CHAPTER II

EARLY GUANYIN IN CHINA

Chinese Buddhism was the result of the meeting of two ancient civilizations, the Indian and the Chinese. In the course of its travel to China, Buddhism entered a different milieu, to a country with a highly developed language and script, where the scriptures were interpreted and rendered into Chinese, transforming the religion into a much Sinicized Buddhism.

The spread of Buddhism eastwards took an active turn once Indian Buddhism began to create images of Buddha and bodhisattvas as objects of worship as well as aids for the discharge of pious acts. Iconic worship spread rapidly as the people believed that making of Buddha images was one of the ways to gain merit, as extolled in Buddhist scriptures. The teachings of the Buddha were visually supported concretely, artistically and realistically which gave

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1 A detailed account of this process is given by Zenryu Tsukamota in A History of Early Chinese Buddhism, translated by Leon Hurvitz, Kodansha International pp.14-18. He has quoted from the chapter on Dharmodgata bodhisattva, the twenty-ninth, in roll of the Tao hsing pa-jo, Lokaksema’s translation of the Astasahasrika prajñaparamita sutra, in the second year of Guangho, and one of the oldest of the extant Buddhist scriptures in Chinese which reads as follows.

"It is as if after the Buddha’s Parinirvana there were persons who fashioned the image of the Buddha. Of men who saw that image of the Buddha, there would be none who would not kneel before it with palms joined. The image would be erect and lovely, no different in appearance from a Buddha. Men, upon seeing it would not fail to praise to it, nor bring to it offerings of fragrant flowers and fine cloth, O worthy one!"
further fillip to the spread of Buddhism in China. The icon as an "object of contemplation" soon followed.

The earliest (early centuries AD) Buddhist icons in China emulated the prototypes of Gandhāra and Mathura schools. The Indian types were realistic but these very types were transformed with representative characteristics superimposed on them, thus giving rise to icons with Chinese characteristics.

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra appears to have had a profound influence on the Chinese popular religion and iconography. Miniature Buddhas, the scene of Prabhūtaratna and Sākyamuni sharing the same platform during the vision of the stupa, Sākyamuni's Paradise are all original creations of the Chinese Buddhist sculpture, being inspired by this sutra.

There have been different interpretations of the original sanskrit word Avalokiteśvara and its equivalent in China. But somehow, the Chinese name of Guanyin for Avalokiteśvara had come to stay in China till today. The translated meaning of Guanyin is "the one who hears the sounds, the prayers, of the world." Sanghavarman, Dharmaraksha and other early translators interpreted the name Avalokiteśvara occurring in the manuscripts of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka in Count Otani's expedition as Guanshiyin meaning guan (looks on, shi (the region of sufferers), yin (whose voices of many tones) touch the heart of the pitiful Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Xuanzang on his return from India translated it as Guanzizai, "Self existent who gazes". This term stayed for a while, but the term Guanyin of
Kumarājīva proved more durable and is continued to be used.

The chapter on Avalokiteśvara in the Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra has the first part describing the supernatural powers of Avalokiteśvara, the second part dealing with transformation and the third part which is the verse portion giving the cause and the effects. It is the second portion related to the transformations that brought a host of Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin images in China with symbols and attributes, some borrowed from the Indian Buddhist pantheon and some peculiar to the Chinese alone. The Chinese version of the sutra mentions thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin. While the Indian Avalokiteśvara had hardly any representation of these manifestations, the Chinese made full use of the variations in depicting the Bodhisattva.  

Part II.

EARLY GUANYIN IMAGES

The earliest appearance of Guanyin as an attending Bodhisattva is seen in Cave No. 169 of Binglingsi (Pl.21). This cave was hewn in Western Qin (385-431AD). The principal figure is that of Buddha sitting in padmāsana with the fingers locked together. Buddha is not in dhyāna, for the eyes are open and the position of the hands is different from that of meditating posture. The Buddha has long earlobes and a simple us notification. The halo behind shows other Buddhas; two flying figures are at the two upper corners. Flanking the Buddha are two attending Bodhisattvas. The one

2Professor Lokesh Chandra has provided details of thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin in China. These have been discussed in Chapter 5.
to the left of the Buddha holds a vajra like object in his raised right hand while the left is let down. He wears an armour and has a protective look. Judging by the object in his hand he must be Vajrapāṇi. The one to the right of the Buddha has a gentler look, his raised left hand holds a lotus and so he is identified as Padmapāṇi. His upper body is bare. The statues exhibit the early Buddhist art of China.

Another triad from Jintasi, belonging to Northern Liang (397-460AD) also shows Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas (Pl. 22). The Buddha is seated in padmāsana with his hands on his lap. His eyes are small; behind his head are two halos, one small and the other large encircling the Buddha figure too. On his two sides are the Bodhisattvas. The one to the right wears the dhoti which covers the lower torso and a shawl which covers his chest partially. He has soft features and is shown wearing ornaments around his neck and arms. The Bodhisatva to the left of the Buddha must be Vajrapāṇi for he seems to wear an armour like suit. Beneath the seat of the Buddha are two flying figures. A detail of the right side Bodhisattva is shown in (Pl. 23).

A Bodhisattva statue belonging to Northern Zhou is in Cave No.6 of Binglingsi (Pl.24). This statue is probably Guanyin. The head carries a five leaved crown. The eyebrows are thick and the eyes are puffy, the nose is long but not sharp. The lips are curved in a smile. The ear lobes are unusually small and the head is encircled by a flaming halo. The limbs are not proportionate and the statue
has no ornaments on it. The shawl is crossed in front. The hands are long with the right holding the vase and the left a rosary. Beneath the plain dhoti which flares like a skirt, a tiny pair of feet is visible.

In the Longmen Caves most of the statues have been damaged but the past glory is still conspicuous in them. The triad in Guyangdong, belongs to Northern Wei with the Bodhisattvas positioned on the north and south sides of the west wall (Pl.25). The Bodhisattva to the left of the Buddha has a broken right hand and the left holds a vase by the neck. A beautiful headgear adorns the head. The face is broad and shows thin shapely eyebrows, long ears and nose and a small mouth. The right shoulder is covered by a shawl and a heavy chain adorns the chest. The folds of the dhoti appear to be realistic; the edge of the robe is wavy which is typical of Northern Wei sculpture. The statue on the right side is more or less similar to the one on the left except that the right hand shows a pipal leaf like object. The face is damaged badly. The vase and the manner in which it is held by the Bodhisattva on the left side, suggest that it is Guanyin.

