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Chapter 4 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* cannot have been made in the 650s-790s

Under Heaven, every corner is the king's land. To the ends of the Earth, every human being is the king's subject. (普天之下，莫非王土。率土之濱，莫非王臣。)

– *The Shijing* 詩經

This chapter continues to investigate textual clues that are connected to China's supreme leaders, regardless of whether they were male or female, whose right to absolute power had been canonized in the Confucian classics for more than 1,000 years by the eighth century. Its three protagonists are two male emperors, Tang Gaozong and Tang Xuanzong, and China's only female emperor, Empress Wu, whose reigns coincided with much of the second period of the Tang church. It examines the taboos on their names and pays particular attention to the usage of the new orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu between 689 and 690. On the basis of the evidence, the likelihood that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were produced between the 650s and the 790s is very slim.

4.1 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Tang Gaozong's reign

Tang Gaozong was the third emperor of the Tang Dynasty. He ascended the throne in 649 and ruled China until 683. His single-character name, *zhi* 治, was commonly tabooed using three methods: omitting, replacing and *quebi*. Careful analysis shows that this character was not avoided by the scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. This disregard of the taboo suggests that the two sources were not made either in or soon after Tang Gaozong's reign.

4.1.1 *Zhi* was not omitted

Acting in pious obedience Tang Chinese did not often commit *zhi* to paper. They removed *zhi* from many persons' names, government positions and common phrases. "In *The Nanshi* and *The Beishi*," Chen Yuan observes, "the titles of the officials, the *zhishu shiyushi* and the *zhizhong congshi*, are often deprived of the character *zhi*" (南北史於官名治書侍御史及治中從事，多脫去治字。)¹ *The Nanshi* and *The Beishi* are two official historical accounts of the Chinese dynasties that were established between the fourth and the seventh century. The two works were completed by Li Yanshou 李延壽 and were submitted to Tang Gaozong, who

¹ Chen Yuan 陳垣 1958:55. See also Piotr Adamek (2015:245).

wrote a preface to them in 659. Understandably given his position, as is attested by more examples given below, Li Yanshou paid the strictest of attention to the taboo practice. In the cases discussed by Chen Yuan, Li Yanshou had obviously chosen to omit *zhi* in order to observe the taboo on Tang Gaozong's name.

Intriguingly, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* deviate from this common practice. This method is not observed in either of the two manuscripts. So far, I have not found any possible example.

4.1.2 *Zhi* was not replaced by other characters

Depending on the context, Tang Chinese also used a number of synonyms to replace *zhi*. For example, *zhibing* 治兵 was changed to *libing* 理兵. The title of a source compiled in the fifth century to set out how to govern a county, *The Zhixianpu* 治縣譜, was renamed *The Lixianpu* 理縣譜 in *The Nanshi*. Both *zhi* and *li* here mean govern, rule or lead. For these frequently discussed replacement characters, see Table 4.1.²

Name	Replacement
<i>zhi</i> 治	<i>hua</i> 化, <i>li</i> 理, <i>chi</i> 持, <i>zheng</i> 政, <i>wei</i> 為, <i>xun</i> 循, <i>ling</i> 領, <i>zhu</i> 主, <i>zhang</i> 掌, <i>pan</i> 判, <i>pi</i> 庇, <i>liao</i> 療, <i>ju</i> 居, <i>xing</i> 興, <i>zu</i> 足, <i>du</i> 都

Table 4.1 Replacement characters used to taboo Tang Gaozong's name, *zhi*

There is not a shred of evidence that either *The Messiah Sutra* or *On One God* employs this method to avoid Tang Gaozong's name. Each of these Christian manuscripts uses several of the characters listed in Table 4.1., but none seems to be a replacement for *zhi*. Take the last two characters, *du* 都 and *zu* 足, for example. In the annotation to *The Houhanshu* 後漢書, Li Xian 李賢, Tang Gaozong's son, uses two interesting phrases, "*du Gaoling*" (都高陵) and "*du Mei*" (都郿).³ As pointed out by Wang Yankun, who compares Li Xian's annotations and earlier versions, *du* here has replaced *zhi*, and the original phrases would have been *zhi Gaoling* and *zhi Mei* that mean govern Gaoling county and govern Mei county respectively. In *The Messiah Sutra*, when *du* is employed it is definitely not used in this way. Although the character *du* does occur four times, every occurrence is contained in the phrase "*piluodusi*"

² This table and the above example are based on Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (2009:405-411).

³ *Ibid.*, 411.

(毗羅都思).⁴ As the immediate Chinese context, some part of which is quoted in Section 4.2.2.3, can be matched with the Biblical story of the trial of Jesus, there is no way to interpret this phrase other than to conclude that it is the phonetic transcription of Pilatus (𐌱𐌹𐌻𐌰𐌸𐌹𐍃) who presided over the trial, and *du* fits the transcription almost perfectly.⁵ Obviously, *du* was not being used as a substitute for *zhi* because the sound of *du* is crucial to an acceptable transcription.

Something similar can be said about the character *zu*. When Li Yanshou submitted *The Nanshi* to Tang Gaozong, he modified “*tianxia bian zhi*” (天下便治), a phrase used in the fifth-century source *The Songshu* 宋書, and substituted the last character *zhi* with *zu*: “*tianxia bian zu*” (天下便足).⁶ In *On One God*, all its twenty-four occurrences are not taboo forms. In Columns 170-172, for instance, *zu* is used three times to denounce those who are led astray by devils and are fairly ignorant about the One God. This Christian manuscript excoriates that those people are no better than “*sizu chusheng*” (四足畜生), that means four-legged animals.⁷ The phrase *sizhi chusheng* would not make any sense at all.

