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## Account of the Buddhist Thaumaturge Baozhi

Alan J. Berkowitz

By the twelfth century, accounts of the life of the Buddhist thaumaturge Baozhi state that he was found as a baby in a falcon's nest atop an old tree near the capital. Earlier sources, however, record nothing strange about how he came into existence. That an uncommon individual should be accorded an uncommon birth is a mark of retrospective hagiography. In the case of Baozhi, the story of Baozhi's origin also contains a sign of Baozhi's nascent bodhisattvahood, for it is said that the Buddha preached the *Lotus Sūtra* on Vulture Peak.

Time and hagiography often enhance accounts of the lives of individuals, and Song dynasty accounts of Baozhi differ substantially from earlier accounts in content and length. Some additions are the result of purposeful fabrication or amplified hearsay, with little basis for credence. Others come from conflating anecdotes concerning the monk that had been culled from a variety of sources, some of which are traceable, some now lost. Others yet are the result of the accretion of accounts of several persons with the same name into the account of the life of a single man.

Huijiao (497–554 C.E.), himself a Buddhist monk and a younger contemporary of Baozhi, included an account of Baozhi's life in his *Lives of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan*), in a section devoted to "Miraculous and Strange Monks (Theurgists)." This earliest account of Baozhi, translated below, is largely corroborated by the account of his life contained in the early seventh-century *History of the Southern Dynasties* (*Nan shi*). The accounts obviously are of the same person, yet the two accounts write his name differently: the earlier account gives his name as "Preserving the Insignia," whereas the *History* writes "Precious Insignia" ("preserving" and "precious" both are pronounced *bao*). The thaumaturge has most commonly come to be known by the latter name, although he often also is referred to simply as Zhigong ("Master Zhi") and occasionally as Baogong ("Master Bao," "Precious").

Anecdotes concerning another Buddhist monk who was referred to as Baogong, Master Bao ("Precious"), sometimes have been ascribed to Baozhi because their

names were similar and because this Baogong's enigmatic prescience was also characteristic of the thaumaturge Baozhi. The longest account of Baozhi, from the tenth-century *Taiping guangji*, simply appends accounts of this Baogong to those of Baozhi, saying that it is uncertain whether they concern one man or two. However, Baogong was a northerner active at the close of the Northern Wei (c. 528; he perhaps was the same as one or both men called Baogong in the early years of the Northern Qi and the Sui), whereas Baozhi was from the south and died in 514 at an advanced age.

The account of Baozhi is intrinsically interesting, but also reflects the awe accorded to "men of miracles" and their conspicuous role in the Buddhist tradition in China, as in other religious milieus. Baozhi was trained and ordained as a Buddhist monk. He was knowledgeable in the Buddhist sūtras, and in traditional scholarship as well, but his fame was due to his being "miraculous and strange." He worked miracles for the emperor and offered cryptic auguries to the elite, speaking in conundrums or poems that events proved to have been prophetic; his renown even attracted an emissary from Korea. His strangeness was manifest in being able to be in several places at the same time, and in eccentric conduct and manners. Although his head was generally shaved in the Buddhist manner, he often wore a cap or let his hair grow out; although he sometimes dressed in a Buddhist robe, he often was scantily dressed or clothed as a layman. His eating habits were irregular, and his hygienic practices peculiar, yet he did not transgress his religious precepts. According to an anecdote, which is of relatively late fabrication, and reflects the popularizing of stories about Baozhi in the manner of other, later, "strange" monks:

He was fond of using urine to wash his hair, and someone among the common monks secretly jeered and scoffed. Now Zhi equally knew that many of the monks had not forsaken wine and meat, and that the one who had ridiculed him drank wine and ate pork intestines. Zhi of a sudden said to him, "You scoff at me for using piss to wash my head, but why is it that you eat bags full of shit?"

