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## **Editorial**

*Richard Gombrich*

As most of our readers know, Pali is the language of a large body of ancient Indian texts, known as the Pali Canon. Followers of one Buddhist tradition, the Theravada, equate these texts with “the word of the Buddha”. They accept information given in one of these texts that the Buddha, a man called Gotama, died at the age of 80 (or thereabouts); most of them hold that he died in about 483 BC, but those who care about such matters mostly accept modern scholarship when it says that he died in about 400 BC. They also accept information from the same source that the Canon was established at a Council of Buddhist monks soon after the Buddha’s death, and has been successfully transmitted by monks and nuns ever since. They assume that Pali must therefore be the language in which the Buddha preached. The texts, they believe, were composed orally and for the first few centuries were presumably preserved orally.

Other Buddhist traditions take different views. For various reasons they propose a very diverse range of dates for the lifetime of the Buddha. They also note that several other versions of the same texts, composed in different Indian languages, are known to have existed; some are lost, but several fairly full versions have survived in Chinese translations. These other traditions mostly propose that the First Council took place much as described by the Pali tradition, but the texts then established were the versions proposed in their own traditions. Though the Chinese translations are mostly dated (within the Christian era), we have no solid clues to the dates of the composition of their Indian originals.

On the basis that they consider the dating of the Buddha to have no credible basis, in recent years many scholars, particularly in America, have held the view that there may never have been such an individual as Gotama Buddha, and if there was, we know virtually nothing about him. I begin the final chapter of my book *What the Buddha Thought* by citing a professor at Chicago University



who says that Pali sources are “centered around the literary conceit of Gotama ‘preaching’”; he sneers at my believing this conceit, but offers no view of how, when, where, by whom or in what language this huge body of texts was composed. The scepticism of these scholars concerning the Buddha’s date extends to the dating of all the canonical texts, first and foremost their Pali versions. However, they seem to have no proposal how we should imagine that the Pali texts (or any others) were composed or preserved.

I have written a short book called *Buddhism and Pali*, which is about to be published by Tony Morris in his series *Mudpie Books*. In this book I describe the Pali language and its place in history, and discuss how texts were composed and preserved in the society in which the Buddha lived, where there was no writing. I use strands of what we know about the language and that society to construct an argument which makes it appear possible, even probable, that Pali is the language that the Buddha used when during a long lifetime he walked to and fro through the villages of northern India, preaching and interacting with the villagers. They must have grown up using local dialects. These dialects must have been related, with no clear boundaries between them, since the institutions of administration and education which create such boundaries were lacking. He needed to understand the users of those dialects and in turn to be understood by them, and this need led him, perhaps unconsciously, to develop a composite dialect containing a great many variants. As he gathered disciples, some of whom moved with him, the language of his preaching became known as the “language for recitation”, which in my opinion is what the word “Pali” means; and it became the private (not secret) language of the religious community which he founded, the Sangha.

My claim that Pali was the language used by the Buddha will surprise no traditional Buddhists, because they have always believed it. They have believed it, however, without any awareness of the difficulties it involves. To give just one example: it is surely remarkable that without writing, let alone any more modern technology for recording speech, all these texts could be accurately preserved for centuries. Western students of Sanskrit have now studied Sanskrit at the feet of traditional teachers and observed how not only their Indian pupils but also the western visitors can acquire mnemonic powers of which we did not know we were capable. Another relevant study is modern linguistics: fieldwork has shown that in other periods too parts of India have evolved common languages (one can call each of them a *lingua franca*) which occupy a middle ground between local dialects and a formalized educated language learnt and used by an elite.

If Pali, or something very much like it, really was the language of the Buddha, this has great implications for the history of Buddhism. Among those early traditions which preserved their texts in languages other than Pali, there began to evolve various new strands of belief and practice which became known as Mahayana.

The Mahayana texts were in Sanskrit, or in what for simplicity's sake we can call deviant forms of Sanskrit containing some of the features of Pali. None of them were in Pali itself: that was too firmly identified with the conservative Theravada. Mahayanists, however, have often claimed that their texts are authentic utterances of the Buddha, which he wanted kept as an esoteric secret teaching reserved for his more advanced disciples. This theory was never probable, and my discovery makes it more improbable still.



## The Buddhas of the Three Times and the Chinese Origins of the Heart Sutra

Jayarava Attwood

### Abstract

The phrase *tryadhvavyavastithāḥ sarvabuddhāḥ* “all the buddhas that appear in the three times” in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* is a *hapax legomenon* in Buddhist Sanskrit, but it is similar to the common Chinese idiom 三世諸佛 “buddhas of the three times”. In every case where this Chinese phrase is used in a *Prajñāpāramitā* text, other than the *Heart Sutra*, the corresponding extant Sanskrit texts have *atītānāgatapratyutpannā buddhāḥ* “past, future, and present buddhas” instead. Additionally, where one translator has used the phrase 三世諸佛 another frequently prefers 過去未來現在諸佛 “buddhas of the past, future, and present”, suggesting that their source texts also had this form with the three different times spelt out. The phrase *tryadhvavyavastithāḥ sarvabuddhāḥ* is unambiguously a Chinese idiom translated into Sanskrit in ignorance of Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* conventions. This proves that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in Chinese.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Jeffrey Kotyk for his useful comments on an earlier draft.

## Introduction

### *The Chinese Origins Thesis*

Buddhists and academics alike long considered the *Heart Sutra* to be an Indian text, composed in Sanskrit and later translated into Chinese. It was a classic of the Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* genre and revered as such by Mahāyāna Buddhists. However, in 1987, Japanese scholar Fukui Fumimasa (writing in Japanese) concluded “that the Heart Sutra is not really a sutra at all”, but a *dhāraṇī* (cited in Nattier 1992: 175-6). Then in 1992 Jan Nattier made a simple but powerful argument that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in Chinese and “back-translated” into Sanskrit. As Nattier says,

“To assume any other direction of transmission would present insuperable difficulties—or would, at the very least, require postulating a quite convoluted series of processes, which (by virtue of this very convolution) seems considerably less likely to have taken place... The *Heart Sūtra* is indeed—in every sense of the word—a Chinese text.” (1992: 198-199)

Jan Nattier’s article stands out as one of the most brilliant individual contributions to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Buddhism Studies. It presents a truly original, even astonishing idea, which is deeply researched, and written about in precise and elegant prose. Anyone reading it must be impressed by the logic of the argument. All of the evidence points to her singular conclusion. However, the reception of Nattier’s article has been mixed so far (it has only been 26 years after all). The “Chinese origins hypothesis” as it is often called, is now widely acknowledged to exist, but there is little engagement with it and still enormous resistance in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

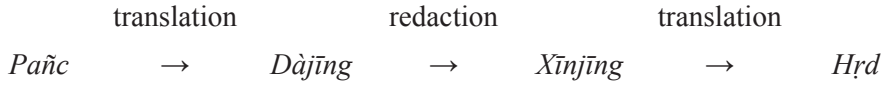
It will be useful to briefly review Nattier’s method to show why her conclusions shift the burden of proof in the discussion about the origins of the *Heart Sutra*. We have known since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century that half of the *Heart Sutra* is a quoted passage from *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañc*). Nattier compared the quoted section as it appears in four texts:

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<sup>2</sup> I hope to publish a comprehensive survey of responses to Nattier’s thesis in the near future.

1. The 6<sup>th</sup> Century Gilgit manuscript of *Pañc*<sup>3</sup>
2. Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of *Pañc*, T223, completed in 404 CE (*Dàjīng*)<sup>4</sup>
3. Conze's edition (1948, 1967) of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* (*Hṛd*)
4. The canonical Chinese *Heart Sutra* or *Xīnjīng* (T251)<sup>5</sup>

If the *Heart Sutra* was composed in Sanskrit and then translated into Chinese, we would expect substantial similarities between the extant recensions of *Pañc* and *Hṛd*, and idiomatic Sanskrit throughout. Assuming that the quote was translated into Chinese at different times by different teams, we expect some significant differences in sentence construction and character choice between the *Dàjīng* and *Xīnjīng*. However, our expectations are confounded. The cited passage in *Hṛd* is syntactically (though not semantically) different from the extant *Pañc* texts and it contains a number of unidiomatic phrases. Furthermore, *Xīnjīng* is almost identical to *Dàjīng* (the *Dà míng zhòu jīng* is identical) and is idiomatic throughout. These observations point to a particular sequence of texts and processes:



<sup>3</sup> The facsimile edition by Vira and Chandra (1966) has since been superseded by Karashima et al (2016), but without any impact on this discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Nattier also looked at the associated *Upadeśa* (T1509), translated concurrently with T223 by Kumārajīva's team. The *Upadeśa* contains an embedded version of *Pañc* with a single minor variant reading, which opens the possibility that it was the source of the quoted passage. However, the text of T251 has the same variation in some older recensions of the Chinese *Tripitaka* and this makes it impossible to determine provenance of the variant reading. This problem is also explored by Huifeng (2008) and Attwood (2017) without resolution.

<sup>5</sup> The other version of the *Heart Sutra* 《大明咒經》 *Dà míng zhòu jīng* (T250) is not used in Nattier's main comparisons, but she does look at differences between it and *Xīnjīng* (T251) when considering the question of authorship of these two versions (1992: 184 ff.).

One of Nattier’s key examples perfectly illustrates this general finding. Take the parallel sentences from the four texts:

*Pañc:*    *nānyad rūpaṃ anyā śūnyatā*

*Dājīng:* 色不異空

*Xīnjīng:* 色不異空

*Hṛd:*    *śūnyatāyā na prthag rūpaṃ*

All of these statements may be translated into English as, “Form is not different from emptiness”. Where *Pañc* follows the expected Sanskrit idiom for a *Prajñāpāramitā* text (*na anya X anya Y*), *Hṛd* uses the formulation with *na prthag* “not different”. This is not wrong or bad grammar, it’s just that it is not used in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. It looks like a naïve Sanskrit translation of the Chinese, rather than a genuine Indian composition.

The comparison makes it obvious what has happened, but the Western Intellectual tradition burdens us with tooth-fairy agnosticism – if we can *imagine* another scenario, no matter how unlikely, we are forced to hedge our conclusions. To remove all doubt we would need to show that the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* contains a passage that could *only* be a result of translating from Chinese to Sanskrit. I will show that there is such a passage, involving a reference to the “three times”. It was not included by Jan Nattier in her article, possibly because it is not part of the quoted section. However, not being a quote means that it reflects the language of composition and thus gives us a way to positively identify what that language was.

### ***The Three Times***

Ancient Indian Buddhists treated time as being made up of past, future, and present (almost always in this order). The usual Sanskrit words are *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*, while the Chinese equivalents are 過去, 未來, and 現在 (*guòqù*, *wèilái*, and *xiànzài*).<sup>6</sup> The Sanskrit time adjectives are all past participles: *ati-ita* “gone beyond”; *an-ā-gata* “not arrived”; and *prati-utpanna* “just now arisen”. Feng Zhiwei points out that the three Chinese adjectives 過去, 未來, and 現在 are semantic loan words from Sanskrit (2004: 7). They have

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<sup>6</sup> In some early translations, e.g. T224 and T221 we see 當來 for “future”; and 今現在 for “present”.

similar literal meanings and morphology, i.e. 過去 “gone beyond”, 未來 “not yet come”, and 現在 “presently existing”.<sup>7</sup> The three times, 三世 (*sān shì*), is sometimes also written, 三祭, but not in any of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts.<sup>8</sup>

Buddhist sutras referred to the three times as a set in three ways:

Individually, one after another, i.e. “In emptiness, past appearance is not apprehended ... In emptiness, future past appearance is not apprehended... In emptiness, present past appearance is not apprehended...” (*na śūnyatāyām atītaṃ rūpaṃ upalabhyate ... evaṃ na śūnyatāyām anāgataṃ rūpaṃ upalabhyate ... na śūnyatāyām pratyutpannaṃ rūpaṃ upalabhyate*. Kimura 2010: 1-2, 132-3).

Collectively, using a *dvandva* compound, i.e. “In emptiness, past, future, and present appearance is not apprehended.” (*na śūnyatāyām atītānāgatapratyutpannaṃ rūpaṃ upalabhyate*. Kimura 2010: 1-2, 134).

Collectively, using *tryadhva* i.e. “All the buddhas appearing in the three times.” (*tryadhva-vyavasthitā sarvabuddhāḥ*. Only in the *Heart Sutra*, i.e. Conze 1948).

Chinese translations also had three ways of referring to the three times corresponding to these:

“In emptiness, past appearance is not apprehended ... In emptiness, future past appearance is not apprehended... In emptiness, present past appearance is not apprehended...” (空中過去色不可得... 空中未來色不可得... 空中現在色不可得。T 5.333.a.1-6).

“In emptiness, past, future, and present appearance is not apprehended.” (空中過去未來現在色不可得。T 5.333.a.8-9).

“buddhas of the three times” (三世諸佛 T 8.848.c.17).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase 現在 may also be (more literally) interpreted as meaning “manifestly existent” or “visibly present”. Jeffrey Kotyk, personal communication.

<sup>8</sup> See the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, sv三世.

When Buddhist Sanskrit texts refer to the *buddhas* of the three times, they always use the *dvandva* compound, i.e. *atīta-anāgata-pratyutpannā buddhāḥ* “past, future, and present buddhas” or, rarely, *atīta-anāgata-pratyutpannā sarvabuddhāḥ* “all past, future, and present buddhas”. In Chinese translations we find the equivalent of this in the form of 過去未來現在諸佛 (*guòqù wèilái xiànzài zhū fú*) “buddhas of past, future, and present”, but we also commonly find the expression used in the *Heart Sutra*, i.e. 三世諸佛 (*sān shì zhū fō*) “buddhas of the three times”. The exact Sanskrit equivalents of 三世佛 and 三世諸佛 i.e. *tryadhva-buddhāḥ*, *tryadhvā buddhāḥ* and *tryadhva-sarva-buddhāḥ* or *tryadhvāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ* are never found either as a compound or as individual words in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. *Tryadhvan* is used a handful of times, especially in the compounds *tryadhvasamatā* “the equality of the three times”; *tryadhvanirmukta* “liberated in the three times”, and *tryadhvatraidhātuka* “belonging to the three times and three realms”.

To the best of my knowledge, *tryadhva-vyavasthitā* “appearing in the three times” is a *hapax legomenon*. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*) does use the word in another context:

“Thus, Subhūti, all phenomena do not arrive or depart, are not constructed or demolished, they are not shaped, do not remain, do not hold, do not appear (*avyavasthitā*); do not arise or cease, and are undifferentiated like space.”<sup>9</sup>

To refer to the buddhas who (at least notionally) lived in the past we can simply use the Sanskrit word for “past” as an adjective, i.e. *atītāḥ buddhāḥ*. We don’t need to specify that a buddha “appears” or “exists” in the past because this is implied by the adjective: a “past buddha” is precisely a buddha who *lived in the past*. To specify that an event occurred in the past we can also use the locative case, e.g. *atīte 'dhvani bodhisattvair* (Kimura 2010: 1-2, 135) “by bodhisattvas in the past”. The addition of *vyavasthita* is unnecessary and unidiomatic.

By contrast, the Chinese phrase 三世諸佛 has been in use in Chinese Buddhist texts since the mid-3rd Century CE. Perhaps the first use is in 《大明度經》 (T225), a translation of *Aṣṭa* attributed to Zhīqiān (ca. 223-229 CE). The phrase is found throughout the Chinese *Prajñāpāramitā* translations, especially

<sup>9</sup> *evameva subhūte sarvadharmā anāgatā āgatā ākṛtā avikṛtā anabhisaṃskṛtā asthitā asaṃsthitā avyavasthitā anutpannā aniruddhā ākāśakalpavāda-vikalpāḥ*. (Vaidya 1960a: 148: reading *agatā* for *āgatā*)

in various translations by Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng. Thus, this phrase is idiomatic in Chinese by the time the *Heart Sutra* is composed, which had to have happened after Kumārajīva completed his translation of *Pañc* in 404 CE (since this is the source of the quoted passage).

The importance of the phrase “all the buddhas of the three times” in the *Heart Sutra* is that it is not part of the quoted passage, but was composed as part of the frame for the quotation and thus reflects the language of composition. The phrase *tryadhva-vyavasthitā sarvabuddhāḥ* in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* looks like a Chinese idiom translated into Sanskrit.

## Method

In order to test this proposition, I used the CBETA Reader to survey all of the Chinese *Prajñāpāramitā* translations in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka (volumes 5-8) for the target phrases 三世諸佛 “all the Buddhas of the three times” or 三世佛 “buddhas of the three times”. Since we have physical evidence of the *Heart Sutra* dated 661 CE in the form of the Fangshan Stele (Lin 1958), it had to have been composed before this date. The survey is thus limited to texts translated in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier. Moreover, Xuánzàng’s *Prajñāpāramitā* translations are collected together under one title, i.e. 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (T220; Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), which makes up volumes 5-7 of the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, whereas all the other Chinese translations make up volume 8. Xuánzàng’s use of terminology is consistent across all of the texts within T220, so to make the survey more manageable, I took T220 parts ii and iv to be representative of Xuánzàng’s translations of the larger (大) and smaller (小) *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* respectively, thus avoiding considerable repetition. Thus, the survey involved the sutras shown in the table below, in chronological order of translation.

The attribution of early Chinese translations to translators in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* is sometimes contradicted by modern scholarship. Jan Nattier’s *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations* (2008) provides a helpful summary of such issues. Nattier (2008: 76) follows Erik Zürcher and Paul Harrison in taking T224 to be authentically attributed to Lokakṣema.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The reconstructed Sanskrit of the name 支婁迦讖 (Zhī Lóujiāchèn) is disputed, but Lokakṣema is the most widely accepted version. The prefix 支 marks him as ethnically Yuezhi.



Chinese Title	Text	Taishō No.	Translator	Date
《道行般若經》	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	T224	Lokakṣema	179 CE
《大明度經》	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	T225	Zhī Qiān	225 CE
《光讚經》	<i>Pañc</i>	T222	Dharmarakṣa	286 CE
《放光般若經》	<i>Pañc</i>	T221	Mokṣala	291 CE
《摩訶般若鈔經》	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	T226	Zhú Fóniàn	382 CE
《金剛般若波羅蜜經》	<i>Vaj</i>	T235	Kumārajīva	402 CE
《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》	<i>Pañc</i>	T223	"	404 CE
《小品般若經》	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	T227	"	408 CE
《勝天王般若波羅蜜經》	<i>Suv</i>	T231	Upaśunya	565 CE
《大般若波羅蜜多經》	<i>Pañc</i>	T220-ii11 (401-478)	Xuánzàng	663 CE
"	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	T220-iv (538-555)	"	"
"	<i>Suv</i>	T220-xvi (593-600)	"	"

<sup>11</sup>Roman numerals indicate the part of T220 as enumerated in Conze (1978: 11-12)

However, Nattier also notes that T224 “has not been transmitted without alteration” but shows signs “here and there” of later editing (2008: 80). The provenance of T225 is complex and appears to be the work of two distinct writers. In Nattier’s notation, T225A consists of chapter one plus an interlinear commentary. T225B consists of chapters two through thirty and appears to be a revision of T224. Nattier concludes, “On balance, therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that T225B is the work of Zhī Qiān, while T225A was produced by another hand” (Nattier 2008: 137). In an article focussed on the authorship of T225, Nattier concludes, “T225B is a revision of Lokakṣema’s T224, produced with at least a cursory reference to a different Indian manuscript” (2010: 335), while with respect to T225A in the absence of definite evidence of authorship, “it seems most prudent to regard it simply as an ‘anonymous’ text” (336). The part of the text referred to in the present study is from the Zhī Qiān portion (i.e. T225B). Translators attributed to other texts seem to be uncontested.

Having identified the target phrases in Chinese, I then attempted to find them in the corresponding Sanskrit editions of the sutras. However, this process is far less straightforward than it might seem at face value. Take, for example, the first occurrence of the target phrase in the *Aṣṭa* translation produced by Kumārajīva’s group, i.e. T227. The context is a speech that Maitreya gives at the behest of Subhūti (beginning at 8.548a17). Maitreya is trying to explain how one can practice transference of merit without falling into wrong views. It is easy enough to locate the same speech in Vaidya’s Sanskrit edition (1960a: 72).<sup>12</sup> However, in Vaidya’s text, the speech is approximately three times as long as it is in T227. Whereas the target phrase occurs once in the T227 version of the speech, it occurs several times in *Aṣṭa*. In the translation by Xuánzàng (220-iv), the speech (beginning at 7.791c29), is considerably longer again. The extra material was not simply added to the end of the existing text, but instead was woven through it. The different recensions, although closely related and with the same basic message, are also unique. There is no exact counterpart of the context for the phrase as found in Kumārajīva’s text, but there are still references to the buddhas of the three times in all versions of the speech, enabling some comparison of different texts.

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<sup>12</sup> Although Vaidya’s editions are perceived as problematic, they are often the only versions available digitally and thus available for electronic searching. This makes using them for this kind of study unavoidable for now. I note that Seishi Karashima (2012) also uses this edition of *Aṣṭa* for comparative purposes. Where possible, I have compared the digitised versions of Vaidya’s editions with others editions. I found no differences that would affect my argument.

There is, in effect, no single text of *Aṣṭa*. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Gandhāra, *Aṣṭa* was a relatively short, Gāndhārī language text. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Century Pala Empire, it was a much longer Sanskrit text. The Sanskrit editions of *Aṣṭa* are based on Pala Era manuscripts. The Chinese translations from different centuries reflect the development of the text. That said, in China, after Kumārajīva, especially after his translation of the commentary on *Pañc* (T1509) in 404 CE, the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition was taught and learned in Chinese. Something similar happened with Tibetan translations. Each community treated their version of the text, in their preferred language, as *the* text.

We need to be very cautious about thinking of any Sanskrit text as “original” or “authentic”. In fact, the original *Prajñāpāramitā* text was almost certainly composed in Gāndhārī (Karashima 2013). The extant Sanskrit manuscripts certainly do not constitute an “original” for Kumārajīva’s translation since they represent a much later recension. The oldest dated Sanskrit witnesses of *Aṣṭa* are from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, so Lokakṣema’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Century translation from a Gāndhārī source-text may well be much closer to the ur-text, and thus more “authentic”, if that term has any meaning in this context. Joseph Walser has recently argued that the Ur-text of the whole *Prajñāpāramitā* literary tradition may have included just the first few paragraphs of Chapter 1 (Walser 2018: 129 ff). Jonathan Silk (2015) has called into question the applicability of the standard methods of philology to Buddhist texts. The idea of an ur-text under these circumstances of constant change and the adoption of different recensions as authentic by different communities is far more fluid than is suggested by how we treat texts. We need to reconsider how we present and understand Buddhist texts both diachronically and synchronically.

Given the wide disparities between versions over time, we must carefully compare each text for each occurrence of the target phrase. Fortunately, the idiom of the Sanskrit texts and Chinese translations was established early and is conserved, meaning that ways of referring to the buddhas of the three times are quite stable across the centuries. Because the idiom is both conserved and different in the different languages, comparisons are still possible.

## Results

### *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

1. In Chapter 7 of T227, on the subject of transference or dedication [of merit] (迴向; *pariṇāmana*), our target phrase comes at the end of Maitreya's speech about how to transfer merit without falling into wrong views.

[Maitreya]: “A bodhisatva dedicates dharmas, just as Buddhas in the three times understand dedication, I also dedicate [them] to ultimate, complete awakening, this is called a real dedication.”<sup>13</sup>

In Vaidya's edition (1960a), Maitreya's speech appears in Chapter 6, *Anumodanāpariṇāmanā*, i.e. Joyful Transference [of Merit]. It has been reorganised in the process of accumulating a lot more material, eliminating a precise parallel of the phrase in T227. However, he does refer to the buddhas and *bhagavants* of the three times (*atītānāgatapratyutpannānām buddhānām bhagavatām* Vaidya 1960a: 75). Lokakṣema has “past, future, and present buddhas” 過去當來今現在佛 (T224; 8.438c9-10). Zhú Fóniàn retains Lokakṣema's phrasing (T226; 8.520b15-16).<sup>14</sup> Xuánzàng's translation (T220-iv) is substantially longer even than Vaidya's Sanskrit text and appears to have some structural changes. Where Maitreya refers to the Buddhas of the three times, Xuánzàng uses the compound phrase 過去未來現在諸佛 “all past-future-present buddhas” (e.g. 7.794c.06).

It is a curious feature of this story, in all the extant versions, that after Maitreya has given his speech in response to Subhūti's prompting, that the Buddha praises Subhūti rather than Maitreya.

2. The second occurrence is in Chapter 20 of T227.<sup>15</sup> The context, in this case, is a speech by the Buddha in praise of *kalyāṇamitra* “the beautiful friend” and of the six perfections as beautiful friends. It is precisely from practising the six perfections that the Buddhas of the past, future, and present have attained ultimate perfect awakening.

<sup>13</sup> 菩薩迴向法，如三世諸佛所知迴向，我亦如是迴向阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，是名正迴向。(8.549a03 ≈ Conze 1973: 130-1)

<sup>14</sup> The passage is in Chapter 4 of T226.