4.1.3 *Zhi* was not deprived of its strokes

We shall probably never know just how quickly the *quebi* method was widely adopted. Tang people were particularly attached to this method. Although the first cases, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, are dated 648, this method had already become fairly popular by Tang Gaozong’s reign. In fact, *zhi* was written in the ‘wrong’ forms so frequently that Tang Gaozong himself seems to have been fairly disturbed by it. In the year 660, his irritation prompted him to issue an edict curbing the excessive tabooing of his name. *The Tanghuiyao* records:⁸

On the first day of the first month in the fifth year of the Xianqing reign, it was decreed: “[...] When the ancient classics are copied, my name is either randomly deprived of strokes or substituted. I am afraid the meaning of the elegant words of the Six Canons will suffer. Should the versions be spread far and wide, their meanings will be changed completely. This is not the purpose for which books were created. Henceforward, copying and editing old and canonic works shall be done in an appropriate manner. There is no need to replace and modify [my name] in according to the immediate meaning. 顯慶五年正月一日詔。[...] 比見抄寫古典。至於朕名。或缺其點畫。或隨便改換。恐六籍雅言。會意多爽。九流通義。指事全違。誠非立書之本。自今以後。繕寫舊典文字。並宜使成。不須隨義改易。

⁴ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:400-401, Cols. 153, 154, 155, 159.

⁵ For the analysis of this name, see Hidemi Takahashi (2013:15).

⁶ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:411.

⁷ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:365, Col. 170.

⁸ Wang Pu 王溥 961/1955:452.

In this quotation, two observations stand out. One concerns the pre-promulgation conditions. The decree reveals that the taboo practice was already very popular by 660. People were fanatical about avoiding the ruling emperor's name *zhi*. Consequently, as the decree reveals, many canonical texts were being changed to such a degree that their original meanings were altered, impairing their proper reading.

The other observation is that Tang people were using two methods. One method was to replace *zhi* with other characters. The popularity of this method has been confirmed by the above analysis of *The Nanshi*. The other method was *quebi*. Although Tang Gaozong neither used this particular term nor offered an example of it, there is little doubt that he was referring to the *quebi* method. The Chinese phrase “*que qi dian hua*” (缺其點畫) is unambiguous. The four characters contained in this phrase are neither complicated characters nor are they difficult to understand. Each is simple and straightforward. Except by reading these characters using the *quebi* method, there is no way to interpret them. In other words, the *quebi* method was being widely used by Tang Chinese for some time before 660.

To elaborate in even greater detail on the taboos of *zhi*, this section adds one special case that has never been discussed anywhere else before. In *The Zhou Zhongyin muzhi* 周仲隱墓誌, the character *zhi* is deprived of its last two strokes, 𠂔 (c20w30). This example occurs in a straightforward phrase “*zhiren*” (治人).⁹ Compared with the other known taboo forms, this example is very rare. Whereas most *quebi* occurrences are deprived of the last stroke, as said this example lacks the last two strokes. Compare it with 𠂔 (P.2536), 𠂔 (S.203) and 𠂔 (P.3742).¹⁰ What makes this case even more special is that this is the earliest known *quebi* taboo of Tang Gaozong's name. According to the inscription, Zhou Zhongyin was buried on “the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month in [...] the twenty-third year of the Zhenguan reign” (貞觀廿三年 [...] 十月廿五日, 649), just five months after Tang Gaozong's enthronement.¹¹

In stark contrast to the extravagant practice of avoiding Tang Gaozong's name using the *quebi* method, *On One God* does not observe the taboo on his name. *Zhi* occurs only once in this

⁹ Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 1997b:200.

¹⁰ The first example occurs three times in P.2536. All occurrences lack the very last stroke. The last two examples are cited from Huang Zheng 黃征 (2005:556). For a short list of other Dunhuang manuscripts that employ these taboo forms, see also Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:244).

¹¹ Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 1997b:200.

Christian manuscript. Its handwritten form, 治 (c391w8), is the very common orthography that is still being used today.¹² Indubitably, it is not a (*quebi*) taboo.

4.1.4 Discussion

It would seem that the use of the taboo practice had become excessive by Tang Gaozong's reign. But, despite his efforts to limit this extravagance, his name was still widely tabooed. Pertinently, it should be recalled that in his reign Aluoben had a very high title bestowed on him and Christians seem to have built churches in many cities and propagated their faith in several Tang provinces. In the light of this information, it would have been only reasonable that, had the two Christian sources been written then they would have embraced the name taboo tradition and strictly avoided *zhi*, the name of their great patron.

However, the findings tell a rather different story. *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* openly 'violate' the general name taboo practice. Unlike the scrupulous avoidance observed by the Tang people, the scribe who penned them did not eschew Tang Gaozong's name and even more importantly this obvious violation is in stark contradiction to the intimate church-court relationship that is documented on the Xi'an Stele erected in 781. Therefore, the most probable explanation is that the two Christian manuscripts had not been made before Tang Gaozong died in 683. They must have been made at a later date when strict observance of the taboo practice had slackened or when there was no longer a need to refrain from using Tang Gaozong's name.

4.2 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Empress Wu's reign

Two strands of evidence suggest that the two Christian manuscripts were not produced between 683 and 705. One is the non-usage of the new orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu. The other one is the non-taboo of her name, *zhao* 曌. I shall begin by offering examples of these new forms and explain their wide usage before I examine the usage of these new forms, including her name, in the two Christian manuscripts.

4.2.1 The usage of Wu's new forms and the dating of a source

The term 'Wu's new forms' (武周新形) has been coined from the phrase the 'Wu's new characters' (武周新字) that is used in the secondary literature to refer to the new

¹² Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:385. This character does not occur in *The Messiah Sutra*.

orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu between 689 and 697.¹³ Of these forms, twelve were officially promulgated in December of 689, and five more were introduced after she changed the dynastic title from Tang to Zhou in 690. In point of fact, Empress Wu actually only created one single character, her name *zhao* 曌. All of the other allegedly new characters had been in use for a long time. Her court did no more than modify their orthodox orthographies, ordering people to use new forms in writing. Hence, this dissertation coins and prefers the phrase ‘Wu’s new forms’.