Baozhi foresaw his own death, and passed away without illness near the end of 514 (one source writes that Baozhi was buried in 506, but this is due to faulty editing of a local gazetteer). The emperor gave him a sumptuous burial, spending 200,000 cash and founding a temple at his tomb on a hill at the foot of Zhongshan Mountain, just outside the capital in modern Nanjing. This temple, first called the Kaishan Temple and known as Baogong yuan during the Tang, is the most important of the several that Emperor Wu of the Liang had founded in honor of Baozhi. It is the predecessor of the grand Linggu Temple at Zhongshan park in Nanjing. Its original site, and the site of Baozhi's grave, however, was where the tomb of the first emperor of the Ming is now located: that emperor rebuilt the temple at its present location in 1381 so that he could avail himself of the geomantically perfect location for his own burial spot. Monuments to Baozhi still are to be found at the temple, including a shrine and a commemorative stele.

At the time of Baozhi's death, the emperor had portraits of the thaumaturge

circulated throughout the land. Baozhi had been the subject of portraits since being captured on silk by his younger contemporary Zhang Sengyao (c. 480–post 549), the artist of whom the famous story is told about adding the life-imbuing final touches to the eyes of a painted dragon. Portraits of Baozhi always picture him with his long staff and its dangling accoutrements, and this is how he is depicted on a celebrated stele known as the Stele of the Three Incomparables (*Sanjue bei*), a monument bringing together works of the greatest in portraiture, poetry, and calligraphy. This stele bears Baozhi's portrait by Wu Daozi (Wu Daoxuan, c. 685–758), with a poem about the monk by Li Bai (701–762) engraved in the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqing (709–785). The original stele no longer is extant, but there is a Ming replica in the garden of the Yangzhou Historical Museum and a Qing facsimile at Baozhi's shrine at the Linggu Temple. Engraved on the stele also are twelve Buddhist poems known as "Songs of the Twelve Temporal Divisions [of the Day]" attributed to Baozhi, done in the superlative calligraphy of Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322).

The portrait of Baozhi engraved on the stele is a further example of hagiography, reflecting the popularization of Baozhi's image and the enhancement of his prophetic powers through time. The earliest accounts of Baozhi describe him holding on his shoulder his long staff, from the top of which hang scissors, mirror, and cloth strips or, in some accounts, also pincers. The portrait, however, depicts the staff's accoutrements as scissors, a ruler, and a fan. These accessories are symbols for the three successive dynasties that Baozhi ostensibly foretold, as indicated in Li Bai's accompanying poem: the scissors, which cut things into a uniform height (*qi*), stand for the Qi dynasty; the ruler, which measures (*liang*), stands for the Liang dynasty; and the fan, which fans away dust (*chen*), stands for the Chen dynasty.

The fan in some accounts was a "duster" (*fu*), a rebus for "Buddha." The ruler may also have had another significance, relating to the founding of eras other than the Liang: according to one account a jade foot-measure was fashioned by Baozhi and sent to the northern Zhou court to be presented to "an elderly fellow with plentiful whiskers"; both the founder of the Zhou and the founder of the Sui assumed that they were meant. The mirror (a symbol of prophetic omniscience) originally adorning Baozhi's staff came to represent in Ming dynasty accounts the monk's prophetic symbolization of their own epoch: the mirror indicates brightness (*ming*), the name of the dynasty. Further "evidence" was deduced from the fact that Baozhi was raised by members of the Zhu family, Zhu also being the surname of the founder of the Ming; the intervening dynasties between the Chen and the Ming presumably were not predicted by Baozhi because they had their capitals in the north, whereas Baozhi was active in Jiankang (Nanjing), the capital also of the early Ming.

Baozhi's legacy and accuracy of prophesy were incorporated into popular Buddhist tradition, and Baozhi still plays a role in popular religion and religious iconography, both in China and Japan. His image has frequently been painted on temple walls at least since the Tang. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts holds a

Southern Song painting in which Baozhi appears as one of five hundred Lohans, and Baozhi was commonly considered an incarnation of Guanyin; one anecdote describes him showing his “true” appearance as the Eleven-faced Guanyin connected with tantric performances. A wall of a cave in Dunhuang (cave 147A), depicts him with his cloth cap (the head attire sometimes still worn by priests, known as the “Zhigong cap,” and at least in the eleventh century worn to indicate the death of a priest), thus referring to the anecdote that Baozhi once wore three of these caps when foretelling the imminent deaths of three members of the imperial family. A fragmentary manuscript also from Dunhuang concerns Emperor Wu of the Liang seeking spiritual guidance from Baozhi; this anecdote is recounted in the translation below; his enigmatic responses to the emperor have earned him a niche in the patrimony of the Chan (Zen) sect. And the Water and Land Convocation Ceremony (*Shuilu hui*), a rite of propitiation by alms to departed souls still performed today, is generally presumed to have its origins with Baozhi.