<sup>15</sup> 深心求菩提 \**adhyāśaya-prasamsthita* [setting out with intention?] = Chapter 22 *Kalyāṇamitra-parivartaḥ* in Vaidya 1960a.

And the universal knowledge (薩婆若; *sarvajñā*) of the buddhas of the three times (三世諸佛) are all born of the six perfections (六波羅蜜).<sup>16</sup>

The received Sanskrit is again considerably more elaborate. It repeats the same phrase three times attributing the awakening of buddhas to the six perfections but uses the individual phrases: *ātīte 'dhvani* “in the past time”; *anāgate 'dhvani* “in the future time”; and *etarhi* “at present”.<sup>17</sup> This appears to be the only time that *etarhi* substitutes for *pratyutpanna* in this context. The sentences each have two clauses: the first refers to the ultimate awakening of the *tathāgata arhat*, and the second refers to the universal gnosis (*sarvajñā*) of the *buddha bhagavant*. Lokakṣema follows the same plan as the received Sanskrit text with three repeated passages using 過去 “past”, 當來 “future” and 今現 “present”.<sup>18</sup> T226 lacks a parallel to this chapter. Xuánzàng also uses the standard phrases for past, future, and present, i.e. 過去, 未來, and 現在 (7.839.c18-25).

3. In T227 Kumārajīva uses the phrase 過去未來現在諸佛 once in the chapter on Hell in a speech about the consequences of having no faith in Prajñāpāramitā (8.551.a26-7). Zhī Qiān (T225) translates with 三世諸佛 (8.488.a29). The parallel in Vaidya uses the phrase twice, both times using the compounded form *atītānāgatapratyutpannā buddhā* (Vaidya 1960a: 90 = Conze 1973: 135).<sup>19</sup>

4. There is one example of Xuánzàng using the target phrase 三世諸佛 in Chp 17 (7.828.c05). Vaidya’s text refers separately to the Buddhas of the past, present and future, and in that unusual order.<sup>20</sup> Kumārajīva, in this instance, has a hybrid

<sup>16</sup> 又三世諸佛薩婆若，皆從六波羅蜜生。(8.571c04)

<sup>17</sup> *ye 'pi te subhūte atīte 'dhvani tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyakṣambuddhā anuttarāṃ samyakṣambodhim abhisambudhya parinirvṛtāḥ, teṣāṃ api buddhānāṃ bhagavatām ito nirjātaiva sarvajñatā, yaduta śaḍbhyaḥ pāramitābhyaḥ / ye 'pi te subhūte bhaviṣyanty anāgate 'dhvani tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyakṣambuddhā anuttarāṃ samyakṣambodhim abhisambhotsyante, teṣāṃ api buddhānāṃ bhagavatām ito nirjātaiva sarvajñatā, yaduta śaḍbhyaḥ pāramitābhyaḥ / ye 'pi te subhūte aprameyeṣv asaṃkhyeṣv aparimāṇeṣv acintyeṣu lokadhātuṣu tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyakṣambuddhā etarhya nuttarāṃ samyakṣambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ tiṣṭhanti, dhriyante, yāpayanti, dharmaṃ ca deśayanti, teṣāṃ api buddhānāṃ bhagavatām ito nirjātaiva sarvajñatā, yaduta śaḍbhyaḥ pāramitābhyaḥ /* (Vaidya 1960a: 197)

<sup>18</sup> 過去恒薩阿竭、阿羅訶、三耶三佛，皆從六波羅蜜出；甫當來恒薩阿竭、阿羅訶、三耶三佛，皆從六波羅蜜出；今現在十方阿僧祇剎恒薩阿竭、阿羅訶、三耶三佛，亦皆從六波羅蜜出，成薩芸若。(8. 462a.2–462a.6).

<sup>19</sup> One occurrence in the genitive plural, one in the nominative plural.

<sup>20</sup> *nāyaṃ kevalamatītānāmeva buddhānāṃ bhagavatām saddharmaparigrahaḥ, pratyutpannānām*

“the buddhas of the past and present... and... of future time” (過去現在諸佛... 亦... 未來世 565.c15-16).

5. T225 uses the target phrase 三世諸佛 as well as the variant 三世佛 in Chapter 25 (8. 502.c22-24). This equates to Chapter 28 of Vaidya’s text, which has *atītānāgatapratyutpannā buddhā* and *atītānāgatapratyutpannānām tathāgatānām arhatām* (1960a: 228). In T227 this passage is included in Chp 24, and uses the phrasing, “buddhas of past, future, and present” 過去、未來、現在諸佛 (577c24-5)

6. T226 never uses the phrases 三世佛 or 三世諸佛 though it is missing some of the chapters where these terms would be expected to occur.

### **Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā**

1. The first occurrence of 三世諸佛 in Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañc* comes in Chapter 36 (T 288b.22-3), in a dialogue between Ānanda and the Buddha about why the Buddha focussed on the perfection of *prajñā* rather than the other perfections. The corresponding dialogue occurs in Chp 30 of *Pañc* (Kimura 2-3:79 = Conze 1975: 241) but has no parallel use of the target phrase. Nor does the phrase occur in the parallel in T221, translated by Mokṣala (cf. T 8.50a.3-10).

2. The phrase 三世諸佛 also occurs in Chp. 41 (T 8.304c10) though it is immediately preceded by 過去未來現在諸佛 (T 8.304c.9), showing that Kumārajīva used both expressions. In T221, there is only one mention of the all the buddhas of the three times, which takes the form 過去當來今現在諸佛 (T 8.63a10), where 今現在 is used for 現在 (今 means “present, today”). This has a parallel in *Pañc*, *atītānāgatapratyutpannānām buddhānām bhagavatām* (Kimura 2-3, 150 = Conze 1975: 288)

3. Finally, in T223, we find the target phrase used twice within three lines in Chp 66 (T 8. 364a.22 and 24). In this passage, the Bhagavan pulls out his tongue and covers his whole face with it, asking Ānanda whether such a tongue could lie. T221 abbreviates the bi-syllabic time adjectives 過去, 當來, and 今現 to just 去來今 (T 8.106a.12 and 14). *Pañc* has *atītānāgatapratyutpannānām buddhānām* on both occasions (Kimura 5:78 = Conze 1975: 489).

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*api buddhānām bhagavatāmeṣa eva saddharmaparigrahaḥ, anāgatānām api buddhānām bhagavatāmeṣa eva saddharmaparigrahaḥ aham api tatra teṣāmanāgatānām buddhānām bhagavatām saṃkhyām gaṇanām praviṣṭa iti*, (Vaidya 1960a: 169. See also Conze 1973: 207)

## Vajracchedikā

The target phrase is not used in *Vaj*, but we do find mention of the three times using the adjectives separately. In Kumārajīva’s translation (T235) the wording is:

Subhūti, past mental events cannot be apprehended, future mental events cannot be apprehended, present mental events cannot be apprehended.<sup>21</sup>

Here, “mental events” translates 心 = Skt. *Citta*, while “apprehended” translates 可得 = Skt. *upa√labh*. Vaidya’s (1961) Sanskrit edition is more or less identical to this, as is the Gilgit manuscript edited by Schopen (1989).<sup>22</sup>

“Subhūti, a past mental event (*citta*) is not apprehended (*upalabhyate*), a future mental event is not apprehended, a present mental event is not apprehended.”

## *Suvikrāntavikrāmipariṣcchā*

Another relevant, though often overlooked, text is the *Suvikrāntavikrāmipariṣcchā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Suv*) or *The Inquiry of Suvikrāntavikrāmi*. Lancaster and Park (1979), in their *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue*, designate T231 as a version of *Suv*.<sup>23</sup> The title of T231 is, in fact, 勝天王般若波羅蜜經 = Skt. *Pravaradevarāja-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. It features dialogues with 勝天王 or Pravaradeva Rāja frequently addressed as 大王, i.e. *mahārāja*. However, in the Sanskrit version (Vaidya 1961: 1-74) there is no king, no one is ever addressed as *mahārāja*, and the text is focussed on the eponymous bodhisatva, Suvikrāntavikrāmi. My impression is that they are not the same text. On the other hand, Xuánzàng’s translation, T220-xvi (fascicles 593-600), appears to have been translated from a text very like the extant Sanskrit manuscript both in form and content.

<sup>21</sup> 須菩提！過去心不可得，現在心不可得，未來心不可得。(8.751b28)

<sup>22</sup> *atītaṃ subhūte cittaṃ nopalabhyate | anāgataṃ cittaṃ nopalabhyate | pratyutpannaṃ cittaṃ nopalabhyate* || 18 || (Vaidya 1961: 86 = Schopen 1989: 9a3-4)

<sup>23</sup> Translation by Upaśūnya: 9th month, 6th year of Tiānjiā (天嘉), Chén dynasty (陳) (A.D. 565) in Yángzhōu (楊州). Based on 開元釋教錄, a catalogue of Buddhist texts compiled during the Tang Dynasty Kāiyuán Era (713–741) (Lancaster and Park 1979; substituting Pinyin Romanisation)



This said T231 uses the phrase 三世諸佛 seven times. Vaidya's Sanskrit edition of *Suv* uses the phrase *atītānāgata-pratyutpannā buddhāḥ* a number of times. If T231 is indeed related to *Suv*, then it follows the patterns established above.

Xuánzàng's translation of *Suv*, T220-xvi, uses 三世諸佛 just once (7.1108. b12.) and this corresponds to the Sanskrit text, *atītānāgata-pratyutpannā buddhā bhagavanto* (Vaidya 1961: 71).

## Conclusion

All Chinese translators prefer translating the Sanskrit phrase *atīta-anāgata-pratyutpannā buddhāḥ* and its variants using the Chinese equivalent 過去未來現在諸佛. For example, across all his *Prajñāpāramitā* translations, Xuánzàng uses 過去未來現在諸佛 227 times and 三世諸佛 69 times (remembering that his contribution contains a huge amount of repetition between the various versions of the same sūtra expanded to different sizes). Similarly, in Kumārajīva's *Prajñāpāramitā* translations, he uses 過去未來現在諸佛 60 times and 三世諸佛 just eight times.

Where we find 三世諸佛 in a Chinese text, we find *atīta-anāgata-pratyutpannā buddhāḥ* or *atīta-anāgata-pratyutpannāḥ sarvabuddhāḥ* in the extant Sanskrit texts. Additionally, where one Chinese translator uses 三世諸佛, we often find that another will have translated the same passage using 過去未來現在諸佛.

We can say that using “the three times” as opposed to “past, future, and present” to refer to *buddhas* in a *Prajñāpāramitā* text, is common though not preferred in Chinese and that it is unknown in Sanskrit, with the single exception of the *Heart Sutra*. The expression *tryadhvan-vyavastīthāḥ sarvabuddhāḥ* in the *Heart Sutra* is consistent with the Chinese conventions for referring to the buddhas of the three times and inconsistent with the Buddhist Sanskrit conventions. We conclude that it is a Chinese expression translated into Sanskrit and not the other way around. Taken alongside the evidence in Jan Nattier's 1992 article, this shows conclusively that the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* is a translation from the Chinese *Heart Sutra* and not the other way around. The language of composition was Chinese.

Although the exact reference to the “buddhas of the three times who rely on *Prajñāpāramitā*” is not a quote per se, the sentence would not be out of place in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Where the redactor of the

Chinese *Xīnjīng* was not actually quoting from the *Dàjīng* they seem to have been consciously employing the language found in it, that is to say, employing Kumārajīva's Chinese idioms. We also know they used some terms preferred by Xuánzàng, but not his translation of *Pañc* as the basis of their redaction.

This study confirms existing observations by Nattier (1992), Huifeng (2014), and Attwood (2017) that have all showed, in one way or another, that whoever translated the *Heart Sutra* seems to have struggled to express the ideas found in the Chinese text using Sanskrit. Even though they have some facility in Sanskrit, the translator does not seem to have had access to, or familiarity with, *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in Sanskrit. Although Huifeng (2014) does not explicitly say so, one of the mistakes he points out—misreading 以無所得故 as *aprāptitvād* rather than *anupalambhayogena*—tells us that the translator was probably not familiar with Kumārajīva's *Dàjīng* either, since the term is used often and unambiguously in that text. This rules out a number of suspects as the translator. Anyone very familiar with the Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and/or with Kumārajīva's *Dàjīng*, such as Xuánzàng, can be eliminated from our inquiries.

We can affirm Nattier's conclusion that the *Heart Sutra* is a Chinese text and add that the Sanskrit translation was not produced by an expert in *Prajñāpāramitā* (Chinese or Sanskrit). As Kyoko Tokuno (1990) and Tanya Storch (2014) have shown, redacted extracts of larger texts known as “digest sutras” (抄經), texts like the *Heart Sutra*, were circulating in their hundreds in early Medieval China. The initial production of a text like the *Heart Sutra* is therefore unremarkable.

The real puzzle is how the *Heart Sutra* ever came to be mistaken for a genuine sutra (正經). It was common knowledge that the sources of digests were Chinese translations. We can only presume that, along with the attribution to Xuánzàng, the forged Sanskrit “original” was part of an attempt to assert the authenticity of the *Heart Sutra* as a sutra, an attempt that clearly succeeded. In a forthcoming article, I will apply observations by Tokuno and Storch to the *Heart Sutra* in the hope of shedding light on its history.

## Abbreviations

Aṣṭa	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
Pañc	<i>Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
Suv	<i>Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛcchā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
T	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i>
Vaj	<i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>

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# Chan Master Hanyue's Attitude toward Sutra Teachings in the Ming

*Yi-hsun Huang*

## Abstract

Historically, a number of Chan masters are regarded as advocates of *sūtra* learning as a supplement to Chan. Despite this commonality, they all have different approaches and demonstrate varying degrees of reliance on *sūtra* teachings. This article aims at understanding Chan Master Hanyue's 漢月 (1573–1635) attitude toward *sūtra* teachings in the late Ming. Hanyue's work, *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*, represents a mature and confident attitude towards *sūtra* teachings on the part of a Chan master during this late stage of development in imperial China.

## Introduction

Although the claims that Chan is separate from the *sūtra* teachings (*jiaowai biechuan* 教外別傳) and is not reliant upon the written word (*buli wenzi* 不立文字) are part of a famous slogan for the Chan school, *sūtra* teachings still play an important role in the works of some Chan monks. The early famous examples are Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (784–841) in the Tang, and Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904–975) in the Five Dynasties.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, *sūtra* teachings

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<sup>1</sup> Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002; Albert Welter, *Yongming Yanshou's Concept of Chan in the Zongjing Lu*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

are also transmitted through different genres of Chan literature such as lamp records (*denglu* 燈錄), recorded sayings (*yulu* 語錄), and collections of *gongans* (*gongan ji* 公案集).

In the Song, Juefan Huihong 覺範慧洪 (1071–1128), an influential Chan master, coined the term “literary Chan” (*wenzi chan* 文字禪) to emphasize learning Chan through written words.<sup>2</sup> Huihong also wrote the *Zhizheng zhuan* 智證傳 (*A commentary on wisdom and enlightenment*) to explain *sūtra* teachings and demonstrate their value. During the Ming dynasty, Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603) praised Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* and republished it. Later, the famous late Ming Chan master Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (1573–1635) taught the *Zhizheng zhuan* at his monastery. These lectures were compiled and published by one of his disciples in a work entitled *Hanyue's Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* (*Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* 於密滲提寂音尊者智證傳).

The *Zhizheng zhuan*, therefore, serves as an excellent example for illustrating the role of *sūtra* teachings in Chan Buddhism due to its long lasting influence from the Song to the Ming dynasties. By using Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* and Hanyue's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* as source material for the present study, several questions will be addressed: If the Chan school's identity requires independence from the *sūtra* teachings, why did Huihong and Hanyue not give up *sūtra* teachings? What are the value and function of *sūtra* teachings explained in their works? Do they treat *sūtra* teachings with the same attitude? The author hopes to answer these questions and clarify the relationship between Chan and *sūtra* teachings according to Huihong and Hanyue in the Song and the Ming respectively.

As Hanyue is seen as one of the most prominent Chan masters in late imperial China, his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* represents a mature and confident attitude held by a Chan master toward *sūtra* teachings during this period.<sup>3</sup> Hanyue's use of this text to attract and convert Confucian literati also demonstrates how *sūtra* teachings were used as a crucial bridge between clerics and elite lay followers in Chinese society.

<sup>2</sup> George Albert Keyworth, “Transmitting the lamp of learning in classical Chan Buddhism: Juefan Huihong (1071–1128) and literary Chan.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Yūkei Hasebe 長谷部幽蹊 states that Hanyue's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* could be seen as the direct cause for the controversy between him and his master Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642), see his “Sanhō ichimon no ryūtai” 三峰一門の隆替, *Aichi kagaku daigaku ronsō ippan kyōiku kenkyū* 愛知學院大學論叢一般教育研究, 32.1, 1984: 109.



## Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan*

The *Zhizheng zhuan* is a collection of 109 quoted passages combined with Huihong's comments. Sixty-two of the passages come from twenty different *sūtras* and *śāstras*. Forty-six passages come from thirty-three works by Chinese Buddhist masters, including those of some Chan masters. There is also one passage that comes from the *Book of Changes*. Huihong adds his comments after each quoted passage, which places the *Zhizheng zhuan* stylistically between traditional Chinese Buddhist commentaries and Chan *gongan* literature.<sup>4</sup> The most frequently cited *sūtras* in the *Zhizheng zhuan* are the *Avataṃsaka*, *Lotus*, and *Lankāvatāra sūtras*; *śāstras* are the *Po sexin lun* 破色心論 (*Śāstra of Refuting Form and Mind*),<sup>5</sup> *Yuqie shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 (*Yogācārabhūmi*), and *Qixin lun* 起信論 (The Awakening of Faith). The Chinese Buddhist masters most frequently cited are Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (665-712), Linji 臨濟 (?-867), Dongshan 洞山 (807-869), Caoshan 曹山 (840-901) and Yongming Yanshou. Judging by the frequency of citations, *sūtras* and *śāstras* are his preferred type of material. Additionally, in his own comments Huihong quotes many other *sūtras*, *śāstras* and works by Chinese masters.

However, there is no preface written by Huihong, and therefore no explanation why he, a Chan master, chose to include so many *sūtras* and *śāstras* in his *Zhizheng zhuan*. The only clue we can find is a passage he quotes from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* containing the term *zhizheng* 智證. In a discussion about not avoiding entanglement with sound and form, that *sūtra* says,

所見色與盲等，所聞聲與響等，所嗅香與風等，  
所食味不分別，受諸觸如智證，知諸法如幻相。<sup>6</sup>  
The forms you see are equivalent to [what] the blind [see]; the  
sounds you hear are equivalent to echoes; the fragrances you  
smell are equivalent to the wind; the flavors you eat should not

<sup>4</sup> George Albert Keyworth, "Transmitting the lamp of learning in classical Chan Buddhism: Juefan Huihong (1071-1128) and literary Chan," pp. 359-367; Zhou Yukai 周裕鍇, *Songseng Huihong xinglu zhushu biannian zongan* 宋僧惠洪行履著述編年總案, Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 高等教育出版社, 2010, p. 145; Lin Boqian 林伯謙 and Chen Hongxue 陳弘學, *Biaodian zhushi zhizheng zhuan* 標點註釋智證傳, Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji 秀威資訊科技, 2004, pp. 35-76.

<sup>5</sup> The *Po sexin lun* is also called *Weishi lun* 唯識論 (T31, no. 1588). According to the Taishō edition, it is written by Vasubandhu and translated by Bodhiruci.

<sup>6</sup> *Wemogie suoshuo jing*, T14, no. 475, p. 540b3-5.

be discriminated; your tactile sensations are like *the realizations of wisdom*; and you should understand that the dharmas are like phantasms.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Zhizheng zhuan*, Huihong cites this passage to explain Chan Master Caoshan's assertion that one should not avoid the entanglement of sound and form, because one could use sound and form sensed by him as opportunities to realize that dharmas are like phantasms, and thus attain wisdom (*zhizheng*).<sup>8</sup>

Although there is no way to be sure that this definition from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* is the reason that Huihong chose the title for the text, the concept of wisdom does play an important role in his *Zhizheng zhuan*. Huihong emphasizes the meaning and function of wisdom for Chan practitioners as follows:

今禪學者馳求之狂，欺詐之病，不以知見之慧鍛之。<sup>9</sup>  
Now, Chan practitioners seek madly and are afflicted by dishonesty.  
This is because they cannot refine themselves with wise intellection.

Wise intellection is the best way to solve Chan practitioners' tendencies toward unchecked seeking and dishonesty. Otherwise, Huihong comments that they will have no chance to rest their minds and achieve freedom:

禪者不能以智慧之力破滅無明，至老死而不暇。<sup>10</sup>  
If Chan practitioners cannot employ the power of wisdom to refute  
and eliminate ignorance, they will remain frantic for the rest of  
their lives.

To Huihong, the teaching from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* shows that wisdom can be attained by understanding the meaning of emptiness through any sound or form. This wisdom also cures Chan practitioners' mad seeking and tendencies toward dishonesty, so that they can rest their minds and achieve freedom.

Huihong's concept of wisdom, stated clearly in his *Zhizheng zhuan*, led to attacks from other Chan masters. After the *Zhizheng zhuan* was published, it was mentioned in the *Congli gonglun* 叢林公論 (*Public comments on Chan*

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis added. My translation is based on *The Sutra Preached by Vimalakīrti*, tr. by John R. McRae (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation, 2004), pp. 87-88.

<sup>8</sup> *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 175b22-24.

<sup>9</sup> *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 189c15-16.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 187b6-8.

monasteries), compiled in 1189. Huibing 惠彬, the author of this work, harshly criticizes the *Zhizheng zhuan*. Huibin lists six examples of how Huihong misunderstands the teachings of the Buddha and patriarchs.<sup>11</sup> Considering how much the other monks' works benefited from the *Zhizheng zhuan*, the modern Buddhist historian Lin Boqian 林伯謙 cannot refrain from remarking that Huibin's comment cannot be considered a "fair comment" (*gonglun* 公論), because Huibin only lists six examples without providing any explanation or correction.<sup>12</sup>

After the Song, for reasons unknown, the *Zhizheng zhuan* was not included in the early editions of the Ming canon, such as the Hongwu 洪武 and Yongle 永樂 editions, but was privately carved, printed and circulated. The monk Mizang Daokai 密藏道開 (active 1560-1595) records in his catalogue *Zangyi jingshu biaomu* 藏逸經書標目 that Lengyan si 楞嚴寺, located in Xiushue 秀水, published three of Huihong's works: *Zhizheng zhuan*, *Sengbao zhuan* 僧寶傳 and *Linjian lu* 林間錄.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, the *Zhizheng zhuan* became widely circulated through its inclusion in the Jiaxing 嘉興 canon, which was probably due to Zibo Zhenke's involvement in its publication.

### **Zibo and the publication of *Zhizheng zhuan* in the Ming**

Master Zibo is regarded as an eminent monk in the late Ming, and is also known for believing that a serious Chan practitioner must combine the practice of meditation with other forms of Buddhist practice, including doctrinal studies.<sup>14</sup> Of particular importance is the fact that Zibo was responsible for raising funds for the Jiaxing canon and deciding on the string-bound style of binding. This reduced costs and made the books easy to handle in comparison with accordion-style binding. This contributed greatly to the propagation of Buddhist teachings in the late Ming and early Qing.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Conglin gonglun*, X64, no. 1268, p. 772a7-9.

<sup>12</sup> Lin Boqian, *Biaodian zhushi zhizheng zhuan*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> *Zangyi jingshu biaomu* 藏逸經書標目, B14, no. 84, p. 442b12-16. The Lengyan si at Xiushue was one of important printing centers in the late Ming, see Chen Yunu 陳玉女, *Mingdai fomen neiwai sengsu jiaoshe de changyu* 明代佛門內外僧俗交涉的場域. Taipei: Daoxiang chuban she, 2010, pp. 228-235.

<sup>14</sup> Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Darui Long, "Managing the Dharma Treasure: Collation, Carving, Printing, and Distribution of Canon in Late Imperial China." In *Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia: The Formation and*

A clue about Zibo's motivation for publishing Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* is provided in Hanyue's preface to his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*. The text was found by Zibo's disciple Jieru 介如 in a pile of discarded paper and presented to Zibo.

萬曆間，介如□公偶於爆紙中購得此書，乃呈之紫柏<sup>16</sup> 老人，老人曰：「吁嗟乎！臨濟兒孫猶在耶！」遂命開公梓而公之天下後世。<sup>17</sup>

During the Wanli era (1573-1620), the Elder Jieru obtained this text unintentionally when he bought a pile of discarded paper. He then presented it to Master Zibo. The Master sighed, "How fortunate! There is still a disciple of Linji!" The Master then asked the Elder Kai to print and circulate it in order to make it available to the public and later generations.

Master Zibo considered Huihong to be a true disciple of Master Linji and asked his other disciple Mizang Daokai to publish it with Huihong's two other texts, the *Sengbao zhuan* and *Linjian lu*, in order to make it available to the public.<sup>18</sup>

In his "Preface to the Reprint of the *Zhizheng zhuan*", written in 1585, Zibo lamented that the reason why Buddhism was in a state of decline was because Chan masters were not clear about the principle of Chan; fortunately, Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* could rectify this problem. Zibo writes,

有宋·覺範禪師於是乎懼，乃離合宗教，引事比類，

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*Transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 224-231.