A similar triad from the same period is seen in Shiyanzhong dong (Longmen) on the north wall (Pl.26). The standing Buddha in this cave has two attending Bodhisattvas on either side. The Buddha is big and stocky with the right hand showing the abhaya mudra and the left palm facing outwards with the index and middle fingers pointing down. The Bodhisattva on the left side of the Buddha can be
identified as Guanyin from the vase in his hand. The Bodhisattva statues are only half the size of the Buddha statue with their faces damaged, but the principal statue is well preserved.

In Maijishan, an attending Bodhisattva on the right wall of the niche, is seen in Cave No. 69 which belongs to Northern Wei (Pl.27). The image of the bodhisattva looks more like an aristocratic lady than a male Bodhisattva. The figure has flowing robes, the shoulders and the upper torso are well covered with the lower portion wrapped in a skirt like dress. Ornaments can be seen around the neck of the figure, the hair is tied in a top knot, the face has soft features and though the eyes seem to be half closed the expression appears to be one of compassion with a gentle smile. The left hand is held close to the chest while the right holds a vase which is damaged. The feet are uncovered. The dress seems to be gently swaying in the breeze. The statue has the looks of a female Bodhisattva.

Appearing tall and stately with well proportioned limbs, a Guanyin statue is seen on the right side of the main wall of Cave No. 26 of Northern Zhou (Pl.28). A crown adorns his head with the figure of Buddha on it. His forehead bears the urna, beautiful eyebrows and kind eyes, long nose and mouth which is the right size for the face. Ornaments cover the otherwise bare chest and a shawl drapes over the shoulders. The left hand is raised with a flower which rests on the left shoulder, while the right hangs down with one end of the shawl twisted at the lower arm. The
lower torso is wrapped in a dhoti which is tied at the hips by a cloth belt. A long pearl string which goes beyond the knees is also part of the ornaments decorating the chest. The Bodhisattva stands on a lotus base and appears more manly than the Bodhisattvas in other caves.

In Cave No.8, of Guangyuan Huangzesi, Dazu of Western Wei, is a Bodhisattva statue to the left of the Buddha on the south wall (Pl.29). The central pillar bears this statue which is 95 cms high. The body structure and pose is natural and smooth with the face showing a divine look and a flowery headgear adorning the head. The hair is tied at the top but some of it falls on the shoulders and gives it the appearance of wadding. The left hand holds the fluttering shawl and the raised right hand shows a bud. This kind of carriage of a Bodhisattva is rarely seen during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. This one resembles the one in Binglingsi from the Tang period. But this has class which the other one lacks. The serene look and grace display a celestial charm.

Dunhuang which has been the starting point of Buddhist art in China is rich in both murals and stuccos while both Longmen and Yungang and Dazu caves are famous for their magnificent rock carvings. An examination of the paintings in Dunhuang gives an idea of the chronological order of the styles and nuances in appearances from the images evolving from an Indian influence to that of complete Sinicization, as it happened in the Song period.

In Dunhuang itself the Avalokiteśvara Sūtra which is
also the Pumen Chapter of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka is illustrated forty three times where the thirty three manifestations of Guanyin are shown five times as if to prove his/her powers. The Cintāmaṇiśvara Avalokiteśvara or Ruyilun Guanyin appears sixty times, as Amoghapāśa or Bukong juansuo Guanyin fifty-six times and the independent appearances total ninety-one. Besides these appearances there are over thirty-five tantric forms of the deity with more than one head and two arms. Other appearances of the deity are the Shuiyue Guanyin(The Moon’s reflection in water Guanyin), Luojiashan Guanyin (Guanyin on Mount Potalaka), Fuzuo Guanyin (Guanyin in Padmāsana), Matou Guanyin (Hayagrīva) and Nanwu jiuku jiunan Guanyin (Namah Guanyin), Guanyin with a willow branch and nectar flask, Guanyin holding lotus etc. No other Bodhisattva has so many depictions.

The total number of confirmed figures of Guanyin and the sutra illustrations surpasses the depictions of even the Buddha. The Bodhisattva’s power as the saviour from perils was so great that whole walls have been allotted for illustrations of the Pumen pin chapter of the sūtra. When cave art started in Dunhuang from Northern Liang, the murals of the period were based mainly on Jātaka stories and so Buddha was given special importance. The stuccos had both Buddha and Maitreya as the main characters with two Bodhisattvas on either sides. Sometimes there was the stucco of a contemplating Bodhisattva with his right leg resting on his left knee. Miniature Buddhas filled up the
rest of the space.

During Northern Wei more Buddha statues appeared in the company of two Bodhisattvas whose identity was not clear either for lack of symbols or because the stuccos were damaged. But their appearance fitted the description of Bodhisattvas in the sutras. Sometimes warriors were shown as attendants flanking the Buddha. This was a theme which was newly introduced during the Northern Wei. The Buddha's head would have a tapering halo with a bigger halo covering the image of the Buddha. This kind of halo was peculiar to Northern Wei. The robes of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas had sharp scalloped edges which was another peculiarity of this period. The Buddha was depicted in the garb of a monk and the Bodhisattvas in princely attire. Thick white lines were drawn on the eyes, nose, teeth and chin as if to draw one's attention to these features. Most of the time it was the preaching scene which was portrayed. The initial phase of Dunhuang art shows triads of Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. But the Bodhisattvas do not have any attribute to easily identify them. But if we go by the triads and the attire of the Bodhisattvas, they can be none other than Mahāsthāmaprāpta/Vajrapāṇi and Guanyin.

The first appearance of attributes such as flower in the hands of Bodhisattva figures, is on the south wall of Cave No. 435 which is a Northern Wei cave. Although the identity of the flower in his right hand is not clear, it is most likely that he is Guanyin. (Pl.30).

Some of the caves of Western Wei and Northern Zhou
(Cave Nos. 432, 438 of Western Wei and Northern Zhou respectively) have the triads in the central pillar of the cave. One hand of the Bodhisattvas is held close to the chest and the other hangs down with the index and little fingers pointing outwards. (Pls 31 & 32).