Huijiao, the compiler of *Lives of Eminent Monks*, was himself a learned Buddhist monk from Guiji (or Kuaiji) in Zhejiang, a locale famous for its eminent monks and lay Buddhists. His *Lives* records accounts of two hundred and fifty-seven men from 67 to 519 C.E., with appended accounts of two hundred and fifty-nine others. The accounts are categorized under ten major headings: translators (*yijing*), exegetes (*yijie*), theurgists (*shenyi*), meditators (*xichan*), disciplinarians (*minglü*), self-immolators (*yishen* or *wangshen*), cantors (*songjing*), promoters of works of merit (*xingfu*), hymnodists (*jingshi*), and sermonists (*changdao*). The *Lives* is a valuable source on the five first centuries of Buddhism in China, documenting the accomplishments and merit of those men of religion whose contributions to the introduction and spread of the faith left an indelible mark on the religious culture of China. Valuable as it is as an historical document, it also is an elegant piece of polished literary prose.

The translation below is from: Huijiao (497–554 C.E.), comp., *Gaoseng zhuan* (Nanjing: Jinling kejingchu, 1885; reprinted by the same from the original blocks, 1986), 11.17b–20b. This version has slight orthographic variances from the text reprinted in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (Tokyo, 1924–1934), 2059; vol. 50, pp. 394–95.

## The Account of the Buddhist Thaumaturge Baozhi

The Buddhist Baozhi was originally surnamed Zhu and was [of a family living in the capital but hailing] from Jincheng [near modern Lanzhou in Gansu province]. At a young age he left his family [for the priesthood], taking up residence at the Daolin [“Forest of the Way”] Temple in the capital [Jiankang, modern Nanjing in Jiangsu]. He served as his Master the śramaṇa Sengjian and



became a monk, cultivating and practicing the meditative endeavor [that is, the Buddhist way].

At the beginning of the Taishi ["Great Incipience"] reign (465–471 C.E.) of the Song (420–479), he suddenly became eccentric and strange: he kept no fixed place of residence, had no regularity in his eating and drinking, and his hair grew several inches long. He often freely roamed the streets and alleys, clutching a monk's staff from the point of which dangled a scissors and a mirror, and sometimes also a strip or two of silk. During the Jianyuan ["Founding the Commencement"] reign (479–482) of the Qi (479–502), signs of his strangeness were increasingly to be seen. He would not eat for several days, yet he had no appearance of being undernourished. When he spoke with others, his sayings at first seemed incomprehensible but later all were found to be effectual and verified. At times he expressed himself in poetry, and his words were as prophetic accountings.

As all of the scholars and commoners of the capital district rendered him esteem and services, Emperor Wu of Qi declared that he was confounding the masses and had him detained in Jiankang [the capital]. The following morning people saw him [Baozhi] enter the marketplace, but when they returned to inspect the jail, Zhi was still there inside. Zhi told the jailer, "Outside the gate there have arrived two cartloads of food, with gold bowls brimming with cooked grains; you might take them in." It happened that the Qi heir designate Wenhui [Xiao Changmao] and the King of Jingling [Xiao] Ziliang jointly had sent food as a banquet for Zhi, and sure enough, it was as he had said. Lū Wenxian, magistrate of Jiankang, brought the affair to the attention of Emperor Wu, and the emperor then invited [Baozhi] into [the palace], lodging him in the posterior apartments.

One time when [the emperor] dismissed a banquet in the palace, Zhi also left [the hall] along with the crowd. Subsequently on Jingyang Mountain (outside of the imperial compound) there was seen another Zhi together with seven Buddhist priests. The emperor became angered and dispatched [his men] to investigate Zhi's having left his station. The officer of the hall entry reported, "Zhi left long ago and presently is in his quarters smearing ink on his body." At that time the Buddhist priest Zheng Faxian wished to present to Zhi a garment, and sent a minion to look for him at both the Longguang and the Jibin temples. Each said that [Zhi] had passed the previous night there and had left at daybreak. He also went to look for him at the home of Li Houbo, where Zhi often frequented. Bo said, "Last night Zhi was here practicing his faith. I went to sleep at daybreak and was not aware [that he had left]." The minion returned to relate all this to Xian, and only then was it known that Zhi could divaricate himself to pass the night at three locations.