<sup>16</sup> I have emended the original text, which reads "柴□," to "紫柏" (Zibo), based on context, as Jieru was Zibo's disciple.

<sup>17</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* 於密滲提寂音尊者智證傳, p.2. The *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* is a rare book from Shanghai library. A photo copy of this rare book could also be found in the Collection of Buddhist Rare Books from the Ming and Qing (*Mingqing xijian wenxian* 明清佛教稀見文獻), v. 3, the Center for Buddhist Studies 佛教研究中心, Fo Guang University 佛光大學, Taiwan.

<sup>18</sup> Daokai was responsible for moving the Jiaying Canon from Mount Wutai to Jizhao an 寂照庵 at Jingshan si 徑山寺 in 1593. For more information on Mizang Daokai, see the *Mizang kai chanshi yigao* 密藏開禪師遺稿, J23, no. B118, p. 34b1-c4; the *Xinxu gaosengzhuan* 新續高僧傳, B27, no. 151, p. 86a6-16; Ryuzo Nakajima 中嶋隆藏, "Kakō nyuzō button to mitsuzō dōkai no tachiba" 嘉興入藏仏典と密藏道開の立場. *Tōhōgaku* 東方学113, 2007: 34-50.

折衷五家宗旨，至發其所祕，犯其所忌而不惜。<sup>19</sup>  
 The Chan Master Juefan [Huihong] of the Song dynasty was very concerned about this issue. He brought Chan and the teachings together, citing passages to show where they matched, and reconciled the tenets of the five houses. He revealed the secrets of the Chan school without concern for whether this would offend the masters of the Chan school.

Zibo explains that what Huihong does in the *Zhizheng zhuan* is matching Chan and Buddhist teachings by citing passages to integrate them. He even admits that by doing this Huihong is revealing the secrets of the Chan school without concern for whether this offends other Chan masters.

As for the meaning of *zhizheng*, Zibo disapproves of the definition from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* as “your tactile sensations are like the realizations of wisdom”. He offers his own explanation as follows:

書以「智證」名，非智不足以辨邪正，非證不足以行賞罰。  
 蓋照用全，方能荷大法也。充覺範之心，即天下有一人焉能  
 讀此書，直究綱宗，行祖令，斯不負著書之意。<sup>20</sup>

The title of the text is *zhizheng*, meaning that without wisdom, one is not able to distinguish right from wrong; without enlightenment, one is not able to carry out reward and punishment. Only when one has both wisdom and enlightenment is one able to represent the Great Dharma. Juefan [Huihong] hopes that as long as there is one person in the world who has a chance to read this text, understand the principle, and carry out the patriarchs' teaching, he did not write it in vain.

Zibo's interpretation extends the meaning of *zhizheng* beyond the personal spiritual experience of enlightenment through wisdom to the qualifications a Chan master needs to teach others. For Zibo, a Chan master should have wisdom (*zhi*), so that he or she is able to distinguish right from wrong; furthermore, only when the Chan master is enlightened (*zheng*) is he or she able to carry out “reward and punishment”, which means making correct judgements and responses about his or her disciples' states of realization.

<sup>19</sup> See Zibo's preface “Chongke zhizheng zhuang yin” 重刻智證傳引 in the *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 170 b6-12.

<sup>20</sup> *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 170 b13-16.

Zibo's devotion to the publication of the Jiaxing canon and his decision to reprint Huihong's works illustrate his belief that the tenet of the Chan school can be revealed through the *sūtra* teachings. Furthermore, as Zibo states in his preface for the reprint of the *Zhizheng zhuan*, as long as there is one person in this world who has a chance to read it, understand the principle, and carry out the patriarchs' teaching, Huihong did not write this text in vain. As we look at the history now, there is at least one person who truly appreciated Huihong and Zibo's efforts in the late Ming: Hanyue Fazang.

### Hanyue and his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*

According to Hanyue's chronological biography, he was born in a Confucian family at Liangxi 梁溪 (current Wuxi 無錫 in Jiangsu). He left the household life at age 15, became a novice at age 19 and received full ordination at 37 years of age. In this early stage, he went on a pilgrimage to visit many monasteries, but failed to find a master that suited him. He finally settled down at a remote temple on Yushan 虞山 (in current Changshu 常熟), which later became the famous monastery, Sanfeng qingliang chanyuan 三峰清涼禪院. At age 40, he entered a one hundred day silent and solitary "death retreat" (*buyu siguan* 不語死關) and finally obtained enlightenment without a master's guidance.<sup>21</sup>

Four years after his enlightenment, in the summer retreat of 1616, he decided to use Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* as teaching material. He explained one or two of Huihong's passages and comments each day. Since there are 109 cases in the *Zhizheng zhuan*, and Hanyue had some health problems, it took him four years to finish teaching the text, and so his lectures ended in 1620. Hanyue's teaching was recorded by his disciple Guangmin 廣敏, and was published with the sponsorship of a loyal lay follower named Yan Zhang 嚴樟 in 1624.<sup>22</sup>

Also in 1624, Hanyue visited Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566-1642), who was regarded as an authentic lineage holder in the Linji school. After their encounter, Miyun confirmed without hesitation that Hanyue could be included in the lineage of the Linji school (*chengsi yuanliu* 承嗣源流). Hanyue, however, did not accept Miyun's Dharma transmission until three years later.<sup>23</sup> The

<sup>21</sup> *Zanfeng zang heshang yulu* 三峰藏和尚語錄, J34, no. B299, p. 207b10-16; Shi Jianyi 釋見一, *Hanyue fazang zhi chanfa yanjiu* 漢月法藏之禪法研究. Taipei: Fagu wenhua 法鼓文化, 1998, pp. 9-12.

<sup>22</sup> The preface of *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* and fascicle 1, p.1 and p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Lian Ruizhi 連瑞枝, "Hanyue fazang (1573-1635) yu wanming sanfeng zongpai de jianli" 漢月

relationship between Miyun and Hanyue started with an awkward encounter and ended with an unpleasant argument. The controversy began with the publication of Hanyue's work the *Wuzong yuan* 五宗原 (*Origin of the five Chan schools*) in 1628 and deteriorated when Hanyue started teaching the *Zhizheng zhuan* again at several monasteries in 1631.

In modern scholarship, discussions of the dispute between Miyun and Hanyue have mainly focused on the *Wuzong yuan*, because Hanyue's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* has long been unavailable. I have discovered that this text is held in the Shanghai Library and the old Buddhist library (*cangjing lou* 藏經樓) at Xiyuan si 西園寺 in Suzhou 蘇州. Its complete title is *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* 於密滲提寂音尊者智證傳. A variation of its title recorded in Hanyue's recorded sayings is simply *Yumi chanshi ti zhizheng zhuan* 於密禪師提智證傳.<sup>24</sup> The term "Yumi" 於密 is Hanyue's style name and the character *ti* 提 indicates that this text is Hanyue's "guiding words" (*tiyu* 提語) to Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan*. The additional character *shen* 滲, found in both editions, is a puzzle, and its meaning is not explained either in Hanyue's preface or in his introduction.

The character *shen*, however, also appears in the titles of other works by Hanyue<sup>25</sup> and has a negative connotation in those contexts.<sup>26</sup> In the preface to his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*, he explains that despite his own arrogance and superficiality (*kuanglou* 狂陋), it is necessary for him to pick up Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* and add his own guiding words in order to teach his disciples.<sup>27</sup> Therefore a possible explanation for the character *shen* in the titles of his works could simply indicate that Hanyue considers his teachings as imperfect or containing "infiltrations" (*shenlou* 滲漏), an expression of his humble attitude.

法藏 (1573-1635) 與晚明三峰宗派的建立. *Zhonghua foxue xuebo* 中華佛學學報 9, 1996: 167-208.

<sup>24</sup> *Zanfeng zang heshang yulu*, J34, no. B299, p. 207b16.

<sup>25</sup> The character "shen" 滲 also appears in the titles of Hanyue's other works such as *Yumi shen chanbing ji* 於密滲禪病偈 (compiled in 1619), *Yumi shen songyuan sanzunsu zuogongfu yinyuan xiezhengzhu* 於密滲宋元三尊宿做工夫因緣邪正註, and *Yumi shen shishi zhigai* 於密滲施食旨槩 (X59, no. 1082). The first two texts are rare books from Shanghai Library and now can also be found in the Collection of Buddhist Rare Books from the Ming and Qing v. 38, the Center for Buddhist Studies, Fo Guang University.

<sup>26</sup> It can be found in Hanyue's recorded sayings when he describes that there are three kinds of "infiltrations" (*shenlou* 滲漏), or flaws: emotional (*qing* 情), views (*jian* 見) and language (*yu* 語), *Zanfeng zang heshang yulu*, J34, no. B299, p. 157b8-9.

<sup>27</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, "preface," p. 3.



Hanyue's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* contains four parts: 1. Hanyue's preface written for the initial publication of the text; 2. Zibo's preface to the reprint of *Zhizheng zhuan*; 3. Hanyue's introduction to his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*; and 4. the main body of the work. There are 109 cases in Huihong's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* but the Shanghai Library edition of Hanyue's text only contains cases 1 to 57. Fortunately the author has recently discovered the second part of Huihong's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* in the old Buddhist library at Xiyuan Si in Suzhou.<sup>28</sup>

Judging from information in Hanyue's introduction and main body, Hanyue taught the *Zhizheng zhuan* before his disciples in the meditation hall. Several passages from the main body indicate that the text records things Hanyue said after shouting at his disciples (*he yun* 喝云) or hitting the ground with his staff (*zhuo zhuzhang yixia yun* 卓拄杖一下云).

As seen in the text, Hanyue provides his guiding words first, which are then followed by full quotations of the cases from Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan*. This is similar to the "pointer" (*chuishhi* 垂示) in the *Blue Cliff Record* (*biyan lu* 碧巖錄).<sup>29</sup> The woodblock printing uses a triangle sign (△) to indicate Hanyue's guiding words. Hanyue's guiding words are followed by the corresponding passage in Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan*, which is followed by Huihong's comments. Furthermore, the woodblock printing adopts the standard format of Chinese commentary tradition to indent Hanyue's guiding words and Huihong's comment one character lower from the top boundary line (pl. 1 and pl. 2).

The historical context of Hanyue's teachings on Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* is clearly explained in his introduction to the text. Hanyue writes that in 1616, while he was giving summer retreat lectures at Sanfeng si, he talked all day but taught them nothing because he did not have anything effective to teach. As a result, he picked up the *Zhizheng zhuan*.

三峯今年結夏，下手全無柄橦，終日商量，不曾說一句話。…如其不會，不免提起葛藤，與大眾翻騰一上，舉寂音尊者《智證傳》。

<sup>28</sup> A photocopy of the complete version of Huihong's *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* now can be found in the Collection of Buddhist Rare Books from the Ming and Qing, v. 101, the Center for Buddhist Studies, Fo Guang University, Taiwan.

<sup>29</sup> *Foguo yuanwu chanshi biyanlu* 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄, T48, no. 2003, p. 140a12.

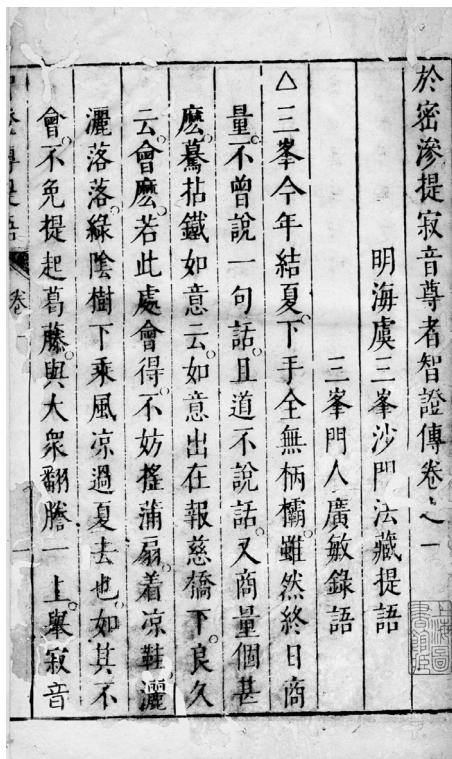
Title: *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan* 於密滲提寂音尊者智證傳

Author: Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (1573-1635)

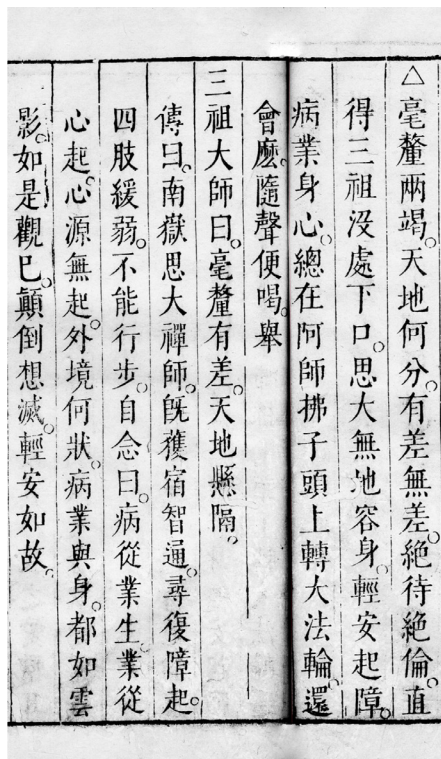
Date: 1624

Page: 15.2 x 25.5 cm, 9 columns of 19 characters. Woodblock

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(Pl. 1) introduction



(Pl. 2) the sixth case

In the summer retreat at the Sanfeng this year, I could not find anything effective to teach. I talked all day, but did not say a word. ... If you still do not understand it, I have to pick up arrowroots and vines to stir up your thought. Therefore I picked up the Venerable Jiyin's *Zhizheng zhuan*.

It is worth noticing that Hanyue used the term “arrowroots and vines” (*geteng* 葛藤) to refer to the *Zhizheng zhuan*. This is like Chan Master Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (1183-1260) referring to *gongans* as bricks to knock on the door in his *Gateless Barrier* (*Wumen guan* 無門關).<sup>30</sup> This shows the general attitude of Chan masters who see everything in the world, including the *gongan*, as expedient means in order to realize the ultimate truth.

The main reason why Hanyue favors the *Zhizheng zhuan* is closely related to his own personal experience. Hanyue recalls in his *Wuzong yuan*:

吾嘗參三玄之旨有深得，欲求決諸方，而難其人。忽見師著《臨濟宗旨》及《智證傳》之臨濟兩堂首座同喝語，今古心心，如覲面相印。復檢其法嗣，未有續之者，因願遙嗣其宗旨。<sup>31</sup>  
When I was young, I investigated the meaning of [Linji's] three mysteries and gained deep insight. I then visited many masters in order to confirm my realization, but failed to find one who could. I came across the Master's (Huihong) work *Linji zongzhi* 臨濟宗旨, as well as his *Zhizheng zhuan*, which contains the spontaneous shouting exchange between the head monks of two halls at Linji si. Suddenly, my contemporary mind met the Master's ancient mind as if we were facing each other in person. I checked to see if he had any Dharma heirs, but found none. Therefore, I made a vow to carry on Huihong's essential teaching through transmission by remote succession.

After trying unsuccessfully for many years to find a master to confirm his enlightenment, Hanyue claimed to be Huihong's Dharma heir. This phenomenon of “transmission by remote succession” (*yaosi* 遙嗣), is defined by Jiang Wu as “a monk declar[ing] himself the master's legitimate Dharma heir without

<sup>30</sup> Wumen Huikai calls *koans* “*qiaomen wazi* 敲門瓦子” in the *Wumen guan*, T48, no. 2005, p. 292b17-18.

<sup>31</sup> *Wozong yuan*, X65, no. 1279, p. 104a9-12.

meeting the master in person.” This type of transmission was common in the late Ming when Chan masters could not find a proper teacher in their own time.<sup>32</sup>

In Hanyue's case, in addition to declaring himself Huihong's Dharma successor, he also used Huihong's works to verify the authenticity of his own enlightenment. In the introduction to his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*, Hanyue emphasizes, “from now on, people who attain enlightenment without a master (*wushi ziwu* 無師自悟) can use this text to verify their enlightenment (*yuci zhengzhi* 於此證之).”<sup>33</sup> The *Zhizheng zhuan* was used by Hanyue and could also be used by other Chan practitioners as material to verify self-enlightenment.

Nevertheless, this kind of self-enlightenment is considered by Hanyue to be a last resort. Hanyue still highly respects the role and function of a master, as seen in his explanation of the title of the *Zhizheng zhuan*:

尊者引經作傳，正調佛法盛時，弟啐師啄，因智而證，以證證智，燈燈相續。<sup>34</sup>

When the venerable [Huihong] collected *sūtras* and compiled his [*Zhizheng*] *zhuan*, the Buddha Dharma was flourishing. Disciples worked hard and masters helped them. People attained enlightenment through wisdom; their wisdom was verified by their enlightenment. This is how the lamps [of Chan] are transmitted.

Hanyue strongly believes that even for disciples who work hard in their practice, help from the master is also necessary. This is probably one of the reasons why at age 52, when he had his own monastery with his own disciples and was well respected as a Chan master, Hanyue still went to Miyun for a Dharma transmission.

Although subsequent generations present conflicting accounts of Hanyue's first encounter with Miyun, we can say that it did have a beneficial impact on Hanyue. After that time, Hanyue was invited to reside and teach at several monasteries in Hangzhou and Suzhou. Notably, in 1631 Hanyue started teaching the *Zhizheng zhuan* at Anyin Si 安隱寺 and then in 1633 at Zhenru Si 真如寺. A common feature of the audiences at both monasteries was the presence of many literati. Hanyue describes his motivation for teaching the *Zhizheng zhuan*

<sup>32</sup> Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, preface, p. 1.

in a public talk (*pushuo* 普說) entitled “Commenting on the *Zhizheng zhuan* at Anyin Si” (*Anyinsi ti Zhizheng zhuan* 安隱寺提智證傳):

「老僧于安隱凡三赴其請，前兩期上堂已委曲指示五家宗要，未能徹上徹下，禪教相印，以收諸種根器，今乃為提覺範禪師《智證傳》。」凡四十餘日。<sup>35</sup>

[Hanyue said,] “This is the third time I have been invited to Anyin. The first two times, I tried my best to lecture on the main ideas of the five houses. However, I was not able to help people of all capacities to understand how Chan and the teachings verify each other and to benefit people of different capacities. This time, I will teach and provide guiding words on Chan Master Juefan’s *Zhizheng zhuan*.” The lecture lasted more than 40 days.

Obviously, when Hanyue taught the main ideas of Chan’s five houses in his first two visits to Anyin Si, not everyone could understand. The third time, Hanyue decided to add *sūtra* teachings in order to supplement his instructions on Chan so that he could include and benefit people of different capacities. For this particular purpose, he chose to lecture on the *Zhizheng zhuan*. Hanyue’s motivation and purpose is finally clear to us now that his *Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* is available for research.

Hanyue’s decision to teach the *Zhizheng zhuan* caused his master Miyun to launch severe attacks against him. In 1634, in the seventh letter he wrote to Hanyue, Miyun accused Hanyue of turning Chan monasteries (*chanyuan* 禪院) into lecture monasteries (*jiangsi* 講席) by teaching the *Zhizheng zhuan* at several monasteries.<sup>36</sup> Miyun criticized Hanyue for violating the Chan taboo (*daji* 大忌) of causing more cognitive hindrances (*suozhi zhang* 所知障) for his audience.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Zanfeng zang heshang yulu*, J34, no. B299, p. 156a21-26.

<sup>36</sup> *Miyun yunwu chanshi tiantong zhishuo* 密雲圓悟禪師天童直說, fascicle 1, p. 5, in the Collection of Rare Books from the Ming and Qing, v. 1, the Center for Buddhist Studies, Fo Guang University; *Miyun chanshi yulu* 密雲圓悟禪師語錄, J10, no. A158, p. 83c20-28.

<sup>37</sup> *Miyun yunwu chanshi tiantong zhishuo*, fascicle 1, p. 5, in the Collection of Rare Books from the Ming and Qing at the Center for Buddhist Studies, v.1, Fo Guang University; *Miyun chanshi yulu*, J10, no. A158, p. 83c20-28. Further readings on this topic, see Lian Reizhi, “Hanyue fazang (15573-1635) yu wanming sanfeng zongpai de jianli.” *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 9, 1996: 167-208; Liao Chaoheng 廖肇亨, “Huihong juefan zai mingdai 惠洪覺範在明代.” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊75.4, 2004: 797-837.

Hanyue's attitude, however, is consistent with literary Chan, defined by Robert Gimello as encompassing those who "encouraged the combination of spiritual discipline with literacy and learning" and were critical of "anti-intellectual Chan".<sup>38</sup> Ironically, this literary characteristic, which irritated Miyun the most, helped Hanyue attract many Confucian literati to become his disciples or lay followers.<sup>39</sup> Extant records contain lists of literati who attended Hanyue's lectures on the *Zhizheng zhuan* in Hangzhou, including such figures as Zhang Xiuchu 張秀初, Feng Yangong 馮儼公, Weng Jixiang 翁季祥, Jiang Dao'an 江道闇, and his brother.<sup>40</sup> For Hanyue, teaching Confucian literati requires more sophisticated contents, which is exactly what the *Zhizheng zhuan* could offer.

As a result, despite Miyun's criticisms, Hanyue continued to teach the *Zhizheng zhuan* until the last year of his life. In the spring of 1635, he was invited to give talks at Shengshou si 聖壽寺. A lay follower named Zhou Yongnian 周永年 wrote an essay describing Hanyue's teaching on the *Zhizheng zhuan* at that monastery.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in Zhou's postface to the *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Sanfeng [Hanyue Fa] Zang Abiding at Shengshou Si*, he provides other details of Hanyue's talks. Zhou records that Hanyue said, "I made a vow to teach this [*Zhizheng zhuan*] ten times in my life. I will count this as several times in order to fulfill my vow." Hanyue passed away in July after this talk, and Zhou recalled that Hanyue's teaching of the *Zhizheng zhuan* at Shengshou si was like the Buddha's teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* before he entered *nirvana*, because the cases Hanyue raised and his guiding words were the essentials (*xinyao* 心要) of the Chan patriarchs' teachings to practitioners.<sup>42</sup> Zhou's postface clearly displays how much Hanyue's teaching of the *Zhizheng zhuan* impressed the literati in Hangzhou.

In summary, the most important significance of Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan* for Hanyue is that Hanyue verified the authenticity of his enlightenment with its contents and thereby claimed to be Huihong's Dharma heir in the Linji lineage.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Gimello, "Mārga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an." In *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Transformation in Buddhist Thought*, edited by R. E. Buswell, Jr. and R. M. Gimello. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992, p. 381.

<sup>39</sup> Ren Yimin 任宜敏, *Zhongguo fojiaoshi (Qingdai)* 中國佛教史·清代. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 2015, pp. 252-287.

<sup>40</sup> *Sanfeng zang heshang yulu*, J34, no. B299, p. 209c10-11.

<sup>41</sup> See Zhou's essay entitled "Chunri shengshou si cangyun tang ting sanfeng heshang ti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan" 春日聖壽寺藏雲堂聽三峯和尚提寂音尊者智證傳 in the *Wudu fachen* 吳都法乘, B34, no. 193, p. 499a12-b3.

<sup>42</sup> See Zhou's postface "Sanfeng zang chanshi singling shengshou si cangyun tang yulu houxu 三峯藏禪師松陵聖壽寺藏雲堂語錄後序" in the *Wudu fachen*, B34, no. 193, pp. 748b14-749a4.



Hanyue's statement that "People attained enlightenment through wisdom; their wisdom was verified by their enlightenment" becomes the best explanation of his understanding of the term "*zhizheng*". Notably, based on his teaching experience, Hanyue felt that witty Confucian literati who were fond of Chan particularly needed *sūtra* teachings to supplement their understanding of Chan. That is why Hanyue taught the *Zhizheng zhuan* at several monasteries in Hangzhou from 1631 to his death. This decision caused severe counterattacks from his master Miyun, who criticized Hanyue for violating the Chan taboo of creating more cognitive hindrances in his audience, a common complaint about literary Chan in Chinese Buddhist history. In the following discussion, we will look at the content of *Hanyue's Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* in order to find out the reason why Huihong and Hanyue dared to violate this Chan taboo.

### From Huihong to Hanyue

Hanyue was born about 500 years after Huihong, and both of them represent a type of Chan master who emphasizes the importance of *sūtra* teachings and wisdom. Typically, such masters were born in Confucian families, received a good education and were well read. This does not mean they were against the concept of enlightenment, as their opponents often accused. Rather, they simply believed that wisdom from the *sūtras* is important for achieving enlightenment and it is not necessary for Chan to be separated from the doctrinal teachings.<sup>43</sup> They do however hold varying attitudes toward *sūtra* teachings and show varying degrees of reliance on those teachings.