The nectar vase as an attribute is seen for the first time in west wall in Cave No. 439 (Pl. 33) of Northern Zhou. The Buddha’s face and that of the Bodhisattva on the left side of the Buddha are damaged. But the one on the right side has a serene look, the right hand showing abhaya mudra and the left holding the vase. The scarf or shawl of the Bodhisattva is wound round the left arm. Since the popularity of this Bodhisattva was on the rise it could only be Guanyin.

Illustrations of the Chapter Guanshiyin pumen appear from Sui Dynasty (581-618) onwards. Among the extant examples, the earliest two belonged to this period. The first Guanyin narratives painted on the east slope of the ceiling of Cave No. 420 are portrayals of immense vitality, while the other in Cave No. 303 is in the form of a frieze. Cave No. 303 which was hewn during the Sui Dynasty has illustrations of the Universal Gate of Avalokiteśvara from the Saddharmaupanḍarīka Sūtra, indicating that Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin had become popular by that time and scenes of him saving the suffering beings from perils are painted on the eastern and western slopes of an inverted V shaped ceiling. The lower portion of the eastern slope and the western slope have depictions of the omnipresence of Guanyin and his
thirty-three manifestations. The lower portion of the western slope is covered by the Buddha's narration on Guanshiyin, the Bodhisattva Aksayamati and others offering pearl string to Guanyin, Guanyin accepting the string and dividing it into two pieces, offering one piece to Sakyamuni and the other to the stupa of Prabhūtaratna, and the two Buddhas sitting inside the stupa of Prabhūtaratna. This must be the first time that Sūtra depictions appeared in the Mogao Grottoes.

In Cave No. 304 of Sui, there are two standing Bodhisattva statues on either side of the seated Buddha. The one on the right side of the Buddha holds a lotus bud in his left hand and a nectar vase in his right. The Bodhisattva on the left also holds a nectar vase in his left hand while his right must have held a lotus bud too. They look identical but have been called attending Bodhisattvas. They are continued to be called attending Bodhisattvas although they can be none other than Guanyin and Vajrapāṇī/Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

An attending Bodhisattva statue holding a willow sprig is seen on the south side inside the niche in Cave No. 416 (Pl. 34) of Sui Dynasty. Since the willow is a feminine symbol and has been associated with the Bodhisattva, it could only be Guanyin. There might have been an image on the crown but all that is left is an oval shaped blank plate which could also be a precious stone.

The triads in the murals of Sui are different in the sense that the Buddha's and the Bodhisatvas' halos are round.
The upper torsos of the Bodhisatvas are more or less covered and the faces are more elongated than the stuccos. The preaching scene in Cave No. 311 shows the Buddha with two Bodhisattvas and two disciples. The one on the left holds the nectar vase in his right hand and the stem of a flower in his left. The one on the right of the Buddha holds the incense burner. The two Bodhisattvas are Guanyin and Mahāsthāmaprāpta respectively and the two disciples are Ananda and Kāśyapa.

The two sets of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues in Cave No. 427 (Pl.35) reflect the perfect craftsmanship of Sui Dynasty. The Buddha looks serene, his hand showing the abhaya mudrā. The two Bodhisattvas wear gem-studded crowns, robes which are called sengzhizhi, shawl and dhoti. The "dhoti" looks very much like a skirt which is embroidered. The upper torso of the Bodhisattvas is only partially bare making it look more feminine.

In the earlier caves the Bodhisattva statues were modelled after the Indian style having a bare upper body with only a shawl flowing from the shoulders. The Sui Dynasty style of Bodhisattva statues resemble the heartland style, the costume being Sinicized Western style. The Bodhisattva statue to the left of the Buddha statue holds a lotus bud in his right hand. Guanyin's place was often to the left of the Buddha when they appeared as a triad. The other Bodhisattva is Mahāsthāmaprāpta who also shows feminine grace. Looking at the statues of the Bodhisattva it could be said that the process of feminization was
gradually setting in. Unlike the paintings, the statues in the Dunhuang caves have been renovated and remodelled. The possibility of later day modifications of such statues cannot however be ruled out.

With this cautionary note, and despite the moustache being visible on careful examination, one cannot stop from mistaking it for two female attendants. In the second set of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues (Pl.36), the Bodhisattvas look increasingly feminine with almost the entire upper torso completely covered. As the Bodhisattvas are always shown in princely garments here too they appear wearing rich clothes which cannot be called "dhoti" in the true sense of the term. The middle parting of the hair adds to the feminine look. The murals of the same cave have Bodhisattva paintings which are distinctly male (Pl.37). On the western side of the north facing niche is the portrait of an attending Bodhisattva holding the nectar vase in his left hand and a full blown lotus in his right. The Bodhisattva painting seen on the northern side of the west facing niche also holds a nectar vase in his left hand and a flaming pearl in his right palm. Both are termed attending Bodhisattvas. There should be no doubt that the one on the north facing niche is Guanyin.

In Cave No. 420 which is also a Sui cave, inside the niche on the west wall there are statues of Bodhisattvas of which one has a lotus bud in the left hand and a nectar vase in the right (Pl.38). The dhoti is no longer a plain one but has designs on it. The position of the feet in the
murals are different as they point sideways. The earlier stuccos have the feet at ease, while these statues have their feet together. Another statue also on the west wall niche just outside, has a willow branch in the right hand and the left must have held the nectar vase which is no more. This one has been identified as Guanyin (Pl.39). In my view the former is also Guanyin for he has the attributes which are generally associated with him. All the statues give the feeling of strength.

The slopes on the north, south and west sides of the cave ceiling have illustrations of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sutra while the east slope shows the illustration of the Chapter of Universal Gate of Avalokiteśvara. The south side of the slope depicts Guanyin saving people from perils. It is here that some scholars feel that the process of feminization of bodhisattvas and particularly of Guanyin had just begun (Pl.40). The Bodhisattva is seen standing in the \textit{tribhanga} stance while rescuing people from dangers.

The attending Bodhisattvas on the south side of the west wall niche of Cave No.425, show the first signs of the art of Early Tang and these two statues are preserved in good condition (Pl.41). Both hold a lotus (one has a bud and the other has the it in the palm) in their right hand and a scarf in the left. The face is long and has a serene look. The statues exhibit a delicate and dignified appearance.

