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## ABBREVIATIONS

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>AJCL</i>  | <i>American Journal of Comparative Law</i>   |
| <i>BBACS</i> | <i>Bulletin of the British Association for Chinese Studies.</i>                          |
| <i>BARL</i>  | <i>Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao</i>  |
| <i>BEFEO</i> | <i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>                                    |
| <i>BLIJ</i>  | <i>Burma Law Institute Journal</i>   |
| <i>IJ</i>    | <i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>  |
| <i>JA</i>    | <i>Journal Asiatique</i>   |
| <i>JAOS</i>  | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>  |
| <i>JIAEA</i> | <i>Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia</i>                                |
| <i>JPTS</i>  | <i>Journal of the Pali Text Society</i>  |
| <i>JSEAS</i> | <i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>  |
| <i>JSS</i>   | <i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>   |
| <i>MJT</i>   | <i>Mikkyō Jiten</i>  |
| <i>PTS</i>   | <i>Pali Text Society</i>   |
| <i>ROB</i>   | Than Tun, <i>The Royal Orders of Burma A.D. 1598–1885</i> , Tokyo, vols. 1–7, 1984–1987. |
| <i>SBB</i>   | Sacred Books of the Buddhists  |
| <i>SBE</i>   | Sacred Books of the East   |
| <i>T</i>     | Taishō Tripiṭaka   |

## “KILL THE PATRIARCHS!”

T.H. Barrett

The quotation<sup>1</sup> which forms my title has, of course, been wrenched out of context, though the context as a whole is dramatic enough:

“If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha; if you meet the patriarchs, kill the patriarchs; if you meet Arhats, kill Arhats; if you meet your parents, kill your parents; if you meet your relatives, kill your relatives; then for the first time you will see clearly.”<sup>2</sup>

So spoke I-hsüan of Lin-ch’i, better known to aficionados of Zen as Rinzai, founder of the school of that name that survives yet, over eleven centuries later. In the remarks that follow I shall make no attempt to explain this passage—that is a task which probably lies beyond me. Rather, I shall endeavour to give my own answer to two questions. Who are the patriarchs? Why should they be in such exalted company, ahead of Arhats and parents, second only to Buddhas?

The answer to the first question seems straightforward enough. They were, as Ch’an (Zen) tradition affirms, a line of some two dozen or so successive spiritual leaders forming an unbroken chain in India from the time of the Buddha himself down to that of Bodhidharma, who departed that land for China late in the fifth century of our era and initiated a further succession, from which number Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch, is incontestably the most famous. But such a brief definition does not begin to do justice to the hold which this patriarchate held over the imagination not only of Buddhists but of their opponents besides.

Thus for centuries Neo-Confucians have been plagued with accusations that their own conception of spiritual lineage was originally derived from that of the Ch’an patriarchate, and these accusations are still the subject of academic debate today.<sup>3</sup> Certainly later Taoists and followers of quasi-Buddhist sects felt no

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<sup>1</sup> In the following notes original materials are cited as far as possible from the following three collections: 1. The Buddhist Canon in the Taishō edition (T), cited by volume number, page and frame; 2. The Taoist Canon as reprinted in the 1920s (*Tao-tsang*), cited by text number in the *Harvard-Yenching Index* enumeration, *chüan* and page; 3. The *Ch’üan T’ang Wen* for texts of secular authorship, cited by *chüan* and page number of the original 1818 Palace Edition as *CTW*.

<sup>2</sup> There are several translations from his sayings: the passage quoted occurs e.g. in Irmgard Schloegl, *The Record of Rinzai*, London, 1975, 21.

<sup>3</sup> The issue has mainly been discussed in recent years in connexion with the T’ang origins of Neo-Confucianism: cf. C. Hartman, *Han Yü and the T’ang Search for Unity*, Princeton, 1986, 160–66, and 330–32; Hartman refers to some earlier work of my own, to which might now be added “How to Forget Chinese History”, *BBACS*, 1986, 12–21.

compunction about terming their leaders patriarchs, whilst listings of the Buddhist patriarchs may be found not only in Ch'an texts but also in general compilations such as administrative encyclopaedias.<sup>4</sup> Some features of the story of the transmission of patriarchal authority to the Sixth Patriarch seem to have had an even wider influence,<sup>5</sup> turning up in Shintō literature in Japan, while one of the pioneers of the academic study of Chinese Buddhism in Europe had to combat the hopeful suggestion that Bodhidharma might have been none other than Saint Thomas.<sup>6</sup>