To demonstrate how differently Huihong and Hanyue incorporate *sūtra* teachings into Chan, the following passage is an example from *Hanyue's Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan* which includes all three elements—Hanyue's guiding words, the original case cited by Huihong, and Huihong's comment—in their original order.

〔漢月提語〕  
△「棒起虛空迸地開，一時生死合歸來。…拈來擲向人前看，雪裏暗<sup>44</sup> 香初綻梅。」以拄杖卓一下云：「若會得

<sup>43</sup> George Albert Keyworth, "Transmitting the lamp of learning in classical Chan Buddhism: Juefan Huihong (1071-1128) and literary Chan," p. 285; Robert Gimello, "Mārga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an," p. 381.

<sup>44</sup> This character is missing in the original text. I have added the character "暗" based on

遮一下子，便會得賓主句子，便會得同喝句子，便會得四賓主句子，便會得三玄三要句子，便會得四喝句子，乃至照用、料揀一切句子，一時會盡。…要之總不出乎安心數語，…此處不會，便學時人於門頭戶腦，說個塗毒鼓子，礙在悟處，法我立根，四相亂起而不自知也。…」喝一喝！問大眾：「如何是臨濟源流？」眾無語，乃哭云：「蒼天！蒼天！」喝一喝！舉：<sup>45</sup>

**[Hanyue's guiding words]**

△“Raise a staff to hit the empty sky, the earth cracks open, At once, birth and death come back together. ... Pick up an old case and throw it in front of the assembly, A subtle fragrance in the snow becomes the first plum bloom.” [The master] hits the ground with his staff and says, “If you understand this now, you will then understand the meanings of host and guest,<sup>46</sup> simultaneous shouts,<sup>47</sup> four host-guest relations, three mysteries and three essentials,<sup>48</sup> four kinds of shout,<sup>49</sup> illumination and functioning,<sup>50</sup> and [four] principles,<sup>51</sup> all at once. ... In fact, these are all just ways of pacifying the mind. ... However, if you don't understand them, I have to be like other people of our day who stand in front of you and talk about things like the poison-smeared drum. What they do not know is that

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context.

<sup>45</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 1, pp. 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> The host and guest relation can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* 臨濟禪師語錄 of *Guzunsu yulu* 古尊宿語錄 version, X68, no. 1315, p. 32 b21-23; see also the *Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1975, p.245.

<sup>47</sup> “Simultaneous shouts” can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* of *Guzunsu yulu* version, X68, no. 1315, p. 23b19-21; see also the *Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, p.133.

<sup>48</sup> “Three mysteries and three essentials” can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* of *Guzunsu yulu* version, X68, no. 1315, p. 23c20-21; see also the *Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, p. 148.

<sup>49</sup> “Four kinds of shout” can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* of *Guzunsu yulu* version, X68, no. 1315, p. 504a26-28; see also the *Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, p. 308

<sup>50</sup> “Illumination and functioning” can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* of *Guzunsu yulu* version, X68, no. 1315, p.32c21-33a2.

<sup>51</sup> “Four principles” can be found in the *Linji chanshi yulu* of *Guzunsu yulu* version, X68, no. 1315, pp. 23c23-24c5; see also the *Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, p. 150.



by doing this, they obstruct you from attaining enlightenment, planting the concepts of self and dharmas in your head which give rise to the four false conceptions of personhood.” ... The master shouts and asks the assembly, “What is the origin of Linji?” The assembly is quiet. The master cries, “For shame! For shame!” He then raises the case:

〔惠洪舉〕

《涅槃經》曰：「譬如有人，以雜毒藥用塗大鼓，於衆人中擊之發聲，雖無心欲聞，聞之皆死，唯除一人不橫死者。是大乘典《大涅槃經》亦復如是，在在處處，諸行衆中，有聞聲者，所有貪欲、瞋恚、愚癡悉皆滅盡。其中雖有無心思念，是《大涅槃》因緣力故，能滅煩惱，諸結自滅。犯四重禁及五無間，聞是經已，亦作無上菩提因緣，漸斷煩惱，除不橫死一闡提也。」<sup>52</sup> ...

**[Case raised by Huìhōng]**

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* says, “Suppose a person smears poison on a large drum, and then, in the company of other people, beats the drum, which makes a sound. Although no one intentionally wishes to hear this sound, whoever hears it, dies, except for one type of person. The same is true for this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. Any type of person, in any place, who hears it will have their greed, anger and ignorance destroyed completely. Although some had no intention of thinking about [these matters], the causal power of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* destroys their afflictions so that their fetters break of their own accord. When a person who has committed one of the four serious offenses or one of the five heinous crimes hears this *sūtra*, causation will be created that leads to supreme Bodhi, and they will gradually become free of afflictions. The only exception is the *icchāntika*, who suffers no such death.”<sup>53</sup> ...

<sup>52</sup> *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T12, no. 375, p. 661a20-28; *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> My translation was done with reference to Mark Blum, trans., *The Nirvana Sutra* (Moraga: BDK America, 2015, pdf edition), p. 291.

〔惠洪〕

傳曰：巖頭禪師嘗曰：「《涅槃經》此三段義，略似宗門。」夫言似則非宗門旨要明矣！然宗門旨要，雖即文字語言不可見，離文字語言亦安能見哉？臨濟曰：「大凡舉唱，須一句中具三玄，一玄中具三要，有玄有要。」此塗毒鼓聲也。臨濟歿二百年，尚有聞而死者。...<sup>54</sup>

**[Huihong's] Comment:**

Chan master Yantou Huo once said, "The three divisions in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* are similar to the essential teaching of Chan."<sup>55</sup> Because he said they are "similar", it is clear that the teaching of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is not the same as the essential teaching of Chan. Although the essential teaching of Chan cannot be understood with words and speech, can it be understood without words or speech? It is for this reason that Linji said, "Each statement raised by a master must include three mysteries and each mystery must include three essentials." What Linji said above is like the sound of the poison-smeared drum. Even though Linji has been dead for two hundred years, there are still people who die when they hear his words.

One way to understand the above material is to read the case raised by Huihong first. He cites a passage from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* saying that the teaching of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is like a poison-smeared drum that kills people's greed, anger and ignorance when they hear it. Huihong comments that Chan master Yantou Quanhao 巖頭全谿 (828-887) likens this idea from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* to the essential teachings of the Chan school.<sup>56</sup> Huihong, however, emphasizes that when the master says that they are similar, it means they are not the same. Nevertheless, Huihong believes that Linji's teaching of the three mysteries and three essentials has the same "killing" effect as the sound of the poison-smeared drum. In short, Huihong makes an effort to connect the teaching of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* with Linji's Chan teaching in his comment.

Then, in the late Ming, Hanyue's work first provides his guiding words,

<sup>54</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 1, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> A similar passage can be found in the biography of Chan master Yantou Quanhao 巖頭全谿 in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, T51, no. 2076, p. 326b18-19.

<sup>56</sup> See further references in his biography, "Ezhou yantou quanhuo chanshi" 鄂州巖頭全谿禪師 from the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T51, no. 2076, p. 326b18-26.

followed by Huihong's passage from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* and Huihong's comment. Additionally, and unlike Huihong's comment, Hanyue does not even mention the title of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* in his guiding words. He starts with a verse, then strikes the ground with his staff and says that if people understand this right now, they also understand Linji's teachings about host and guest, shouts, three mysteries and three essentials, illumination and functioning, and four principles all at once. To Hanyue, understanding these teachings of Linji is all about pacifying the mind (*anxin* 安心). However, if people cannot understand this, then Hanyue has to teach them something like the "poison-smeared drum". Although Hanyue adopts the same simile from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, he insists that giving *sūtra* teachings still obstructs people from attaining enlightenment by planting the concepts of self and dharmas in their minds. Nonetheless, he has no choice but to use *sūtra* teachings because people cannot understand Chan in a sudden manner.

Huihong's and Hanyue's attitudes toward *sūtra* teachings differ in that while Huihong agrees that the *sūtra* teachings have the same effects as Chan, Hanyue considers *sūtra* teachings to be necessary expedient means for some people. He still insists that *sūtra* teachings would also obstruct people from attaining enlightenment if they lack proper guidance. As a result, in Hanyue's guiding words, he cites a much smaller number of *sūtras* and *śāstras* than Huihong, and does not provide detailed explanations of concepts such as karma and merit like Huihong. For example, in the third case of the *Zhizheng zhuan*, Huihong's comment elaborates on the story of Sudhana 善財 learning meditation from the holy man 仙人 Pimu 毘目 in the *Huayan jing*. By contrast, Hanyue's guiding words warn his readers not to follow Huihong's explanation, otherwise they would become entangled by "arrowroots and vines".<sup>57</sup>

Hanyue not only holds this kind of critical attitude toward *sūtra* teachings, but also challenges some Chan masters who are fond of *sūtra* teachings, for example Zongmi. In the case 3 of the *Zhizheng zhuan*, Huihong cites a passage from Zongmi about maintaining the correct mind at the last moment of death:

圭峯密禪師偈曰：「作有義事是惺悟心，作無義事是散亂心。  
散亂隨情轉，臨終被業牽。惺悟不由情，臨終能轉業。」<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Huayan jing*, T10, no. 279, pp. 345c18-346a4; *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 1, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> This statement can be found in the biography of Zongmi (*zhongnanshan guifeng zongmi chanshi zhuan* 終南山圭峯宗密禪師傳 from the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T51, no. 2076, p. 308b6-13.

A verse from Master Guifeng [Zong]mi: "When people are aware of the purpose of what they are doing, this is known as awakened mind; When they are not aware of the purpose of what they are doing, this is called scattered mind. People with scattered minds are driven by their emotions and will be led by their karma when they die. On the contrary, people with awakened minds will not be driven by their emotions, and can change their karma when they die."

In Huihong's comment, he tells a story about a woman who became a widow at age 19, decided not to remarry, recited the *Lotus Sūtra*, had a clear mind every moment for the rest of her remaining 50 years, and was able to foresee the time of her death.<sup>59</sup> Huihong uses this woman's story to exemplify how a person could have control of his or her mind. However, while reflecting on Zongmi's words, Huihong doubts that Zongmi had great freedom when he died because he was still obstructed by intellectuality (*lizhang* 理障).

With similar judgement, Hanyue in his guiding words directly calls Zongmi a patriarch from a non-standard branch of Chan (*pangchu* 傍出) and represents the "losing side's" (*fuduo* 負墮)<sup>60</sup> view of Chan.

此舉祖家傍出道理，禪負墮之宗旨也。旁出者透徹如來禪，不墮有無四句之法，而能曲盡法奧，未得大用現前，故但見理性而不能出格。如僧那牛頭、永嘉、鳥窠、忠國師之類，雖竭玄妙，然義事未絕。故神會之下，圭峯悟圓覺妙義，而其言語偏枯如此，參禪人不可以了義之義為究竟也。<sup>61</sup>

This is a patriarchal teaching from a non-standard branch of Chan; it is the losing side's view of Chan. Those masters from the non-standard branch understand *tathāgata* Chan thoroughly and do not fall into the tetralemma about existence and non-existence. Although they penetrate the profound meaning of Dharma, they are not able to obtain and carry out the great function. That is why they only realize the truth with reasoning, but cannot surpass this.

<sup>59</sup> *Zhizheng zhuan*, X63, no. 1235, p. 171b8-9.

<sup>60</sup> The term "losing side" is also found in the *Blue Cliff Record*. In doctrinal disputes in India the winner holds a red flag in his hand, while the loser turns his clothes inside out and departs through a side door. *Foguo yunwu chanshi biyan lu*, T48, no. 2003, p. 154a10-12; *Blue Cliff Record*, translated by Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005, p. 89.

<sup>61</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 1, p. 6.

For example, monks like Niutou, Yongjia, Niaochao and National Master Zhong could exhaust mystery, but could not understand doctrine thoroughly. By contrast, in the lineage of Shenhui, Guifeng [Zongmi] realizes the profound meaning of perfect enlightenment, but his language is excessively dry (*pianku* 偏枯). Chan practitioners must not take the meaning of the ultimate teaching as ultimate.

For Zongmi, the *dhyāna* of the highest vehicle is known as *tathāgata*-purity *dhyāna* (*rulai qingjing chan* 如來清淨禪), believing “that one’s own mind is from the outset pure, that the depravities have never existed, that the nature of the wisdom without outflows is from the outset complete, that the mind is Buddha.”<sup>62</sup> To Hanyue, Zongmi only realizes truth with reasoning (*lixing* 理性) and understands the profound meaning of perfect enlightenment through *sūtra* teachings. Furthermore, Hanyue warns Chan practitioners that they should not take the meaning of ultimate teaching (*liaoyi zhi yi* 了義之義) taught in the *sūtras* as ultimate (*jiujing* 究竟). Zongmi’s *tathāgata*-purity *dhyāna* advocating a clear and pure mind with the understanding of doctrine is still not a free mind.

Hanyue’s critical attitude towards *sūtra* teachings, as well as toward Zongmi and Huihong, helps us to understand the reason why, in contrast to Huihong, who adds his comments after the cited passages, Hanyue puts his guiding words before the cited passages and Huihong’s comments. By doing this, he ensures that his audience hears his guiding words first. His guiding words usually do not repeat the cited passages or Huihong’s comments, but just point out general principles in understanding the contents in a way that is more consistent with Chan thought. This is similar with the guidelines Hanyue provides for Chan masters about how to cite passages from the *sūtras* when they teach Chan practice.

引教言參禪，須情理兩絕，無所攀緣…今學者欲以講說意度通，豈不謬哉？<sup>63</sup>

Whenever you cite *sūtra* teachings to explain Chan practice, you must first eliminate emotion and reasoning so that you are without

<sup>62</sup> Zongmi’s *Chanyuan zhuquan jidu xu* 禪源諸詮集都序, T48, no. 2015, p. 399b16-19; Jeffrey Broughton’s “Translation of the *Chan Prolegomenon*” from *Zongmi on Chan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> *Yumi shenti jiyin zunzhe zhizheng zhuan*, fascicle 2, p. 7.

attachment. ... Now, however, some intellectuals think they can penetrate Chan simply by explaining and speculating. Isn't this ridiculous?

To Hanyue, Chan masters should not cite *sūtra* teachings to explain Chan practice like lecture masters. *Sūtra* teachings could be used to supplement Chan practice only when the Chan master has eliminated his or her emotion and reasoning and has no attachment.<sup>64</sup> This is why Hanyue insisted on teaching the *Zhizheng zhuan* up to the last year of his life despite harsh criticisms from his master Miyun.

## Conclusion

Historically, many Chan masters have been regarded as defending *sūtra* teachings. Despite this, they have different approaches. Taking Zongmi and Yanshou as examples, it is easy to find long passages cited from the *sūtras* in their works. Zongmi has even written commentaries on several *sūtras*. *Sūtra* teachings and Chan are usually treated as two coexistent entities in their works. After them, in the Song, the Chan master Huihong cites a considerable number of passages from the *sūtras* and *śāstras* in his *Zhizheng zhuan* without hesitation. He looks at *sūtra* teachings as being "similar" to Chan, and in effect uses them to introduce important Buddhist concepts and tries to explain them with Chan teachings. In the late Ming, by using Huihong's *Zhizheng zhuan*, Hanyue on the one hand understands the importance and function of *sūtra* teachings well and decides to teach them; on the other hand, standing firmly on the ground of Chan, he states that Chan practitioners should not have attachment to anything, including *sūtra* teachings, because the meaning of ultimate teachings taught in the *sūtras* is not ultimate.

Of the Chan masters identified as defenders of *sūtra* teachings, Hanyue in fact has the most detached attitude. The recently discovered text, *Hanyue's Guiding Words on the Zhizheng zhuan*, first helps us to understand Hanyue's claim that the *Zhizheng zhuan* could be used to verify the authenticity of one's own enlightenment due to the lack of confirmation from a master, which was a common problem in Chan Buddhism during the late Ming. It

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<sup>64</sup> Similarly, at age 62, when Hanyue gave a public talk at Guangfu yuan 廣福院 in 1634, he emphasized that Chan practitioners should not "read" or rely on the *Zhizheng zhuan* before they attain enlightenment, *Sanfeng zangheshang yulu*, J34, no. B299, p. 157b18-19.

also shows how Hanyue uses *sūtra* teachings in response to the needs of literati in the late Ming. This is an important characteristic of Chan and *sūtra* teachings, serving as a crucial bridge between clerics and lay followers in Chinese society.

Another important characteristic of Ming dynasty Chan is Hanyue's way of dealing with *sūtra* teachings. Without separating Chan from *sūtra* teachings or equating *sūtra* teachings with Chan like Zongmi, Hanyue places Chan higher than the *sūtra* teachings and demonstrates a confident attitude by using the teachings to supplement Chan teaching or verify enlightenment experience. However, Hanyue is not the only Chan master who holds this kind of attitude. Many other Chan masters also interpret *Yogācāra*, Tiantai, Huyan, and Pure Land with Chan thought in the Ming.<sup>65</sup> This is an interesting topic that we should continue to research, using the many recently discovered rare books from the Ming and Qing dynasties, in order to complete the picture of Chan studies during this period.

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<sup>65</sup> For example, see Lin Chen-kuo's 林鎮國 paper on "When Chan Meets the Logicians: Miyun Yunwu's (1566-1642) Response in the Debate on No-Motion" presented in the International Conference on "Texts and Studies on East Asian Buddhism from the 16th to 19th Centuries (近世東亞佛教的文獻和研究)" held by Center for Buddhist Studies, Fo Guang University, Taiwan, June 2-3, 2018.



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## **Counting the Cost of Buddhist Syncretism**

*Brian Victoria*

### **Abstract**

This article explores the changes that occurred in Buddhism, both doctrinally and ethically, as a direct or indirect result of its tolerance of other faiths, particularly the indigenous animistic faiths it encountered in the course of spreading to various Asian countries. While the history of Buddhism's relationship to indigenous animistic religions differs in its particulars in each Asian country, this article suggests that the relationship between Buddhism and the animistic faith of Shintō in Japan is broadly representative of this larger, transnational phenomenon. Thus, a study of this interfaith relationship in Japan will facilitate a better understanding of the impact that Buddhism's tolerance of other faiths had on Buddhism itself.

### **Introduction**

Observant visitors to most, though not all, Buddhist temples in Japan will notice that somewhere on the temple grounds are located one or more small, architecturally incongruous buildings – Shintō shrines. To first-time Western adherents of one of the Abrahamic faiths, this is a puzzling scene, for in what Western country would one, for example, find a small Muslim mosque on the grounds of a Christian church, or a Christian chapel on the grounds of a Jewish synagogue?

It is not difficult to find textual evidence of this religious exclusivism, for it lies in the traditional intolerance of Abrahamic religions towards faiths other than their own. For example, Deuteronomy 13:6-10 of the Hebrew Bible states:

If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, “Let us go and worship other gods” (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, this intolerance is not limited to the Hebrew Bible or Judaism. In Christianity its echoes may be seen in the Crusaders of the 11-13<sup>th</sup> centuries who, when killing Muslims and Jews, shouted, “God wills it!” This was followed by multiple Christian Inquisitions from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards as well as long and bloody confrontations between Catholics and Protestants. And, of course, the persecution and death of infidels and apostates has a long history in Islam extending to the present day and so-called Islamic terrorism. However, it is noteworthy that Islam has been the most tolerant of the three Abrahamic faiths, at least with regard to Jews and Christians: they are recognized as fellow “people of the Book (Bible)”. Yet this Islamic tolerance does not extend to non-Abrahamic faiths. The Taliban’s destruction of the “idolatrous” Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan in March 2001 is but one recent example.

By comparison, Buddhism’s historical willingness to live side by side with other faiths may be considered exemplary. For example, the Buddhist King Aśoka (aka Piyadasi), r. c. 268 to 232 BCE, wrote in one of his famous stone edicts:

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, honors both ascetics and the householders of all religions, and he honors them with gifts and honors

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<sup>1</sup> Text according to the New International Version of the Bible.

of various kinds. . . . One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.

In a more contemporary expression of Buddhist tolerance and the thinking behind it, the American Theravāda Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi wrote: “Buddhist tolerance springs from the recognition that the dispositions and spiritual needs of human beings are too vastly diverse to be encompassed by any single teaching, and thus that these needs will naturally find expression in a wide variety of religious forms”.<sup>2</sup>

As admirable as Buddhist tolerance of other religions is, this tolerance raises a question that has seldom been explored. Namely, what cost did Buddhism have to pay doctrinally and ethically for its tolerance of other faiths, in particular the indigenous animistic faiths it encountered. By “animism” is meant the belief that all natural things, such as plants, animals, rocks, trees and the sun, can have spirits and influence human events.<sup>3</sup> While it is true that Buddhism had a significant impact on indigenous animistic faiths, was Buddhism itself able to escape being significantly altered in the process?

This article is a preliminary exploration of this topic. It will explore the interaction that took place in Japan between Buddhism and the animistic faith that later came to be called Shintō (Way of the *Kami*). One reason for this exploration is that Shintō, albeit rooted in animistic practices dating from prehistory, remains a popular, vibrant and organizationally independent religion in Japan. Shintō and Buddhism have a long history of interaction.

The history of Buddhism’s relationship to indigenous animistic religions differs in particulars in each of the Asian countries which Buddhism penetrated, but the relationship between Buddhism and Shintō in Japan is broadly representative of what may be called this larger, transnational phenomenon. As Buddhist scholar Richard Gombrich notes:

The system which complements Buddhism by dealing with matters of this world varies from country to country. In Japan it is called Shinto. In the Theravadin societies of Sri Lanka and

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<sup>2</sup> Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. “Tolerance and Diversity.” Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 5 June 2010. Available on the Web at: [http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay\\_24.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_24.html) (accessed 07-22-2018).

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus. Cambridge University Press.

continental southeast Asia it has no all-embracing indigenous name, and modern anthropologists have used such names as 'the spirit religion' and 'the spirit cults'. . . . Despite the lack of a local name for the system as a whole, it is indeed a system and closely comparable to Shinto.<sup>4</sup>

### **Early conflict between Buddhism and Japan's indigenous faith**

The relationship between Buddhism and Japan's indigenous religious practices was in the beginning far from harmonious. Unsurprisingly, those responsible for the conduct of indigenous religious rituals at the nascent imperial court viewed Buddhism as a threat, not least to their own position. The struggle occurred between contending members of the Soga and Mononobe clans. In 552 the king of the Korean kingdom of Paekche sent a statue of the Buddha to Emperor Kimmei (r. 531-71), hoping this gift would lead to the formation of a military alliance with Japan. Although Japan ultimately refused the king's entreaty, the head of the Soga clan, Soga no Iname, favored accepting the statue inasmuch as it was widely worshipped in foreign lands. On the other hand, Mononobe no Okoshi, head of the militarily strong Mononobe clan, opposed acceptance of the statue, claiming that "the *kami* (Shintō deities) of our land will be offended if we worship a foreign *kami*".<sup>5</sup>

### **The Buddha as a Deity**

Both of the clans struggling over the acceptance or rejection of the Buddha agreed that he was a *kami*, i.e. an animistic deity with superhuman powers and a personality.<sup>6</sup> This agreement would eventually lead to the formulation of the well-known Japanese phrases *shinbutsu shūgō* (unification of *kami* and Buddhas) and *shinbutsu ichinyo* (*kami* and Buddhas are one). Thus, the struggle was not one between two separate religions, but, instead, whether or not a foreign deity, of the same character as indigenous deities, was more powerful than indigenous deities. In other words, the critical question was whether the Buddha's alleged magical powers were superior to those of indigenous deities.

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<sup>4</sup> Gombrich, "A Buddhologist's Impression of Japanese Buddhism." In *Japanese New Religions in the West*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Tamura, *Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Initially it appeared that the Buddha was the loser. When a plague subsequently broke out, the Mononobe clan was quick to blame the worship of a foreign deity. This resulted in the image of the Buddha being unceremoniously dumped in the nearby Naniwa canal. However, when still later Soga no Umako fell ill, Emperor Kimmei's successor, Emperor Bidatsu (r. 572-585) allowed the image to be restored in hope of curing Umako's illness. It was not until 587, however, that the issue was finally settled thanks to the Soga clan's military defeat of the Mononobe, a feat ascribed to the Buddha's protection.

The Soga clan prevailed due to the Buddha's association with the powerful continental civilizations of Korea and China. These countries, Japanese leaders believed, could not have become as powerful as they were without the support of equally powerful deities. As Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga note, Buddhism was "merely regarded . . . as a possible superior form of magic long practiced by the advanced civilizations they respected and sought to emulate".<sup>7</sup> Thus it is not surprising to learn that the first Japanese emperor personally to espouse Buddhism, i.e. Yōmei (r. 585-587), did so to enlist the aid of the Medicine Buddha, Yakushi (Skt. Bhaiṣajyaguru), in curing his grave illness.