The north and south sides of the west wall in Cave No.278 have portraits of two Bodhisattvas both of which can
be identified as Guanyin because of the attributes seen in the hands (Pl. 42 shows one of the Bodhisattvas). The one, on the south side holds in his right hand a full blown lotus and his left carries a vase. The figure on the north side also holds a nectar vase with a willow branch in the left hand and the right holds the scarf. They stand respectfully with a steady gaze.

In Cave No. 276 a figure on the north wall is termed as attending Bodhisattva in spite of the lotus and the nectar vase in the hands. The Bodhisattva image on the south wall (Pl. 43) has been identified as Guanyin from the willow branch in his right hand, the nectar vase in the left and the image of his spiritual father on his crown. This is the first time that the image of the Buddha is seen on the head of the Bodhisattva. This picture of Guanyin is more masculine despite the delicate hands and flowing robes perhaps due to the conspicuous moustache and beard.

The painting on the north wall in Cave No. 401 shows two Bodhisattvas in the company of a donor child (Pl. 44). Out of the two, one is clearly Guanyin because of the lotus in the left hand and the nectar vase in the right. Though the face and the body are dark coloured there is certain element of feminine grace visible as compared to the manly Bodhisattva statue next to the figure. The gentle curve of the body lends it a womanly look.

Two such graceful figures can also be seen in Cave No. 394 on the north and south sides of the west wall. The two Bodhisattvas hold the nectar vase and either willow branch
or a flaming pearl (Pls 45 and 46). Although both are generally termed as Bodhisattvas, the one with the willow branch is most probably Guanyin.

Moving to Cave No. 390 there is a preaching scene showing Maitreya as the central figure (Pl.47). Although the sitting posture is manly, the face is distinctly female with closed eyes and a small mouth. He carries the Buddha figure on his crown. The two attending Bodhisattvas look feminine and going by the symbols in the hands, the one on the left side is Guanyin.

So far, the images of Guanyin and bodhisattvas likely to be Guanyin as in Dunhuang up to the Sui period (618 AD) have been considered and some general observations can be made.

- The images have generally followed the rigid Buddhist tenets.
- Besides the original Indian attributes, a few Chinese attributes like fly whisk, willow branch had started creeping in.
- Feminization had set in as seen in Dunhuang murals and stuccos and in Maijishan. In the latter, traces of feminization are noticed even during the Northern Wei.
- The influence of Gandhāran and Gupta art continued to be felt.
9. Avalokitesvara as door-keeper, Ellora, Cave No. 2.
10. Padmapani Avalokitesvara, Nalanda, Vihara No. 3.
Significantly, Emperor Wen and his queen earned the name "er sheng"-Twin-Sages. As they grew older they became more pious and followed strict Buddhist observances. In 601 AD, in an attempt to imitate the Indian Emperor Asoka, Yang Jian is said to have carried out an elaborate ceremony to enshrine holy relics throughout the empire. The empress participated in all such ceremonies.

In the year 602, the empress died. She had been a strong influence on Yang Jian. On her death, the court historian promptly declared her to be a Bodhisattva. In view of the strong influence of the empress on the administration and the spread of Buddhist ideology, it is possible that the declaration of the deceased empress to be a Bodhisattva could have influenced the beginning of feminization of Bodhisattva.

Being world famous for male chauvinism, the Chinese society had the unique distinction of having a woman "Son of Heaven" (Emperor) -- an institution exclusively preserved for men. This happened in the latter half of the seventh century, and the person responsible for this coup-de-tat was Wu Zetian. She rose from a girl of a commoner's family to the height of not only China's supreme ruler, but even a symbol of a very powerful deity on earth. In addition, she made an obscure Wu family one of China's ruling families without the use of force. This remarkable interregnum of Wu zetian in Chinese history is relevant to my enquiry on Guanyin.
At the age of merely fourteen when the Tang Emperor Taizong recruited her as a member of the imperial consort, she told her weeping mother while parting, that her date with the Son of Heaven could become a turning point of the family fortune.¹ She was correct.

Wu Zetian entered the palace in 638 AD. On the death of Emperor Taizong in 649, she entered a nunnery as was customary for all the concubines of a lamented emperor to go. It was Empress Wang who had encouraged Emperor Gaozong to retrieve her from the monastery. Soon by her ruthless manipulations and despite opposition from elder statesmen, Wu got herself promoted as the Imperial concubine. She cleverly worked her way into the inner circle of Emperor Gaozong who ultimately deposed his Empress and elevated Wu to the place of first lady in November, 655.

Emperor Gaozong was a weak character both physically and intellectually. Wu Zetian on the other hand proved herself a genius in sorting out the knotty problems of the Tang Empire. Though the emperor began to distrust her after some time, he found himself a mental prisoner of Wu Zetian. She created history even when the emperor was alive by sitting side by side with the emperor in court sessions, and was the ultimate arbiter of all imperial decisions. This created the phenomenon in Chinese history of the imperial government having a twin sagehood like that of Sui Dynasty Emperor Yang Jian and

¹Xin Tangshu, juan 76, biography of Wu Zetian.
his queen. Whereas the Chinese political tradition tolerated no second sheng (sage) other than the emperor, the new Empress Wu shared this honour and authority with her imperial consort -- both of them were known as a part of ersheng (two sages). In this sense, she demonstrated her capacity of carving out an additional authority from China's highly centralized totalitarian regime for an empress in the face of the emperor. This was a constitutionalized extra-constitutional authority.

Beneath the surface, the "twin-sagehood" of Emperor Gaozong's ruling machine had only one authority, i.e. Empress Wu. In the year 660, Emperor Gaozong suffered a paralytic stroke from which he never recovered. Thus for Empress Wu the symbolic obstacle in her way to the goal of her personal ambitions was removed-- even the sky was not the limit.

Enough attention has not been paid to the attainment of sheng (sagehood) by Wu Zetian even when she was just the first lady who, by Chinese convention, was not supposed to participate in the ruling and decision-making process of the empire. But, Empress Wu's clout of sheng had not only crossed the conventional limit, but also eclipsed the supreme authority of the empire among the high-ups. Her sharing the honour of er-sheng was not just an additional feather on the hat of honorifics, but the opening of a floodgate to her future daring acts of revolution (or violation of conventional norms). This point should be borne in mind when we proceed to discuss
her quest for the *shengmu* (holy mother) image.

Empress Wu’s first act was to consolidate her position at court. Although she was later known to be a devout Buddhist, she was shrewd enough to win over the Confucians and Taoists (a) by discouraging the establishment of temples and monasteries and (b) by associating herself with the Tang patronage of Taoism.