Our researches have now, thankfully, matured to the point where more critical approaches are the norm, and a number of studies have recently appeared in English which have raised important questions concerning the genesis of Ch'an traditions relating to the patriarchate. Bernard Faure, for instance, has pointed out that in the earliest (seventh-century) biography of Bodhidharma there is no hint that his religious career should be seen as part of some unbroken series; rather, it is examined by means of a comparison with the career of a figure representing a different type of religiosity.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of the Ch'an school as a whole has been the subject of a very extensive monograph by my erudite friend John McRae, in which he demonstrates just how central the patriarchal succession is to the identity of that school: "The traditional orthodoxy of the Ch'an School would have its followers believe that the only significant information about Ch'an is the body of biographical information and inspired sayings of a number of individual religious authorities, who follow each other in master-disciple relationships much like a set of beautiful pearls on a string."<sup>8</sup> It was this "string of pearls" which, then, constituted Ch'an as traditionally understood, that Ch'an which the movement's own ancient authorities defined as "A special transmission outside the scriptures, not founded upon words and letters; by pointing directly to man's own mind, it lets him see into his own true nature and thus attain Buddhahood".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The two most prominent patriarchs in these other traditions were, for Taoism, Lü-tsu (i.e. Lü Tung-pin, allegedly ninth century A.D.) and, in sectarian religion, Lo-tsu (? Lo Ch'ing, 1442–1527); cf. also the final remarks in the study by Jorgensen cited below. Listings of the patriarchs and the Ch'an lines of transmission derived from them may be found in Wang Ch'i, *Hsü Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, chüan* 248–52, various editions.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, 327.

<sup>6</sup> J.P. Abel-Rémusat, on page 125 of his "Sur la succession des trente trois premiers patriarches de la religion du Buddha", as printed in his *Mélanges Asiatiques*, I, Paris, 1825, 113–28.

<sup>7</sup> B. Faure, "Bodhidharma as Textual and Religious Paradigm", *History of Religions*, 25,3, 1986, 187–98; as Faure's title suggests, his own interest is not in the patriarchate at all but rather in combatting the prevailing assumptions in Ch'an studies concerning the nature of the surviving documentation on the origins of Ch'an.

<sup>8</sup> J.R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, Honolulu, 1986, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller-Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, New York, 1966, 229–30.

We shall revert shortly to McRae's study, which is rich in materials locating the emergence of the concept of a patriarchal succession within Chinese Buddhism. But the immediate starting point for my investigation is a further publication by John Jorgensen, concentrating on eighth-century squabbles over the status of the Sixth Patriarch which brought the Ch'an "string of pearls" to widespread attention, and which he analyses not simply in terms of Buddhist belief, but also as a reflection of purely indigenous Chinese concepts of legitimate succession: the impact of Ch'an, in his opinion, derived in no small part from its ability to model its patriarchal succession upon Chinese patterns of family descent and imperial rule.<sup>10</sup> There is much to commend such an interpretation (though perhaps not without qualification) when applied to the disputes of the eighth century, but even a cursory reading of the Japanese scholarship (notably that of Yanagida Seizan, but more recently the work of Tanaka Ryōshō), upon which all three of the above-mentioned scholars draw most profitably, reveals that the notion of a patriarchate was already, embryonically at least, in existence well before the period on which Jorgensen himself concentrates.

Thus Tanaka, while agreeing with the general view that the seventh-century biography of Bodhidharma (which, more precisely, must have reached its present form by A.D. 667)<sup>11</sup> contains no explicit reference to a "transmission of the lamp" succession (i.e. handing on the torch of Buddhism, Ch'an's own way of expressing McRae's "string of pearls"), nonetheless the biography of his disciple Hui-k'o in the same source already contains a prophecy about events occurring "four generations later" which must from context refer not to an inexact way of counting the passage of time in general but to a succession of four master-disciple relationships.<sup>12</sup> Jorgensen himself, too, following Tanaka, notes at the end of the same biography a reference to two disciples in Hui-k'o's lineage (*tsung-hsi*), and, following Yanagida and McRae, goes on to list the appearance in an epitaph dated 689 for the monk Fa-ju of the term "patriarchal teacher" (*tsu-shih*) along with a more explicit listing of a lineage of four names after Hui-k'o.<sup>13</sup> He also treats briefly a text known as the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* by Tu Fei and a somewhat later work, the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi* by Ching-chüeh, which provide versions of the Ch'an lineage from the second decade of the eighth century, before examining in more detail developments some twenty years later.<sup>14</sup>