Pertinently the non/usage of these forms (including her name) serves as an additional but nonetheless useful method by which to date sources, including our manuscripts.¹⁴ The reason is twofold. Firstly, the new forms are obviously different from the orthodox orthographies. Secondly and more importantly, the non/usage of these forms like the taboo of a name also has a clear temporal demarcation. The new forms quickly replaced old orthographies and were widely employed in China. After Empress Wu was deposed in 705, they were immediately revoked by the restored Li family and fell into general disuse. I shall examine these two reasons individually.

4.2.1.1 Why were the new forms widely used?

The widespread usage of these new forms, demonstrated below, was the outcome of the political factors that lurked behind the promotion of these new forms.

In the edict *Gaiyuan zaichu shewen* 改元載初赦文 that was issued in December 689, Empress Wu claimed that the promotion of new forms was a Chinese tradition and that the new forms would safeguard the foundations of the empire by restoring the values of antiquity and purity. As this edict is extremely long (almost 3,000 characters) and contains information about her enthronement that took place ten months later, I shall confine myself to a discussion of the part relevant to the encouragement of the use of the new forms: twelve forms (characters) in total. The illustrations of all new forms are listed in Table 4.2 below. The crucial elements of the edict that are of the most interest are as follows:¹⁵

The reason people have names, I am also aware, is [...] to serve Heaven and people with reverence. [...] And] I shall use 曌 [Zhao] as my name. [...] When the Qin dynasty conquered the

¹³ For the latter term and a concise summary of the field, see Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 (2014).

¹⁴ For this general conclusion, see Imre Galambos (2012:112-113), Antonino Forte (2005:55-60), J.P. Drège (1984), and Zhang Yongquan 張湧泉 (2011:631-632).

¹⁵ Song Minqiu 宋敏求 1070/1959:19-20. See also Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:64), and Wang Weikun 王維坤 (1987:64).

lands under Heaven, [...] it created the Qin writing [...] that was inherited by the two Han dynasties. [...] Since the Wei-Jin period, however, all dynasties have been deficient in learned skills, and any newly created characters appear to [...] deviate from the older [style of] writing. As a consequence, later people and students have been thrown into total confusion and the texts of the ancient kings are neglected. [...] We shall restore the sagacity of the ancient kings [...]; however, these customs have become entrenched and cannot easily be changed immediately. Therefore, [I] have taken the initiative on behalf of the officials of creating twelve characters [new forms]. Speaking of the past, these characters [new forms] emulate the older forms; looking towards the future, they will inaugurate a new language. I believe that they will safeguard the enduring foundations of the Empire and demonstrate that we want to return to purity [of yesteryear]. (朕又聞之。人必有名者。[.....] 尊事天人。[.....] 朕宜以璽為名。[.....] 秦兼天下。[.....] 爰創隸書。自著秦文。[.....] 兩漢因之 [.....] 魏晉以降。代乏名儒。[.....] 結造新字。[.....] 古今訛舛。[.....] 遂使後生學徒。罔知所據。先王載籍。從此湮沈。[.....] 思返上皇之化。[.....] 但習俗多時。良難頓改。特創制一十二字。率先百辟。上有依於詁 [古] 體。下有改於新文。庶保可久之基。方表還淳之意。)

Despite the careful phrasing of this edict, Empress Wu's real aims in promoting the new forms were not as pure as she set out. The promotion of these new forms, Norman Harry Rothschild notes, "reflects a series of inter-related strategies, designed not only to gain political legitimacy, but to redefine it".¹⁶ The campaign to change the old forms and popularize new ones, Antonino Forte points out, was invested with "ideological motivations".¹⁷ Undoubtedly, Empress Wu seems to have understood that language can be easily manipulated and this manipulation could ultimately reap her immense political benefit.

In fact, the reasons for encouraging these new forms were very subtle. First and foremost, the new forms were deeply embedded in traditional Confucian ideologies. As indicated by the new form of *chen*  (𡗗), the elements of which it is composed give a graphic description of what a good minister should be: always faithful. The top element is *yi* 一, that connotes always; the lower is *zhong* 忠, that means faithful. The combination of these two elements to replace the old form 臣 conveyed a clear message to her ministers that they should redirect their loyalty from the deposed Li family to Empress Wu and keep faith with this new ruler.

Empress Wu also utilized these forms shrewdly to underline her position, importance and uniqueness. Her name, *zhao* 曌, seems to be even more illustrative of this point than any other forms. This newly created character is a composite of the most magnificent celestial bodies. The left top is sun (日); the right top moon (月); the bottom sky (空). By assuming this

¹⁶ N. Harry Rothschild 2009:145.

¹⁷ Antonino Forte 2005:57.

name, she “cast herself as a light-bearer, a luminary nurturing a populace with her sage presence”, elevating herself above everybody else.¹⁸

Significantly, these forms involved religion, Buddhism in particular. Antonino Forte has shown that one of the earliest official documents to use the first twelve new forms, *The Dayujingshu* 大雲經疏, Dunhuang manuscript S.6502, was a piece of political propaganda meticulously crafted to prophesy that Empress Wu would become both a bodhisattva and a Cakravartin who would rule the world as a female emperor.¹⁹ Unquestionably, the way the old forms were modified seems to have been influenced by religion. At the very least, the new form of

yue 月 first released in 689 was closely related to Buddhism. Examining the new form  — for this rubbing, see Table 4.2 — Shi Anchang was the first to suggest that what is inside the circle is the Buddhist symbol of a swastika 卐.²⁰ As new tombstones have been found, Shi

Anchang’s postulation has been confirmed. For instance, this clearer example  was used on *Yangfujunbei* 楊府君碑. This stone was carved in Empress Wu’s reign. It was unearthed in Xi’an in 2014 and is now housed in the Xi’an Stele Museum.²¹

In a nutshell, the motivations underlying the promotion these new forms were complex. They anticipated a new beginning and a new era in which a woman could rule and could be an emperor like any man. Their promotion was part of Empress Wu’s overall strategy to legitimize her rule, display her power and secure her position.

