarian royalties were meticulously painted based on historical events. To some extent, these paintings with great details act as visual records to argue for the power of the Tang dynasty of China, there is still a difference. In my opinion, instead of acting as visual records, *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* made during the Song dynasty was probably very appealing imagery to the emperor with its pictorial representation of a political ambition that he could not achieve.

Song Taizong was an ambitious emperor and was aspiring to build up a highly unified empire. According to some scholars' research, the "barbarian" royalties appears in the painting may include kings from Xinjiang 新疆, Yunnan 雲南, Gaoli 高麗 (Korea), Huihu 回鶻 (Uyghur), Xia Guo 夏國 (the majority of people in Xia Guo are from Bai zu 白族), and Qidan 契丹.⁴³ Hence, by rendering these foreign royalties presenting tributes to Song Taizong, the emperor appeared to be the ruler dominating countries around China.

⁴³ Huang Du, 18-26.

However, the image does not match with the historical records. Indeed, there were several minor ethnicities such as Hui hu 回鶻(Uyghur) and Bai zu 白族 (Bai people) from Da Li 大理 who paid tributes to Song Taizong. However, although Song Taizong had made great endeavors, he eventually failed to recapture *yanyun shiliu zhou* 燕雲十六州 (sixteen provinces occupied by Qidan). In this case, Song Taizong could only give up attacking Qi dan 契丹 (Qidan people). Meanwhile, people of Dang xiang 黨項 (Tangut) were not willing to completely submit to the Song court either. At times, they would secretly unite with Qidan to fight against the Song court.⁴⁴ Due to the incongruence between the image and the historical records during the Song dynasty, we can come to the conclusion that *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* possibly acted as propaganda for Song Taizong's court and helped promote the emperors' vision of their authority in international and religious arenas.

In fact, there are other paintings bearing similar function as *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* made during the Song dynasty. For instance, the great Song artist Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106) made *Wu ma tu* 五馬圖 (Five Horses) (fig.7). The painting is about five tribute bearers presenting horses as gifts to the Song court. Yet, contrast with the painting, the Song court usually paid extremely high price to “purchase” these horses from barbarian countries.⁴⁵

Apart from the function of the paintings, we should also notice the

⁴⁴ Tuo Tuo, 53-73.

⁴⁵ Zhang Youjie 張有雋 and Xu Jieshun 徐傑舜, *Zhong Guo minzu zhengce tonglun* 中國民族政策通論 (the History of Chinese policies concerning non-Han regions), (Guangxi: Guangxi jiaoyu chu ban she, 1992), 68-76.

barbarians' images in the paintings. In *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*, the foreign kings are properly dressed and act politely. Nonetheless, normally the barbarian people were not rendered in such a way. The description of *Fanzu* 蕃族 paintings (paintings bearing subject matter of barbarian people) may reflect the main stream of barbarian paintings during the Song dynasty. It reads:

...there is a tradition of painting *fan* tribes. But the painters usually depict their bows and arrows, their daggers at their waists, and their engagement in hunting expeditions with horses and hounds. What the painters have taken to depict is limited. These paintings simplify the customs of the Man people and the Yi people while honoring the trust and generosity of the civilizing culture of Hua Xia (Chinese culture).⁴⁶

Under this concept, paintings such as Hu Gui's 胡環 (act. c.907-c.1125) *Chu lie tu* 出獵圖 (Hunters with Eagles) (fig.8) and Li Zanhua's 李贊華 (899-936) *She qi tu* 射騎圖 (Shooting arrows and riding horses) (fig.9) were valued and recorded in *Xuan he hua pu*. Apart from the two paintings, Li Gonglin's *Mian zhou tu* 免胄圖 (Guo Ziyi Receiving the Homage from Barbarian General) (fig.10) is another painting that shows the cultural superiority of Han Chinese through the depiction of barbarian people in a military event. The story shown in the painting was also recorded in historical texts. According to the records, During Tang Taizong's reign, thousands of enemies from Western region led by generals from Tibet and Uyghur came to invade Chang'an. Considering the extremely strong military force of the enemy, Chinese general Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697-781) decided to visit the enemy's camp and convince