Granted that these early sources passed over so rapidly by Jorgensen provide but rudimentary descriptions of the patriarchate when compared with those that were to follow, there would still seem to be some point in exploring in the seventh-century background not only (as McRae has already done) in Buddhist materials but also in non-Buddhist literature, as Jorgensen has already done for the later period, in order to gauge some of the forces which may have ushered the conception of

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<sup>10</sup> J. Jorgensen, "The 'Imperial' Lineage of Ch'an Buddhism: The Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch'an's Search for Legitimation in the Mid-T'ang Dynasty", *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 35, 1987, 89–133.

<sup>11</sup> Tanaka Ryōshō, *Tonkō Zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, Tokyo, 1983, 570.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 608.

<sup>13</sup> J. Jorgensen, *op. cit.*, 101.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 101–2.

the patriarchate into being. To be fair, Jorgensen himself does mention some initial stimuli to the development of Buddhist notions of patriarchal succession, such as the prevalence of genealogical studies in the aristocratic society of the age,<sup>15</sup> and the supposed tendency of Buddhist chains of masters and disciples to inherit property rights in pseudo-genealogical fashion.<sup>16</sup> This last stimulus has also been brought forward by contemporary Chinese Marxist scholarship,<sup>17</sup> but the major drawback to accepting its validity is the complete absence of any evidence for transfer of property (apart from some later allegations of mantle inheritance) within the early Ch'an lineage. Not only were the monks concerned not domiciled at the same monasteries; there is also plenty of evidence to suggest that the Ch'an lineage (and maybe others) were *invented* traditions, which could only attempt to confer legitimate possession of a spiritual, not a material, legacy.<sup>18</sup>

So let us look at the matter of spiritual legacies in Chinese civilization, starting with the term *tsu-shih* itself. Rather than 'patriarch-teacher', a more literal and etymologically correct translation would be 'ancestor-teacher'. But in this context of intellectual influence *tsu* seems early to have lost any literal meaning of 'ancestral': Confucius himself is described in one of the Confucian Classics as having *tsu-shu*, "taken as ancestral and described", the doctrine of the far more ancient sages Yao and Shun.<sup>19</sup> That is, he proclaimed their virtues as the self-appointed heir of these sages: there is no question of any direct thread of succession between himself and figures so remote. Similarly (according to the seventh-century commentator, who quotes the phrase *tsu-shu* for comparison) *tsu-shih* is used by Shen Yüeh (441–513) in discussing lines of intellectual influence in the Han dynasty (not lines of direct transmission). This passage may be found in an essay of his included in the *Wen-hsüan* literary anthology—and the Classics and the *Wen-hsüan* were the "Bible and Shakespeare" of the seventh century.<sup>20</sup> No wonder, then, that some seventh-century Buddhists saw no need for a continuous "string of pearls", but were quite happy with a sequence of pearls spaced at regular intervals. Chi-tsang (549–623), for example, in his *San-lun hsüan-i*, quotes a *sūtra*, the *Mo-ho-mo-yeh ching*, which names seven great Buddhist leaders distributed amongst each of seven centuries following the Buddha: the seventh, Nāgārjuna, whose teachings Chi-tsang himself propagated, is even described as having *lighted* the torch of the Dharma, rather than as having received it already lit.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>17</sup> Apart from those scholars cited by Jorgensen (see preceding note) one might add e.g. Fang Li-t'ien, *Wei, Chin, Nan-pei-ch'ao Fo-chiao lun-ts'ung*, Peking, 1982, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Faure's article, cited above, gives an excellent methodological perspective on the degree of invention prevalent in the texts of early Ch'an; McRae's remarks from a more conventionally historical standpoint on Seng-ts'an (*op. cit.*, 11) dispose entirely of the supposed Third Patriarch's role in any possible succession—just to cite one example.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Legge, *The Confucian Classics*, vol. 1, Hong Kong, 1960 reprint, 427, *Chung Yung*, 30.1.