4.2.1.2 Empress Wu changed seventeen characters into eighteen forms

On account of the incompleteness of sources and the loss of the original edicts, how many forms were promulgated and what exactly these forms were has puzzled Chinese scholars since the eleventh century. Many have claimed that Empress Wu introduced more than fourteen forms; some have argued that the court promoted twelve; a few have asserted that only eight forms were changed. Although some aspects of these new forms are still unclear, a more accurate picture of Wu’s new forms has emerged since the 1980s, and this has led to a general acceptance of Shi Anchang’s theory.²² Analyzing examples found on bricks, steles,

¹⁸ N. Harry Rothschild 2009:148.

¹⁹ For more detail, see Antonino Forte’s monograph on this manuscript (2005).

²⁰ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:56-57.

²¹ I have cited this sample from a Xi’an local news edited by Zhou Yantao 周豔濤 on November 15, 2014.

²² This scholarly debate dragged into the twentieth century, and the bulk of the literature published over the past 1,000 years or so has been neatly summarized by Qi Yuantao 齊元濤 (2005:78). See also Lu Shanhuan 盧善煥 (2011:100). For Shi Anchang’s contribution, see N. Harry Rothschild (2009:141).

tombstones and in Dunhuang manuscripts, calligraphic works and historical accounts, Shi Anchang points out that some alleged forms were in fact not actually encouraged by Empress Wu. He argues that Empress Wu modified seventeen forms in five installments between 689 and 697. He has determined that eighteen new forms in all were released because the character *yue* was changed twice (689, 697). The times of the promotion and the orthodox orthographies are — for the illustrations, see Table 4.2:²³

The first batch included these twelve characters: *tian* 天, *di* 地, *ri* 日, *yue* 月, *xing* 星, *nian* 年, *zheng* 正, *jun* 君, *chen* 臣, *zai* 載, *chu* 初 and *zhao* 曀. They were released in 689 in the abovementioned edict.

Batch 2 consisted of only one character, *shou* 授. As the first occurrence of its new form was dated 690, this character seems to have been changed when she adopted the new regnal title, Tianshou 天授, and ascended the throne in October 690.

Batch 3 contained two characters, *zheng* 證 and *sheng* 聖. They must have been changed soon after the regnal title Yanzai 延載 was replaced by Zhengsheng in November 694. The earliest examples of their new forms are dated later than 694.

Batch 4 again involved just one character, *guo* 國. The first case was dated 695.

Batch 5 consisted of two characters: *ren* 人 and *yue* 月. The earliest usages of their new forms have been traced to 697.

This promotion process is of course a reconstruction. The specific dates have been proposed on the basis of the very first occurrences used on Tang tombstones and in some other records. Nevertheless, so far the hypothesis of seventeen-characters-eighteen-forms has gained wide acceptance. No serious objection has yet been spelt out. Examining more than 400 stones dated between 689 and 704, for instance, Chen Lijun generally agrees with Shi Anchang, although she argues that Empress Wu promoted only four batches of new forms. She proposes that *chen* was changed in 690 rather than 689 and *zheng*, *sheng* and *guo* were promoted together in one batch in 695.²⁴

4.2.1.3 Wu's new forms were widely used before 705

²³ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:84.

²⁴ Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:12.

Probably because the power of the state was involved and the court promulgated edicts to promote Empress Wu's new forms, proximity to or distance from the imperial political center would not have curtailed their reach. Archeological excavations have shown that all new forms were widely employed not only in official documents and religious texts but also in private manuscripts and on lay tombstones that were made between 689 and 704. Among 422 stones found from Xinjiang in the west to Shandong 山東 in the east and from Liaoning 遼寧 in the north to Guangdong 廣東 in the south, Chen Lijun states: "The only tombstone that does not use any of Wu's new forms" (唯一一篇全文皆未使用武后改字墓誌銘文) is *Dugu fujun gufuren Yang shi muzhiming* 獨孤府君故夫人楊氏墓誌銘 that was dated 703.²⁵ On this stone, *nian*, *yue*, *ri* and other characters all retained their normal orthographies. It was buried in Wannian 萬年, a county under the jurisdiction of Xi'an. A frustrating lack of information means that we are completely in the dark about why this family failed to use Wu's new forms.

By and large, all these forms were quickly adopted. For example, the first twelve forms might have been used immediately upon their promulgation. The very moment seems to be encapsulated on *Yuan Zhiwei zhi* 元智威誌 found in Luoyang. On this tombstone, no fewer than nine new forms were used: *jun* (c1w12, c8w13, c11w10), *zheng* (c3w15), *nian* (c3w21, c11w15, c12w13, c15w15, c16w14, c25w15), *di* (c4w7), *yue* (c15w15, c16w21), *ri* (c15w18, c17w1), *zai* (c16w11), *chu* (c16w12) and *tian* (c19w4). Interestingly, all these new forms were not part of the original carvings. There is clear evidence of re-sanding and re-chiseling on the places on which these new forms were carved. The most obvious explanation of this reworking is: the stone had been carved before the promulgation but the first batch of Wu's new forms was implemented just before the funeral, and hence all common forms were erased and replaced by the new forms. The inscription records that the deceased had died two years before the introduction of the new forms, on "the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month in the third year of the Chuigong reign" (垂拱三年五月廿八日); however, the funeral took place five days after the promulgation of the Empress Wu's edict, on "the fifth day [...] of the eleventh month [...] in the first year of the Zaichu reign" (載初元年[.....]十一[.....]五日).²⁶

²⁵ Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:3, 151.