Both the emperor and the empress were deeply religious. Emperor Gaozong personally supervised the building of Ci’en (Benevolent Mother) Monastery and Dayan (Great Goose) Pagoda in the imperial capital Chang’an and wrote a preface for the Chinese translations of famous pilgrim and Tripitaka Master, Xuanzang (sometimes spelled as "Hsuan-tsang") when he was the crown-prince. As an emperor, he continued to patronize Buddhism like his late imperial father. It was in the reign of Emperor Gaozong that Xuanzang accomplished most of his translations of the Sanskrit scriptures which he had brought back from India. But after the death of Xuanzang, the imperial patronage for the translation project was abruptly withdrawn, which event, perhaps, highlighted the emperor’s greater respect for an individual tripitaka master than his general concern for the evangelic dissemination of Buddha-dharma.

Coming from a pious Buddhist family and with a short participation in the life of the holy order, Empress Wu was only too eager to support the cause of Buddhism. She saw the growth of Taoism under the patronage of the
emperor and the treatment meted out to the Buddhist monks by the Taoist priests. She could not openly suppress the Taoists as long as the de-jure ruler, her imperial husband, was alive. In 674, she revoked the edict issued by Emperor Taizong placing Taoists before their Buddhist counterparts in the priority list of the imperial protocol. This was a small but important step towards the establishment of Buddhism as most favoured religion of the land. Five years later, another edict was proclaimed in the name of Emperor Gaozong who was dying, "allowing translators of Buddhist texts to disregard all imperial taboos (guo hui) in the use of characters occurring in the personal names of Tang emperors. The ban on the usage of ordinary Buddhist terms like shi zun ("the World Honoured One") and jiu shi ("salvation") to avoid the characters in the personal names of Emperors Taizong and Gaozong was lifted."

In 666, she persuaded the emperor to perform the feng-shan ceremony at the Taishan Mountain (one of China's holy mountains). Although there had been no precedent of women's participation in such grandiose and solemn rituals, Empress Wu made her presence universally felt so as to legitimize her status as a sheng (holy) personality with equal prominence as the emperor. She led a ladies' procession of imperial consorts and royal

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2Stanley Weinstein, The Politics of Legitimization in Tang China, p.40
relatives during the ceremony. 3

In 674, for the first time in Chinese history the emperor and empress took the grand titles of "Heavenly Emperor" (tian huang) and "Heavenly Empress" (tian hou) titles which the empress hoped would be distinct from those of all the preceding Chinese monarchs. This was just one of the several titles she arrogated to herself. The others were "Sacred Emperor of the Golden Cakra", "Shengmu" and "Her Majesty from the Phoenix Throne." 4

Soon after the death of Emperor Gaozong in 683, Empress Wu took advantage of her being the lone surviving member of the "twin-sages" to throw her weight around. No sooner had she installed her son as the successor of Emperor Gaozong (as Emperor Zhongzong) than she deposed him and proclaimed herself as the reigning empress. With a stroke of brush she broke three thousand years of Chinese political tradition of reserving the position of the "Son of Heaven" exclusively for the male sex. She became the first (and eventually the only one) female "Son of Heaven" in Chinese history.

As pointed out earlier, this usurpation of the supremo status on the part of Empress Wu had been facilitated by her earlier coup of usurpation of the


4As mentioned by Prof. Tan Chung in his article "Cave Art in China: A Historical Perspective", presented at the first Seminar on Cave Art of India and China held in November, 1991 at New Delhi.
honorific title of sheng -- the latter was equally extraordinary than the former. In other words, she had crossed an insurmountable obstacle (for a woman to usurp the throne) by crossing two thresholds which became much easier.

The empress began to encourage people to discover auspicious omens (furui) that could be interpreted to her advantage of usurping the throne. The result was that the people of the kingdom vied with one another to inform her of such omens. Her favourite nephew Wu Chengsi, the most persistent advocate of Wu's usurpation, schemed with a courtier to announce in court that a stone bearing the prophecy "The Imperial Cause will forever prosper when the Sage Mother (Shengmu) reigns over the people" discovered in the Lo river in 688. She promptly declared the Lo river sacred and prohibited fishing there while taking the new title "Sage Mother Sovereign Divine". The term "sovereign" (huang) free of sexual connotation was a significant choice and a major change from the traditional practice.  

On the one hand Empress Wu was keen to promote Buddhism and earn the respect of the subjects while on the other, she had an affair with a common peddler like Xue Huaiyi who was raised to the position of a monk. The latter abused his position as the Empress's favourite but

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5 Ibid, p.41.

made himself useful by fabricating a chapter in the Sutra "Da yunjing" (Mahāmāya Sūtra or the Great Cloud Sūtra). The chapter was called "Heihe Nuzhu shuo" (The Legend of the Female Ruler of the Black River) which showed Wu Zetian as having been bestowed with Heaven's consent to serve with dedication. The second version of the so-called legend spoke of a small kingdom in South India which had a river called the Black River. The ruler Deng Cheng had died and his daughter Zeng Chang ascended the throne. The kingdom was powerful and neighbouring states submitted to her rule and paid tributes to her.

A recent discovery in Dunhuang of a fragment of a commentary written by Xue Huaiyi and others has thrown new light on this issue. The Da Yunjing was not fabricated by Xue Huaiyi and followers, as this scripture had been translated much earlier. The earliest translation was done during the Northern Liang by Tan Wuchen who was also known as Tan Wuchan. He was a man from Central India who came to China in 412-425 AD. He lived in Guzang for a long time (present day Wuwei in Gansu Province), and translated the Buddhist scripture Dafang deng wuxiangjing namely Da Yunjing which was one of his translated works. Wang Guowei, a scholar who compared the Can juan (Fragmented documents) and Tan Wuchen's translation discovered that the Da Yunjing cited in the Fragmented volume had even been mentioned in the translation, "the story of the Queen of Heihe is mentioned at length". This has come to be known as the
legend of the Female Ruler of Black River, and had become a sort of old saying and therefore not an invention or creation of Xue Huaiyi and associates.

This did not mean that Xue Huaiyi and the others had nothing to do at all with the Da Yunjing. The Sūtra had been brought to China even by the fifth century, while the fragment was written and compiled not before the end of the seventh century. The important point to be noted is how Wu Zetian made use of this sutra.