Zhi once went about in the full of winter with bared flesh. The śramaṇa Baoliang wished to present him with a Buddhist robe, but before he had said a word Zhi suddenly arrived, brought out the robe, and left. Also at that time [Zhi] approached someone and asked for minced raw fish. The man undertook to prepare this for him and went to find some [live fish]. When he had gotten

his fill, he [Zhi] left. When [the man] turned his gaze back to the basin, the fish was alive and swimming as before. Zhi later provided his spiritual power for Emperor Wu: he saw Emperor Gao [Emperor Wu's deceased father] beneath the ground in constant pain from an awl [an instrument used in a form of capital punishment]. From this time on the emperor forever banned awls [and capital punishment]. Hu Xie, chamberlain for the palace garrison of the Qi, was ill and sought [assistance from] Zhi. Zhi went, but withdrew saying, "will submit tomorrow." The next day he did not go at all, and on that day Xie died. When his [Hu Xie's] corpse had been carried back to his [Hu's] residence, Zhi said, "What I meant by 'will submit tomorrow' was that on the next day his corpse would go forth" [the character "submit" could be construed as being composed of the characters for "corpse" and "go forth"].

Yin Qizhi, commander-in-chief of the Qi, accompanied Chen Xianda in guarding Jiangzhou [in 490]. When he parted from Zhi, Zhi painted on some paper a single tree with a bird atop it and said, "In times of exigency, you can climb this." Later, when Xianda went against his duties [in revolt against an unrightful and tyrannical ruler], he left Qizhi to guard [Jiang]zhou. When he [Xianda] was defeated, Qizhi rebelled and took refuge at Lu Mountain. When the pursuing riders were about to overtake him, Qizhi saw a single tree amid the forest with a bird atop, just as Zhi had painted. Having understood, he climbed it; the bird unexpectedly did not fly off. When his pursuers saw the bird, they thought that there could not be a man present and turned back. In the end, [Qizhi] was pardoned.

When Sang Yan, commandant of garrison cavalry of the Qi, was considering planning a revolt [also hoping to restore order], he happened to go pay a visit to Zhi. Zhi looked off to the distance and walked away, saying with a great sigh, "He'll be encircled at Taicheng Fortress, desiring of rebellion: they'll chop off his head and split open his guts." Less than a week later, the events began to unfold. Yan revolted and headed [downriver] toward Zhufang, but was captured by others; the result was his head being chopped off and his gut split open.

Xiao Hui, the Zhonglie king of Boyang in the Liang, once constrained Zhi to come to a gathering at his residence. Zhi suddenly ordered that some thistles be found with great haste; when he got hold of them he fixed them on the door. None could guess his reason. A short time later the king was appointed as regional inspector of Jingzhou [Thorn Province]. There were more than one example of this kind showing the palpability of his [Zhi's] prescience.

Zhi often frequented the Xinghuang and Jingming temples. When the present emperor [Emperor Wu] rose [to assume the rule] in the manner of the dragon, Zhi was accorded great reverence and ceremonial attentions, but earlier during the Qi, Zhi often was forbidden free access [to the imperial residence]. When the present emperor ascended the throne, he issued an edict stating:

Master Zhi's tangible traces are confined to the dust and dirt [of the mortal world], but his spirit roams in the Profound Stillness. Water and fire cannot

wet or burn him; snakes and tigers cannot harass or scare him. In speaking of his Buddhist principles, then what one hears from him is unparalleled. When discussing the way he is seclusive and submerged, then he is a withdrawn immortal, one of lofty ways. How could one ever hope vainly to constrain and restrict him with the common sentiments of an ordinary man? How could one's vulgarity and narrowness coalesce to such a point? Effective from the present onward, he shall enter and leave according to his will. He is not again to be prevented.

From then on Zhi often came and went within the forbidden imperial quarters.