²⁶ Given the difficulty of using these new forms, the Chinese of these dates has been updated using modern forms. In addition, under the terms of the Empress Wu's edict, the last date contains a mistake. The eleventh month should be *zhengyue* 正月, that is the first month of the year. When promoting the new forms, Empress Wu also renamed the eleventh month to *zhengyue*; the twelfth month *layue* 臘月; *zhengyue* of the coming year *yiyue* (一月). Moreover, the character *yue* 月 was mistakenly changed into the new form of *ri* 日. For the dates, rubbing and mistakes, see Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 (1991b:283-287).

Such a rapid implementation is also nicely illustrated by *Chen Ping zhi* 陳平誌. According to this inscription, this tombstone was buried on the first day of *layue* in the first year of the Zaichu reign (載初元年臘月朔一日), one month after the Empress Wu's edict.²⁷ On this stone, *jun* (c1w11, c2w1, c8w2), *xing* (c3w9, c18w5), *zheng* (c6w1), *tian* (c9w1, c10w13), *chu* (c10w2, c14w12), *nian* (c12w2, c13w16, c14w14), *yue* (c12w4, c13w18, c14w20, c20w2), *ri* (c12w7, c13w20, c15w4), and *zai* (c14 w11) are all found in their new forms. All examples are complete and clear. There is no sign of re-carving. This stone was discovered in Xinzhou 忻州, a county that lies about 600 kilometers north of Luoyang.

As has just been implied, the new forms were also being used simultaneously in places that were situated far from the political centers. *Wang Renqiu bei* 王仁求碑 dated 698 and discovered in Southwest China, for instance, employs several new forms like *tian*, *di*, *guo* and *sheng*.²⁸

4.2.1.4 Revoking Wu's new forms after 705

Wu's new forms were quickly revoked and generally fell into disuse when Empress Wu was overthrown in 705.²⁹ The edict, *Jiwei shewen* 即位赦文, ordered that these new forms be no longer used. It was issued by Tang Zhongzong on the day on which he was restored to power:³⁰

As our enterprises have been reformed, this matter will also be re-organized. It is proper to change [our country's designation] from *Dazhou* to *Tang*. [...] Characters such as *tian* and *di* [...] shall hark back to the old practice prior to the Yongchun reign [682-683]. 業既惟新。事宜更始。可改大周為唐。[.....] 天地等字。[.....] 並依永淳已前故事。

The speed with which the characters fell into disuse is also confirmed by other sources. In general, post-705 tombstones and Dunhuang manuscripts abandoned these new forms, and resorted to pre-Wu characters again.³¹ In 837, Tang Wenzong 唐文宗 issued another edict again renouncing Wu's new forms: "In the tenth month of the second year [of the Kaicheng reign], it is ordered that the twelve characters created by the Heavenly Empress [Empress Wu]

²⁷ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:47; Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:157. The Chinese of this date has also been updated to the modern writing system. For the rubbing and inscription, see Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 (1991b:303-307).

²⁸ Lu Xixing 陸錫興 2011:126. See also Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 (2014:056).

²⁹ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:84; Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 2014:056.

³⁰ Dong Gao 董誥 1819/1983:206-207.

³¹ For this conclusion, see Jean-Pierre Drège (1984), Wang Sanqing 王三慶 (2005, 1986), and Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:118-130).

shall be abandoned and restored to their original forms”([開成] 二年十月詔曰天后所撰十二字並卻書其本字).³²

This does not necessarily mean that all new forms were completely abolished. Some language innovations, once they have been introduced, are tenacious and die very hard. As these new forms had already been in use for more than fifteen years, they still continued to be employed for quite some time. They can even occasionally be found in Dunhuang manuscripts made in the tenth and eleventh centuries.³³ For example, the new form *guo* 𠄎 (囙) occurs in P. 2187 that is dated 944.³⁴ Consequently, as the sources indicate, some of Wu’s new forms might have been used in much later times. The new form *guo* 𠄎 was employed in the rugged terrains of present-day Southwest China well up into the twelfth century, if not later. It has been found in No. 12 Cave of the *Jianchuan Shizhongshan* 劍川石鐘山第 12 窟, a Buddhist inscription carved in 850; the *Jianjun qidaiwang shu* 薦舉七代亡疏, a ritual text composed in 1052; the *Dali Congshengsi Qianxunta tongpian mingwen* 大理崇聖寺千尋塔銅片銘文, an inscription on a copper plate cast in 1116, and the *Xingbaosi dehuamin* 興寶寺德化銘, a Buddhist monastery inscription composed in 1186.³⁵

4.2.2 The non-use of Empress Wu’s new forms in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

The scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* seems to have been ignorant of Wu’s new forms. None of the new forms occurs in the two manuscripts. The only possible usage 𠄎, that could have been the new form of *chen*, is a scribal error. This non-usage strongly intimates that the two Christian manuscripts were not made in Empress Wu’s reign. In order to enable the reader to get a good grasp of the non-usage, I shall compare Wu’s new forms with actual occurrences one by one.

4.2.2.1 Comparing examples with Wu’s new forms

Not all the seventeen changed characters occur in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. Characters like *jun* 君, *chen* 臣 and *zhao* 𠄎 are absent. Nevertheless, some do occur fairly frequently. For instance, the character *tian*, that was promoted in the first batch, occurs

³² Wang Qinruo 王欽若 1013/1989:337.

³³ For a good list, see Wang Sanqing 王三慶 2005, 1986.

³⁴ See also Ma Shichang 馬世長 1989:20.