She utilized the sutra to her advantage in two stages. In the first stage, she revived an old legend and, in the second, she effected the creation of a new one. As the translation was already in existence for over two hundred years, it is certain that Wu Zetian knew about the legend of the Female Ruler of Black River. According to Wu Zetian herself, she had been converted to Buddhism even in her childhood. "The sovereign had admired and adored Buddhism in her youth." (The Preface of the sacred teachings of the Tripi̇takas, Complete Tang Literature - 97) and as such Wu Zetian must have been aware of the legend of the Female Ruler of Black River. Even if it was not in her childhood, she could have listened to this tale of the Female Ruler of Black River from her sycophants after she became the Empress. Not until the establishment of the dynasty did Wu Zetian make use of the legend of the Ruler of Black River. As

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Empress, if she had publicized the story of the Female Ruler of Black River she would have only revealed her plans, well before the appropriate time thereby inviting trouble. So her use of the Sutra could not but be deferred till after the establishment of the dynasty.

In the thirty-seventh chapter of the Dayunjing, mention had been made of ideas that could be used to legitimize rule of a woman. Buddha spoke of a divine female by name Jinguang Tiannu "The Heavenly Lady Pure and Radiant" who served and helped the sentient beings in her female form without being transformed into a male. This female divinity would be reborn seven hundred years after the Buddha's death, as a beautiful princess in a small kingdom named Black River Kingdom in South India being admired and respected by her subjects. She would ascend the throne on her father's death and her rule would be accepted throughout the world. The kings of the neighbouring states would submit to her and her country would prosper under her rule. She will be the protector of those who follow the Buddha's teachings and destroy those who slander the True Doctrine.  

Though Wu was born in North China more than eleven hundred years after the death of the Buddha, and not after seven hundred years after his passing away, as the

*Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the Tang*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p.42. His account is similar to the one mentioned by Wang Diwu, but the name of the princess is different and Stanley also adds that the princess was transformed into a Buddha after being reborn in the Pureland of Buddha.
Buddha prophesied, the Sutra contained ideas that could be cited to justify the ascension to the throne and the elimination of her opponents. As in the legend, Wu a devout Buddhist, had also established a prosperous state, rewarding the faithful and punishing the wicked, which in her case included political opponents. Wu declared herself to be Maitreya, the future Buddha. After knowing the legend of Jingguang, Wu must have decided to base her rule on the prophecies in this Sutra.9

The second phase of the use of Dayunjing by Wu Zetian, was the creation of a new doctrine. No doubt the story of the Female ruler of Black River had an important role to play, but it could not be treated as having played a major part in her ascendancy for it was a story which had taken place at a different place and a different time. It was not directly relevant to the fact that Wu Zetian was establishing the Zhou Dynasty during the Tang dynasty in the eighties of the seventh century. In case she wanted to project her cause she had necessarily to make use of the old legend as the basis for the creation of a new one. So proclaiming in the fragment of the Dayunjing that Wu Zetian was Maitreya's incarnation was more convenient and therefore the story was created according to the needs of the times.

In Buddhism, Maitreya is regarded as a Mahā bodhisattva. Buddhist records say that he will

9As mentioned by Stanley Weinstein, Empress Wu declared her assumption of the throne as her past karma in fulfillment of a prophecy.
inherit the mantle of Buddhahood from Sakyamuni and become a Buddha. The Sūtra depicting Maitreya's rise to Tusita Heaven says that after the death of Maitreya he will be born in Tusita Heaven, the Pureland of Maitreya. The Sutra of Maitreya coming down to be born in this world (*Mile xiasheng chengfo jing-Maitreyavya Karana*) also mentions that when Maitreya appears in this world he will attain enlightenment under the nagapushpa or dragonflower tree. The impression of Maitreya grew enormously in the mind of the Chinese people because Xuanzang and his disciple Kuiji, held him in high esteem.

According to *Xu Gaosengzhuang* (Second Series of Biography of Eminent Monks), before Xuanzang had visited India, he "often wished to be born as Maitreya", "and journeying to the western regions this yearning intensified proving Xuanzang's infatuation for the Pureland of Maitreya."

Xuanzang's disciple Kuiji also had blind faith in Maitreya. Both Xuanzang and Kuiji were great masters of idealism. Through their eulogy, the concept of Pureland of Maitreya became widely prevalent in China, and Wu Zetian skillfully used this opportunity to declare herself as the reincarnation of Maitreya.

The earliest doctrine of Maitreya's reincarnation that Wu advocated, was in the form of "lingyi", "xiang rui" and not as a Buddhist scripture, though its persuasive might was not yet formidable. It was for Xue Huaiyi and others to work on the theory of the
reincarnation of Maitreya as Wu Zetian and its relation to Buddhism.

In 693 the Empress assumed the title of Sacred and Divine Sovereign of the Golden Wheel (Jinlun Shengshen Huangdi) which is an unmistakable reference to the Buddhist concept of the idealized Universal Monarch (Cakravartin, 'turner of the wheel [of the Law]') who rules in accordance with the high ethical principles of Buddhism. In 695 Empress Wu formally added the name of Maitreya to her title thereby combining in her person the secular authority of the Universal Monarch and the religious authority of the Future Buddha.

It was during the reign of Empress Wu that active translation work of Buddhist sūtras was undertaken. The Empress not only provided the financial support for the able translators but also participated in their work as the Buddhist rulers of the fifth and sixth centuries had done. In 685, Wu Zetian ordered a Central Indian by name Divākara, who had arrived in China some time earlier to translate the scriptures in the monasteries of Chang’an and Loyang. He was assisted by ten monks who had been assigned to him by the empress herself. An extant preface written by the empress was for the Fangguang da zhuangyan jing (Lalitavistāra). Under her patronage, Divākara translated a total of eighteen works. She eulogized Divākara in her preface. According to "The Biographical records of Huayan jing" (Avatāmsaka Sūtra) Divākara died at the age of 75 at Shan Yang, Longmen.
Monks Bodhiruci and Yijing were two other important translators who enjoyed the favour of the Empress. The former translated fifty-three texts and the latter sixty-one. The importance that Empress Wu attached to the translation of Buddhist texts is evident from the large number of prefaces that she wrote for translators whom she patronized as well as the interest she took in the translation of specific texts. She invited the Khotanese monk Śiksānanda in 695 to assist in the preparation of a new Chinese version of the Huayan jing (Avatamsaka sūtra) while the Empress herself served as a copyist.