There was drought during the winter of the fifth year of the Tianjian reign [506–507]. Sacrifices for rain were executed to the fullest, yet rain did not fall. Zhi suddenly petitioned, saying, "When I, Zhi, am afflicted with illness that does not abate, I go to my [local] official to beg for sustenance. If he does not petition on my behalf, then the official is deserving of [punishment by] the cane and the staff. I wish for you to solicit rain by having the *Śrīmālā-devī-siṃhanāda-sūtra* (*Shengmanjing*) recited in the Huaguang hall." The emperor forthwith had the śramaṇa Fayun [Dharmamegha or "Dharma cloud"] recite the sūtra, and when he had finished, that very night there was a great snowfall. Zhi also said that he needed a bowl of water. He cut across the top [of the water] with a knife, and a moment later a great rain fell, sufficient for locales of both high and low elevation.

The emperor once asked Zhi, "I, your disciple, have not yet rid myself of vexation and perturbation. What may I do to cure this?" Zhi responded, "Twelve." Ones who understood took this to mean the medicine of the twelve nidānas for curing perturbation. When further asked for direction about the twelve nidānas [links in the chain of existence], he responded, "It is to be found in the written characters, in the temporal divisions, and in the water clock." Ones who understood took this to mean that it was written in [his "Poems on] the Twelve Temporal Divisions [of the Day"] (*Shi'er shi shi*). He [the emperor] further asked, "At what time will I, your disciple, attain a tranquil mind so as to cultivate and practice [the precepts of Buddhism]?" Zhi responded, "When ease and joy are proscribed." Ones who understood took this to mean that "proscribe" meant "cease," and that it was simply that at times of ease and joy he should desist.

Later, when Fayun was reciting the *Dharma-Flower* (*Fahua*; that is, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* or *Lotus Sūtra*), when he came to "and was caused a dark wind [and storm to arise]," Zhi suddenly asked whether the wind existed or not. Fayun replied, "It is a 'worldly truth,' and thus exists; but in terms of 'supreme reality,' then it does not." Zhi walked back and forth three or four times and then laughed, saying, "That's as if form presumes existence. It permits it but does not allow it; it's an explanation that is difficult to explain." The purport of his words was obscure and cryptic, with many examples just like this.



There was a certain Chen Zhenglu, whose entire family served Zhi with great devotion. Zhi once made manifest to him his [Zhi's] true presence: his radiant "distinctive indication" [sign of buddhahood] was just like that of a likeness of a bodhisattva. Zhi gained a prominent reputation, displaying his uncommonality for over forty years. One could not measure the number of men and women who paid him reverence and service. In the winter of the thirteenth year of the Tianjian reign [late 514 or possibly January 515], he told people in the rear hall of the palace complex, "the bodhisattva is about to leave." In less than a week's time, he came to his end without illness. His corpse was fragrant and soft, and he had a radiant and pleased appearance.

When he was near to death, he personally lit a single candle and gave it to the houseman of the Entry to the Rear [apartments], Wu Qing. Qing brought this to the attention of the emperor, who sighed and said, "Our grand teacher will not be staying with us any longer. As for the candle, doesn't it signify that the matters to come will be consigned to me ['candle' was a homophonic equivalent to 'consign']?" Thus, the emperor generously provided for the encoffining and funeral procession, burying Zhi at Dulong ["Lone Dragon"] Hill at Zhongshan Mountain [just outside the capital]. He further had the Kaishan ["Unfolding of Goodness"] Hall of Contemplation erected at the place of his grave, and ordained Lu Chui to compose the funerary tablet inscription to be placed in the tomb and Wang Jun to engrave the stele inscription at the gate of the temple. He disseminated a posthumous likeness of Zhi, which was to be everywhere preserved.

Earlier, when signs of Zhi's prominence were first noticed, he was perhaps around the age of fifty or sixty; yet at his demise he still was not aged. Nobody at all could guess his age. A certain Xu Jiedao, who lived north of the Jiuri ["Ninth Day"] Pavilion in the capital, said personally that he was Zhi's younger maternal uncle, younger than Zhi by four years, and that calculating from the time of Zhi's death, he should have been ninety-seven [sui, or ninety-six years of age in Western reckoning].