³⁵ Zhang Nan 張楠 1992:61.

eighty times in *The Messiah Sutra* and 137 times in *On One God*. In most cases, it is used in one of the key theological phrases, *tianzun* 天尊 (God), discussed in Chapter 2.

However, as demonstrated by Table 4.2, the forms that occur in the two Christian manuscripts are completely different to Wu's new forms. With the exception of the form of *chen*, that will be discussed separately below, not a single example even looks similar to its corresponding new form. Few examples, in point of fact, ever diverge from the norm and are written in strange variants. All are in their orthodox forms. Most are still being used today — for instance, *tian* 天 (天), and *di* 地 (地).

Before I venture any further, I would like to say something about the samples I have used. All the illustrations are the first unequivocal occurrences in the surviving sources. Wu's new forms are cited from the tombstones edited by Mao Hanguang.³⁶ As that of *Yuan Zhiwei zhi* was re-carved and some forms, although legible, are not very clear, this research has set it to one side. The first nine examples are quoted from the aforementioned *Chen Ping zhi* carved in 690. The illustration *di* is taken from that of *Tang Xiaogu zhi* 唐小姑誌 that was also buried in 690.³⁷ Two cases, *chen* and *shou*, have been scanned from that of *Xu fanshi zhi* 許樊氏誌 that was also buried in 690.³⁸ The form *sheng* occurs on that of *Qi Lang zhi* 齊朗誌 erected in 694.³⁹ The sample *zheng* is found on that of *Gu Pilou shi zhi* 古匹婁氏誌 that was carved one day after that of *Qi Lang zhi*.⁴⁰ The form *guo* was used on *Wang Sine zhi* 王思訥誌 that bears the date 695.⁴¹ The last two examples were employed on that of *Qin Lang zhi* 秦郎誌 that was also carved 695.⁴² Empress Wu's name *zhao*, as it was avoided — see Section 4.2.3, disappeared almost completely from daily life, and no illustration of it is offered.

All the examples in the Christian manuscripts are taken from *The Messiah Sutra*. However, the form *yue* does not occur in this text, but it is cited from *On One God*. Moreover, as the character *yue* 月 was changed two times, I shall also deal with it twice.

Batches	Promotion time	Orthodox forms	Wu's new forms	Occurrences in Christian sources	Examples in Christian sources
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³⁶ For the impressive list of Tang stone examples, see Chen Lijun 陳俐君 (2014:14-138, 168-1042). For samples collected from other sources including the Dunhuang manuscripts, see Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:43-130) and J.P. Drège (1984:341).

³⁷ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1991b:451.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1991a:369.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1992:137.

1	載初元年正月 December 689	tian 天	 (c9w1)	217	天 (c2w7)
		ri 日	 (c12w7)	23	日 (c61w4)
		yue 月 ^a	 (c12w4)	6	月 (c250w17)
		xing 星	 (c18w5)	3	星 (c125w14)
		nian 年	 (c14w14)	10	年 (c128w5)
		zheng 正	 (c6w1)	3	正 (c14w4)
		jun 君	 (c1w11)	--	--
		zai 載	 (c14w11)	--	--
		chu 初	 (c14w12)	3	--
		di 地	 (c15w2)	41	地 (c16w17)
		chen 臣	 (c4w5)	--	--
		zhao 墨	--	--	--
2	天授元年九月 October 690	shou 授	 (c11w2)	--	--
3	證聖元年正月 November 694	zheng 證	 (c15w9)	4	證 (c91w11)
		sheng 聖	 (c14w13)	36	聖 (c63w5)
4	證聖元年四、五月 May/June 695	guo 國	 (c3w19)	4	國 (c37w12)
5	聖曆元年正月 December 697	ren 人	 (c15w6)	242	人 (c4w14)
		yue 月 ^b	 (c11w13)	6	月 (c250w17)

Table 4.2 Comparison of orthographies in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* with Wu's new forms

4.2.2.2 The form is a scribal error of e 惡

The only usage of Wu's new forms that arouses any suspicion in the two Christian manuscripts is  (c161w4), that occurs once in *The Messiah Sutra*.⁴³ Haneda Toru was the

⁴³ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:401.

first person to note this form and doubt that it was Wu's new form *chen* 𡗗. He writes that this form might shed some light on the time of making *The Messiah Sutra*, suggesting that this manuscript could have been made "earlier than the Mid-Tang" (中唐以前).⁴⁴ However, he quickly discarded this supposition, claiming that it was an error of *e* 𡗗, a variant of 惡 that means evil and is used many times (35 and 80 respectively) in both *The Messiah Sutra* and in *On One God*.

Haneda Toru's suspicion was justified. Even though this form does not deviate from the new form and looks exactly the same as the sample offered in Table 4.2, it is very probably a scribal error of *e* 𡗗.

The reasons for this assumption are several. First of all, *e* 𡗗 makes much more sense than *chen*. The character is used in the Gospel story of Jesus' death. The surrounding context is that the Messiah was accused by *eyuanren* (惡緣人, evil persons), who demanded that Pilate pass the death sentence. Although the example quoted is not attached to *yuanren* 緣人 in the original text, there is little doubt that the complete phrase is *eyuanren* 惡緣人:⁴⁵

[Pilate reiterated:] "I really cannot kill this person." The evil persons resubmitted the request and insisted on demanding the death penalty. The Messiah [intended to] give his life to the 𡗗 (evil) [persons]. For the sake of all the living, He warned the humans in this world and instructed that human life is but a flickering candle and that to die for them is to give alms to all persons alive today. The Messiah / [decided to give] his life to [the evil persons] and embraced death completely. The evil persons then [took] the Messiah to another place, [...] and [bound] him to a piece of wood. 我實不能煞其人/惡緣人等更重諮請非不煞不得弥師訶 [欲]將/身施与 𡗗 [緣人] 為一切眾生/譴[誡]世間人等[告] 知其人/命如轉燭為今世眾生布施代命受死弥師/訶[決意]將自身[施]与[惡緣人]遂即受死惡業人乃將弥師訶/[帶到]别处 [.....] 即[系]木上縛着

Secondly, the form 𡗗 is similar to the form of *e* 𡗗. The former differs slightly from the latter, that is consistently written as 𡗗 (c161w1) throughout the two sources.⁴⁶ The only difference is that the former has one middle vertical line whereas the latter has two. Given this, it would seem correct to assume that the former is "a merely ignorant or careless form

⁴⁴ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1926:126.