<sup>20</sup> *Wen-hsüan*, 50.12b (Hu edition).

<sup>21</sup> T. 12, 1013b, quoted in T. 45, 6b. Chi-tsang and later San-lun scholarship constructed a continuous tradition in China, but it seems that in earlier times this was considered to have been interrupted: cf. T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Sui-T'ang fo-chiao kao*, Peking, 1982, 111.



At the same time unbroken continuity ever since the Buddha's lifetime was stressed elsewhere in Buddhist literature, particularly with regard to the *Vinaya*: presumably (though I stand to be corrected) any admission of discontinuity here would have had consequences for the validity of ordinations. The most famous text of this type known through Chinese sources is the so-called "Dotted Record", the copy of the *Vinaya* brought to Canton in 488 to which a dot had been added for every year that had passed since the Buddha's lifetime: in 489 the total stood at 975 dots.<sup>22</sup> The account of this preserved in the late sixth century also lists the succession of six teachers responsible for transmitting the *Vinaya* in early times: such succession lists are by no means unparalleled in other sources,<sup>23</sup> as McRae notes.

A further type of source for such lists (also discussed by McRae) is the literature in Chinese surrounding the *Ta-mo-to-lo ch'an-ching*, a work on meditation translated early in the fifth century: meditation teachings, too, presumably required an unbroken transmission. Here we get some far longer lists of names (fifty or so), coming right down to the translators of the text, and (in some versions at least) all but the last few are denominated arhats or bodhisattvas. There is no mention, however, of this line of transmission continuing in China, nor is the Chinese term 'patriarch' (*tsu-shih*) used in any description of these meditation teachers: McRae does employ the word 'patriarch' in his translation of a famous preface to the *Ta-mo-to-lo ch'an-ching* by Hui-yüan (334–416), but the Chinese original, *tsung*, simply refers to lineage membership.<sup>24</sup>

Even more influential than this text was another known as the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yüan chuan*: Tanaka points to evidence of its impact on iconography by the end of the sixth century.<sup>25</sup> This work presents us, more manageably, with a couple of dozen names of transmitters of the Buddha's law in India, a list that was to become the basis of Ch'an accounts of the Indian transmission—except in one important respect: in the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yüan chuan* the list is terminated in India with the death of the last-named worthy, Simha, killed in an anti-Buddhist persecution in Kashmir. In fact this tale is not quite what it seems, since at the start of this century Henri Maspero had already proved that this list was concocted in China from shorter *Vinaya* lists and other sources; its dramatic conclusion, which is followed by a lengthy disquisition on the iniquity of extinguishing the light of

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<sup>22</sup> The most recent "Study of the Dotted Record" is that by W. Pachow, in *JAOS*, 85.3, 1965, 342–49: it has, of course, been much discussed in connection with the dating of the life of the Buddha.

<sup>23</sup> T. 49, 95b, gives the passage in question; McRae, *op. cit.*, p. 298, n. 197, gives also some earlier examples.

<sup>24</sup> McRae, *op. cit.*, 80–82: the translation on the last page has perhaps been influenced by a somewhat interpretative Japanese rendering of the same piece in a standard work on Hui-yüan.

<sup>25</sup> Tanaka, *op. cit.*, 66–73.

Buddhism, marks in his view a date of composition shortly after a major North Chinese persecution of Buddhism in the mid-fifth century.<sup>26</sup>

But even if these transmission lists fell short of providing a full working prototype of the patriarchal succession, they did put at the disposal of seventh-century Buddhists model chains of teacher-disciple continuity far more impressive than any available in other spheres of Chinese culture. The seventh century was in fact a time when such chains were very much a matter of current concern: the new age of stability following centuries of disunion and chaos was very keen to reaffirm its links with antiquity. For example, in the preface to the official commentary on the *I Ching* (all the Confucian Classics were equipped with commentary in the middle of the century) we find much discussion of the chains of masters and disciples responsible for transmitting an understanding of this work through to the Han dynasty, but there is no comprehensive listing thereafter.<sup>27</sup>