### **The Buddha as Guardian of the State**

To this day, miraculous cures remain attributed in Japan to various Buddhas, bodhisattvas and even certain Buddhist clerics. However, there was one additional area in which the magical powers ascribed to one or another of the Buddhas introduced to Japan was even more important than curing illness: protection of the state. This is hardly surprising in that sixth century Japan was still a confederation of clans only nominally under control of the Yamato clan and its head, the emperor. This magical power could be accessed through the adoption of three sutras – the *Golden Light Sutra* (Skt. *Suvarṇaprabhā sōttamasūtreन्द्रarājah*), the *Sutra on the Benevolent King* (Ch., *Rén Wáng Jīng*), and the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*). Elaborate ceremonial recitations of these sutras were held, and, as Tamura notes, "Most of the temples were built to ensure the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' protection of the nation".<sup>8</sup>

The *Golden Light Sutra* teaches that the Four Heavenly Kings protect a ruler who governs his country in the proper manner. This sutra was highly esteemed

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<sup>7</sup> Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism* (Vol. I), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Tamura, *Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History*, p. 40.



for the protection it offered not only in Japan but also in China and Korea, where it was publicly recited to ward off threats and disasters. In China it was first read at a court ceremony during the Tang dynasty around 660, and in Korea when the state of Silla defeated the state of Paekche in 663. When in 741 Japanese Emperor Shōmu (r. 724-749) founded provincial monasteries for monks and nuns in each province, he designated them as “Temples for Protection of the State by the Four Heavenly Kings Golden Light Sutra” (J. & Ch., 金光明經四天王護国之寺). The 20 monks who lived in each of these temples regularly recited the *Golden Light Sutra* to protect the country.

Following Buddhism’s acceptance in Japan, many powerful clans also erected their own temples. As Miyata Koichi notes, “Each clan had autonomy and the right to govern their land and people directly. The heads of the clans could make some of their people become priests without restraint and make them dwell in their clan temples to pray for the clan’s prosperity”.<sup>9</sup> Once again, Buddhas were invoked for the decidedly worldly benefits their worship would produce. It was not until 701 that the central government was sufficiently powerful to bring all male and female clerics under its strict control, including permission to be ordained.

The *Sutra on the Benevolent King*, also known as *Inwang-gyeong* in Korean and *Ninnō-gyō* in Japanese, is purported to be a translation from Sanskrit, though it is generally believed to be an apocryphal text first composed in China. The *Sutra on the Benevolent King* is unusual because, unlike most sutras, its target audience is not *arhats* or *bodhisattvas* but the kings of sixteen ancient countries in India. Further, instead of expounding on the merits of meditation and wisdom, the virtues of benevolence and forbearance are promoted as the most important criteria for a ruler to possess.

In Japan, a ceremonial lecture on the *Sutra on the Benevolent King* was first held at court in 660. Stress was placed on a passage stating that when a foreign threat appears, 100 demons or gods will protect the king if he will make 100 images of the Buddha and invite 100 priests to lecture on it. Such protection was of no idle concern to the government at the time, given that a military alliance between the governments of the Chinese Tang dynasty and the Korean state of Silla had defeated Paikche, a second Korean state, and were threatening Japan. The ceremony was thus of critical importance to the emperor and his court.

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<sup>9</sup> Miyata, “The Acceptance and Impact of the Lotus Sutra in Japan,” *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol 11, p. 124.

The *Lotus Sutra* is without doubt the most famous and influential sutra in East Asian Buddhism, especially in Japan. It is considered to bestow innumerable benefits on believers, including protection of the state. Rōben (689-773) was the first Buddhist priest to hold a ceremonial lecture on the *Lotus Sutra* in 749, something destined to become an annual event sponsored by the government. Included in the ceremony were prayers for the prosperity of the Imperial House and noble families, security of the state, and a rich harvest, all of which were integral to the protection of the state. Additionally, the *Lotus Sutra* was chanted to ensure recovery from disease and used in memorial services for deceased parents and ancestors. For example, as early as 726 Emperor Shōmu ordered additional copies of the *Lotus Sutra* to be made in order to pray for the recovery of his aunt, retired Empress Genshō (r. 715-724). When she died in 748, Emperor Shōmu ordered 1000 copies of the *Lotus Sutra* to be produced as part of her memorial service.

### **The Emperor as a Buddha**

One temple in particular became the center of the state-protecting cult: Tōdaiji temple in Nara. Nara was established as Japan's first permanent capital in 710, part of the process of creating a strong, unified and centralized government. As the cultic center of this effort, Tōdaiji was chosen as the site for Rōben's first ceremonial lecture on the *Lotus Sutra*. Moreover, Tōdaiji served as the headquarters of the state-protecting monasteries established by Emperor Shōmu, one in each province of Japan.

Befitting its leading position, Tōdaiji's main hall was completed in 757. Housed in what was then the largest wooden building in the world was a "Great Buddha" statue, i.e. Mahāvairocana, a universal Buddha regarded as a symbol of the unity of the cosmos. Mahāvairocana's cosmic, universal nature served as the ideal embodiment of Emperor Shōmu's desire for a unified nation-state. Additionally, Vairocana's name in Sino-Japanese is Dainichi (lit. Great Sun [Buddha]).

Legend states that in order to gain approval for the construction of Dainichi's statue, Emperor Shōmu sent the Buddhist priest Gyōgi (668-748) to the paramount Shintō shrine of Ise to seek the approval of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Gyōgi spent seven days and nights reciting sutras until the oracle declared Mahāvairocana compatible with worship of the Sun Goddess. The shrine oracle's response suggested that Dainichi was the universal essence of the indigenous Sun Goddess. This identification, in turn, enhanced Shōmu's

position, for like emperors before him, he was regarded as a descendant of the Sun Goddess. Thanks to the oracle, Shōmu could be connected to a universal Buddha in the celestial sphere, further justifying his reign on earth. Whatever other virtues Japanese Buddhism may have had, it was definitely a valuable tool in the hands of the state.

### A Shintō/Bodhisattva “God of War”

A good argument can be made that Buddhism cannot be held responsible for the manner in which Buddha(s) were deified and used for political purposes in Japan by its secular authorities. However, as Yoshio Tamura notes: “[Japanese Buddhist priests] certainly were aware of the Buddhist rejection of reality and its supramundane claims, but their awareness failed to give birth to any resistance to secular rule”.<sup>10</sup> The identification of Mahāvairocana/Dainichi with the Sun Goddess marked only the beginning of a doctrinal process that in following centuries culminated in the emergence of the Japanese Buddhist doctrine of *honji-suijaku* (lit. true nature-manifestation). According to this concept, Shintō *kami* were regarded as local manifestations (*suijaku*) of universal Buddhas as well as bodhisattvas.

The underlying elements of the *honji-suijaku* doctrine were not an invention of Japanese Buddhism, for its roots can be traced back to early Buddhism, perhaps even to the time of the founder himself. Early Buddhists regarded *devas* (gods) as supernatural beings who were capable of being converted and realizing Enlightenment. However, in order to attain Enlightenment, *devas* first needed to be reborn as humans in the human world. Nevertheless, they were assigned roles as guardians of the Dharma.

In Japan the Tendai sect, like its Chinese antecedent T’ien T’ai, regarded the *Lotus Sūtra* as composed of two parts. The first consisted of a description of the historical Buddha, i.e. the phenomenal manifestation of the Buddha Dharma. The second half, however, explicated the Absolute in the form of the Original Buddha. This division is also found in the esoteric *Dainichikyō* (Skt. *Mahāvairocana Sutra*), in which *Dainichi* is regarded as the Original or Absolute Buddha.

Although firmly rooted in the Buddhist tradition of assimilation, the *honji-suijaku* doctrine promulgated in Japan did contain one unique feature: “the *kami* or *suijaku* is afforded a philosophical equality with its Buddha or bodhisattva

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<sup>10</sup> Tamura, *Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History*, p. 38.

*honji*".<sup>11</sup> In India, it was not until the rise of Tantrism in the 5th to 7th centuries of the common era that native deities achieved a degree of equality with Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

On the one hand, the granting of equality on the part of Japanese Buddhists may be considered a magnanimous gesture, a further sign of Buddhist tolerance. At the same time there was no doubt an element of self-interest in granting this status, since it contributed to Buddhism's acceptance in Japan. Yet it can also be regarded as a denigration of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, in that they were reduced to the status of *kami*, i.e. powerful supramundane beings whose main function was to grant blessings in response to believers' petitions.

A further element of the *honji-suijaku* doctrine is the concept of a *gongen*, lit. incarnation, according to which Buddhas and bodhisattvas choose to manifest themselves in the form of a *kami* in order to save sentient beings. This concept was rooted in the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of *upāya* or "expedient/skillful means" whereby a teaching, technique, etc., though not ultimately true in the highest sense, may nevertheless be helpful in bringing the practitioner closer to true realization. In other words, *upāya* refers to skillfully adapting one's message to the intended audience. This understanding also reinforced the belief that *kami* (*suijaku*) were the equals of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji*).

By the end of the eighth century it was possible for certain *kami*, who had allegedly converted to Buddhism, to acquire the title of 'bodhisattva', albeit not yet a full-fledged Buddha. The first to receive this honor was a *kami* by the name of Hachiman, originally a Shintō god of war whose roots can be traced to two semi-legendary rulers: Empress Jingu and her son, Emperor Ōjin (r. 270-310?). Both of these figures were regarded as avatars of Hachiman due to their great feats in both warfare and culture – Jingu for her invasion of Korea, and Ōjin for inviting Chinese and Korean scholars to Japan.

Hachiman's first connection to Buddhism occurred in 747 when, as the chief deity of Usa Shrine on the southern island of Kyushu, he issued an oracle expressing his wish to travel to Tōdaiji to pay homage to the Great Buddha. A shrine maiden transported Hachiman to Tōdaiji, where he was installed as the temple's official protector. This subsequently led to various Shintō *kami* being incorporated as protectors of Buddhist temples throughout the country. Even today one can see these guardian deities honored in small Shintō shrines located on temple grounds.

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<sup>11</sup> Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism* (Vol. I), p. 239.

It is noteworthy that Shintō deities were relegated to the role of protecting Buddhist temples, not the other way round. Their role as protectors was justified on the basis that, like all sentient beings, *kami* were suffering creatures seeking to escape their present condition and attain Enlightenment. Buddhist priests created a series of tales describing the desire of various *kami* to receive Buddhist teachings, thereby overcoming the negative karma that had caused them to remain as no more than deities. Some *kami*, it was claimed, even expressed their desire to become Buddhists by taking refuge in the Three Treasures, i.e. Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

In the following centuries, Shintō clergy accepted (no doubt unwillingly) what was essentially second class status for themselves and their deities. This included Buddhist control of major Shintō shrines as embodied in the construction of *jinguji* (shrine-temples), built with the encouragement of the government. At these shrine-temples, Buddhist priests recited Buddhist sutras for the sake of the *kami* who had, it was claimed, decided to protect the foreign faith in hopes of spiritual advancement. However, by relegating *kami* to a second class status, Buddhism laid the groundwork for its own suppression more than 1,000 years later.

In 937 Hachiman was officially declared to be a bodhisattva, the first of many *kami* to be given this status. In effect Hachiman had completed his transition to a Buddhist deity although Shintōists continued to view him as one of their own. This resulted in Buddhist monks being given the responsibility for interpreting Hachiman's oracular proclamations. Hachiman proved so popular that he was eventually elevated to the rank of Great Bodhisattva (J. *Daibosatsu*) with his duties expanded to become the guardian of all Tōdaiji's subordinate temples in the provinces. Befitting his martial image, Hachiman's symbol was originally that of a bow and arrow, the ancient weapon of choice of Japan's warriors. In his Buddhist incarnation, however, Hachiman was depicted in the form of a Buddhist priest both on scrolls and in statuary.

One of Japan's greatest religious leaders was Kūkai (aka Kōbō-Daishi, 774-835), founder of the esoteric Shingon (True Word/Mantra) school of Buddhism. In 816, when Kūkai was searching for a suitable spot to establish a mountain retreat on Mount Kōya, legend states that he came across a hunter whose two dogs, one black and one white, led him to a hidden valley. The hunter was considered to be the son of the Shintō goddess Niutsuhime, i.e. Princess Niutsu, who readily granted him permission to build his monastery on her land. This event marked Kūkai's recognition of the existence of *kami* and led to the building

of shrines throughout the mountain. These shrines were serviced by Shingon sect priests, and the deities they enshrined were, like Hachiman at Tōdaiji, believed to protect the monastic compound. This event also contributed to the creation of similar Shintō shrines on the grounds of other Buddhist temples throughout the country.

In the 11th century the militarily powerful Minamoto clan selected Hachiman as its tutelary deity in order to claim descent from Emperor Ōjin. Minamoto Yorinobu (968-1048) made this claim in 1046, and his son Yoriyoshi (988-1075) strengthened the family ties to Hachiman by crediting the deity for his victory over the Abe clan in 1062. When the Minamoto and Taira clans went to war in the Gempei War of 1180–1185, Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199), founder of the Kamakura Shōgunate, first put on ceremonial robes and bowed towards the Iwashimizu Hachiman shrine, requesting Hachiman's protection. Hachiman's greatest alleged triumph, however, occurred at the time when Japan faced repeated Mongol invasions in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The deity was credited with responding to prayers for divine intervention by sending the *kamikaze*, lit. 'kami wind', in the form of typhoons, to destroy the two Mongol invasion fleets sent by Kublai Khan in 1274 and 1281.

Thus it is not surprising that during the Asia-Pacific War of 1937-45 Hachiman was once again called upon to protect Japan, this time from Allied invasion. In this instance, his protection took the form of the aptly named *kamikaze* suicidal (and futile) air attacks. With some 25,000 shrines dedicated to him, Hachiman remains a popular deity to this day, as both a Shintō god and a Buddhist bodhisattva.

### **Kannon as a “God of War”**

If a Shintō *kami* could become a Buddhist bodhisattva, it is perhaps not surprising that a bodhisattva could be turned into a *kami*, at least in function. This is exactly what happened to possibly the most popular bodhisattva in East Asia, i.e. Kannon (Skt. Avalokiteśvara). Inasmuch as Kannon is the Buddhist personification of compassion, this bodhisattva would appear to be the least likely of the pantheon of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas to play the role of Hachiman, a god of war. To some extent, this transformation in Japan was foreshadowed by what had already occurred in China. In Chinese art Kannon (Ch. Guānyīn) is sometimes depicted flanked by two warriors. The two warriors are the historical General Guan Yu (d. 220) of the late Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) and the

warrior representation of the bodhisattva Skanda.<sup>12</sup> With Kannon in the center, these three figures are understood to protect both the temple where they are enshrined and Buddhism itself.

In Japan Kannon was turned into a god of war by the Minamoto clan, specifically Minamoto Yoritomo. As noted above, Yoritomo initially prayed to Hachiman for his clan's protection at the time of the Gempei War. Nevertheless in 1189 Yoritomo had a personal temple built that became known as the Hokke-dō (lit. "Lotus Sutra hall") after his death in 1199. The main object of worship chosen by Yoritomo was a 6 cm silver statue of Shō-Kannon (lit. holy/proper Kannon). Given its small size, this statue is likely to be the one Yoritomo always carried under his helmet, inserted in his hair topknot, during battle.<sup>13</sup> Due to the alleged unity of *kami* and deified Buddhas/bodhisattvas, Yoritomo was able to enjoy the protection of figures in both religions.

It is certainly possible to argue, as Buddhist scholar John Nelson does, that in Japan, if not all of East Asia, Kannon is no longer a specifically Buddhist deity. Nelson states:

Kannon has been so widely dispersed in Japanese culture, like the air one breathes, she has become part of the social and cultural landscape in ways that transcend sectarian doctrine. . . . Perhaps we are limiting the possibilities by thinking of Kannon as a specifically Buddhist deity. Surely it makes as much sense in the context of the Japanese religious culture to see her role as similar to that of a Shinto *kami* – specific to the situations of any place and its people, and attentive to sincere petitions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Skanda, also known as Wei Tuo in Chinese, is a Mahāyāna bodhisattva regarded as a devoted guardian of Buddhist monasteries who also guards the teachings of Buddhism. Skanda is depicted as a young man fully clad in the armor and headgear of a Chinese general, and is usually depicted leaning on a vajra-shaped sword. Son of Śiva and commander-in-chief of the army of the devas (gods), Skanda came into Buddhism from Hinduism. One of his other names is Kārtikeya, the Hindu god of war. Skanda may also be a manifestation of Vajrapāṇi, a bodhisattva who bears some relation to Skanda because they both wield vajras as weapons, are portrayed with flaming halos, and are both heavenly protectors of Buddhism. Alternatively, Skanda may be connected through Vajrapāṇi to Greco-Buddhism, as Skanda's image is reminiscent of the depiction of Vajrapāṇi as Heracles.

<sup>13</sup> See reference in "Miraculous Japanese Legends About Kannon" section of Kannon Notebook, Buddhist Statuary. Available on the Web at: <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/kannon.shtml> (accessed 08-15-2018).

<sup>14</sup> John Nelson, "From Battlefield to Atomic Bomb to the Pure Land of Paradise: Employing





*Skanda in Japan*

Further supporting Nelson's argument is the fact that in Shintō art yet another form of Kannon, Jūichimen Kannon (Eleven-Headed Kannon, Skt. Ekādaśamukha), is a common choice as the *honji-butsu* (Buddhist counterpart) of female Shintō deities. Indeed, Jūichimen Kannon is one of the two most common choices as *honji-butsu* to the Shintō Sun Goddess Amaterasu. As previously noted, the other common Buddhist identification of the Sun Goddess is Dainichi/Vairocana Buddha. Yet the question must be asked, isn't this easy identification of Buddhas and bodhisattvas with animistic *kami* problematic? For example, when Buddhas and bodhisattvas become identified with gods of war, what happens to Buddhism's first ethical precept, not to take life?

### **Buddhas as gods of war**

It was not only bodhisattvas who were capable of becoming gods of war. Buddhas, especially Amida (Skt. Amitābha), was also capable of playing this role. The great warlord and ultimate unifier of medieval Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543 -1616), exemplifies this possibility. Ieyasu was a devoted follower of the Jōdo (Pure Land) sect, of which the chief object of veneration is Amida Buddha. Ieyasu had the Pure Land temple of Zōjōji relocated to Edo (present-day Tokyo) in 1598. Thereafter Zōjōji became the family temple of the Tokugawa clan and the site of a grand cathedral.

One of the smaller forty-eight attached temples built on Zōjōji's spacious grounds was Ankokuden. The following description of this temple can be found on the English language version of the temple's contemporary website:

Enshrined in this building is the Black Image of Amida Buddha, which was deeply worshiped by Tokugawa Ieyasu. This wonder-working image is said to have repeatedly saved Ieyasu from dangers and enabled him to win battles. Since the Edo period [1603-1868], it has been widely revered as a Buddhist image which brings victory and wards off evils.<sup>15</sup>

However, whether by design or accident, it is not until one reads Zōjōji's explanation of this "Black Image" in *Japanese* that one learns the process by which it became black:

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the Bodhisattva of Compassion to Calm Japan's Spirits of the Dead," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 1, no. 2 (2002): pp. 160-61.

15 Available on the Web at: <https://www.zojoji.or.jp/en> (accessed 08-20-2018) .

Tokugawa Ieyasu deeply revered the statue of Amida Buddha said to be the work of Eshin Sozu (aka Genshin)[942-1017]. Ieyasu carried it to battlefield campsites where he prayed for victory. After Ieyasu's death, it was presented to Zōjōji where, during the Edo period, it was widely believed to be a miraculous Buddha ensuring luck at winning and eliminating misfortune. Its name "Kurohonzon" (lit. black principal image of worship) comes from having been darkened by incense smoke offered at campsites over the years and is also due to Amida's willingness to accept in his own body the wrongdoings and misfortunes of others, thereby contributing to turning his body black. Tradition states it was Ieyasu who named the statue.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Minimoto Yoritomo's miniature Kannon, the black statute of Amida Buddha was full-sized, so large that it had to be transported to battlefield camps in a special case mounted on wheels. Further, it became black due to the smoke emanating from countless campfires, not just incense. However, the most surprising feature of the above description, whether in English or Japanese, is that the contemporary Zōjōji-affiliated priests who placed this description on the temple's website did not hesitate to claim that Amida Buddha not only saved Ieyasu from dangers but "enabled him to win battles". In making this claim they clearly support the idea that Amida is a god of war.

As for Ieyasu, while yet alive he expressed the wish to be deified after his death in order to protect his descendants from evil. Accordingly, he was posthumously deified with the name Tōshō Daigongen, the "Great Gongen, Light of the East". This signifies, as previously noted, that Ieyasu regarded himself as nothing less than a Buddha appearing on Earth in the shape of a *kami* to save sentient beings. In this we can see that the emperor was not the only one to justify his rule through claiming linkage to cosmic Buddhist figures.

No doubt some would argue that the preceding reference notwithstanding, it is incorrect to label Amida, let alone Hachiman or Kannon, as gods of war. After all, the vast majority of prayers made to them are for *protection*, not killing or victory. In reality, this is exactly the nature of the prayer political leaders and military chaplains of every faith, past and present, make to their respective deities as the faithful go into battle. For example, in ending his speech on Afghanistan

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<sup>16</sup> Available on the Web at: <http://www.zojoji.or.jp/info/history.html> (accessed 08-20-2018).

of July 6, 2016, US President Barack Obama called on God to “bless our troops and all who serve to protect us”. Would it be accurate to claim that in asking for God’s blessing Obama had changed the Judeo-Christian God into a god of war?

As difficult as this question may seem, the answer is clear if one but considers how to determine whether the deity in question answered prayers for protection. Those warriors who are the beneficiaries of the deity’s protection return safely from battle, while the enemy, who has no such protection (or protection offered by an ineffective/false deity), are all killed. In ensuring this result, the deity whose protection is sought has effectively been turned into a god of war. In the case of Buddhism, is it conceivable, doctrinally speaking, that Buddhas and bodhisattvas could act to ensure the deaths of the vast numbers of combatants who inevitably die in warfare?

## Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge once again that what happened to Buddhism in Japan is, except in its particulars, certainly not limited to that country alone. For example, it is clear that Buddha(s) and bodhisattvas were deified long before their arrival in Japan, beginning perhaps as long ago as the creation of the first Buddhist statuary some two thousand years ago. While Buddhist statues may have initially been created to recall the founder, it did not take long for certain of them to be regarded, at least by some adherents, as possessing magical powers. For example, the Mahāyāna “Medicine Buddha” emerged prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE in India. According to the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* (Skt. Bhaiṣajya-guru-vaiḍūrya-prabhā-rāja Sutra) this Buddha, while yet a bodhisattva, vowed to cure any form of illness, assist the poor, feed the starving, etc. for those devotees who recited his *mantra* or even just heard his name. The Medicine Buddha has been particularly popular in China, where he is depicted as one of three prominent Buddhas, together with Śākyamuni and Amitābha (Amida) Buddhas.

In addition, the belief that Buddhas could act as protectors of a nation and its rulers has clear antecedents in both China and Korea, if not other Asian nations. In Korea, for example, this function of Buddhism was known as *hoguk pulgyo* (state-protecting Buddhism). During the Koryō period (918-1392), lectures were held on Buddhist sutras and elaborate ceremonies conducted to ensure the safety of the state. The *hoguk pulgyo* tradition continued during the following Joseon period (1392-1897), but this time monks took up arms and fought against successive Japanese invasions from 1592 through 1598.

Buddhism has, moreover, co-existed, if not coalesced, with animistic deities in every country to which it has spread. In Thailand, for example, houses for the guardian spirit of a place, *san phra phum* in Thai, are found throughout the country, mounted on a pillar or dais. The long-standing tradition is to leave offerings of food and drink at the spirit house, rice, bananas, and coconuts being among the most common offerings. It is believed that friendly spirits will congregate in the spirit houses to enjoy free food and drink, thereby serving to keep more malign spirits at bay. Given the widespread and enduring presence of animistic practices like these throughout Buddhist Asia, what happened in Japan was no aberration in Buddhist history, but just one additional example in a long line of similar developments. If there are lessons to be learned from these developments, they certainly extend far beyond Japan.

As for Japan, the Japanese have two folk sayings that seem relevant in this situation. The first is: *shū ni majiwareba, akaku naru* (If you rub up against a stick of vermillion, you'll become red.) As has been observed, Buddhism in Japan took on many of the characteristics of the Shintō faith, to the point that, at least in the eyes of many laity, there is today little doctrinal difference between the two faiths. As previously noted, this identity is expressed by the term *shinbutsu shūgō* (the unity of *kami* and Buddhas). This does not mean, however, that there were no Buddhist leaders who recognized that Buddhism was significantly different from Shintō. For example, while Shinran (1173-1263), founder of the Jōdo Shin (True Pure Land) sect, acknowledged the existence of *kami*, he believed they were irrelevant in comparison to the power of Amida Buddha. As a result, associated amulets and other charms, so ubiquitous today at all large Shintō shrines and many Buddhist temples, are not sold at Jōdo Shin sect temples.

From a purely pragmatic viewpoint, a good argument can be made that had Buddhism not initially accommodated itself to the indigenous animistic traditions of the host country it would have been impossible to take root in Japan (or other Asian countries). Furthermore, this accommodation was far more humane than the strenuous efforts of the Abrahamic faiths to physically eradicate the animistic faiths they encountered. From a Buddhist viewpoint, the proposition can be advanced that Buddhism's accommodation to animistic faiths was a form of *upāya* or skillful means: rather than seeking to destroy indigenous faiths, reconciliation with them was seen as the first step in leading their adherents on the path to understanding Buddhism's true ethos.