⁴⁵ This is quoted from *The Messiah Sutra*, Cols. 160-165. See Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:401-402).

⁴⁶ This example is quoted from Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:401).

of a common word.”⁴⁷ In other words, it is not one of Wu’s new forms and hence it does not contain any clue to the time of making the two Christian sources.

4.2.3 The non-taboo of Empress Wu’s name in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

Empress Wu’s name *zhao* 曩 was widely tabooed.⁴⁸ As far as I know, only two extant sources ever used her name. One is the 689 edict mentioned above that introduced her name to the Tang Chinese. The other one is *Wu Zhao Jinjian* 武曩金簡, a strip of gold accidentally found by a farmer in 1982 and now housed in Henan Museum 河南博物館.⁴⁹ This strip was made for the personal benefit of Empress Wu and was inscribed with a sixty-three-character petition to the gods. It was hurled from the peak of the holy mountain Songshan 嵩山 in 700, supplicating the gods to “erase Wu Zhao’s wrongdoings” (除武曩罪名).⁵⁰ Even on this strip, the character *zhao* was written half the size of other characters to avoid offending Empress Wu.⁵¹

Besides the character for her name in particular, the character *zhao* 照 was also tabooed. To avoid using this character, for instance, one of Empress Wu’s grandsons was even renamed. “Prince Yide, Chongrun, was the first son of Zhongzong. His former name was Chongzhao but this was changed in order to avoid [Wu] Zetian’s name” (懿德太子重潤，中宗長子也。本名重照，以避則天諱，故改焉。).⁵² The character *zhao* 照 could also be replaced by other characters like *guang* 光. A Buddhist monastery, *Puzhaowangsi* 普照王寺, was renamed *Puguangwangsi* 普光王寺.⁵³

Another character, *zhao* 詔, was also prohibited. For example, Empress Wu’s court changed *zhaoshu* to *zhishu*. *The Jiutangshu* documents: The Empress “named herself using the character *zhao* and changed *zhaoshu* into *zhishu* immediately” (自以「曩」字為名，遂改詔書為制書).⁵⁴

⁴⁷ A.C. Moule 1930:58.

⁴⁸ For this taboo, see Piotr Adamek (2015:251) and Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (2009:386-387).

⁴⁹ For more details, see the official website of Henan Museum 河南博物館, http://www.chnmus.net/dcjp/201307/22/content_12412.htm.

⁵⁰ For a photo of this strip and a short introduction, see T. H. Barrett (2008:91-93).

⁵¹ For more details, see Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:53-54).

⁵² Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:2834.

⁵³ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:386.

⁵⁴ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:120. This avoidance is further confirmed by *The Tangliudian* 唐六典, a compendium of state offices of the Tang dynasty compiled at the command of Xuanzong in 722 and submitted to the throne by Li Linfu in 738. In the commentary about using *zhishu*, this source acknowledges the name taboo tradition: “In the first year of the Tianshou reign of the Heavenly Empress [Empress Wu, 690], *zhao* 詔 was changed to *zhi* 制

Having cleared up this matter, let us examine whether or not the two Christian sources avoided Empress Wu's name. Quite clearly, the names *zhao* 曁 and *zhao* 照 do not occur at all.

However, the character *zhao* 詔 is spotted in *On One God*. As attested by the example  (c338w15), this sole occurrence does not deviate from the orthodox form.⁵⁵ It is not a taboo. This suggests that the two Christian manuscripts did not taboo Empress Wu's name.

4.2.4 Discussion

Empress Wu assiduously promoted the new forms in her covert pursuit of her hidden political agenda. All new forms (with the exception of her name) were widely used until 705. Since Wu's new forms differ radically from their previous orthographies, they are reliable indicators of the time of the making a manuscript. Moreover, her name *zhao* 曁 was avoided. The usage of these new forms and the observance of the taboo practice is therefore a convincing intimation that a particular source was made in Empress Wu's reign. Conversely, the deviation clearly indicates that the source must be dated before and/or after her rule.

Given that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* do not employ a single new form and do not observe the taboo custom, we can be certain that neither source was made in Empress Wu's reign. Since we have already excluded the period before Empress Wu on the basis of the absence of other taboo characters, we do not need to concern ourselves any further with the possibility that the two Christian manuscripts antedate her reign.

4.3 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Tang Xuanzong's reign

Tang Xuanzong was the sixth male Tang ruler. He ascended the throne in 712 and ruled China until 756. His name contains two characters, *long* 隆 and *ji* 基. Both characters were commonly avoided. However, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* do not taboo either of them. This suggests that the two manuscripts were not made in or soon after Tang Xuanzong's reign.

4.3.1 *Long* and *ji* were not omitted

In Tang China, like other emperors' names, both *long* and *ji* were also removed from many persons' names, designations of government positions and customary expressions. For

owing to the taboo practice.” (天后天授元年，以避諱，該詔為制。) For *The Tang Liudian*, see Li Linfu 李林甫 (738/1992:274).