In the arts, too, we get a concern for tradition expressed, but still not worked out so consistently. One preface to a work on painting dated 639 speaks of the many outstanding painters of the period of disunion “transmitting their mind’s eye” to one another,<sup>28</sup> which might perhaps be taken as an anticipation of the Ch’an doctrine of transmission from mind to mind, but no early text on painting known to me elaborates on the idea. True, in the field of calligraphy we do possess one document providing a transmission list of twenty-three names who maintained a style of calligraphy revealed by a spiritual being, but since the list (undated) ends with names in the late eighth century we cannot rule out an influence from the Ch’an conception of the patriarchate itself—though the existence of this document may be used to show the compatibility of Ch’an with a general Chinese interest in the maintenance of tradition.<sup>29</sup> In fact Tu Fei, in the *Ch’uan fa-pao chi*, compares the Ch’an patriarchate quite explicitly with Chinese concepts of transmission, but not those associated with painting or calligraphy: it is alchemy which he takes as the closest analogy to Ch’an. For only by studying with the right teacher can one be taught how to create an elixir of immortality: reading about it in Taoist books, he says (with good reason, one might add!), obfuscates everything.<sup>30</sup> There is indeed plenty of evidence for compatibility between certain Ch’an and Taoist ways of thinking: we find, for instance, the Ch’an concept of “transmission from mind to mind” being used in a Taoist context within a century of its first appearance in a Ch’an text.<sup>31</sup> But even if Tu’s use of analogy tells us quite clearly that the concept of a patriarchate must have been very much a novelty demanding explanation in his

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<sup>26</sup> H. Maspero, “Sur la date et l’authenticité du *Fou fa tsang yin yüan tchouan*”, in *Mélanges d’Indianisme offerts par ses élèves à M. Sylvain Lévi*, Paris, 1911, 129–49.

<sup>27</sup> See the preface to the *Chou-i cheng-i*, in *Shih-san ching chu-shu*, Taipei, 1977, reprint of Juan Yüan’s edition, 1b, 11b–12a.

<sup>28</sup> *CTW*, 159, 10a.

<sup>29</sup> The document is included in the late ninth-century Chang Yen-yüan’s *Fa-shu yao-lu*, 1, Shanghai, 1986, 14, though for some reason very much out of chronological sequence.

<sup>30</sup> See Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki Zen shisho no kenkyū*, Tokyo, 1967, 562.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *CTW*, 719, 27a (circa 825) and Yanagida, *op. cit.*, 470–72, tracing the term back to a sermon by Shen-hui (684–758).

day, it is hard to find any earlier, explicit Taoist depiction of a “string of pearls” which could have served as a model for the new-fangled doctrine.

For while it is possible to point to lines of transmission of alchemical and other occult knowledge which may be retrieved from early writings,<sup>32</sup> once again it is not until the eighth century that we get any clear statement of a succession of patriarchs in Taoism, and that in historical terms a distinctly spurious one.<sup>33</sup> Nor does uninterrupted succession seem to have been obligatory in that religion: we learn in the ninth century of one series of seven perfected immortals connected by place rather than time.<sup>34</sup> The ruling dynasty during the seventh century had already conjoined genealogical succession with religious leadership by claiming descent from Lao-tzu, founder of Taoism, and imperial propaganda may have played some part in promoting an awareness of such matters in that century, as Jorgensen reveals that it did in the eighth.<sup>35</sup> But the T’ang emperors could hardly claim that all their ancestors were illustrious—it was the very obscurity of their forebears that allowed the claim to be made at all. What emerges from Taoist texts prior to the eighth century is not so much the elevation of chains of masters and disciples to patriarchal status as an emphasis on the transmission of sacred texts.<sup>36</sup>

And that is precisely true of Buddhism also. If we turn back to the transmission of the *Ta-mo-to-lo chan-ching*, we find that the line of arhats and bodhisattvas mentioned simply guarantees the text: given the text in translation, the Chinese had no further need of a line of supermen to pass it on. And when Chih-i (538-597), systematizer of the T’ien-t’ai school of Buddhism, quotes the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yüan chuan*, the ultimate extinction of the line of the Buddha’s oral teaching, the *chin-k’ou* (‘Chrysostom’) line, is of no consequence, since that line passed through Nāgārjuna, whose writings, available in Chinese, provide the foundation for Chih-i’s own philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Other references to the “transmission of the lamp”