Buddhist scholar Richard Gombrich provides a positive interpretation of the relationship between the two religions, stressing their mutual, though hierarchical, complementarity:

When, therefore, Japanologists say that Japanese Buddhists have two religions, because they hold Shinto weddings, but Buddhist funerals, they are pointing to a feature which has been common to Buddhists everywhere. Since Buddhism is a pure soteriology, those Buddhists who live in the world, and to the extent that they live in the world, need another system to supply their worldly needs, notably that orderly continuation of society which marriage is designed to ensure. . . .

At the same time, however, the complementarity between Buddhism and the local spirit religion is hierarchic: Buddhism, from its own point of view as a soteriology, is superior to the spirit religion and in a way subsumes it, since it sets the cosmological framework and prescribes the overarching values. The Japanese tradition of attaching Buddhist priests to Shinto shrines to bring the gods within the Buddhist fold and thus serve their spiritual needs, a practice which was stopped by the modernism of the Meiji Restoration, exemplifies this hierarchic complementarity, as does the Theravadin system of offering the merit accruing from Buddhist acts of piety to the gods in exchange for their material help and protection.<sup>17</sup>

In support of Gombrich's position one can point to what may be viewed as today's 'division of labor' between the two faiths. Ritualistically speaking, Shintō currently has a near monopoly on life's happier moments, e.g. birth-related celebrations and the conduct of marriage ceremonies, something Gombrich describes as meeting "worldly needs". On the other hand, Japanese Buddhism has a near monopoly on life's ultimate sadness, i.e. funerary rituals and repeated memorial services for the deceased extending up to 100 hundred years or more. This is because, as Gombrich elaborates, "The only life crisis which it is normal for Buddhism to solemnize is death, because death is an apt occasion for pondering on ultimate concerns".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gombrich, "A Buddhologist's Impression of Japanese Buddhism." In *Japanese New Religions in the West*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



Gombrich's insights are both accurate and insightful in establishing a theoretical construct for understanding the positive relationship between the two faiths. However, the question is, do they explain the entirety of that relationship? Has the nearly 1500-year close relationship between these two faiths in Japan had no negative impact on Buddhist doctrine and ethics?

As this article demonstrates, the negative impact of this close relationship is equally clear. In short, what happened in Japan, if not in other Asian countries, is that Buddhism devolved into yet another *transactional* religion. This means that Buddhas and bodhisattvas were transformed into supramundane deities who, when properly propitiated, were believed to bestow abundant secular blessings, including on the battlefield, to those who worshipped them.

Just how at odds this development was with Buddhism's traditional teachings can be seen, among other things, in the teaching of the *Ittha Sutta*. In this sutra, the Buddha lists five things people commonly pray for, i.e. long life, beauty, happiness, status, and rebirth in heaven. He goes on to say, "'Now, I tell you, these five things are not to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes'.<sup>19</sup> This teaching of the Buddha was echoed in the stone edicts written by King Aśoka. As Gombrich notes, "[Aśoka] says that people go in for all sorts of ceremonies on family occasions such as marriages, and women especially perform all kinds of paltry and useless rites for good luck, but the only rewarding ceremony is to practise *dhamma* (Skt. *dharma*). . . ."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, when Buddhas and bodhisattvas are turned into transactional deities who bestow the blessings people commonly pray for, they have turned the Buddha's message into the mirror opposite of what he taught. Further, when these blessings are believed to be acquired through the practice of elaborate and costly rituals, e.g. Buddhist funerals in today's Japan, the betrayal of the Buddha's teachings is only compounded, for the Buddha taught that rituals were useless apart from a very few ceremonies related to Sangha affairs such as full ordination.<sup>21</sup> This is truly an illustration of a second Japanese folk saying, "*miiratori wa miira ni natta* (The person searching for a mummy became a mummy). In other words, what passes for Buddhism in Japan, on the whole, has become a moribund, if not *mummified*, religion – the very opposite of its liberating purpose.

<sup>19</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans. Ittha Sutta. Available on the Web at: [http://buddhasutra.com/files/ittha\\_sutta.htm](http://buddhasutra.com/files/ittha_sutta.htm) (accessed 09-26-2018).

<sup>20</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> The comments concerning the Buddha's teaching regarding the overall uselessness of ritual were shared by Richard Gombrich in an e-mail message to the author on March 7, 2018.



Expressed in Buddhist terminology, it can be argued that the Buddhist acceptance of *kami* as a form of *upāya* never led to a broad or deep understanding of the Buddha Dharma in Japan. On the contrary, the alleged unity of *kami* with Buddhas and bodhisattvas came to be, for all intents and purposes, a permanent replacement, even a refutation, of the Buddha's essential message. In other words, it was the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who ended up as blessing-bestowing *kami*, not the other way around. Buddhist priests were left with little more to do than conduct funerals and memorial services, turning Japanese Buddhism as a whole into today's "funerary Buddhism" (J. *sōshiki bukkyō*).

The final result is what many find to be the greatest danger Japanese Buddhism has ever faced, a danger even greater than the severe threat Buddhism faced at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912). At that time outside forces attempted to physically eradicate Buddhism in a movement known as "abolish Buddhism and destroy Shākyamuni" (J. *haibutsu kishaku*). That movement resulted in the destruction of hundreds if not thousands of Buddhist temples and paralleled the Japanese government's decision strongly to encourage Shinto practices which emphasized the emperor as a divine descendant of the Sun Goddess. Government control over shrine finances and the training of priests was used to accomplish this goal. This essentially political program, popularly known as "State Shintō" (J. *kokka Shintō*), was created by the Japanese government to promote national unity and absolute obedience to the emperor's dictates. It would last until Japan's defeat in WW II.

Unsurprisingly, Shintōists enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to free themselves from a thousand years of Buddhist control at the time of the Meiji Restoration. No longer was Shintō relegated to a subservient position, one in which Shintōists were expected to protect the Buddhist faith. At long last Shintō could be independent, even though the cost of this independence was the requirement that Shintō leaders support the policies of the Japanese government without question.

As Japan expanded and became an empire in the 1900s, Shintō became an important spiritual support mechanism justifying Japanese expansion. This may be considered the Achilles heel of not just Shintō but all animistic faiths: they are easily captured by the tribal or ethnic *Zeitgeist*, especially in wartime. Thus Shintō leaders readily supported the political policies of their ethnic leaders, no matter how aggressive those policies might be. With Shintō's support, the Japanese people were taught to regard Japan as a divine land, protected by *kami*, and ruled over by a divine emperor.

Buddhism's reaction to this momentous change in its fortunes was both dramatic and far-reaching. Inasmuch as this was a long and complicated affair, however, it is a story for another day. Suffice it to say that Buddhism was, in the long term, weakened substantially. Nevertheless, it is no exaggeration to say that the danger Japanese Buddhism faces today is even greater than what occurred when it was under direct assault.

Today the danger Buddhism faces is simply its growing irrelevance to Japanese life. Even its past near monopoly in funerary rites is being challenged by a growing trend to conduct secular, and less expensive, memorial services with minimal or no priestly involvement. A 2015 article in *The Guardian Weekly* noted:

Over the next 25 years, 27,000 of the country's 77,000 temples are expected to close, in one of the biggest existential crises facing Japanese Buddhism since it was introduced from Korea in the sixth century. . . . Society is changing at a rapid rate, but the Buddhist world has missed out on that because its connection with ordinary people is focused on funerals and memorials for the dead . . . . Buddhism must start dismantling the wall it has built around itself, before it is too late.<sup>22</sup>

Lest this assessment be thought too pessimistic or one-sided, it should be acknowledged that there are Buddhist priests in Japan who are attempting to break out of traditional norms. For example, some priests have opened cafes in their temples, while others support volunteer activities, and still others host music and theatre productions. In Tokyo, priests have even opened a bar, named Vowz, to dispense spiritual guidance while serving alcohol to their young clientele.

Moreover, at the time of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, many temples opened their doors to survivors, and priests walked the length of the disaster zone offering spiritual advice and comfort. Commenting on these actions, Bunkei Shibata, abbot of Kaigenji temple, said, "That's exactly what they should be doing. When people are going through difficult times in their lives, it is our responsibility to help them".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Justin McCurry. "Zen no more: Japan shuns its Buddhist traditions as temples close," *The Guardian Weekly*, November 6, 2018. Available on the Web at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/06/zen-no-more-japan-shuns-its-buddhist-traditions-as-temples-close>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

While the merit of Buddhist priests “dispensing spiritual guidance” together with mind-clouding alcoholic drinks can be debated, it is noteworthy that none of these recent attempts to make Buddhism relevant to contemporary society depend on the existence of transactional Buddhist deities bestowing blessings on adherents. It is equally clear that not all of Japanese Buddhism’s current woes and bleak future prospects can be blamed on the transformation of Buddhas and bodhisattvas into transactional deities, or its nearly exclusive focus on the performance of funerary rites.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there is no recorded instance of the historical Buddha having ever conducted so much as a single funeral. Nor, of course, did the Buddha ever lay claim to being a deity capable of bestowing supernatural blessings of any kind on his followers. On the contrary, he encouraged his followers to live an ethical life as expressed in the Holy Eightfold Path, part of the Four Noble Truths. This ethical life can be undermined, if not ignored completely, when Buddhas are called on to protect the state and its rulers, bring victory in war, and produce miracles of whatever kind. In attempts to fulfill decidedly worldly desires, the Buddha Dharma all but disappears.

At the same time, the fundamental impetus for Buddhist practice, i.e. the unavoidable suffering associated with old age, sickness and death, remains as relevant today as it was at the time of the historical Buddha. At its best, Buddhism has always offered a clear method for addressing the basic cause of suffering through an understanding of the true nature of the individual and reality. This understanding has no need of transactional deities of any kind.

In days long past, in the absence of advanced medical and scientific understanding of the world around us, it is understandable that human beings looked to transactional deities to miraculously/magically solve the challenges they faced. Where else could they look? Fortunately, those days are, for the most part, long gone. At least for Buddhism, which never relied on the existence of transactional deities in the first place, this is a true “blessing”. Buddhism should now in theory be free to return to what it once was at the time of the historical Buddha.

But let no one be under the illusion that separating the “wheat from the chaff” can be easily accomplished. For starters, there will always be differences in determining what is “wheat” and what is “chaff”. Nevertheless, the need to divorce Buddhism from the widely accepted belief in transactional deities has never been greater, for at least in the case of Buddhism in Japan, if not in other Asian countries, its future viability may well depend on it.

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## Text-critical History is not Exegesis A Response to Anālayo

*Alexander Wynne*

In a recent edition of this journal (2016/11), Anālayo argued against the so-called ‘two paths’ theory of early Buddhist meditation. Originally formulated by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, and more recently elaborated by Gombrich (1996), this theory claims there were two opposing soteriologies in Indian Buddhism:<sup>1</sup>

Without being too rash, one may discriminate in the Buddhist sources, both ancient and scholastic, between two opposed theories, the same as the *Bhagavadgītā* distinguishes by the names of *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*: the theory which makes salvation a purely or mainly intellectual achievement, and the theory which makes salvation the goal of ascetic and ecstatic disciplines.

On the one hand we have *prajñā*, ‘discrimination between things’ (*dharma-pravicaya*); *pratisaṃkhyāna*, discrimination; *vipaśyanā*, ‘contemplation’; seeing the four noble truths (*satyadarśana*); application to the doctrine (compare *dhamma-yoga*, AN III, 355). The ascetic recognises things for what they are (*yathābhūtam*): painful, impermanent, empty, without self; he is disgusted with them; he kills desire and as a result stops the process of acts bringing retribution and of transmigration.

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<sup>1</sup> de La Vallée Poussin (1936–7: 189–92), as translated in Gombrich (2005: 133–134).

On the other hand, the path of *śamatha*, ‘calm’: of *samādhi*, ‘concentration’; of the *dhyānas* and the *samāpattis*, ecstasies and contemplations; of *bhāvanā*, ‘meditation’. By a gradual purification and the gradual suppression of ideas (*saṃkalpa*), this path leads up to a state of unconsciousness – cessation of all forms of thought, *saṃjñāvedayitanirodha* or just *nirodhasamāpatti* – which puts the ascetic in touch with a transcendent reality which is Nirvāṇa (ancient doctrine) or is like Nirvāṇa (Sarvāstivādin scholasticism). In principle, if not in fact, this path has nothing specifically Buddhist about it; ‘seeing the truths’ has no place in it; speculative understanding (*prajñā*) is not employed in it . . .

Louis de La Vallée Poussin here presents the ‘two paths’ as a soteriological polarity, consisting of a meditative way focusing on calm (and resulting in the liberated state of ‘cessation’), and a way of insight focused on understanding the true nature of things (which avoids calm more or less entirely). Anālayo disagrees with this position, at least with regard to the early literature:

The point I intend to make is only that the assumption of two conflicting approaches to liberation, the one requiring a mode of intellectual reflection and the other being based solely on ecstatic absorption, does not accurately reflect what emerges from the early discourses. (2016: 39)

We will here respond to Anālayo’s arguments against the ‘two path’ thesis. Before doing so, we must first clarify the nature of the historical problem identified by de La Vallée Poussin. In particular, we must survey three key texts: AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70.

## 1. What exactly is the ‘two path’ thesis?

As we have seen, de La Vallée Poussin makes a soteriological distinction between salvation understood as ‘the goal of ascetic and ecstatic disciplines’, and ‘a purely or mainly intellectual’ version of salvation. The two path thesis (TPT) says little about the Buddhist path in general: it is concerned, specifically, with the states and practices thought to effect liberation. Whether or not the ‘intellectual’ path dispenses with absorption *completely*, or allows

for a minimal level of meditation, does not matter. Likewise, it is hardly likely that the path of meditation dispenses entirely with insight, as every Buddhist adept must have a basic Buddhist understanding of things. What matters is whether the path of meditation finally does away with cognition and thought, and whether the way of insight does away with jhānic levels of meditation.

Whether some versions of the insight path include an ‘access’ level of meditation is likewise beside the point. As has been pointed out by Gombrich (2005: 96), Harivarman’s *Satya-siddhi-śāstra* is an insight text (of the Bahuśrutīyas) despite the fact that ‘Harivarman accepts a tiny bit of concentration (*samādhi*), but only below the level of the first *jhāna*’.<sup>2</sup> The important point is Harivarman’s claim that liberation occurs not in a deeply absorbed state of calm, but rather ‘by a process of intellectual analysis (technically known as *paññā*, insight) alone’.<sup>3</sup> One of our concerns here is to establish whether a similar path can be found in the canonical texts.

To put this in simpler terms, we must distinguish between means and ends. We take it for granted that Buddhist spiritual *means* includes a wide range of practices, and the generation of a variety of ethical and spiritual qualities; the Buddhist path is obviously, complex and multifaceted. But the TPT is about *ends*: what is prescribed and/or described, as practice and experience respectively, at the very end of the path.

We therefore understand the TPT as a characterisation of certain trends in early Buddhist soteriology. It does not offer a general theory of early Buddhist meditation, covering the entire path of spiritual development from start to finish; it is concerned neither with the preliminary levels of calm, nor with entry-level ‘insight’ contemplations. It is, rather, concerned with the specifics of what happens at the higher reaches of the path, as imagined in certain early Buddhist texts. The question is this: are there, in the early texts, rival versions of the trifold Buddhist way of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, which ultimately focus on either *samādhi* or *paññā* at the expense of the other? Keeping this question in mind, we will now consider the key texts.

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<sup>2</sup> Gombrich (2005: 96 n.2); (de La Vallée Poussin, 1936–7:201–2).

<sup>3</sup> Gombrich (2005: 96).



## 2. The key texts

I. AN 6.46. The *Mahācunda Sutta* describes two groups of mendicants who criticise or disparage each other (*apasādentī*): ‘meditators’ (*jhāyī bhikkhū*) and those who ‘work out’ or are ‘applied to’ the doctrine (*dharmayogā bhikkhū*). Those who work out the doctrine accuse the meditators of brooding (*pajjhāyanti*).<sup>4</sup> The meditators, on the other hand, accuse those devoted to the doctrine of being ‘haughty, arrogant, garrulous, full of chatter, with confused mindfulness, lacking full awareness, lacking absorption, having scattered minds and uncultivated sense-faculties’.<sup>5</sup>

The tone of both critiques is pejorative, and seems to depict a conflict between different spiritual orientations: whereas meditators are criticised for being good-for-nothing idlers, doctrinal experts are criticised for being superficial chatterboxes. Venerable Mahācunda, advising harmony and reconciliation, provides us with more information. He advises those who are applied to the doctrine to esteem the meditators, since they ‘touch the deathless dimension with the body’;<sup>6</sup> the meditators are likewise advised to esteem those who work out the doctrine, because ‘they see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight’.<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to ‘touch the deathless dimension with the body’, or to ‘see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight’? Textual parallels suggest that Mahācunda’s descriptions indicate divergent soteriologies. With regard to the meditators, a couple of verses from the *Itivuttaka* (It 51) equate the attainment of cessation (*nirodha*) with touching the ‘deathless dimension’ through the body:

Understanding the realm of form,  
but not abiding in the formless [realms],  
Released (*vimuccanti*) in cessation (*nirodhe*),  
those people abandon death.

<sup>4</sup> AN III.355: *idha āvuso dhammayogā bhikkhū jhāyī bhikkhū apasādentī ime pana <jhāyino 'mhā jhāyino 'mhā ti jhāyanti pajjhāyanti*.

Be also accuses the meditators of ‘musing’ (*nijjhāyanti*) and ‘mourning’ (*avajjhāyanti/apajjhāyanti*).

<sup>5</sup> AN III.355: *uddhatā unnaḷā capalā mukharā vikiṇṇavācā muṭṭhassatī asampajānā asamāhitā vibbhantacittā pākaṇḍriyā*.

<sup>6</sup> AN III.356: *ye amataṃ dhātuṃ kāyena phusitvā viharanti*.

<sup>7</sup> AN III.356: *ye gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya atvivijha passantī ti*.

Understanding the realm of form,  
but not abiding in the formless [realms],  
Released (*vimuccanti*) in cessation (*nirodhe*),  
those people abandon death.

Touching the deathless dimension (*amataṃ dhātuṃ*),  
which lacks material substratum,  
with the body,  
Witnessing the relinquishing of material attachment,  
being without defilements,  
The Fully Awakened One teaches  
the state devoid of grief and defilement.<sup>8</sup>

While the two items *nirodhe* and *amataṃ dhātuṃ* do not stand in apposition, they clearly indicate the same goal. This suggests that for some early Buddhists, ‘touching the deathless realm with the body’ was the same thing as attaining ‘the cessation of perception and feeling’ (*saññāvedayitanirodha*).<sup>9</sup>

The position of those ‘working out the doctrine’ is not so easy to establish. But there seem to be two possibilities: either the statement ‘they see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight’ (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijja passanti*) refers to liberating insight, or it denotes doctrinal expertise. Pāli dictionaries support the latter option: the CPD defines *attha-pada* as ‘a right or profitable word’; the PED defines it as ‘a profitable saying, a word of good sense, text, motto’, and the DOP definition is similar, a ‘profitable saying; word of good sense’. All suggest that those ‘working out the doctrine’ were experts in early Buddhist teaching in general.

Despite these definitions, the compound *attha-pada* is surprisingly rare in the Pāli Suttas.<sup>10</sup> Chapter VIII of the *Dhammapada* certainly understands it

<sup>8</sup> It 51 (Ee pp.45-46): *rūpadhātuṃ pariññāya arūpesu asaṇṭhitā / nirodhe ye vimuccanti te janā maccuhāyino / kāyena amataṃ dhātuṃ phassayitvā nirūpadhiṃ / upadhippaṭṭinissaggaṃ sacchikatvā anāsavo / deseti sammāsambuddho asokaṃ virajaṃ padan ti /*

Reading *rūpadhātuṃ* and *asaṇṭhitā* with Be instead of Ee *rūpadhātu* and *susaṇṭhitā*. See also: It 73 (Ee p.62), Sn 755 (Ee p. 147).

<sup>9</sup> See Wynne (2007: 103).

<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I do not consider the meaning of the term in the relatively late *Jātaka* or *Apadāna*.

in the sense of ‘profitable saying’.<sup>11</sup> But apart from this, the term only occurs in the definition of the Dhamma devotees at AN 6.46, and in one other Sutta, AN 4.192, which mentions the wise *bhikkhu* who expounds the *atthapadaṃ* which is ‘calm, supreme, beyond the scope of logic, subtle, to be known by the wise’.<sup>12</sup> There can be little doubt that *atthapadaṃ*, here, is a synonym for Nirvana, and means something like ‘spiritual purpose’. In this sense *atthapadaṃ* seems more or less equivalent to *amatapadaṃ* (Dhp 21); in both compounds, the term *pada* seems to indicate the metaphorical ‘place’ of liberation. As the only other prose occurrence of *atthapadaṃ* is found in AN 6.46, it is likely that it too uses the term as a designation of Nirvana.

This parallel suggests that those ‘working out the doctrine’ were not merely doctrinal experts, but rather liberated Arahants. Indeed, in other texts the notion of ‘penetrating with insight’ (*paññāya ... ativijjha*) indicates advanced levels of spiritual understanding. AN 1.112 (Ee I.265) refers to a *bhikkhu* who ‘penetrates with insight’ the workings of karmic retribution, to such a degree that desire (*chando*) does not recur. Although no comment is made about the path-level at which insight occurs, this teaching is obviously concerned with much more than ‘profitable sayings’.

AN 4.186 (Ee II.178) also mentions ‘penetrating with insight’ in the context of the higher levels of the path. It states that a learned person (*sutavā*) with ‘penetrating insight’ (*nibbedhika-pañño*) first hears a teaching on the Four Noble Truths, and then ‘sees, having penetrated the meaning/purpose (*atthaṃ*) with insight’.<sup>13</sup> Seeing with insight is thus differentiated from simple or ‘rote’ learning. Yet again, AN 9.4 refers to the mendicant who preaches the Dhamma,<sup>14</sup> and then ‘penetrates and sees the profound meaning (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ*) with insight, just as he illumines it’.<sup>15</sup> Once again, doctrinal learning is followed by a higher level of comprehension, apparently liberating.

A few other places are even more suggestive of insight. In the *Piya-jātika Sutta* (MN 70; Ee II.112), *paññāya ativijjha* refers to the Buddha’s understanding of things. Even more importantly, in MN 70, MN 95, SN

<sup>11</sup> Dhp 100-02 (Ee p.29).

<sup>12</sup> AN II.190: *tathā hi ayam āyasmā gambhīraṃ c’eva atthapadaṃ udāharati santaṃ pañitaṃ atakkāvacaraṃ nipuṇaṃ paṇḍitavedanīyaṃ*.

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Ee II.178: *idaṃ dukkhaṃ ti sutaṃ hoti, paññāya c’assa atthaṃ ativijjha passati*.

<sup>14</sup> Ee IV.362: *dhammaṃ deseti ... brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti*.

<sup>15</sup> Ee IV.361-62: *yathā yathāvuso bhikkhu bhikkhūnaṃ dhammaṃ ... brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti, tathā tathā so tasmim dhamme gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati*.

48.50, SN 48.53 and AN 4.113, the idea of ‘penetrating with insight’ (*paññāya ativijjha*) occurs in a pair, the other half of which is *kāyena phusitvā* or *kāyena sacchikaroti*.<sup>16</sup> These texts thus set out a calm-insight soteriology, according to which deep states of calm must be complemented by liberating insight. They are the closest counterpart to AN 6.46, a text which seems to undo their calm-insight understanding.

The parallels to the expression *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati* show that it denotes an advanced level of insight, one which is either liberating or tantamount to it. Only one early text (Dhp VIII) uses the term *atthapada* in a sense which is obviously unrelated to liberating insight. If so, there are good reasons to suppose that the Dhamma-devotees of AN 6.46 were exponents of insight alone, and that the text presents a soteriological distinction between the rival ways of calm and insight.

**II. SN 12.68.** In the *Kosambī Sutta*, Savitṭha asks Musīla whether he ‘knows, by himself alone’ (*paccattam eva ñāṇaṃ*) each of the links in the twelvefold version of Dependent Origination, in both its arising and cessationist modes; with each query, Savitṭha stipulates that this seeing is ‘apart from faith, apart from personal preference, apart from oral tradition, apart from reasoned reflection, (and) apart from acceptance of a view after pondering it’.<sup>17</sup> Musīla replies positively to these questions. So when Savitṭha asks if Musīla sees that ‘Nirvana is the cessation of becoming’,<sup>18</sup> and Musīla affirms that he does, Savitṭha concludes that he is an *arahant*. By staying silent at this point, Musīla indicates his agreement with Savitṭha’s conclusion.

This exchange is followed by a similar episode, in which Nārada asks Savitṭha to put the same questions to him. Nārada then answers in exactly the same way as Musīla, but when Savitṭha concludes that he is an *arahant*, Nārada denies it. He compares his condition to that of a thirsty man who sees the water at the bottom of a well but cannot reach it. His words are revealing: he says that although he has knowledge of water, he cannot ‘touch’ the water ‘with his body’.<sup>19</sup> This is a very strange way of describing thirst; Pāli Suttas

<sup>16</sup> The Ee page references are MN I.480, MN II.173, SN V.227, SN V.230, AN II.115 respectively.