In the history of Buddhist thought, the reign of Empress Wu is particularly noted for the support that was given to two new schools the Chan and the Huayan. Of the Chan masters who enjoyed her patronage noteworthy is the ninety-year old Shenxiu whom she invited to the court in Luoyang. So great was the Empress's respect for Shenxiu, that when they met in the audience chamber she sank to her knees while he sat in the meditative pose. Similarly Fazang of the Huayan school was the other monk who was held in high esteem by the court during her reign and even after she was deposed.

The empress also devised twelve new characters which were added to the Chinese written language. Perhaps there was an implicit comparison of the empress with the legendary inventor of Chinese script. In the Act creating the new characters the empress's analysis was that some of the old characters had become so complicated
even for scholars to understand. Therefore she created twelve new characters which presented the origin of words and also illustrated the real meaning and an example was the new character for her own name pronounced Zhou made of parts showing the heavenly bodies illuminating the void below. It was a symbol which according to her "would make all men come (to submit) to us and facilitate good government."\textsuperscript{10} This was also to avoid any inconvenience which would fall upon her own first name when she ascended the throne as Emperor.

A major factor in Wu Zetian's role in Chinese history, was the result of a weak-willed king and his queen who felt insecure for her own place as she violated the most important code of 'filial piety', to be inefficient in not begetting a son to carry on the lineage (wu xiao you san, wu hou wei da). The position of women in the family depended on their ability to give birth to a son who could engrave the family name for posterity. If there was no male heir, there would be no family tree to speak of. Wu Zetian was clever and could establish her position as she had a son as the first-born.

Empress Wu had achieved the impossible; for the first and the last time in Chinese history a woman had ascended the Throne of emperors and had been recognised not as Empress or Empress Dowager, titles which were not

\textsuperscript{10}For more details on the new characters a reference may be made to Tokiwa Daijo Bu-Shu shinji no ichi Kenkyu, THGH (Tokyo), 6(1936) 5-42.
sovereign, but as Emperor. The Chinese people came to believe that even if Wu Zetian was not Maitreya come to earth she was the one spoken by the Grand Astrologer whom Taizong had consulted forty years before and was well named as the Holy and Divine Emperor.

Suffice it to say that Empress Wu found Buddhist classic prophesies that favoured her to reign as the empress and she used it adroitly to bring around the feudal ruling class who were themselves facing social and economic decline, in accepting her as the "emperor". This was also the time when the emergence of two of the sects, the Huayan and the Chan was a turning point in Buddhist reforms in China. The new nobility were from the lower strata and the new breed of monk-preachers in these two sects came not from the nobility but from the lower strata. Thus the rise of Wu could be attributed as the direct cause of changes in the society and in Buddhist religion itself.

Thus we see an incredible phenomenon in Chinese history with a woman - Wu Zetian - holding absolute power and reigning the country for four decades keeping the Chinese male chauvinist tradition at bay. The end of her supremacy came only a few months before her death when the 80 year old imperial lady was tremendously weakened by her illness. A palace coup took place and the garrison troops entered the palace and put her trusted counsellors to the sword. She sat up on her sick bed with great shock. Top courtiers then went to her
pleading that she pass on the reign to the Crown Prince who had just been reinstated. Empress Wu said nothing and returned to her sleep. She was deposed, but remained to be the empress dowager. Her son and successor, Emperor Zhongzong (who had been deposed by her earlier), led the entire court to enquire her health in her demoted residence. Soon after, she died.

It is obvious from the above account that Wu Zetian's challenge to the mighty male chauvinist tradition had a powerful support from the Buddhist legends without which she would not have triumphed. But, her being forced to quit the top slot of power also demonstrates that in the absence of her physical power all the new equations built up by her with a Buddhist reorientation could still be demolished. In other words, China's socio-political system had the resilience to fight back, and, ultimately, reinstated the ancien regime and healed the wounds suffered by the Chinese male chauvinist dominance. This historical encounter between Wu Zetian and China's male chauvinist tradition was not without any impact on Chinese culture. And it is this impact which is relevant to my present study on Guanyin.

Two ramifications of this impact deserve our attention. The first is the noticeable feminization of Buddhist idols during the Tang Dynasty which was, obviously, not unrelated to Empress Wu's assuming the stature of a super-human during the period of her supremacy. The second ramification is the creation of a
new goddess in China, i.e. *shengmu* (holy mother) which was Wu Zetian’s creation.

When scholars like Kenneth Chen place the beginning of feminization of Guanyin to the Tang period, there is a tempting inference of nexus between emergence of Empress Wu and the feminization of Guanyin. As Empress Wu was keen to be deified she had many statues cast to her liking. The impetus given by her for making of innumerable images in female form resulted in the popularization of Guanyin as a goddess of mercy. As proof this, one has to see the statues in the Dazu Caves especially of *Shengmu* the Holy mother and several Guanyin images which have a distinctly royal bearing and feminine looks.

(Plate 48) shows an image of Shengmu in the Houtu Shengmu niche no.4, Nanshan Dazu. On the backwall of the cave is the niche wherein is seen the statue of this saint wearing a phoenix crown and sitting in a regal pose. Though many statues were carved to resemble aristocratic ladies of the time, there was no statue dedicated to a female saint or holy mother as such. Perhaps this could be a statue erected in admiration of the Tang empress Wu who was very keen to be immortalised as a Bodhisattva. The other name for Houtu Shengmu is Houtu Huangzhi and she is the Goddess of all beings. It is on the backwall that there are three statues of Holy Mothers all with kind and dignified appearance. The principal image among these is that of Goddess of
Fertility (who has been described as the Chinese counterpart of Indian Hariti).

Today Wu Zetian is remembered by a majority of the womenfolk of Guangyuan in Sichuan Province, who proudly tell travellers visiting the place that the ancient city is best known as the birth place of Wu Zetian. It was during her reign that women were allowed to take the imperial examinations and assigned posts in the government to those who cleared the exams. Her birthday which falls on the 23rd day of the first month of the Chinese lunar calendar is celebrated by the local women at the Huangzesi (Temple of Imperial Bounties) built in the Tang Dynasty in Wu's honour. The women take the day off and the husbands stay at home and look after the household duties. The day evolved into a festival in Wu's honour and has been celebrated for more than 1200 years. Today it is called Guangyuan Women's Day. The Huangzesi temple is at the foot of the Wulong Hill and houses a stone statue of the empress in gilded dress. There they would kowtow and burn incense by way of paying homage to their empress. Many times in the past it was almost destroyed by rulers after the Tang Dynasty, who wanted to belittle the empress only to be rebuilt again. The statue has become a valuable relic and the temple a tourist attraction.