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Isabelle Robinet, *La Révélation du Shangqing dans l’histoire du Taoisme*, vol. I, Paris, 1984, 16, 17, 42, 49, etc.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Maeda Shigeki, “Iwayuru ‘Bōzan-ha Dōkyō’ ni kansuru shomondai”, *Chūgoku shakai to bunka*, 2, 1987, 227–34. Cf. also for this point (and for the general theme which I treat here) Yoshikawa Tadao, “Dōkyō no dōkei to Zen no hōkei”, *Tōyō gakujutsu kenkyū*, 27 (special issue, 1988), 11–34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ch’üan T’ang shih*, 624, Peking, 1960, 71–74. There is, however, talk of a “Seventh Perfected One” going back apparently to the sixth century, though evidence that this messianic figure was one of a series (rather than a configuration, such as the seven stars of the Dipper) is entirely lacking: cf. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, *Dōkyō to Bukkyō*, vol. III, Tokyo, 1976, 105–13, for this controversial figure.

<sup>35</sup> One of the chief vehicles for such propaganda was an imperially-sponsored biography of Lao-tzu, now unfortunately lost except for some quotations, by a Taoist priest named Yin Wen-ts’ao: a shorter work that is probably from his brush does, however, survive in the Taoist Canon: see Kusuyama Haruki, *Rōshi densetsu no kenkyū*, Tokyo, 1979, 403–22.

<sup>36</sup> See J. Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao*, Paris, 1981, 117–22, for a summarized account from a late sixth-century Taoist encyclopaedia of the whole role that transmission of texts played in Taoism.

<sup>37</sup> On the T’ien-t’ai concept of transmission, cf. McRae, *op. cit.*, 82–3, and his note 205, pp. 299–300, for some further references.

up to the mid-seventh century similarly quote a few names from this lineage only in order to emphasize the survival of their teachings in written sources.<sup>38</sup>

So why a subsequent rejection of texts and a return to these lineages with the new purpose of deriving ineffable truth from them? As McRae notes, the Buddha's ultimate teaching had always been considered to be ineffable:<sup>39</sup> this axiom we find duly repeated in the Buddhist literature of the period. And, of course, we find similar statements in Taoist sources also:<sup>40</sup> the ineffability of any truths concerning the Tao had been a key tenet of that religion since (in the opinion of its later believers, at least) the composition of Lao-tzu's *Tao-te ching*. So an awareness of the inability of words to capture ultimate truth can hardly have struck home with any great novelty in the late seventh century. More plausible, however, is a new, or newly heightened, awareness of the fallibility of texts—and, yet more so, of their readers.

Now it is possible to point to a very specific reason for this in the history of mid-seventh-century Chinese Buddhism, and that is the successful career of the great translator Hsüan-tsang (600–664). After long years of journeying and studying this remarkable figure returned to China in 645 to produce a steady flow of translations of the highest possible quality from a voluminous collection of Sanskrit manuscripts which he had brought home with him. For reasons in part philosophical but also stemming from his unrivalled command of both Chinese and Indian languages he was highly critical of at least some of his predecessors, whose works were relegated to the obsolete category of 'old translations'. But this did not happen without a detectable backlash from those who felt that he was subverting their whole understanding of Buddhism by questioning the value of the texts most familiar to them.<sup>41</sup> In fact by exciting such a backlash this signal triumph for Chinese Buddhism only exacerbated the very problem that had impelled Hsüan-tsang to undertake his journey in the first place:<sup>42</sup> Chinese Buddhists were still unsure of their texts, and unsure of their meaning.

Yet it was not just the Buddhists who were worried about their grasp of their ancient spiritual heritage: in contemporary Taoism, too, we find at least one scathing reference to 'latter-day people' who treat Lao-tzu's sacred writings as if they were a matter for academic debate, rather than profound respect.<sup>43</sup> This may

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. T. 50, 445a, col. 10–12, quoting a mid-seventh-century letter from the emperor to a monk reluctant to assume official responsibilities at his behest, for one good example. For an earlier (early sixth-century) example, cf. T. 50, 345b.

<sup>39</sup> McRae, *op. cit.*, 78.

<sup>40</sup> e.g. Tao-tsang, No 769, 1.21a, col. 2–4: this is a quotation within a quotation from the lost biography of Lao-tzu mentioned above which dates from about A.D. 680.