<sup>17</sup> SN II.115: *aññatr’ eva āvuso musila saddhāya aññatra ruciyā aññatra anussavā aññatra ākāra-parivattakkā aññatra diṭṭhi-nijjhāna-kkhantiyā ...*

<sup>18</sup> SN II.117: *bhavanirodho nibbāna ti.*

<sup>19</sup> SN II.118: *tassa udakan ti hi kho ñāṇaṃ assa, na ca kāyena phusitvā vihareyya.*

do not normally imagine thirst as a person's inability to touch water with the body. Nārada must be speaking metaphorically, and since the notion of 'touching with the body' is associated above all with the formless states (*ye te santā āruppā*) or the eight 'releases' (*vimokkhas*),<sup>20</sup> Nārada must surely be referring to these. The metaphor of a thirsty man suggests that Nārada's 'spiritual thirst' is due to not attaining the formless spheres and their goal, cessation.

It is true that a couple of Suttas speak of touching the *jhānas* with the body (AN 9.43, 9.45).<sup>21</sup> But these Suttas also call the *jhānas* 'spheres' (*āyatanaṃ*), and so are almost certainly late adaptations of earlier material; in all the standard Suttanta accounts of the path, the *jhānas* are not 'spheres' (*āyatana*) of meditation, let alone meditative objects, but rather experiential *states*, of body and mind, through which the meditator passes. On the other hand, the formless meditations are described as 'spheres' in all the standard accounts (e.g. *ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ*). The understanding of the four *jhānas* as spheres seems to have been adapted from formless meditation, and if so, has nothing to do with the implied meaning of Nārada's metaphor.

In fact, Nārada's cessationist metaphor has obvious connections with the soteriology of the meditators in AN 6.46 (AN III.356: *ye amataṃ dhātuṃ kāyena phusitvā viharanti*). And just as in AN 6.46, Nārada's soteriology is distinguished from an insight soteriology; as Gombrich (2015: 129) has pointed out: 'Nārada ... interprets *paññā* in the narrow sense of intellection without a deeper, experiential realisation'. SN 12.68 only differs from AN 6.46 by specifying that liberating insight is focused on the teaching of Dependent Origination. SN 12.68 thus seems to present two soteriologies through contrast: Nārada's meditative/cessationist path versus Musīla's contemplative/intellectual understanding.

**III. SN 12.70.** In the *Susīma Sutta*, the non-Buddhist wanderer (*paribbājaka*) Susīma ordains as a Buddhist mendicant in Rājagaha and encounters Buddhists who claim to be 'liberated by insight' (*paññā-vimuttā*). This

<sup>20</sup> E.g. MN I.33: *ye te santā vimokhā atikkamma rūpe āruppā, te kāyena phusitvā vihareyyanti*. AN II.90: *kathaṃ ca bhikkhave puggalo samaṇa-padumo hoti? idha bhikkhave bhikkhu sammā-diṭṭhiko hoti ... pe ... sammā-vimutti hoti, aṭṭha vimokhe kāyena phusitvā viharati*. Reading *phusitvā* with Be for Ee *phassitvā* in both texts.

<sup>21</sup> AN IV.451: *yathā yathā ca tad āyatanaṃ tathā tathā naṃ kāyena phusitvā viharati*. Once again reading *phusitvā* with Be for Ee *phassitvā*.

claim is made despite not attaining five of the six higher knowledges (*abhiññā*) which occur after the four *jhānas* in standard canonical schemes (e.g. of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*): supernatural powers, the divine ear, mind-reading, knowledge of past lives and the ‘divine eye’ by which one sees the ongoing process of karma and rebirth in the world. These ‘insight-liberated’ *bhikkhus* also admit they have not ‘touched’ the formless spheres ‘with the body’.

When Susīma asks the Buddha to explain the notion of liberation through insight, the Buddha says that first there is the ‘knowledge of the regularity of *dhammas*’ (*dhamma-tṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ*) and then ‘knowledge of Nirvana’ (*nibbāne ñāṇaṃ*).<sup>22</sup> Apart from the late Paṭisambhidāmagga, the expression *nibbāne ñāṇaṃ* occurs only here in the entire Pāli canon; the expression *dhamma-tṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ* occurs elsewhere at SN 12.34, where it is connected with Dependent Origination. This suggests that SN 12.70 is similar to SN 12.68, in that the liberating cognition, of Nirvana is achieved through contemplating Dependent Origination. Indeed, in SN 12.70, after delivering the not-self teaching, the Buddha leads Susīma through the different causal relations of Dependent Origination, in its arising and cessation modes. At each point of the teaching, Susīma assents to the Buddha’s query whether he ‘sees it or not’ (*passatha no*). Susīma also agrees, when asked by the Buddha, that he has attained neither the five higher knowledges nor the formless spheres.

The Buddha’s teaching to Susīma seems to be an attempt to demonstrate the nature of ‘release through insight’. If so, SN 12.70 must advocate an insight-based soteriology: it suggests that liberation occurs through contemplating doctrinal teachings, without being in an advanced state of meditative absorption. It is perhaps significant that although SN 12.70 focuses on Dependent Origination, it also mentions the not-self teaching. As such, it somewhat resembles the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11, Vin I.13-14 Ee), in which the first five disciples of the Buddha are liberated simply through hearing not-self teachings.

At the least, the deviation of SN 12.70 from the classical scheme of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* is striking and significant. Not only do the insight-liberated *bhikkhus* lack supernatural attainments, they apparently lack *all* the insights which come after the four *jhānas*. Since the knowledge of causal relations and Nirvana also replaces insight into the Four Noble Truths –

<sup>22</sup> SN II.124: *pubbe kho susīma dhamma-tṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ, pacchā nibbāne ñāṇaṃ ti*.

the culminating point of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* – the insight-liberated mendicants lack the ‘three knowledges’ (*tisso vijjā*), and hence are presented as the figureheads of a non-standard soteriology. Although the text does not mention the four *jhānas*, it seems that the insight-liberated *bhikkhus* did not follow the way of *jhāna*, as the canonical texts normally present it. And they were certainly not practitioners of formless meditation.

### 3. Anālayo’s arguments (2016)

Since our three texts apparently provide strong support for the TPT, it is somewhat strange that Anālayo (2016) does not mention them. Instead, he makes three other arguments.

- I. He claims that an intricate interrelation between calm and insight should be taken as standard in the early Buddhist discourses. But this subtlety is played down in later Buddhist scholasticism, whose ‘standardizations’ led Louis de La Vallée Poussin astray:

Although such standardization yields neat theoretical presentations, a problem inevitably results from the fact that theoretical accounts can only describe one item at a time. There is therefore an inherent danger that cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path recede to the background, whereas its sequential aspects are foregrounded. This might explain the variations found in path accounts in the early discourses, which could be read to exemplify that a single mode of description fails to do full justice to the complexity of actual practice. With the adoption of a unified and standardized mode of description, the interrelation between tranquillity and insight appears to have to some degree faded out of sight in substantial parts of Buddhist exegetical activity. This development would in turn have fuelled interpretations of the two paths to liberation type, such as those proposed by de La Vallée Poussin and by other scholars who have been influenced by his presentation. However, the position taken by these scholars goes considerably further and results in losing sight of the interrelation between tranquillity and insight to a much stronger degree than do the exegetical traditions. (2016: 40)



Whether or not de La Vallée Poussin and other scholars were influenced by Buddhist scholasticism is beside the point; it does not matter if the TPT was inspired by Vasubandhu, Harivarman or even the Bhagavadgītā. We are only concerned to establish whether the TPT is a reasonable interpretation of at least a few early texts. In this regard, Anālayo's argument can only be regarded as highly dubious. He seems to claim that the higher levels of the Buddhist path *must* inherit foundational levels of calm and insight.

That is to say, Anālayo assumes that the Buddhist path develops a myriad of 'path qualities', which are finally brought to 'fruition' in awakening. But most early models of the path, such as the detailed account in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, do not say explicitly that calm-insight *means*, initially cultivated as 'qualities', are brought to 'fruition' as spiritual *ends*. This is also true in our three texts. While they surely assume all the basic aspects of a *bhikkhu*'s training, their focus on ends – the higher-level practices and mental states which trigger awakening – betrays no notion of 'cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path'. If anything, they tend towards distinguishing the 'qualities' of calm and insight, as we have seen.

Invoking the notion of 'cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path' as the key to understanding the Buddhist path merely begs the question: is a 'cumulative and interrelated' model assumed in the key texts? In other words, there appears to be a serious circularity in Anālayo's thinking. To the question, 'is there a distinction between calm and insight in some early texts?', Anālayo's answer is 'There is no distinction, because there is no distinction between calm and insight in early Buddhist path schemes'. Whereas the universal application of calm-insight is a hypothesis to be proved, Anālayo takes it as a general assumption.

**II. Anālayo's second argument claims that insight into the Four Noble Truths, a main feature of the standard early path model, is not 'intellectual':**

[F]rom the time of what tradition regards as the first sermon given by the recently awakened Buddha, engagement with the four noble truths was clearly not presented as an intellectual exercise in reasoned understanding only. Rather, it was considered to involve a prolonged task, expressed with the metaphor of "three turnings". It is only with the completion of this prolonged task that according to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and its parallels the Buddha felt qualified to claim he had reached liberation. (2016: 44)

Anālayo argues that different stages are involved in understanding the Truths, beginning at the provisional level of the learner and culminating with realisation through insight. Turning his attention to the Buddha's awakening as described in the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*, he further claims that liberating insight into the Four Truths is only a motif, whereas the nature of the insight is quite different:

Besides, judging from the above passage and its parallels, the four noble truths are not the actual content of the experience of awakening. That is, to describe the realization of awakening with the help of the scheme of the four noble truths does not necessarily imply that such realization takes place in a way that directly involves the formulations employed for describing these four noble truths. In other words, the presentation in the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and its parallels does not require us to imagine the Buddha at the moment of awakening mentally saying to himself: "This is *dukkha*, this is the arising of *dukkha*..." etc.' (2016: 44)

Anālayo concludes that the path does not culminate in the Four Truths:

Understood in this way, the four noble truths can fulfil their diagnostic function at the outset of the path, when an initial appreciation of the fact of *dukkha*, its cause, the possibility of its cessation, and the vision of a practical path to this end motivates someone to set out to cultivate the path. They can continue to encapsulate the motivation and deepening insight of the one who walks the path, and they can eventually function as an expression of the arrival at the goal. But they are not the goal itself, just as the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. (2016: 45)

This might seem a sensible way to understand the Buddhist path. And perhaps we should read early accounts, particularly those which culminate in the Four Truths (such as the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*), through the lens of Anālayo's reading of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. If so, the necessity of witnessing (*sacchi-kātabbā*) the third truth (the cessation of suffering, *dukkha-nirodham*) could be understood to be the true goal of the path.

There are numerous problems with this interpretation, however, in particular, the precise language of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. It states that in order to gain insight into the truths, the *bhikkhu* ‘turns his mind’ (*cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*) ‘towards knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions’ (*āsavānaṃ khaya-ñāṇāya*). In the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta* (MN 119), the following simile elaborates what is meant by ‘turning the mind’ towards ‘knowledge’:

It is just like a quadrangular lotus pond, on an even plot of land and hemmed in by embankments, full of water, full to the brim, so that crows can drink the water. If a strong man breaks the embankment at any point, would water flow out?

‘Yes, respected sir’

Just so is whoever has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body. He turns the mind (*cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*) towards the witnessing by higher understanding of whatever phenomenon can be witnessed by higher understanding. He attains the ability to see into this and that (phenomenon), as long as there is the specific objective support.<sup>23</sup>

The insight simile is very clear: penetrating the truth of any object is likened to the inevitability of water flowing out of a pond at whichever point the pond’s walls are intentionally breached. The imagery suggests that focusing the mind on an object precedes its complete penetration. If so, the language of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, and its illustration in the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta*, indicate that insight into the Four Truths does not ‘function as an expression of the arrival at the goal’, but was in fact thought to constitute the culmination of the path.

These points might seem tangential to the interpretation of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70. But they are of central importance. For Anālayo’s hermeneutic allows the explicit testimony of the texts to be explained

<sup>23</sup> MN III.96-97: *seyyathāpi same bhūmi-bhāge caturassā pokkharanī ālibaddhā pūrā udakassa sama-tittikā kākaṇṭhā. tam enaṃ balavā puriso yato yato āliṃ muñceyya āgaccheyya udakan ti? evaṃ bhante. evaṃ eva kho bhikkhave yassa kassa ci kāya-gatā sati bhāvitā bahulī-katā, so yassa yassa abhiññā-sacchikaraṇīyassa dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti abhiññā-sacchikiriyāya, tatra tatr’eva sakkhi-bhavyataṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane.*

away; and if knowledge of the Noble Truths can be re-imagined as a direct, meditative, realisation of Nirvana, then so too can other insight claims. According to Anālayo, it would be possible to understand the Buddha's reference to the 'knowledge of Nirvana' (*nibbāṇe ñāṇaṃ*: SN 12.70) as an experiential realisation of Nirvana, despite the text's failure to mention meditation in this connection.

Anālayo's argument brings into sharp focus the fact that too much should not be read into exceptional or unusual texts, such as the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*, at the expense of the explicit testimony of foundational texts or passages.<sup>24</sup> The philological or text-critical method should rather draw out the meaning of difficult passages by using closely related textual parallels. This is what we have attempted to do here, in trying to understand the meaning of two key expressions: 'touching with the body', and 'seeing, having penetrated with insight'. Every effort must be made to keep the discussion firmly rooted in what the texts actually say, rather than edge towards what one would like them to say, depending on texts of marginal importance.

### III. Anālayo's final argument claims that absorption alone is insufficient for attaining liberation in early Buddhism:

[A]bsorption attainment, in spite of its undeniable benefits for progress on the path, was not considered to be liberating in and of itself. (2016: 48)

In support of this Anālayo cites the *Brahmajāla Sutta* and AN 6.60 (Ee III.394) as well as their Chinese Āgama counterparts. According to Anālayo, AN 6.60

shows that absorption attainment needs to be combined with the cultivation of insight, that the temporary aloofness from sensuality gained during such absorbed experience does not suffice to ensure that sensual passion does not overwhelm the mind on a later occasion. (2016: 46)

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<sup>24</sup> If Schmithausen's judgement of the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta* is correct (1981: 203: 'It is not likely that this rather sophisticated and schematic account of the Enlightenment of the Buddha is the original one.'), it would seem to be a dubious text on which to base a general interpretation of calm-insight schemes.

But AN 6.60 does not make any such point. It certainly says that the *jhānas* alone are not enough, and that a person who attains them might still return to lay life. It does not say, however, that insight is the solution to this problem. The same is true of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. In mentioning other ascetics and wanderers who attain the four *jhānas*, and mistake them for Nirvana, it certainly indicates that meditative absorption is not enough. But it does not say what else is required, a gap filled in by Anālayo as follows:

It is precisely the understanding of the role of craving, as expressed in the second noble truth in particular, that is missing in the case of the absorption attainers described in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* and its parallels. (2016: 48)

It is true that the *Brahmajāla Sutta* has an important section on liberating insight; but this insight is concerned with the rise, fall, satisfaction and danger of the six sense spheres, as well as the release from them.<sup>25</sup> It is not clear that this focus on insight, and critique of *jhāna*, implies a calm-insight soteriology. The text could perhaps be read from the perspective of insight alone, and could possibly support a meditative-cessationist version of the path, along the lines that insight into the danger of ‘contact’ indicates the need to transcend it through attaining cessation. One could argue, not very convincingly perhaps, that when the *Brahmajāla Sutta* states that a person ‘understands what is beyond all these [sense spheres]’ (DN I.45: *ayaṃ imehi sabbeḥ’eva uttaritaraṃ pajānāti*), it is referring to cessation.

To be sure, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* does not expound any version of the Buddhist path; its concerns are metaphysical rather than meditative or soteriological. Hence its significance for the TPT is unclear. We cannot be certain that understanding ‘the role of craving, as expressed in the second noble truth in particular’, is the insight which complements its critique of absorption.

Thus far, our analysis has not exposed a strong case against the TPT. Anālayo has rather proposed rather general arguments, each unconvincing in their own right. And he has not analyzed the most important texts, an omission which he corrects, however, in his *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies* (2017), towards which we will now turn.

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<sup>25</sup> DN I.45: *yato kho bhikkhave bhikkhu channaṃ phassāyatanānaṃ samudayañ ca attha-gamañ ca assādañ ca ādinavañ ca nissaraṇaṃ ca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ imehi sabbeḥ’eva uttaritaraṃ pajānāti.*

#### 4. Anālayo's arguments (2017)

Before considering Anālayo's reading of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70, it must be mentioned in passing that he expands his *ad hominem* critique of Louis de La Vallée Poussin. He does this by claiming that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*:

By way of background to his taking up this position, it could be pertinent that 1929 falls within the period in which de La Vallée Poussin must have been working on his remarkable annotated translation of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, published in six volumes from 1923 to 1931. This makes it fairly probable that his approach and thinking were influenced by Buddhist exegesis as expressed by scholars such as Vasubandhu. (2017: 91)

Anālayo further claims that the TPT was not just influenced by Buddhist scholasticism, but is also an Orientalist projection onto the East:

As far as I can see, the two-paths theory might best be set aside as an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation. Of course, others will not necessarily agree with my assessment. Yet, those who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it. (2017: 101)

There is no need to consider these points any further. As explained above, the sources of scholarly influence or inspiration do not matter; we are only concerned with the content of arguments – what is actually said. Rather than speculate whether or not the TPT is an Orientalist fantasy, let us restrict our attention to the texts themselves.

**I. AN 6.46.** Anālayo claims (2017: 96 n.66) that this text 'does not juxtapose two types of *arahants* and therefore does not support the two-paths theory'. Instead, the meditators and Dhamma-devotees of AN 6.46 have reached different levels of spiritual attainment:

The discourse does indeed set meditators (*jhāyin*) in opposition to those who devote themselves to Dharma (*dhammayoga*), but

of these only the first are reckoned to have actually reached a level of awakening. Whereas the meditators dwell having personally experienced the deathless element, which would imply they must at the very least be stream-enterers, those who devote themselves to Dharma have only reached a wise understanding. This does not imply any level of awakening, let alone turning them all into *arahants*. (2017: 95-96)

Anālayo reads the disagreement of AN 6.46 as a conflict between those who ‘might be liberated’ (the meditators, who are ‘at the very least stream-enterers’) and those who are most definitely not (the devotees of the Dhamma, who ‘have only reached a wise understanding’). But, this reading imposes a much later exegetical understanding on the texts: although there are numerous discourses on ‘stream entry’, virtually all of them relate the attainment either to faith or to doctrinal knowledge.<sup>26</sup> No Pāli Sutta suggests that stream-entry involves touching the deathless element with the body, even temporarily. On the other hand, the idea that a stream-enterer experiences Nirvana briefly, and then spends the rest of the path fulfilling this accomplishment, is an exegetical creation.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the idea that the monks ‘devoted to the Dhamma’ merely have a ‘wise understanding’, Anālayo offers neither an argument nor even a consideration of the relevant terms and texts. Moreover, Anālayo’s reading of the text suggests that a group of unenlightened monks disparages (*apasādentī*) a group of (nearly) enlightened monks. But this reading of the text is not supported by Mahācunda’s meditation. In pointing out that each group should esteem the other, he treats them equally, which could hardly be the case if the levels of spiritual attainment between the groups was different. Read on its own terms, the text *only* makes sense as an attempt to reconcile two parties making rival claims about the goal of the Buddhist path.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. SN 12.42 (Ee II.69), where someone endowed with the limbs of stream-attainment is said to be endowed with ‘knowledge-based faith’ (*avecca-ppasādena samannāgato*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. But at SN 22.122 (Ee III.168), the fruit of stream-entry results from understanding the impermanence of the five aggregates (... *bhikkhu ime pañcupādānakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato ... pe ... anattato yoniso manasi karonto sotāpattiphalaṃ sacchikareyyā ti*).

<sup>27</sup> See Visuddhimagga XXII, on the cognition of Nirvana as the knowledge of the path of stream-entry. In the ‘reviewing’ stage of the attainment, the stream-enterer is able to contemplate the cognition of Nirvana as follows: ‘He reviews the deathless Nirvana, ‘I have penetrated this phenomenon as an object’.’ (Ee p.676: *ayaṃ me dhammo ārammaṇato paṭividdho ti amataṃ nibbānaṃ paccavekkhati*).



**II. SN 12.68.** As we have seen, in denying that he is an *arahant*, Nārada compares his condition to that of a thirsty man who can see but not ‘touch’ the water at the bottom of a well. Anālayo (2017: 95) explains the situation as follows:

In all versions the monk Nārada employs the simile of seeing water that one is unable to reach physically to illustrate that, even though one has already seen the goal, one therefore need not have fully reached it. In other words, the simile conveys that he has reached a stage of awakening that falls short of being arahantship. This conclusion finds confirmation in the commentary, which reports that Nārada was a non-returner. Thus this discourse is about the difference between one who has already experienced Nirvāṇa when attaining a lower level of awakening, a trainee (*sekha*), and an arahant who has reached full awakening. In sum, the difference between the monks Nārada and Musīla is not one of different paths, but only concerns different levels of the path.

This explanation is again based on later exegesis. The notion that Nārada is a non-returner (*anāgāmin*) is derived from the commentary; we have already dealt with the anachronistic idea that a person can experience Nirvana at a ‘lower level of awakening’. Moreover, the simile of the man who has the knowledge ‘(there is) water’, but who cannot ‘abide having touched it with his body’ (*na ca kāyena phusitvā vihareyya*),<sup>28</sup> has no relation to the canonical texts on the ‘non-returner’, which simply state that the latter has a ‘residue of clinging’ (*sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*).

Although Anālayo’s explanation of Nārada’s simile in SN 12.68 relies on later sources, the canonical Suttas contain enough parallels to deduce its meaning. We have seen that Nārada’s words are derived from the specific context of formless meditation; this evidence, rather than the notion of experiencing the goal without fully reaching it, is the key to understanding the text’s meaning. We have also seen that Musīla’s position is apparently one of insight without meditation, and yet Anālayo merely says that Musīla is ‘an arahant who has reached full awakening’.

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<sup>28</sup> See n.19 above.

**III. SN 12.70.** According to Anālayo, the *Susīma Sutta* and its parallels do not support the notion of ‘dry insight’:

None of them supports the idea that a purely intellectual approach could lead to full awakening, without having cultivated a level of tranquillity that at the very least borders on absorption attainment. (2017: 94)

Arguing that ‘even those versions that do not stipulate absorption attainment do clearly refer to meditation practice’, Anālayo points out that according to the (Mūla-) Sarvāstivādin accounts, the insight-liberated monks did some meditation:

SĀ 347 at T II 97c2 clearly indicates that they meditated, as they reached liberation after having dwelled alone and in seclusion, with single-minded attention and being established in diligence ... According to the *Vibhāṣās*, they attained liberation based on what appears to be access concentration. (2017: 94 n.63)

As already explained, the TPT is concerned with what happens at the higher reaches of practices. The attainment of low levels of meditation, including ‘access concentration’, are not directly relevant to it. What really matters is soteriological *ends* rather than spiritual *means*, and on this point the Sarvāstivādin tradition offers an insight soteriology effectively devoid of meditation. It is thus more explicit than the Pāli text and its Mahāsāṅghika version. On the latter, Anālayo points out that

in a discourse quotation in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya, T 1425 at T XXII 363a14, the arahants deny that they attained supernormal powers or the immaterial attainments and then explain that they are liberated by wisdom. This leaves open that they could have attained absorption. (2017: 94 n.63)

This is somewhat of an understatement, for in the Mahāsāṅghika account, as in the Pāli text, much more is at stake than the attainment of ‘supernormal powers’ and ‘the immaterial attainments’. As Bhikkhu Bodhi has pointed out, in the Mahāsāṅghika account *Susīma* inquires

not about all five super-knowledges, but only about the divine eye that sees how beings pass away and take rebirth according

to their kamma, and about the recollection of past lives — the last two of these super-knowledges, given here in inverse order from S 12: 70 – as well as about the peaceful formless emancipations. (2007: 65)

More so than the Pāli Sutta, then, the Mahāsāṅghika version of SN 12.70 focuses on the insight-liberated monks' lack of the three knowledges (*tisso vijjā*), the culminating insights of the jhānic path: the remembrance of one's past lives, the divine eye (by which to see the process of karma and rebirth in the world) and insight into the Four Noble Truths. By the standards of canonical Buddhist discourses, both the Mahāsāṅghika and the Theravādin accounts attribute a strikingly peculiar soteriology to the insight-liberated monks. Viewed from this perspective, Susīma's failure to ask the insight-liberated monks if they have attained the *jhānas* is not that strange. Indeed, Bhikkhu Bodhi claims that Susīma overlooks the *jhānas* simply because of

the need to draw forth answers that would contradict orthodox doctrine, which upheld the secure place of *jhāna* in the structure of the Buddhist path; and it deftly hints that these monks did not have the *jhānas* ... by passing over this issue in silence, they discreetly imply that they do not attain the *jhānas* at all. (2007: 63)

The issue is left daintily alone, as though it were too sensitive to be touched upon. Perhaps the stock definition of the path factor of right concentration in terms of the four *jhānas*, and the role of the *jhānas* in the standard description of the gradual training of the monk, occupied niches too hallowed within the canonical collection for the Theravāda tradition to ever consider altering the received heritage of *suttas* in a way that might explicitly state such attainments are dispensable. (2007: 62)

Bhikkhu Bodhi offers a compelling version of the argument from silence: the failure of the two key sources – Mahāsāṅghika and Theravāda – to mention *jhāna* was because of deference to old tradition. But there can be little doubt about the import of the text. Within the broad Theravādin/Sthavira tradition, the insight-liberated monks' lack of *jhāna* was taken for granted. The Pāli commentary defines the insight-liberated monks as 'dry insight practitioners,

devoid of *jhāna*, released merely through insight alone’,<sup>29</sup> whereas in the extant (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin sources, as we have seen, the Buddha says that the insight-liberated monks’ liberation is based on ‘access concentration’.<sup>30</sup>

The old Sthavira interpretation of the text is makes good sense. While the Pāli text and its Mahāsāṅghika counterpart both imply the lack of *jhāna* without actually stating it, the Buddha’s teaching to Susīma clarifies the matter. As we have seen, the Buddha puts the very same questions to Susīma as Susīma had put to the insight-liberated monks, prior to which he guides Susīma through the Not-Self teaching and the doctrine of Dependent Origination. In other words, when the Buddha explains the way of liberation by insight, meditation plays no role in it. Just as in SN 12.68, the insight portions of the texts are crucial in any interpretation; strangely, however, Anālayo has nothing to say about them.