⁵⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:380.

example, Tang Xuanzong's brother, Longfan 隆範, was renamed Fan. This avoidance was preserved in historical annals. "Fan, Prince Huiwen, was the fourth son of Ruizong. His previous name was Longfan. Later, he used a single-character name Fan in order to avoid [Tang] Xuanzong's two-character name" (惠文太子範，睿宗第四子也。本名隆範，後避玄宗連名，改單稱範。).⁵⁶ Another of Tang Xuanzong's brothers, Longye 隆業, also used a new name Ye 業.⁵⁷

Unlike the Chinese sources, however, neither of the two Christian manuscripts observes a taboo on Tang Xuanzong's name using this method. I have not noted any case of this.

4.3.2 Long and ji were not replaced by other characters

To avoid Tang Xuanzong's name, both *long* and *ji* could also be replaced by other characters — see Table 4.3.⁵⁸ Examples of the renaming of Chinese counties by this method are readily found in private sources and historical annals like *The Jiutangshu*. For example, Hualong 化隆, a county named after the famous local topographical feature, the Hualong Valley, was "changed to Huacheng County in the first year of the Xiantian reign" (先天元年，改為化成縣).⁵⁹ In this example, *long* was replaced by *cheng*. Another county, Langzhou 閬州, was renamed Longzhou 隆州 in 618 but was changed back to Langzhou "in the first year of the Xiantian reign" (先天元年).⁶⁰ The first year of the Xiantian reign was the year in which Tang Xuanzong ascended the throne. In other words, these two places were named upon or shortly after his enthronement. Moreover, *The Jiutangshu* documents more explicit cases of renaming as a consequence of observing the taboo practice. For instance, the county Jicheng 基城, *The Jiutangshu* writes, "was renamed Youchuan in the first year of the Xiantian reign in order to avoid [Tang] Xuanzong's name" (先天元年，改為祐川，避玄宗名。).⁶¹

Names	Replacement
<i>long</i> 隆	<i>xing</i> 興, <i>cheng</i> 成, <i>bu</i> 布, <i>chong</i> 崇
<i>ji</i> 基	<i>ye</i> 業, <i>qi</i> 其, <i>ben</i> 本, <i>zong</i> 宗, <i>zheng</i> 政

Table 4.3 Replacement characters used to taboo Tang Xuanzong's name, *longji*

⁵⁶ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:3016.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3018.

⁵⁸ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:129-131, 180-183.

⁵⁹ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:1638.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1672.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1637.

In contrast to this common Tang common practice, neither Christian source avoids Tang Xuanzong's name by resorting to this method. Several characters listed in Table 4.3 can be found in the Christian texts. For example, the character *cheng* 成 occurs four and thirteen times in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* respectively. However, none is a taboo case. In *On One God*, the phrase “*sishi chengsui*” (四时成岁) contains the character *cheng*, meaning that four seasons make up a year.⁶² The use of *cheng* here has nothing to do with the character *long*. The phrase *sishi longsui* 四时隆岁 does not make any sense. I have not come across any other source that has ever used such a phrase.

4.3.3 Long and ji were not deprived of their strokes

Unlike his grandfather Tang Gaozong, Tang Xuanzong seems to have preferred the *quebi* method to implement name taboos. In his reign, he did not restrict but indeed even encouraged the adoption of this method. In *The Tangliudian*, we have a commentary that legitimizes the usage of this method. “Should a state taboo be encountered in the course of writing canons, history and other books or in compiling and recording past events, the characters shall not adopt their orthodox forms” (若寫經史羣書及撰錄舊事，其文有犯國諱者，皆為字不成。).⁶³

In Tang sources, *long* 隆 was often deprived of its long vertical line – for instance,  used in P.2602, a Dunhuang Taoist source dated 718. The same can be said of the character *ji*. In P.2607, a manuscript in which the scribe copied the other sources, the vertical line of the lower part of *ji* 基 has been removed – .⁶⁴

In neither of the two Christian manuscripts was this method used. The word *long* does not occur. The character *ji* appears in *On One God*. As attested by its three occurrences  (c148w14),  (c149w6) and  (c154w16), none deviates from the normal.⁶⁵ All are in the orthodox form, obviously differing from the above *quebi* example. They are not instances of a taboo.

4.3.4 Discussion

⁶² Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:364, Col.162.

⁶³ Li Linfu 李林甫 738/1992:113.

⁶⁴ These two examples are cited from Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永(2010:248-249).

⁶⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:363.

This analysis reveals that, on the face of it, the scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* would seem to have shown Tang Xuanzong scant respect. His lack of deference was in not employing any of the common methods to avoid Tang Xuanzong's name. As attested by the occurrences of *ji*, had he written at the time the scribe would undoubtedly have committed Tang Xuanzong grave offense. Furthermore, given that it was during Tang Taizong's reign that the Tang imperial patronage, mentioned in Chapter 1, was resumed and Tang Christians were slowly recovering from the setbacks inflicted on them after the rise of Empress Wu in the late seventh century, this violation of the taboo tradition is a very strong clue that the two Christian manuscripts were not made either in or soon after Tang Xuanzong's forty-three-year reign.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* deviate significantly from the general practice adopted by the Chinese between the 650s and the 750s. Irrefutably, neither of the two manuscripts embraced the demanding practice of avoiding the names of Tang Gaozong, Empress Wu and Tang Xuanzong. Evidence endorsing this finding is that not a single Christian source employed the new forms, introduced by Empress Wu in the course of the period 689-697. The only possible usage of the new form 惡 was just another scribal error of 惡.

Furthermore, considering the setbacks that beset the Tang church between the 690s and the 710s and the disastrous rebellion that ravaged Tang China between 755 and 763 raise serious doubts about the possibility of making religious manuscripts before peace had been restored. That is, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were unlikely to have been produced during the second period of the Tang Church, the theme of this chapter. The most likely possibility is that they were made in a later period and this is the matter to be examined in the next chapter.