<sup>41</sup> On this backlash see e.g. Hsiung Shih-li, "T'ang-shih fo-hsüeh chiu-p'ai fan-tui Hsüan-tsang chih yin-ch'ao", in Chang Man-t'ao, ed., *Hsien-tai fo-chiao hsüeh-shu ts'ung-k'an*, vol. 6, Taipei, 1977, 225–34.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. T. 50, 221a (his biographer), 261a (his own statement).

<sup>43</sup> *Tao-tsang*, no. 953, 13a: this is the work which Kusuyama, referred to above, ascribes to Yin Wen-ts'ao. There may have been some immediate political reasons for this remark, since in 674 the *Tao-te ching* was on the Empress Wu's suggestion made a set text in civil service examinations: see the study by Guisso cited below.

appear to be a slightly different problem, but the term ‘latter-day’ marks the passage off as betraying a degree of eschatological concern—or, more precisely, concern over the ‘spiritual entropy’ entailed by the ever-increasing passage of time that separated mediaeval China from the sages of high antiquity, a concern which in some circles at least fuelled equally disturbing hopes that a future sage might appear to bring new light to an etiolated tradition.<sup>44</sup> In Taoism such hopes and fears were, in the seventh century of our era, strictly muted, in that they had been co-opted by the imperial line, which embodied (in its own view) a revival of Taoist fortunes: at one point the heir apparent was even given a name with quite explicitly messianic connotations in Taoist lore.<sup>45</sup> Under such circumstances too overtly expressed fears over decline and gathering darkness became politically inexpedient, for obvious reasons.

But in Buddhism such fears were nothing if not rampant. Worries over the decayed state of the religion, the age of the ‘decline of the Dharma’ (*mo-fa*), assailed Hsüan-tsang even in his moments of greatest triumph,<sup>46</sup> while lesser mortals seem to have faced them at every turn.<sup>47</sup> As has been noted by a number of scholars, the notion that the truth was destined to fade away and that untruth would increasingly and inexorably prevail seems to have resulted in a form of paranoia in China, even if these ideas first came into being elsewhere entirely.<sup>48</sup> This paranoia has, for example, been seen lying behind the increased sectarianism of the seventh century, the “I am right and you are wrong” which begins to supplant more pluralistic approaches to truth and encourage the growth of recognizable rival schools of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>49</sup> Rather than let such unpleasant

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<sup>44</sup> Despite a recent conference on Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, still no integrated study of Chinese eschatology can be cited to clarify this vitally important complex of ideas; for an outline of the areas that might be covered cf. *Modern Asian Studies*, 17.2, 1983, 333–51.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. D.C. Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, Cambridge, 1979, 249, 270 for this man, and e.g. Wang Ming, *Tao-chia ho Tao-chiao ssu-hsiang yen-chiu*, Peking, 1984, 372–76, for some Taoist background to his name.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the remarks in my paper “Exploratory Observations on Some Weeping Pilgrims”, published in this volume, and also Hsüan-tsang’s statement in T. 50, 261a.

<sup>47</sup> Again (see three notes above) not enough has been published even on this restricted aspect of Chinese eschatology, but see D.W. Chappell, “Early Forebodings of the Death of Buddhism”, *Numen*, 27, 1980, 122–154.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. McRae, *op.cit.*, p. 299, n. 199, with p. 300, n. 200, where he perceptively notes that both the *mo-fa* doctrine and the notion of a succession originally applied to Kashmir or other regions outside China, but both were taken up by the Chinese as if addressed specifically to them. In the light of my own paper referred to above I would argue that these two ideas coincided with peculiarly Chinese concerns, and I would further argue that the two ideas are linked.

<sup>49</sup> Particularly insightful in this regard are the remarks of T’ang Yung-t’ung, *Sui-T’ang fo-chiao shih kao*, 217.

impulses go to waste the state, too, co-opted this paranoia, using the doctrine of decline as a pretext for intervening with a firm hand to maintain standards.<sup>50</sup>