⁴⁶ *Xuan he hua pu* 宣和畫譜 (Records of paintings before the Xuanhe Era), Vol.8, 6-11. The Chinese reads “此蕃族所以見於丹青之傳然畫者多取其佩弓刀挾弧矢遊獵狗馬之玩若所甚貶然亦所以陋蠻夷之風而有以尊華夏化原之信厚也”, for English version, please refer to Irene S. Leung, “ ‘Felt Yurts Neatly Arrayed, Large Tents Huddle Close’ Visualizing the frontier in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127)”, in *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, And Human Geographies in Chinese History*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Don f. Wyatt, (London ; New York : RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 192

them to withdraw their troops. Guo Ziyi was a respectful general of the Tang court among barbarian troops. Hence, when Guo Ziyi took off his martial attire and appeared in front of the barbarian soldiers on his own. The barbarian generals were so impressed that they agree to make peace at once and swear that they would not invade China again.⁴⁷

As it is shown from the records, the military force of the barbarian troops was much stronger than that of Chinese soldiers. In this case, what made the barbarian troops who had already come all along to Chang'an decide to go back? From my point of view, the answer is possibly "culture". As we can see from *Guo Ziyi Receiving the Homage from Barbarian General*, the barbarian general dressed in martial attire was kneeling down on the ground. On the contrary, Guo Ziyi without martial attire looks elegant, noble, and civilized. In this way, the painting suggests the hierarchy between culture and military. The Song dynasty was a militarily weak while culturally strong period. Given the continuous failures of the Song emperors' attempts in ruling China and barbarian countries, *Guo Ziyi Receiving the Homage from Barbarian General* would appeal to the Song emperor by showing barbarian military conquered by Han Chinese culture.

Given the trend of promoting Han Chinese culture in paintings, I believe *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* argues for the cultural advancement of China in a different approach. Paintings from Tang dynasty and Li Gonglin's paintings emphasized on Chinese culture by rendering barbarian people in a weak and humble

⁴⁷ Ouyang Xiu, Biography. 142, Vol. 217, 6111-6128.

way. On the contrary, barbarian kings appear in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* are elegant, noble, and cultivated. Then why did the Song artist make such a change in the painting? How did the artist argue for the cultural advancement of Han Chinese with the cultivated royalties from the foreign countries?

From my point of view, I believe the elegant foreign royalties in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* could help to reflect Song Taizong's achievements in the foreign policies. Generally, emperors from the Song dynasty used two strategies dealing with foreign people, *Huanrou* 懷柔 (being kind) and *Laihua* 來化 (assimilating).⁴⁸ The emperors implemented *Huanrou* policy by showing kindness to foreign people in order to attract them coming to China. *Laihua* policy was practiced by promoting Chinese culture among foreign people. This policy on the one hand could show the superiority of Chinese culture. On the other hand, the emperors believed they conquered these non-Han Chinese by having them assimilate to Han Chinese.⁴⁹

During the Song dynasty, rulers of Liao, Xi Xia and Jin learned from Chinese emperors in several aspects. In term of governance, the non-Han Chinese rulers promoted Han Chinese officers to help them govern the country. For instance, the Han Chinese envoy Han Yanhui 韓延徽 (882-959) was kept by the ruler of Qidan because of his erudition and wisdom. In term of culture, Xi Xia presented valuable horses to the Song in exchange for Buddhism sutra from China. In term of

⁴⁸ Zhang Youjie, 51.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 50-76.

production, the non-Han region put more emphasis on agriculture.⁵⁰ All the events mentioned above were recorded in historical texts of China. On the one hand, these records affirm the cultural advancement of China. On the other hand, the records also show the emperor's emphasis on cultivating the barbarian people. Bearing this in mind, the overtly cultivated barbarian royalties in *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* may have two layers of meanings. First of all, the painting shows the contemporary people barbarian kings' submissions towards the Song court. Second of all, the painting helped promote Song Taizong as a great emperor under whose reign Chinese cultures was so prosperous that all the foreign kings were attracted.