## 5. Conclusions

This study does not support Anālayo’s claim that the idea of ‘two conflicting approaches to liberation ... does not accurately reflect what emerges from the early discourses’. Instead it seems highly likely that a distinction between calm and insight emerged, at some point, in at least one corner of the early Buddhist Saṅgha. There were ‘insight practitioners’ who barely meditated – ‘insight meditation’ would seem to be a contradiction in terms – and there were meditators who followed a mystical-cessationist path to liberation. The difference was serious, although it is difficult to guess its extent; we only know there were varying levels of disagreement. From the rather gentle exchange of opinion between Mūsila and Nārada, to the antagonistic debate between meditators and Dhamma-devotees, mediated by Mahācunda, the fissures in the early tradition are not difficult to make out.

The debate focuses on a spiritual polarity: the practice of formless meditation leading to cessation, on the one hand, and insight alone on the other. The four *jhānas* are not mentioned in the three most important texts on the debate, an absence most strongly apparent in SN 12.70. We must therefore ask, once more, did the debate bypass the *jhānas* completely? Or can the *jhānas*, even in a limited form, be attributed to the insight side of the debate, thus forming a

<sup>29</sup> Spk II.126: *mayam nijjhānakā sukkhavipassakā paññāmatten’eva vimuttā* ti.

<sup>30</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi (2007: 68): ‘Those monks first exhausted the influxes based on the access to the *jhāna*, and afterwards aroused the basic *jhāna*.’

neat calm-insight position in line with the general early Buddhist position? The reasons against this are as follows:

In AN 6.46, the Dhamma-devotees are presented as non-meditators; having ‘confused mindfulness, lacking full awareness, lacking absorption, having scattered minds’, it is difficult to assign any serious meditation to their insight soteriology.

SN 12.68 only makes sense if a soteriological distinction is being drawn; the questions Nārada puts to Musīla must therefore indicate Musīla’s path of doctrinal contemplation, not meditation, in contrast with Nārada’s cessationist soteriology.

In SN 12.70, the general deviation from the ‘three-knowledge’ scheme indicates a non-jhānic path, leading to ‘release by insight’. The position that insight is effected by doctrinal understanding is made clear in the exchange between the Buddha and Susīma, in particular, through the point that a knowledge of causality precedes the knowledge of Nirvana.

Far from presuming the idea that insight is mediated by *jhāna*, these three texts betray an insight focus utterly removed from jhānic themes and concerns. Nothing in them indicates a general calm-insight position, nor even a minimal *jhāna* soteriology similar to those found in such texts as the *Aṭṭhakanāgara*, *Mahāmālunkya* or *Jhāna Suttas* (MN 52, MN 64, AN 9.36).<sup>31</sup> Instead, the *jhānas* are simply bypassed in our three TPT texts; they seem not to have been a concern of what we could call the insight and meditation schools.

There is little reason to believe that the jhānic path, or some version of it, lies hidden in the shadows of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70. The most natural reading of these texts is that some early Buddhists had diverged from an older jhānic soteriology. Those who offer a calm-insight reading of the texts must therefore assume the burden of proof, and provide reasonable arguments showing that *jhāna*, although not mentioned, can be assumed. Anālayo’s arguments do not seem to meet this burden of proof; they rely on an anachronistic application of later Buddhist ideas, and a rather general argument from silence (the failure of the three texts to mention *jhāna* is taken

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<sup>31</sup> On these texts see Schmithausen (1981: 223-30).

to imply its presence). Beside this, there are a few methodological problems with Anālayo's arguments:

**1. Playing the man, not the ball.** This sporting metaphor refers to the use of psychological tactics to undermine one's opponent ('gamesmanship'), rather than concentrating purely on the game at hand. It is an apt description of Anālayo's *ad hominem* attacks on Louis de la Vallée Poussin. Rather than deal with the academic problem identified by de La Vallée Poussin (the 'ball'), Anālayo prefers to 'play the man', by suggesting that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu, or is guilty of Orientalism.

Personal criticism demeans academic endeavour. One might as well say that Western converts to Buddhism are not sufficiently objective to study Buddhism academically. Of course, such a point would be absurd.

**2. Ignoring modern scholarship in disagreement with his own ideas.** Reflecting on the TPT, Anālayo (2016: 41) makes the reasonable point that those 'who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it.' This is sensible and commendable, but Anālayo unfortunately fails to follow his own advice. The arguments made here have already been made, albeit more briefly, in Wynne (2007: 102-04). Other important works are bypassed: Gombrich (1996) is not taken seriously, and Schmithausen's study (1981) of early path schemes is more or less ignored, as is Bhikkhu Bodhi's tentative support for the TPT (2007). By ignoring alternative points of view, Anālayo makes a one-dimensional case that ultimately harms his own analysis.

**3. Circularity.** To prove the ubiquity of the calm-insight paradigm in early Buddhist discourses, Anālayo refers to two texts (AN 6.60 and the *Brahmajāla Sutta*). But both texts lack calm-insight schemes. Anālayo's argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable not because of what the texts say, but simply because calm-insight must be universally applicable.

Anālayo similarly claims that distinguishing between calm and insight ignores the subtle 'interrelation between tranquillity and insight' that the Buddhist path implies. Once again, the argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable because calm-insight is universally applicable; what the texts actually say is ignored.

4. **Failing to take the texts seriously at their word.** Anālayo claims that the standard account of insight into the Four Noble Truths is a motif for the meditative realisation of Nirvana. In other words, the texts are not to be taken seriously at their word: although the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* talks of ‘turning the mind towards knowledge’, and the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta* explains this idea with quite precise similes, Anālayo believes that his own interpretation of the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta* is to be preferred instead. Dissenting voices are again overlooked.<sup>32</sup>
5. **Relying on later Buddhist scholasticism.** Anālayo assumes that the meditators of AN 6.46 are at least stream-enterers, but this idea is based on a later Buddhist notion of stream-entry, one unknown to the canonical discourses. Similarly, his assertion that Nārada (in SN 12.70) is a ‘non-returner’ (*anāgāmin*) is based on the Pāli commentary; the idea of experiencing but not fully realising Nirvana also belongs to later exegesis. Rather than studying the many internal parallels which actually help clarify what these texts mean, Anālayo prefers to read relatively late schemes, anachronistically, into them.

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Some of these methodological failures are more serious than others. Perhaps academic progress can be made even when the objectivity of its practitioners is undermined, or when contemporary scholarship is ignored, or even when circular argumentation is deployed. But progress is surely impossible when the explicit statements of the texts are bypassed in favour of one’s own preferred ideas; this problem is exacerbated by following the lead of later Buddhist scholasticism. Both are serious failures of text-critical history, which can only hinder, rather than help, the academic understanding of early Buddhism. Rather strangely, however, Anālayo believes his own arguments are an unqualified success:

As far as I can see, the two paths theory has by now been successfully refuted and might best be set aside as an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation. (2016: 41)

The notion that academic debates can be settled once and for all, even by those fully involved in the debate, is surely misconceived. Instead, progress

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<sup>32</sup> See n.19 above for Schmithausen’s comments on the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*.



in text-historical research occurs gradually, through the invisible hand of uncoordinated academic endeavour. The process is haphazard and open to much trial and error; mistakes occur, wrong turns are taken and better perspectives gain the upper hand gradually. Above all, final judgements are mostly an illusion in intellectual history: one never knows exactly what lies around the corner – the new evidence that might be found, the new arguments that could be made.

Arguments are the bread and butter of text-critical history, the discipline most relevant to the study of early Buddhism. But Anālayo's case against the TPT, followed by his judgement that the debate is settled, go against the grain of normal academic procedure. Why is this? The problem perhaps is possibly due to the distinction between exegesis and history being unwittingly blurred. Whereas exegetes naturally prefer tradition to remain unchallenged, historians deal in arguments and uncertainty. Indeed, historical doubt inevitably invites an strong exegetical response, and this might explain Anālayo's response to the TPT: casting aspersion on the intellectual proclivities of others; reading one's own conclusions into texts which lack them; ignoring other perspectives which challenge one's own ideas; failing to take one's sources seriously, at their own word; and, most seriously of all, relying on commentarial and scholastic perspectives: all of this signals an approach which is more exegetical than philological. The overall effect is to seal off what tradition regards as sacred – the homogeneity of the canonical discourses on the Buddhist path – while at the same time attempting to shut down debate.

It is to be hoped that the points made here show that the 'two path' thesis is in urgent need of further consideration. By now it should be clear that the calm-insight debate sits along a serious faultline in early Buddhist thought. The problem at hand could be defined as the 'soteriological question': at the decisive moment of the path, what triggers awakening? Is the mendicant in a state of mindfulness and full awareness of things, or deeply absorbed in concentration? Is the mendicant conscious or not, or perhaps even mindful without being conscious? Is insight a knowledge of ideas, or a cognition of Nirvana (a transcendental object), or even a trans-conceptual understanding of cognition itself? Does the liberating cognition, whatever its nature, require absorption, and if so, is the state of absorption consistent with mindfulness?

The early Buddhist discourses offer a variety of perspectives on these problems, a situation best explained if the discourses emerged over the course of an extended period of speculation involving numerous minds. The homogeneity of the Tipiṭaka is an illusion. Indeed, the texts are far more diverse than what the

‘two path’ thesis suggests: the ‘two paths’ of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70 are really three, four, five and more. Insight and concentration, the polarities studied here, in fact stand at opposite ends of a broad soteriological spectrum:<sup>33</sup>

1. Pure insight, e.g. the *Dīghanakha Sutta* and Vinaya Mahāvagga, where liberating insight is instantaneous and meditation does not figure directly.
2. Meditation plus insight i), e.g. the *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52), where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, as in the *Anupada Sutta*, but leads to liberation directly.
3. Meditation plus insight ii), e.g. the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where insight occurs at the end of a meditative progression culminating in the 4th *jhāna*.
4. Meditation plus insight iii), e.g. the *Anupada Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, but only to direct an adept onwards towards a final state of concentration, in which liberation occurs.
5. Pure Meditation, e.g. the Nivāpa (MN 25) or *Mahācunda Suttas* (AN 6.46), which focus on the attainment of the ‘cessation of perception and sensation’ or the ‘deathless element’, and have no interest in or are outright hostile to insight practice.

Even if the historical Buddha was skilled in the means of communication, wisely adapting his ethics or meditations to those he encountered along the way, so many spiritual possibilities can hardly go back to a single person. For there is barely any connection between knowing ideas while in a non-absorbed state, and touching the immortal reality while in a deep meditative trance. Different Buddhist teachers, traditions and centres must have emerged over the course of the first century of the Buddhist era; such variety was the inevitable product of

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<sup>33</sup> For this scheme and comments on it, see Wynne (2018: 94-95).

a dynamic speculative community, with no appointed leader, expanding within the rapidly changing society of northern India in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

One influential factor almost certainly came from without: the path of formless meditation, leading to the goal of cessation, was probably formulated under the influence of early Brahminic thought. Thus the idea of attaining final liberation (*parinibbāyati*) into the ‘Nirvana-realm’ at death, stated in a few Suttas, is very similar to the Upaniṣadic notion that release is a dissolution into *brahman* at death.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps insight alone was a reaction to this neo-Upaniṣadic tendency. More radically, perhaps even the very idea of calm-insight was itself due to the early Brahminic influence, for the basic model is stated in the pre-Buddhist *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.<sup>35</sup> If so, it is possible that the calm-insight ideal supplanted an earlier, mindfulness-based soteriology.<sup>36</sup>

These reflections suggest that the early Buddhist discourses are a complicated and varied collection belonging to a very specific historical period. The attempt to impose an order on them, indeed an order derived from later tradition, is surely misconceived. Anālayo is not alone in following this approach, for the application of later exegesis to the study of early Buddhism is widespread.<sup>37</sup> It might also be a trend which will further develop in the future, as the academic study of Buddhism grows at Theravāda monastic universities, and as more ‘Western’ monastics turn their attention to academic studies. At this point in time, then, it is crucial that a firm effort is made to distinguish text-critical history from exegesis. Both approaches are valuable in their own right, of course, and the broad field of Buddhist Studies would benefit if both perspectives could inform each other. But this would only work if the distinction between them is closely observed.

In recent years, Anālayo has been at the forefront of the comparative study of the Pāli canon and its Chinese Āgama parallels. This important development is to be welcomed, and could potentially be of great benefit to the study of early Buddhism in the years to come. The problems we have noted here only concern certain aspects of Anālayo’s study of early Buddhist thought and practice. In particular, we should note that if exegetical thinking is unwittingly smuggled into Buddhist Studies, and if modern studies are cherry-picked towards a desired end, little progress will be made in understanding intellectual history.

<sup>34</sup> See Wynne (2015: 92-93) on Ud V.5 (Ee 55-56) and Ud VIII.1 (Ee 80-81).

<sup>35</sup> Wynne (2018: 102).

<sup>36</sup> Wynne (2018: 102-05).

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Wynne (2018: 104) on Gethin (2004: 215).

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**Alexandra Green, *Buddhist Visual Cultures, Rhetoric and Narrative in Late Burmese Wall Paintings*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 237 pages. ISBN 978-988-8390-88-5. US\$55/ £43.**

*Reviewed by Sarah Shaw*

This book sets the bar for examination of the relationship between text, art, chant and ritual practice in a given period and a given location. Indeed, the period under discussion here – from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century – saw a flowering of Buddhist art in Burma, expressive of the richness of personal and public devotion and offering. Generous in its annotation, with extensive citation of primary and secondary sources, careful in its examination of the evidence specific to each context, and, most importantly, highly appreciative and analytic in its account of the beautiful art that is demonstrated, the book builds for us a sense of the particular location, social and economic background that contributed to the commissioning and execution of some remarkable temple paintings and murals.

When we come to a temple, however beautiful, we often have little capacity to understand the interplay of text, art, funding, social circumstances, hierarchical interactions, and popular practice that created its environment. This book provides extensive and detailed background to the paintings, and so communicates a sense of the kind of people for whom they would have had meaning, and those who would have supported and commissioned the painting in the temple. Their imaginative life would have been shaped by the colourful, intricate and densely active narratives that fill all the space of these temple environs. As the author says, the ‘temples and their contents operate as a whole, with the murals enfolding the sculpted images in a space designed for personal interactions’. And, as we are included in the careful delineation of the rich interiors, notably well contextualized, this book introduces the detail of the chants, stories and personal devotions that would be familiar to those visiting,

as well as providing close analysis of the murals, ceiling painting, shrines and spatial arrangement of the temple itself.

The introduction sets the background to the book. Factors that militate against these temples' survival are exhaustively delineated – from bats, infestation, lizard eggs to an ethos of the abandonment old temples, or the painting over of old murals. Throughout many parts of Southeast Asia, until recently, there has been an inbuilt cultural preference for the accumulation of merit through new artistic work rather than preservation of the old. Green gives the history of such depictions in Burma from the extraordinary and now well documented efflorescence of the eleventh to the thirteenth century, through a slight dip from then until the late seventeenth century, and then the less discussed period afterwards, the primary subject of this book. The motifs and subject matter are briefly discussed, alongside the accompanying textual basis, before study of the various kinds of contemporary approaches that can be applied to the examination temple murals. In an excellent analysis of recent narratological study, Green suggests that the traditional 'cause-and-effect' structure of a story need not apply, as the exuberant and rich vertical, horizontal and central periphery work in these temples attests. Narrative and icon work together, not instead of one another, each, as the author says, 'reinforcing the other to present the Buddha as worthy of and available to worship' (Page 15). Audience, usage and the unusually central role accorded in Burma to the Jātakas, the stories of the many lives of the Bodhisatta as he finds his way to Buddhahood, are discussed.

Chapter 1, 'A Formula to Honor the Buddha', examines this in greater detail. It is an impressive aspect of Green's work that her research has been so comprehensive and thorough. Trends, overarching themes and anomalies can then be carefully noted and analysed. It is on the basis of this extensive fieldwork that in this chapter Green explores the murals and their content more: the life of the Buddha, his past lives in Jātakas, and the twenty-eight previous Buddhas. As she notes, from the seventeenth century there is a notable continuity of content and to a certain extent arrangement, though there is variation within these parameters. An emphasis on the figure of the Buddha and the aspiration to Buddhahood remains always central. Chapter 2, 'Presence and Memory: Commemoration of the Buddha', explores the subject matter with greater scrutiny, linking the complex material to the *Buddhānussati* practice, clearly so central to devotion at this time. As she argues, ritual practice and mural depiction work together to create a kind of visual memory system, linking the devotee to a vast narrative and text base, largely consistent throughout these

regions, but also engaging and allowing a more immediate devotional response to the works, through particular emphases on certain key scenes involving the Buddha's life and teaching. Chapter 3, 'Art as Action: Representation as Ritual', suggests that the narrative element and its arrangement provides also a far more subtle and considered system of encoding and conveying information about the teaching. The importance of offerings is central to this, and Green argues that the repetitive motifs and luxurious patterns surrounding murals would have represented offerings of the rich textile designs produced by the merchant traders, a class growing in power during this period, who would have been financing the temple depictions and thereby demonstrating their loyalty to the throne, the people, and the temple. Often simply beautiful, yet ornate, repetitive motifs, 'enveloping the interior', support meditation, ritual, offerings and *paritta* chant in their use of reiterated qualities, so that 'the three themes of the Burmese murals – merit, protection and enlightenment – worked together through relationships within and between the separate subject matters, objects, and spaces, creating in the process a formula for the embellishment of temple interiors' (page 160). Chapter 4, 'Word and Image, Expanding Vernacular Narratives', explores further the relationship between text, depiction and ritual. Esoteric literature, alchemy and astrology are copiously referenced in these paintings. Green suggests such allusions offer a means of communicating a body of literature and its associated practice traditions not only to the court and educated monastic elites, but also to those visiting from peripheral regions, or to those who would not naturally encounter them outside the temple. Large amounts of material are thus, through the paintings, encoded and integrated into the cohesiveness of the temple surrounds.

Summaries of books cannot do justice to the full range of their argumentation. But as an example of this, we could take an area so often marginalised in studies of Buddhist practice. One of the many great excellences of this book is the dedicated care with which the chanting traditions are examined and explained. Such close scrutiny is rare in a book of art history, and worthy of mention. Buddhist practice, ritual and education have, since the earliest times, been perpetuated by the chanting of the texts. Repetition, rhythm and the enumeration of extensive lists are the lifeblood of the Buddhist transmission. From the earliest times, memory devices such as *mātikās*, or root lists, and endlessly repetitive *suttas* were specifically designed for the human brain to remember and pass on to the next generation. It is chant, both of longer texts and shorter *parittas*, that has ensured that both at a monastic and at a lay level, the varied texts of



the Tipiṭaka and the commentarial stories have been remembered and recited. As Green notes, they have also been used meditatively, as means of calming the mind, and arousing mindfulness through the stretch of the human faculties needed to remember vast quantities of discursive texts. They are complex and highly organized memory systems, and to this day in Burma skill in remembering the texts is highly valued: there are eleven accredited chanting monks today who know and can recite the entire Tipiṭaka of Sutta, Abhidhamma and Vinaya.

By taking so many temples, in a relatively small area, Green is able to examine tendencies and deviations from the norm with unusual precision, and offers intelligent analysis of the evidence that is available. In doing this, she gives a rare examination of the interplay and dynamic of chant, text and image. She suggests that reiteration, which governs so deeply the pace and content of the chants, has also affected the very patterning and balance of the designs that loop, like bales of cotton and silk, across all available space upon the walls and ceilings. Just as rhythm and repetition impel the momentum of the texts that would have been heard chanted constantly in these temples, so motifs and designs provide the moving heartbeat to more illustrative depictions that surround the Buddha figures at the centre and the entrance of these temples. These patterns, she suggests, also have their own natural pace and rhythm, and repeat themselves, with slight variations, just as the chants would repeat the qualities of the *anussatis*, the recollections of the Buddha, *dhamma* and Sangha. This then provides a supportive background as the practitioner within the temple goes, over and over again, the recollections of Buddhist practice (*bhāvanā*), allowing them to settle in their own minds. Such practices are, of course, still at the centre of devotional and meditative activity throughout Southeast and Southern Asia. As Green demonstrates, the exercise moves out to other aspects of theory: protective diagrams, numerical patterns, zodiacal imagery, and a cosmology of vast and magnificent scope extend the recollections so that they become ordering principles for the evocation of a highly complex doctrinal tradition. The art, with its highly detailed diagrams and patterns, becomes then an enactment of the Pāli *imaginaire* in its ritual context. It is a credit to this book that through its extensive referencing and intelligent commentary it manages to link us to this background too, giving some sense of the interconnected world in which those attending the temples would have entered. As the author points out, we can only surmise as to the extent such symbologies and interconnections would have been known to those who entered the temples when they were constructed. But, as in Southeast Asia today, where yantras, mandalas and numerical symbologies

are comparably dense, most lay and monastic participants would have some intuitive sense, if not detailed knowledge, of the auspicious world which enfolded them as they entered into the presence of images.

Of course, another major feature of the book is the discussion of the stories depicted in this world. As Green points out, the *Jātakas*, tales of the past lives of the Buddha, would be known to everyone, particularly the *Mahānipāta*, or the Great Ten as they are known, dedicated to the pursuit of the ten perfections of *pāramīs*, the qualities needed by the Bodhisatta if he is to become a teacher of gods and men, a fully awakened Buddha. These transregional, transcultural stories, kept living through their constant depiction in temples, were, again, constantly recited too. Burma really seems to have been the home of the highly detailed *jātaka* depiction, at least from the eleventh century onwards. Translated into vernaculars throughout South and Southeast Asia, and constantly refigured, in drama, story-making and art throughout Burma, these tales formed the basis of the legal system in the eighteenth century, and, perhaps even from the eleventh century, appear to have provided the well of narratives from which all classes drew inspiration and understanding of their Buddhist teaching. In *Jātakas*, ogres, monsters, humans, gods, animals and beings of many kinds argue, debate, extol the benefits of *dhamma*. Beings communicate constantly between their own kind, and other species. The *Jātaka* universe is highly interactive, and all creatures in these tales converse with one another, even when on hostile terms. Each character in the ongoing drama of the Bodhisatta's quest for awakening has his or her own individual *kamma* and path. As Green demonstrates, this inclusivity is an important aspect of the subject matter of the temple art. So, whether king, monk, peasant worker or, indeed, the kind of merchant that financed and so often commissioned these pictures as offerings, all who entered into the temple could feel, even by lighting a simple lamp, that they were participating in a shared field of merit and devotion, stretching out through many lives and many universes. The subtle and allusive art that explains individual paths within this is itself then, as Alex shows, an offering, linking the participant to the great panorama of interrelated narratives which evoke a Buddhist history, cosmology, and imaginative background.

Southeast Asian art has not yet received the extensive scrutiny that has been accorded to Western religious depiction. In cultures where the generation of new merit by the renewed depiction takes precedence over the preservation and appreciation of the old, this process of examination is still nascent. What is striking about this book is the detailed analytic care with which the author

undertakes her study, and draws on so many disciplines, with full references, to provide a complete cultural background to study of these exuberant and sumptuous pictures. Although often necessarily highly technical in its account of the way texts and image support one another, the book is easily accessible for any scholar of Buddhist studies, or reader from an unrelated field too.