Exactly what those standards were had evidently become a more bothersome matter as well for many, if not for imperial despots. The “confusion of right and wrong” is very much a current slogan in our early T’ang sources, though whether it is commitment to Buddhism as a whole which is to end this confusion (*vis-à-vis* Taoism, Confucianism, and so forth)<sup>51</sup> or the adoption of Hsüan-tsang’s new translations (*vis-à-vis* the imperfections of earlier Buddhism)<sup>52</sup> depends on the writer’s particular *parti pris*. But one fears that many were not persuaded by either of these two solutions; indeed, it is known that large numbers of Buddhist believers were inclined rather to cast themselves straightforwardly upon the mercy of Amitābha Buddha to save them in such evil times, or to turn to yet more salvationist heterodox cults.<sup>53</sup> Hsüan-tsang’s heroic pilgrimage to the fountainhead of the faith represented the best that could be expected of mainstream, established Buddhism to rectify the situation. Yet so long after the glory of the Buddha’s own preaching had departed from India all that he could do was bring back more books and they, however well translated, did not speak for themselves but remained subject to the vagaries of exegesis, the petty squabbling of scribes and scholars.

What was clearly needed in the Buddhism of late seventh-century China was the voice of authority, some Nāgārjuna redivivus to set the lamp of the Dharma ablaze once more and make the truth plain for all. Given that the mechanisms of rebirth in Buddhism afford ample opportunity for spiritual leaders one thought had disappeared to reappear again in unexpected places—the Dalai Lama is one well-known example of such a figure who just never seems to go away, and Chinese Taoists in recent centuries have assigned an analogous status to their own hierarchs<sup>54</sup>—it is perhaps surprising that no such personality arose to lighten the darkness of mediaeval China. Or maybe one did; in any case I hope to be able to treat this possibility on another occasion. For the time being it is worth pointing out that the sudden appearance of leaders claiming inherent religious authority was politically a tricky business: the state saw anything smacking of overt messianism as a potentially disruptive and insurrectionary threat, so (as in the case of Taoism) we find a tendency (albeit cautious) to co-opt where possible titles such as Maitreya for the sovereign’s own use.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See e.g. *CTW* 9, 9a–b; *cf.* also R.W.L. Guisso, *Wu Tse-t’ien and The Politics of Legitimation in T’ang China*, Bellingham, Washington, 1978, 67.

<sup>51</sup> T. 52, 97c, 378b.

<sup>52</sup> T. 52, 258b.

<sup>53</sup> Once again this aspect of Buddhism is under-represented in Western scholarship, though I hope J.H. Foard, ed., *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, and R.E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Buddhist Apocryphal Literature*, both to be published in Berkeley, will make these varieties of religion much better known.

<sup>54</sup> See J. Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*, vol. I, Oxford, 1891, 42.

<sup>55</sup> See Guisso, *op. cit.*, 35–45. This was only possible because the Empress Wu stood outside the line of Lao-tzu’s descendants, who were exclusively committed to embodying Taoist sagehood.

The best alternative, then, was to assert boldly that the lamp of the dharma still blazed on, as it had in the uncomprehending dark even before Hsüan-tsang had felt moved to go to India. For it blazed on not among the exegetes who thronged the famous monasteries of the capital but far away in the mountainous retreats of a line of meditators, a hitherto neglected “string of pearls” who had already received this transmission of the lamp from India almost two centuries earlier, at a time which just predated its final extinction there—that is, at a time now so distant that any assertions concerning Bodhidharma, key link in the chain, were, of course, no longer subject to disproof. The exegetes, moreover, had been blind to this light because they had been looking in quite the wrong place—they had been looking, poor inky fools, in their books. No wonder Ching-chüeh’s preface to the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi* implicitly contrasts the Ch’an meditator not reliant on the written word but in touch with the living truth with those who even in the age of the “semblance of the true Dharma” (an intermediate stage between the age of truth and that of complete decline) can only cope with the truth as formalized for their benefit.<sup>56</sup>

To conclude, then, the patriarchal succession was a device drawn from the accumulated repertory of native and imported stratagems for dealing with the vanishing past that already existed in mediaeval China. But the force which threaded together the separate pearls and the continuous string, the two components of that succession, was the force of necessity. There were patriarchs because there had to be, otherwise all was for the dark. So we end, appropriately, with a paradox. Ch’an is best known in the West for its iconoclastic spirit, so apparently in tune with our own times. Why, it would even do away with its own patriarchs! But the patriarchs are there because they embodied spiritual authority, an authority which T’ang China desperately needed. Kill, says Rinzai. But that is not a suggestion. It is an order.

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<sup>56</sup> Yanagida, *op. cit.*, 630, col. 6 and col. 12.