The largest niche is the Grand Buddha Tower, 20

metres above the ground. Built in the Tang Dynasty, it contains five Buddha statues and the centre one which is the largest at a height of 6 metres is a plump, tender and charming female Buddha said to be modelled after Wu.

The large number of statues to her resemblance must have been a stepping stone to different forms of Guanyin like Baiyi Guanyin, Shuiyue Guanyin, Purple bamboo Guanyin, to name a few of the feminine forms of Guanyin. An eleven-headed Guanyin commissioned by Wu Zetian (Pl.49) is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington.

The shengmu scenario provides an additional clue to our enquiry on how Guanyin has acquired a feminine image, and thus deserves to be highlighted in academic investigations. In the first place, there was no such deity in the Chinese pantheon before its creation for Empress Wu. Afterwards, the symbol of shengmu niangniang (with Niangniang meaning the "holy mother" like Shengmu) began to be registered in Chinese cultural tradition. This means that the first Chinese shengmu (Holy Mother) was no other person that Wu Zetian, the heroine of our discussion. Though there were selfish motives behind the whole proceeding, it is, looking at it objectively from the viewpoint of cultural history, an ingenious creativity and contribution to the enrichment of Chinese culture.

As alluded to earlier, Empress Wu’s being honoured as sheng (a sage) side by side with her imperial husband gave a great opportunity for Wu Zetian to scale a new
trail in cultural creativities. When she became the empress dowager after Emperor Gaozong's death an extraordinary situation was created, viz. the surviving member of ersheng (twin-sages) was the mother of the would-be emperor who, by virtue of his position, should succeed the sagehood (sheng) which came along with the throne. However, the Chinese hierarchical order was slightly embarrassed if the son would be paired with the mother in sharing the ersheng (twin-sagehood). For one thing, the emperor had to kneel down before his mother in keeping with the spirit of filial piety. It would seem extraordinary that this conventional noblest and highest symbol of Chinese political culture -- the imperial sagehood -- had to kneel down before a newly created symbol of "sage-mother". Empress Wu took advantage of such an embarrassing situation to go a small step further, i.e. to transform her "sage-mother" image into "holy mother" image. The name shengmu remained the same, but its semantics had changed. The new semantics went beyond the human boundary to assume a celestial significance. The shengmu image, thus, carried Empress Wu to the dazzling height of a Bodhisattva, albeit not overtly. Empress Wu's subsequent arrogation of superhuman attributes, as I have alluded to earlier, became just a logical follow-up, once the limit was crossed.

The year 688 (the 4th year of Chuigong Era) was marked by two extraordinary events. The first was the so-called discovery of the inscription on a rock
retrieved from the river Luo reading:

"Shengmu lin ren, yong chang diye."

(A Holy Mother has descended on humanity,
The imperial career will prosper in eternity.)  

It was this inscription which was instrumental in Empress Wu's assuming the status of the "Holy Mother" (apparently on popular demand from the imperial courtiers). The entire proceeding looked like an initiative coming from Heaven -- which was Empress Wu's improvement on the Chinese convention of demonstrating the "tianming" (Mandate of Heaven).

The second extraordinary event was the building up of Daminggong (Palace of Grand Brilliance) known also as "Mingtang" which was later renamed as "Tongtiangong" (the palace leading to Heaven) also known as "Tiantang" which was the Chinese version of devapura, i.e. paradise.  

Both the events were relevant to each other. As she was the Holy Mother, her residence had to be in Heaven. She held gala ceremonies and celebrations (with feasts) in her celestial residence which are recorded by many court poets. One of her favourite poets was Song Zhiwen who had the honour of winning her imperial robe during a royal procession led by her to the Longmen grottoes (a famous Buddhist shrine in China) near Luoyang which was


13 Xin Tangshu (the new annals of Tang Dynasty), juan 76, biography of Empress Wu.
Empress Wu's second capital city. This robe-winning incident has an anecdote attached to it. There was a kind of competition as the court poets in her entourage vied with each other to compose poems on the spot to win her special favour. She had actually taken off her robe to award to another poet. When Song Zhiwen handed in his master-piece, the empres was greatly impressed. As she had no imperial robe on her body to award, she snatched back her robe from the other recipient to give to Song Zhiwen. In this award-winning poem, Song wrote:

"Solid is the kingdom created by the imperial founders, Riding on Ratna-Mandate there lie the fortunes of Zhou -- a new universe; How great Your Majesty Now enjoying the Paradise! Like the timely shower Visiting spring tide agriculture."

There is the unmistakable "Holy Mother" image in the poem. In the Perriot collection of the Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved in the National Library in Paris there is one scroll eulogizing Empress Wu as shengmu and shenhuang (god emperor). The latter attribute shenhuang was one of the titles arrogated by Empress Wu viz. Jinlun

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14 Song Zhiwen, Longmen yingzhi (Writing by Her Majesty's order at Longmen), see Quan Tangshi (Collected works of Tang poetry), Beijing: Zhonghua Bookshop, 1950, vol.2, p.628.

shengshen huangdi (golden-cakra holy-god emperor) --
shenhuang being just the abbreviation of shengshen
huangdi.

The Shengmu legend created by Empress Wu went a long
way to enrol a new goddess nicknamed niangniang
(mother/holy mother) in China’s pantheon. Among the
various reincarnations of niangniang there is songzi
niangniang (holy mother who sends the son to people) who
is synonymous to songzi guanyin who is one of the various
images of Guanyin in China. I can say for certain that
the creation of shengmu image and Guanyin’s assuming the
feminine form complemented each other. The key factor
involved in the great transformation was this unique
woman -- Wu Zetian, who not only made up to the status of
supreme ruler of China, but reached that height by riding
on the "Great Vehicle" (Mahayana). Although she failed
to create an eternal feminine rule in China, she did
leave behind her a new feminine deity shengmu whose
attributes have interwoven with those of the Chinese
version of Avalokitesvara.