Conclusion

The extremely prosperous China under Tang Taizong's reign was like a milestone for the later emperors. As an emperor during the Song dynasty which was right after the Tang dynasty, Song Taizong pursuit to be as a great ruler as Tang Taizong. However, according to historical records, Song Taizong was not able to exceed Tang Taizong in terms of culture and governance. Under this circumstance, Song Taizong turned to the visual records. Hence, paintings such as *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* were created. In the painting, the living Buddha perfectly matched with Song Taizong's idea of combining the Buddhism and governance together in ruling the country. Moreover, tribute receivers overtly occupied superior positions than tribute bearers. Thus, Song Taizong actually claimed his domination over the foreign kings and China with the painting. Finally, the Song

⁵⁰Ibid, 50-75.

dynasty was a culturally prosperous while militarily weak period. In order to convince the people of his power, Song Taizong exaggerate the use of cultural developments while minimize that of military practices. Thus, I believe the core message that Song Taizong would like to transfer to the audience via *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha* was that, Song Taizong was a great emperor, and he subjugated barbarian kings with his superior culture and advanced spirituality rather than with war. (Words: 5512)

Figures



Fig.1. Zhao Guangfu 趙光輔 (attributed), (act. c.10th-11th cent.), *Barbarian Royalty Worshipping Buddha*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, c.900, 28.6cm x 103.5cm, Ohio: Cleveland Museum.



Fig.2. Anonymous, *Barbarian Royalty Mourning for Buddha*, fresco, ink and color on wall, mid-Tang, Dunhuang: Mogao Cave No.158.

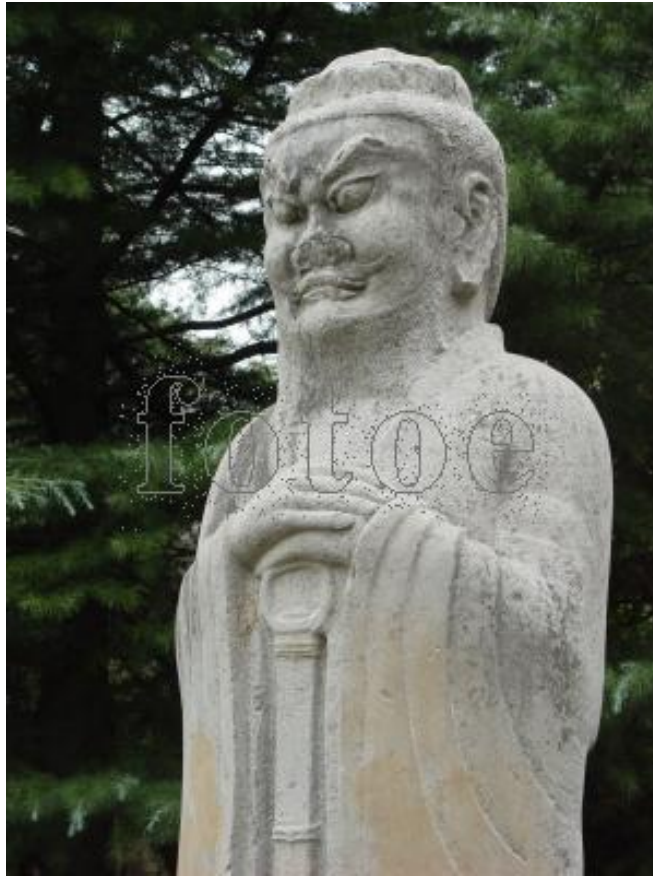


Fig.3. Anonymous, one of the *Fourteen Barbarian Kings*, sculpture, c.649, Xianyang: Tomb Zhao.



Fig. 4. Anonymous, *Sixty-one Barbarian Kings*, sculpture, c.705, Xianyang: Tomb Qian.



Fig.5. Anonymous, *Barbarian Envoys*, fresco, c.683, Xianyang: Zhanghuai Prince's Tomb.



Fig.6. Yan Liben 阎立本 (c.601-c.673), *Emperor Taizong receiving the Tibetan envoy*, ink and color on silk, 38.5 x 128.3 cm, Beijing: Palace Museum.



Fig.7. Li Gonglin (c.1041-c.1106), *Five Horses*, ink and color on paper, c. 11th cent. 29.3 x 225cm, (Tokyo) Japan, Yamamoto Teijino Collection.



Fig.8. Hu Gui (act. c.907-c.1125), *Hunters with Eagles*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, c. 10th cent. 7182.9 x 104.1 cm. Taipei: National Palace Museum.



Fig.9. Li Zanhua (c. 899-c.936), *Archer and Horse*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 27.1 x 49.5 cm. Taipei: National Palace Museum.



Fig.10. Li Gonglin (c.1041-c.1106), *Guo Ziyi Receiving the Homage from Barbarian Generals*, handscroll, ink on paper, 32.3 x 223.8 cm. Taipei: National Palace Museum.

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